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Basmati crying out for a Green Revolution

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BASMATI exports in 2004-05 touched an all-time high of 11.2 lakh tonnes, up 45%. With that, the million-tonne barrier on basmati exports was broken. In value terms, exports shot up to Rs 2,741 crore compared to Rs 1,990 crore in the previous year. Even non-basmati rice exports during the year touched 36.4 lakh tonnes or Rs 3,899.73 crore or in value terms.

Export of rice has emerged as a significant foreign exchange earner for the country, fetching \$1.48 billion in FY05, as against \$918 million in FY04.

Traders and exporters contend that India can definitely continue to maintain this tempo for both basmati and non-basmati rice.

Nonetheless, scientists say the time has come to create a Green Revolution just for the world's best known aromatic, long grained variety of rice. Particularly since there is a 2 tonne gap/ha between the actual realisation on productivity and what the farmer produces. To boost production

and exports, the farm ministry has a "Take Technology to the Farmer" plan to set up Centre of Excellence labs under the ICAR.

The Basmati Export Development Council (BEDC) is developing its own labs to focus on DNA characterisation, strict regulations on which may impact about 17% exports, particularly to the European market. By November this year, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) will also put in place a DNA testing facility for basmati rice exporters in order to comply with the demands of the European importers about the authenticity of

the exported consignment. "With state-of-the-art labs for DNA testing, we could focus on boosting our exports to W Asia and even the USA, even while working at ensuring that our basmati matches EU's exacting DNA-based standards," traders point out. Concerns on the EU trade front for Basmati are sharp enough here now, as developments on the front indicate. The European market for basmati rice had become a scramble among basmati rice exporters from India, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam and the US with both traditional and evolved varieties of basmati competing for a pie.

