DIGITAL AGRI NEWS

EXPORT POTENTIAL
of Horticultural Crops from Himalayan States

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Introduction

The Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim hold tremendous potential in horticultural production due to their diverse agro-climatic conditions, altitude variations and relatively low chemical usage systems. These states are emerging as important contributors to India's high-value horticultural exports. According to the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, India's total horticulture production reached 354.74 million tonnes in 2023-24, surpassing food grain production [1]. Despite this large production base, India contributes only about 1% of global horticulture exports, indicating significant untapped export potential [2].

1.Horticultural Strength of Himalayan States

Himachal Pradesh has approximately 3.38 lakh hectares under horticulture, with fruits accounting for a major share [3]. The state contributes significantly to India's apple production, producing around 5-6 lakh tonnes annually depending on climatic conditions. Uttarakhand produces nearly 3.6 lakh tonnes of fruits annually, including citrus, peach, plum and kiwi [4]. The state is also expanding cultivation of off-season vegetables and aromatic plants, enhancing export diversification.

Jammu & Kashmir is one of India's largest apple-producing regions, contributing nearly 75% of India's apple exports in some years [5]. The region also produces walnuts and cherries, which have established international demand. Sikkim, declared India's first fully organic state in 2016, cultivates large cardamom, ginger, turmeric and organic vegetables, offering premium export potential in niche organic markets [6].

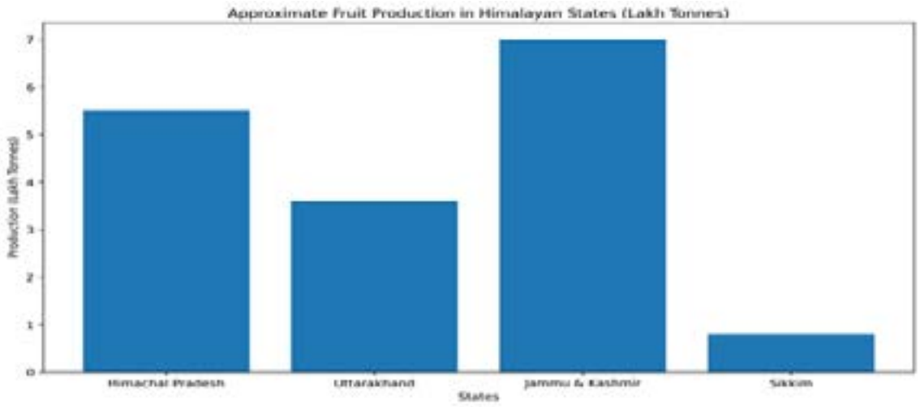

Fig.1 Approximate Fruit Production in Himalayan States (Lakh Tonnes)

2. Export Scenario and Market Trends

According to the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), India exported horticultural products worth approximately USD 3.8-4.0 billion in 2022-23, including fresh fruits and vegetables [7].

Major export destinations include:

- UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, UK and Netherlands. The Gulf region remains a strong market for Indian apples and vegetables due to proximity and established trade channels [7].

Himalayan apples, especially from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, fetch premium prices because of:

- Better colour development due to diurnal temperature variation
- Higher sugar content
- Longer shelf life under cold conditions. Off-season vegetables grown in hill regions also supply metropolitan markets and have growing export interest due to pesticide-residue compliance [2].

3. Climate Advantage & Comparative Edge

The Himalayan agro-climate provides natural advantages: • Cool temperatures suitable for temperate fruits • Low pest pressure in high altitudes • Potential for organic and residue-free production. The Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States (HMNEH) has supported area expansion, nursery development, and post-harvest infrastructure in hill regions [8].

High-value crops suitable for export include:

Crop	Export Potential	Key States
Apple	GCC & EU markets	HP, J&K
Kiwi	Niche premium markets	Uttarakhand
Large Cardamom	Middle East & Southeast Asia	Sikkim
Walnut	Europe & USA	J&K
Medicinal Plants	Global nutraceutical industry	UKD, HP

4. Infrastructure & Policy Support

Government schemes such as:

- Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)
- PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM-FME)
- Operation Greens have strengthened cold chain infrastructure and processing capacity [1].
- However, India's cold storage capacity remains unevenly distributed and hill states face transportation challenges due to mountainous terrain [2].

5. Challenges Limiting Export Growth

Despite strong potential, key constraints include:

1. Fragmented landholdings that limit export-scale aggregation
2. High logistics costs due to hilly terrains
3. Strict sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards in EU markets
4. Inconsistent quality grading and packaging India ranks 14th in vegetable exports and 23rd in fruit exports globally. This highlights the potential for improving competitiveness [2].

6. Strategic Way Forward

To improve export prospects, Himalayan states need to concentrate on the following:

- Improving Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

- Developing organic certification (particularly in Sikkim and Uttarakhand)
- Developing packhouses and reefer transport services
- Implementing digital traceability solutions
- Developing the "Himalayan Produce" brand as a high-end mark. Export clusters for apples, cardamom, walnuts and medicinal herbs could help increase export quality.

Summary

The Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Sikkim have a strong potential for export-oriented horticulture due to favourable agro-climatic conditions and the production of high-value temperate fruits and organic products. Although India has a large production of horticultural products, its share in the global export market is still small. Apples, walnuts, cardamom, kiwi, medicinal plants and off-season vegetables are some of the promising export products. Although the government has made efforts to improve infrastructure and support, the issues of logistics, fragmentation and quality standards continue to be challenges. Improvement in FPOs, certification, branding and post-harvest infrastructure can help make the Himalayan region a competitive export destination for horticultural products.

Conclusion

The Himalayan states have a strong comparative advantage in high-value horticultural crops. Although the contribution of India to the global export of horticulture is not substantial, with proper investment in infrastructure, certification and export development, these Himalayan states can become leading contributors to the growth of agri-exports in India. The Himalayas can change from being production centres to export powerhouses in the global horticulture market.

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