

CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE OF PLANTATION ASSOCIATIONS

Tea – Coffee – Rubber - Spices

Telegrams: TEA
Phone: 2210-2474/75
Fax: 91(033) 2243-4301
Email: ita@indiatea.org
Website: www.indiatea.org

ROYAL EXCHANGE
6 NETAJI SUBHAS ROAD
KOLKATA 700 001

PRESS RELEASE

CCPA RESPONSE TO GREENPEACE REPORT ON PESTICIDE RESIDUES IN INDIAN TEA

The Consultative Committee of Plantation Associations (CCPA) --- the apex body of the Tea Producers Associations in India records its strong resentment over the Report captioned "Trouble Brewing --- Pesticide Residues in Tea samples from India", which has appeared in a wide cross section of the media.

This Report --- while purporting to have anchored its findings within the statutory framework governing pesticide use in India and claiming adherence to scientific/technical rigour in analyzing presence of specific chemicals in the Tea samples analysed --- resorts to sweeping generalizations to undermine the quality and safety credentials of Indian tea which have been assiduously built up over long years in both domestic and global markets. Crop Care Federation of India (CCFI) has released a statement dismissing the claims of Greenpeace. The CCFI contends that while the Greenpeace Report on analysis of Tea samples have been released to the popular press there is no evidence of this having been subjected to peer review by scientific /technical experts. Furthermore, there has neither been any disclosure on the laboratory which has analyzed the samples nor the protocols that have been followed. The CCFI has pointed out that under a central sector scheme the Government of India had, between 2006-2012 initiated an analysis of a wide range of food articles --- including Tea --- with the participation of several laboratories representing the Ministry of Agriculture, ICAR, Ministry of Health, CSIR, State Agricultural Universities, etc. This Comprehensive Study threw up no disturbing reports on Indian tea.

The Greenpeace Report is replete with contradictions. It acknowledges that Tea --- as monoculture --- provides habitat to around 1000 species of arthropods and over 80 species of nematodes and that infestation is most acute in the North East India requiring application of multiple PPFs to control the pests. Yet the Report resorts to innuendoes such as "cocktail of pesticides" disregarding the fact that a large number of Plant Protection Formulations (PPFs) are cleared for use in tea within a well defined Indian legal framework and the reality that the control of such a large number of pests demand application of a number of PPFs. Cocktail implies that there is synergistic effect which is not scientifically validated and as long as each individual PPF is within limits the product is safe.

CCPA records its deep disappointment over the Green Peace Report which has surfaced which has taken no cognizance of the efforts that continue to be made by the tea sector to ensure delivery of a quality compliant and safe product being produced in conformity with globally accepted best practices of environment management and sustainability.

The CCPA has noted that the Tea Board of India, as the regulatory, developmental and promotion agency of the Indian Tea sector has come out with a strong defence of the Indian Tea industry touching on all the aspects which feature in the Greenpeace Report which should serve to assure consumers that the Indian Tea industry is strongly committed to deliver a safe and quality compliant product. The CCPA reiterates, on behalf of the Indian Tea Industry, that along with the

Tea Board of India and its dedicated Tea Research Institutes it is also committed to raise the bar of quality and safety standards even further. A large segment of the Indian Tea industry is under Rain Forest Alliance (RFA), Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP), HACCP and ISO 2000 Certifications. These also require verified and demonstrated adherence to Quality and Safety parameters.

The CCPA would place the following to substantiate this commitment:

- **Plant Protection Formulations (PPFs) in use by the Tea industry fully conform to Indian law with the Central Insecticides Board and Registration Committee (CIB & RC) having specified the list of PPFs which have been registered and cleared for use in Tea.**
- **Indian Tea also is fully compliant of the Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for specific PPFs which have been notified by the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). MRLs for Tea set out under FSSAI are among the most stringent and those of other jurisdictions such as Japan, EU, US, etc, are, in many instances, more liberal.**
- **The Indian Tea industry has dedicated Tea Research Institutes which are continuously and pro-actively engaged in risk assessment arising out of the use of PPFs and guiding the tea industry towards responsible use and application of PPFs.**

These Research Institutes are also actively propagating the cause of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) **a concept introduced in India as far back as 1970** towards helping minimize use of PPFs. IPM is a system that utilises all suitable methods and techniques combining cultural, biological, physical and mechanical approaches which can be concurrently pursued along with the use of PPFs to combat various types of infestations.

The Indian Tea industry had unequivocally supported the Tea Board of India when it developed a comprehensive Plant Protection Code (PPC) for implementation/adoption by the Tea industry. The PPC is intended to serve as the best practice guide to Tea production in conformity with standards jointly developed by all Stakeholders supplementing existing regulations such as from CIB & RC and FSSAI. The PPC deals with safe and responsible usage of PPFs and methodologies to be followed to reduce incidence of pesticides residues in Tea. The PPC seeks to encourage Tea producers to critically review their PPFs to reduce usage wherever possible and apply them in the safest way possible.

The Indian Tea industry is also committed to partnering the Tea Board in its Trustea initiative seeking to promote safe and sustainable agriculture in conformity with globally accepted sustainability practices. The Trustea Sustainability programme was introduced as a multi-stakeholder initiative to establish sustainable practices in, and to strengthen the ecosystem for tea cultivation in India based on ground realities with globally-accepted sustainability principles. The trustea programme incorporates elements of management systems and continuous improvement for tea-producing farms and plantations, product traceability, soil conservation and management, water management, fertilizers, crop protection products, food safety, worker welfare and labour conditions, biodiversity and environment management, and waste and pollution management.

The Greenpeace Report states that ***“a significant proportion of pesticides found in Tea samples are not approved for use in tea cultivation in India”***. Tea Board as a regulatory body has clearly responded to this charge by stating that no PPFs other than those which are registered and cleared by the CIB & RC are being used by the industry. Prevalence of certain PPFs beyond this list is possible as trace elements and as these may either have come from accidental contamination from peripheral agricultural activity or by virtue of the fact that some of these products are highly persistent and known to remain in the soil for over 30/40 years even after stoppage of active use in agricultural operations.

Greenpeace in their Conclusion and Recommendations advocate “a strong legitimate and urgent case for various commercial players in tea sector to invest in a transition towards ecological approaches to cultivation” and cites the case of a Tea estate which has adopted an “integrated and holistic ecological approach” thereby implying that a decisive move to total organic agriculture is possible in tea.

The CCPA would unambiguously state that given the geographical location of tea plantations in India, the Tea industry has been seeing growing incidence of pest attacks in the wake of aberrations of climate change, higher mean temperatures and destruction of feedant habitats. In this environment it is impossible for the Tea industry to move en block to organic agriculture. There is already conclusive evidence that organic farming involves significant crop loss. A Report of the Working Group on Organic Tea which was placed at a recent meeting of the Inter-Governmental Group on Tea under the FAO, clearly states that conversion to organic cultivation could lead to yield loss of over 40% while pushing up production costs due to the significantly higher mandays required for organic operations. The FAO Report also highlights that these debilitating factors are not adequately compensated by higher price realizations for organic tea.

Greenpeace advocacy of organic farming will jeopardize on going operations and threaten the very existence of tea plantations with disastrous consequences on the sub sectors and the Stakeholders dependant on it --- not the least of which are some 1.2 million workers directly employed in the tea plantations. Such a move would also hold out immediate threat for the 2-lakh strong small grower sector in virtually all the tea growing regions in India.

Kolkata
Date: 13th August 2014

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