

Saffron cultivation begins in Ladakh

L-G VK Saxena saffron plantation aimed at promoting crop diversification and creating new avenues for enhancing farmers' incomes

Leh, October 2: A chunk of land in Leh, which was barren till 3 months ago, is all set to grow some exquisite saffron for the first time in Ladakh.

Buoyed by the stupendous success of the Liliun flower fields in Ladakh, Lieutenant Governor Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena has undertaken another agricultural-diversification exercise of growing saffron in the cold desert of Ladakh. As an ambitious experiment, nearly 800 kg corms (90,000 nos.) of premium Iranian saffron have been planted over nearly 4000 square meters of land, which was earlier barren and has been recently restored and rejuvenated, as part of Project Him Sarovar, under the guidance of L-G Shri Saxena. Agriculture experts said these saffron corms are expected to produce a good quantity of saffron.

The initiative is guided by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of diversifying traditional agricultural practices for financial sustainability and economic empowerment of the farmers and the youth. Saffron plantation in Ladakh builds on the Administration's successful experiment with high-value floriculture, particularly the massive cultivation of Liliun and Gladiolus in Leh, that has opened new employment and livelihood opportunities for farmers, Self-Help Groups and other local entrepreneurs.

The pilot saffron cultivation is being undertaken at Command Area Gate No. 27 at Spituk Pharka in Leh. For this purpose, high-quality Iranian saffron corms with a circumference of 8 to 10 cm, a diameter of 2.5 to 3 cm or larger, and a weight of 10 grams or more, which are considered the best corms, have been planted. These specifications are considered suitable for high-quality saffron production.

L-G Shri Saxena said the saffron plantation has immense potential to strengthen our local economy by introducing another high-value crop under Ladakh's unique high-altitude agro-climatic conditions. This, he said, would also bust the myth that saffron cannot be grown in Ladakh and that the barren or degraded land could not be restored.

"Our endeavour is to transform degraded and barren land into productive assets and create new opportunities for our farmers. The introduction of saffron is another important experiment in crop diversification, which can open a new avenue for enhancing farmers' incomes through a premium-value crop," said L-G Saxena.

Saffron is a high-value crop with strong market demand and commands a premium price, offering the potential to provide farmers with an additional and remunerative source of income. Jammu and Kashmir is the primary region for saffron cultivation in India, accounting for approximately 90 per cent of the country's total production. Its introduction in Ladakh is, therefore, being undertaken as a pilot to assess its suitability to the region's climatic conditions and explore its economic potential.

It may be noted that the saffron plantation site is part of the 800 acres of land being restored in Leh by bringing fresh water from the adjoining Igoo-Phey irrigation canal, which was recently restored and operationalised. On the directions of the Lieutenant Governor, unutilised or excess water from the canal is being channelled towards the barren land to increase its moisture content and make it suitable for cultivation.

The Command Area also has four water ponds as part of Project Him Sarovar, which are located adjacent to the site, with a combined storage capacity of around 24 million litres.

