

# Watermelon exports a shot at the heart of Iran's agriculture

Social Desk

EXCLUSIVE

Watermelon is a popular fruit enjoyed by people around the world for its sweet, refreshing taste and high water content. It's hard to imagine a better fruit that quenches your thirst on a hot summer day. A sweet, watery slice of the fruit, however, comes at a rather high price. As global demand for watermelon increases, many countries have turned to cultivating this fruit for export, including Iran. However, the cultivation of watermelon for export purposes presents several dangers, particularly concerning the water needs of the fruit and other critical factors – which will be dealt with later on in this article. In a rather sad piece of news, Iran's Ministry of Agriculture has reported that watermelon was the leading export item for Iranian agro-food products in April. The fact that this water-intensive fruit topped the charts is not only no cause for celebration, but it also demands a critical reflection on the whole process of cultivation

of watermelons. The ministry's report showed that over 801,000 metric tons of agricultural and food products worth \$438.6 million were exported by Iran from March 21 to April 20. The report went on to add that despite a 19.48 percent decline in volume compared to the same period last year, the value of exports increased by 2.81 percent – which is the only real good news in an otherwise heart-breaking story. Watermelon topped the list, followed by tomatoes, with \$49.78 million, milk powder with \$30.03 million, eggs with \$26.55 million, and apples with \$16.96 million. It should certainly sound an alarm for our water-deprived country that watermelons, tomatoes, and apples, all water-consuming fruits, are among our leading export items. The report adds that in terms of weight, watermelon took first place, with 221,690 metric tons, followed by tomatoes, with 108,350 metric tons, apples, with 37,850 metric tons, Persian melons, with 35,230 metric tons, and dates with 29,480

metric tons. This data suggests that despite challenges posed by the global pandemic, Iran continues to make strides in the agro-food industry. That is true, but as we mentioned earlier, cultivating water-consuming fruits, particularly watermelons, with the intent to export them and increase our revenues should be reflected on critically. Watermelon is a water-intensive crop, requiring large amounts of water for optimal growth and fruit development. On average, watermelon plants need 400-600 milliliters of water per growing season, with some estimates suggesting that up to 1,000 liters of water are required to produce just one kilogram of watermelon. This high water demand can lead to several issues, including depletion of water resources and increased competition for water. Regarding the former, the cultivation of watermelon for export can put significant pressure on local water resources, particularly in scarce areas. Over-ex-

traction of water from rivers, lakes, and aquifers can lead to reduced water availability for other uses, such as drinking water, sanitation, and irrigation for other crops. As for the latter, while watermelon cultivation expands, competition for water resources may intensify among different users, including farmers, industries, and households. This can lead to conflicts over water allocation and exacerbate existing water scarcity issues. Therefore, for a country like Iran which is already struggling with the dire consequences of water scarcity and climate change, cultivating and exporting watermelons is far from making any sense. We should also mention that the hidden subsidies of water goes directly into the pockets of middlemen. In addition to the high water needs of watermelon, the cultivation of this fruit for export can also have several negative environmental impacts, such as soil degradation, deforestation and habitat loss. Intensive watermelon cultivation can, of course, lead to soil degradation

through erosion, nutrient depletion, and salinization. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides can further exacerbate these issues, contaminating soil and water resources. Also, the expansion of watermelon cultivation often involves the conversion of natural habitats, such as forests and grasslands, into agricultural land. This can result in deforestation, habitat loss, and a decline in biodiversity. The cultivation of watermelon for the sole purpose of export can also have socio-economic consequences for local communities. These terrible consequences might include displacement of traditional crops, inequitable distribution of benefits, and vulnerability to market fluctuations. As farmers shift their focus to watermelon cultivation for export, traditional food crops may be displaced, leading to reduced food security and increased dependence on imported food. On another note, the profits generated from watermelon exports may not be equitably distributed among local communities, with small-scale farmers

and laborers often receiving low wages and limited access to resources. And it would be far too dangerous not to keep in mind that dependence on watermelon exports can make local economies vulnerable to fluctuations in global market prices, exchange rates, and trade policies. This can result in economic instability and reduced resilience to shock. While the cultivation of watermelon for export can generate economic benefits, it also presents several dangers related to the water needs of the fruit and other critical factors. These dangers include the depletion of water resources, environmental degradation, and socio-economic consequences for local communities. To mitigate these risks, it is essential to promote sustainable watermelon cultivation practices, such as efficient irrigation techniques, integrated pest management, and crop diversification. Additionally, policies and regulations should be implemented to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits and the protection of natural resources and local livelihoods.

## Iran witnesses burial of 7k healthy organs each year



ISNA

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The deputy head of the Iranian Organ Donation Association revealed that each year, 3,000 individuals suffering from brain death expire in the nation. Regrettably, merely one-third of these potential donors contribute their organs, resulting in the interment of 2,000 individuals and the loss of 7,000 viable organs annually. Omid Qobadi elucidated that while the annual incidence of brain death in Iran fluctuates between 5,000 and 8,000 cases, only approximately 3,000 of these individuals qualify for organ donation. Tragically, a mere 1,000 of these eligible donors ultimately provide their organs, while the remaining 2,000 are laid to rest with their organs intact. The primary impediment to organ donation is the absence of familial consent. Consequently, an estimated 7,000 potential donors are interred each year, alongside the 3,000 individuals who perish while awaiting life-saving transplants. If only half of these available organs had been procured, countless lives could have been saved and families reunited. The official identified 20 factors contributing to families' reluctance to consent to organ donation, with two salient reasons being: first, a substantial portion of the population remains unconvinced that brain death constitutes true cessation of life; and second, even when death is acknowledged, families are uncertain of their deceased loved one's stance on organ donation. Possessing an organ donation card serves as a potent instrument to alleviate familial distress during critical moments, as the consent of the next of kin is imperative for organ donation, and the window of opportunity for organ procurement is fleeting. To underscore the importance of organ donation, consider the poignant words of Dr. Christiaan Barnard, the pioneering heart transplant surgeon: "It is infinitely better to transplant a heart than to bury it so that it can be devoured by worms." By embracing organ donation, we can honor the memory of our loved ones and provide the gift of life to those in dire need.



IRNA



PIC OF THE DAY



In the idyllic village of Isparaxan, a mere 36 kilometers north of Tabriz, the ephemeral Tulip Garden enchants nature enthusiasts with its tranquil ambiance. Seize the fleeting opportunity to witness these vibrant blooms, as their transient existence graces the farm for but a few precious days.

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