

Maha raisin farmers staring at losses owing to lockdown

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Pune, July 30

FARMERS IN MAHARASHTRA who opted for raisin production in hopes of making profits are now staring at losses, thanks to the continued lockdown in the state. Around 2 lakh tonne of raisins are lying in cold storages across the state, industry people said.

Some 2.80 lakh tonne of raisin was produced in the 2019-20 season and barely 80,000 tonne has been sold, according to farmers.

Santoshkumar Patil, chairman, Sangli Agriculture Produce Market Committee, said not only exports have stopped, but the lockdown has also affected domestic sales.

Around 2 lakh tonne still remains unsold, he said, adding that demand has fallen 60%.

Raisins from Maharashtra are exported to Malaysia, Dubai, Brazil, Bulgaria, Uzbekistan, Russia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

This season, grape farmers converted their grapes into raisins due to the drop in demand for grapes.

However, even after conversion to raisins, they have been unable to find buyers for their product, Patil said.

Maharashtra accounts for 81% of India's grapes production.

Thousands of farmers who grow black and green grapes have suffered losses because of lockdown.

Auctions of raisins had begun at the Sangli APMC as part of the Centre's eNAM project. However, they were called off because of Covid, and only 50% of raisin could be auctioned.

Rajendra Kumbhar, president, Sangli District Raisin Association, said farmers were forced to keep rest of the produce in cold storages, and have been paying rent for the facilities.