

While Agrocel Industries may have been the first to make headway in fairtrade grapes with its raisins, Nashik-based Monsoon Foods plans to up the ante with the category in table grapes.



Speaking with www.freshfruitportal.com during the Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference, the company's Ravikiran Dange said the program started last year selling fairtrade table grapes through supermarket chain Migros in Switzerland.

"Fairtrade was majorly involved in India for rice, coffee and tea - the grape industry has recently started applying those standards of fairtrade," he said.

"As a matter of fact we are the first [table "" not found /] company to get certified under fairtrade - we have a small producer organization comprising 33 farmers. They are cultivating grapes for the European market."

He said while fairtrade premiums were important for farmers, what may have a bigger effect will be some of the associated biological controls against pests.

"To reduce the attack of insects we are providing farmers with the sticky traps, and we are going to introduce the solar traps also," Dange said.

"If a farmer becomes sustainable with these practices, the use of pesticides and chemicals will be reduced dramatically and they'll move to more organic production. Then the base will be clear.

"So automatically they will have more capacity. We are using the premium to start complementary products."

In total however, Monsoon Foods sources from an association of 250 farmers to its own packhouse, supplying table grapes mostly to Germany, but also to the U.K. and Switzerland.

"We do black seedless and white seedless - those are the main varieties," he said.

"The timing, we start around week 6 arrival to week 19 for the white seedless, and for the black we start at the same time and go to week 15-16."

"When the Southern Hemisphere ends with Chile, then we start. We fill that gap actually in the European market."

He said because India was a large country with a high level of local table grape consumption, the vast majority of production was sold domestically.

"The domestic market predominates the export market, but anywhere between 10-15% of our grapes are exported. But that is a very big volume, because Nashik must have a few thousand containers going to Europe."

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