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TURMERIC: EXPORTS NEED A PUSH

For years, India's turmeric market was governed by a limited supply that was consumed mostly within the country. But with good prices leading many farmers to double their acreage under turmeric, prices are falling as volumes rise. This could be a good time to explore greater prospects in the global market.



Higher prices since 2008 have encouraged farmers to increase the area under turmeric cultivation, and

Turmeric, known as the Indian saffron, originated in southeast Asia. It is an important spice in Indian food that is prepared from the root of the turmeric plant. The botanical name for turmeric is *Curcuma Longa* and it belongs to the Giberaceae family. Erode, in Tamil Nadu, is the world's largest producer and most important trading centre of turmeric in Asia. Indian turmeric is considered the best in the world market because

of its high curcumin content.

Area under turmeric cultivation in India

The main turmeric producing states in India are Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Karnataka, West Bengal, Gujarat and Kerala. More than 80 per cent of turmeric is cultivated in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The area under cultivation and volume of turmeric production in India are given in Table II.

Table I
Nutritional Value of Turmeric
(per 100 grams)

Contents	Value
Moisture	13.10 gm
Protein	6.30 gm
Fat	5.10 gm
Minerals	3.50 gm
Fibre	2.60 gm
Carbohydrates	69.40 gm
Energy	349 K cal
Calcium	150 mg
Phosphorus	282 mg
Iron	67.80 mg

Source: www.turmeric.co.in

Table II
Area under Turmeric Cultivation and Production Volumes in India

Year	Area (hectares)	Production (tonnes)
2005-06	173,139	867,074
2006-07	183,917	856,464
2007-08	178,021	884,306
2008-09	195,076	894,590
2009-10	187,535	927,912

Table III
Export of Turmeric from India

Year	Quantity (tonnes)
2005-06	46,405
2006-07	51,500
2007-08	49,250
2008-09	52,500
2009-10	50,750

Source: Spices Board of India

most farmers have doubled the area under this crop. According to trade sources, total acreage under turmeric in 2010-11 was around 206,000 hectares compared with around 187,000 hectares the previous year. In Tamil Nadu, the area under turmeric is expected to increase 9 per cent to 43,000 hectares.

Current exports and future potential

There are a number of reasons why India ought to push for higher exports. Given below are the country's strengths in this domain:

1. India is the largest producer of turmeric in the world.
2. India has bred improved and high-yielding cultivars of turmeric.
3. It is in the dominant position as far as the production and trade of turmeric is concerned.
4. There is strong research support for the cultivation of turmeric from the Indian Institute of Spices Research located in Calicut and also other State Agricultural Universities.
5. Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), government of India, has sanctioned an agri export zone for turmeric in Orissa to increase the export of turmeric from the state.

The export of turmeric was at an all-time high in 2008-09, both in terms of volume and value. The

Table IV
Major Importers of Indian Turmeric
(Quantity in MT)

Country	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
UAE	8133	5151	5911	6719
Malaysia	2264	2895	4826	3952
Japan	2632	2797	3090	3149
USA	2492	2649	2532	2285
Iran	6095	3709	5335	4233
Bangladesh	4039	2880	4593	4119
UK	2893	2461	2927	3340
South Africa	2195	1643	2121	2312
Germany	1156	1255	1501	1686
Netherlands	1817	1700	1570	1519

Source: indianspices.com

country shipped out 52,500 tonnes of turmeric valued at Rs 2485.8 million against 49,250 tonnes valued at Rs 1570 million in 2007-08. In April-September 2010-11, the country's total spices exports rose by 8 per cent to 273,000 metric tonnes compared to the same period in 2009-10. Turmeric exports during April-September 2010-11 were 25,750 tonnes, down from 30,275 tonnes during the same period in 2009-10.

Problems exporters face

Inadequate surplus for exports. Of the 315 million tonnes of spices produced annually (excluding mustard), India can hardly export 7.5-8 per cent. There have been severe shortages of exportable varieties of spices in certain years. The major reason is burgeoning domestic demand. Demand for spices from the upwardly mobile middle-class is on the increase. Changing eating habits and the population explosion are also factors. This huge domestic demand leaves little surplus for overseas markets and hence exports happen more by accident rather than design.

Insufficient quantities of quality spices. The major causes of the inferior quality of spices are:

1. Lack of awareness among

farmers about the latest technologies in production and post-harvest operations.

2. Facilities at the grading and packing centres are also rudimentary, and the merchants in this sector do not have modern equipment for cleaning, grading or storage of spices.

3. Proper drying of spices, leaving just 8-12 per cent of moisture, is not done after harvesting, resulting in micro-

bial contamination.

4. Drying of spices on non-hygienic surfaces leads to contamination from microbes such as fungi, germs and bacteria, including the harmful salmonella, staphylococcus aureus, bacillus cereus, clostridium perfringens, yeast, mould, e-coli, coliform, etc.

5. There is lack of adequate real-time information about the area sown, especially with regard to annual crops.

Possible areas for government intervention

To reduce the worries of turmeric farmers, the government has to ensure a minimum support price for their harvest. And to increase exports, government policies should provide liberal support to processors and exporters to upgrade their technologies in order to meet international standards in both processing technology and product quality. Exporters need to establish clear backward linkages with farmers to develop value-added products.

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