

Grading of Arecanuts

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Many of our agricultural commodities at some stage or other are being sold mixed with some other similar commodities or with inferior varieties of the same commodity and this is quite common when the prices of the commodity show a tendency to rise owing to its poor crop or a normal crop with increased demand. This tendency for adulteration seems to be mainly due to the defective marketing system. To prevent such malpractices in marketing the only remedy is to resort to what is known as grading of the produce. Grading in its simple definition is only a method of sorting out products in large lots into groups of uniform kind, quality and size within as narrow limits as possible. Today in this process of grading various mechanical devices are used and proper grading of the produce depends on the skill and judgement of those who use such devices, sort out and grade the products. Although grading of the produce has not well developed and reached the nook and corner of each and every village, farmers have begun to realise the benefits of grading of their produce before they sell it in the markets.

Grading introduced

The surveys to study the prevailing market conditions undertaken by the Agricultural Marketing Adviser to the Government of India in the country as early as in the thirties highlighted the necessity for "better grading of agricultural produce in

order to eliminate waste and provide a common basis for trading on standard quality to the advantage of both producers and consumers". The Agriculture Produce Grading and Marking Act, 1937, as passed by the Central Legislature provide fixing of grade designations to indicate the quality of any scheduled article of agricultural produce for defining standards of quality and specifying grade designation marks. As per the act, the Agricultural Marketing Adviser to the Government of India has been empowered to issue certificate of authorisation to suitable persons who are prepared to grade and mark their produce and also to inspect their work with the help of the State Governments. The grade specifications of the commodities are prescribed by Government of India in consultation with State Governments. The Act lays down a national insignia "Agmark" which denotes a recognised standard of purity and quality. Since the grading of commodities meant for export is compulsory under "Agmark" the fixation of quality standards are of special importance in case of commodities meant for international trade. Also certain commodities for internal consumption are graded with "Agmark".

Grading of arecanuts — its need and advantages

Arecanut, an important commercial crop of India, is estimated to be grown in an area of 1.74 lakh hectares producing

about 1.51 lakh tonnes of arecanut valued at about 90 crores, at the present level of prices. About 95% of the total production comes from Kerala, Karnataka and Assam (including Meghalaya) and arecanut growers in these states are generally poor with small holdings. Since the produce from their holdings are very small and their resources are poor, they do not pay much attention for any orderly marketing. Normally they sell the produce in small lots to the curcum-merchants or merchants, as the case may be, without pooling and grading them (in Karnataka, however, the cultivators sell their produce in a roughly graded form). The pooling and grading of arecanuts are thus mostly done after the goods reach the hands of the merchants, and also in the assembling markets. The grading of arecanuts done by merchants, at present, is based on long standing trade practices and is not based on any scientific specifications. They are arbitrary varying from market to market and the number of grades that are existing today are confusing. This, therefore, necessitates an urgent need for establishing grade standards for both whole dried arecanuts (chali) and whole and sliced boiled arecanuts.

The grading and standardization of arecanuts helps a great deal in the creation of mutual confidence between buyers and sellers — the buyer is assured of the quality produce for his money when the graded arecanuts are made available with its corresponding prices quoted in the markets and the producer will have a wider market and better price for his produce. Other advantages of this system are that the wastage is much reduced and scientific basis for storage is provided (since the graded produce is more readily accepted by the warehouses)

Introducing grading of arecanuts

The important commercial types of

arecanut recognised by the trade are Chali, Pharcha, Nayampak, Iylon, Api or Idi, Hassa or Bette or Ottavettu, Choor and Erasel. Each of these commercial types include many trade varieties. It has been estimated that the total trade varieties included under all these types exceed 160 in number.

Arecanut is one of the articles included in the schedule of the Agriculture Produce Grading and Marking Act 1937. Standard grades were prescribed as early as in 1952 for whole dried arecanuts covering 4 trade varieties namely Moti special, Srivardhan special, Jamnagar special and Jeeni special each of which is further divided into 3 standard grades, based on the then existing trade practices in Mangalore market. In spite of the best efforts made to introduce grading of sundried whole arecanuts in Mangalore market it did not meet with much success in the absence of any compulsion to grade. Therefore for drawing up standard grade specifications for all other commercial types, the erstwhile Indian Central Arecanut Committee under a scheme sponsored by it collected 227 commercial samples of arecanuts from different producing, assembling, distributing and importing regions in India and got it analysed by the Oilseeds Specialist, Coimbatore (Tamilnadu) for various quality factors, such as colour, length, breadth, maturity, moisture content, number of pieces per kilo and refraction. However, Agmark specifications for these products based on the results of the analysis of the Oilseeds Specialist could not be finalised since a fresh marketing survey which included *inter-alia* detailed study on the grade specification for all types of arecanut other than the sundried wholes was contemplated by the Agricultural Marketing Adviser. This marketing survey was conducted during the year 1957-59 (at the instance of the erstwhile Indian Central Arecanut Committee). During the course of

this survey it was revealed that grading was not done under any of the Agmark standards for whole dried arecanuts prescribed as early as 1952 and that no trader had applied for certificate of authorisation for grading and packing of this commodity. It was also revealed that a large number of arecanut trade types were being produced and marketed in various stages in India which differed from State to State. It therefore, became all the more necessary to not only revise the already drawn up grades under Agmark for whole dried arecanuts but also for laying down Agmark standards for the grading of other commercial types of arecanuts. Based on the results of this survey, the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection suggested that the first step in the orderly marketing of arecanuts would be to clearly define the grades and quality and suggested a revised system of commercial classification of arecanuts in their report, "Report on Marketing of Arecanuts in India". Before finalising the grades and grade specifications it was also suggested therein that the experimental grading should be undertaken in typical curing and producing centres in the various producing areas and for this purpose suitable Co-operative Societies in these areas might be selected and entrusted with the work of grading of their members' produce based on the existing trade practices

and the tentative grade specifications as recommended by the Directorate in their report.

Experimental grading of arecanuts

In accordance with these recommendations, two schemes on experimental grading of betelnuts in Karnataka (erstwhile Mysore) and Tamil Nadu were initiated with the financial assistance of the erstwhile Indian Central Arecanut Committee and the concerned State Governments. In Karnataka, three Centres, (i) Mangalore (for sundried whole, Chali) (ii) Shimoga (for boiled split, Deshawaram) and (iii) Sirsi (for boiled whole Api or Idi) were selected and the service of the arecanut marketing co-operative societies functioning in these places viz. the South Kanara Agriculturists Co-operative Marketing Society Ltd, the Malnad Areca Marketing Co-operative Society Ltd., and the Sirsi Totgars' Co-operative Sale Society Ltd, respectively, were utilised for working out the schemes. In Tamil Nadu State the centre selected was Mettupalayam and the society, Mettupalayam Co-operative Marketing Society Ltd. The scheme was implemented from 1962-63 to 1968-69 in Tamil Nadu and 1963-64 to 1968-69 in Karnataka State. During the period the following quantities of arecanuts (tonnes) were graded under the scheme.

Year	KARNATAKA			TAMIL NADU	(Authorised packers)
	Mangalore	Shimoga	Sirsi	Mettupalayam (At the societies)	
1962-63	—	—	—	21	—
1963-64	—	—	668	40	—
1964-65	1196	610	776	41	8
1965-66	2605	169	440	18	140
1966-67	6716	372	675	23	34
1967-68	5815	213	275	25	121
1968-69	4420	314	290	23	93

(Source : Progress reports of the experimental grading centres).

In Mettupalayam some of the authorised packers were also persuaded by the society to take up grading in accordance with the prescribed tentative grade specifications.

It was reported by all these experimental grading centres that there were regular enquiries from up-country markets for graded produce and it fetched higher prices at the terminal markets. Based on the tentative grade specifications for sundried whole (chali) types of arecanuts drawn out as a result of the trials conducted at Mangalore and Mettupalayam, the Agmark grades prescribed as early as in 1952 for these types have since been revised and published in the amended rules 1969. The grades are based on commercial types and take into consideration maturity, diameter of nuts, colour, pitch and freedom from insect damage and diseases. The tentative grade specifications drawn out as a result of the trials conducted at Shimoga and Sirsi are yet to be approved for fixing Agmark grades.

The economics of grading as worked out at these centres indicate that by grading the producers' produce before selling, the premium over the ungraded produce amounts to about Rs. 30 to 100 per quintal depending

on the trade type of arecanut, the terminal markets, demand etc.

Progress of grading

The scheme for grading of arecanuts introduced on an experimental basis in Tamil Nadu and in Karnataka States are now being continued as a state financed scheme. In Karnataka State grading of arecanuts have since been extended to some more centres viz. Sagar, Siddapur and Kumta.

Although, very small quantities of arecanut about 200 to 300 tonnes are being exported from India to countries like Nepal (accounting for a major share) Singapore etc. they are not graded since compulsory grading under Agmark for export has not yet been introduced in respect of arecanuts. Also, while a very nominal quantity of arecanuts are graded under 'Agmark' for internal trade on voluntary basis, in particular at Mettupalayam in Tamil Nadu, considerable quantities are being graded at producers' level mostly in Karnataka at Mangalore, Shimoga and Sirsi. Quantities of arecanuts graded under Agmark for internal trade and at producers' level are as given below :

Year	Grading for internal trade.		Grading at producers' level.	
	Quantity in tonnes.	Value in '000 Rs.	Quantity in tonnes.	Value in '000 Rs.
1967-68	120	842	3850	27,074
1968-69	115	945	4997	37,200
1969-70	135	972	4456	30,937
1970-71	147	992	5117	36,664
1971-72	41	243	2667	10,133

(Source : Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Nagpur).

Conclusion

From the above paragraphs it will be observed that since the importance of

grading of arecanuts at the producers' level before they are put in the market for sale was keenly felt, experimental grading was

initiated in some of the important centres of two arecanut growing States Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to finalise the grade specifications for both sundried and boiled and dried arecanut. However, although as a result of the trials at these experimental centres grade standards for sundried arecanuts have since been finalised and published in the Gazette, as amended in 1969, grade specifications for boiled and dried arecanuts are still under consideration. During the period of running of this scheme it was observed that at all these centres there were regular enquiries from up country markets for graded produce and that the grading of the growers' produce before sale not only enabled growers to get better prices but also fetched high prices for the traders at the terminal markets.

While reviewing the progress of the work done in the matter of grading of arecanuts, it is found that the progress in this field is very slow. The main reason for this very slow progress seems to be the absence of any strong agency with all facilities for undertaking commercial grading i. e. grading at the producers' level, and strong opposition from the traders in this matter. The two agencies which can implement the commercial grading are the Regulated market committees and co-operative societies which can equip themselves, with necessary facilities for grading. The strong opposition from the traders for grading seems to be due to the fact that at present most of the traders and commission agents purchase the produce mostly in the ungraded form from the growers directly or in auction and undertake grading of arecanuts themselves to meet the demands of the purchasing centres so that the whole benefit of grading may go to them. Certain suggestions are made below in order to improve grading of arecanuts so that the producers reap the benefits of grading.

1) Arecanut has been brought under regulation only in Karnataka (about 15 regulated markets), Kerala (about 6 regulated markets), Tamil Nadu (about 2 regulated markets) and recently in Goa. This shows that some of the important arecanut States like Assam, Maharashtra etc. are yet to enact the necessary legislation for introducing regulation of markets for arecanut. Also where it has been done, either it is not enacted completely throughout the State (like Kerala) or the number of regulated markets for arecanut is very limited. Therefore, immediate action should be taken by the states to pass the necessary legislation for regulated marketing of arecanuts where it is not done and, where it has been done, to strictly enforce the same throughout the State to cover all the markets for arecanut.

2) Grading units should be set up by the Regulated market committees and the Co-operative Marketing societies in all the assembling markets for arecanut. It may be added that the installation of the commercial grading unit does not involve any costly equipment for the purpose but only setting up of a unit with some skilled personnel and a few implements like cutters (to cut and detect the maturity of the nut, colour, pitch etc) Sieves (with different size holes to separate out unassorted arecanuts according to size or diameter of nuts) etc.

3) The Regulated market committees and Co-operative marketing societies after providing necessary facilities for grading, may make it incumbent on the producer to compulsorily grade his produce before bringing them for sale.

4) To get skilled personnel for the grading unit necessary pre-training for them is imperative and for this purpose concerned State Governments in consultation with the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection may set up grading training centres and

impart training to those who are to be considered for appointment in these grading units.

5) Also to make the growers more grading minded it is important that nece-

ssary publicity and propaganda in this matter is taken up in all the concerned arecanut growing States by way of educating the farmers in grading matters through literature, exhibitions etc.

