

4 districts in Rajasthan set to become hubs of fennel production

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Four desert districts in Rajasthan, where farmers depend on saline water for irrigation, are set to emerge as hubs of fennel production following a three-year-long study that examined the yield of different varieties of the crop through drip irrigation with brackish water. The research also dealt with the management of salt-affected soils where fennel is cultivated.

Researchers of the Swami Keshwanand Rajasthan Agricultural University, Bikaner, conducted the study in Bikaner, Nagaur, Churu, and Barmer districts. The trials measured the

yield and tested salt tolerance of the different fennel varieties and found encouraging results.

Taxonomically classified as *Foeniculum vulgare*, fennel is a hardy, perennial herb with yellow flowers and feathery leaves.

‘Remunerative option’

Drip irrigation with saline water could expand the area under fennel production and increase productivity to make agriculture remunerative for farmers cultivating the spice, Bhumendra Singh, project in-charge of the All India Coordinated Research Project told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Singh said the fennel variety, RF-290, was found



Fennel grown at the Agricultural Research Station in Bikaner during a study on drip irrigation with saline water. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to be viable for irrigation with saline water.

The experimental irrigation led to the production of about nine quintals of fennel per hectare and good production of fennel can also be obtained in

areas where farming is done through tube wells, the study showed.

The trials were held at the Agricultural Research Station, Bikaner, situated 9 km from the district headquarters and three km



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from the university.

Saline water with electrical conductivity of 4 deciSiemens per metre (dS/m) can be used for irrigating the RF-290 variety, according to the study.

Rameshwar Lal Meena, principal scientist, Central Soil Salinity Research Institute, Karnal, who coordi-

nated the project's activities, said the saline water selected for fennel production would not have an adverse impact on the productivity of farmland.

“Farmers in the desert region may grow fennel as an alternative to cumin, which is often destroyed due to frost,” he said.

Rajasthan and Gujarat are the leading fennel-producing States in the country, contributing about

96% of the total production. In Rajasthan, the highest amount of fennel is cultivated in Nagaur district, covering 10,000 hectares. Its cultivation also takes place in Sirohi, Jodhpur, Jalore, Bharatpur, and Sawai Madhopur districts.