

**A STUDY ON SMALLHOLDER RUBBER PRODUCTION IN
MONARAGALA DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is one of the nine major producers of Natural Rubber (NR) in the world. In terms of productivity, it is now the third best. However, if Sri Lanka is to retain, or better still, improve its position in the fast expanding and increasingly competitive global rubber business in the next ten years, it has to pull itself up by the bootstraps, smoothen the many rough edges, and adopt new technologies and practices, suited to the local agro-climatic and socio-economic conditions.

A study on smallholder rubber production was carried out in the Moneragala district. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Primary data were collected from rubber farmers. Pre-tested, structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data from farmers. Secondary data were collected from Rubber Research Institute of Sri Lanka, Rubber Development Department of Sri Lanka, Department of Agriculture, District Secretariat of Monaragala and the Agriculture instructors who are working in the region. The study was conducted in five Divisional Secretariat divisions of Monaragala district and the simple random sampling method was used for the primary data collection among the farmers in the selected five DS divisions. Twenty respondents (rubber producers) were randomly selected from each selected DS division. The total sample size was 100 rubber producers.

The results of the study indicates that majority of the farmers (54%) were between the age range of 41-60 years. Rubber cultivation was predominantly a male occupation and majority of the farmers (52%) had attended the primary level education. The average farming experience of the respondents was 7.5 years and more than half of the respondents

(57%) had the farming experience of less than 7 years. The average extent of land cultivated was 1.7 acres and it was observed that 93% of respondents' cultivated land size was less than 3 acres. 47% of rubber farmers had produced 50 – 100 kilograms rubber per month. Average number of untapped trees was 112 and average tapped trees were 205. Yield per month was 160 sheets. And the average of cost of production per month was Rs. 6, 240. Multiple regressions analysis was carried out to find out the amount of correlation made by the independent variables in explaining the variation in the dependent variable, experience in rubber farming and number of tapped trees had positive and highly significant correlation, whereas extent of land used had negative significant relationship with rubber production of smallholder rubber farmers.

Despite impressive progress in the Sri Lankan rubber industry, it is still plagued by a series of critical issues such as declining planted area, labour shortage -more specifically skilled tappers, low land and labour productivity, an ageing labour force, inadequate resources, and high cost of production. The foremost challenge before research institutions and the rubber industry here is to develop a golden clone which will not only be very high yielding but also have other positive attributes, such as compatibility with over exploitation, low frequency tapping without loss of yield and so on. Research efforts have to be given top priority.

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