



Saffron Cultivation in Northeast

Why in News

A pilot project of saffron cultivation has yielded successful results in **Yangyang village of Sikkim**, which produced its first crop of saffron recently.

Key Points

▪ About:

- **Saffron** is a plant whose dried stigmas (thread-like parts of the flower) are used to make **saffron** spice.
- Saffron cultivation is believed to have been **introduced in Kashmir by Central Asian immigrants** around the **1st Century BCE**.
- It has been associated with traditional Kashmiri cuisine and represents the rich cultural heritage of the region.
- It is a very precious and costly product.
- In ancient Sanskrit literature, saffron is referred to as **'bahukam'**.
- It is cultivated and harvested in the **Karewa (highlands)** of Jammu and Kashmir.

▪ Importance:

- It **rejuvenates health** and is used in **cosmetics** and for medicinal purposes.
- It has been associated with **traditional Kashmiri cuisine** and represents the rich cultural heritage of the region.

▪ Season:

- In India, saffron Corms (seeds) are cultivated during the months of **June and July** and at some places in **August and September**.
- It starts flowering in **October**.

▪ Conditions:

- Saffron grows well at an altitude of 2000 meters above sea level. It needs a photoperiod (sunlight) of 12 hours.
- **Soil:** It grows in many different soil types but thrives best in **calcareous** (soil that has **calcium carbonate** in abundance), **humus-rich and well-drained soil with a pH between 6 and 8**.
- **Climate:** For saffron cultivation, we need an explicit climatological summer and winter with temperatures ranging from no more than **35 or 40 degree Celsius in summer to about -15 or -20 degree Celsius in winter**.
- **Rainfall:** It also requires adequate rainfall that is **1000-1500 mm per annum**.

▪ Saffron Producing Regions in India:

- Saffron production has long been restricted to a limited geographical area in the Union territory of **Jammu & Kashmir**.
- **Pampore region**, commonly known as **Saffron bowl of Kashmir**, is the main contributor to saffron production.

- **Pampore Saffron Heritage of Kashmir** is one of the [Globally Important Agricultural Heritage systems \(GIAHS\)](#) recognised sites in India.
 - Other districts producing saffron are Budgam, Srinagar, and Kishtwar districts.
 - Recently, the **Kashmir saffron** got **Geographical Indication (GI) tag status**.
- **Production & Demand in India:**
 - India cultivates about **6 to 7 tonne** of saffron while the demand is **100 tonne**.
 - To meet the growing demand of saffron **the Ministry of Science and Technology**, through the [Department of Science and Technology \(DST\)](#), is now looking at extending its cultivation to some states in the Northeast (Sikkim now, and later to Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh). There is a huge similarity of climate and geographical conditions between Kashmir and few regions of Northeast.
- **North East Centre For Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR)**, an autonomous body under the DST in collaboration with the **Botany and Horticulture departments of Sikkim Central University** implemented a pilot project in **Yangyang village of South Sikkim**.
- **Benefits**
 - The extension of saffron production will help in meeting the annual demand in India.
 - It will help in reducing imports.
 - It will also diversify agriculture and provide new opportunities to the farmers in the North-East.
- **Other Initiatives:**
 - **The National Saffron Mission** was sanctioned by the central government in the year 2010 in order to extend support for creation of irrigation facilities through tube wells and sprinkler sets which would help in production of better crops in the area of saffron production.
 - Recently, the [Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology \(CSIR-IHBT\) and the Government of Himachal Pradesh](#), have jointly decided to increase the production of the two spices namely, Saffron and Heeng (asafoetida).
 - Under this plan, IHBT will be introducing new varieties of saffron and heeng from the exporting countries and will be standardized under Indian conditions.

Way Forward

- Initiatives such as the National Saffron Mission and extension of saffron production to the North-East will help to **diversify the agricultural sector**. It will also enforce [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan](#) in the agricultural sector.

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