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Protecting Tropical Tasar Sericulture Farmers from Covid-19

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Abstract

During the present Covid-19 situations, the tasar sericulture farmers are involved in rearing tasar silkworm on plantations. Hence, in order to contain the spread of this disease which is an infectious and spreads primarily through droplets, the farmers have to take measures to safeguard themselves along with following standard field hygienic measures. Herein discussed the measures ensure safeguarding and protecting farmers from COVID-19 and thus help to contain the spread of this disease.

Introduction

The tropical tasar silkworm grainage and rearing activities are initiated with the onset of monsoon, especially in the month of May-June and onwards. During grainage period, the seeds (dfIs) availability increases and the farmers especially the rural poor and tribal populace plan silkworm rearing by preparing plantation and procuring dfIs from the state sericulture Departments. Tasar culture activities are generally being carried out by the group of farmers, particularly in clusters or specific areas. Hence, there is an immediate requirement for suitable precautionary measures to contain the spread of coronavirus disease of 2019 (Covid-19) among the fellow farmers during tasar silkworm rearing process.

Covid-19

Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The Covid-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (WHO, 2020).

Symptoms of Covid-19

The symptoms vary from person to person. The most commonly fever; dry cough and tiredness, less commonly; aches and pains, sore throat, diarrhoea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell and a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes are noticed. The serious symptoms requiring immediate medical attention are difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure and loss of speech or movement (WHO, 2020).

Measures to Safeguard the Farmers

The following precautionary measures may be taken while performing different field based activities during the tasar sericulture practices so as to protect farmers from the risk of Covid-19 infection and to prevent further spread of this disease.

- Ensure only the healthy persons to get involved in the

silkworm rearing activities.

- All the farmers need to wear mask, wash hands frequently and avoid touching face.
- Wash the used masks timely with warm water and soap.
- The container with sodium hypochlorite solution placed in the rearing field or soap may be used for frequent hand washing.
- Avoid entry of suspects or disease carriers into the field.
- Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Always maintain safe distance of 5-6' in the field, during rest and having of meals.
- Avoid many workers on same day and at same time, instead staggered timing may be followed.
- Allow only the essential number of workers in the field and avoid overcrowding.
- Always maintain sanitation in the field and follow all standard procedures of disinfection.
- Frequently sanitise the tools used in rearing activities and avoid their unnecessary touching.
- Compulsorily use gloves while collecting the diseased and dead larvae.
- Rows of trees may be allotted to particular worker so as to eliminate risk of others frequenting same place.
- Each activity must be assigned to specific persons to evade many doing same activity in group.
- Safeguard personal hygiene before, during and after field operations.
- Take personal safety measures during loading/ unloading of inputs/ cocoons.
- During the collection of inputs or sale of cocoons in market, always follow standard safety measures.

Standard Field Hygienic Measures

The following measures recommended to follow during the tasar silkworm rearing ensure hygiene in the field and thereby reduces the chances of Covid-19 infection to the farmers. Hence, it is necessary to follow them. It includes general practices and disinfection activities before brushing and during and after tasar silkworm rearing as follows.

General Practices

To avoid the chances of bacterial and viral diseases, the rearing should not be taken up in dense forest area as it may increase the humidity after rains, thus providing

congenial environment for disease development. Since the air circulation reduces chances of diseases, the area selected for silkworm rearing must be well aerated and not waterlogged. All dried branches, dead twigs, debris and grasses are to be removed and properly disposed.

Before Brushing

The bark and basal cover area of trees should be disinfected with flame gun controlled firing. If possible, burning or flame gunning of rearing field shall be followed. The ground area in and around rearing site should also be cleared from bushes and weeds. It is necessary to disinfect rearing field with spray of 5% bleaching powder solution and dusting of slaked lime and bleaching powder mixture in ratio of 9:1 with the help of dusting machine.

During Rearing

Ensure foliar spray of Jeevan Sudha, sodium hypochlorite and leaf surface microbe besides dusting (slaked lime 9: bleaching powder 1) on different instars.

After Rearing

One week after the harvest of tasar silkworm cocoons, rearing field is to be disinfected with 5% bleaching powder solution spray or dusted as per the ratio mentioned above.

These standard field hygienic measures not only protect the tasar silkworm but also the persons engaged in their rearing from diseases.

Conclusion

Though COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet but the season of rearing tasar silkworm is being experienced. Since many poor and tribal farmers depend on tasar sericulture as a source of their livelihood, there is need to carry tasar sericulture activities. Hence, following all the discussed above measures ensure safeguarding and protecting farmers from Covid-19 and thus helps to contain the spread of this disease.

Reference

WHO, 2020, January 10. *Coronavirus*. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>.