

Agripreneurs of Tamil Nadu peel European market for bananas

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The first of banana exports to Europe will start in a couple of months through separate private initiatives in Tamil Nadu. This will eventually open the doors to markets in the West for the local varieties.

One, the Trieste Port Authority in Italy is funding a project by the Tamil Nadu Banana Growers Federation, which is working with the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, to standardise harvesting and post-harvest facilities for banana exports.

Austrian interest

Through another project, a buyer based in Vienna, Austria, keen on Indian varieties for the local mar-

kets there, is supporting Tirupur-based fruits exporter Ka Ve Ezhilan of Greeneers Agro Products India. The exporter is partnering with the National Research Centre for Banana (NRCB) and a consultant in IIT-Madras for a cable conveyor for moving harvested bananas to the pack house.

This equipment has been demonstrated to the buyer who has approved the idea, he said.

Ezhilan, who is, on his own initiative, investing over ₹10 crore in a pack house for fruits exports in Pollachi, says the first consignment of about 100 kg of Grand Naine variety of banana will be airlifted by the month-end. Then, exports will be stepped up and by September a 20-tonne consign-

ment of the fruit will be shipped out. The objective is to move about 150 such containers a year.

Ezhilan says farmers can benefit from a 20-25 per cent increase in prices as compared with the ₹15-20 a kg they get now.

Tapping the West

Theni in Tamil Nadu is a major banana cultivation centre but exports are primarily restricted to Gulf countries and South-East Asia, targeting overseas Indians.

But now, exporters are targeting developed markets in Europe. While initially, the Cavendish banana will be shipped, he plans to popularise local varieties including Red Banana, Poovan and Kathali.

G Ajeethan, General Secretary,



Tamil Nadu Banana Growers Federation — who is backed by the Trieste Port Authority — says, as of now, there is no common infrastructure facility meeting

European norms for banana exporters in the State.

For freshness

The Port Authority is funding the Federation and the Agriculture University about ₹1.25 crore to establish a rope conveyor facility in a selected banana farm. The major challenge is to minimise human handling during harvest and post-harvest to maintain the freshness of the fruits at destination.

By mid-June, Ajeethan expects to ship out the first of the consignments to Europe. The consignment will initially be airlifted through Kochi or Bangalore, he said.

S Uma, Director & Convenor, NRCB, said a team at the centre

has designed the protocol for sea shipments of Nendran variety of bananas to Dubai. This was a Public-Private Partnership project with a Kochi-based exporter, Fair Exports India and the Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority, New Delhi.

While airlifting can be costly, protocols have to be designed for sea shipments as the fruits will be in transit for up to three weeks. Now, nearly 20 tonnes of Nendran are being shipped out weekly.

This has helped to bring down prices for overseas consumers who now pay about ₹125 a kg compared to ₹150 for air cargo consignments. Farmers too benefit as they get ₹5-10 more per kg.