

Quality concerns could be a huge problem for Indian ag exports

After registering a phenomenal 40 per cent growth in the financial year 2016-17, India's fruit exports may find it difficult to sustain the momentum in the coming years.

A study on difficulties faced by exporters in the supply chain of agriculture products by Yes Bank stated India's fresh fruit exports were suffering due to stringent quality norms in importing countries that mandate procurement of goods from registered suppliers only. The study was conducted with the approval of the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda).

While the entry of large corporates into contract farming has helped mitigate some of the quality issues exporters were facing earlier, experts believe that India would have a long way to go to get a significant part in the global fruit trade. Apart from quality, transportation along with pre-harvest and post-harvest measures to enhance the shelf life of crops continued to pose a challenge to the Indian fruit exporters.

"Importing norms are becoming stringent for fresh fruits and vegetables. To comply with the norms of importing nations, it is requisite to procure the produce from registered farmers only. If farmers' registration is not put in place, exporters may be adversely affected. At present, except few states not much effort has been put in by the state governments to get farmers registered," said the study.

Reflecting on the current trend, India's exports of fresh fruits posted a decline of nearly 4 per cent to 2,45,641 tonnes for the April-July period in 2017, as compared to 236,313 tonnes in the corresponding period last year, according to data compiled by Apeda. In terms of value, total exports of fresh fruits declined to Rs 1,527 crore (\$237 million) during the April-July period this year, from Rs 1,551 crore (\$235 million) in the same period last year. In FY17, exports jumped by 40 per cent to 6,96,057 tonnes worth \$659.2 million.

Meanwhile, an advisory from Apeda issues warnings to Indian exporters, saying: "The Chinese National Health and Family Planning Commission, Ministry of Agriculture, China Food and Drug Administration has released the National Food Safety Standard for maximum residue limits (MRL) for pesticides in foods, including fresh vegetables and fruits. In accordance with this directive, exporters and growers are advised to strongly adhere to the import requirements of China and not make any shipments

without getting the product tested prior to export and unless it is found to be compliant," said Dr Sudhanshu, Deputy General Manager, Apeda.

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