

Impact of COVID-19 on Haldi Crop

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More than 40,000 turmeric farmers in Odisha's Kandhamal district are suffering huge losses from the economic downturn wrought by the nationwide lockdown to curb the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. **Kandhamal is known for its indigenous variety of turmeric or haldi** – a spice that holds an important place in Indian kitchens because of its strong aroma and healing properties as well.

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Though Kandhamal saw a bumper yield this year, **less than 20% of raw turmeric has been sold so far, leaving the rest of the produce with the farmers.** In many interior villages, farmers have not even been approached by local traders. Those who were in urgent need of cash had no choice, but to sell turmeric at a throwaway price of ₹30 to ₹35 per kg. Taking advantage of the COVID19 restrictions, unscrupulous traders have been quoting prices below ₹40 for a kilo of the tuber whereas the **Kandhamal Apex Spices Association for Marketing (KASAM), the government backed cooperative agency,** offers ₹60 per kg.

With more than 60% of the geographical area covered with hills and forest, **Kandhamal offers ideal conditions for cultivation of various spices including turmeric, ginger, mustard and tamarind.** 'Kandhamal Haladi' for which **GI tag** has been received is a pure organic product. **Tribals grow the tuber without applying fertiliser or pesticide.** The aromatic value and golden yellow colour of 'Kandhamal Haladi' make it stand out from the rest. The cultivation begins in the summer months of April and May.

The tuber is harvested during December to February. The raw turmeric is then boiled and sundried. **Kandhamal haldi is**

popular in foreign countries and 95% of KASAM's procurement is exported to the US, Europe, Australia, Japan and Korea. For 60,000 families, turmeric is the only cash crop with the collective production exceeding 26,000 tonnes annually in the district. However, around March when farmers were getting ready to sell their produce, the nation went into lockdown.