

Factors Influencing on Perceived Post-Harvest Wastage of Vegetables and Fruit with Special Reference to Dambulla Dedicated Economic Center

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Food loss is more serious in developing countries while food waste is more serious in developed countries. On average 30%-50% of what is produced is lost in the postharvest value chain of horticultural crops in developing countries before it reaches consumers, and it is 30%-40% in Sri Lanka. The post-harvest food supply chain, as explained in the theory of food supply chain, is the process of farm to fork, involving production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of vegetables and fruits. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of food supply chain on perceived post-harvest wastage and in particular it investigated the relationship between transportation, packaging, excess supply, storage facility and perceived post-harvest wastage of vegetables. The study used the cross-sectional survey based quantitative research approach and a self-administered structural questionnaire was utilized for the primary data collection purpose. Dambulla Dedicated Economic Centre (DDEC), the largest food supply hub in Sri Lanka in terms of the sales volume and the only Centre opens for 24 hours, was selected as the study location. The sample included 105 respondents representing both farmers and regional collectors and selected using a systematic random sampling technique. All variables of the conceptual model were measured using a five-point Likert scale followed by the standard scales. To test the hypothesized relationships between the constructs, the multiple regression analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0 version. Findings of the study supported all proposed hypotheses and thus, it confirmed that there is a significant relationship between transportation, packaging, storage facility, excess supply and perceived post-harvest wastage. It is expected that the model can serve as a support for the policymaking process regarding people keep progress activities in economic centers and affecting increment of additional cost from farm to fork. This problem may affect families who depend on cultivation as well as final consumers who have to pay the additional cost. Therefore, ultimately this affects the development of Sri Lanka by increasing imports of the country.

Keywords: *Dambulla Dedicated Economic Center, Excess Supply, Packaging, Perceived Post-harvest Wastage, Sri Lanka, Storage Facility, Supply Chain Management, Transportation*