

Iraqi dates, Israeli tech on Kutchi soil!

Nayan Dave | TNN

Ahmedabad: Given their history of hate, Iraqis and Israelis may refuse to see eye to eye on anything. But that has not stopped farmers in arid Kutch from growing 'Barhi', a variety of Iraqi dates using Israeli technology. The first batch of dates produced on Kutchi wasteland is set to hit the markets this week.

It was about seven years ago that Pravin Gala, a progressive farmer in Kutch, imported Barhi tissue from a UK laboratory to experiment with growing it here.

As the Barhi palm adopted Kutchi soil, eight more farmers joined Gala in the trials. More tissue was imported from UAE. Today, there are around 30,000 date palms spread over 600 acres in different locations. "We use Israeli horticulture methods, including drip irrigation. Our monitoring systems too are fully computerised," said Gopal Gorasia, who has invested Rs 60 lakh for date plantation. Buoyed by the success, Gorasia now plans to import cold storage technology from Holland. "Looking at the quality of the fruit, I want to import a 1,200-tonne cold storage facility," he said.

This year, the yield per plant is about 25 kg. Farmers expect it to go up to 200 kg next season — double than the yield of indigenous Kutchi dates, popularly known as 'Kharek'. As against 70,000-tonne yield of kharek, Barhi variety crop stands at a mere 1,500 tonnes this season.

"But it will grow faster in coming seasons. Date farming needs a lot of patience as trees mature only after eight to 10 years. But, it's worth a wait as unlike Kutchi kharek, taste of Barhi is uniformly sweet," said Rahul Gala, whose family has grown date palms spread over 115 acres. The Iraqi variety is in great demand in Europe, US, Canada, Malaysia among others. "We are targeting Indian markets first. Subsequently, we will look at exports," said Gala. While the Kutchi variety usually hits the market around mid-June, Barhi trees start offering fruit around August.



Gopal Gorasia at his farm with Barhi dates in Kutch