

April 21, 2011

Onion variety that yields well and is drought resistant

Government's version of trying to control price rise is not helping



Wide popularity: Manaram chowdhary with his new onion variety.

An onion cannot be dismissed as just another vegetable. "In fact no other vegetable seems to be backed by a strong lobby like the humble onion. Especially in our country, Governments can be toppled and unseated if the vegetable records a meteoric price rise. When onion price fluctuates it becomes front page news," says Mr. Manaram Chowdhary from Sikar, Rajasthan.

Decade of work

The farmer developed an onion variety after nearly a decade of trial and error and says these ones yield well, are drought resistant, and fetch a better price compared to the other local varieties.

Named Rashidpura, the variety attained wide popularity in the northern states of Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana for its distinctive taste and strong smell.

"I tried cooking them and found them delicious. But their shelf life was short. I then preserved some bulbs by drying them and sowed them in the next season.

Water scarcity

“Though I did cultivate the local varieties, acute water shortage made me experiment with a variety, whose requirement of water was less and which could survive the drought conditions that are prevalent in our area,” he adds.

The three wells in his 10-acre farm were unsuitable for growing wheat, bajra, and other crops in addition to onions.

He says that he observed that the plants from this particular variety were maturing earlier (110-115 days) than the other varieties (125- 135 days) and yielded well — 40,000 kg bulbs per hectare — than the commercially cultivated varieties (25,000-30,000 kg per hectare), even under water-stress and low irrigation conditions.

He stabilised the characteristics over a period of ten years (1983 to 1993) by performing repeated selection. Once he was satisfied with the yield stability of the variety, and the drought resistant characteristic of the variety, he named it Rashidpura.

Consumer awareness

“As of now the availability and awareness among consumers for this particular variety are relatively low compared to the other popular ones. This variety can also fetch a good price like the other local ones and farmers should realise this and start cultivating it,” says the farmer, adding, “this variety is usually used to spice soups, salads and pizzas due to its peculiar taste.

“Urban consumers seem to prefer these variety and the requirement for this type of onion is also expected to increase. Farmers would definitely benefit from growing this variety of onion”.

Appreciation

Officials from the agriculture extension department in Sikar and research station, Durgapur (Jaipur) appreciated the variety developed by Mr. Choudhary.

“Several onion farmers end up ploughing their crops back into the soil in frustration as they are not able to get a good price for their produce. The weather also creates problems for us.

“It suddenly starts raining during peak summer and sometimes there is little rain for years together,” says Mr. Sundaram Verma, Honey Bee Network collaborator Rajasthan.

False claim

“The transport cost to the mandis does not even make up for our investment expenditure. The Government's claim of trying to control the rise does not seem to be of much help to poor farmers.

“The media must also throw light on plight of onion cultivators, their problems, and new methods if any, to increase area of cultivation and encourage other farmers to start cultivating onion, instead of just reporting on price rise and how it affects consumers and the Government's reply and control mechanism to the same,” adds Mr. Manaram.

For more information readers can contact Mr. Manaram Chowdhary, Village Sanvloda Ladkhana, District Sikar, Rajasthan at 09799237178.
