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**DIVERSITY OF UNDERUTILIZED CROPS IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA:
CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

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Research and innovation focuses on major and commercial agriculture crops in Sri Lanka, but little is known about the performance of underutilized crops. Diversity of underutilized crops are depended on geography, location, farming knowledge and demand of public. Underutilized crops are neglected but rich in medicinal and nutritive values. Diversity is useful in innovation and domestication on breeding implications, need to increase productivity and sustainability in agriculture and food production. Objective of the study is to assess the diversity and distribution of underutilized crops in Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Diversity and distributions of underutilized fruit crops was higher than vegetables and field crops due to its negligence. Diversity and distributions of underutilized fruit crops was high in home gardens. However, underutilized vegetable and medicinal crops were common in unutilized lands. Diversity and distribution of palmyrah was high in northern costal line than coconut plantations, but utilizations are quiet questionable. There was a big gap on inheritance and ethneological knowledge of underutilized crops between ancestors to young generation, leads to significant genetic loss. Systematic approach, networking and cooperation on education, extension and research are crucial and to be promoted towards the commercial orientation of underutilized crops. Hence, research policy and management could be improved and implemented to promote the production of underutilized crops.

Keywords: Diversity, distribution, underutilized crops, dry zone, Sri Lanka