

India seeks Israeli collaboration for litchi

India has sought collaboration with Israel to enhance the quality of litchi, grown mainly in Bihar, to boost its domestic and export market.

'Collaboration with Israel is in the offing to enhance quality of litchi and to get rid of problem of very short harvesting period,' said Dr K.K. Kumar, director of the National Research Centre for Litchi at Muzaffarpur, about 70 km from here.

India is eyeing technology transfer from Israel for litchi. 'Israel has got technology that will help litchi growers as well as those engaged in its marketing to earn lucrative prices,' Kumar told IANS over telephone.

Dr H. P. Singh, deputy director of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, recently visited Israel in this connection. 'Singh was impressed by the technology when he was told about it during his visit,' Kumar said.

Israel possessed an innovative technology to keep perishable fruits like litchi fresh for at least 28 days. 'Access to this technology will manifold increase earnings through litchi,' he said.

The union Agriculture Ministry plans to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Israel government for the collaboration soon.

Kumar said litchi suffers from the problem of a very short harvesting period. It also suffers from high post-harvest losses up to 50 percent due to non-availability of suitable post harvest technology and standard packaging. Fading of the natural pink colour of the fruit by the time it reaches distant markets is another significant problem.

About 70 percent of all litchis produced in India are grown in Bihar. The agro-climatic condition of the state is ideal for this fruit. The number of farmers in the state growing litchis has increased in the last decade, especially in Muzaffarpur district and neighbouring areas.

The famous shahi litchi of Muzaffarpur is a variety loved by all. The state government has initiated moves to claim the brand name under the intellectual property rights (IPR) laws. The brand name will benefit farmers who will gain access to more markets and better prices.

But in a recent report, the World Bank noted that litchis good enough for export were being grown in only about 10 percent of the 2,000-odd orchards in Muzaffarpur. Countries that import litchis from India include the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Canada, Russia and Yemen

Imran Khan (© IANS / India eNews)