



# The Daily Star

# Enabling fruits and vegetable export to improve farm income



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enact aligned guidelines for growers, exporters, traders and farmers with proper coordination among the ministries and relevant organisations
- Implement best agricultural practices for quality assurance by following GlobalG.A.P.
- Establish accredited labs
- Provide competent certification schemes that match international standards
- Set fair market prices for the products to stabilise farmers' income
- Provide suitable and efficient transportation services for fruits and vegetables
- Establish proper packhouses and trade centres to improve price monitoring
- Train and educate farmers with emphasis on sustainable farming
- Increase subsidies for vegetable production
- Provide varieties of seeds with export potential
- Emphasise on policies concerning residue management

Bayer CropScience Limited in association with The Daily Star organised a roundtable titled "Enabling Fruits and Vegetable Export to Improve Farm Income" on October 24, 2019. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

**Sajjadur Rahman**, Editor, Star Business, The Daily Star and moderator of the session

Bangladesh has already achieved food security in staple crops like rice, potatoes, and vegetables. Bangladesh is the third largest growing vegetable producer and the tenth largest tropical fruit producer in the world. However, it lags behind many other countries in terms of supply chain, cold storage, and the development of growth centres.

**Albert Schirring**, Crop Manager, Vegetables and Potatoes, Bayer AG, Germany

Innovations by Bayer support the production of fruits, vegetables and potatoes according to the principles of sustainability. We strive to increase production of premium quality fruits and vegetables, with reduced inputs.

Bayer actively develops partnerships with Food Value Chain partners to improve connectivity between the farm base and the market, and to improve transparency and traceability both on and beyond the farm. The Food Chain Partnership of Bayer provides farmers with BayGAP training, which is a foundation training that certifies farmers according to the principles of Good Agricultural Practices (G.A.P.). The certification scheme provides a trustworthy basis for Food Chain Partners to secure and operate with a professional and responsible farm base in support of premium potato quality, respecting sustainable farming practices. Bayer fosters open partnerships with growers, and private and governmental partners to jointly build and strengthen Food Value Chains, to improve the incomes of all partners involved.

Bayer also invests in digital farming technologies to support small holder farmers in their decision-making, to provide them with access to knowledge and expertise, and to ease farm operations. In Bangladesh, Bayer partners with local technology companies to enhance the efficiency of fungicide applications to improve the control of fungal diseases in potatoes. In this digital project called "GeoPotato," Bayer aims to reach out to 100,000 potato growers in Bangladesh. Bayer launched the Crop Specialism programme to train its technical field staff and partners to improve fruits and vegetables production according to the principles of G.A.P.

**Shusmita Anis**, Managing Director, ACI Formulations Ltd

The mango variety needs to be developed. We need to take into account what importers ultimately want: sweet and sour mangoes with a shelf life of 15 to 20 days. We can have very good, sweet mangoes but if their shelf life is only three to four days, then that's not viable. Moreover, there is a high demand for French fries in the Philippines. We cannot provide that because we don't have the variety. I would request the government bodies to invest in research and development in the right kind of variety that can be exported from the Bangladesh market.

In terms of agrochemicals, the main agrochemical companies must be able to join hands to support the farmers and make them more aware.

The government is currently providing a 20 percent subsidy for the production of vegetables. We would recommend that this number be increased, in order to be competitive with the international market. In addition, we need to create value-added vegetable products. For example, there is a strong demand for dried jackfruit in the Philippines and Thailand. Thus, dried format processing and cut up vegetables are elements related to adding value to the present market.

**Lutful Hassan**, Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU)

We need to think about more varieties of potatoes which can contribute to the system. The Ministry of Agriculture and Development Research Initiative (dRI) are now working on this very seriously. Partnership is needed with the Government—firstly, the ministry, and secondly, the research institutes, agricultural universities, private sector, NGOs,

and the media.

We need industry linkages and community development. Community engagement is very important because G.A.P. will go through the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE). The community will gain knowledge on how people can earn more money by exporting quality products.

**Shaikh Abdul Quader**, President, Bangladesh Potato Exporters Association

Our population is increasing so we need 0.275 million tonnes of food grain per year. There is a limitation on the production of cereals: rice and wheat. The extra food grain requirements cannot be met from cereal production only. Therefore, we should increase our potato consumption.

There are five varieties: extra early, early, medium early, medium late, and late. We can produce the extra early variety in 65 days since we have favourable climate in north-western Bangladesh.

We are bringing some extra early potato varieties from Europe this year. These potatoes will be suitable for export. Mediterranean countries are exporting early potatoes to Europe since the value of these potatoes there is high. We can compete with the Mediterranean countries. At the same time, we can advance our export period. Then we can export higher quantities. We need to reduce the huge post-harvest loss as it is increasing costs; with potatoes it's 14 percent.

**Md Monjurul Islam**, Adviser, Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporters Association (BFVAPEA)

Nowadays, export is low. We have a lot of demand but we cannot fulfil it due to our lack of compliance. With the help of the Ministry of Agriculture, quarantine officials and field services, we have set up cluster groups of farmers at the district level and upazila level. In these groups, we are creating traceability, and G.A.P. but this is not enough. G.A.P. is not up-to-date, so we need improvement there. Exports may be boosted if Bayer CropScience helps with the certification system and G.A.P. system. We also have to make sure there are no quarantine pests in our products for export.

More than 90 percent of what we are exporting to Europe is only to the UK. So there is a lot of scope in other European countries. The horticultural fresh produce exports in 2012 and 2013 were more than USD 260 million but this is now less than USD 100 million. We produce almost 16 million tonnes of vegetables but our domestic demand is 13 million tonnes. We can export the extra three million tonnes easily.

**Srinivasa Kumar Karavadi**, Managing Director, Bayer CropScience Ltd, Bangladesh

Bayer is a 60/40 joint venture with the Bangladesh Government. We are looking forward to collaborating with DAE, and also with big companies with big value chain initiatives. We can

also involve some seed companies to tackle the variety issue. For one or two years, we can work together, having implemented G.A.P., and successfully export at least two to three consignments to different European countries.

**Md. Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan**, Professor, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University

The vegetables we are growing in Bangladesh are dependent on the import of hybrid seeds. The local varieties are openly pollinated. Only a few hybrid varieties are produced in Bangladesh.

Variety development takes at least five years for potatoes if seed material is introduced. For vegetables, it requires even more time. It will not be favourable to develop processed varieties in Bangladesh due to the climatic conditions, unless you have a very good programme for variety development. Research and development is required to develop those sources of variety. We are releasing at least

seven to eight varieties of potatoes each year in Bangladesh. The National Seed Board has recommended at least ten varieties.

**Sazzadul Hassan**, Managing Director, BASF Bangladesh

BASF exports betel leaves (paan) to different countries. While working with the Vegetable Exporters Association, it found salmonella bacteria on the betel leaves. BASF came up with a solution—using

washing chemical from natural sources, called APG, Alkyl Polyglycosides, along with organic acid to rid the betel leaves of salmonella. This same technology helps with pesticide residue to tackle compliance issues while exporting to Europe.

BASF came up with an innovative insulation technology that can be applied to give an energy-efficient solution. 20 percent of energy can be saved with this technology. We have to be price competitive so 20 percent is a huge save as far as energy is concerned.

Crop protection plays a vital role in production enhancement. As one of the largest crop protection companies, BASF has solutions for farmers which can help them produce better crops.

**Dr Anil Kumar Das**, National Consultant (Programme), Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The Government and respective ministries have decided that the G.A.P. for all crops will be developed by BARC, in coordination with Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA).

Our country is now moving from subsistence to commercial agriculture. To export fruits and vegetables, we must first identify and prioritise the crops which will be exported. ACI is currently working with 400 farmers, which is great.

However, 60 million people live on 12 million small farms, a majority of whom are in need of assistance. According to the Hortex Foundation, potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, pointed gourds, yardlong beans, cauliflowers, lemons, mangoes, pineapples and jackfruits are among the pioneering fruits and vegetables of our country.

An efficient market still does not exist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Jashore has the potential to be developed as a major exporter of tomatoes.

The government has developed G.A.P. for two crops: tomatoes and mangoes. We do not have any G.A.P. policies for potatoes. We should develop crop-to-crop and case-to-case methodology and standards for these should be different.

Safety issues prevail even though the government is trying to produce safe crops. Institutions like ours have trouble providing certificates due to our sub-par labs. Maintaining seed standards has thus become difficult, and relevant ministries need to play their part in addressing such problems.

**Dr Md Abdur Rouf**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

We must increase the production of high-value crops; we are increasing the production of maize, which is a high-value crop. Community farming and contract farming are two ways in which

overall productivity and quality might be increased. Fruits such as papayas and guavas are available throughout the year which we would like to export.

We are trying to enforce value chain development and competent processing labs, suitable for accreditation, in order to improve our products for local markets and exports. We are in talks with the Ministry of Commerce to increase the incentive for exporters. We are trying to have all exports go through the Hortex Foundation before reaching exporters. The quality of our fruits and vegetables is on the same wavelength as India, and other Asian countries. We must be able to depend on other companies for the quality and variety of vegetable seeds.

We are also striving for entrepreneurship development. The National Agricultural Technology Project's (NATP) main objective is to develop entrepreneurship in various areas. Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) does not have a proper certification process in place. This is a major concern.

**Md Abul Kalam Azad**, Director, Export Promotion Bureau, Ministry of Commerce

We want to diversify our products, but we continue to be reliant on only a few products. Issuance of certificates is a major problem. Recently, 270 consignments were sent back from the European Union, with some

containing fake certifications. Accreditation at the required levels does not exist. Certificates issued by DAE may not always be accepted by international markets. Business is no charity and competition is an integral part of it. Thus, if other nations provide products of better quality than Bangladesh, how can we compete with them? Our reputation needs to be ensured in such markets with the help of organisations like Bayer, concerned experts and partners. In addition, trade policies need to be aligned to come up with comprehensive regulations.

**Md Manzurul Hannan**, Managing Director, Hortex Foundation

Our farmers can produce safe and quality products but they do not get fair prices. We also lack developed infrastructure such as quality packhouse, which is required for export. Government has one

packhouse which is not up to the mark.

The transportation system in Bangladesh is also not up to the mark. Substandard packaging is used for our exports. There is a lack of hygiene in our local markets. To increase exports, we must develop our G.A.P. certification programme. I believe we do not have auditors working in such programmes in Bangladesh. We also need labs in which Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) certificates will be issued by competent individuals.

We are raising awareness about heavy metals. Agricultural processes, however, are not responsible for those heavy metals. Some people might blame this particular procedure but I would point to the contaminated water instead. Hortex has already set up a global guideline. We have a committee headed by BARC working towards the subject of new policies.

**Md Zahidul Islam**, Country Commercial Lead, Bayer CropScience Ltd

Residue management is very important for export and it is the most significant criteria for food safety. We have different pesticide regulations compared to other countries. As we are struggling with export, should we stick to our policies or should we follow protocols of other nations who are successful in Agro commodity export? For example, for a particular crop potato, if a European or Mediterranean country is using a method/ solution to control particular pest and diseases already, and they are meeting the certification requirements easily, should we follow them, or should we invent new methods?

**Md Shamsul Alam**, Deputy Director, Export, Plant Quarantine Wing, Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE)

Countries such as Russia and Indonesia have stopped importing potatoes from Bangladesh. In the fiscal year of 2013-14, we exported 1,02,000 metric tonnes of potatoes. This year, the number came down

to 34,794, excluding exports to Russia and Indonesia.

Russian authorities have complained of "brown rot" disease in our potatoes. They also do not consider our product monitoring procedure and control measures to be up to the mark. Inadequate manpower and lack of accredited labs are issues they strongly condemn. Such issues led to forming a committee consisting of the Ministry of Agriculture and DAE, including others to find solutions. We came to the resolution that harvesting certain seeds/crops should be prioritised to improve overall exports.

During a visit to North Bengal, we put forth two conditions: (1) Inform the farmers exactly how much potato the administration was looking to export; (2) Which type of potato was needed for efficient exports? Till date, we have received no reply concerning this matter.

At the quarantine stage, our work is involved in the import and export processes. We are also concerned with the prevention of diseases and

bacteria during these processes. The labour requirements for G.A.P. are directly linked to the equipment provided to workers: aprons, hats, shoes, bathroom facilities, soaps, food for consumption, expenditures. We must coordinate with the representatives of DAE stationed at every upazila in Bangladesh. Initiatives must be taken by exporters in this regard. We should comply with the requirements of the importing countries to issue the Phytosanitary Certificate.

**Md Shafiq Islam**, Contract Farmer

Rajshahi is known for the production of mangoes. For the past two to three years, mango farmers in this particular region have not been able to sell their mangoes adequately, and thus have been left with a surplus. However, since

2014, with the assistance of DAE and the Hortex Foundation, we have been able to export some of the produce.

Still, thousands of mangoes are rotting and going to waste due to a decrease in overall demand. Himsagar mangoes, along with other varieties, ripen in seven days or so, giving farmers and buyers a limited time-frame in which to conduct business. Thus, many contract farmers are reluctant to work with such produce, due to the associated business risks.

Hot water treatment procedure is available here but the cooling system is inefficient and sometimes not available. This leads to mangoes being packaged without being cooled down, further decreasing the market value.

Those who are involved in contract farming should acquire products from efficient farmers.

Juice factories in the regions where the yield is high could be a solution to saving these mangoes. Trade centres in such regions are essential. This would lead to a more strict method of price monitoring.

**Md Abu Taher Masud**, PSO, Horticultural Research Centre, BARI

Healthy agro-economy practices are also of concern. BARI has the suitable technologies needed for healthy production. We have efficient technology for harvest handling.

We are lacking the number and variety of seeds demanded by our farmers. Other organisations also need to come forward to provide varieties of seeds with export potential. Manpower in this area is limited, and certification for all producers cannot be provided. Clinical Pathology Labs and Pesticide Labs are essential for such matters.

**Stephanie Faugeras**, Crop Strategy, Horticulture Crop Specialism, Bayer AG Germany

Working in cohesion and mapping the process of the whole chain, in order to identify the gaps is essential. We must work as a group in order to achieve the required results.

**AFM Fakhurul Islam Munshi**, President, Bangladesh Agro-Processors' Association (BAPA)

Initially, when we exported mangoes to Europe, the policy adopted by the government was faulty. The responsibility was given to an association which could not fulfil its responsibilities. The way it was transported to Dhaka was bad for the mangoes.

Our associations related to fruits and vegetables need to be geared up. All countries have their own rules and quality control, which we are yet to implement. We need the right infrastructure; airports and seaports are still not properly equipped.

Without major changes, frozen foods and vegetables will not be properly exported (in quality or volume). The training required for quality control is not there in Bangladesh. Universities related to the agricultural field have not progressed. India currently exports medicinal plants worth USD 12 billion annually. We have the required plants, in the Hill Tracts region, but there is no infrastructure to support them.

Arsenic contaminated water is also a huge hurdle in the production of good quality produce. NGOs cannot help in the long run, as many of them end up looking forward to making profit. Agribusiness has always been controlled by farmers. These farmers need to be professional entrepreneurs. The responsibility of training farmers needs to be taken by the government, the private sector and the farmers themselves.