



# Lack of quarantine checks raises concern for import of exotic weeds & diseases

## Dangerous Parthenium weeds was imported with PL-480 wheat

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Food imports so far have not been against a price. The country paid a heavy price for imports of wheat under PL-480 from US in the pre-Green Revolution days, when the Parthenium weed found its way into India with the imports.

Even today, due to lack of proper quarantine and sanitary and phytosanitary checks at the points of entry exotic weeds and plant diseases are entering the country through imports of food and agri products.

The exotic Parthenium weeds were first detected in 1956 in Pune in Maharashtra. Since its first occurrence, this weed has spread to all parts of the country, including the remote parts like northeast India, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the Lakshadweep group of islands.

Experts say the food imports was done under compulsions of scarcity. It was then a necessity. But what we lacked was proper quarantine checks at the points of entry. Recently the government has formulated a Plant Quarantine Order for imports.

But proper mechanism is yet



to be put in place for its effective implementation.

The director of the Jabalpur-based National Research Centre for Weed Science (NRCWS), Dr NT Yaduraju, says that, apart from the deadly Parthenium, many other exotic weeds have entered the country like Mile-a-Minute and Chormolinia.

The Parthenium weed is otherwise called Gajar Ghas, literally meaning leaves of carrot. It is also called 'Congress weed', reminding of its imports under the then Congress rule. Similarly, the Chormolina weed first detected in Kerala is

called 'Communist weed'.

The long-drawn battle against Parthenium is still on, says Dr Yaduraju. "We have now found an effective weapon to fight Parthenium. We have about two lakh imported Mexican beetle in the last three years. This insect eats up the leaves of Parthenium and does not harm any other crop. We are multiplying this insect and distributing through our 22 centres spread across the country. We have also distributed to about 150 out of 400 krishi vigyan kendra (KVKs)."

Apart from sucking useful

nutrient from the crop fields, Parthenium is known to cause diseases like asthma, allergy and skin disorders. Airborne pollen may cause severe allergic rhinitis in some individuals. While the farmer takes care in removing Parthenium from fields through manual means and sprays, the concern remains about its presence in non-crop lands, say Dr Yaduraju.

He says that biological control method through Mexican Beetle (*Zygogramma bicolorata*) is likely to be slow. Hence this programme needs to be integrated with plantation of suitable competitive plants available locally like Cassia tora (Chakada), C sericia and marigold. These plants would suppress Parthenium spread, he says. Mr Yaduraju says that NRCWS has also found out some useful use of Parthenium.

The stems of this plant are being used to prepared wooden laminates. Both leaves and stem are used for preparation of green manure mixing it with cowdung. He also says that Parthenium is being used as a medicinal plant in different parts of the globe. Every year NRCWS launches a Parthenium Awareness week beginning August 26 to September 1.