

Key answers to EX 1 in Revision & Practice 2

Pesticide suicide

As many as 60,000 small farmers in the region of Andhra Pradesh, southern India, have taken to farming cotton instead of food crops. Some 20 of them have recently committed suicide by eating lethal doses of pesticide.

Most of the farmers are extremely poor. Attracted by cheap loans from pesticides traders and the prospect of a quick buck, they borrowed heavily to raise cotton on small plots of land.

Whitefly, boll weevils and caterpillars multiplied and destroyed their crops, despite the constant application of pesticides. The average yield of cotton fields in Andhra Pradesh fell by more than half in just one year. Now the farmers are in no position to repay the loans or feed their families.

The suicide of Samala Mallaiah in Nagara village grabbed media headlines. He owned one acre of land, leased two more and grew cotton on all three. After making a loss in the first year, he leased yet more land in an attempt to recover. Confronted with falling prices, mounting debts and pest attacks, he committed *harakiri*. 'Cotton has given us shattered dreams,' said one old farmer in Nagara village.

Nearly half the pesticides used in India go into protecting cotton, the most important commercial crop in the country. However, pests have shown increased immunity to a range of pesticides. Last year there were heavy crop losses due to leaf-curl, which is caused by the dreaded whitefly. This nondescript, milky-white fly sucks sap from the cotton leaves, making them curl and dry up. The fly struck first in Pakistan and north-western India. Then it turned south.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the crop losses and destruction in Andhra Pradesh arose from the repeated application of excessive amounts of chemicals - a practice actively encouraged by pesticides traders.