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Post-harvest losses: reasons and strategies to reduce them

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Today, one of the main global challenges is how to ensure food security for growing world population. In developing countries, poor post-harvest handling and poorly developed infrastructure contribute to loss of quality and massive quantities of fruits. Obviously, one of the major ways to ensure food security is by reducing these losses. Therefore, Post-harvest loss is increasingly recognized as part of an integrated approach to realizing agriculture's full potential to meet the world's increasing food needs. Post-harvest loss refers to measurable quantitative and qualitative fruits loss in the postharvest system from harvest to consumption. India emerging as a major producer country of fruits and vegetables in the world. Also, horticultural crops form a significant part of total agricultural produce in the India and have become key drivers of economic development in many of the states in the country. But the extent of post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables in India varies from 4.58% to 15.88%

due to lack of awareness about harvesting, improper packaging, transportation and storage practices and inadequate marketing infrastructure. Since, fruits and vegetables are highly perishable, require more care during and after harvesting. To improve quality and prolong shelf-life of horticultural produces, pre-harvest factors influencing fruit quality must be investigated and properly understood. Harvesting of fruits is one of the important operations because quality of a produces cannot be improved after harvest, only maintained. Therefore, it is important to harvest at the proper maturity stage and at peak quality to ensure quality and storage life of fruits. After harvesting of fruit, pre-cooling is helpful in maintaining the quality of fruits and it is also an essential component for cold chain. Post-harvest management practices especially cleaning, washing, sorting, grading, cold storage and proper packaging extend shelf life of horticultural perishables.

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