

## Coronavirus-hit passenger-load knocks off exports of Kerala's vegetables to half

Exports of vegetables and fruits to the Gulf countries via three Kerala airports fell 50% from the impact of COVID-19. Because of this, the price of bananas went down to Rs 10 per kilo from rs 45 in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, much to the delight of buyers of the two



states. Farmers in South Tamil Nadu and in Kerala, through Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode airports, export about Rs 2 crore worth vegetables per day to Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia is the biggest importer. Banana and pineapple account for as much as 70% of the green exports from Kerala. Of the banana varieties, Nendran plantain leads the food preferences of Kerala's 20 lakh diaspora families fanning out in the GCC nations. The three airports export around \$1,056 million worth greens to Gulf countries. "There is no import ban to fruits and vegetables from India so far, due to Covid-19, except in Kuwait, but the fluctuations in logistics have affected the export volumes," said Dil Koshi, secretary, APPEXA (Agricultural Products and Processed Food Exporters Association) told FE. It is the shift of Gulf flights from wide-bodied aircraft to narrow-bodied aircraft, due to low passenger load factor, that has hit the air cargo carrying capacity, thus trimming vegetable exports from 200 tonne to 100 tonne per day. Frequent cancellations of flights between Kerala and Gulf have also affected the export volumes. Saudi Arabia has banned travel to India. Early this week, several flight operators including Air India, Qatar Airways, Oman Air, Bahrain Air and Saudi Airlines have cancelled services to the Gulf from Kozhikode airport. Tamil Nadu farmers are equally hit as they supply much of the perishable products exports through the Kerala airports. Kamalakkannan Pandiyan, who cultivates Nendran variety banana in three acres in Nagercoil, said that he was aghast to be told that his freshly harvested banana clusters, which were to be taken to be loaded to Thiruvananthapuram international airport, could not be accepted. "It costs Rs 2 lakh to breed Nendran variety plantain in one acre and if the assured market fails, we'll be pushed to debt," he said. In Tamil Nadu, farmers in Trichy alone have set aside 25,000 acre for banana cultivation, according to Murugan, deputy director, agriculture marketing, Trichy. Last year, it was Nipah virus scare in Kozhikode that tripped Kerala's export basket through the vegetable export ban. This had trimmed exports by 14%

year on year. “Usually from March to October, Gulf countries nurse a warm season appetite for fruits like banana and pineapple from South India. That air cargo issues cause loss of this market is alarming,” said PE Ashraf Ali, Pomona Exports, Kozhikode. Free-falling prices of Nendran banana have become a windfall gain for the local value-addition business like fried banana chips units in Kerala. Pineapple, a key export item, however has managed to retain its local price at Rs 30 per kilo.

Source: [Financial express, March 18, 2020 \(verbatim reproduced\)](#)