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**Short Communication****COMMERCIAL PROSPECTS OF DATE PROCESSING FOR EXPORT  
PURPOSES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The date fruit is a rich source of nutrients and energy for human body providing about 280 Kcal/100 grams of edible materials. Being sweet and palatable fruit, it is easily digested to provide carbohydrates and a number of valuable minerals and vitamins. Dates are free from fat-soluble cholesterol and are ideal ingredients for the quality products demanded by the today's health conscious consumers. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to date processing in Pakistan due to which large quantities of produce are wasted every year. There is a dire need to boost the date processing on commercial as well as on domestic scale to manufacture a number of value-added products such as chopped dates dusted with icing sugar, dates pressed in cube form, stuffed dates, date syrup, date vinegar, date chutney, date pickle, date jam, date drink for export and domestic use.

**Key words:** *Phoenix dactylifera*, processing, value added products.

**INTRODUCTION**

Date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) were appreciated and commercially cultivated in southern Iraq 4000 B.C. Pakistan is the fifth largest date producing country after Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran and UAE. This fruit provides the staple food for millions of the people in tropical regions, throughout the world. It can grow with less water than any other food crop and tree bears more fruits and needs little care (Dowson, 1962).

In Pakistan, many varieties are grown widely in the coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan and also in many districts of Punjab (Table 1). The total area under date cultivation is 77,866 hectares with production of 6,25,043 tones (MINFAL, 2004).

The date fruit is rich source of nutrients and energy for human body providing about 280 Kcal/100 g of edible materials. The nutritional and medicinal value of the fruit is also mentioned in twenty verses of the Holy Quran and our Prophet (PBUH) has said that date cures many diseases. Both dried and fresh form of this fruit contain many vitamins and minerals along with large a number of essential and non-essential amino acids (Table 2, 3 and 4). The fruit is also being used as a functional food due to the large number of nutraceutical effects (Table 5).

### **Processing of dates**

Date palm is one of the potential fruits as a large number of food products can be manufactured from pulp and stone of this fruit (Figure 1) due to its nutritional and medicinal value.

### **Present status and export prospects**

Date palm ranks third after citrus and mango. Although it is an export commodity of Pakistan, but still there is a big scope to enhance the export of this potential fruit. Last five years export data of both fresh and dried form of dates (Fig. 2 and 3) indicates that the dried dates the demand of dried dates is more than the fresh one in offshore markets as and fall in ratio of almost 20:1, respectively (MINFAL, 2004).

In respect to export of any product, volume, variety and value are three mainstays to confront with the offshore market demands. Pakistan is rich with variety and volume of date palm whereas, we are far behind in value and quality as compared to other competitive nations. In international trade, quality assurance parameters especially, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures have become the soul of export of food products, under WTO scenario. These measures need to have strategic and effectively designed system, which includes the following recommendations:

- Establishment of advanced date processing and preservation units.
- Committed and strong organizational leadership.
- Strategic planning to adopt quality management system such as ISO-9001-2000 and HACCP and ultimate creation of quality culture and environment for export.
- Developing defined company structure, methods of operation and pre- and post harvest procedures to match with international requirements of sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures.
- Selection of disease free plants.
- Pre- and post-harvest management, processing and behavioral trainings of the employees/staff for their role in the system.
- Strict compliance to the procedures and quality standards must be ensured.
- Integrated supply chain (from farm to fork) for handling, processing, packing, marketing and export of dates and date products.

These synoptic suggestions then would help harvest the following market opportunities and permanent development of the growers, processors, traders and other stakeholders. These opportunities are:

- To avail the open market opportunities under WTO scenario.
- Chances of opening of income generation avenues from gross root level.
- Chance to develop the economic status of the growers, traders, processors and exporters.
- Ultimate reduction in post harvest losses, un-employment and poverty.
- This would also result in creating consistently based “Quality Culture” in processing units.

### **CONCLUSION**

Being the most nutritious and medicinal fruit and third major exported fruit of Pakistan, date palm is the most potential horticultural commodity. Relentless efforts are required to harvest further nature blessed opportunities by applying post-harvest management and processing techniques and ultimate qualifying the international standards.

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