

Beet beats the cane in B'desh

Prospect of sugar beet farming commercially in different parts of Bangladesh has been found to be bright and that can contribute a lot address the sugar deficit of the country to some extent. We have been conducting research on sugar beet farming since last 2002 and assessed optimistic result," said Dr Khalilur Rahman, Chief Scientific Officer of Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute (BSRI) at Ishwardi.

Sugar beet is a plant whose tuber contains a high concentration of sucrose and it is grown commercially for sugar production, he said. It ranks second to sugar cane as the two most important sugar crops in the world. In addition to sugar production, sugar beet is also used for syrup, spirit and bio-fuel production as well as livestock feed, Dr Khalil added.

He said sugar beet takes 5-6 months for getting maturity while sugarcane requires 12-14 months. On the other hand sugar recovery rate from the sugar beet is 10-12 per cent while the rate from sugarcane is 8-10 per cent. In line with the previous investigation, he said a three-year Pilot Project titled "Development of Sugar beet Cultivation Technologies in Bangladesh" is being implemented at 17 locations across the country to explore the potentialities. Project Director Dr Khalil mentioned that about 88 to 133 tonnes of sugar beet of different varieties can be produced on a hectare of land. Side by side with winter the tropical sugar beet can be a good example of sustainable agriculture, since it improves land use and helps water management.

He mentioned there are around 6000 hectares of sugarcane farming land in the country's 14 sugar-mills jurisdiction and if the lands are brought under sugar beet farming then around 4.8 lakh metric tons of sugar beet could be harvested annually. Thereby, around 48,000 tons of white sugar valued at around Taka 264 crore could be manufactured by the mills yearly. He said as the sugar beet contributed to the world's sugar production by at least 30 per cent, Bangladesh's existing sugar mills could produce a considerable amount of sugar from the sugar beet by setting up some additional equipment including diffuser plant.

Referring to his research findings Dr Khalil said the crop can be harvested in two times farming one from November to April and another from February to May. Besides, it can be cultivated in intercropping method with different other crops and vegetables including sugarcane. The existing sugar mills can easily extract white sugar from the sugar beet in diffusion method and diffuser plant and some other

related instruments have to be added in the sugar mills for the purpose. Presently, he said crops diversification process is being promoted widely to embrace high value and diversified crop varieties to ensure food security. Sugar beet can be one of the high valued crops as it can be used as raw material for production of ethanol as bio-fuel.

Beet top and beet pulp can also use as cattle feed. Continuous supply of raw materials is another considered as an option in this context and it is therefore getting importance to increase knowledge about the potentials in the country for cultivating this crop.

"Bangladesh has immense potentiality for sugar beet cultivation which can take the production of sugar to a satisfactory level," Dr Khalil said adding that the farmers should be accustomed to the potentiality for wide-ranging expansion of the farming (Bangladesh Today 25-1-12).