

EXPORT POTENTIAL OF HORTICULTURAL PRODUCTS: CONSTRAINTS AND STRATEGIES

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Horticultural sector has the highest potential for export, owing to the wide diversity of horticultural flora, agro-climatic conditions coupled with efficient low cost labour and advantageous geographic location. India has an edge over other producing countries to expand its export basket and exploit the hitherto untapped potential indigenous germplasm. However, the above stated climatic diversity offer equally diverse problems in post harvest handling of produce due to their varying shapes, sizes shelf life, nature of ripening and varied storage, transport and packaging requirements. Marketing is an important step in the post harvest handling of the horticultural produce. It is the most complicated issue that requires better understanding of the complexities and identification of the bottlenecks to provide an efficient solution. An efficient and effective marketing system is a boon to any production system in agriculture and horticulture in particular.

Current status

Horticultural crops play an important role in the economy of the nation, as there are crops suitable for almost all the agro-climatic zones of the country. India has accelerated in total annual production of horticultural crops touching over 149 million tonnes during 1999-2000. Today, India has emerged as the second largest producer of the fruits (46 million tonnes) and vegetables (91 million tonnes), contributing nearly 10% and 14% respectively, of the world production. The horticulture crops cover about 8% of the total area contributing about 20% of the gross agricultural output in the country. India also enjoys the crown of being number one producer of mango and banana in the world. The overall productivity of the fruit and vegetable is 12 and 15.2 tonnes/hect., respectively. Though the country is the second largest producer of the fruits and vegetables in the world, our per capita consumption

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of fruits and vegetables for over one billion populations is very low. Fresh fruits and vegetables has the lions share of exports followed by processed one. Our export is mostly directed to Arabian and European countries. India still has a considerable scope for expanding the export basket by promoting fruits and vegetables, which have a large production base. Out of 149 million tonnes of horticulture crops that is produced in the country, about 60% is consumed by the local market and only the 40% of the produce is channelised in the regulated markets for the consumption of the urban population in the big cities. Export market accounts for 10% of the total production. India has a large tradition of growing flowers and about 89000 hac. of area is under cultivation of cutflowers. Floriculture offers great potential both for domestic use and also the exports. Medicinal and Aromatic Plant is another unexplored area where future global demand and interest are likely to grow tremendously.

Constraints in promotion of export

The low performance of the country in export of horticulture produce is attributed to a variety of reasons. Lack of infrastructure facility, which results in heavy post harvest losses, non-availability of export quality fruits due to lack of proper pre-harvest practices, coupled with low productivity and high process of raw material makes our export in competitive in the international market. The limited air cargo space and high airfreight and sea freight rate compared to other countries also act as impediments. Also the lack of export promotion and market development efforts, existing land ceiling regulations and high burden of taxes, limits the export. Following are the constraints in horticultural development.

- Low productivity and poor quality of the produce
- Lack of infrastructural facilities for post harvest management and marketing
- Absence of backward linkages
- Inadequate efforts for production diversification and consumption
- Inadequacy of quality seed and planting materials
- Inadequacy of human resource in horticulture

- Absence of farmers/producers organizations
- Lack of appropriate database for effective planning
- Inadequacy of trained manpower and infrastructure in States
- Poor delivery system, credit support/price support.
- Slow pace in adoption of improved technology
- Limited number of cultivars suitable for export purposes in major horticultural crops
- Inadequate export surplus combined with high cost of produce due to freight charges, warehouse/ storage charges, auction house charges, import duties render our produce uncompetitive in the international market
- Lack of quality standards in packaging and grading for export
- Export basket contain few horticultural commodities .Export is limited to few international market
- Lack of efficient market intelligence/information

Strategies for promotion of export

It is necessary that a very concerted effort in terms of market promotion exercise need to be initiated to revive the consumer interest for the Indian products. Following are the strategies for the promotion of export:-

- Ensure quality planting material for horticultural crops
- Reduction in losses through the development of suitable infrastructure and creation of awareness
- Establishment of market system having forward and backward linkages
- Establishment of system to service all kinds of horticultural Requirements
- Development of quality testing laboratories. Skillful and efficient transfer of technology
- Application of information technology in horticulture

- Adoption of technology has to be used more effectively to achieve the goal of improved productivity and enhanced competitiveness
- Contract farming may be pursued more vigorously to make such ventures more self sufficient in infrastructure and other inputs can raise the level of their performance to meet the international commitments
- Development of human resource for effective introduction and efficient management of the modern post harvest technology
- The standards for horticultural products should be in conformity with the international standards
- Specialised facilities like irradiation for onion and potato, X-ray detection of spongy tissue in Alphonso mango, vapour heat treatment, crop specific curing/ ripening chambers etc. are required to be set up to cater to the sophisticated markets abroad and in domestic metropolitan cities
- Non-traditional market should be tapped, and at the same time our relationship with the buyers in the traditional/established markets should be sustained
- Export of value-added forms in consumer packs should be promoted vigorously
- Intensive training programme to be undertaken on sanitary and phytosanitary measures required for export, meeting the standards of international market

Conclusion

A holistic approach synergizing the efforts of backward integration, post-harvest handling, infrastructural development, quality assurance system and market promotion will be very essential to achieve the objective of manifold increase in exports of horticultural products from India. It is necessary that a very concerted effort in terms of market promotion exercise needs to be initiated to revive the consumer interest for the Indian products. Also, the steps for improving the quality of the products will slowly but surely reverse the present trend and make Indian products well known and acceptable in the international market. This will result in the accelerated growth of the Indian horticultural products in the international market.