

Fruit Melas: A Gateway to Conservation, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Pooja G. K¹. and Pavithra R².

¹Senior Research Fellow, Keladi Shivappa Nayaka University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, Shivamogga

²Research Associate, Keladi Shivappa Nayaka University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, Shivamogga, India

SUMMARY

Fruit melas are organized exhibitions, fairs and public awareness programmes that bring together farmers, scientists, nursery entrepreneurs, processors, marketers, students, consumers and other stakeholders involved in the fruit sector. These events serve as an effective platform for showcasing the diversity of fruit crops, improved varieties, farmer-developed selections, production technologies, value-added products and marketing opportunities. Fruit melas also create direct interaction between producers and consumers, thereby strengthening awareness about the nutritional, economic, cultural and environmental importance of fruits. By combining technology dissemination, farmer recognition, market promotion and consumer education, fruit melas can play an important role in strengthening the horticulture sector and encouraging diversification towards high-value fruit crops.

INTRODUCTION

India is endowed with diverse agro-climatic conditions that support the cultivation of a large number of tropical, subtropical and temperate fruit crops. Fruits contribute significantly to nutritional security, farm income, employment generation and agricultural diversification. In addition to well-established crops such as mango, banana, citrus, grape, guava and pomegranate India possesses a rich diversity of underutilized, indigenous and region-specific fruits such as jackfruit, jamun, kokum, bael, custard apple and several minor fruits. Despite this diversity, many valuable fruit crops and traditional varieties remain inadequately recognized by consumers and markets. Farmers may also face limitations in accessing improved planting materials, scientific production technologies, processing facilities and remunerative markets. Fruit melas provide an important platform to address these gaps (ICAR-IIHR, 2023). They bring scientific institutions, farmers, entrepreneurs, processors and consumers together and help transform fruit cultivation from a traditional activity into a more knowledge-based and market-oriented enterprise.

Fruit Melas as a platform for showcasing fruit diversity

One of the major objectives of fruit mela is to display the wide diversity of fruit crops and varieties available in a particular region or country. Exhibitions can include improved varieties, indigenous landraces, farmer selections, rare fruits and superior planting materials. Fruit exhibitions are particularly useful for promoting underutilized and indigenous fruits. Many traditional fruit species possess unique qualities related to taste, nutrition, climate adaptability and cultural importance (NHB, 2024; ICAR-IIHR, 2023). Through fruit melas, these resources can receive greater public attention and may contribute to their conservation and wider cultivation.



Fig.1. Display of improved and farmer varieties at Mela

Promotion of improved varieties and superior farmer selections

Fruit melas provide an opportunity to introduce newly released varieties and superior farmer-developed selections to a wider audience. Farmers can directly observe important characteristics such as fruit size, colour, shape, flavour, yield potential, keeping quality and processing suitability. Farmer varieties with desirable traits can also receive recognition and support for multiplication and wider distribution.

Technology dissemination and farmer-scientist interaction

A major significance of fruit melas lies in their role as an extension and technology transfer mechanism. Scientists and horticultural experts can demonstrate improved production practices from nursery management to post-harvest handling. Direct interaction enables farmers to discuss location-specific production problems and receive practical guidance. This interaction also helps scientists understand farmers field-level challenges, thereby strengthening the connection between research and farming communities.



Fig.2. Farmer-Scientist Interaction at Mela

Development of entrepreneurship and rural employment

Fruit melas can create awareness about the numerous business and entrepreneurship opportunities associated with the fruit sector. Value-added products such as fruit beverages, jams, jellies, squashes, candies, dehydrated products, chips, pickles, pulp, powders and other processed products can be displayed during fruit melas. Such exposure encourages farmers, rural youth, women entrepreneurs and self-help groups to explore fruit-based enterprises and generate additional income.



Fig.3. Farmer entrepreneurship and rural employment

Strengthening direct farmer-consumer linkages

Fruit melas often provide direct marketing opportunities where farmers can sell fresh fruits and processed products directly to consumers. This reduces dependence on intermediaries and enables producers to receive better price realization. Direct interaction also allows consumers to learn about the origin, production methods, unique characteristics and nutritional qualities of different fruits.



Fig.4. Direct farmer-consumer linkages

Creating awareness about nutrition and health

Regular consumption of fruits is important for maintaining a balanced and healthy diet. Fruits provide essential vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre and several beneficial phytochemicals. Fruit melas can therefore serve as an effective platform for educating the public about the importance of including diverse fruits in daily diets (WHO, 2020).



Fig.5. Creating nutrition awareness among the consumers

Conservation of indigenous fruit genetic resources

India possesses a valuable wealth of indigenous and traditional fruit genetic resources. However, changing agricultural practices and market preferences may lead to the neglect of many local varieties. Fruit melas can contribute to their conservation by documenting, displaying and popularizing these resources. In this way, fruit melas can support both on-farm conservation and the utilization of indigenous biodiversity (FAO, 2019; Bioversity International, 2017).

Promotion of climate-resilient and sustainable fruit production

Climate variability is increasingly affecting horticultural production through irregular rainfall, drought, high temperatures, extreme weather events and changes in pest and disease incidence. Fruit melas can disseminate information on climate-resilient fruit varieties and sustainable production technologies.

Recognition and motivation of innovative farmers

Fruit stall competitions and farmer awards are important components of many fruit melas. Recognition for exceptional fruit quality, superior varieties, innovative cultivation methods and successful entrepreneurship can motivate farmers and encourage innovation. Award-winning farmers can serve as role models and share their experiences with other growers.

Promotion of local identity and agro-tourism

Fruit melas can become important event for promoting the agricultural and cultural identity of a region. These events can support agro-tourism by combining fruit exhibitions with food festivals, farmer interactions, cultural programmes, farm visits and demonstrations of traditional processing methods.

Major benefits of organizing fruit melas

- Promotion of diverse fruit crops, varieties and indigenous genetic resources.
- Dissemination of improved and scientific fruit production technologies.
- Direct interaction between farmers, scientists, entrepreneurs and consumers.
- Identification and promotion of superior farmer-developed varieties.
- Increased awareness about the nutritional and health benefits of fruits.
- Creation of opportunities for nursery, processing, value addition and marketing enterprises.
- Development of direct farmer-to-consumer marketing channels.
- Conservation and promotion of traditional and underutilized fruit species.
- Encouragement of climate-resilient and sustainable horticultural practices.
- Recognition and motivation of innovative and progressive farmers.
- Generation of employment opportunities for rural youth and women.
- Promotion of regional fruit identity, tourism and local economic development.

CONCLUSION

Fruit melas are much more than exhibitions. It is an effective platform for integrating scientific knowledge, farmer innovation, entrepreneurship, consumer awareness, biodiversity conservation and market development. In the context of increasing demand for nutritious foods, sustainable agriculture and diversified farm enterprises, the importance of fruit melas is likely to increase further. Well-organized fruit melas can strengthen the connection between research institutions and farming communities, encourage the conservation of valuable fruit genetic resources improve market opportunities and promote healthy fruit consumption. Therefore, regular organization of fruit melas at district, state and national levels can play a significant role in the sustainable development and modernization of the horticulture sector.

REFERENCES

- Bioversity International (2017). Mainstreaming agricultural biodiversity to improve livelihoods and food security. *Bioversity International*, Rome, Italy.
- FAO (2019). The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy.
- ICAR-IIHR (2023). Annual Report 2022-23, ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.
- National Horticulture Board (NHB) (2024). Horticultural Statistics at a Glance. *Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare*, Government of India, New Delhi, India.
- World Health Organization (WHO) (2020). Healthy Diet. *World Health Organization*, Geneva, Switzerland.