

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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I pronounce with immense pleasure that it's great opportunity for me to be among the galaxy of scientists as well to interact with the foreign delegates and resource persons of the "First International Conference on Mango and Date Palm: Culture and Export". I would like to ensure that Agriculture remains the mainstay of Pakistan's economy. It provides raw material to industrial sector which is mostly agro-based. At present almost 75% of foreign exchange is earned through the export of agricultural produce in raw shape or as value added goods. Although due to steady growth of trade and industry share of agriculture in GDP has fallen, it still remains largest component of the economy.

In spite of its importance, agricultural sector on the whole has not been able to produce sufficient food for the teeming millions. During sixties and seventies, there was a production breakthrough. However, the self-sufficiency has proved to be marginal and very much dependent on weather conditions. Failure of rains or inclement weather results in lowering yields there by necessitating import of food grains in certain years. Unless some revolutionary measures are adopted-and structural changes are affected, we may experience continuous stagnation in production of major food and cash crops.

There is need to see the things in proper perspective and to give due attention to high value horticultural commodities in fixing priorities in national plans. In our agro-based economy, the horticultural sub-sector deserves special attention. A vast natural diversity in the soils and climate of Pakistan is suitable for the cultivation of numerous fruits and vegetables. Promotion of cultivation of fruits will not only help greatly enhance the availability for local consumption but would also generate sizeable exportable surplus. The shift of emphasis to horticultural crops would be justifiable on more than one count. Horticultural crops have great potential for increasing income of people. They produce more yields per unit area and give much higher returns as compared to other farm crops. Fruits, vegetables and flowers are in big demand in foreign countries. The current decade might turnout to be the decade of horticulture.

The soil, climatic conditions and water resources allow cultivation of all major tropical, subtropical and temperate fruits and vegetables in Pakistan. Tropical and subtropical fruits are very important in lower Sindh area. For instance, mango, banana, papaya, date palm, guava and chiku are grown with ease and success in Sindh. Punjab grows citrus, mango, litchi, loquat and dates in plains, and deciduous fruits in Murree Hills. Balochistan is famous for raising excellent quality apples, grapes, almonds, dates, cherries and pomgranates. NWFP produces citrus fruits stone fruits and strawberry in Northern areas and in Peshawar valley. Azad Jammu and Kashmir grows apples and other deciduous fruits of excellent quality. Potatoes, tomatoes, onions, cauliflower okra, brinjal, peas, chillies, lettuce, carrot, turnips and raddish are widely grown throughout the country.

With a few exceptions, the orchards are mostly small sized and scattered thereby limiting the collective efforts and mobilizing resources to improve both production and marketing of horticultural products. This explains why we are not producing enough fruits to cater for domestic needs inspite of possessing great horticultural potential.

The Kinnow, mango, dates and apples are in great demand in Gulf States, Singapore, Malaysia, United Kingdom and Germany. However we are not fully utilizing our export potential in horticultural products, currently <2 percent of fruits are being processed although this activity offers great opportunities to augment volume of value added products using modern technology. According to some modest estimates, there are bright prospects for export of horticultural commodities and their products.

The government policies have provided great impetus for the development of horticulture sector; therefore PHDEB has taken new initiatives to venture for the exploitation of export potential and to search more markets around the globe.

Many countries have derived economic benefits by adopting advance technology in the production and processing of horticultural crops. Israel, Spain, Turkey, Chile, Brazil, are some of well known examples. Actually horticulture has become the back bone of their economics. They are earning billion of dollars as foreign exchange from the export of fruits, vegetables, flowers and value added products. Pakistan possesses all the ingredients of success in this field and in certain respects has clear edge over other competing countries. Pakistan will have an easy access to Central Asian republics which do not grow horticultural crops of tropical and subtropical types. Gulf States are net importers of fruits and vegetables. Saudia Arabia alone imports about 300 thousand tonnes of orange concentrates every year from USA and Brazil. This market should be within the reach of Pakistan.

Our government, growers and the processors should avail these opportunities and plan to derive benefits from these developments. Many countries are already striving hard to gain foothold in these areas. Pakistan due to having varied climate can ship commodities which cannot be grown in most countries in apparent competition. Export of fresh and processed fruits and vegetables can substantially add to our foreign exchange earnings. By encouraging the processing industry, we will be able to eliminate post harvest losses which currently can run as high as 40%.

Mango and date are among the prized fruit with great export potential. The demand for better quality produce is on increase within the country and abroad. In Pakistan room for improvement in packing and streamlining marketing exists. The available cultivars can compete in the world markets; however, there is need to present our produce in accordance with international standards and procedures. There is also need to produce; keeping in view the demand and consumers' preferences. Pakistani mangoes are equally liked in the export market. It is a fact that Pakistani mangoes are considered far superior in quality throughout the world.

This conference is being held at a very critical time, when our horticulture industry is passing through the initial phase of WTO era. This occasion would provide an excellent opportunity to assess the improvement and progress made, not only in fruit production, processing and marketing within the county, but also the implications of new regulations on our industry. The event would foster close harmony between growers, processors, consumers, exporters, and research and extension workers. The "First International Conference on Mango and Date Palm: Culture and Export" would also be immense educational value, besides motivating healthy sense of competition between growers and manufacturers of products to further improve the quality of their produce and value added products.

I congratulate Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim, Professor and Director Horticulture and his team who have worked enthusiastically for organizing an International Conference on Mango and Date palm as it seemed fit to be the clarion of the time to address current issues related to production, processing, post harvest losses and export of fresh and value-added fruit commodities.

I also congratulate Dr. Saeed Ahmed, (FAO expert Retd.) who has been an inspirational and motivating personality behind the scene for all that which we see culminating into an international event.

With these words I declare the conference open.

Thanking you all.