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## Food Processing: Promising Extra Gains To Growers

India holds immense potential in the segment of food processing. Indian agriculture is racing towards becoming a \$500 billion economy in a year or two, while Indian economy itself may take five years or more to become a 5 trillion economy. The need for giving a major boost to food processing has become absolutely essential for farmers to become major beneficiary of the gains of this growth. The poor agri infrastructure and distorted markets put the onus on the Indian food processing sector to insulate the farmers from the vagaries of high seasonal price fluctuations by through value addition longer shelf life.

The potential for investments in India and assurance of high returns are guaranteed with abundance of agricultural produce, skilled man power and a vast and diversified fast growing food market. India is the largest producer of many agricultural commodities, often creating gluts and fall in prices. There are opportunities galore in the food processing segment, especially beyond the conventional food processing activities. The Covid pandemic has opened up immense space for healthy, safe and hygienic food. This space can be effectively used, and in the process a stable market can be created for traditional immunity-building foods and snacks.

The ready to eat food category is seeing an exponential growth. Packaging is a lesser explored area demanding new age solutions capitalizing on the need of easy handling, longer shelf life, better dispensing quality, no loss of nutrients etc. Business ventures concentrating on automation-based technologies and robotics will have immense scope. Food safety has emerged as an important challenge in the event of enhanced food processing demands. Inadequate knowledge about food hygiene and the standards and certification is a major handicap. Measures to address this concomitantly will aid in the development and expansion of the food processing sector.

Temperature controlled warehouses for the perishables, cold storages and appropriate logistics are emerging as prerequisites for the development of the sector. This sector requires intensive efforts from the government and the corporate since it is investment heavy. The Scheme for Formalisation of Micro Food Enterprises 2020, launched by the Government of India @INR 10,000 crores could be game changer, as it envisages upgrading the technology, skills, products and systems of micro food units and food vendors, and linking the FPOs with food processing industry to unleash its full potential.

Today India's biggest weakness in the agriculture segment is over production, and the inability to timely channelize excess production for proper storage, processing or exports. Food processing can convert this weakness into big strength. If proper technologies are developed and made accessible at farm level, not only can we address the issue of wastages but also substantially increase the income from agriculture.

