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Citrus export to European countries resumes after restriction.

The export of Jara Lemon, a big variety of citrus, to European countries has got a large boost over the last six months after the restriction on Bangladeshi citrus imposed by the United Kingdom (UK) was withdrawn in November last year after three months, reports UNB.

According to Plant Protection Wing of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), 106 tonnes of Jara Lemon was exported from November last year to May this year.

Mitul K Saha, assistant general manager of Hortex Foundation, told the news agency that the country's citrus export to European countries was virtually stopped due to a restriction imposed by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) of the UK in 2008.

As the UK is the largest importer of Jara Lemon from Bangladesh, other European countries also stopped the import after Defra pronounced the restriction, he added.

"Defra claimed that the citrus exports from Bangladesh was not fulfilling the requirements of the quality compliances," he said, adding that the country used to export citrus varieties such as Jara Lebu, Ada Lebum, Elachi Lebu, Satkara and Pumela to the European market.

According to DEFRA, the peels of citrus from Bangladesh were bruised and discoloured due to citrus canker, black spot and leaf spot infections.

Officials at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), DAE and Hortex Foundation worked in collaboration to overcome the situation and found out that citrus from Narsingdi and Bandarban districts were not affected by the above mentioned diseases, said SM Emdadul Hoque, deputy director (fruit and vegetable) of the Food Crops Wing at DAE.

Besides, it was also observed that the infections could be easily tackled by spraying some 'soft' pesticides instead of 'powerful' pesticides that are not allowed to be sprayed on fruits consumed by European peoples, he said.

One of the major reasons behind the restriction was the use of 'powerful' pesticides that are otherwise banned in European countries, he pointed out.

A BARI team also collected some samples from lemon orchards across the country and conducted laboratory tests in its Plant Pathology Division. The tests confirmed that the lemons are free from citrus canker, black spot and leaf spot, he added.

After the findings were conveyed to DEFRA, they agreed to allow a trial shipment, provided that each and every step of the consignment follows the standards set by them, said Md Rafiqul Islam, assistant general manager of Hortex Foundation.

Hortex Foundation, in collaboration with Plant Pathology Division of BARI and the Quarantine Section of the Plant Protection Wing of DAE, sent two trial shipments of Jara Lemon to London in November, he said.

Two more trial shipments to Paris were also done in December, he added. "The authorities in the destination ports accepted the consignments without any further queries," he said.

Since the withdrawal of the restriction, 107 tonnes of Jara Lebu has been exported to the UK and France in six shipments, he said. "I hope the trial shipments will have a great impact on the citrus export in the coming years," he said.

Provided that proper standard of packaging and shipment are maintained, export of citrus fruits can constitute almost 20 per cent of the total fruit export from the country, he pointed out.

According to the DAE, fruit export in the 2011-12 fiscal will possibly exceed the amount of 1175.66 tonnes, as exported in the 2010-11 fiscal. The country now exports nearly 50,000 tonnes of vegetable and fruits every year.