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MITE CONTROL

(This Circular cancels Advisory Circular No. 17, Serial No. 1/94, issued in June 1994)

1. Introduction

There are five species of mites that cause damage to tea in Sri Lanka. Their common names are: Red Spider Mite (*Oligonychus coffeae* Neitner), Scarlet Mite (*Brevipalpus californicus* Banks), Yellow Mite (*Hemitarsonemus latus* Banks), Purple Mite (*Calacarus carinatus* Green) and Pink Mite (*Acaphylla theae* Watt).

Tea mites are generally dry-weather pests, feeding on tea foliage but also attacking other vegetation, such as certain species of shade trees, cover crops, weeds, etc. Tea by roadsides and in pockets, exposed to various environmental and physiological stress factors, are prone to infestation by different species of mites.

Mites often make their appearance in isolated pockets at the beginning of dry weather, and unless controlled in time they can spread over an entire field causing significant loss of crop. In particular, Scarlet Mite and Red Spider Mite could result in a setback to bush growth.

2. Mite-prone fields and spot treatments

While some fields are prone to mite infestations, others are seldom affected. It is advisable to use spot applications of acaricides for prevention rather than as a curative measure after infestation.

3. Rain and mites

Though mite infestation is generally less pronounced during wet weather, mild wet-weather conditions are not conducive to its eradication. In fact, light rain promotes Yellow Mite. Red Spider Mite infestations continue into monsoonal weather once the populations reach high levels.

4. Damage Symptoms

4.1 Red Spider Mite

Mainly attacks the upper surface of the maintenance foliage. This mite could be identified by the bronze colouration of its upper surface. Webs and minute white specks of cast skin are visible.

Thumb Nail Test. When a thumb is pressed against an affected leaf, a pin-dot mark of mite blood appears.

4.2 Purple Mite

Older leaves are preferred. These mites occur on both surfaces of the leaf. The leaves attacked have a dull matt appearance and a purplish-bronze discolouration.