

Abstract:

This paper provides an overview of the current and likely future importance of the postharvest sector to the global economy, while emphasizing its particular relevance for developing countries. First, the paper highlights the contribution of postharvest activities to output, exports and employment in various parts of the world, and its vital role in promoting food security and rural welfare. Second, the paper examines the key qualitative trends which are propelling growth in the postharvest sector and changing its structure in dramatic ways. In particular, this section considers the contraction of agriculture, the drive towards urbanization, increased awareness of gender roles and the environment, technological advance, and perhaps most importantly, the massive changes being wrought by globalization and increased attention to food safety. Third, the paper turns to the challenges firms and governments will face in the coming years, in seeking to ensure that the continued growth of postharvest activities is dynamic and broad-based. As they seek to cope with these challenges, governments face a number of pressing policy issues. The paper closes by outlining those that appear most relevant on a national level: the need for a regulatory framework that promotes growth while safe-guarding welfare; for adequate market information to be given to all participants involved; for further investment in postharvest research; and for participation in international agreements that promote trade and food safety.