

Climate Shocks and Climate Smart Agricultural Adoption in Sri Lanka, 2024-2025

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Key findings and policy implications

We assess the adoption of climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices and the role of climate shocks using the BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey data for 2024–2025.

- Twenty percent of farmers faced severe climatic shocks, while 40 percent faced more moderate negative shocks.
- The largest share of farmers reporting natural shocks lived in the dry zone.
- Forty-four percent of farmers were negatively affected by pests and diseases, including 72 percent of oilseed and tuber farmers.
- Seventy-four percent of farmers reported that changing weather patterns affect their income.
- Forty-one percent of farmers reported that they were currently using at least one climate smart agricultural practice (CSA).
- Crop type strongly predicts CSA adoption. Vegetable, pulse, and maize farmers are significantly more likely to adopt CSA practices, with marginal effects indicating increases of roughly 16–17 percentage points. In contrast, rice cultivation is not significantly associated with adoption—important given rice’s dominance in the country.
- Adoption levels of CSA practices vary sharply across provinces. Eastern Province shows the highest adoption (66 percent), while Sabaragamuwa records the lowest adoption at just 14 percent.
- Exposure to climate shocks increases CSA adoption. Experiencing a moderate or severe climate shock in the previous year is associated with a 6–7 percentage point increase in CSA adoption, suggesting that shocks are prompting adaptive responses.

Policy Implications for Sri Lanka

- Strengthen CSA adoption in lagging provinces. Sabaragamuwa, North Western, and Western show consistently low adoption despite exposure to climate risks.
- Expand and tailor extension services to promote CSA for the most climate vulnerable farmers.

Background

Sri Lanka faces a growing burden of climate-related shocks, with multiple assessments identifying the country as highly vulnerable to climate variability and extremes (World Bank, 2025; UNFCCC, 2021). The most recurrent hazards include droughts, floods, landslides, heat stress, and increasingly erratic rainfall patterns, alongside longer-term threats such as sea-level rise and coastal erosion that affect most agricultural zones (Disaster Management Centre, 2023; The World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, 2021).

These shocks have direct consequences for agricultural productivity and household welfare, intensifying the urgency for resilient production systems and effective extension support. In response, the Government of Sri Lanka has promoted Good Agricultural Practices (SL-GAP) and articulated a broader policy push for climate-smart agriculture (CSA) through instruments such as the National Agriculture Policy and the National Adaptation Plan, including guidance on CSA technologies, farmer training, and improved extension delivery (Ministry of Agriculture, 2019; Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, 2016).

Although these policy commitments provide a strong framework, CSA adoption in Sri Lanka remains relatively limited. Sri Lankan farmers face financial and technical barriers to adopting climate-smart agriculture, including limited access to credit, insurance, and reliable extension services, as well as gaps in practical knowledge at the grassroots level. Adoption is further constrained by institutional and policy weaknesses, such as fragmented coordination across government agencies, weak research-to-policy linkages, and inconsistent or slow policy implementation. In addition, infrastructure limitations and social factors—including unreliable irrigation, gender disparities, and generally risk-averse farming practices—reduce both the incentives and feasibility of investing in new CSA technologies (Munaweerage et al. 2025; FAO, 2021; Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, 2016). Local case studies, such as Yogarajah and Weerasooriya's (2020) Dry Zone study in Vavuniya shows that CSA adoption hinges more on farmers' socio-economic capacity than on the availability of technologies. Higher income, education, training, and access to extension services increased adoption, while smallholders with limited institutional links and resources were far less likely to adopt.

In recent years, several events have intensified these challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent macroeconomic crisis disrupted agricultural input supply chains, reduced household purchasing power, and constrained the operational capacity of public institutions, including extension services (World Bank, 2022; IMF, 2023). Meanwhile, the increasing frequency of rainfall anomalies, heatwaves, and flood events documented between 2019 and 2023 heightened the need for climate smart agriculture (The World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, 2021; UNFCCC, 2021).

Together, these developments created a more volatile farming environment in which timely information and extension support became both more necessary and harder to provide. These disruptions likely also affected the adoption of CSA practices as reduced fiscal space limited the Government's capacity to fund field-level demonstrations, hire extension officers, and roll out technical training programs (World Bank, 2022). Even amid limited fiscal space and competing government priorities, advancing CSA adoption is vital because Sri Lanka's agriculture remains both economically central and highly exposed to worsening climate risks. Strengthening farmers' adaptive capacity through targeted financial, technical, and institutional support is therefore essential to improve CSA adoption across diverse agro-ecological zones (Marambe et al., 2014).

The BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey of Sri Lanka 2024-2025

Given the lack of up-to-date, nationally representative information on Sri Lanka's socioeconomic conditions after the 2022 economic crisis, the BRIGHT project carried out the country's first comprehensive, multi-thematic household survey—the BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey of Sri Lanka. Conducted between November 2024 and March 2025, the survey collected information from 6,850 households, interviewing both men and women across every district and province.

The BRIGHT survey was designed to represent the urban, rural, and estate sectors, as well as each province individually. Its sampling approach—combined with the incorporation of the 2024 Census and the 2019 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)—allowed for the generation of survey weights that ensure national representativeness.

In terms of content, the BRIGHT survey builds on IFPRI's experience implementing large, multi-topic household surveys in countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar (see <https://www.ifpri.org/publications/datasets/>). Yet, within Sri Lanka, it stands out for its unusually broad thematic scope. The questionnaire covers an extensive set of topics, including food and non-food expenditure, monetary poverty, education and health, housing and assets, employment and livelihoods, agricultural and non-agricultural enterprises, women's empowerment, psychological well-being, nutrition knowledge and anthropometry, social protection, food, water and energy insecurity, debt, migration, climate change adaptation, and household exposure to shocks, among other themes.

Additional information on the survey's design, sampling methods, and implementation can be found on the BRIGHT project website: <https://www.ifpri.org/project/bright-sri-lanka/>

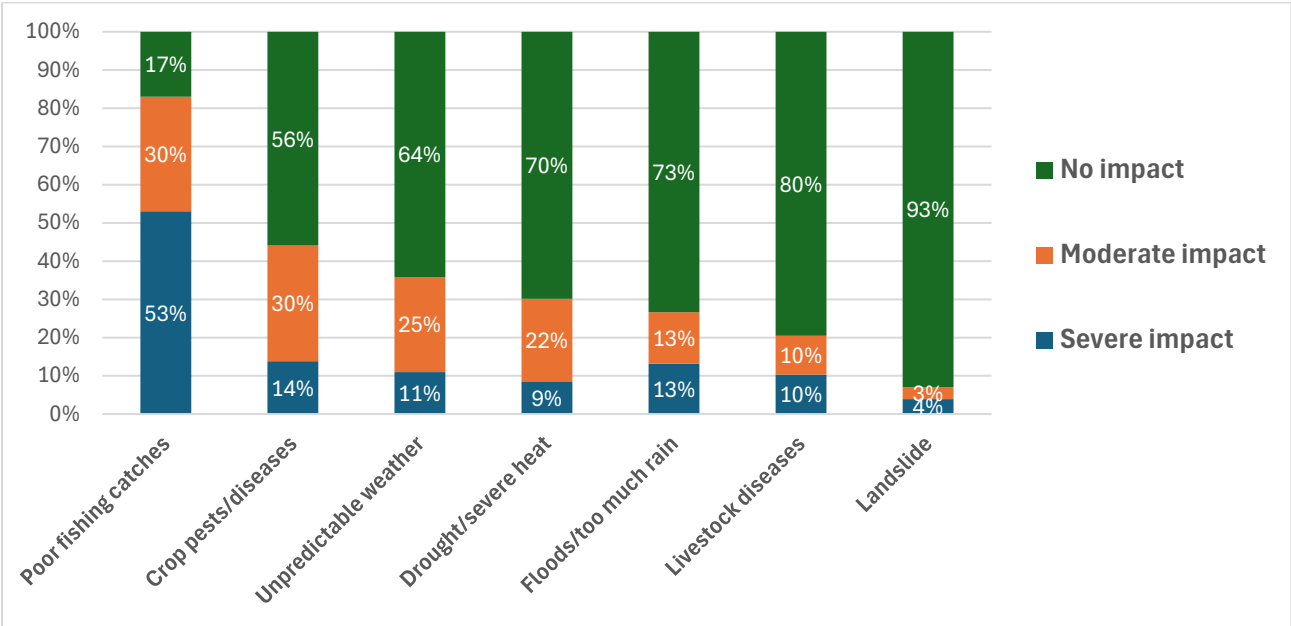
Natural shocks in Sri Lanka in 2024/2025

In 2024/2025, 18 percent of households in Sri Lanka reported experiencing a climatic shock that had a severely negative impact on household welfare, while 26 percent experienced a climatic shock with a moderately negative impact. These shocks include unpredictable weather, drought, severe heat, floods, excessive rainfall, and landslides. **Among farmers, 20 percent faced severe shocks, while 40 percent faced more moderate negative shocks.**

As shown in Figure 1, **unpredictable weather severely negatively affected 11 percent of farm households and moderately negatively affected 25 percent.** Drought and severe heat also had substantial negative effects, severely impacting 9 percent of households and moderately affecting 22 percent. Floods and excessive rainfall severely negatively affected 10 percent of households, with an additional 10 percent reporting more moderate negative impacts in 2024/2025.

Other natural shocks, such as pests and crop diseases, also significantly undermined the welfare of farm households. **Forty-four percent of farmers were negatively affected by pests and diseases in 2024/2025,** while 20 percent of livestock farmers experienced negative impacts due to livestock diseases. Fishers appear to be the most affected by low fish stocks—likely driven by overfishing and changing climatic patterns—with 53 percent reporting being severely negatively affected by poor catches. Only 17 percent of fishers were not affected by this shock at all in 2024/2025.

Figure 1. Prevalence of self-reported natural shocks in Sri Lanka, 2024/2025



Source: BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey, 2024-2025

Table 1 illustrates how shocks varied across agricultural zones in 2024/2025. The largest share of farmers reporting natural shocks lived in the dry zone, followed by those in the intermediate zone, and then the wet zone. **In the dry zone, roughly 40 percent of households reported that their welfare was negatively affected by unpredictable weather conditions, drought or severe heat, and floods or excessive rainfall.**

Table 1. Prevalence of self-reported natural shocks by agro-ecological zones, 2024/2025

	Crop pests/diseases	Unpredictable weather	Drought/severe heat	Floods/too much rain	Livestock diseases	Landslide
Dry zone						
Severe impact	13%	11%	10%	22%	14%	1%
Moderate impact	36%	30%	30%	17%	13%	2%
Intermediate zone						
Severe impact	14%	9%	8%	10%	5%	4%
Moderate impact	18%	18%	20%	11%	12%	4%
Wet zone						
Severe impact	7%	8%	4%	12%	8%	2%
Moderate impact	11%	15%	7%	11%	5%	2%

Source: BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey, 2024-2025

Within this zone, 22 percent of households reported being severely affected by floods or excessive rainfall. Pests and diseases also affected more households in the dry zone than in the other zones, with 48 percent of farmers reporting negative impacts from crop pests and diseases, and 27 percent reporting negative impacts from livestock diseases.

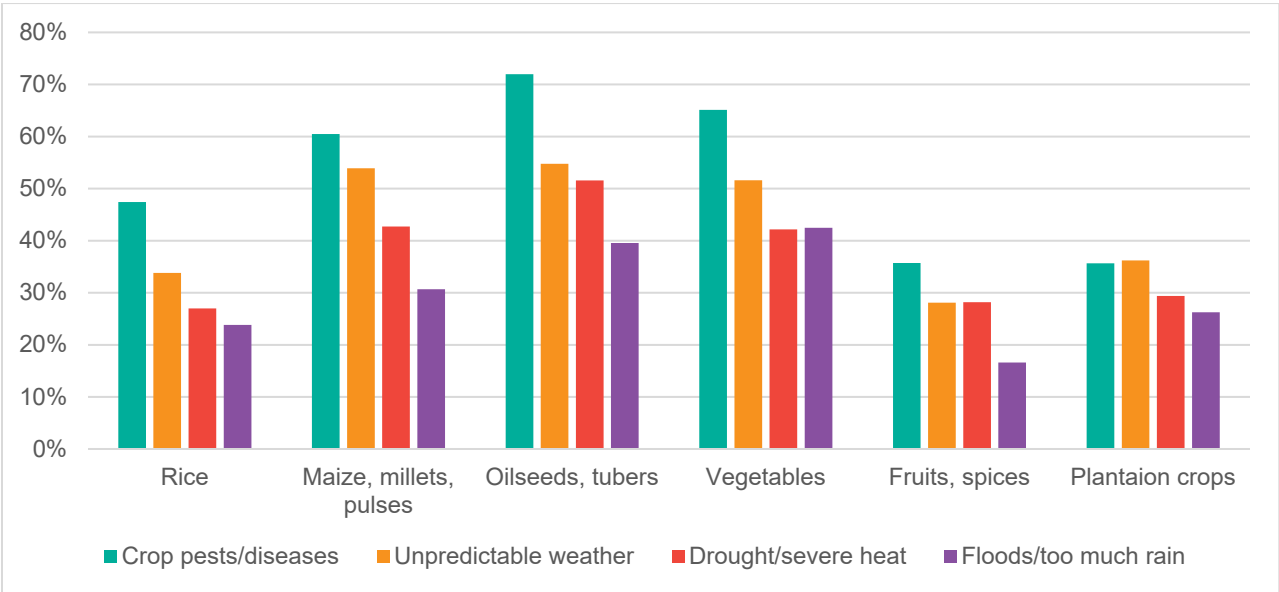
In the intermediate zone, drought or severe heat, unpredictable weather conditions, and pests and diseases were the most widely reported shocks. Nearly as many households in this zone were severely affected by these shocks as in the dry zone.

Finally, in the wet zone, the two most significant shocks were unpredictable weather and floods or excessive rainfall, with 8 percent and 12 percent of households' welfare severely affected, respectively.

Shocks affected the production of key crops in Sri Lanka in distinct ways. Oilseed and tuber farmers reported experiencing the highest levels of negative climatic and natural shocks, followed by vegetable farmers; maize, millet, and pulse farmers; rice farmers; plantation crop farmers; and finally fruit farmers. As shown in Figure 2, pests and diseases were the most significant threat to livelihoods across nearly all crop groups, with the exception of plantation farmers. **Seventy-two percent of oilseed and tuber farmers reported that their welfare was negatively affected by pests and diseases**, followed by 65 percent of vegetable farmers and 60 percent of maize, millet, and pulse farmers. Nearly 50 percent of rice farmers also struggled with pests and diseases. This issue was somewhat less prevalent among perennial crop farmers, with 36 percent of fruit farmers and 36 percent of plantation farmers reporting negative impacts—still a relatively high share.

Unpredictable weather was the second most commonly faced shock for all crop groups. Thirty-six percent of plantation farmers were negatively affected by unpredictable weather, while more than 50 percent of vegetable, oilseed, tuber, maize, millet, and pulse farmers reported negative impacts from this shock. Drought and severe heat were also major concerns, negatively affecting the welfare of more than 50 percent of oilseed and tuber farmers. Finally, floods and excessive rainfall negatively affected more than 40 percent of vegetable, tuber, and oilseed farmers.

Figure 2. Prevalence of self-reported natural shocks by crop, 2024/2025



Source: BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey, 2024-2025

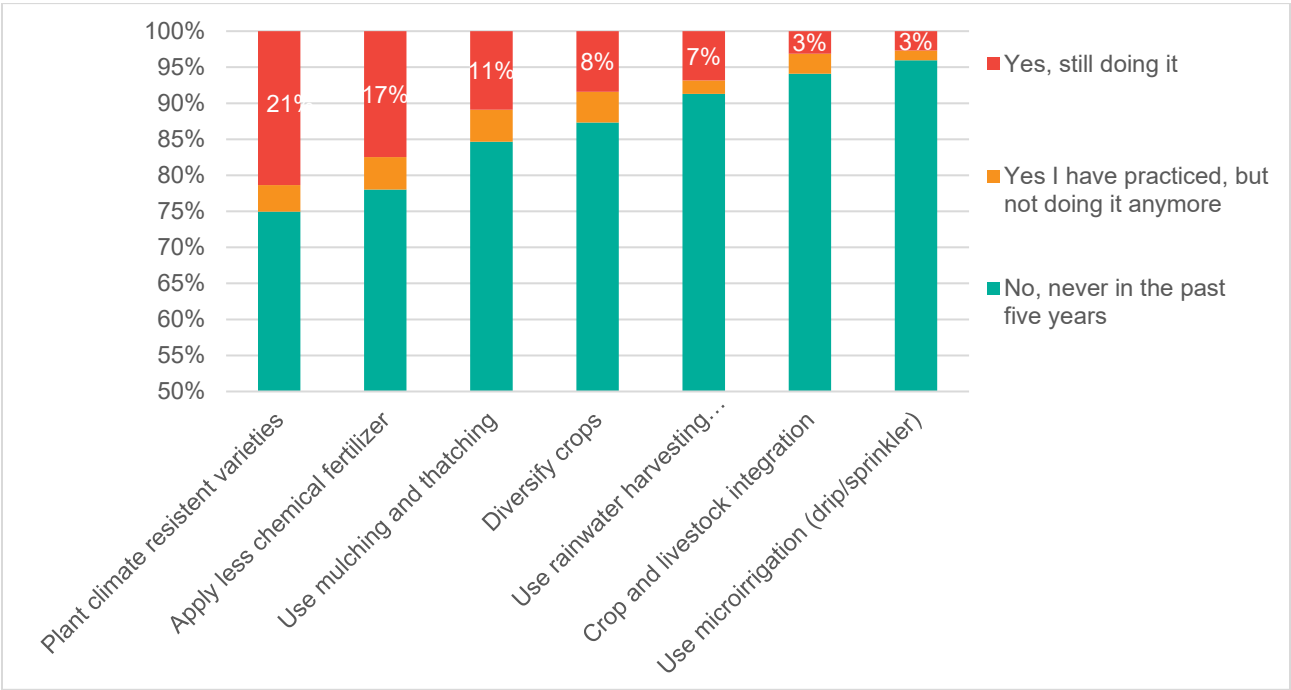
Adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices in Sri Lanka in 2024/2025

We began the survey section by asking farmers whether they felt that changing weather patterns were affecting their farm income. **Seventy-four percent reported that changing weather patterns do, in fact, affect their income.** We then asked whether they had received any training on climate-smart agriculture (CSA). Only 3.8 percent of farmers indicated that they had received such training. After that, we asked farmers whether they had implemented specific CSA practices in the past, whether they were still using them, or whether they had never implemented them. Importantly, for each practice, farmers were asked whether they had adopted it specifically to “combat changing climate patterns.”

We asked about the following CSA practices: planting climate-resistant varieties, applying less chemical fertilizer, using mulching and thatching, diversifying crops, using rainwater-harvesting techniques, integrating crops and livestock, and adopting micro-irrigation (drip or sprinkler). **Overall, 41 percent of farmers reported that they were currently using at least one of these practices.** Twenty-four percent had adopted one practice, 10 percent had adopted two, and the remaining 7 percent had adopted more than two.

Across individual practices, the most commonly used was the planting of climate-resistant varieties: in 2024/2025, 21 percent of farmers had implemented this strategy (Figure 3). This was followed by reducing the use of chemical fertilizer specifically to address climate-related changes, with 17 percent continuing to use this approach. Eleven percent of farmers were using mulching and thatching as a CSA practice, while 8 percent had diversified their crops in response to climate change. Another 7 percent were using rainwater-harvesting techniques. Two far less common strategies were crop-and-livestock integration and the use of micro-irrigation.

Figure 3. Adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, 2024/2025



Source: BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey, 2024-2025

Climate-smart agricultural practices have been adopted at varying rates across different crop groups. **Approximately 70 percent of oilseed, pulse, and maize farmers have implemented at least one climate-smart practice.** This is followed by 58 percent of vegetable farmers and about 50 percent of tuber farmers. Adoption rates are seemingly lower among rice farmers (42 percent), plantation crop farmers (38 percent), and fruit farmers (33 percent).

Across individual practices, as shown in Table 2, **the use of climate-resistant varieties is highest among rice, maize, millet, pulse, oilseed, tuber, and vegetable farmers.** Adoption is particularly notable among maize farmers (59 percent) and oilseed farmers (55 percent). Reduced chemical fertilizer use is the most widely adopted strategy among plantation and fruit crop farmers, with 24 percent and 17 percent adopting this approach, respectively. It is also an important strategy among maize, millet, pulse, and vegetable farmers.

Crop diversification is used by nearly one-quarter of vegetable farmers and by 35 percent of oilseed farmers, though adoption of this strategy is notably low among fruit and plantation crop farmers. Mulching and thatching are most commonly practiced by vegetable farmers, who also lead in the adoption of rainwater-harvesting techniques. Similarly, crop-and-livestock integration and micro-irrigation are mainly used by vegetable farmers, with roughly 10 percent adopting each practice.

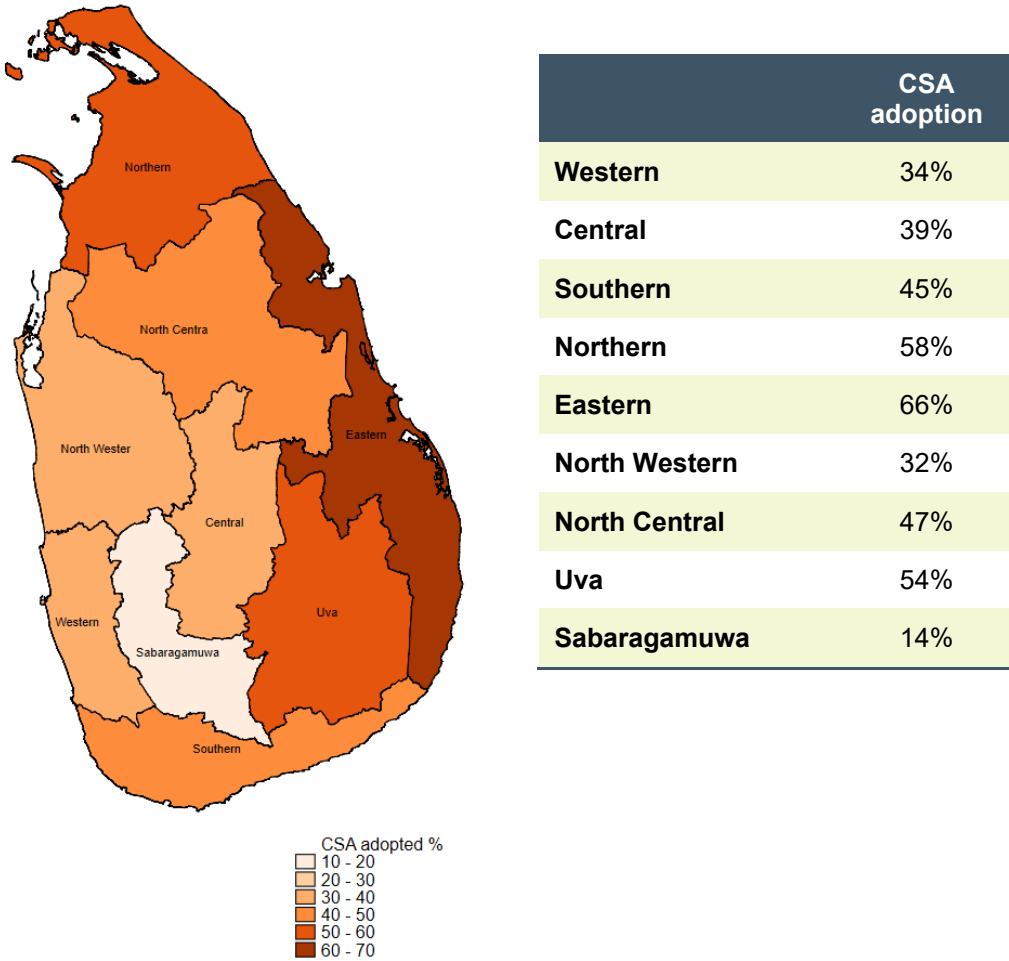
Table 2. Climate-smart agricultural practices, by crop

	Rice	Maize, millets, pulses	Oilseeds tubers	Vegetables	Fruits, spices	Planation crops
Climate resistant varieties	28%	47%	29%	32%	11%	11%
Reduced chemical fertilizer	13%	27%	19%	25%	17%	24%
Diversified crops	8%	21%	17%	24%	7%	5%
Mulching and thatching	10%	7%	10%	19%	10%	11%
Rainwater harvesting techniques	8%	5%	5%	11%	7%	6%
Crop and livestock integration	3%	6%	3%	10%	3%	1%
Micro-irrigation (drip, sprinkler)	2%	2%	5%	10%	2%	1%

Source: BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey, 2024-2025

Levels of adoption of climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices vary widely across Sri Lanka’s provinces. **Eastern Province—dominated by rice and pulse farmers—has the highest overall adoption rate.** This is largely driven by the widespread use of climate-resistant varieties and rainwater-harvesting techniques, which align well with the province’s exposure to recurrent drought and irregular rainfall. Northern Province follows, with 58 percent of farmers adopting at least one practice. Adoption there is led by climate-resistant varieties (33 percent) and mulching and thatching (24 percent), reflecting the region’s mixed composition of rice and vegetable farmers and its history of water scarcity and soil degradation.

Figure 4. Climate-smart agricultural practices, by province, 2024/2025



Uva Province—where vegetable production is common but where farmers are also highly diversified—records an adoption rate of 54 percent. In Uva, climate-resistant varieties and reduced chemical fertilizer use are the two most frequently implemented strategies.

At the other end of the spectrum, Sabaragamuwa—characterized by substantial plantation, rice, and fruit cultivation—has one of the lowest CSA adoption rates in the country, with only 14 percent of farmers reporting the use of any climate-smart practice. Adoption of each individual practice is limited to 5 percent or less of farmers. This pattern aligns with persistent challenges faced by growers in perennial crop systems, including high upfront costs and limited access to CSA-related training and information.

These differences across zones are consistent with patterns documented in existing Sri Lankan CSA research. Studies note that adoption tends to be higher in regions with more frequent drought exposure, stronger extension presence, and crop types that more readily accommodate CSA practices such as improved seed varieties or mulching (e.g., Dissanayake & Premaratne 2021; Esham & Garforth 2013; FAO Sri Lanka 2019). For example, dry-zone rice and pulse farmers—who operate in more climate-vulnerable environments—have stronger incentives to adopt risk-mitigating practices like drought-tolerant seed varieties and water-harvesting. In contrast, plantation and fruit farmers in wetter zones face higher capital constraints, lack tailored CSA recommendations, and are less frequently targeted by training programs, all of which contribute to lower adoption. Limited knowledge dissemination, weaker access

to CSA-relevant inputs, and lower perceived need for adaptation in these humid and intermediate zones also reduce uptake. Thus, provincial variation in CSA adoption appears closely linked to climate exposure, crop systems, input access, and differences in public extension outreach.

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Predictors of CSA adoption in Sri Lanka

We examine how household, farm, and location characteristics are associated with the adoption of climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices. The dependent variable is a binary indicator equal to 1 if a household is currently using at least one of the eight CSA practices included in the survey. We estimate a logistic regression model and use average marginal effects (AMEs) to interpret the results. In the coefficient plot, we display only statistically significant associations.

Consistent with the descriptive findings, vegetable, maize, and pulse farmers show higher rates of adoption. The margins indicate that pulse farmers are approximately 17 percent more likely to adopt at least one CSA practice, while vegetable farmers are about 16 percentage points more likely to adopt, relative to the omitted crop category. (In contrast, rice farmers do not have a statistically significant difference in their likelihood of adopting CSA practices.)

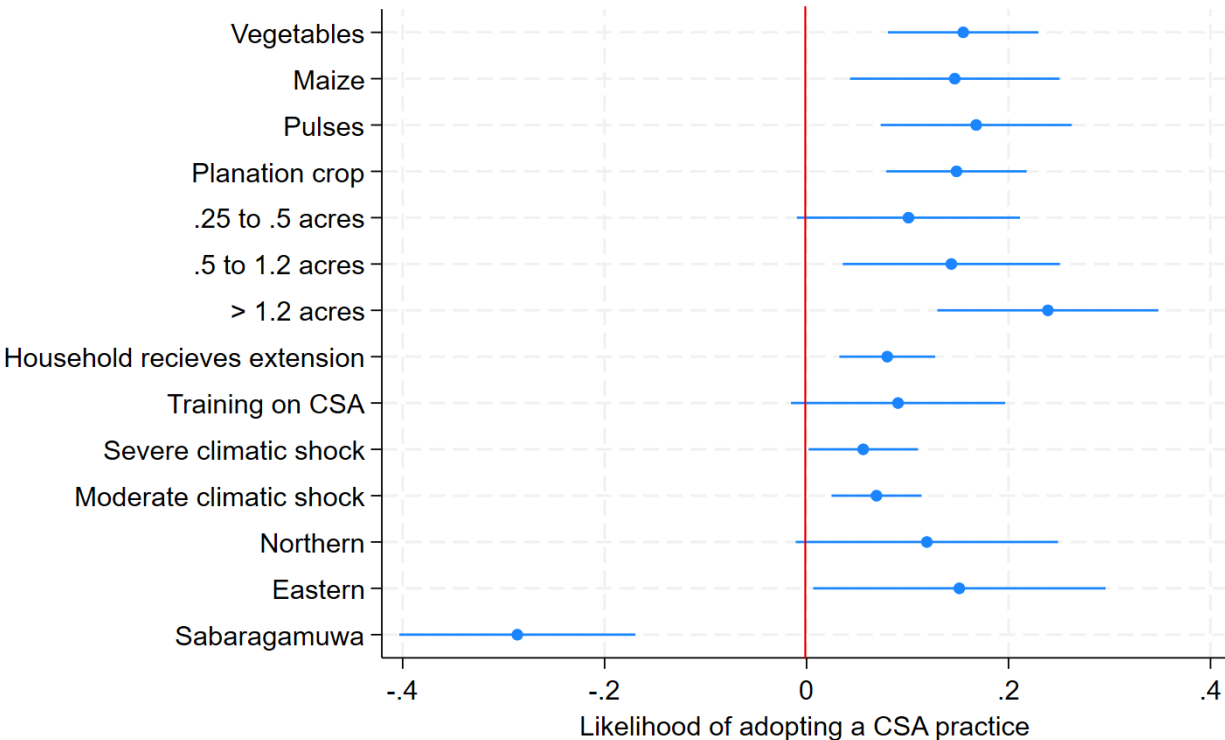
Farm size is an important predictor of CSA adoption. Very small farmers cultivating less than 0.5 acres are not significantly different from the reference group, but farmers cultivating 0.5 to 1.2 acres are 14 percentage points more likely to adopt CSA practices, and those with more than 1.2 acres are 24 percentage points more likely to adopt. Access to agricultural extension services also increases adoption: farmers who received extension advice are 8 percentage points more likely to adopt a CSA practice. Training in CSA has a positive coefficient, but the marginal effect is not statistically significant at the 5 percent level, meaning we cannot conclude that training increases adoption.

Experiencing climate shock is also associated with higher adoption. Households that reported a severe shock in the past year are 6 percent more likely to adopt, and those reporting a moderate shock are 7 percentage points more likely to adopt, relative to households that did not experience a shock.

We find no statistically significant associations between adoption and several household characteristics, including asset-quintile, household size, women-only households, low-education households, or the receipt of Aswesuma benefits.

Geographic patterns also matter. Consistent with the descriptive maps, households in Northern and Eastern provinces appear more likely to adopt—by approximately 12 and 15 percentage points, respectively. However, the 95 percent confidence intervals for both effects include zero, meaning these associations are not statistically distinguishable from zero at conventional significance levels. **Finally, farmers in Sabaragamuwa are 29 percentage points less likely to adopt at least one CSA practice, relative to Western province**

Figure 5. Predictors of CSA adoption in Sri Lanka



Source: BRIGHT Integrated Household Survey, 2024-2025

Policy Implications for Sri Lanka

The findings show that Sri Lankan farmers face a high and growing burden of climatic shocks—including unpredictable weather, drought and severe heat, floods and excess rainfall, and widespread pest and disease outbreaks. These shocks cut across all agro-ecological zones but are most severe and most frequent in the dry and intermediate zones. At the same time, adoption of climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices remains limited: only 41 percent of farmers use at least one CSA practice, and adoption is highly uneven across provinces, crop systems, and farm sizes.

Key Recommendations

1. Target CSA outreach and training to farmers most exposed to shocks and least likely to adopt

Dry-zone and intermediate-zone farmers face the highest rates of unpredictable weather, drought/severe heat, and pest and disease outbreaks. Yet CSA adoption is far from universal in these areas. Targeting proactive training and demonstration plots to these zones would directly address the risks farmers identify as most harmful. Move from general “targeting” to an institutional structure (CSA hubs) that can deliver zone-specific support efficiently.

2. Expand crop-specific CSA guidance, especially for rice, plantation, and fruit sectors

The results show that oilseed, pulse, maize, and vegetable farmers are far more likely to adopt CSA practices, while rice and perennial crop farmers’ lag. Tailored messaging is needed to help rice farmers

adopt climate-resistant varieties and water-saving techniques, and to support fruit and plantation farmers in integrating soil-moisture conservation and diversified nutrient management.

3. Strengthen integration of CSA content into public extension services

Farmers who accessed extension were 8 percentage points more likely to adopt CSA practices, but CSA training remains extremely rare (3.8 percent coverage). Engaging extension officers to share CSA adaptation strategies can significantly enhance adoption. Embedding CSA modules, including water-management, climate-resilient seed selection, soil-health practices, and pest-monitoring into routine extension visits would scale up knowledge efficiently.

4. Reorient agricultural extension services to integrate climate literacy and sustainability awareness alongside technical CSA training.

Extension programs should pair technical CSA training with guidance on the broader environmental implications of farming practices. Farmers need greater awareness that, even if unintentional, unsustainable practices can collectively intensify environmental stress. By improving farmers' understanding of both the pros and cons of different farming methods and their role in mitigating adverse climatic impacts, extension services can promote more sustainable resource use and strengthen farmers' sense of ownership in building climate resilience.

5. Promote affordable CSA options for very small farmers

Farmers with less than 0.5 acres show no increase in adoption relative to the baseline, suggesting financial or labor constraints. Promoting low-cost, low-labor practices can help remove adoption barriers for the smallest farmers. Strengthening collective action through farmer groups, shared resource centers and community demonstration plots enables cost- and labor-sharing while building confidence in new practices.

6. Use shock-responsive programming to accelerate preventive CSA adoption

Incorporating CSA training and input into disaster-response and early-warning systems, as well as post-disaster recovery packages would help shift farmers from reactive coping to preventive adaptation. For example, linking CSA advice to drought alerts or post-flood community meetings ensures that knowledge reaches farmers exactly when they reassess their production risks.

7. Address provincial disparities by prioritizing lagging regions such as Sabaragamuwa

Sabaragamuwa farmers are 29 percentage points less likely to adopt CSA practices. Targeted support is needed.

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