

Asafoetida: Agriculture to Agribusiness

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Asafoetida, that is as of lately featured in news is native to Middle Eastern countries. However for the first time in India, the first batch of locally grown asafoetida is sown in Lahaul valley in Himachal Pradesh by CSIR, Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology. Till October, all the demand of this spice was met through imports from Iran, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Asafoetida, being one of the most important herbs used in the Indian food culture since forever, is a herbaceous perennial plant whose oleo gum resin is extracted from its thick fleshy tap roots and rhizome. This gum resin is antispasmodic, laxative and sedative. The volatile oil in the gum when eliminated from lungs cures asthma in patients. It is also used as food flavouring agents and as a medicinal herb to treat various respiratory disorders like whooping cough and bronchitis. It is a constituent of many flavor blend consisting of 67% carbohydrate, 4% protein and 1% fat respectively. The mineral and vitamin content includes substantial calcium besides phosphorus, iron, carotene, niacin and riboflavin. Not many people know why this herb with such beneficial effects has never been grown in India until October 2020. CSIR mentioned that shortage of planting material and high dormancy of the seeds were major hindrance in cultivation of this plant earlier. It is difficult to locate a superior climate for asafoetida development as it is important to satisfy certain standards, the most significant of which is a favorable temperature. Asafoetida endures best in the dry and cold climate with temperature ranging between 35 to 40°C.

Apart from its benefits, Social media has been raving about prioritizing self-care and self-love during this lockdown. This whole time have given a chance to people to revisit the concept of self-care and create a personal version of it especially for women who otherwise pay only a little attention towards their health. Asafoetida is a wonder for such women in many ways. Periods are often one's nightmare until asafoetida come to your rescue while dealing with menstrual cramps. Asafoetida also has anti inflammatory properties to reduce

inflammation of blood vessels in head. It also works against acne production. It can also act as a natural antidote to insect bites and stings. It does wonders for woman with the dry and frizzy hair with his moisturising properties. This signifies the huge demand of asafoetida among the Indian women and how this crop has international value in pharmaceutical sector.

Against the existing scenario of covid-19 and its impact on overall economy ,agriculture sector has sense the repercussions of covid-19 since the very beginning of this pandemic. While the whole startup ecosystem has been continuously striving to adapt to the present situation as flexibly as possible, the need to move to more imaginative and diversified thought like asafoetida cultivation can conceal the misfortune if this experiment remains a success then it would change the economy altogether. Asafoetida cultivation could prove to be profitable venture as the market price of unadulterated milk of ferula asafoetida is between Rs 25,000 to Rs. 30,000 per kg in the market. The rise of asafoetida prices from Rs 200 per kg of hing in 1900 to Rs. 10000-15000 per kg in the present day market shows how hing is treated as gold in India.

Despite the fact that India alone account for 40% of the world hing consumption followed by other Middle East countries but doesn't produce the spice itself even when there is tremendous and consistent demand for this particular spice in India and abroad. Our nation imports around 1500 tonnes of crude asafoetida from Middle Eastern countries spending roughly around 940 crore rupees every year which makes it significant for India to become more self reliant in hing production to cope with economic crisis prevailing.

With proper efforts and initiatives by government to ensure its cultivation within the country and supporting such start up could help lowering huge amount being spent on its import. Cultivation of such demandable spice within the country will also help in upliftment of socio economic status. As India is still not over with the Covid-19 crisis, challenges are likely to increase. Asafoetida farming might serve as an opportunity for farmers under miserable conditions to turn the barren wasteland into goldmine.