

Demand for geographical indication status: This time for Gulbarga toor

Traders want the coming Union Budget to clamp a “minimum 20 per cent” import duty on pulses, as against nil now.

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After Dehraduni basmati, Darjeeling tea and Malabar pepper, it is the turn of pulses millers and traders in this Northeast Karnataka district to seek geographical indication (GI) status for “Gulbarga toor”.

“The toor (pigeon pea or arhar) grown here is of superior quality, having to with this region’s unique soil and climatic conditions. Gulbarga toor should be projected as a brand in itself,” says Chandrashekhar Nadar, whose Rs 60 crore-turnover firm, Global Dhall Industries, sells milled pulses (dal) under the “Dove” label.

“One kg of imported Burmese toor dal can feed only 10 people, as against 16-17 with Gulbarga toor. Also, steam cooking of 50 kg of Burmese toor takes about 35 minutes, whereas it is hardly 20 minutes with our dal,” claims Nadar. Ashok Kumar Kagi, a pulses trader, estimates yearly market arrivals of toor across Gulbarga district at 2.5-3 lakh tonnes or roughly a tenth of India’s total production.

Toor, also called arhar, is India’s second largest pulses crop after chana or chickpea.

Gulbarga alone has some 300 dal mills, with capacities to process — i.e. de-husk and split the grain — between 10 to 15 tonnes of toor per day.

“This is a dry area (750 mm annual rainfall) where farmers grow toor as the main kharif crop (in about 3.7 lakh hectares). The toor quality here you will not find anywhere else,” notes Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress MP from Gulbarga and leader of the Congress in the current Lok Sabha.

“Obtaining a GI for Gulbarga toor is certainly an idea worth exploring. But for that, we must first establish the parameters distinguishing it from toor of other origins. These may relate to flavour, cooking quality, grain size/boldness, and also the specific attributes of this region

contributing to the distinctiveness and uniqueness of its dal,” points out **S Chandra**, former head of the Indian Institute of Pulses Research, Kanpur.

Chandra is currently director of the **Indian Society of Agribusiness Professionals (ISAP)**, an agriculture extension services consultancy that has popularised the adoption of improved disease-resistant toor varieties such as TS-3R and BSMR-736 among farmers in Gulbarga and Bidar. The main benefit from GI and promoting Gulbarga toor as distinct brand, according to him, would be better price realisations for growers. This has become an issue, especially with large-scale imports.

In 2013-14, India imported 4.66 lakh tonnes of toor valued at \$291.1 million (Rs 1,755.88 crore), over half of it from Myanmar and the rest mainly from Tanzania, Mozambique, Malawi and Kenya.

“The imported toor is of inferior quality, but much cheaper. If our toor is selling at Rs 5,200 per quintal, lemon (as Myanmar toor is called) will fetch Rs 300 less,” observes Kagi.

Traders want the coming Union [Budget](#) to clamp a “minimum 20 per cent” import duty on pulses, as against nil now. This, along with GI status for Gulbarga toor, is seen as providing adequate protection against inexpensive Myanmar and East African origin raw dals.

ISAP’s Chandra believes that while higher customs duty and GI protection are all fine, the real long-term solution lies in boosting crop yields. That requires planting varieties like TS-3R and the right package of practices (soil testing, land preparation, seed rate, plant spacing and nutrient application), farmers are today harvesting 7-8 quintals an acre. “Earlier, they were growing non-descript local varieties yielding 3-4 quintals and susceptible to fusarium wilt or sterility mosaic virus. We have helped increase TS-3R’s coverage in Gulbarga from virtually nothing to 50 per cent in the last five years,” he adds.