

Palani guava growers export to West Asian countries

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New initiative: 25 guava farmers were brought under the direct supervision of a team of specialists.— Photo: M.J. Prabu

Ayakudi, a small village near Dindigul and Palani in Tamil Nadu, is famous for its guavas. Though the fruits are delicious and much sought after by the locals, they never fetched a good price for the growers. For many years farmers used to sell the fruits in the local market and on the Dindugal-Palani highway for as little as Rs 8 to Rs.9 a kg.

Old story

“All the farmers in the region have been growing this fruit for years. Almost every farmer has two or three guava trees in his garden. But getting a good price always proved to be a challenge as the local traders decided on the price. But all this changed two years ago, when the growers were brought together to form a group called “Guava growers stakeholders for exploring export market,” says Dr. T.N. Balamohan, Special Officer, Tamil Nadu Women’s Horticulture and Research Institute, Navalur, Kuttapattu, Tiruchi. The project spearheaded by the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University is funded under the National Agriculture Innovation Project scheme by ICAR, New Delhi.

“The scheme became operational from June 2009 to enhance guava productivity and quality through good agricultural practices (GAP). Importance on reducing post-harvest losses, enhancing the shelf life through scientific pre and post harvest management practices, strengthening of guava processing through entrepreneurship development, and facilitating growers to get a hold on the domestic and international market were all considered,” says Dr. Balamohan.

Selection

Accordingly 25 guava farmers were identified by the University and brought under the direct supervision of a team of specialists who constantly guided the growers on scientific cultivation practices through several training programmes and demonstrations, which included soil testing, drip irrigation technology, soil based micro and macro-nutrient application, integrated pest and disease management, introduction of biological pest management, and post harvest technologies. The beneficiaries were selected after exhaustive field visits and personal interactions.

Accordingly farmers growing the crop in 2-4 acres, those with interest, and a pro active approach were selected. They were also supplied with necessary inputs like fertilizers, cutters, nylon nets etc. “By 2012 we started getting good feed back from them. The group in two years time followed the recommendations

proposed by the specialists team and was able to harvest 15 tonnes of fruit from an hectare against nine tonnes in the past,” says Dr. Balamohan.

“But this was far from the goal we had set for ourselves. Unless market intelligence is exploited increasing production alone cannot solve problems for a farmer. Marketing linkage plays a vital role to realize a better income for whatever crop is grown,” he reasons.

Next step

As a next step, a meeting of farmers, traders, exporters, processors, retailers, bankers and graders was arranged. A private exporter volunteered to export the fruits to West Asian countries, but placed a condition that only the best ‘A’ grade fruits should be supplied. Initially farmers became worried as to what they could do with the second grade fruits as it would find no takers.

The specialist team convinced them that local traders would buy it and also roped in a private trader at Coimbatore to take the consignments. Once assured that a ready market existed, farmers happily agreed to supply the fruits. Both TNAU scientists and officials from the exporting firm visited the beneficiaries several times to brief and educate them as to how to harvest and pack the ‘A’ grade fruits. That hard, back breaking work for the last two years has paid off.

Export details

Today 250 kg of guavas are being exported every alternate day to nearly 14 countries in the Gulf. Farmers realise a premium of Rs.30 to 35 per kg against the Rs. 8 to 10 per kg in the past. Presently 560 acres in the region are under guava cultivation. “The beneficiary farmers have invested their income in buying some more lands and cultivating the same guava crop in them. This is quite an encouraging trend in this belt because today we are flooded with a lot of enquiries from other growers to be also consider them under this project,” smiles Dr. Balamohan with a sense of pride.

Award

Dr. Balamohan was recently conferred the Kadali Puraskar Award by the Government for a similar outstanding work on Banana growers, for consolidating them into a banana growers association.

For More Details

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