

India seeks early breakthrough for mango exports to US, Japan

India needs to allow quarantine mango irradiation to meet US and Japanese sterilization laws.

Fresh Plaza
March 19, 2006

President George W. Bush's wish of seeing fresh Indian mangoes in the US may have to wait at least one more year as India complies with necessary quarantine requirements even as it mounts efforts to penetrate the Japanese market.

For breakthrough into the Japanese market, India has so far fulfilled 11 out of 13 steps outlined to get it to lift the import ban, while in the case of the US all the necessary information to resume export of mangoes and trade of several other fresh fruits and vegetable is still to be worked out, official sources said.

The major hindrance faced by India, the largest mango producer, is concerns about pests like pulp weevil and fruit fly. India annually produces over 11 million tones or about 40 percent of global mango produce but exports hardly Rs.850 million (\$19.14 million) worth fresh produce.

"One of the major US requirement would entail India amending the Food Adulteration Act, which at present prescribes irradiation only as a treatment for disinfections of mangoes, unlike the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) that permits it as a quarantine treatment for all fruits and vegetable," a senior commerce ministry official told IANS.

During irradiation, foods are exposed briefly to a radiant energy source such as gamma rays or electron beams within a shielded facility. It helps kill harmful bacteria, greatly reducing potential hazards as also spoilage bacteria, insects and parasites, and in certain fruits and vegetables it inhibits sprouting and delays ripening.

"In fact, the request of agriculture ministry to permit irradiation as a quarantine treatment for all fruits and vegetables has been pending with the ministry of health," official sources said.

Under the pact signed earlier this month between President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for boosting bilateral exports of fruits and vegetables including fresh Indian mangoes to the US after 17 years, irradiation of all fruits and vegetables has been made one of the reciprocal steps required from both countries.

India would also have to enter into a "facility compliance agreement with Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the USDA for an on-site inspection and accreditation of the Krushak Irradiator at Lasalgaon in Nashik," the sources said.

Both the countries would also have to agree on an operational work plan for covering pre-clearance inspection procedures, monitoring protocols and other post treatment inspections.

In addition, the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) and the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Agency (APEDA) under the commerce ministry would have to sign a trust fund agreement with the APHIS and the USDA to deposit funds to meet the pre-clearance requirements of export consignments during the irradiation treatment.

"All these procedures are expected to take time. Meanwhile, in the case of Japan, two quarantine experts will be visiting India from March 23 to April 29 and conducting confirmation tests on the efficacy of vapour heat treatment for 100 percent disinfestations of the fruit flies," a senior official said.

Once the Japanese experts are satisfied, the same would be notified through the Japanese Quarantine Department for public comments and conducting public hearing.

Only after clearance from the public would Japanese authorities amend their regulation for lifting the ban on import of Indian mangoes. The whole process is expected to take around nine weeks.

"In effect, the clearance may be too late for India to export to Japan any of the early season varieties of mangoes like the prized Alphanso, which is exported to several European and Middle East countries. We would however be able to export Kesar and Banganpalli provided the clearances come in time."

The official body for promotion of fruit and vegetable exports, APEDA is waiting in the wings to hold a "mango promotion campaign in the middle of the mango season in May/June provided clearances from the two countries are forthcoming.