

## **Note on the visit of delegation to Saudi Arabia**

Small cardamom is one of the important spices exported from India since time immemorial. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Iran, USA, Qatar, Canada, UK, Japan, etc. are the major export destinations for Indian small cardamom. Consumers in Saudi Arabia prefer Indian Small cardamom for preparation of the Qahwa, their traditional Arabic Coffee due to its rich intrinsic qualities, superior aroma & flavor etc.

During May 2018, a few consignments of Indian small cardamom exported to Saudi Arabia were detained due to detection of pesticide residues above the MRLs set by Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA). Subsequently, export of small cardamom from India to Saudi Arabia has declined drastically.

In order to sort out the issues/ resume the export of small cardamom to Saudi Arabia, a delegation led by Secretary, Spices Board and comprising of officials from Spices Board & leading exporters of small cardamom, had visited Riyadh, Saudi Arabia during 17-19, December 2019. The delegation focused on highlighting the technical issues/ inconsistencies of SFDA standards viz a viz internationally accepted Codex Standards and standards of other importing countries, during the discussions with Saudi Food & Drug Authority (SFDA). Further, meetings were held with GCC Standardization Organization (GSO), leading buyers of small cardamom in the GCC region, supermarkets / wholesalers etc, in the presence of officials from Embassy of India, Riyadh.

The delegation apprised the Saudi authorities on the roadmap of Spices Board to produce and export small cardamom, with the cleared test report from the Board's Quality Evaluation Laboratories (QELs). The team could convince the SFDA on Spices Board's capability in successfully handling export alerts from other countries. It was suggested that SFDA may consider the globally accepted benchmarks such as Estimated Daily Intake (EDI), Codex Standards, the dissipation time for pesticides in soil & environment, mechanism followed by other countries while prescribing/commencing import inspections etc, in order to address the inconsistencies noticed in the MRLs prescribed by SFDA for spices.

The delegation requested SFDA to provide a cooling off period and consider allowing the export of Indian Small Cardamom by relaxing the MRLs of pesticides for cardamom for two crop seasons (till September 2022), in line with Codex standards, considering the fact that the Codex MRLs are universally accepted and are considered as reference standards by WTO in international trade.

The SFDA, in response to the Board's request, informed that the standards are being revised. Further it was decided to continue having an active engagement between Spices Board and SFDA. Accordingly it was opined that the action plan of Spices Board, may be shared with SFDA, for suggestions before implementation.

The discussions with supermarkets and other leading buyers revealed that the Saudi customers are increasingly becoming health conscious and there is a strong demand for safe/ organic products. This presents future prospects for exporting IPM compliant Cardamom to Saudi market. It was also informed that Indian Cardamom is sought after by the Saudi consumers owing to its rich intrinsic qualities.

In the light of the discussions with SFDA, the roadmap and the list of registered spice exporters from India were shared with the SFDA, through the Embassy of India, Riyadh, for further needful.

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