

Only 3% have tertiary education in SL's agri sector: survey

In what could be termed as a crucial finding, only 3 percent of the population involved in Sri Lanka's agricultural sector have a degree-level education or any form of tertiary education and the majority in the trade has completed schooling only up to the 10th Grade.

At the bottom end, 4 percent of the population in agriculture had no form of schooling while 19 percent had passed up to Grade 6 and a further 46 percent had passed up to the 10th Grade in school.

The findings were from the recently finalised Agricultural Household Survey (AHS) conducted in 2017 by the Census and Statistics Department, with a total sample of 24,050 housing units, in all 25 districts, representing 2.1 million estimated agricultural households in Sri Lanka, which has an estimated agricultural household population of 8.1 million.

The survey also revealed that 17 percent of the agricultural population had an education level up to Ordinary Level and 12 percent up to Advanced

Level. The AHS also goes into history as the first survey conducted using handheld devices such as smartphones and tablet computers, which is referred to as computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), with the technical and financial support from the Asian Development Bank.

The survey was originally intended to cover the Anuradhapura district, where a larger section of the agricultural households reside. It was later decided to extend its reach

to all 25 districts covering the entire island, for which district-level field staff were given the handheld devices to collect data.

The level of education of those engaged in a particular trade plays a critical role in deciding the level of sophistication that trade may achieve and Sri Lanka's agricultural sector, which has failed to adopt modern agricultural practices and technology, is a clear indication of this phenomenon.

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The respondents of the AHS on the level of education in agricultural households were aged 25 years and above.

The findings of the survey can help many areas including policymaking and education, where more informed and constructive decisions and action plans could be drafted based on long-term national economic priorities.

While the agriculture as a trade is less fashionable in the eyes of the new generation, this is a misnomer in the developed and emerging world, where food security is regarded as a non-negotiable priority.

In Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the United States, there are lot more people, including the young, who have tertiary-level qualifications in agriculture, including livestock.

While the agriculture is often regarded as a blue collar occupation, the gap is blurring in the developed world when earnings are considered.

In the West, some farmers are qualified in economics and they use their knowledge to benefit from the trade as a large part of commercial agriculture is economics than science.