



Indian Council of Agricultural Research
PR UNIT

Newspaper/Magazine:

FINANCIAL EXP

Date: 10/10/2005

Place of Publication: Delhi/Chandigarh/Faridabad/Meerut/Jaipur/Bangalore/Mumbai/

Tobacco body looking for new avenues to improve yield

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Hyderabad, Oct 9

As the pressure from the anti-tobacco campaigners is mounting, the Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI), Rajahmundry, is sparing no effort for improving the yields. The research institute is now looking at tobacco as a source for alternative uses like seed oil, vaccines, phytochemicals, etc. Further, flavoured tobacco is on top on its agenda to meet export demand.

Another step ahead is a technique for detection of genetically-modified tobacco standardisation. Despite all this, the tripartite tussle between the farmers, traders and the industry on the beneficiaries of tobacco trade continues.

K Deo Singh, director, CTRI, explains the strategies to meet the demand in the international scenario.

■ **On initiatives taken to meet the global demand:** CTRI is working closely with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) on a Plan of Action upto year 2020 which includes targeted objectives in areas such as maintaining the standard of Indian FCV (flue-cured virginia) tobacco, reducing cost of production, utilisation of biotech tools, feedback on technologies besides addressing the socio-economic issues associated with tobacco production. This integrated approach helps to improve productivity as well as returns for a producer.

■ **On R&D:** We are developing varieties/hybrids to increase average productivity of more than 2,000 kg/hectare in FCV and more than 2,500

kg/hectare in non-FCV tobacco. We are trying to produce flavoured and quality filter FCV tobacco in place of semi-flavoured and neutral filters. New advanced breeding lines that give 15-43% more pro-

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ductivity are being developed. Apart from breeding varieties, we have reduced the tar content to less than 15 mg/cigarette and the TSNA content to less than 1ppm in FCV and less than 10ppm in non-FCV tobacco. We have also controlled some important diseases and pests through integrated management.

Wide variability of lower levels of Tobacco Specific Nitrosamines (TSNA), solanesol and seed oil was observed in tobacco germplasm. Now, about 20 different factories are into extraction process in Gujarat to market value-added produce. Apart from this, CTRI is working to extract oil from tobacco seeds. We are looking it as a oil seed crop as the oil content is about 43%. However, the availability of tobacco seeds is less (about 40-60 kg per quintal) in FCV varieties. We are focusing on screening germplasm variety for higher seeded variety. In this regard, we have experimented with

A145 variety in Gujarat which seems to yield more seeds but are yet to work on the qualitative analysis

■ **On the need for government support:** We have been requesting the government for stepping up the R&D expenditure in order to increase the pace of research. While farmers complain that most of the contract farming agreements are one-sided. There is a good potential in value-added products which will help in getting better returns. We have sought permission for new varieties as Indian tobacco is claimed to be cleaner than other available varieties.

■ **On the future of tobacco industry:** Equipped with better yields, we are working with the industry to improve exports. This year, exports were close to 162,000 tonne valued at about Rs 1,362 crore showing an average growth of 16% in the last three years. About 30 million people are depending on this industry. CTRI is reorienting its research to meet present day requirements as the industry is going through a bad phase due to anti-tobacco movements. ♦