

A Glance at Medicinal Herbs Production and Exports

Man's inclinations towards medicinal herbs during the closing years of the 20th century pictured a bright future for these products in the present century. Medicinal herbs were paid due attention only during the final years of the previous century. Statistics say that although in 1980 the sales index for medicinal herbs worldwide was 4.5 billion dollars, in 1990 it stood at 15.5 billion dollars and in 1999 European states, USA, Australia and Canada sold 70 billion dollars of medicinal herbs. Few fields can be found with such an outstanding growth in a period

of less than a decade.

The ever-increasing growth in medicinal herb production and consumption worldwide suggests that investment in this field is quite economical in the world, especially in Iran.

Iran enjoys diverse climatic conditions, which allows the growth of diverse plant species. Furthermore, being the torchbearer of the science of medicinal herbs, Iran possesses the most knowledgeable manpower on the field. These all contribute to make the conditions ripe for



Turnera diffusa
Damiana

investment in medicinal herbs in this country. If industrial nations claim to be ahead in technology, Iran can surpass them in medicinal herb production.

Some Years ago a regional tu-

torial workshop for medicinal herbs was established according to an agreement signed between the Asian-Pacific Center for Technology Transfer (APCTT) affiliated to the United Nations and the Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology (IROST), Researchers, experts, scientists and those concerned in research and industrial projects and activities of the nation attended the gathering. The objective behind the formation of this workshop was presenting the latest technical and scientific achievements on medicinal herbs. Experts unanimously believed that Iran enjoys a unique situation in the world as far as geographic features and variety of medicinal herbs is concerned, in a way that it is home to 80 percent of the world medicinal herbs a really rich country in medicinal herbs.

Some species of forest and pasture lands by-products grow in large quantities in Iran only, but due to the lack of required technology they are exported raw and in limited quantities to foreign markets. Given the fact that 80 percent of the world known medicinal herbs grow here in Iran, the annual \$10m exports of medicinal herbs, is

not a promising figure. Not only can medicinal herb exports earn 500-600 million dollars for the country, but also it can help preserve the soil, store water, improve living standards, supply food and finally protect the environment.

The majority of medicinal herbs byproducts such as, turpentine, gum tragacanth, galbanum, borage, sweetroot, forest tree fruits, myrtle leaf, madder, shallot, self-grown almond and wild pistachio, etc. are self-growing.

Of these, borage, garden thyme, sweetroot, glue powder, lotus tree leaf (chiefly used as a raw material for shampoo), galbanum (used for making perfume and is mainly exported to France) possess pharmaceutical properties.

We have no problem with botany and the majority of medicinal herbs bear the names of Iranian botanists.

We have no problem with botany either. There are numerous celebrated botanists in our country teaching in universities. The only impeding factor is the lack of equipment and intermediate industries. This is why we export these products in their



Echium vulgare
Viper's Bugloss



Verbena officinalis
Vervain



Echinacea angustifolia
Echinacea

raw form. For instance, we cannot make perfume out of galbanum and our use of turpentine is confounded to gums, cellophane, with a little use in leather and dye industries.

It should be noted that these plants are abundantly found in all regions of the nation but the provinces of Khorasan and Ilam rank first in medicinal herb production. Furthermore, over 2.5 million people across the nation - 99% of who are natives - deal with medicinal herbs directly or indirectly. However, there is no reliable statistics on the use of these herbs in various industries and factories.

Medicinal herbs are exported by the private sector in cooperation with the Export Promotion Center and the Ministry of Commerce with the full support of the Forest and Ranger Organization. At present, this sector exports over more than 3,000 tons of herbs, valued at over more than 15 million dollars to the Persian Gulf states and to some European countries including Germany and France, plus a few nearby nations such as Turkey, India and Pakistan.

Due to the potential sources of these products, efficient programming for development and

export of the herbs will earn hard currency well over the current \$15m, These programs must concentrate on export promotion and supporting exporters and investors, Among the required steps to be taken for this industry are: replacing the traditional methods of exploitation by industrial methods, attracting more and more native people to this industry to identify all possible profitable herbs, making supportive policies for cultivating medicinal herbs. Also imperative for the advancement of this industry are: importing the required technology for production and processing, coordination with the Ministry of Commerce for exports, creating links with research centers for cultivating medicinal herbs, etc.

Therefore, materializing the potential sources, protecting and developing the rare species, preservation of soil and water, preventing export of medicinal herbs in raw form, processing the herbs inside the country, making a balance between demand and supply of byproducts, reviving the destroyed area, etc., will lead to more jobs and income for the people, especially for the farmers. Developing medicinal herbs processing industries will promote the export of processed herbs and by-prod-

ucts, make a balance between livestock and pasture lands, prevent ever-increasing migration of villagers to major cities, and boost sustained development programs. Last but not the least, the variety of medicinal herbs in Iran is a God-given treasury that equals gold in value.



Chamomile recutita
Chamomile



Althaea officinalis
Marsh Mallow