

## Long Live The King of Fruits

Mangos have long been seen as a sign of wealth and prosperity. Often called the 'king of fruits,' they were also once the fruit of kings, and among the favorite foods of many Mughal emperors. In Pakistan, where they are the national fruit, they have been cultivated for thousands of years. Over 200 varieties can be found here.

Mangoes are the second leading fruit crop produced in Pakistan, with an annual production volume of 1.7-1.8 million metric tons. Pakistan is the fourth largest producer of fresh mangos, producing 1,673,900 metric tons per year. Punjab and Sindh are the main production centers, contributing approximately 65 and 35 percent of the total respectively. Despite this, Pakistani-grown mangoes have not realized their full economic potential.

Strengthening the mango industry would have a major impact on the economies of Punjab and Sindh. Job creation, income generation, creation of ancillary business, and employment opportunities for women are all positive benefits of a robust and expanding Pakistani mango industry. Significant market opportunities exist, both domestically and internationally, for mango producers and agro-processors that can consistently provide high quality fruit. However, the international market is fiercely competitive. To keep up, Pakistan must make significant improvements in production practices, postharvest care, packaging, and transportation. There is also the problem of perception. Currently Pakistani mangos are known as a low priced product of inconsistent quality. For them to be recognized as a high quality, high value product, mango producers must see the need for substantial investment.

The recently launched U.S.-Pakistan Partnership for Agricultural Market Development is a \$21 million (Rs. 2.1 billion) investment by the U.S. Agency for International Development that will boost domestic and international market access for Pakistani meat, vegetables, citrus, and mangoes by nearly \$140 million (Rs. 14 billion) over the next four years. The endeavor will use grants, training sessions, and technical improvements to encourage private sector investment and innovation.

One essential area for improvement is reducing the prevalence of decay in Pakistani mangos. Anthracnose and stem-end rot are fungal diseases responsible for the most serious postharvest blight. Hot water (52° C for 3-5 minutes) and fungicide treatments can be very effective in minimizing rot. To keep fruit healthy, it should be rapidly cooled following the hot water treatment and kept cold (12-13° C) through transport and distribution.

Beyond quality improvements, Pakistan is also missing out on the growing global market for dried mangoes. Pakistan is spoiled with an abundance of readily available fresh fruit, but no significant domestic market for dried mangos exists. There is also a lack of market information and few links to potential buyers willing to invest in the development of dried mango processing.

Dried mangos can actually be processed with minimal investment and technology on a large or small scale. Pre and post-harvest losses in the mango sector are very common annually. Poor quality fresh mangoes are sold at low prices with little profit for the growers. Dried mangos are a way for producers to recoup would-be losses. These lower-grade mangoes are the perfect raw material for value added products (canned, dried, pulp, etc.), which have a shelf life of one year or more. The global shortage and subsequent demand for dried mango products offers a major opportunity for Pakistan to take the lead in a niche market.

The development and expansion of the mango industry would be a boon for small-scale producers, farmers, and agro-processors alike. The king of fruits is more than a sign of prosperity. It is a gateway to greater economic opportunities and prospects.