

ADDRESS OF THE CHIEF GUEST

Mr. Sikandar Hayat Bosan
Minister for Food, Agriculture and Livestock, Government of Pakistan

My dear Vice Chancellor, Dr. Bashir Ahmad, Dean Faculty of Agriculture, Dr. Iftikhar Ahmed Khan, Director Horticulture, Dr. Muhammad Aslam Pervez, distinguished delegates, scientists, fellow farmers, ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamu-alaikum Warahmatu Allah Wabarakatuh

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be amongst galaxy of scientists who are committed to the cause of uplifting the farming community. This is the segment of society who is mired in poverty since centuries. To help the poorest of the poor is a virtuous duty that you people are performing. How well it is being done is evident from a turn around brought about in citrus and potato to cut it short. We used to import citrus from India till 1965 but are exporting them now. Similarly the import of seed potatoes has been reduced to 1/4th and the yield level raised from 9-18 tonnes ha⁻¹; thanks to dissemination of on farm seed plot technique (autumn to autumn cycle) and improved production practices to farmers under the aegis of Pak Swiss Potato Development Project. The introduction of olive, good quality peaches, coconut, palm, dwarfing apple rootstock, strawberry, tea and tunnel technology also deserve applause

But there is no room for complacency since our citrus industry is dominated by Kinnow mandarin alone while major share of international citrus trade is claimed by seedless sweet oranges. Fifty percent higher price China and Iran fetch than ours is probably due to export of such citrus cultivars. The need for exploring cooler areas for orange cultivation needs no underpinning. The position in case of mango, where we enjoy comparative edge in production over regional competitors is the worst in term of trade because Indian, Chinese and Sri Lankan varieties are exported at two, three and six times higher prices than ours. Can the existing cultivars be replaced by those suited to consumer's taste remains a big question to be answered. The other areas of concern are hazardous residue levels of chemicals in horticultural products which can be addressed by evolving ICM technique relevant to each crop. Prevalence of fruit fly in mango, citrus and cucurbits restricts their export to affluent Japanese consumers. The product after treatment with VHT is acceptable to them. The parameters of the above treatment for an effective fruit fly control should be determined with respect to each kind of fruit, to facilitate export to the unexplored market.

It is claimed that our yields can be doubled if technologies in store can be applied in the field. Is the lack of technology application due to poor technology transfer, resource constraints because of small size orchards or low share of producers in consumer's price? Can the issue be resolved by adopting the foreign model studied by PHDEB under our peculiar rural cultural heritage or extension services be strengthened to cope with the challenges should also be deliberated upon.

Further dimension to government concern about the high import bill of vegetable seeds is being added by the inclusion in the import list of new crops like leek. It is feared that the list would swell up further with the awareness about role of exotic vegetables i.e. broccoli in providing a defense shield against serious diseases e.g. cancer if role of local horticultural produce for such purpose is not probed.

I believe that you are already seized with the issue

to cover the deficit and to meet the future obligations. The symposium extends an excellent opportunity to prioritize the thrust areas by interacting with farmers, R&D personnel and the renowned foreign delegates to transform the subsistence into commercial farming.

I am confident that faculty of the Institute of Horticultural Sciences is fully geared to embrace the above issues under the enlightened leadership of the Vice Chancellor. At the end I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Bashir Ahmed for providing me an opportunity to enrich my knowledge of horticulture discipline through this symposium on “Prospects of Horticultural Industry in Pakistan”.

Thank you very much and Khuda Hafiz.