

Apple season almost over in Himachal, 1.2 cr crates sold

With the apple season in Himachal Pradesh almost over, 1.2 crore boxes have been despatched to markets across the country.

'The season in districts like Shimla, Mandi, Kullu and Chamba districts is almost over,' said horticulture director Gurdev Singh Sunday.

'A major chunk of the crop is currently coming from high-altitude areas of Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti districts,' Singh told IANS.

The high quality apples from the Chango, Ribba and Namgiya valleys of Kinnaur, and Hurling in Lahaul and Spiti command a virtual monopoly these days, though the output in the two districts is lesser than that elsewhere due to the harsh climatic conditions.

According to Singh, 15,000 to 20,000 crates of 25 kilograms each are being despatched daily to other states.

Said Sunil Katoch, a farmer from Ribba village in Kinnaur: 'Harvesting is on in certain pockets in the interiors. Farmers are getting record prices despite low production, and supplying directly to markets like Chandigarh and Delhi.'

Kinnaur-based horticulture development officer Jagat Negi said the season will continue for another 15 days, with outstation traders now camping in the district to procure apples directly from farmers.

'Even after one month of the onset of the season (in Kinnaur), traders are offering an on-field price of Rs.1,200 per 25-kilogram box. The figure is quite high as compared to previous years,' Negi said.

Horticulture director Singh said this year turned out to be lucrative for farmers despite the massive decline in production because of deficient rains during the monsoon and poor snowfall last winter.

'Apple prices saw a significant jump throughout the season due to fall in production. The prices remained almost 50 percent higher compared to the previous year,' he said.

'Even the undersized and hail-hit apples fetched a record price. The price is almost Rs.500 per box more than last year.'

According to horticulture department estimates, the total production this season will be around 1.8 crore boxes, considerably less than last year's 2.6 crore crates.

Apple is the main fruit crop of Himachal Pradesh and is grown in nine out of the state's 12 districts, and accounts for about 40 percent of the total area under fruit cultivation.

More than 200,000 families are engaged in apple cultivation and 90 percent of them are small and marginal farmers with an average holding of less than 0.6 hectare.

Besides apples, other fruits such as pears, peaches, cherries and plums are the major commercial crops of the state.

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