

PLANTATION OF CHILLIES IN RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT

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Abstract

Growing Chillies requires a warm growing environment and so unless you live in a warm climate your Chilli plants will spend a considerable amount of time indoors or in the greenhouse. Chillies are most often grown in pots or grow-bags and are a good source of vitamin C. They also stimulate the circulation and boost metabolism so give a feeling of energy. Chillies are very similar to sweet bell peppers (Capsicum) but they have a hot fiery flavour instead of the sweet flavour associated with bell peppers.

Key Words: *Indian Chilli Market, Process of chilli, Harvest.*

Introduction

Chilli belongs to the family 'solanaceae' to which some other important vegetables such as potato, tomato, brinjal, etc. belong. It is a very popular vegetable, not only in India but all over the world. The chilli includes a large number of horticultural varieties. The fruit varies in size from 1-20 cm in length from thin, long to conical and thick fleshed blocky shapes. It includes both pungent and non-pungent varieties. The native place of chilli is considered to be tropical America, especially Brazil where it is still found growing in wild state. There are more than 400 varieties of chillies found all over the world. Its botanical name is "Capsicum annum". Some varieties of chillies are famous for red colour because of the pigment 'capsanthin;' others are known for biting pungency attributed to 'capsaicin.' It is commonly called chilli pepper, red or green pepper, or sweet pepper in Britain, and typically just capsicum in Australian and Indian English. The large mild form is called bell pepper in the US and Canada. It is called paprika in some other countries. The original Mexican term, chilli came from the Nahuatl word chilli, referring to a larger capsicum variety cultivated since 3000 B.C, as evidenced by remains found in pottery from Puebla. The crop can be grown over a wide range of altitudes from sea level upto nearly 2100 meter.

The origin of chillies is believed to be as old as 7000 B.C used in Mexico. Chillies were grown and cultivated from 3500 B.C. Chilli was brought to the rest of the world by Christopher Columbus who discovered America in 1493. Christopher had set from Spain to reach India to bring spices such as pepper back to his country. Christopher not only mistook America for India, but also mistook chilli as the black pepper. Christopher Columbus, the founder of America, was one of the first Europeans who consumed chilli, and called it

pepper due to the similarity in taste. He took chilli pepper back to Spain where it became a very famous spice. Chilli became popular in Portuguese. In 1498, the Portuguese explorer Vasco-da-Gama reached Indian shores bringing with him the pungent spice. Chilli seeds were brought to North America for cultivation. In 1888, experiments began for cross breeding of chilli plants. It became popular in the whole of Asia rapidly and native Asians started cultivating this crop as well. Today, the most sharp and valued varieties of chillies are grown in Asia only. India, Mexico, Japan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Indonesia, China and Pakistan are the major chilli growing countries. It is also grown in Italy, Spain, Hungary and the United States. In India, its introduction is believed to be through the Portuguese in 17th century. The Portuguese brought capsicum from Brazil to India during the year 1584. The most popular for chilli production because of India has immense potential to grow and export different best suited climate, soil, irrigation facilities, skill and types of chillies required to various markets around the intensive cultivation practices adopted by the farmers of world.

Harvesting

The Chillies should take a few weeks to develop and will take a further couple of weeks to change from green to red. You can harvest them when they are Green or Red. They will start to shrivel after they have been on the plant for a while but they can still be harvested and used at this stage. The longer you leave the chillies on the plant, the hotter in flavour they will become. Leaving the chillie on the plant after it is ready for harvest will result in a decline in further yields. If you have a large amount of chillies ready for harvest at the same time and can't use them up fast enough then harvest and freeze any excess fruits. When preparing Chillies in your cooking recipes make sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling chillies and their seeds as if you accidentally rub your eye with Chilli juice on them you will know about it.

Soil type

Chillies grow well in a well drained, fertile soil. If planting in pots be sure to use a good organic compost that will retain moisture.

Chilli Production and Processing in Tamilnadu

Ramanathapuram district is the leading producer of chilli in Tamil Nadu, contributing to 31% of the state's production. The district grows chilli normally in an area of roughly 16,000 ha with a normal production of 13,164 tonnes. Chilli is the major cash crop cultivated in the district. district is 808 kg per hectare. Thoothukudi and Madurai districts together match the production of Chilli in Ramnathapuram district.

Presentation of the Target Area

Ramanathapuram is one of the backward districts in Tamil Nadu. The population is 1.3 million. The climate is semi-arid with normal annual rainfall of 750mm, much of it occurs between October and December. Rainfed tanks are major sources of irrigation (partial) and the groundwater availability and quality is highly limited. Mundu chilli production is widespread in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu.

Indian Chilli Market

Currently, chillies are produced throughout India, making our country the most dominating player in the world market. The market for chillies is affected by seasonal price fluctuations, overall production in the country, world demand, stocks available in cold storages and hedging among the various varieties of chillies. The major trading centres of chilli and chilli powder in India are Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), Warangal (Andhra Pradesh), Khammam (Andhra Pradesh), Hindpur (Andhra Pradesh), Raichur (Karnataka), Bellary (Karnataka), Unjha (Gujarat), Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Nagpur. Guntur is the largest chilli market in the world. The following are the major assembling markets for chilli producing states in the country.

Factors Affecting Income from Chilli Production

The farmers, who grow the chillies, are not able realise better value for their produce, due to the following reasons

- **Farmers Losing the Value of Chilli due to Improper Storage:** The bright red colour of the chilli, which is a very crucial factor in fetching a good price, is lost due to storing of chilli at environmental temperatures and drying it in the sun for prolonged period of time.
- **Farmers not Able to Cater to the International Market demand due to Improper Drying Methods:** The farmers dry the chillies in the open ground leaving it contaminated with dirt, aflotoxins etc., Also the pesticide residue in chilli is beyond the accepted levels. Hence, the farmers are not able to cater to the needs of the export market, leaving them with no other option than to sell it domestically that too at very low prices.
- **Improper Natural Resource Management Practices:** Due to lack of knowledge on soil conservation & water management and improper method of harvesting the farmers are not able to get good income out of the chilli cultivation.
- **Middlemen Control the Farm Gate Price of Chillies as they buy from the farmer at the farm gate.** The farmers are not organised as an association and they do not aggregate their produce, this results in the farmer having no bargaining power.
- **The Farmers are Not Able to Understand Farm Economics:** The farmers do not track their income and expenses out of the chilli farming fearing that the result will always be negative. There is very little knowledge on Farm Economics.

Time of Sale

The chillies get fully ripped in the plant itself. At that stage the chillies are plucked from the plant and allowed to dry for a period of seven days in open sunshine. After that it is packed in gunny bags and stored for a period of four to five months. If stored for more than five months, it will affect the shining, colour of the chillies and such stocks may not fetch the maximum price. Those who are in immediate need of money will sell the chillies without storing them. Others who can afford to wait will store and sell them at the maximum possible price.

Grading

The chillies are graded mostly by farmers on the basis of colour and size, before they are brought in the market. The damaged discolored and immature pods are removed depending on market demand. However, at traders level the other important quality parameters are moisture and stalks. Excess moisture adds weight to the pods, but gives room to various fungi to grow. Similarly, if the stalk of the pods is broken, exposing the seeds entirely, the seeds may fall out. On the other hand in absence of optimum moisture the pods may break and let off the seeds. Thus the seed and pod ratio in a lot is also a valuable parameter of grade. Apart from the apparent characters of colour, size, moisture and stalk of the pods, the following features also have weightage in grading chillies: seed and fruit ratio; seed size and hardness; thickness of the skin of the pod; and pungency.

Packaging

Packaging is an important function for every produce and so is in marketing of chilli. Good packaging of chilli not only facilitates convenience in transportation and storage, but also attracts consumer to pay more. The packaging reduces the marketing cost and protects the quality. In the study area, chillies are packed mostly in gunny bags. There is no uniformity in the packing size of chillies in the study area. The pack size is more than 40 kg in Tamil Nadu. Chillies are also packed in polythene bags.

Storing

The dried chilli is packed into sacks of the ordinary market size, mini or maxi bag, and stored on bamboo platform or on the floor in the house. Chilli can be stored for about 12 months in this manner without any change in quality if it has been dried well and has a moisture content of less than 10%. The pods lose 65 to 75% weight during drying. Commercially, chillies are dried artificially in 2-3 days in thin layers in stacked wire bottom trays, while for local purposes they are dried according to the season in 10-15 days. Dry chillies with thin pericarp, few seeds and firm stalk, of medium size, bright red colour, glossy appearance and high pungency fetch a high price in the market. Chillies are sometimes smeared with mahua oil to impart glossiness. The farm level storage capacity among the chilli farmers is not adequate in the study area. Proper storage facilities for

chillies are available with co-operative marketing society and commission agents. Most of the farmers store the produce in their own ways.

Summary

Chilli is a very popular vegetable, not only in India but all over the world. The native place of chilli is considered to be tropical America, especially Brazil where it is still found growing in wild state. There are more than 400 varieties of chillies found all over the world. The most popular for chilli production because of India has immense potential to grow and export different best suited climate, soil, irrigation facilities, skill and types of chillies required to various markets around the intensive cultivation practices adopted by the farmers of world. Ramanathapuram is second to the Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh in chilli production where farmers are very disadvantaged due to high degree of saline groundwater and uneven rainfall. Ramanathapuram is a dry place and has a high degree of heat that suits growth of chilli crops. The chapter discusses the production and marketing practices of the chillies in Ramanathapuram district.

Conclusion

The project will create a positive impact the livelihoods of 100 poor and marginal chilli farming families to become profitable agricultural producers through collectivization, capacity building events and access to technology in a sustainable manner. The problems of the farmers who are at the bottom of the pyramid could be better addressed only through working with them for a longer term. A strong foundation will be laid through the project which will be used to make the farmers to understand better about the local supply chains thoroughly to improve their position in the market as an active and a competitive player in the market.

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