

## Need to tap potential of organic pesticides: Experts

India has several plants and trees, which can be immensely helpful in preparing environmentally friendly organic pesticides, which can act as a viable, economic and eco-friendly substitute for harmful chemical pesticides. This suggestion besides several other alternative approaches in disease management was given by scientists from various parts of the country during the National Symposium on 'Alternative Approaches in Plant Health Management for Enhancing Farmers' Income'. The symposium was organized by the University's Department of Plant Pathology held under the aegis of Indian Phytopathological Society and Himalayan Phytopathological Society.



Organizing Secretary Dr Satish Sharma told that the participating scientists stressed on the need to utilize the untapped potential of botanical pesticides, which are quite effective for the management of diseases. It was informed that India has over two crore neem (*Azadirachta indica*) trees, which can yield up 80000 tonne oil and can be effectively used to check the attack of pests and diseases. In addition, there are over 1000 plant species exhibiting insecticidal properties, 384 with antifeedant properties, 297 with repellent properties, 27 with attractant properties and 31 with growth inhibiting properties. There are more than 200 plant species, which have been reported to have anti-microbial properties against important pathogens

of different crops. Emphasis on disease forecasting to reduce the losses due to pests was also suggested during the symposium. In apple, *Massonina* blotch is continuing to be a serious disease and Dr JN. Sharma underlined the need for adopting the spray schedule of apple, which is being updated by the University every year. Dr G Manjunath from Horticulture University, Bagalkot (Karnataka) suggested an eco-friendly strategy of disease management for pomegranate. Dr A. Nagaraj gave a detailed account of the eco-friendly management of millet diseases while Dr Sanjeev Sharma from CPRI Shimla gave an effective model of disease forecasting for potato, which can substantially reduce the losses. Dr PN Sharma, former Professor and Head from Department of Plant Pathology, CSK Palampur talked about molecular approaches for the diagnosis of viral diseases which have grown in serious proportions over the years.

Former Member of Planning Commission and Ex-Director General of ICAR Prof. VL. Chopra emphasized the need for strengthening of the extension services to take the technologies effectively to the field. He exhorted the scientists to develop effective alternative approaches of plant disease management to reduce the use of chemical pesticides in agriculture so that healthy food is available to the consumers. A session on farmer-scientist interaction was an important event of this symposium, which was attended by more than 100 farmers from Shimla, Solan and Mandi. Farmers raised various issues related to the disease problems in apple, capsicum in polyhouses and diseases in other crops.

In the concluding session, UHF Vice-Chancellor Dr HC. Sharma outlined the need for quality research to bring excellence which could be channelized into effective technologies to the farmers. He also emphasized the need for molecular approaches for incorporating desirable genes in the crops for developing good varieties. Ranvir Singh, Chief General Manager of NABARD gave a detailed account of the schemes of the NABARD, which can help the farmers.