

Okra: A Green Gold for Health, Wealth and Global Trade

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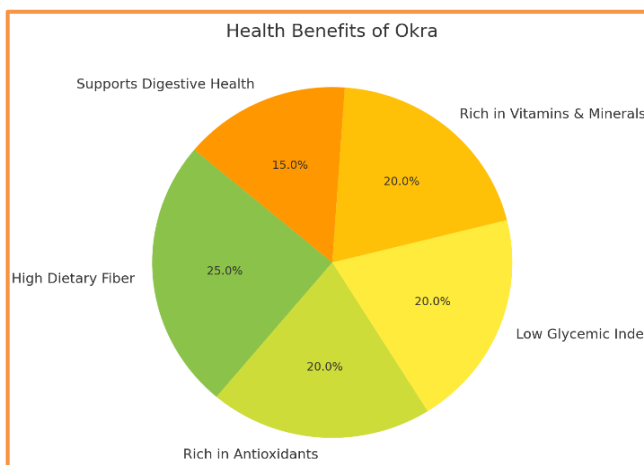
The use of okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) which is grown during warm months for its tender pods, is slowly advancing from being a simple backyard vegetable to delivering meaningful nutrition, earnings to farms and increasing export income. Due to fast growth, steady buyer interest and increased global adoption, it greatly contributes to the livelihoods of people in rural India. This article discusses the importance of okra in various ways such as for the national economy, its nutritious value, export opportunities and main hurdles that need to be resolved, while providing useful advice for making India's 'green gold' grow.

Economic Importance of Okra

- **India's leading position:** Being the top producer of okra, India provides for both the domestic market and other countries with around 70% of all okra in the world.
- **Short-duration, high-income crop:** It takes only about 50–60 days for okra to grow, so farmers can plant it again quickly. This crop makes good profits and in ideal situations, farmers can earn net profits of ₹80,000–₹1,00,000 per hectare.
- **Ideal for intercropping systems:** Okra is commonly planted next to pulses or maize which allows farmers to share the land and earn more together.
- **Women-friendly enterprise:** The produce is well-adapted for use in home gardening, family agriculture and small businesses run largely by women which encourages female financial independence.

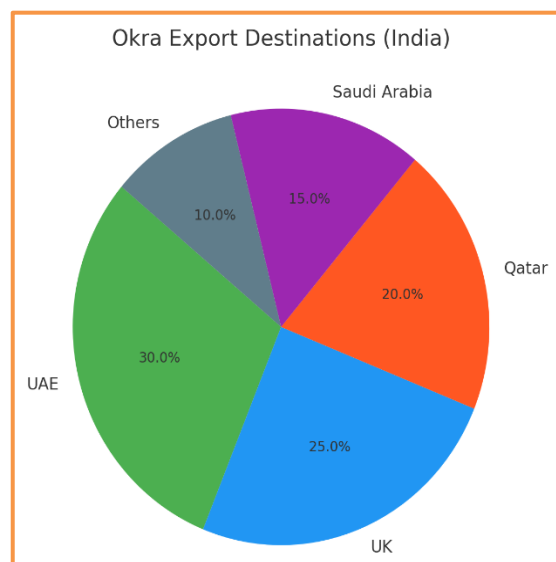
Health and Nutritional Benefits

- **Rich in essential nutrients:** Vitamins A, C, K, folate, calcium and magnesium in okra are necessary for your eyes, your body's resistance and proper blood clotting.
- **High dietary fiber:** Benefits of soluble fiber are improved digestion, prevention of constipation and regular blood sugar control which help those with diabetes.
- **Abundant antioxidants:** Quercetin and polyphenols lower the body's oxidative stress, show anti-inflammatory properties and help ward off chronic diseases.
- **Supports weight management:** Since it has few calories and a lot of water, okra is valuable for people trying to lose weight.
- **Medicinal mucilage:** For many years, slimy mucilage was used to deal with ulcers, irritated lungs and to control cholesterol in the diet.



Export Opportunities

- **Rising global demand:** Many Gulf nations, the UK and Southeast Asia are interested in Indian okra because of its great flavor, texture and harvest all year.
- **Fresh and processed forms:** Okra pods are shipped out in fresh and frozen forms, along with dry and pickled products which meet the needs of diverse kitchens.
- **High value for organic produce:** Okra produced without chemicals is being sold for good prices in Europe and the US which helps open up new export markets.
- **APEDA support:** The Administration works on helping export okra by giving quality certificates and building better cold chain structures.
- **Export income contribution:** During the 2023–24 financial year, the value of India's okra exports was around ₹130 crore and there is plenty of room for the sector to develop using strong market relationships.



Key Challenges

- **Pest and disease outbreaks:** Major pests like fruit and shoot borers, whiteflies and diseases like yellow vein mosaic virus (YVMV) can cause up to 80% crop loss in severe cases.
- **High perishability:** The shelf life of okra is 2–4 days at ambient temperatures which means that much of the produce is lost during transportation and storage without cold storage.
- **Quality standards for export:** Global customers prefer produce that is all the same size, color and without pesticides which is hard for farmers to deliver now.
- **Market volatility:** When food prices change dramatically such as during peak harvest seasons, farmers earn less and do not want to put more money into farming.
- **Limited access to export infrastructure:** There is not enough cold storage, packhouses and air freight logistics in rural areas in India which limits its ability to export.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges

- **Adopt Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** Farmers are taught to use neem-based biopesticides, pheromone traps and encourage natural enemies to manage pests in a friendly way.
- **Promote improved varieties:** Use varieties that protect against YVMV and are suitable for export such as Arka Anamika, Arka Nikita and those created by ICAR-IIVR and private firms.
- **Strengthen post-harvest management:** Spending on sorting, grading, packaging and refrigerated transport helps reduce problems and ensure vegetables are fresh longer.
- **Empower Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs):** When farmers join FPOs, their access to markets gets better, their crops are tested in bulk and they can ask for higher prices.
- **Encourage organic certification and GAP compliance:** Farmers can enter high-value export markets by getting training and subsidies for Global GAP and organic certification.
- **Policy and financial support:** It would be useful to use plans like PM-FME, MIDH and NHB to establish packhouses, processing areas and cold storage next to the areas where the main crops are grown.

Conclusion

Okra holds tremendous untapped value as a nutritious, economically viable and globally tradable crop. With rising health consciousness and demand for plant-based foods, okra's profile is expected to rise even further. Addressing production and marketing constraints through technology, capacity building and infrastructure can transform okra into a true "green gold"—benefiting both rural producers and health-conscious consumers in India and abroad.

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