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OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF POMEGRANATE PRODUCTION AND SALES IN SURKHANDARYA REGION

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Annotation: The article analyzes opportunities for increasing the efficiency of pomegranate production and sales in Surkhandarya region, based on real statistical and regulatory data. The practice of processing and export preparation is examined using the pomegranate clusters in Sherabad and Dashnabad districts, in particular the "Sherabad Anor Impeks" enterprise. The main problems related to certification costs, storage infrastructure, and shallow processing depth are identified, and directions for overcoming them are substantiated.

Keywords: pomegranate growing, Surkhandarya region, agro-cluster, export potential, processing, certification.

Annotatsiya: Maqolada Surxondaryo viloyatida anor ishlab chiqarish va sotish samaradorligini oshirish imkoniyatlari real statistik va me'yoriy ma'lumotlar asosida tahlil qilinadi. Sherobod va Dashnobod tumanlaridagi anorchilik klasterlari, xususan "Sherobod Anor Impeks" korxonasi misolida qayta ishlash va eksportga tayyorlash amaliyoti o‘rganiladi. Sertifikatlashtirish xarajatlari, saqlash infratuzilmasi va qayta ishlash chuqurligi bilan bog‘liq asosiy muammolar aniqlanib, ularni bartaraf etish yo‘nalishlari asoslanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar*:* anorchilik, Surxondaryo viloyati, agroklaster, eksport salohiyati, qayta ishlash, sertifikatlashtirish.

Аннотация: В статье на основе реальных статистических и нормативных данных анализируются возможности повышения эффективности производства и сбыта граната в Сурхандарьинской области. На примере гранатовых кластеров Шерабадского и Дашнабадского районов, в частности предприятия «Шерабад Анор Импекс», рассматривается практика переработки и подготовки продукции к экспорту. Выявлены основные проблемы, связанные с затратами на сертификацию, инфраструктурой хранения и недостаточной глубиной переработки, обоснованы направления их решения.

Ключевые слова*:* гранатоводство, Сурхандарьинская область, агрокластер, экспортный потенциал, переработка, сертификация.

Introduction

Uzbekistan is one of the leading pomegranate-growing countries in Central Asia and the CIS: more than 25 percent of all pomegranate orchards in the CIS countries are located in Uzbekistan [1]. Nationwide, farms of all categories harvest 82.9 thousand tonnes of pomegranates from a total area of 10.8 thousand hectares, and according to expert forecasts annual production is expected to reach

at least 600 thousand tonnes within the next 5-10 years [2, 3]. Fergana, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions have been identified as the main territorial drivers of this growth [3].

In Surkhandarya region, agriculture provides 42 percent of employment and accounts for 8 percent of the country's agricultural output [4], while fruits and vegetables make up 40.8 percent of the region's exports [5]. Pomegranate growing, particularly in Sherabad district, is regarded as one of the "growth points" of the region's fruit and vegetable sector, and more than 5 thousand residents of the district alone are engaged in this industry [6]. At the same time, the export and processing potential of the sector is not being fully realized. Therefore, the aim of the article is to identify the main factors limiting the efficiency of pomegranate production and sales in Surkhandarya region and to substantiate directions for overcoming them on the basis of real data.

Literature review

A study on the untapped economic opportunities of Surkhandarya region identifies agro-processing, along with transit logistics, as a particular priority [7]. A study of the regional features of establishing agro-clusters notes that the formation of a pomegranate growing and processing cluster in Dashnabad district of Surkhandarya region was planned within the second stage (2019-2025) of the national cluster development programme [8]. A certification guide prepared by international organizations substantiates that the application of international standards is a prerequisite for successful export activity for Uzbek farmers and exporters [9]. Nevertheless, the existing literature contains few studies that analyze the production-processing-export chain of the pomegranate sector as an integrated system, specifically in Surkhandarya region and using real enterprise data.

Research methodology

The study is based on the method of **content analysis of official statistical and regulatory documents**: national and regional statistics, Presidential resolutions (PQ-136) and the agro-cluster development programme were analyzed. Using **comparative analysis**, the indicators of Surkhandarya were compared with those of other regions (Kashkadarya, Fergana, Tashkent), while the **case study** method was used to examine processing practice at the "Sherabad Anor Impeks" enterprise.

Analysis and results

The main indicators of the pomegranate sector in Uzbekistan and Surkhandarya region are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Main indicators of the pomegranate sector in Uzbekistan and Surkhandarya region

Indicator	Value	Period
Area of pomegranate orchards in the country	10.8 thousand hectares	Current status
Gross pomegranate harvest in the country	82.9 thousand tonnes	Current status

Indicator	Value	Period
Forecast annual production volume	≥600 thousand tonnes	Next 5-10 years
Share of CIS pomegranate orchards located in Uzbekistan	>25%	Current status
Pomegranate exports of Surkhandarya region (2-month period)	823 tonnes (2nd place among regions)	January-February 2022
Share of fruits and vegetables in Surkhandarya exports	40.8%	2025

Source: compiled by the author based on data from [1, 2, 3, 5].

The table shows that Surkhandarya is among the leading regions of the country in pomegranate exports; however, fully realizing the five- to tenfold growth potential planned nationwide requires further strengthening of the production-processing chain.

The practical state of the processing stage can be seen in the example of "Sherabad Anor Impeks" LLC in Sherabad district: using modern technology worth 1 million dollars, pomegranates are sorted by taste, colour, weight and peel thickness; first-grade fruit is packed for export, second-grade fruit is processed into natural juice, and large warehouses have been built to store raw materials and finished products [6]. This model – combining sorting, export preparation and processing of secondary raw materials within a single enterprise – can be regarded as an effective approach that reduces product losses and creates added value.

Positive results have also been recorded in international markets: along with cherries, Uzbekistan has become a leading exporter of pomegranates to South Korea [10], which shows that, with proper certification and quality control, Surkhandarya pomegranates can also enter high-demand markets. At the same time, a number of problems limiting the efficiency of the sector, together with government measures aimed at solving them, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.

Main problems in the pomegranate sector and measures to solve them

Problem	Essence	Solution
High certification costs	Exporters incurred high costs by sending samples abroad for certificates such as GlobalGAP, Organic and ISO	Full state reimbursement of certification costs for entrepreneurs applying international standards (PQ-136)
Shallow processing depth	A large share of lower-grade produce was lost unprocessed or sold cheaply	Expanding capacities specialized in producing juice and concentrate from second-grade produce
Lack of storage and	High losses between harvest and	Building modern cold storage and

Problem	Essence	Solution
cooling infrastructure	sale	warehouse complexes on the basis of clusters
Narrow export markets	Exports oriented mainly to CIS markets	Diversification into new markets (Europe, the Middle East) based on the South Korean experience

Source: compiled by the author based on data from [9, 10] and Resolution PQ-136.

Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis shows that Surkhandarya region has significant natural and economic potential for pomegranate growing, and the cluster experience in Sherabad and Dashnabad districts demonstrates an effective model for realizing this potential. At the same time, problems related to certification costs, processing depth and storage infrastructure are preventing the sector from reaching its full potential.

On this basis, the following recommendations have been formulated: first, to extend the integrated model combining sorting, packaging and processing used by "Sherabad Anor Impeks" to other pomegranate-growing districts of the region (Dashnabad, Angor, Muzrabad); second, to intensify awareness-raising among farmers on making full use of state reimbursement of certification costs (PQ-136); third, to reduce product losses and increase added value by expanding capacities for producing juice and concentrate from second-grade produce; fourth, to study the successful experience in the South Korean market and develop targeted marketing programmes to expand export geography to the European Union and Middle Eastern countries.

The findings can serve as a scientific and practical basis for decision-making on improving the strategy for developing the pomegranate sector in Surkhandarya region and fully realizing its export potential.

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