



Potential and biodiversity conservation strategies of underutilized or indigenous vegetables in Himachal Pradesh

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INTRODUCTION

The use of the term underutilized refers to “categories of wild and cultivated plants, whose potential has not been yet fully realized”. It includes those non-commodity crops, which are the part of a larger biodiversity portfolio, once more popular and today neglected by users by agronomic, genetic, economic, social and cultural factors.” (Padulosi and Hoeschle-Zeledon, 2004). These crops have under-exploited potential for contribution to food security, health (nutritional medicinal), income generation, and environmental services (Jaenicke and Hoeschle-Zeledon, 2006).

Farmers cultivate them less than in the past because these species are no longer competitive with the crops that have come to dominate the world food supply and that are supported by seed supply systems, production and post-harvest technologies and extension services. In addition, their markets are well established and consumers are accustomed to using them. Lack of competitiveness is one of the important factors for underutilization but, in itself, this tells us little about the geographical, social and economic reasons associated with the decline of local crops. Underutilized crops are often presented as ‘new crops’, not

because they are ‘new’ but because they have been taken up by commercial companies and researchers for a new market. In reality, local communities have used these species for generations but the current loss of local knowledge means that their traditional uses are being forgotten.

Himachal Pradesh, being a hilly state, has diverse agro-climatic conditions ranging from sub-humid tropical (Elevation 350-1000 m) in the southern low tracts, warm and temperate (Elevation 1001-1500 m), cool and temperate (Elevation 1,501-2,500 m), and cold alpine and glacial (Elevation 2,501- 6,975 m) in the northern and eastern mountain ranges and are conducive for growing diverse types of crops throughout the year. State, is a treasure house of traditional, locally adapted indigenous vegetables, which are mostly underexploited. There are several lesser-known plant species, which have tremendous potential to be used as vegetables and they do not require high input technology and can thrive well on marginal and sub marginal lands and therefore, could be exploited for meeting the protein requirement of the predominantly vegetarian population of the country.

Increased use of these greens of high nutritive value could be great significance towards solving the problem of

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