



2528-9705



## INVESTIGATING THE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED FOR THE PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING OF DATES IN SARAVAN

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the date marketing of Saravan in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. The area under cultivation of the city is 13000 ha and the production rate is 40,000 tons. This city is one of the most fertile areas to grow date palms in Iran. The product quality is influenced by such important factors as cultivar, weather conditions, and the quality and quantity of crop improvement operation. Most of the crop improvement activities in groves of date palm included pollination, nutrition, irrigation, thinning, the coverage of clusters, and fighting pests and diseases, which are among inevitable principles in producing quality products, are not applied in groves of date palm for various reasons. The research is applied in terms of survey-documentary research method and has studied the relationships between independent and dependent variables, using descriptive and analytical method. Cluster random sampling method has been used and such cases as the department of domestic and foreign studies, priorities-setting, policy making and support have been examined. The results showed that increasing education, decreasing bureaucracy and administrative inhibitive criteria, more stable rules and regulations, and timely notification of export laws, applying government supportive policies and etc., have led to a reduction in problems on date export.*

**Keywords:** Product Marketing, Wholesale, Date Packaging and Processing

### INTRODUCTION

Today, in many developing countries, increasing production is only part of the agricultural sector's tasks, and another important part is the marketing of products. In fact, marketing system is responsible for the distribution of agricultural products. If marketing system of agricultural products a country has more capacities, it will, on the one hand, promote the well-being of consumer and producer, and, on the other hand, provide more employment opportunities. So far, many studies have been conducted on racial foods such as date. Date palm is one of the most important horticultural products in Iran, and Iran is one of the main producers and exporters of the product in the world. Despite the fact that Iran has a good position in terms of date type in the world, paying no attention to the marketing of the product and the lack of investment, including the lack of cold storage facilities and the lack of proper and sanitary packaging, the lack of complementary industries, high costs of date production and harvesting has caused producers to face the various problems in domestic markets, and exporters in the foreign markets will also be in a weaker position compared to exporters from other countries.

Hosseini and Hooman (2007) examined two indices of concentration ratio and Herfindahl of the global market structure of date as well as the target markets for exporting Iranian date, and the result of the research was that by fluctuations that occurred during 2001-2008, the global production structure of dates has the multilateral monopoly and Iran's share in global production has increased.

In a fairly comprehensive study, Khodadad Kashi & Shahiki-Tash (2005) investigated the global markets of most export products. According to the findings of this study, it was estimated that the global market structure for pistachios, handmade carpet, saffron, date, and raisins have high degree of concentration. The concentration rate on caviar, grape and apple markets was assessed moderately.

In many cases, measuring barriers to entry and economies of scale is not easy; therefore, in many studies, concentration indices is basically used to understand the structure of markets (Stiglitz, 1993; Shephard, 1990; Maddala, Dobson and Miller, 1995).

Sistan and Baluchestan is one of the most fertile areas to grow date palms in Iran with area under cultivation equal to 3544415 ha, average yield of 6360 kg/ha, but given the fact that date breeders in Sistan and Baluchestan face many problems in the marketing stages of the product, this has prevented them from earning enough income from their date production and caused the dissatisfaction of this hard-working people. The aim of this study was to investigate services, different marketing paths and price at producer, wholesaler, retailer and exporter levels, determine the efficiency of different paths, and investigate and determine the marketing margin of Mazafati dates for various agents in Sistan and Baluchestan.

## RESEARCH LITERATURE

### *Dates and its Features*

Dates are considered as the most important fruits grown in hot desert regions. The exact origin of the date is unknown, however, it is estimated that the date palm was cultivated in Iran about 2000 BC. On average, with having 230,000 ha of cultivated land, Iran produces more than 1 million tons of dates per year; According to these figures, we find that the date production rate in Iran is much lower than the global average. So that Iran now produces between 4 and 5 tons of dates per hectare. After Egypt, Iran is the second largest producer of dates in the world.

The dates contain 25% Sucrose, 50% Glucose, and Albuminous substances, pectin and water. It also contains various vitamins including vitamins A, B, C, E and some mineral salts.

A kilogram of dates produces more than 3,000 calories of energy, and has 15 to 30 percent of water. The date fruit has 2% protein and less than 2% fat and salts. Depending on the type of date and the ripening stage of it, its protein and water are varied. Date has a small amount of sodium.

In addition, due to low fat content, date is considered as a low-fat food. Due to insignificant amounts of sodium, patients with high blood pressure will have no problem with taking it, unless its unbalanced consumption causes overweight.

The stipe of date, despite having the large diameter, has always maintained the original structure, in other words, the main structure of the monocot stem. In the peripheral concentric rings of the stem, the vascular bundle is too much and small, and due to the small number of wooden vessels and the lack of sclerenchyma ring, they have less stiffness around themselves. After a passing several mid-nodes, the vascular bundles in the periphery of stem



are gradually concentrated toward its central part, and in the next nodes, when they were aggregated in center, they are concentrated toward the outside of the stem and enter into the leaf. There is also the uniform parenchyma in the leaf structure and palisade parenchyma is not visible beneath overlying surface.

Enzymatic and non-enzymatic agents can cause the date to darken. This increases with temperature and humidity. In order to deactivate enzymatic agents, the oxygen concentration should be reduced in the environment. Microbial fermentation causes the dates to be sour that contain more than 25% moisture.

Sugar crystallization on the fruit's skin and flesh occurs in soft date cultivar. Although sugar crystallization doesn't affect the taste of the date, it changes its tissue and appearance. In order to prevent sugar crystallization, keep the date at the proper temperature.

When storage, it is infected by the larvae of some insects. In order to prevent this infection, dates can be stored and disinfected by disinfectants such as methyl bromide or carbon dioxide and in anti-insect packs.

### *Date problems in Saravan*

#### 1. The Existence of Sub-ownership

The existence of sub-ownership has abundantly observed in Saravan due to financial and information poverty as well as the livelihood economy of farmers.

#### 2. Date Fruit Rancidity

Another factor in reducing the production of dates is the rancidity of date fruit among clusters before pruning.

#### 3. The Traditional Production of Dates

Despite the fact that people are the date exporter for several decades, exporting the product is still traditional and not industrialized. While some countries (including France) re-export dates and earn a lot of profits, by buying date in bulk from Iran and processing it. The powerful presence of date mafia in third world countries and, most importantly, the traditional production of dates in Iran, is one of the reasons for not developing this industry in the country.

#### 4. Ignoring the Management Principles

The main problem which farmers have is to ignore the principles of management and non-observance of interspacing of planting. The intervals between palms should usually be 8 meters, so that they can receive sufficient light and their fruition rate increase. While Iranian farmers typically plant trees at 6 meter intervals, this ultimately leads to quality loss and a reduction in the price of their dates.

#### 5. Selling Dates at Much Lower Prices than the Global Average

The price of Iranian dates is very low compared to the world dates, so that Iranian date price is four times lower than that of date exporting countries, including Tunisia.

The date price of Sistan and Baluchestan is similar to that of Iranian date in the world, i.e. as the price of Iranian date is lower than other countries, date of Sistan and Baluchestan and Saravan are also sold at a lower price than other provinces. Therefore, the farmers of Sistan and Baluchestan and Saravan take a little portion of the profit from selling their date product.

#### 6. Export Barriers



Among the export barriers of the dates of the region, one can be referred to the losses of dates at the harvesting stage, poor advertising, inappropriate packaging, lack of mechanized facilities, and the supply of the product in bulk.

#### 7. Drought

Over the last several years, the drought is caused irreparable damage to farmers and their groves of date palm, causing the destruction of a wide range of their best date palms. During this drought, due to the drying of products and negligence of people, a wide range of them was destroyed by fire, which caused a significant drop in the production of date and its supply in the region.

#### 8. Among other problems for the date production in Saravan, one can finally be referred to inappropriate washing, non-standard disinfection and lack of moisture adjustment.

After stating problems in the above-mentioned items, we will now come up with solutions to these problems.

### Product Marketing

Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups work together to meet their needs and demands through the production and exchange of goods (Cutler & Armstrong, 2006). This parameter consists of 4 elements that include product, price, promotion and distribution (Ebrahimi, Venus and Rusta, 2001).

#### 1) Product

What can meet a need or demand includes not only physical properties, but also elements such as packaging, guarantee, after-sales service, and product name.

The main aspects of the product

Product benefits: This includes factors that customers consider them as their need estimator

Product Attributes: This includes factors that are in second place in terms of importance, such as naming and packaging

Marketing Support Services: These services include items such as delivery, after-sales service. It is considered as the foundation of the product and is involved in increasing customer satisfaction (Phillips, Doole & Lowe, 1994).

#### 2) Quality

This shows the goods ability to perform tasks and includes attributes such as durability, reliability, accuracy, ease of use, easy-to-repair. But the quality of strategic management means outpacing of rivals in the supply of goods that meet the needs of customers and is a competitive opportunity (Cutler & Armstrong, 2006). Total Quality Management: Quality is not what we consider to be part of the production process, but it is the essence of the organization (Ebrahimi, Venus and Rusta, 2001). Total quality is the participation of all employees, including managers, workers and other employed people to continually improve the quality of goods and services, which customer satisfaction place at the head of its objectives (Montaghemi, 2003).

#### 3) Packaging

Product packaging is any container or package in which the product is available for sale on the market or by which the necessary information about the product is transferred to customer.

Product packaging is a costly and important part of the marketing strategy and is especially important for food (Ebrahimi, Venus and Rusta, 2001).



Packaging product, despite its high cost, is essential, because it has many benefits for producer, retailer and consumer. Packaging is often very effective in the ease of use, transport, conservation and storage and lifecycle of product. The mindset that it creates in the consumer is also of significant importance. Packaging may indicate the status and even the quality of the product (Ebrahimi, Venus and Rusta, 2001).

A successful packaging should attract attention, differentiate the company's goods from competing goods, quickly transfer the identity of the goods, increase the value of the goods, stay in the customer's memory, and encourage customers to buy the goods (Iranmanesh, 2001)

#### 4) Price

Some believe that this parameter is the most independent and controllable element of marketing mix. It should be noted that this is influenced by factors such as exchange rate fluctuation, inflation, and alternative methods to cash payment (Phillips, Doole & Lowe, 1994). Customers create a balance between price and quality. In fact, the price of the product should represent the perceptive value of product consumer (Cateora, Graham, 1999)

Agum et al. (2012) used Herfindahl index to analyze the wholesale market for frozen fish in Nigeria over the period from 2000 to 2010. The value of the Herfindahl index calculated for this study was 0.21, which indicates that the wholesale market structure for the frozen fish in Nigeria is quite competitive.

Adtonji and Adbesian (2008) used the Herfindahl index to examine the market structure of plane tree in Nigeria, that the value of the index was 0.123, indicating that the market of plane tree is quite competitive in the country.

Folayan and et al. (2006) used the concentration ratio and Herfindahl indices to examine the market structure of the cocoa in southwest part of Nigeria and concluded that the cocoa market in the southwestern part of the country is quite competitive.

By examining the market structure and the effect of transfer (Beef prices), Hosseini and et al. (2010) have shown that due to the improper distribution of cattle housing and slaughterhouse in different regions of Iran, the non-competitive structure of the processing and marketing industry of the goods, the large number of intermediaries in the marketing chain, diversity in methods of buying and selling live cattle is constantly changing throughout the year and in different parts of the country. In addition to fluctuation in price, the market margin has increased and the well-being of beef producers and consumers has decreased. The existence of non-competitive structure of slaughterhouses in the country has increased the market margin of beef.

Pirie et al. (2010), in an article entitled "Investigating the Market Structure and Analysis of Iran's Apricot Target Market", using indices of concentration ratios and Herfindahl, examined the Iranian apricot and dried apricot demand market structure and its changes during 1997-2007. According to the findings of this study, they concluded that in 1997, one country (Turkey) has the monopoly of 27% of the dried apricot, two countries (Turkey, Ukraine) has 52%, three countries (Turkey, Ukraine and Russia) has 68%, and four countries (Turkey, Ukraine, Russia and Germany) has 79%, and between 2001 and 2005, Iraq and Germany were the first and the second importers of this product from Iran, respectively.

Mahdipour et al. (2005) examined the marketing of potato product in Iran. They examined the marketing margin and marketing cost coefficient as well as the factors affecting the marketing margin using markup functions. The results indicated that the marketing margin of potato in





Iran is affected by several factors such as wholesale price, retail price, export rate, production rates and exchange rate in free market, among which retail price is the most important factor affecting the total marketing margin and retail margin.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is applied in terms of the type of research, and it is a survey- documentary, descriptive and analytical research in terms of research method. In order to achieve the research goals, the statistics required are collected in two ways: a documentary study through the official sources of relevant libraries and resources, and in form of survey by completing the questionnaire at producer, retailer, wholesaler, and exporter levels in a cross-sectional manner in 2016 crop year via interview in Saravan. The selection of date growers was done by a two-stage cluster sampling method; at first, among the cities of Sistan and Baluchestan, 4 cities was selected based on the area under cultivation of the product, and then, in each city, according to the number of date growers and using random sampling method, several villages were selected. In the second stage, the farmers of selected villages were selected and interviewed using a systematic random sampling. The statistical method of the study is represented as frequency and percentage and tables and diagrams are used.

The marketing margin is divided into two parts, wholesale margin and retail margin, which are calculated as follows:

$$MM = MR + MW = PR - PF$$

$$MW = PW - PF$$

In the above equations, MR is the retail margin, MW is wholesale margin, MM is marketing margin, PR is retail price, PW is wholesale price, and PF is farm price. In order to determine the share of marketing factors in retail prices, the following relationships were applied:

$$100 SH_p = (PF/PR) *$$

$$100 SH_w = ((PW - PF)/PR) *$$

$$100 SH_r = ((PR - PW)/PR) *$$

In these equations, SH<sub>p</sub>, SH<sub>w</sub>, and SH<sub>r</sub> are the share of the producer, the share of the wholesaler and the share of the retailer from the retail price, respectively, other variables were already defined. The definition of Shefred and Fotol were used to determine the marketing system. To do so, they have proposed the following formula for measuring marketing efficiency:

$$100 ME = (Ad / C) *$$

ME: Marketing efficiency

AD: Value added of product

C: The cost of marketing services

The following relationships are used to determine the net profit of marketing operations at three levels of producer, wholesaler and retailer:

Net profit of marketing operations of producers per kg of date = average price received by producer (total marketing costs of producer + date price before marketing operations)

Net profit of marketing operations of wholesaler = price received by wholesaler (total marketing cost of wholesaler + purchase price)

Net profit of marketing operations of retailer = price received by retailer (total marketing cost of wholesaler + purchase price)

Net profit of the marketing operations of exporter = price received by exporter (total marketing cost of exporter + Purchase price)

### **Research Objectives**

#### **Overall Objective**

Investigating the important factors in export development, problems and proposed solutions for production and processing of date in Saravan

#### **Minor Objective**

1. Investigating the problems of domestic market of date in Saravan
2. Investigating the role of Iran's economic factors in the export development rate of date product
3. Investigating the domestic markets in Saravan and other cities

### **Data Analysis**

The data in Table 1 indicate the cost of services and the net profit of the marketing operations, various factors of the marketing of Mazafati date at producer, wholesaler, retailer and exporter levels. The results indicate that date growers play a minor role in marketing operations of their product, and their operations include the harvesting and transporting of products, with spending 120 Rials, and because of their smaller services, they earn little net profit of marketing operations that equals to 280 Rials.

Wholesalers and exporters spend 980 and 222 Rials in date marketing operations, respectively, and also earn the net profit that equals to 1520 and 668 Rials. Retailers also spend 120 Rials in the date marketing operation and earn net profit that equals to 1880 Rials. They said that the net profit of marketing operations at the retail level is higher than other levels.

There was observed a special case, when examining the marketing cost and profit of exporters, given that all exports of the Mazafati dates to Pakistan were carried out in a limited time period (20 days before and 10 days after Ramadan). By exporting dates to Russia, Poland, Sweden and Belgium, by spending a marketing cost of 7672 Rials, one of the exporters managed to earn a net profit of his marketing operations that was equal to 5028.



**Table 1: Cost of Services and Net Profit of Marketing Operations and Various Factors of Mazafati Date Marketing (Kilogram-Rials)**

Title	Producer	Wholesaler	Retailer 1	Retailer 2	Exporter
The cost of marketing services	120	980	120	60	222
Net profit of marketing	280	1520	1880	1940	668

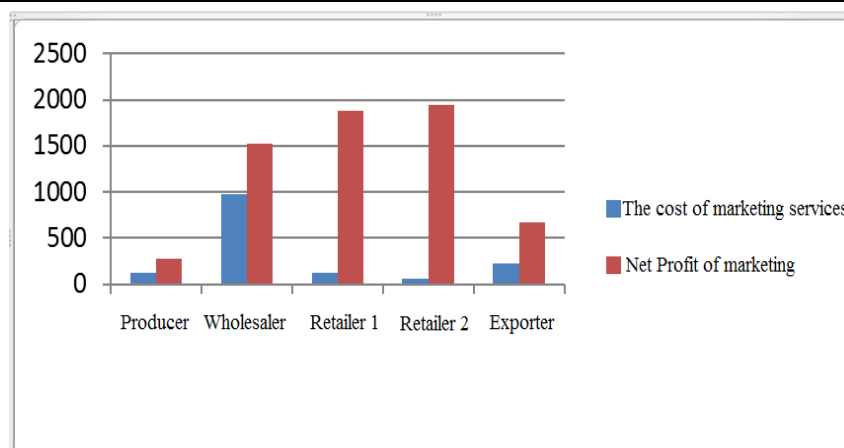


Figure 1: The Cost of Services and Net Profit of Marketing Operations

### Cost Coefficient, Efficiency, and Marketing Margin

The total margin of marketing, retail margins and wholesale margin of date is 4500, 2000, and 2500, respectively. The results show that the distance between consumer payment and producer receipt per kilogram of Mazafati date is 4,500 Rials, of which 2,000 Rials are related to the retail margin and 2500 Rials are for the wholesale margin.

The marketing cost coefficient is also  $r = 28.68\%$  that the coefficient indicates that 64.28 percent of the retail price of Mazafati dates is related to the costs of product marketing. The results also show that the shares of producers, wholesalers and retailers from retail prices are 35.71%, 35.71% and 28.58%, respectively. An important point obtained from comparing the share of marketing factors is that the significant share of the producer lies in the price of the date consumer.

Table 2: Marketing Efficiency in Two Main Paths of Marketing of Mazafati Dates in Sistan and Baluchestan

Path	Value added	The cost of marketing services	Marketing efficiency
Path A	4500	1220	27%
Path B	2000	60	3%

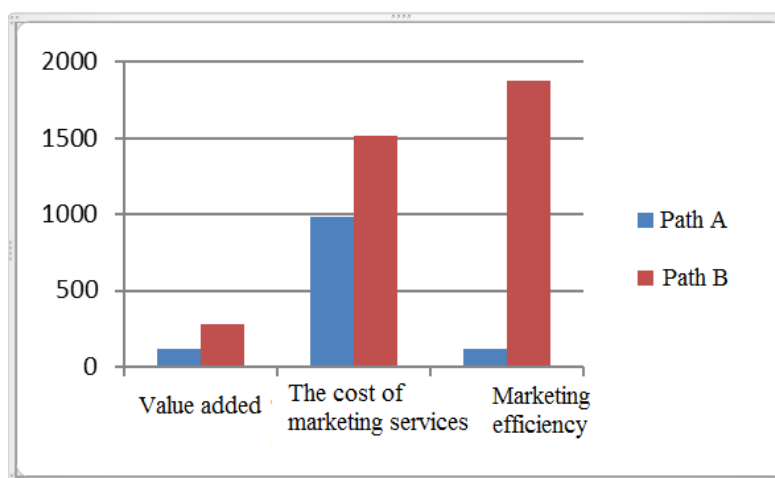


Figure 2. Marketing Efficiency on Two Main Paths of Date Marketing



As observed in Table 2, marketing efficiency on paths A and B is 27% and 3%, respectively, indicating that 27% and 3% of the value added were spent on the cost of marketing services.

**Table 3: Producers and Consumer Path**

Marketing path	Price inefficiency	Technical inefficiency	Total inefficiency
Producer, wholesaler, retailer and consumer	0.27	0.11	0.38
Producer, wholesaler and consumer	0.32	0.13	0.45
Producer, retailer and consumer	0.25	0.1	0.26
Producer and consumer	0.03	0	0.03

The data in Table 3 indicate that marketing inefficiency has the least value on the path in which the least marketing factors are placed (producers and consumer path). In other words, in that path, marketing efficiency has the highest value. Therefore, if measures are taken to create marketing cooperatives and distribute the dates, the growers will be more involved in marketing, and the interference of intermediaries and dealers will be reduced. That accordingly, the cost of waste is reduced, while marketing efficiency increases.

**Table 4: Indices of Concentration Ratio and Herfindahl**

Year	Concentration index (Cr)	Herfindahl index (H)
2003	0.74	0.1892
2004	0.72	0.1760
2005	0.72	0.1827
2006	0.72	0.1714
2007	0.70	0.1734
2008	0.76	0.1924
2009	0.72	0.1771
2010	0.76	0.1958
2011	0.76	0.1909



The indices of concentration and Herfindahl were used to investigate the domestic market structure of the date product (2003-2011), which its results are presented in Table 4.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- ***Reduction of bureaucracy and administrative inhibitive criteria:***

One of the important issues in Iran is the presence of administrative inhibitive bureaucracy in the administrative system. Therefore, in order to resolve the unsuitable bureaucracy, the overall revision of the administrative system is necessary. So that the duties and responsibilities of each organ are clear, and repetitive items are removed, and all are for export development.

- ***Stability of laws and regulations and timely notification of export laws:***

Given that the laws and regulations affect the export, it is recommended that by choosing correct policies, the rules and regulations is provided timely, and are available to the exporters. Therefore, the right time for formulating, approving and notification the rules on the one hand, and flexibility in relation to the conditions must be such that, of course, the characteristics of the stability is preserved and the investors are assured.

**Education:**

Despite the high quantity and production rate of date as well as the volume of its exports, the quality of product produced and exported is very low. Unfortunately, the weakness of the technical knowledge and illiteracy or low literacy of most producers, lack of familiarity with production laws and regulations, the lack of familiarity with contemporary science on the production of healthy and hygienic products, the lack of familiarity with the standards of marketable products of the countries of destination, non-observance of technical issues on implanting, growing and harvesting of dates has led to the production of a very low quality product. Given the ever-increasing advances in science and the emergence of new nutrition issues, physical and mental health, social, and etc., demands and marketability of various products have undergone dramatic changes, and producers and exporters must necessarily meet the standards of products accepted by reference markets. With regard to the issues mentioned, we see that the education plays a key role in export. Because education is fundamental and encompasses a wide range of exports, it is essential. Therefore, it is suggested that the necessary education is taken into consideration on definitions and terms, on transportation, insurance, packaging, disinfection and product grading, on legal issues relating to export, such as, failure to fulfill obligations, non-payment of the cost of goods by the buyer; and the education of palm breeders on the technical issues of implanting, growing, and the harvesting of dates is necessary, and in general, any education that the country's export system needs must be considered.

- **Investment in the transport sector**

Most date production, processing, and packaging corporation (including in Khuzestan) are forced to transport their products to export terminals at very remote locations, thus, in addition to impossibility of controlling and monitoring how to load and transport the product, the heavy costs of displacement also impose on them. The lack of suitable cold storage facilities with sufficient capacity for initial storage of the product causes a great deal of quality damages to the date fruit and therefore its loss of export value. Given the shortcoming that Iran has in various dimensions in transport sector, it is suggested that both the government and the private sector invest in developing the country road network, creating the necessary facilities for using the aviation network, and using containers equipped with cooling equipment.

- **Government supportive policies**

One of the biggest challenges faced by date exporters is the relative volatility of the global price of the export date and price volatility of inputs inside the country. Ever-increasing inflation and price volatility impose a lot of daily expenses on date exporters and will follow heavy financial losses. In order to prevent such losses, the government can, taking into account available facilities and data, adopt the best and most effective policy. Increasing export subsidies, ensuring exchange rate fluctuations, restoring customs duties, exemptions or deductions from income taxes are among actions that the government can take to help exporters.

- **Investment in advertising**

Investing in cross-border advertising, especially local TV of importing country and specialized directories can play a significant role in gaining market share and market penetration. Of course, the presence of active commercial agents, representatives and representative offices abroad should not be ignored. Active attendance at international food industry exhibitions, promoting the use of Iranian dates in international flights and embassies of Iran in foreign countries can be a suitable trend for advertising the product.



- *Improving the quality of produced date*

In order to improve the quality of dates, it is necessary to pay attention to the regeneration and revitalization of groves of date palm (for example, by replacing commercial cultivars instead of undesirable cultivars or sanitizing of groves of date palm as well as the product improvement principles). The mechanization of groves of date palm is also of special importance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Given that in the current marketing system, the wholesalers and retailers take a good portion of the profit and growers do not benefit much; on the other hand, the price of dates is much higher than the cost of marketing services, in order to reduce the retail and wholesale prices and thus reduce the marketing margin, the government can create marketing and distribution cooperatives with the participation of date growers in Sistan and Baluchestan.
2. Shortage of warehouse space and facilities for storage of the dates result in a reduction in the quality of the product supplied to the market and creating a lot of waste. Therefore, it is suggested that growers are organized in the form of marketing cooperatives and proceed to construct the warehouse and cold storage facilities through the funds received from the official sources.
3. Through the investment in the date processing industries (the production of date nectar and sap, liquid sugar, alcohol, vinegar, etc.), it is possible to use the date product at lower grades and prevent waste to a large extent.
4. Due to price inefficiency in Mazafati date marketing paths in Sistan and Baluchestan, and the low bargaining power of growers in determining the price, if measures are taken to provide more marketing services by growers and through the formation of marketing cooperatives, their bargaining power is increased, resulting in reduced marketing inefficiency.
5. Due to the lack of timely notification of a guaranteed purchase rate by the Rural Cooperative Organization, timely notification of the rate, and quick and cash payment by date producers can be a solution to eliminate profiteer seekers, dealer and prevent farm prices from falling.



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