

Tribal farmers in Kerala export organic pepper

A group of tribal farmers in Kerala, with governmental support, have turned exporters of organic pepper and the first consignment will be sent to Germany April 12.

State Forest Minister Binoy Viswom told reporters here that the first consignment of four tonnes of pepper, cultivated by 59 tribal families in Vanchivayil village in the interiors of Thekkady forests, is ready to be exported.

'This is a dream come true for me because I have done a lot of work and this month the first consignment of certified organic pepper from a group of tribals will be sent to Germany,' Viswom said Wednesday.

Padma Mohanty, deputy director of Periyar East Division, said: 'For generations these tribal families have been engaged in organic farming of pepper. But all these years it was the middlemen who took away all the benefits. They would extend loans to the tribals and in turn collect the produce. From now on the tribal families would get the full benefits.'

Orders have also been received from New Zealand and Doha, the official added.

'We had to do a lot of work to get the papers ready for organic certification and finally we got it from Lacon International, a German based company. We have also got the certification from the Spices Board of India,' Padma told IANS.

Organic pepper fetches Rs.230 (\$5.5) per kg in international markets against Rs.130-Rs.140 for non-organic pepper.

Periyar Foundation under the state government, an apex body of 76 eco-development committees, organised the pilot project.

'Next season we are confident that several more eco-development committees will take up organic farming and we expect to harvest a total of 150 tonnes of organic pepper. Cultivation of other products like chillies and ginger would also be taken up,' said Padma.

(© IANS / India eNews)