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Niche Markets: an Opportunity for Developing Countries

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Abstract

In the last year FAO has organized in collaboration with the GFAR (Global Forum for Agricultural Research), several regional workshops in 5 regions of the world (Asia, Africa, Near East, Central Asia and South America). The outlook of the exercise was to generate an international focus and awareness concerning the breadth of the post harvest sector and to request funds to support a global initiative for the development of the post harvest system and technologies (GIPH).

Different documents and procedures were prepared for these workshops in which a certain number of elements were highlighted, such as niche-markets.

Even if food security remains an essential consideration for most of the developing countries, exportations are seen as a major source of possible income for the producers.

For the man crops, small producers can't compete with large exporting countries, however there are some existing opportunities which are for non-traditional products. In addition, food consumption pattern is in permanent change, consumers are looking for new flavours or to discover products in their own countries that they have tasted during travel. Another factor is immigrant population that look after traditional products, or industrialists are looking for new flavours or new raw materials. The biggest markets for these products worldwide are in the USA, Europe and Japan. In this group, the Market Volume was 11 billions US-Dollars in 1997, 13 billion US-Dollars in 1998 and it was expected to reach 20 billion in 2002.

These new products could be classified as follow:

- Organic (spices and aromatic plants, fruit and vegetable)
- Ethnic (breadfruit, tamarind)
- Functional (quinoa)
- Orphan crops (quinoa, fonio, amaranth...)
- New (dragon fruit, Andean tubers, cut flower...)

Even when the importance of these cases is growing, a few is known on the specific conditions of handling, conservation and requirements. This situation could have negative impacts such as problems with the products that can be often refused in developed countries because of their own rules and regulations on food safety or quality.

There are some needs on research and analysis regarding new equipment, economical considerations, guidelines and recommendations that could help the producers from developing countries to fit with the requirements for exports. From the conclusions of the regional workshops post harvest stakeholders who were invited have highlighted the following weaknesses:

- limited information on the ‘new products’
- limited research and development,
- lack of trained personal,
- lack of marketing intelligence

These points among others will be part of the Global Initiative on Post Harvest that FAO, in collaboration with the other institutions working on the same area is willing to design and present to an international expert consultation in 2004 for a future implementation