

India hopes to improve grape exports this season

According to the All India Grape Exporters Association president, Jagannath Khapre, around 1.92 lakh tonne was the previous record for Indian grape exports and the country is likely to cross this mark this year, due to a good monsoon and the prevailing good weather conditions in the grape growing regions. On the other hand, the table grape crop in Chile is expected to suffer a loss of 15% to 20% as a result of the unfavourable climate this season and the devastating impact of El Nino.

“Grape exports from Chile to the European Union are likely to be impacted this season because of the bad weather in that country. And if India plays its cards right, it could benefit and improve grape exports this year,” he said. Moreover, Russian and Bangladeshi exports from India had reduced last year and if these countries increase their exports then again India could gain an advantage, he added. The demand will rise, and if the currency improves, exports could rise, he said.

Last year, the country exported around 84,000 tonnes of grape to Europe. This number could improve by 5-7%, he said. The European Union (EU) has agreed to retain the residue levels of chlormequat chloride (CCL), a plant growth regulator at 0.05 ppm (papers per million), for a period of two years and this comes as a major shot in the arm for Indian exporters. In August this year, the EU had proposed to change the pesticide residue levels in grapes to 0.01 ppm, causing unrest among Indian exporters. In 2010, Indian grape exports faced a setback as the EU was reluctant to accept Indian table grape consignments after chlormequat chloride was detected in excess of the prescribed maximum residue level (MRL). In 2009, the EU had come up with more stringent regulations on pesticides. Unaware of the changed rules, Indian exporters who did not meet the new standards, faced rejection. However, less than 10% of the total export volumes were rejected.

Indian grapes began to find favour after 2014 when 1.92 lakh tonnes of grapes were exported by Indian traders to around 94 countries. Of this, Europe and the UK together accounted for the largest share of 65,000 tonnes.

Of the overall grape exports from India, Nashik district recorded the highest ever export of 108,000 tonnes during the last grape season, against 49,768 tonnes in 2014-15. Of the total 108,000 tonnes of the fruit, 75,000 metric tonnes were exported to European countries, while the remaining 33,000 tonnes were shipped to countries like Russia, Bangladesh, China, Dubai etc.

At present, Canada has granted market access for the Indian fresh grapes. This follows the recent Indo-Canadian bilateral discussions held in New Delhi. However, the Indian exporters will be able to take advantage of this development only from the next season. Canada will then open its market for the Indian exporters who have been shipping fresh grapes to European countries. Canada has also imposed conditions that exporters have to register the vineyards and pack houses, and maintain traceability.

The total area under grape plantation across the country is estimated at 3.50 lakh acres, including 2.75 lakh acres in Maharashtra and rest of the 75,000 acres spread over Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The total grape production of the country is estimated at 28 lakh metric tonnes, of which 22 lakh tonnes is expected from Maharashtra alone.

Meanwhile, grape growers have started the registration of vineyards with the agriculture department of the state for the 2016-17 season. The agriculture department has set a deadline of October 30 for this purpose. As per guidelines by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda), it is mandatory for grape exporters to register their vineyards for export.

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