

Onion Mission in Assam



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Mowsam Hazarika 25 October 2013 11738 views

With the onion price issue on the boil, Assam government is escalating its local cultivation to plug the drainage of revenue for procurement from other States. In this connection, CM's Onion Mission launched in Assam. Additional 2000 ha of land will be brought under onion cultivation this year in Assam. As spiralling prices of onion continue to burn holes in consumers' pockets with retail prices hovering around Rs. 70 or 80 a kilogram, the Assam government has decided to grow onions in a mission mode in the State to make this high value perishable commodity locally available at a cheaper price and reduce the flight of State's revenue in its procurement from outside.

According to the Directorate of Horticulture and Food Processing, Assam produces about 7.20 per cent (approximately 30.90 thousand MT) of the total annual requirement, while 92.80 per cent (3.98 lakh MT) of the requirement is sourced from outside the State which results in heavy drainage of revenue. The State's annual requirement of onion is estimated at 4.29 lakh MT against the national per capita availability rate of 13.76 kg.

As the State is heavily dependent on supply from outside, onion becomes scarce during July and September due to short supply from onion growing sources. According to the statistics of the Horticulture Division, Ministry of Agriculture, total area under onion production in Assam for the year 2012-13 is only 8.53 thousand hectare while the productivity is as low as 3.62MT/hectare. Compared to these, Gujarat, which tops the list of States in onion productivity, has 28.85 thousand hectare area under onion production while it registered total production of 7.04 lakh MT and productivity of 24.42 MT/hectare.

Under the mission mode, Assam now plans to expand area under onion production by bringing vast tracts of cultivable land of chars and chaporis(sand bars) formed in the course of river Brahmaputra. Mission operational areas will include these riverine belts in seven districts of Jorhat, Nagaon, Marigaon, Darrang, Kamrup, Barpeta and Dhubri. “The char, chapori areas are considered as established onion belts having light textured soil suitable for growing onion,” says Mowsam Hazarika, SDAO(Information), Directorate of Horticulture and Food Processing.

The five-year-long onion mission has five basic components: expansion of area; production and productivity with high yielding variety and critical production inputs; seed production in rain-shadow belts of the State; creation of infrastructural facility for post harvest handling, packaging and storage; setting up modern cold storage based on Ultra Oxazine Technology and capacity building of farmers and stakeholders.

The Directorate of Horticulture and Food Processing, which is the nodal agency for the mission, has projected that “large bulk of stored onion shall help in mitigating quantitative crisis during the lean period and aid in regulating market price”. Besides, the mission will “open up avenue for the onion farmers of the State to participate in agri-trade with ASEAN and neighbouring SAARC countries in due course”.

Mr. Hazarika says that despite scope for onion production, farmers in the State are reluctant to increase production as storage of the perishable commodity has still remained a challenging task. The mission aims at addressing storage related issues by providing cold storage linkage not only to take care of the lean period from July to September but also for long term storage of fresh onions. The harvesting period for late kharif and rabi onion in Assam is from January to March. The mission targets to increase the productivity of onion from existing 3.62 MT/hectare to 10 MT/hectare in 2013-14 rabi season, the first year of the five-year mission.

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BY MOWSAM HAZARIKA

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