

# Grading in Arecanut and Spices

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Grading of the farm produce is of primary importance in the orderly marketing of any agricultural commodity. Besides standardising the produce, it increases its marketability by creating mutual confidence between the buyers and sellers; the consumer gets the quality he wants and the producer a better return. As an aid to orderly marketing in the country, the Government of India in the year 1937, passed the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act, authorising the Agricultural Marketing Adviser to the Government of India to prescribe grade standards and grade designation marks for different types and varieties of agricultural produce. The passing of the above Act and grading under 'Agmark' marked the beginning of the introduction of quality control measures in regard to notified agricultural produce in the country.

Under the Agricultural Produce Grading and Marking Act, grading is of a permissive character, although in regard to certain commodities it has been made obligatory under the Sea Customs Act, which prohibits the export of any notified article unless they are graded and marked in accordance with the provisions of the Agricultural Produce Grading and Marking

Act. During the last 33 years, grading is being done under the provisions of the above Act in different parts of the country and today grade standards for about 93 agricultural commodities involving about 277 grades have been prescribed. But the absence of standard grades in respect of other agricultural commodities intended for internal consumption and the reluctance of the growers to resort to their pooling and grading poses a major problem in their efficient marketing. Grading activities may be generally classified under three broad heads viz., (I) Grading for internal trade (II) commercial grading or grading at the level of the farmers and (III) grading for export.

Arecanut is one of the commodities included in the schedule of the Agricultural Produce Grading and Marking Act, 1937. Although Agmark grade standards have already been prescribed under the provisions of this Act for sundried whole arecanuts (chali supari), grading under Agmark is yet to gain momentum and become popular among both growers and traders. The traders and the co-operative marketing societies dealing in this commodity have not yet adopted the same for purposes of

internal trade in spite of the many advantages that accrue from grading. With a view, therefore, to drawing up Agmark grade standards for arecanuts and to popularise the same among primary producers with the ultimate object of adoption by the trade, schemes on experimental grading of different types of boiled and unboiled arecanuts based on the existing trade practices were initiated in the States of Mysore and Tamil Nadu, under a scheme financed by the Government of India. In view of the very limited opportunities available for individual growers to undertake pooling and grading of their produce, the services of the arecanut marketing co-operative societies were utilised for this purpose. The results of the trials so far conducted have revealed that the growers are generally slow in getting convinced of the usefulness of pooling and grading of their arecanuts before sale at the primary level although the specifications fixed at the experimental grading centres started receiving favourable response from the terminal markets and fetched premium prices. The grade specifications for 'boiled split', 'boiled whole' and 'sundried whole' types of arecanuts drawn up as a result of the trials conducted at these centres have been finalised in consultation with the trade and recommendations have also been made to the Agricultural Marketing Adviser to the Government of India for prescribing Agmark grade specifications under the Agricultural Produce Grading and Marking Act for these grades. While the grade specifications for the sundried whole (chali) arecanuts, finalised under this scheme, have already been accepted for prescribing Agmark specifications, the specifications for boiled arecanuts are under consideration of the Agricultural Marketing Adviser. The grading activities at these centres in both the states are being continued to impress on the

primary producers the need for undertaking pooling and grading of their arecanuts. In Kerala which is one of the major producing states, five Agmark grading centres for arecanuts are at present functioning under the co-operative sector.

However, as already indicated, grading under Agmark in the case of commodities like arecanut which are intended mainly for local consumption being purely voluntary, has not become very popular. Attempts so far made to introduce grading at farmer's level through co-operative marketing societies regulated markets etc. have also not been able to fully bring about the desired effect. The growers have not been evincing much interest in offering their individual lots for pooling and grading, on the apprehension that their produce might get mixed up with that of the others which might be inferior in quality and that they would stand to lose by doing so. The suggestion to grade their produce before pooling is also not generally favoured as the individual lots are generally very small. Many of the marketing societies are, therefore, not in a position to undertake grading and pooling of the produce on behalf of their grower-sellers. It would, therefore, take some time to educate the growers, traders and consumers and make them realise the advantages of introducing the graded produce in the market. More sustained efforts are called for to popularise grading at the farmer's level and to inculcate the grading habit among the primary producers so as to ensure better quality and price for their produce. Since almost all the co-operative marketing societies dealing in arecanuts are functioning as commission agents and the produce of individual arecanut growers is sold in separate lots, they are the most appropriate agencies to undertake grading and pooling of the produce. Vigorous

propaganda is needed to make the consumer also conscious of the benefits of grading.

The position in regard to spices is slightly different. Quality and purity have been a tradition in spices trade in India and to maintain this tradition and to be in keeping with modern developments in the field of standardisation of agricultural produce, grade standards have been prescribed for almost all spices under the Agricultural Produce Grading and Marking Act. Although in the initial years grading under Agmark was mainly confined to commodities used for internal trade this was subsequently extended to the export trade also by taking recourse to the Sea Customs Act. At present compulsory pre-shipment inspection and quality control in accordance with the standards prescribed under the Act is being exercised in respect of all the major exportable spices such as Pepper, Ginger, Chillies, Cardamom, Turmeric etc. Standards have also been prescribed for other spice crops such as Cumin seed, Fennel, Fenugreek, Celery seed, Coriander etc., in which also India has sizable export trade. Agmark has thus assumed a pioneering role in the the grading and standardisation of almost all the spice crops.

However, the primary producers have not been taking advantage of the grading and no grading of the produce is done at the producer's level. The current practice is that selective grading is done by the wholesalers and exporters at the terminal markets for purpose of export. The actual producers do not thus benefit from such grading arrangements. With a view to help the growers to directly enjoy the benefits of grading, a scheme of grading at the farmer's level has since been introduced through co-operatives and regulated markets. In this connection, it is gratifying to note that the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, which is the Central Agency for introducing grading and standardisation and the State Marketing Departments have initiated grading programmes, although the efforts so far made have not been able to bring about the desired impact. A good deal of propaganda and publicity is, therefore, necessary to educate the growers on the usefulness of grading before sale at their level. This will not only ensure a reasonable share for the producer in the consumer's price for the commodity but will also indicate the consumer preference through appropriate price differentials for different grades.