

O-69 (121)**BANANA INDUSTRY OF PAKISTAN: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

Aish Muhammad, National Agriculture Research Center, Park Road, Islamabad 45500, Pakistan; aish.muhammad@yahoo.com (Presenting author)

Dr. Iqbal Hussain, National Agriculture Research Center, Park , 45500 federal Islamabad, Pakistan; iqbal_abi@yahoo.com

Dr. Kazim Ali, National Agriculture Research Center, Park , 45500 federal Islamabad, Pakistan; kazim76@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Zeesha Hyder, COMSATS Institute of Technology, 45500 Islamabad, Pakistan; mzeeshanhyder@gmail.com

Dr. Ghulam Muhammad Ali, National Agriculture Research Center, Park , 45500 federal Islamabad, Pakistan; drgmali@yahoo.ca

The banana is a major cash crop in south-east of Pakistan cultivated over an area of 32000 hectares. Feeding its own population of 200 million, it has great potential of export to its neighboring countries especially Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Northern part of China. With the development of CEPEC these opportunities has increased many fold and more importantly Pakistan will be able to share the production technology of this fruit. Banana industry of Pakistan has been operating at very low productivity and yield (about 7 times less) as compared to other regional countries such as India where average yield since 2000 to 2013 was about 32.9 tons/Ha and in China 29 tones/Ha. This low yield obtained in Pakistan, was because of many factors including re-planting of infected suckers and unavailability of healthy disease free suckers, poor crop management, lack of skills and post-harvest losses. The efforts were initiated to resolve these issues through the introduction of new banana cultivars to replace single banana cultivar (Basrai). These banana cultivars were acquired from China and International Banana Germplasm Repository Belgium. After multiplication through tissue culture and adaptability trials, four cultivars namely Grand Naine, William Hybrid, Brazilian and Pisang were recommended for commercial cultivation. Initially plants of these cultivars were produced through in vitro techniques by public sector and distributed among farmers free of cost or at subsidized rates. Trainings of farmers, extension workers and representatives of NGOs were conducted for handling of tissue culture materials and field plantation. Keeping in view the demand of healthy banana plants, a number of private tissue culture labs has initiated this activity and in future will be able not only to meet local demand but also export to neighboring countries if required. In future the major challenge of this industry is to maintain the phytosanitary conditions of banana fields and implementation of global standards to harvest the maximum benefits of banana industry through export to regional countries and efforts have been initiated to meet the challenge.

Keywords: banana, tissue culture, field adaptability, public sector