

## **Rajasthan becomes first state to start olive refinery**

Rajasthan today started the country's first olive refinery and expressed hope that it would be able to fulfil the country's demand of olive oil in coming years.

Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje inaugurated the refinery set up with a cost of Rs. 3.75 crore in Lunkaransar area in the district and said it was an achievement for Rajasthan to become the first state in the country to set up such refinery.

The olive oil produced in the refinery will be marked under the brand name of 'Raj Olive Oil' and will be available in markets after some time.

"Rajasthan is leading in the area of Olive farming and the first state to set up the refinery. It is a big achievement," Raje said in the inaugural function. The Vasundhara Raje government in its earlier term in 2007 had commenced the olive cultivation project by taking assistance from Israel and had planted 1.12 lakh saplings in 7 agro-climatic zones.

282 hectare areas of land in districts like Bikaner, Nagaur, Jhunjhunu and others have been covered with olive plantation and the government wants to increase the area to 5,000 hectare in coming years so that the refinery can get more fruits for getting the oil in increased quantity.

Raje said that the government would try to address the issue of lack of water in the area so that farming can be done properly.

Agriculture Minister Prabhu Lal Saini said that the current produce of oil fruit is 80 tonne annual which will be increased so that the state can fulfil the demand of oil fruit in the country. "The project of olive farming has been very successful and gave encouraging results with fine quality content in fruit. The state is now at the international level in olive farming," he said.

The minister said that the government now plans to promote the olive cultivation, a typically Mediterranean occupation, at mass level in the state.

"During the initial stage, olive oil will be produced and later we will utilise the farm produce in making of cosmetics, medicines and cattle feed," Saini said.

Israel Ambassador to India Daniel Carmon also congratulated Chief Minister Raje for the success by writing her a letter.

Seven leading varieties of Barnea, Arbequina, Crotina, Picholine, Picual, Coraniki and Frontoy have been planted in the farms.

Olive is a small tree belonging to the oleaceae family and is found in coastal areas of eastern Mediterranean (Italy and Spain), northern Iraq and northern Iran south of the Caspian Sea.

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