

Title Postharvest technologies in smallholder fruits production: Challenges for extension service in Bangladesh

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Citation Abstracts of 7th International Postharvest Symposium 2012 (IPS2012). 25-29 June, 2012. Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 238 pages.

Keywords tropical fruit; postharvest

Abstract

A rich variety of tropical fruits are grown in Bangladesh. While the major fruits of the country include banana, mango, jackfruits, pineapple, guava, litchi, jujube and papaya, more than 30 species of underutilized fruits are grown in the rural and hilly areas. Smallholder farmers are the backbone of Bangladesh agriculture. The overwhelming majority of the farmers of the country operate less than one acre of land and cultivate fruits in small orchards in and around homesteads. It is assumed that apart from some commercial fruits like mango, banana, pineapple and litchi (nowadays, jujube), the major part of the total fruit production of the country comes from the orchards of smallholder producers. Moreover, the women members of the smallholder households have active participation in homestead fruit production activities. Research reports indicate that 30-40 percent of total fruit production of the country is lost mainly due to absence of appropriate postharvest technologies or farmers' awareness of such technologies. This seems a huge loss in a country where malnutrition is prevalent in both urban and rural societies and lack of postharvest management technologies is a huge barrier to maximize profits by the smallholder farm producers. On the other hand, although there is a well organized agricultural extension service throughout the country, the service lacks programmes and human resources to address this important problem. It is until recent time the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), the mainstream extension agency, is formulating strategies to incorporate knowledge and skills for the farmers on postharvest management practices in fruit production. Considering the complex nature of production system, it seems a challenging task to disseminate appropriate postharvest technologies to all categories of the smallholder farmers across different agro-ecological zones of Bangladesh. The paper focuses on some pertinent issues of these challenges and their possible solutions towards capacity strengthening of smallholders in improving postharvest management of fruits.