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IISR's tips to make up for production loss

Govt urged to take steps to prevent plant diseases

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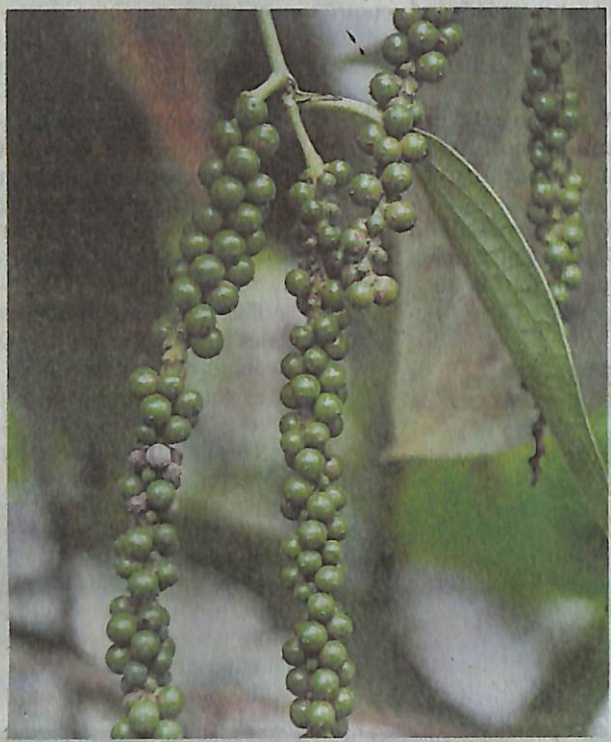
The Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR) has urged government authorities to take adequate measures in a timely manner to prevent the spread of various diseases in spices.

The institute and Farmers Welfare last month pointed out in a study that the State suffered a production loss of over 25,000 tonnes of spices, valued at ₹1,254 crore, in 58,379 hectares of farmland.

Post-floods, high incidence of plant diseases and pest attacks have been noticed in many areas. The sudden change in annual rainfall and its distribution, fluctuations in solar radiation and temperature, and changes in atmospheric carbon level would adversely affected crop production and expose them to high risk of pest and disease attacks, a team led Santhosh J. Eapen, ISSR (Head- Production), observed.

Most crops, including paddy, coconut, pepper, rubber, nutmeg and cardamom, were badly affected. Spice crops such as black pepper, cardamom, nutmeg, and cinnamon were perennial in nature and hence they needed to be replanted if plants were lost or dead. Crops such as ginger or turmeric could not be replanted, as the planting season was already over. Chances of pest and disease incidence in survived crops, due to high humidity conditions, could lead to further losses, the team said.



High incidence of plant diseases has been detected in black pepper. ▪ K. RAGESH

Recommendations to mitigate the problem had been made for each crop -- black pepper, cardamom, ginger, turmeric and nutmeg. An integrated strategy such as reducing water stagnation and removal of dead vines for black pepper and phyto sanitation of damaged plants in the case of cardamom needed to be adopted.

Replanting the affected areas with high-yielding and tolerant varieties, implementing village-level crop-weather forewarning systems, providing interest-free credit support for sustenance of livelihood activity, and carrying out studies on germplasm tolerant to biotic and abiotic stress had also been recommended.

An action plan should be chalked out for soil amelioration, as landslips and erosion of top soil were noticed in high ranges, and heavy deposition of silt and clay in midland and lowland.

Soil reclamation could be done using lime, green leaf manures, bio-fertilizers, coir pith, and composts. As the major spice growing soils were already acidic, heavy rain had aggravated the situation by increasing the acidity due to leaching of bases and organic matter.