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Participatory Domestication of *Prunus caspica* Kov. & Ekin

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Abstract

In contrast to the widely cultivated agricultural and horticultural crops of the world that have been domesticated for millennia, the initiatives to domesticate some of the indigenous fruit trees in different regions are starting now with wild, or virtually wild, gene pools. Hyrcanian forest region is located in southern of the Caspian Sea. Indigenous people living in rural areas depend on the wild fruit trees in their diet. They use them as table fruit, conserve and local food as well as folk medicine. Throughout the area, there are indigenous species that produce locally important fruits and other non-timber forest products that have the potential to be domesticated to provide economic and livelihood benefits to subsistence farmers. Their commercial importance has led farmers to identify some of these indigenous species as candidates for domestication. *Prunus caspica*, which is locally named “toresh hali ترش هالی” is an indigenous fruit tree occurring in the Caspian coast of Iran and Caucasian. Semi-cultivated individual plants for its edible fruits have been planted in home gardens of the area indicating furthering domestication of this species. The fresh fruit with 2–4 cm in diameter is part of the diet of people in the fruiting season. The fruits are eaten raw or used to prepare a local tart candy. It traditionally was prepared by heating of the fruits for a long time, but today because of more demand, small factories for preparation of this have been established. As demand for fruits and other products is increasing, the supply of fruits from forests is threatened by increasing deforestation. This situation is seriously threatening food and germplasm security and calls for urgent action aimed to expand domestication and cultivation of this species. To be successful, tree domestication should provide farmers with both food security and opportunities for cash generation. Participatory domestication allows farmers to be the beneficiaries and guardians of the use of their indigenous knowledge. This approach conforms to the aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity that seeks to protect the rights of local people to their indigenous knowledge and germplasm.

Keywords: Domestication, Hyrcanian forest region , indigenous knowledge, Iran