

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is seeking technical assistance from Canada to improve Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary (SPS) Measures and develop quality infrastructure as per international standards to increase rice and mango exports to the North American country.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan told the Canada's High Commissioner to Pakistan Wendy Gilmour on Wednesday that both countries should specify mutual areas in research for long-term implications in existing and potential trade agreements.

He urged the envoy that Canada must consider and take steps to open its markets for Pakistani mangoes and rice which are of exceptional quality. Currently, Canada is importing these products from Mexico and Brazil.

Bilateral trade could be accelerated through harmonisation of SPS measures, Mr Sultan said while highlighting the need for liaison between importers and exporters of agro-commodities.

Ms Gilmour said Canada was eager to explore new areas of cooperation with Pakistan. Moreover, she assured the minister that she will take steps to increase rice and mango imports from Pakistan.

"This is a tremendous opportunity between the two countries and we are cognizant of the best practices which are human and environment friendly," she added.

Mr Sultan said Pakistan could benefit from Canada to minimise post-harvest losses of perishable food items by constructing packing houses and cold storages equipped with the state-of-the-art technology so that fruits and vegetables could be saved from wastage and available for export.

"We could jointly work in establishment of pest and disease free areas across Pakistan which will not only minimise the risk associated with our agro exports but will reduce post-harvest cost of plant and plant material and will give sound footings to Pakistan in the international market," he suggested.

Mr Sultan said bilateral relations could be extended into bilateral trade which can help benefit Pakistan's agri-research and development.

However, prudent formalities like pest-risk analysis and stringent conditions make trade difficult, and in this regard, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research is trying to secure maximum market access for agro-commodities, he added.

Pakistan's imports from Canada mostly include pulses and canola seeds. Last year the country imported 880,525 tonnes of oil-seed and pulses. The volume of exports to Canada was 14,521.36 tonnes of agro-products.

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