

India major importer of Pakistani dried dates

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India has emerged as the major importers of dried dates from Pakistan as it imported 171,004 tonnes of dates during the year 2016-17 against the imports of 113,146 tonnes last year. Fresh dates are exported to the UK, USA, Germany, Turkey, South Africa Denmark etc., while more than 90% of dried dates are exported to India via Lahore.

Date fruit is one of the most import fruit crop especially in the Middle East with global production of dates reaching 7.8 million tonnes in 2016. It is the third largest fruit crop in Pakistan after mango and citrus.

Table 2: Top 10 Countries Growing Fresh Dates

Rank	Country	Production (Tonnes)
1	Egypt	1,084,529
2	Iran	947,809
3	Saudi Arabia	836,983
4	Iraq	675,440
5	Pakistan	556,608
6	UAE	533,701
7	Algeria	485,415
8	Sudan	435,668
9	South Sudan	432,100
10	Oman	239,397

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Table 1: Area and Production of Dates

Year	Area (000 Hecters)	Production (000 Tonnes)
2012-13	89,746	524,612
2013-14	89,658	526,749
2014-15	91,145	537,204
2015-16	91,850	540,305
2016-17	92,350	550,050

Source: Ministry of Food Security and Research, Government of Pakistan

There is no cholesterol and no fat in dates. Dates have a great importance as a staple food as well as a dessert fruit. Dates have found their way into sweets, confectionery, chocolates, baking products, preservatives, salads, sauces, and breakfast cereals. Dates also have bulk industrial uses with advancements in food technology.

Production: Dates are among few fruits that are grown in all four provinces of the country over an area of about 92,350 hectares. The annual production of dates in Pakistan is estimated 550,000 tonnes. Sindh contributes around 50% of dates produced in Pakistan of which 90% comes from the date palms of Khairpur. Pakistan falls in such an agro-ecological region where dates can grow on a large scale with superior quality.

Pakistan is the world's fifth largest date producer and ranks second after Iran among its neighbours. In Pakistan there are more than 160 varieties of dates palm in the country, among them the popular varieties are: Aseel, Zahidi, Fasli,

Maazwati, Dhakki, Kharbalian, Begum Jangi, Dagh, Goakna, Tota, Karwan, Hillavi, Khudrawi and Mozawati Gulistan, Jowansur, Lango, Sabzo, Kharuba, Karbala, and Kupro. Aseel of Khairpur, Dhakki of D.I.Khan and Begum Jangi of Mekran are best of all varieties of dates grown in Pakistan in terms of demand and popularity due to their exotic taste.

These varieties have surpassed by none and are matched with Deglet Nour, Zahidi and few others of world most popular dates.

The harvesting season for dates starts in July and runs till September the local fresh dates, therefore, hit the markets after mid-Ramazan. But due to the lack of value-addition, processing and preservation, the local farmers are unable to stock dates for a longer period and even lose as much as half of their produce every year.

Pakistan has not increased production for more than a decade while the rest of the world has more than doubled its production. Area and production of dates in Pakistan are given in Table-1.

Global Dates Producers

Pakistan is the 5th largest producers of fresh dates are being grown in all the four provinces of Pakistan. Led by Egypt, Middle Eastern, West Asian, and North African countries grow the fresh fruits of the date palm tree. The top four countries producing dates are Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE and Pakistan. These four countries contribute over 60% to the global production dates.

Several varieties are similar to those cultivated in Iraq, Iran and the Gulf countries like Hillawi, Zahdi, Shakeri, and Basri etc. Pakistan, especially Sindh is blessed as a major grower and exporter of dates due to its soil and season. Top 10 countries growing fresh dates are given **Table-2**.

Exports: Pakistan has become the fourth largest country in the world that is exporting dates to the rest of the world. Pakistan has a favourable climate for the production of organic dates which have a great demand in international date market.

Dates are exported in two forms as either fresh dates or dried dates. Pakistan entered the international date trade by sheer chance in early 1980s when Iran and Iraq went to war, and became the number one date exporting nation in the world by selling over 78,000 tonnes of dates in 2004.

Export of dates from Pakistan increased from Rs.7.37 billion (US\$ 76.08 million) in 2012-13 to Rs. 11.95 billion (US\$ 141.46 million) in 2016-17, thus showing an average increase of 12% per annum. Pakistan receives low prices of its dates as compared to other export countries like, UAE, Egypt and Tunisia because of low standard and lack of value addition. Exports of dried and fresh dates from Pakistan are given in **Table-3** and **Table-4**.

Importers of dates such as India, USA, UK, Germany, Denmark and Canada are re-exporting Pakistani dates after quality enhancement and preparation of by-products, at a price that is four to six times higher than their import price.

Pakistan imports dates to meet local demand almost every year in the month

Table 3: Exports of Dates (Dried)

Year	Quantity	Value	
	(Tonnes)	(Rs. Million)	(US\$ 000)
2012-13	146,343	6,667	68,810
2013-14	151,708	7,507	72,966
2014-15	8,832	6,244	61,642
2015-16	114,500	7,293	69,966
2016-17	175,163	10,644	101,662

Source: i) Trade Development Authority of Pakistan
ii) Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

Table 4: Exports of Dates (Fresh)

Year	Quantity	Value	
	(Tonnes)	(Rs. Million)	(US\$ 000)
2012-13	9,781	703	7,271
2013-14	14,742	1,495	14,528
2014-15	26,966	2,092	20,650
2015-16	11,386	1,095	10,509
2016-17	13,043	1,307	12,484

Source: i) Trade Development Authority of Pakistan
ii) Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

of Ramadan. Imported dates are processed in comparison with the local ones thus are more appealing to the consumers and for this reason for importing dates. The major markets are India, USA, the UK, Bangladesh, Germany Canada and South Africa. Country-wise exports of fresh and dried dates are given in **Table-5** and **Table-6**.

Solar Technology: Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) has built capacity for date growers to use solar technology for drying of dates by developing a Solar-cum-Gas Fired Date Dryer for the dehydration of dates. This system can reduce post-harvest losses and improve quality of dates. Five solar drying systems have been installed in Khairpur and Sukkur Region of Sindh Province at Pano Aquil, Pryalo, Pir Jo Goth, Therhi and Hayyat Solangi in date production areas of Sindh.

At these sites PARC also conducted training for local farmers to use and maintenance of these systems to get benefit from this technology to increase their production as well as to produce quality dates. The farmers' capacity building program would help to increase capability and understanding of the farmers to

equip themselves with proper drying techniques of dates. The farmers can also use this system to dry other fruits. Through the use of this technology, farmers can improve their production and enhance income by producing quality dates and other fruits.

Future Prospects: The date sector offers substantial opportunities for export income and employment generation in addition to economic growth of the country.

Currently, India is the biggest importer of Pakistan's dried dates, accounting more than 90% of Pakistan's total date exports in 2016-17. However, Pakistan's date imports only account for half of India's total date imports. This leaves room for an increase in exports to India, especially since India levies 24% tariff on Pakistan's imports on average whereas 30% tariff is levied on Pakistan's competitors Iraq, Iran, UAE and Oman.

Another market that can be explored is the European Union, which is the biggest importer of dates globally. In 2016, Pakistan's percentage share in EU's \$343 million date market was 2%. Under GSP Plus, Pakistan faces zero tariffs on its date exports to EU.

Israel and Tunisia are some of the top global exporters of fresh dates. The average price per tonne of their dates is \$2,114 and \$2053 respectively, indicating a large price differential between Pakistan's date exports and their date exports.

France is not a date producing country. Instead it imports dates, processes them and exports them as a premium product at higher prices. In 2016, price on average of a tonne of France's date exports was \$ 2,900.

Dates are among Pakistan's abundant resources that have potential to increase export earnings if invested in. It is a pity that a product with so much potential is being allowed to be perished in large quantities every year. It is time that investments in date processing are made to allow Pakistan to benefit from its exports.

Around 95% of the export consists of dried dates and only about 5% is exported in the form of pasteurized fresh dates, which is less than even 1% of the total date production in the country. Over the years, Pakistan has gained significant strength concerning dried dates. India and Bangladesh are two largest importers of Pakistani dry dates. Pakistani dates have a huge national and international market demand.

Table 5: Exports of Dates Dried
Quantity: Tonnes
Value: Rs. Million

Country	2016-17		2015-16	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
India	171,004	10,366	113,146	7,169
Bangladesh	2,811	150	451	26
Germany	591	56	162	18
Japan	126	10	100	8
Saudi Arabia	88	7	50	6
South Africa	95	8	21	1
UAE	147	13	106	8
U.K	108	11	206	26
Qatar	23	2	15	2
All others	170	21	243	29
Total	175,163	10,644	114,500	7,293

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

Table 6: Exports of Dates Fresh Quantity: Tonnes Value: Rs. Million				
Country	2016-17		2015-16	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
U.K.	5,068	495	4,106	401
U.S.A	2,268	245	2,538	278
Turkey	826	76	126	12
Saudi Arabia	345	41	268	32
Germany	1,641	166	1,434	148
Denmark	779	64	902	68
Canada	302	37	115	18
India	451	44	591	21
Italy	149	13	--	--
Lithuania	315	30	175	11
Latvia	198	23	90	9
Bangladesh	291	33	527	49
Japan	190	14	326	21
Netherlands	100	11	64	8
All others	120	15	-24	19
Total	13,043	1,307	11,386	1,095

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

Khairpur and Sukkur are the main date producing regions where monsoon season coincides with the harvesting season every year. Rain water is regarded as the major source of decay present on the palm trees or lying over a vast land for drying purposes. As a result, producers sometimes lose as much as half their produce.

By contrast, dates are imported every year (Rs 747 million in 2016-17) to meet local demand. Not only because imported dates are processed and hence considered tastier, but also of losses due to the perishable nature of dates. By one estimate, only 5% of domestic dates are consumed locally.

The majority of date exports of Pakistan are in the form of dried dates whose price is nearly half the price of the higher valued fresh dates. The main reason for lower

volume of fresh date exports is lack of processing facilities, with proper cleaning, grading and packing facilities

Pakistan has the capacity to supply fully processed high quality dates in various styles, shapes and forms, which include pitted/ un-pitted whole dates, pressed date bricks, date chops, date paste in bulk as well as ready-to-distribute small boxes/jars. Importers in other countries continue to buy Pakistani dates only to add value and then re-export.

Pakistan has a favourable climate for the production of organic dates which have a great demand in international date market. There is still no intervention for the production and marketing of organic standard dates in Pakistan. Pakistani date varieties can compete with other top varieties like Medjoul, Deglet Nour, Barhee etc. if government pay attention on value addition, processing and post-harvest technology of date palm.

References

1. Ministry of Food Security and Research, Government of Pakistan
2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
3. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
4. Trade Development Authority of Pakistan. ♦