

Baska farmers towards commercial horticulture



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Mowsam Hazarika 23 September 2009 15256 views

For the first time in the new district of Baska, an interactive workshop was organised under Horticulture Technology Mission on last 22nd September. Amidst profuse enthusiasm, about 200 farmers participated in a brain storming session exclusively designed to project the horticultural potential of the district : Ginger, Turmeric, Black Pepper and more particularly Bhut Jolokia - were the largest crops in the interaction. According to the Guinness World Records, 'the hottest of all spices is believed to be the chili pepper Bhut Jolokia, belonging to the Capsicum chinense which was measured at 1,001, 304 Scoville Heat Units (SHU), at the New Mexico, USA, on 9 September, 2006'. Opening the workshop, Pramila Rani Brahma, Minister of Agriculture and WPT & BC, Assam spoke at length urging farmers to take full advantage of various provisions of different schemes particularly Horticulture Technology Mission . She assured extra support from her Ministry of WPT & BC if farmers come forward in a mission mode.

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Harshajyoti Barooah, Director , Horticulture and Food Processing, Assam briefed about comparative and competitive advantage of horticultural sector of Baska district as regard, soil, climate, market access, quality and organic footing. Three scientists from Assam Agricultural University, namely, Dr. G. Medhi, Dr. Nirmal Majumder and Arup Sarma offered technical deliberation covering vital aspects of spice cultivation more particularly Bhut Jolokia cultivation. All technical details were circulated to all participants through a colourful brochure .

The Directorate of Horticulture & Food processing, Assam will cultivate Bhut Jolokias, the hottest in 300 hectares of land. State Agriculture Minister Pramila Rani Brahma has instructed the directorate of horticulture and food processing to promote cultivation of the chilly in Golaghat and Baksa districts under Technology Mission for Horticulture Development. Brahma said the area of Bhut Jolokia cultivation in the state has to be increased because of its high export value. She said the directorate of horticulture and food processing would provide incentives to farmers who opt for cultivating this variety of chilli. According to agriculture experts, the demand for Bhut Jolokia has increased recently, especially after it was established that it is the hottest pepper about two years ago. "The demand for Bhut Jolokia abroad is especially for its spice usage. In fact, it is also the tastiest pepper in the world. Moreover, different experiments on multiple uses of Bhut Jolokia has increased its demand," Agricultural Development Officer, Information Wing, Directorate of Horticulture & Food processing, Assam Mowsam Haziraka said. Hazarika said the Defence Research Laboratory in Tezpur has found that the chili can be very useful in controlling riots. In fact, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is testing grenades stuffed with the chillis to take on insurgents and rioters. According to experts, the bomb is non-lethal and just the smoke from it can bring tears to the eyes of a person coming in contact besides choking his respiratory tract.

According to elephant conservationists, the chilli can be used as a powder to chase away marauding herds of elephants. Chilli cakes and fences have proved effective in keeping wild elephants at bay. So far, Bhut Jolokia cultivation is more or less confined to kitchen gardens. Wildlife conservationists have suggested that organized farming can only bring about a visible result in using the chilli products for driving out elephants.

"Considering the diverse uses of Bhut Jolokia, we think it is right to start organized farming," Hazarika said. The rate of man-elephant conflicts is very high in Golaghat. Experts said cultivation of Bhut Jolokia would provide livelihood to farmers as an alternative crop.

Mowsam Hazarika

BY MOWSAM HAZARIKA

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