

Export potentials of Bangladeshi aromatic rice



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Entertaining guests and relatives with delicious food made from fragrant rice have been a part of our tradition and rituals from time immemorial. Farmers have been cultivating fragrant rice in the corner of their land for a part of it. The purpose is to serve various delicacies including polao, biriyani, kachchi, firni, pitha-puli made of fragrant rice to entertain the guests in various events including religious festivities like Eid and Puja. In addition, aromatic rice has become a commercial staple in any festival or hotel-restaurant set menu.

Gradually, the traditional native aromatic varieties have been replaced by high-yielding fragrant rice varieties. Now, aromatic is not only being cultivated to fulfil family needs but also for business purposes. However, cultivating aromatic rice is more profitable than traditional or local rice varieties as it requires the same input cost to cultivate. Moreover, the price of aromatic rice is much higher than any other rice. For example, where the price of one kg of ordinary rice is 50-60 Taka, the price of one kg of loose aromatic rice is about 90 Taka. If it is properly packaged price could be 120-130 taka/Kg. Deshi aromatic rice has such a good demand in the local and foreign market.

Bangladesh now has a good volume of fine and premium quality aromatic rice which can be exported after ensuring national demand. Last year BRRI sent some samples of premium quality aromatic rice varieties to the diplomats in Dhaka and to the United Arab Emirates as gift. After that, the demand for fragrant rice has increased abroad. The demand is high mainly in the countries where South Asians live. In addition, the demand for fragrant rice has recently increased among the natives of Europe and America. Aromatic rice is now very popular for fast food and various Chinese dishes. Most of the fragrant rice is exported from Bangladesh to Middle Eastern countries. Especially in Europe, America we have a huge demand for Bangladeshi aromatic rice.

Some corporate companies of Bangladesh are so far exporting packaged fragrant rice to 137 countries. According to the data of some organizations concerned, the export of fragrant rice has been increasing continuously for 10 years. The amount of aromatic rice exported through various private companies is about 10-15 thousand tons every year. Besides, about 5-10 thousand tons of aromatic rice goes abroad through expatriate Bangladeshis working in different countries.

According to the current export policy (2018-21), there is an opportunity to export 25 varieties of aromatic rice. The Ministry of Commerce has a list of exportable aromatic rice. To keep the rice market stable in the last few years, the government has decided to export only aromatic rice. Due to the lack of awareness and promotions about the quality of the local aromatic rice, the use of foreign aromatic rice--instead of our variants--is seen in the reputed hotels and restaurants.

It incurs a lot of foreign currency on imports. However, it is possible to have a huge amount of foreign currencies by cultivating commercially more high-yielding aromatic varieties developed by our scientists.

The weather of Bangladesh is very suitable for the cultivation of aromatic rice. Aromatic rice is being cultivated commercially especially in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Rangpur, Naogaon, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh districts. There are many regional aromatic rice varieties in Bangladesh. BRRI's research has shown that at one time about 57 types of aromatic varieties were cultivated in Bangladesh; now more or less 32 types of aromatic varieties are being cultivated.

Therefore, the scientists of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute are conducting research to develop new high-yielding varieties. BRRI has so far developed a total of 8 varieties of fine and aromatic rice. These are BR5 (Dulabhog), BRRI dhan34, BRRI dhan37, BRRI dhan38, BRRI dhan70, BRRI dhan75, BRRI dhan80, BRRI dhan90, and BRRI dhan50 which is suitable for cultivation in the Boro season which is also known as Banglamati.

BRRI scientists have changed the concept of aromatic yield. Whereas earlier the yield of conventional varieties was 5-8 maunds per bigha, now the yield per bigha of rice is 12-22 maunds. In addition, the research for developing high-yielding and anthocyanins and anti-oxidants enrich rice by pure line selected locally popular aromatic rice is going on in full swing at BRRI.

BRRI dhan34 is similar to Chinigura or Kalijira but the yield is almost double. The farmers are thus more interested to cultivate this variety. About 80% of the Chinigura rice available in the market is BRRI dhan34. Due to its light sensitivity, this variety is suitable for planting in flood-prone areas. BRRI dhan80 is similar to Kataribhog, and its average yield per bigha is about 17 maunds, which is twice as much as Kataribhog.

Also, it is slightly longer than Kataribhog. BRRI dhan80 is light sensitive and has an average yield of about 18 maunds per bigha, and is as fragrant as the popular Thai variety Jasmine rice and delicious to eat. On the other hand, in the Boro season, the fragrant modern variety BRRI dhan50 or Banglamati is a popular choice. The yield of this rice is about 20 maunds per bigha. The profit is higher as the price is much higher than the different varieties of rice prevalent in the rice market. The quality, taste, aroma of this variety of rice is similar to that of Basmati rice. Day by day Banglamati rice is replacing imported Basmati rice.

Proper management must be ensured to ensure fair price of aromatic rice and the quality and nutritional value of aromatic rice of Bengal should be spread from country to country through wide publicity and promotion. The lost tradition of aromatic rice will come back only if we can reduce the dependence on foreign varieties of rice and encourage new attractive varieties of local aromatic rice including Banglamati. This will enable the farmers to play a role in the progress of the country as well as getting benefitted financially.

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