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Protected cultivation of horticultural crops in India: Challenges and opportunities

ooking to the increasing population, climate change, decreasing land holdings, increasing pressure on natural resources i.e. aland & water and high demand of quality horticultural fresh produce we are forced to shift towards modern technologies of crop production like protected cultivation. Protected cultivation at least is needed to convert some portion of present 9.2 million ha area under vegetable cultivation for increasing the national productivity and quality of the produce. Presently area under protected cultivation of horticultural crops is only around 40,000 ha and out of which large portion mostly in northern parts of India is not successfully being utilized for protected cultivation. Although promotion of protected cultivation will certainly help in creation of huge self-employments for unemployed educated youths and will also raise the national economy by sale of high quality produce in domestic and international markets. Under the new era of WTO (World Trade Organization), these kinds of models posses' high potential for enhancing the income of farmers opting for quality and offseason vegetable and cut flower cultivation under protected conditions. Production of vegetable and cut flower crops under protected conditions not only provides high water and nutrient use efficiency but it can easily increase the productivity by 3-5 folds over open field cultivation of these crops under varied agro climatic conditions of the country. This technology has very good potential especially in urban and peri-urban areas adjoining to the major cities which is a fast growing market for fresh produce of the country. But protected cultivation technology requires very careful planning, maintenance and management about timing of production and moreover, harvest time to coincide with the shortage period of availability of vegetables and high market prices, choice of varieties adopted to off season environments, and able to produce higher and economical yields of high quality produce etc. Vegetable and cut flower farming in agri-entrepreneurial models targeting various niche markets of the big cities of the country is regularly inviting attention of the vegetable and flower growers for diversification from traditional ways of crop cultivation to such modern methods. Even the unemployed educated youths who are not attracted or interested in traditional agriculture are also showing good interest and can be further motivated forthis kind of modern agricultural technologies.

Keywords: Natural resources, protected cultivation, self-employment, high qualityproduce, vegetables and cut flowers, urban and peri-urban areas.

Biography

Balraj Singh has completed his PhD in 1991, specialised in vegetable production Technology from CCSHAU, Hisar, Haryana. Presently he is working as Director, NRC on Seed Spices, a pioneer Institute on Seed Spice Research under ICAR. He has been working in the area of research for more than 25 years, and has more than 100 peer reviewed research articles to his name. He is a member of more than 18 National and International Societies. He is known as a national expert in field of protected cultivation of crops in the country.

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