



## GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS IN SUPPORTING MANGO FARMERS IN KERALA DURING COVID-19



*The timely intervention by extension officers of the Department of Agriculture Development and Farmers' Welfare, (DoAD&FW) Kerala, coupled with support from people representatives and farmers during the COVID-19 lockdown period led to the emergence of new channels for marketing the popular Muthalamada Mangoes. In this Field Note, Sujith SS and Mary Vijaya discuss how extension personnel helped farmers to turn the tide in their favour during this uncertain period.*

### CONTEXT

Muthalamada - The Mango City of South India is very popular for its mango orchards. This place on the foothills of Thenmala has more than 3,500 hectares of land under mango cultivation. Here, the mangoes flower early and the fruits get ready for harvest very early in the season. Muthalamada mangoes start flowering by the end of October and the harvesting season starts by mid-January and the season lasts till the end of April. The harvested mangoes are usually sold at a high price right from the beginning of the season. In a normal year, the prices of Muthalamada mangoes in the local market peaks during Vishu festival in April. Muthalamada mangoes are usually transported to fruit markets in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Indore, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Goa, Chennai, etc. First grade quality mangoes are exported to UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, etc. However, this year the lockdown imposed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 has adversely impacted the harvesting and marketing of mangoes. With markets closed and transportation disrupted, the farmers' hopes of selling the mangoes at good prices were crushed.



**Krishi Bhavan Team- Muthalamada**

## GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT FARMERS

With the nation-wide lockdown imposed on 25 March 2020, the problems of farmers with regard to the likely market glut situation was initially brought to the direct attention of the Ministers in charge of Agriculture and Irrigation by the Agricultural Officer, people's representatives, Producer Company representatives, and farmer representatives. On 26 March 2020, the issue was discussed in the cabinet and the Government took a decision to procure the mangoes through its agencies – Hortcorp and VFPCK – and giving a minimum support price to farmers.



On 31 March 2020, a joint meeting of farmer representatives, people's representatives, Agricultural Officer, Farmer Producer company representatives, and mango cluster representative was conducted which was presided over by the Hon. Nenmara MLA Sri. K Babu. Support price for individual varieties of mangoes were fixed (Table 1), and procurement conditions were discussed during this meeting. The government offered a support price which was the highest for all the varieties of mangoes as compared to the existing local price.

Hortcorp agreed to procure 15 tonnes a week with complete monitoring by Krishi Bhavan-Muthalamada. A sub-committee was formed by the MLA/his representative, Panchayat president, Assistant Director of Agriculture-Kollengode, Agricultural Officer-Muthalamada, Hortcorp District Manager and Farmer Producer Company representatives for the necessary modifications of procurement price and other required changes in the process.



*Field Visits by Krishi Bhavan Muthalamada team*

**Table 1: Procurement price offered for different varieties of mangoes**

No.	Variety	Procurement price (per kilogram)
1	Sindooram	Rs. 50/-
2	Banganapalli	Rs. 60/-
3	Alphonso	Rs. 90/- Rs. 70/-
4	Imam pasand	Rs. 100/-
5	Kalapadi	Rs. 70/-
6	Thotapuri	Rs. 20/-
7	Moovandan	Rs. 20/- Rs. 25/-
8	Neelam	Rs. 55/-

Initially, the 10 Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) clusters under Krishi Bhavan-Muthalamada were targeted to mobilize mango farmers, and Lead Resource Persons (LRPs) of each cluster were given charge for collection of applications and assigning procurement quantity. These 10 PKVY clusters comprising 500 farmers from various parts of the panchayat is an accurate representation of mango farmers of Muthalamada. Thus, the 10 clusters were further grouped into three groups for preventing rotation gap between first and last cluster. On the basis of variety wise mango requirements by HortiCorp, the Lead Resource Person (LRP) of each cluster was given responsibility for identifying true beneficiaries and allotment of variety wise permit without any local issues between farmers. First such procurement happened on 2 May 2020, but unfortunately, a few farmers raised questions about the transparency of the procurement process while selecting beneficiary farmers and allocating permits. To address this concern of the farmers, the Krishi Bhavan called a meeting of the sub-committee formed for mango procurement the very next day, and it made necessary modifications to make the procurement process more transparent. Farmers were asked to submit the application at Muthalamada Krishi Bhavan. As the work force was not enough to manage the file and field activities, the Agricultural Officer, Muthalamada, requested the Principal Agricultural Office (PAO), Palakkad, to put together a team of interested department staff to support the procurement process. PAO-Palakkad responded quickly (by 6 April 2020) by forming three teams of its staff (Table 2) to organize the procurement process.



Team 1 was given the responsibility of receiving applications in the office and subsequent digital data entry and further telephonic interactions in connection with the availability of specific varieties on a day-to-day basis. Allocation of permits according to the requirement is also the duty of Team 1. Team 2 was given charge of daily field inspections so as to avoid unknown mangoes from getting the benefit and also to prevent any deception. Field inspection ensured that only true beneficiaries are enjoying the government support price. Team 3 took charge of receiving the mangoes from farmers and monitored sorting and grading activities. Other activities of the team included local purchase of cartons for packing, monitoring the weight and giving weigh slips to farmers on completion of an individual's procurement.

**Table 2: Details of the Teams formed by DoAD&FW to support the procurement process**

<b>Team 1</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sri. Arun TT, Agricultural Officer, Peruvembu</li> <li>2. Sri. Vineeth Kumar, Agricultural Assistant, Nenmara</li> <li>3. Sri. Karthik P, Field Assistant, State Horticulture Mission, Palakkad</li> </ol>
<b>Team 2</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sri. Aswin T, Agricultural Officer, Pudussery</li> <li>2. Sri. Varun V, Agricultural Officer, Nenmara</li> <li>3. Sri. Pravanadas, Agricultural Assistant, Vadavannur</li> <li>4. Sri. Satheesh M, Agricultural Assistant, Pattanchery</li> </ol>
<b>Team 3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sri. Gautham L, Agricultural Officer, Vandazhy</li> <li>2. Sri. Jiji Allen, Agricultural Officer, Elapully</li> <li>3. Smt. Ranjini R, Agricultural Assistant, Ayiloor</li> </ol>

**Table 3: Procurement Details**

HORTICORP MANGO PROCUREMENT – KRISHI BHAVAN-MUTHALAMADA											
No	Date	Details of Procurement - Variety wise Quantity in Kg								Total Qty procure d Per Day (Kg)	Total Value of produce procure d per day (INR).
		Sindoora m	Bangan apally	Alph onsa	Thotap uri	Moovand an	Kalap ad	Hima pasan d	Nee lam		
1	02.04.20	1000	760	0	0	0	0	280	0	2040	123600
2	03.04.20	1527	1367	960	518	460	0	0	0	4832	264330
3	05.04.20	2470	1360	2783	330	1370	140	0	0	8453	499370
4	06.04.20	0	0	0	0	2040	0	0	0	2040	51000
5	08.04.20	1371	1040	0	1510	1160	0	0	0	5081	190150
6	09.04.20	2660	2583	1220	520	110	0	0	0	7093	410930
7	12.04.20	0	0	0	0	1085	0	0	0	1085	27125
8	13.04.20	1758	1167	0	230	492	0	0	0	3647	174820
9	16.04.20	1390	1506	0	0	2210	0	0	0	5106	215110
10	17.04.20	444	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	444	22200
11	18.04.20	1076	714	0	0	0	0	0	0	1790	96640
12	22.04.20	560	0	0	2260	420	0	276	0	3516	111300
13	30.04.20	800	866	0	650	668	0	0	80	3064	125660
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15056</b>	<b>11363</b>	<b>4963</b>	<b>6018</b>	<b>10015</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>48191</b>	<b>2312235</b>

Claims are prepared and submitted based on the weigh slips of individual farmers. Claims thus prepared were recommended by ADA Kollengode and forwarded to PAO Palakkad the very next day, which allows release of funds into farmers' accounts via DBT. Thus during the 13 days of procurement Horticorp collected 48.191 tonnes of mangoes (Table 3) worth 23.12 lakh rupees directly from farmers

for supply to various parts of Kerala. This is the first time that Muthalamada Mangoes reached Kerala markets in such huge quantities. Every farmer got better prices until the end of the season as the final HortiCorp procurement happened on 30 April 2020.



*Flag off of Mango Procurement Operations of HortiCorp by Hon MLA K Babu*

### Other marketing interventions

Every crisis creates an opportunity. This is the first time, Muthalamada farmers realized the local marketing possibilities within the State and the purchasing power of its customers.. When the HortiCorp procurement processes started, a few of the individual farmers came forward with their own WhatsApp and other social media networks to sell their products at better prices. Farmers joined together, formed into groups and organized door delivery to flats and residence associations in and around Palakkad.

Muthalamada Mango Producer Company has collaborated with Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF) in forming a marketing network in Thrissur, and later this network was extended to parts of Ernakulam. Farmers themselves realized the profitable marketing network that was possible within the State. This was the very first time for Muthalamada mangoes to reach these many consumers in Kerala, and we all hope that there will be more demand for Muthalamada mangoes within Kerala in the coming season as well.



*Muthalamada Mango Farmers Producer Company's first load*

The Association of Agricultural Officers Kerala (AOAOK) also joined hands in supporting Muthalamada farmers by procuring the products at the Government fixed support price. AOAOK's Palakkad and Malappuram units actively came forward and procured around 30 tonnes of mangoes directly from farmers during this time of distress. AOAOK-Malappuram unit came forward to visit the mango orchards, interact with farmers and then procure mangoes as per their pre-booked orders. Both the units of AOAOK (Malappuram and Palakkad) collected orders via online media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook according to their requirements. The Krishi Bhavan collected mangoes from

farmers at a common collection point for packing and loading for dispatch to respective destinations. The 2020 mango season was one such season when consumers in Kerala experienced the real taste of excellent quality mangoes at reasonable prices. During the lockdown period, Muthalamada mangoes got prime place among other exotic fruits and we hope this will continue in the coming years.



*Field visit by members of the Agricultural Officer Association from the neighbouring Malappuram District*

## **INTER-STATE TRANSPORTATION OF MANGOES DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD**

By the end of March 2020, major fruits and vegetable markets around the country started to reopen, though for a very limited time, with adherence to the COVID-19 protocols issued by the Government.



This again raised the hopes of mango farmers in selling their produce through the available markets. However, the transportation restrictions – especially between the state borders – again shattered these hopes and a few trucks with mangoes were stuck at state borders without further transportation clearance. The Krishi Bhavan intervened and with the support of the Department of Agriculture, came forward to issue essential commodity (fruits/vegetables) transportation passes to the mango transporting vehicles. Using these transportation passes, Muthalamada mangoes started reaching Delhi, Ahmadabad, Indore, Mumbai, Goa, Chennai, and Hyderabad markets and also other foreign destinations such as Qatar, Oman, Bahrain etc., via Bangalore Airport without any trouble.

The staff of the Department of Agriculture worked 24X7 to verify and issue essential commodity transportation passes to the loaded vehicles and for their timely arrival at destination markets. Like this about 1,600 tonnes of mangoes were transported during the initial strict phase of the lockdown period. This ultimately saved Muthalamada farmers from having a glut of mangoes and suffering from low prices and rotting fruits in warehouses.

Gradually, agricultural operations and transportation of perishable agricultural products and farm inputs were classified under essential services and farmers themselves were able to continue their usual farm and marketing activities by following COVID-19 prevention protocols.



Media coverage on Muthalamada mangoes further increased the demand among the public for these mangoes during this lockdown period. Due to this, a number of enquiries were received at the Krishi Bhavan and these were directed to farmer contacts. This lockdown period especially connected producers to end users and that too without the use of middlemen; and consumers were extremely satisfied with the excellent products they received. The Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture appreciated the efforts of the Agricultural Officer and the Krishi Bhavan's teamwork in addressing the marketing challenges during the lockdown period on his official Facebook page.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the COVID-19 lockdown period opened up new marketing channels to farmers within the State which had hitherto never been exploited. For us, as officials of the Department of Agriculture in charge of the region, the experience of lending a helping hand to farmers in their bad times has been very satisfying. Due to the goodwill generated, mango farmers in Muthalamada are now more connected to the Krishi Bhavan and we hope this will help the latter to offer more need-based programmes to farmers in future. It is high time that a government procurement centre for mangoes is established at Muthalamada to support farmers in the years to come.

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