

Pakistan world's fifth largest date producer

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Saudi government gifts 80 tonnes dates for people of Pakistan. The Saudi government recently handed over a gift of 80 tonnes of dates to the World Food Program for distribution among the needy people of Pakistan to help meet their nutritional needs.

The World Food Program would distribute the dates amongst the registered families on behalf of the government of Saudi Arabia. The donation has come from the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre that has emerged as an international model of excellence for the provision of humanitarian aid. Saudi Charge d' Affairs Habiballah Al-Bukhari said the gift of the dates to Pakistan was an annual feature and reflective of the fraternal bonds between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Table 1: Area and Production of Dates

Year	Area (000 Hectors)	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

Pakistan is one of the largest date producers in the world. Most of the country's produce comes from Sindh, where date farming is spread over 92,000 acres. More than 200 varieties of the fruit are grown in the province. Nearly 70 % of the province's cultivation is done in Khairpur district, around 450 kilometres from Karachi, due to suitable climate.

The tremendous growth in date farming took place just after the Sukkur barrage was completed in the mid-1930s as the irrigated soil became more conducive for date palm. Agriculture is central to Khairpur's economy and date farming is the main source of livelihood for the residents.

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.

Table 2: 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

In Pakistan there are more than 160 varieties of dates palm in the country, among them the popular varieties are: Aseel, Zahidi, Fas 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

Table 3: 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**

September the local fresh dates, therefore, hit the markets after mid-Ramazan. Area and production of dates in Pakistan are given in Table-1.

Growers plant an average of 60 trees per acre, with each tree bearing 100 kilograms of dates. A large portion of the produce, around 550,000 tonnes, is transported to the markets of Khairpur and Sukkur. At least 10 people are required to handle 100 date palms when the harvest is in full swing. In the off season, however, the task can be done by two people.

Therefore, an estimated 450,000 workers look after the farms in the season for up to at least a month compared to 90,000 during the off season. Nearly 80%-90% of these dates are dried (called chuhara) and then put in gunny bags and taken to the market. However, a large quantity of dried dates is exported to our neighbouring countries. The remaining soft dates are in demand in both local as well as international markets.

Dry dates are the main produce in terms of volume and value. They are handled at the date markets of Khairpur and Sukkur by more than 200 traders, nearly two dozen active exporters and around 5,000 workers. Soft dates are processed

Table 4: 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

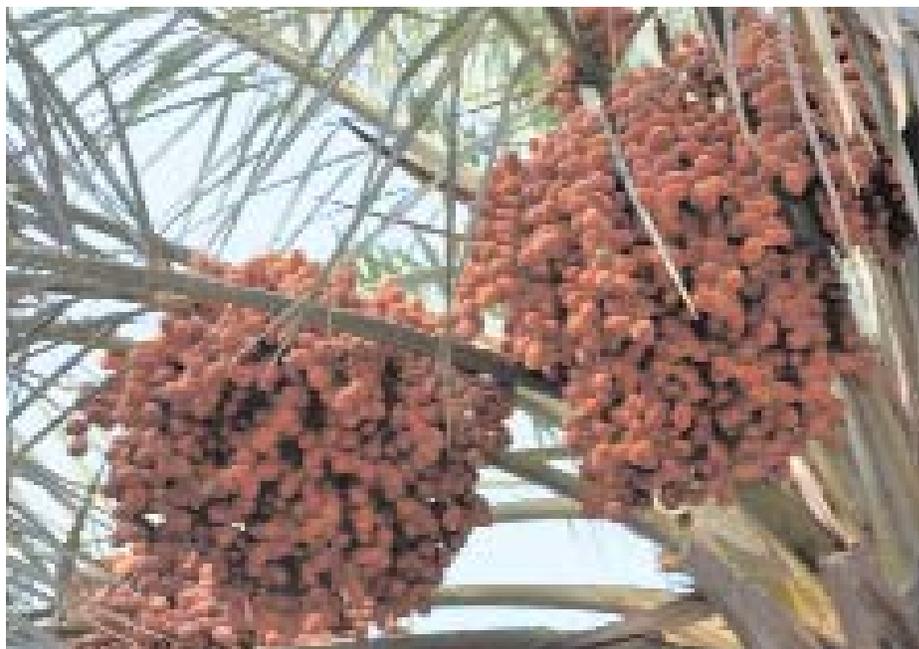
Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics



in local factories. There are 20 such factories, of which 10 are regularly involved in the export business.

Each factory employs around 200 people on an average, making the overall workforce to 4,000. Each worker takes home Rs 400 to Rs600 daily. These workers perform various processing tasks. However, a major part of the processing (grading, cleaning, pitting and dicing) also takes place in houses and cottages where three to four times more volume is handled than factory workers. This indirect workforce is estimated to comprise 12,000 to 15,000 people, almost all of whom are women.

Exports: The export market of dates requires compliance of global food standards, hence it has different dynamics. 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-2** and **Table-3**. Importers of dates such as India, USA, UK, Germany, Denmark and Canada are re-exporting Pakistani dates after quality enhancement and preparation of byproducts, 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 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-4** and **Table-5**.

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.

Prospects: 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

The number of highway shops selling dates and its products is above 200, with daily average earnings of Rs1,000 to Rs2,000. Therefore, date farming is benefiting thousands of households, with major beneficiaries being women who find decent opportunity to work in their area and enjoy financial empowerment by contributing a significant share in the household earnings.

Apart from Khairpur, the farming of dates has also spread to Sukkur, Ghotki and Naushahro Feroze districts of Sindh. The growers have adopted the traditional methods in cultivating the plant and nursing it for at least two to three years. The plantation was made by keeping a required distance between each palm so that it should enjoy good environment and space to flourish for bearing quality fruit.

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. ♦

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