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Climate change squeezes mango yield

Expert's fear 600,000MT fall in production; export target reduced to 100,000MT
GOHAR ALI KHAN | May 17, 2024

The altered weather conditions disrupt the normal life cycle of mangoes, affecting tree health and fruit quality. This year, the crop faced challenges from malformation, hoppers, and rain in certain areas, says SAB SVP Mahmood Nawaz Shah. Photo: file

KARACHI:

Climate change took a heavy toll on mango yield for the third consecutive year as the overall production of the major fruit might fall by 600,000 metric tons this year, exporters and horticulture experts warned on Thursday.

Punjab and Sindh are main producers of mango, sharing 70% and 29% of the 1.8 million metric tons of national produce. The remaining 1% comes from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P).

However, poor weather conditions might reduce Punjab's yield by 35- 40% and by less than 20% of Sindh.

The All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters Association (APFVEA) has set an export target of 100,000 metric tons for the current season, which begins on May 20, APFVEA Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed said in a statement on Thursday.

Along with the traditional markets, the focus this season would be on the value-added market of China, America, Turkey and Japan, he said, adding that Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian states would also play an important role in achieving the mango export target.

“Climate change is negatively impacting mango orchards in the country, resulting in a significant reduction in the production. Due to the non-availability of export quality mangoes, the export target could not be achieved last year,” Ahmed said.

Last season, the export target was 125,000 metric tons, but only 100,000 metric tons could be exported. This year, the target has been reduced to 100,000 metric tons. The experts suggested that if the target was achieved, it would generate \$90 million in foreign exchange.

Ahmed said that this year, the markets of Central Asian countries and Iran would be stabilized through Afghanistan, while strenuous efforts would be made to enhance the volume for China’s market, where the export started during last season.

“We will also try to ramp up exports to the value- added markets like Australia, Japan and America. This season, Pakistani mangoes will be promoted in Turkey and Far East countries in collaboration with the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP),” he said.

The value- added sector, including mango processing, packaging and warehousing is worth more than Rs100 billion, besides providing employment to millions of people. The sector also faces challenges like rising cost of electricity, gas, transportation, garden maintenance, pesticides and water management.

Ahmed said that climate impacts on the cultivation of fruits, including mango, and the agricultural sector in general were increasing every year. Long winters, heavy rains and hail following heat waves had also changed the pattern of agricultural diseases.

Meanwhile, talking to The Express Tribune, progressive farmers and growers from Sindh criticized the federal and provincial governments and their organizations which were not knuckling down to serious works on research and development.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) Senior Vice President Nabi Box Satie, Farmer Organizations Council Sindh Chairman Jawaid June and Small Growers’ Organization Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC) President Ali Pal stressed the need for research-based solutions to challenges.

They called for developing new varieties and seeds, and adopting Agri-tech, besides holding awareness programmes so that the growers and progressive farmers could get updated information about climate change, new crop patterns and other issues.

To enhance mango yield and exports, they urged the government institutions to develop new varieties that suited the changing weather conditions. They also urged the government to ensure supply of suitable pesticides and launch prevention programmes to protect agriculture.