Lathyrism
Lathyrus sativus (*kesari dal*) is a hardy crop grown easily on unirrigated land. Till the sixties, this inexpensive pulse was given as wages to bonded labourers in Madhya Pradesh who consumed it in the form of chappatis. The toxin from the pulse, β-oxalyl aminoalanine (BOAA) caused neurolathyrism characterised by spastic paraplegia. In the 1950s, the reported prevalence of lathyrism was 1.5 per cent but studies carried out at NFI in 1981-82 showed that there was a steep reduction in the prevalence of lathyrism (Figure 37).

NFI recommended that:
- cultivation of lathyrus should be prevented
- payment of wages to workers in the form of lathyrus sativus must be prohibited
- ban on inter-state movement of lathyrus must be strictly enforced
- laboratory facilities for detection of BOAA in pulse flour must be made freely available in food testing laboratories to detect the adulteration of other pulses with lathyrus.
- research to develop low toxin strains of lathyrus sativus should be encouraged.

Agricultural scientists were not very successful in developing low toxin (BOAA) strains of Lathyrus and the other recommendations were not implemented effectively. Subsequent studies in the nineties have shown that lathyrism has become rare. The decline was due to the fact that cost of *kesari dal* had increased several folds and so it was no longer given to laborers as ‘wages’. Lathyrism is an example of the ‘nutritional’ problem, which was solved by ‘market forces’.