

Diseases hit pepper prospects

Drought-like situation in major pepper-growing areas like Wayanad, Idukki

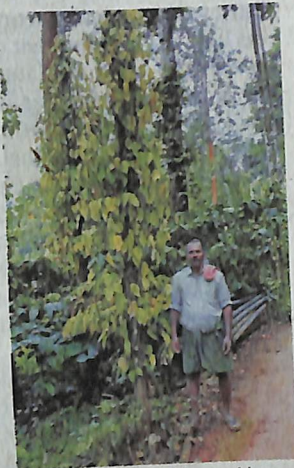
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Post-deluge drought coupled with various diseases affecting pepper vines has put farmers in different parts of the State in distress.

Hundreds of acres of pepper plantations in the State are under the threat of quick wilt disease owing to the drought-like situation prevailing in the State, especially in major pepper growing areas such as Wayanad and Idukki districts.

"I had replanted pepper vines on three acres four years ago, of which vines on nearly an acre were completely destroyed owing to quick wilt disease," said George, a farmer at Nadavayal in Wayanad district.

He had shelled out more than ₹4.5 lakh to raise pepper. He raised the money by disposing of an acre of land. The disease has spread wide-



A pepper vine affected by quick wilt disease at Vazhavatta in Wayanad.

ly in the drought-like situation after the deluge, he said.

Reji Thomas, a marginal farmer at Vazhavatta, said he got 3 quintals of black pepper from his two acres of land but most of the pepper vines were destroyed by

quick wilt disease, including around 100 pepper saplings that he had planted last year.

The high humidity and high temperature due to the drought-like situation after the flood caused multiplication of pathogens like Phytophthora, P. Rajendran, Associate Director of Research Station, Ambalavayal, said.

Fungal diseases

"The outbreak of fungal diseases in black pepper has been reported from various parts of the district. Though we had advised the farming community to adopt preventive measures, including application of Bordeaux mixture to pepper vines, many a farmer was not able to follow the advice as the community was in a crisis after the flood," Dr. Rajendran said.

If the farmers failed to adopt preventive measures against the disease, the in-

tensity of the infection would be very serious during the northeast monsoon, he said.

"Torrential rain had washed off black pepper vines in many parts of the State. Moreover, the drought-like condition has triggered fungal diseases like quick wilt and soft wilt. This will adversely affect pepper production in the coming season," Kishore Shamji Kurruwa, Cochin Chapter head, Indian Pepper and Spice Traders, Farmers, Producers and Planters Consortium, said.

The average production of black pepper in the State is around 18,000 to 22,000 tonnes a year, including 5,000 to 7,000 tonnes in Wayanad. But the production may fall to 75% to 80% in Wayanad and 25% to 30% in Idukki districts in the coming season, he said.