

Growing mushroom in tobacco barns

By Tahir Ali Khan

MUSHROOM can be cultivated anywhere in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but it is more convenient to sow it in areas where tobacco is grown.

Thousands of tobacco barns lie mostly unused from October to June every year which can be used for cultivation of mushroom.

The timing for the use of tobacco barns is ideal for two reasons: first, they are vacant and can be used without any damage to the next crop. Second, the crop requires temperature between 22-27 degrees Celsius and humidity of around 80 per cent, which prevail during that period.

The Pakistan Tobacco Board (PTB) has also started a project for cultivation of mushroom which will be promoted among farmers from next year.

"Farmers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have lagged far behind their counterparts in Punjab. The latter are earning more money from their modernised and efficient farming practices and for utilising their agriculture infrastructure to the maximum. For example to-

bacco farmers in Punjab grow cucumber and green chillies in winter and earn a lot of money. Unfortunately, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa farmers are either too ignorant or poor and not interested in doing that. They can earn a lot by opting to mushroom cultivation in

"The PTB will provide seed to the farmers for the first time and then they will be asked to develop the spawns themselves for their use. Farmers will also be provided training and guidance on how to grow the plant," he added.

Farmers are generally ignorant

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their barns during the interval," said a PTB official.

"We will provide technical support, guidance and spawn initially for growing mushroom to tap the potential and enable tobacco growers to increase their income," he said.

about mushroom seeds and know-how to grow oyster or button variety. Guidance on the crop and provision of its spawns (seeds) to farmers could attract multitude of farmers to the sector.

The ingredients needed for the crop are easier to get. Mushroom spawn, two

kg quality substrate (wheat straw) and two per cent lime, a plastic bag and clean water are all that is needed for growing mushroom.

Mushroom requires little space, consumes little time, does not need hard work and can be grown even by women and children.

It requires small investment. Its seed in a bag costs around Rs30 which grows in three months. An ordinary barn can provide around 30-50 bags, and with this investment a farmer can earn Rs1000-Rs1500 per bag.

Mushrooms have both nutritional

and medicinal values. Being a good food for patients of heart disease, blood pressure and eyesight, mushroom can be used as a diet for common man and in soup.

It can also be marketed to save foreign exchange spent on import of canned mushroom.

Mushroom has been found to have greatly augmented milking capacity of livestock in the province. Its residues are also a major organic fertiliser.

The fungus apart from being a major organic food, is a rich source of protein and can be used as a substitute for protein-providing foods such as meat which is increasingly becoming costlier and unaffordable for the middle-class.

While growing mushrooms, sufficient amount of water, oxygen and darkness is needed. Sterilisation of the compost before spawning is another prerequisite which prevents it from poisoning.

The spawning process completes within 40-45 days. After a week, production starts which continues for three months. In case of button variety, the compost is ready within a month while the oyster's compost takes a week for germination. This spawning component can also be used as seeds and a spawn bag gives 25 bags of mushroom seeds.

Marketing of the commodity is another problem. The farmers have no access to and information about the buyers. There are many buyers in the market but irregularity in supplies spoils things. Recently a five-star hotel showed interest in mushroom purchase agreement but it wanted regular supplies and good quality.

This can be sorted out by ensuring coordination between growers and purchasers on the one hand and the farmers on the other.

"By developing mushrooms farmers' and buyers' database, the problem of marketing the produce can be solved to the advantage of the stakeholders. We are hopeful that big chain restaurants will themselves contact the producers for the commodity," the official said.

"Purchase centres can be opened in the districts where information can be provided to the stakeholders on the demand and supply situation of the commodity in the market to facilitate business," the official added.

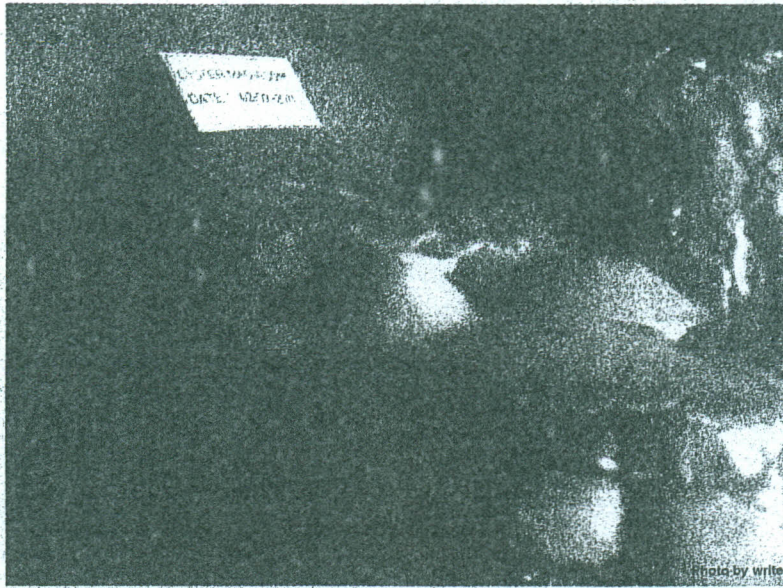


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