

"Impetus to food Processing can minimize wastage of Fruits and Vegetables"

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Union Food Processing Industries Minister, Harsimrat Kaur Badal has said that impetus to food processing can minimize wastage of perishable commodities and give better returns for farmers while simultaneously ensuring cheaper prices for consumers.

Harsimrat Kaur Badal said this while addressing the meeting with Ministers of Food Processing Industries of States/ Union Territories (UTs) to review the progress of National Mission on Food Processing in New Delhi. She also stressed the need for bringing down the percentage of wastages in the agricultural commodities particularly in fruits and vegetables from the present 18% to much lower levels.

The minister also laid stress on using practical engineering solutions and simple techniques particularly at the harvesting stage and transportation stage so that farmers could get a better price for their produce and minimise the wastage.

Commenting on the progress in the National Mission for Food Processing, the Minister noted with great satisfaction that in the first six months of the current financial year, around 50% of the grants has been released to the States, which was a notable achievement and vast improvement three over the past r years when grants were not being utilised by state Governments.

Krishna B Gowda, Agriculture Minister, Karnataka, stressed on the need for backward integration of retail units with the Food Processing projects so that a direct connect was achieved between the consumers and the producers. He said that investments in organised retail would result in efficiency in the food chain and better value for farmers. He also highlighted the need for de-regulation of agriculture markets. He requested that food processing sector should be included in the priority sector lending at par with agriculture by the banks.

Ministers from other States /UTs who had done well in food processing shared their experience and also gave their suggestions and inputs for the food processing sector. Dr S K Goyal, Additional Chief Secretary, Maharashtra recounted the great benefit that had accrued to the farmers through National Mission on Food Processing Lt. Gen.(Retd) A K Singh, Lt

Governor, Andaman & Nicobar Islands noted that 30% of India's fish resources was in A & N Islands and they would collaborate with Andhra Pradesh for the fisheries sector. Mahadev Naik, Minister for Industries, Goa, suggested that cold storage should be set up in villages for processing fish and meat.

Union Food Processing Industries Minister appreciated the exchange of ideas through this brainstorming session and assured the representatives from different states/UT's that their suggestions have been noted down and suitable action would be taken so that the bottlenecks in the setting of Food Processing Units were removed. The state Ministers from Goa, Manipur, Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Karnataka welcomed this initiative of Ministry of Food Processing Industries and felt it would help in solving problems and encourage faster setting up of food processing industry thereby reducing wastage and ensuring better price to farmers.

The minister also informed that her Ministry was looking at a new scheme of Mega Food Parks where cluster based approach would be followed which gives flexibility to the prospective entrepreneur regarding the area and the number and nature of units to be set up in the food parks. She invited suggestions from them so that district wise identification could be done on the surplus fruits & vegetables in that area. The Union Minister also stressed the need to collaborate & collectively participate in food Shows abroad under "Brand India."

Ministers from Goa, Manipur, Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Karnataka attended the meeting. Earlier, Secretary, Ministry of Food Processing, Siraj Hussain welcomed the gathering.