

WEBINAR - WONDER NUT-GROUNDNUT

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WELCOME ADDRESS

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Good morning friends!

Welcome to the first webinar being organized on Groundnut by SEA in association with IOPEPC and supported by CLAFMA and SOMA. We are happy to share that this webinar has attracted interest not only from India but also internationally. We have almost 500 delegates attending this conference from India and almost 20 other countries. We take this opportunity of welcoming all the delegates.

We are honored at the presence of Food Secretary, Shri Sudhanshu Pandey as well as Madam SHUBHA THAKUR JT. Secretary in Agriculture Ministry. Their presence reflects the importance which policy makers in the Government are now giving to Groundnut.

We have christened groundnut as a 'wonder nut' on account of its multiple uses. GN doubles up not only as an oilseed but also as a dry fruit. Gandhi Ji used to say it is a full meal and its nutritious value is second to none. Today noticed that Sadhguru also feels the same. Somehow over the last few decades this wonder nut did not receive the importance due to it and lost out to other oilseeds like Soya. COVID and the huge upsurge in edible oil prices worldwide has once again brought focus back on this important oilseed. To give GN its due we decided to kickstart this webinar. Corona has compelled us to do it online but in future I am sure we would start physical seminars.

Friends, No one is certain about the origins of Groundnut cultivation. However, there is generally a consensus that the first domestication of this crop took place in the valley systems of Paraná and Paraguay River in South America.

Today Groundnut is an important Oil, Food and Forage crop generally distributed in tropical, sub tropical and warm temperature zones. Early Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and German explorers found Red Indians cultivating the crop on many islands in Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina and Peru.

When were groundnuts introduced into India is a matter of debate among academicians and Agri historians. It is safe to assume that as South America was discovered in early 1500 A D it is probable that the plant was introduced into India at the earliest in first half of 16th century.

Groundnut occupies a very important place in the oilseed basket of India. As a matter of fact in the sixties and seventies of the last century it was the most important oil in our country. Not many would realize that Vanaspati Ghee which was the most important cooking medium in those days was made largely from GN OIL. Folklore says the importance of GN OIL increased to such an extent that State Government in Gujarat depended on GN oil stakeholders for their stable existence.

At a personal level also I have fond memories of ground nut. I came into the edible oil business in 1980 and the first thing which my Guru late Shri Lalit Malhotra told me was to go and meet Govind Bhai to understand groundnut and also keep close track of Rajkot Telia as that decides the price of other oils across the country. Friends, I met Govind Bhai in 1980 when he was running Dipak Vegetables and over the years what he has taught us all is invaluable. Just as we check the price of CBOT and KLC first thing in the morning today, we used to check Telia prices. Such was the importance of GN and its players. Even in case of feed, GN meal was the most important meal domestically as well as in exports before Soya meal replaced it in importance.

No wonder India had many solvent extraction plants involved in crushing GN.

With the opening up of the oil imports under OGL in the nineties the preeminent position of GN got seriously compromised. It would come as a shock to many that GN which contributed about 60% in India's overall edible oil consumption in the seventies is now less than 1.5% of our consumption. The solvent plants engaged in GN have long been either scrapped or diverted to other oilseeds.

The onslaught of imported oils at practically nil duty in the last two decades gradually sounded the death knell of GN oil. GN OIL became a niche oil as against a mass consumed oil and its price rocketed, limiting its consumption. It became an oil which could be afforded only by very rich connoisseurs. High price also induced many unscrupulous elements as well and it became difficult to procure pure GN oil.

The situation now has undergone a sea change. Years of neglect of our oilseed cultivation by the decision makers who were lulled into complacency by low world prices ended up, creating a situation where 70% of our consumption is now dependent on imports. No nation can afford to compromise its edible oil security to such an extent and this realization is getting driven in the minds of our policy makers with the unprecedented price rise of last few months.

Every dark cloud has a silver lining and this price rise has come as a blessing in disguise for our oilseed farmers. Groundnut is bound to benefit with prices ruling much above MSP and after a very long time GN oil is selling at par or lower than imported oil. Exports of ground nut oil are booming and India will end up exporting in excess of 2.40 lakh

mts of oil which is an all time record. Even the exports of HPS are booming and we would see exports of close to Six Lakh mts.

At SEA we had mentally started treating GN as a dry fruit as opposed to being an oilseed. However the recent changed equation has once again stressed the importance of GN if india is to achieve a semblance of Atmanirbharta in edible oils. Being a high oil bearing oilseed like mustard with a very strong acceptability in our country time has come to promote it big time.

We are happy to state that GOI has included GN promotion as one of their main agenda under National mission on edible oilseeds.

To give GN the required thrust SEA has decided to promote GN on a war footing and once again help create the right eco system which will promote this important oilseed.

With our Prime Minister from GUJARAT we trust the required push at policy level would be given by the Agriculture ministry.

The month of June has brought good tidings by way of reduction in Corona infections on one side and very good advance of monsoon across the country. We are confident the worst is behind us and we can once again look at the future with renewed hope .

With these words I would like to thank you for your patience,

Thank you.

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