

Putting Kashmir apples into world's fruit basket

Govt looks to branding agricultural products for demand, profit

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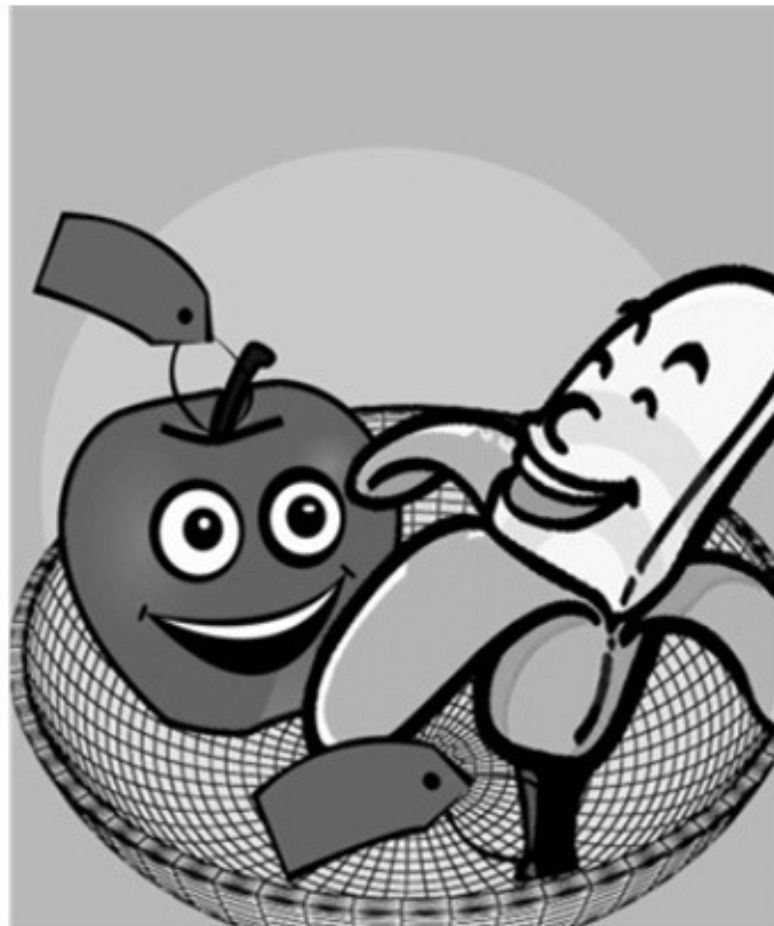
Chennai

IMAGINE Kashmir apples and Tamil Nadu bananas selling in the global market very much like Washington apples or Florida oranges. The National Cold Chain Task Force — set up under the aegis of CII — has come up with the idea of branding of agricultural products to ensure profitability to the farmers, better quality and availability for consumers and foreign exchange to the country through exports.

The Task Force, which is helping the agriculture ministry in formulating technical standards, has approached some state governments with a proposal in this regard.

"It is a tremendous opportunity. There are several products such as the Darjeeling tea, the red rice of Kerala, the Ratnagiri mango or the Goan feni, which have a value attached to them besides that of a commodity. But it is just the tip of the iceberg. India has not yet exploited the opportunity to unlock the value of its distinct agricultural produce," said Manosh Sengupta, mentor of Brand@-itude.

There are two main



components that make a brand out of a commodity — infrastructure to provide consistent and standardised quality and marketing activities to build up desirability around the product. Branding of agricultural products is an exercise that needs both public and private involvement.

"Each state has to identify a product that can be

branded. We have submitted feasibility reports to the Jammu & Kashmir and Tamil Nadu state governments for branding of apples and bananas respectively. The government can provide duty and tax incentives to the private sector or the farmers' cooperative societies in setting up necessary infrastructure for transportation, warehousing and

cold chain. It can also introduce a quality mark that will ensure standardised quality of the branded product in terms of colour, ripeness, hygiene, shelf life etc," said B Thiagarajan, member, Cold Chain Task Force.

Sengupta recommends forming of bodies like the Coffee Board or Tea Board in taking up the branding activities at a global level. "Branding also includes building up desirability around the product. Apart from maintaining consistency of flavour, taste and colour, the product should also carry the charm and romance of the place from where it comes. For this adequate marketing investments are needed. The stakeholders should look at the initiatives on a long-term perspective," he said.

According to Thiagarajan, a branded product will grow the demand and reach and increase profitability of the farmer as it cuts wastage and fetches better price for the product. Right infrastructure will ensure longer shelf life and this in turn will address longer availability of the product in domestic as well as export market.

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