

INI in pact with Munger Farms to grow blueberries

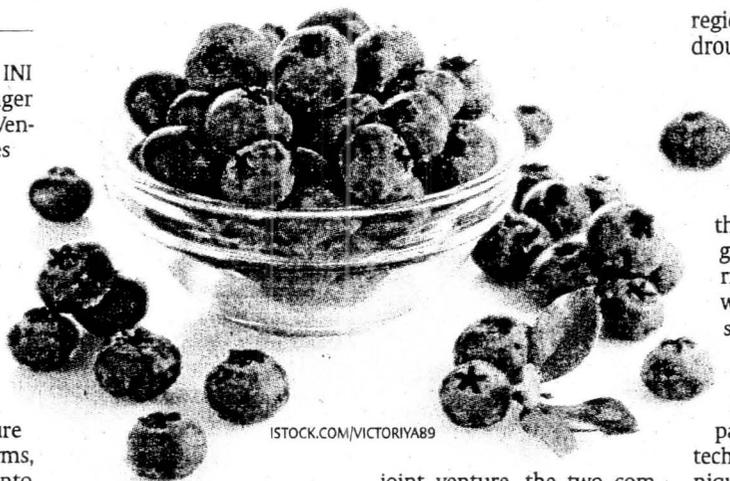
FORUM GANDHI

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Horticulture company INI Farms and US-based Munger Farms plan to start a Joint Venture to cultivate blueberries in India and export pomegranates. The two companies have shortlisted Marathwada, Ahmednagar, Pune and Western Maharashtra to grow the fruit.

Blueberries are currently available at ₹4,000 a kilogram in the retail market. The venture capitalist-backed INI Farms, which is currently into Pomegranate, Banana and Coconut farming, plans to introduce the product in the retail market in the next 2-3 years.

Speaking about the joint venture, Pankaj Khandelwal, Chairman of INI Farms said: "Our relationships with Indian farmers, and their expertise in cultivating blueberries will be a great opportunity for us. The Mungers will invest in research in India, and we will fo-



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cus on the distribution."

David Munger, Owner, and Director, Munger Farms said that currently, they have been successful in cultivating and marketing blueberries across the world. According to Munger, India is a difficult market to ship fresh blueberries to while maintaining quality upon arrival. "That is why we need to be closer to the market," he added.

From the perspective of the

joint venture, the two companies are looking at starting with the research first to determine what varieties will fit best here.

"Within 2-3 years, we will be able to be thorough with the research and be in a position to expand to the retail market," said Munger. Gradually the company wants to have a full berry portfolio in India, moving to strawberry next.

Indian weather conditions are tropical and erratic. Some

regions face widespread drought while others are reeling under excess rain.

Munger said his firm had developed a way to grow the fruit in California which, too, has tropical weather. "Picking the right variety, right region, technology, and the right growing conditions is what we are looking at," he said.

Tech-driven cultivation

He added that the company will test a lot of new technologies, varieties, techniques, field structures and technology. "We are also going to use technology to recycle water from the leftovers of the plants as well to work around the drought situation. We will also pick the berries at the set time to avoid wastage," he explained.

The two companies will also get into exporting pomegranates to the US. Currently, according to Munger, there are only a few companies importing the fruit.