

How to Improve agricultural trade between India and Japan



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Given that Japan is only about 40 per cent self-sufficient in foods based on caloric intake, 60 per cent of food stuffs are imported, implying that Japan is a large market for agriculture and food products. Paying attention to foods imported to Japan, Article 8 of the Food Sanitation Act (1947) stipulates that food business operators including importers must recognise their own responsibility for food safety and take appropriate measures at each stage of the food supply process to ensure it. The Act also requires food business operation to retain detailed records relating to the imported foods. The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) provides guidelines to food business operator in how to conduct voluntary safety controls to ensure food safety. Article 55 specifies that repeated violation of the food safety regulations can lead to suspension of or ban on importation by the food business operator.

The guidelines to the importers and food business operators suggest that they should make sure that food is manufactured and processed in compliance with the laws and regulations of the exporting countries. In addition, the standard of establishment, facilities and equipment of the manufacturer should be at least equal to standards concerning establishments, facilities and equipment stipulated in related Japanese law and ordinances. Thus, the guidelines to food business operators pay specific attention to the management of food safety across the value chain and many of those guidelines serves as the restrictions to the importation of foods.

Due to the fact that the government wants Japan to be autonomous in food production, there has been a lot of development and research in Automation to help agriculture and make it more productive. Automation which is like using agricultural specific robots in Japan farming and there has been a huge lot of research and improvement. The goal is to make robotic agriculture using remote monitoring technology a reality. This is a part of the project by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, to develop agriculture automation and assistance systems in order to reduce manual farm labor. The idea is that robotic farm machines will operate autonomously in multiple fields, while being monitored from remote offices. These farm machines require no drivers. When they run out of fertilizer, they'll stop, and someone will go and supply it. The plan is to build monitoring rooms where two people can oversee four or more machines.

As the first step, looking at a system in which one person is responsible for two farm machines. There is still room for improvement in terms of safety before an autonomous self-steering farm machine can operate without a driver, so for now, to ensure safety, it will be followed by another tractor driven by a farmer, who will monitor the driverless tractor while performing another task as well. This way, the farmer can do two jobs at once, doubling efficiency. In other words, the project as a collaboration between a robot and a person, with the aim of increasing work efficiency, and then work on practical applications.

Indian Exports to Japan is as old as post world war II era. The trade relations between India and Japan flourished after the establishment of diplomatic ties, especially after the World War II. Japan resurrected from the debacle of the World War II loss with the help of India's iron ore export. Japan reciprocated by providing yen loans to India in 1958, first of its type, by Japanese government. And as a matter of fact since then, Japan is India's largest aid donor.

Indian Exports to Japan includes items like Agricultural products, Fresh Fruits and dried fruits, Fruit juices and concentrates, Vegetables, Oilseeds, Vegetable oils and fats, Edible nuts, Sugar and honey, Grains and Pulses, Wheat, Tea, Coffee, Spices and herbs, Tobacco, Leather garments and goods, Handicrafts, Carpets, Cashew, Fisheries products, Cotton, Animal feed and many more.

Indian Exporters feel that it is very expensive to export fruits and vegetable to Japan as they require Vapour Heat Treatment. Vapour heat treatment is a quarantine process that does not use any chemicals but hot saturated water vapour to sterilise fruit like mangoes and papaya. During this process temperature and humidity are strictly controlled so fruit remains naturally fresh and undamaged. Importing countries like Japan insist on vapour heat treatment as they do not want the flora in their country to get infested with pests such as eggs and larvae of Melon flies and oriental fruit flies as they do not have these infestations in their country.

Since the quarantine and sterilisation treatment is expensive mango exports to Japan were limited but now exporters are showing a keen interest for this far away market. To encourage exports Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) had set up some vapour heat treatment facilities in Vashi, Navi Mumbai, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Japanese inspectors who had not been called to India since the last two years to oversee the vapour heat treatment would be invited. To help Indian mango exporters APEDA has also decided to bear 90% of the expenses incurred for stationing of quarantine inspectors in India for three years (2015-17). Japanese inspectors will provide the certificates for clearance for export.

However, Indian exporters who sign the deal have to supply at least 50 to 70 metric tons of mangoes in 2015 and 100MT in 2016 and another 50 more so mango exports to Japan would be 150MT by 2017. Once Indian exporters have entered the agreement they cannot back out of it. Japan is currently only accepting the Alphonso, Kesar, Banganpalli, Langra, Chaunsa and Mallika varieties cultivated in either Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh or West Bengal.

Agricultural and Processed Food Products from India to Japan has big potential provided Export, quarantine conditions are relaxed or met, even if Japan is going towards fully automated agricultural farming process to be self-sufficient.

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