

Pakistan has favourable climate for production of organic dates

by Dr. Noor Ahmed Memon, Professor KASBIT

Export of dates from Pakistan increased from Rs.5.98 billion (US\$ 78.42 million) in 2011-12 to Rs. 9.00 billion (US\$ 67.49 million) in 2013-14, thus showing an average increase of 4% per annum. 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. The annual production of dates in Pakistan is estimated at around 535,000 tonnes of which only 166,450 tonnes are exported during 2013-14 and the rest are either consumed locally or perish.

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.

Dates are rich in carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. 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: Pakistan is the 6th largest producer of dates. The top five countries producing dates – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE and Pakistan contribute over 60% to the global production.

Dates are being grown in all the four provinces of Pakistan over an area of about 92,300 hectares. In Pakistan more than 130 varieties are grown. Province wise commercial varieties are in Sindh Aseel, Faslî, Bhedîr, Karbalian, Kupro and Mithri. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Dhakki, Mazavati, Kango, Gookna. Balochistan Bagma Jangi,

Table 1: Area and Production of Dates in Pakistan

Year	Area (000 hectares)	Production (000 Tonnes)	Yield per Hectare (in kgs)
2000-01	78.6	612.5	7,793
2001-02	78.5	630.3	8,029
2002-03	77.9	625.0	8,023
2003-04	74.8	427.0	6,705
2004-05	81.7	622.1	7,614
2005-06	82.0	496.6	6,056
2006-07	84.7	426.3	5,033
2007-08	90.1	557.5	6,188
2008-09	90.7	556.4	6,245
2009-10	90.6	531.2	5,863
2010-11	90.1	522.2	5,796
2011-12	92.2	532.5	5,775
2012-13	92.3	535.0	5,783

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan.

Kaharba & Mozawati. Punjab Hillavi, Khudrawi, Zahidi & Shmran. Sindh is the largest date producing province followed by Balochistan, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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 is given in Table-1.

Exports: Pakistan entered the international date trade by sheer chance in early 1980s when Iran and Iraq went to war,

Table 2: Export of Dates from Pakistan

Quantity: Tonnes
Value: Rs. in Million

Year	Fresh		Dried		Total	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
2005-06	4,023	161	85,321	17,80	12,555	1,941
2006-07	6,767	291	9,733	2,034	16,500	2,325
2007-08	4,687	195	88,451	2,068	93,136	2,263
2008-09	4,471	258	107,244	3,232	111,715	3,490
2009-10	6,394	364	115,286	3,783	121,679	4,147
2010-11	7,844	6,24	104,879	4,000	112,723	4,624
2011-12	10,641	951	116,368	5,029	127,009	5,980
2012-13	9,781	703	146,343	6,657	156,124	7,360
2013-14	14,742	1,495	151,708	7,507	166,450	9,002

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan.

and became the number one date exporting nation in the world by selling over 78,000 tonnes of dates in 2004. Overall export of dates has witnessed a steady growth. In 2011-12, date exports were valued at Rs5.98 billion rising to Rs7.33 billion in 2012-13 and to Rs9.00 billion in 2013-14

Of the total produce, Pakistan exports only 22% or 116,450 tonnes during fiscal year 2013-2014, while local consumption is not even 5% of the output. By contrast, the country imports dates to meet local demand almost every year in the month of Ramazan. Imported dates are processed in comparison with the local ones thus are more appealing to the consumers and for this reason for importing dates. 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. Export of dates from Pakistan is given in Table-2.

The major markets are India, USA, the UK, Bangladesh, Germany Canada and South Africa. India is the largest importer with market share of about 90% while UK and USA are second and third largest importers with shares of 3.3% and 2.6% respectively. Country-wise export of fresh and dried dates is given in Table-3 and Table-4.

Future Prospects: The date sector offers substantial opportunities for export,

income and employment generation in addition to economic growth of the country. Since 1999, per acre yield of dates in Pakistan has not increased much, whereas worldwide production increased by 166%. Thus due to these problems the country had to import dates during the month of Ramadan.

A report of USAID revealed that lack of awareness about best farming practices, improper fruit handling techniques, and an absence of developed processing facilities are major constraints inhibiting profitable date production in Pakistan. Usually the harvest season of dates starts in July in upper Sindh, during the monsoon season; they remain safe due to lack of rain in these areas during harvesting.

Besides proper storage and value addition, date farmers also lack techniques to control fruit disease thus a significant amount of their produce perish in the post harvesting process.

There is a great scope for increasing the exports of Pakistani dates,

If the country opts for processing dates through modern techniques, pays vigilant attention to packaging and dates' product manufacturing, this versatile and highly nutritious fruit.

Pakistan receives very low prices of her dates as compared to other countries because of low standard and dried dates are still dominated export item of Pakistan despite the fact that soft dates have more international demand and price.

Table 4: Exports of Dried Dates (Major Countries)

Quantity: Tonnes
Value: Rs. 000

Country	2013-14		2012-13	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
India	150,022	7,359,322	143,091	6,470,500
Bangladesh	508	27,502	931	46,843
Japan	256	18,377	369	24,644
Germany	288	27,820	326	28,394
Canada	194	22,473	78	991
U.K.	109	14,585	140	11,839
U.A.E.	76	10,530	211	12,198
U.S.A.	69	9,378	86	5,782
China	55	1,642	79	1,759
Lithuania	54	5,484	--	--
Saudi Arabia	38	3,427	49	3,944
All Other	39	6,730	983	50,281
Total	151,708	7,507,270	146,343	6,657,175

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan



Moreover, farmers' perspective is greatly ignored by the government especially in marketing of dates and provision of training regarding production and protection aspect of date palm.

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. Trade Development Authority of Pakistan
3. United States Department of Agriculture. ♦

Table 3: Exports of Fresh Dates (Major Countries)

Quantity: Tonnes
Value: Rs. 000

Country	2013-14		2012-13	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
U.K.	5,414	551,543	2,275	202,021
U.S.A.	4,285	471,848	2,180	191,766
Germany	1,229	114,144	722	59,248
Denmark	951	85,484	380	31,940
Canada	593	79,917	73	9,812
Australia	494	42,301	551	45,417
South Africa	388	43,091	289	29,653
India	395	23,875	1,496	52,902
Afghanistan	323	13,908	3,009	12,719
Turkey	111	12,012	166	15,701
Latvia	217	21,722	108	8,952
Lithuania	143	15,691	--	--
All Other	199	19,398	1,468	43,342
Total	14,742	1,494,754	9,781	703,473

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan