

REPORT

—Table grapes

Empowerment scheme bears fruit

MAHARASHTRA—Don Limon’s grape-grower project in India is bearing fruit, with its first commercial season starting this month.

by Luisa Cheshire

German importer Don Limon began commercial grape imports from its grower-empowerment project in India last month.

The Hamburg-headquartered firm launched the developPPP-Programme – a scheme to help small-scale Indian grape producers access export markets – in September 2015, with funding from the German government and German development agency.

Under the scheme, Don Limon is training 40 growers linked to a producer association in the Sangli district of Maharashtra on best farming practices and international market standards.

The firm expects to import approximately 600 tonnes or 50 containers of their grapes into Germany this season, which began in early January. This import volume is set to double by season three of the project, at which time it is hoped 100 additional growers will be involved in the scheme.

“The project will run for three years, until 2018,” says Don Limon’s Debjit Ghosh, who masterminded and now runs the scheme with his colleague Christopher Mars.

“The aim of the programme is to give small-scale growers in this area the necessary training and knowledge to achieve sustainable grape exports to international markets without our help.

“We have some other targets too,” he adds. “These include empowering women by employing them in the packaging and production process of grapes, and helping to educate local children.”

Don Limon schedules regular training sessions for the growers, led by experts in the relevant field, and organises motivational meetings and awards to encourage producers to stick with the scheme.

“If, for example, the training is on GlobalGAP, we bring in a GlobalGAP expert to come and speak to the growers and answer their questions. If it’s on pesticide residues, we bring in a pesticide residue expert,” Ghosh explains.

“Lack of awareness is the main problem for small-scale grape growers in India. They are simply not aware that their fruit has to follow different regulations for different markets.

“Our goal with this project is to arm them with the necessary facts and the practices to successfully access new markets.”

Ghosh is a frequent visitor from Germany to the Indian growers involved in the scheme, while his right-hand man Pratik Mutha, who is involved in running the Sangli producer association to which the growers belong, is permanently based in India.

However, all of Don Limon’s traders are involved in the project.



“It is hard for small-scale Indian farmers to access export markets by themselves,” says Ghosh. “They need support behind them.”

Don Limon anticipates a successful Indian grapes season, he adds. All 50 containers are earmarked for German supermarkets, and quality, so far, is looking good.

“The Indian grape season is expected to start a bit earlier than usual, towards the beginning of January,” says Ghosh. “Water was a scarcity in September and October, but water was transported to drought regions.

“Provided there is no unexpected hail or rain to damage the fruit, quality is looking good. We’ll know by next year in more details the further progress of the project.” **A**

TOP—Grapes produced as part of the programme are destined for German retailers
BELOW—The project will run until 2018