

Commercial values of different banana varieties cultivated in Kanyakumari district

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ABSTRACT

Among twenty eight varieties of banana eighteen are preferred by farmers which have good commercial value, eight are neglected and one is extinct. The varieties showed different crop duration, bunch weight and price in the local market. Nendran is an export variety which has longer shelf life. Chips produced from Nendran and fruit bar produced from Karpooravalli are famous for their use as food. Bananas have many medicinal values. Leaf sheath, leaves, inflorescence axis, flowers and roots have also commercial values.

Key words : Banana, Commercial value, Nendran chips, Fruit bar, Cultivar.

The word “banana” is a general term embracing a number of species or hybrids in the genus *Musa* of the family *Musaceae*. Bananas are cultivated commercially under tropical and subtropical conditions in all the states of India, except in those having extreme winter such as Himachal Pradesh and Jammu Kashmir. In Tamil Nadu, bananas are cultivated in about 88,100 hectares and the total production is estimated at 4406000 tonnes (Anon, 2003). India is the leader in banana production and it exported nearly 940 metric tonnes of banana in the year 2007. In India, more than 600 varieties are known, but often many of the varieties carry a lot of synonyms. The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University recorded 115 varieties.

The ripe banana is utilized in a multitude of ways in the human diet. Banana is of great nutritious value and it has a rich combination of energy value, tissue building elements, proteins, vitamins and minerals. It is a good source of calories, many other nutrients and enzymes. People of south India traditionally use banana as a balanced and supplementary diet. It is a wonderful nutritious diet for easy digestion, which prevents diarrhoea and worm trouble (Prem Kumar and Khurdlya, 2002).

Kanyakumari district is situated in the southernmost knot of the western Ghats and is an important biodiversity hot spot of the world. The factors that influence the climatic conditions are southwest and northeast monsoons and the proximity to the sea. The soil and the climatic factors of Kanyakumari district favours the cultivation of banana. There are many varieties of banana are cultivated in this district, some of them are never seen in other parts of the world. The economy of the district has been raised to a peak by three important crops *viz.*, rubber, coconut and banana.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Extensive field visits were conducted to the various parts of Kanyakumari district to collect the different varieties of banana. The varieties were identified with the help of the traditional cultivators of banana and the Agricultural Officers. Crop duration was recorded by repeated visits to twenty sample fields of different varieties, the fraction of months was not considered. The height of the plant, number of leaves produced until inflorescence and the girth of the pseudostem were recorded by the mean of twenty samples. Regarding height, the fraction of feet was overlooked and the girth of the pseudostem was measured at the base of the plant. Bunch weights of different varieties, number of hands per bunch and number of fingers per bunch were calculated by the means of twenty samples. In bunch weight also small fractions were not taken into account. The market price was taken when the price was in peak in the month December 2007 from the various markets in Kanyakumari district. Traditional banana cultivators and Sidha practitioners were interviewed to find out the commercial and medicinal values of banana. Small industries producing Nendran chips and banana fruit bar were visited.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was carried out from June 2004 to December 2007. The study reveals that twenty-eight cultivars were cultivated in Kanyakumari district. Among the twenty eight cultivars, nine were neglected by the farmers because of their low commercial value. One (Sooryakadali) has become extinct recently. Eighteen cultivars were considered commercially viable and