

UAHS DEVELOPS NEW PADDY VARIETY RESISTANT TO BLAST DISEASE

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As part of its initiative to prevent decline in the area under paddy cultivation, the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences(UAHS), Shivamogga, has developed 'Sahyadri Megha', a new red variety of paddy that is resistant to blast disease and rich in nutrients.

The new variety has been approved by the State-level Seed Sub-Committee and it will be available for farmers from the coming kharif season.

B.M. Dushyantha Kumar, professor of Genetics and Plant Breeding with UAHS, Shivamogga, told *The Hindu* that the 'Jyothi' variety, which was widely cultivated in the command areas of the Bhadra and the Tunga reservoirs and in semi-arid areas in Sorab, Shikaripur, Hanagal and Sirsi taluks, had become vulnerable to blast disease and other infestations. There was a demand for a new paddy variety that is resistant to the infestations.

Another objective of developing the new variety was to cater to the strong demand for red rice, rich in fibre and protein, by health-savvy consumers in urban areas. The research work commenced in 2009, he said.

'Sahyadri Megha' is developed under the hybridization breeding method by cross-breeding the best among the 'Jyothi' variety with that of 'Akkalu', a native disease-resistant and protein-rich paddy variety.

The results of the field trials conducted in Shivamogga, Chikkamagaluru, and Davangere districts have proved that the new variety has a high-level of resistance to blast disease.

Optimistic that the rice from the new variety can be sold for a premium by showcasing it as a protein-rich red rice, he said that the protein content in it is 12.48%, higher than the other red rice varieties grown. The yield per hectare from 'Sahyadri Megha' is around 65 quintals, substantially higher than other red paddy varieties.

Also, as the new variety can be harvested after 120 days of sowing, it is a medium-term paddy that can be grown when there is a delay in the onset of monsoon.

The aroma and taste of the rice from the new variety was also praised by farmers. The new variety will be notified under the Indian Seed Act 1966 shortly after which it will become part of the seed chain, he said. It may be mentioned here that the area under paddy that was around 1.5 lakh hectares in Shivamogga district in 1990, has come down to around 1.05 lakh hectares now.

Paddy growers are switching over to commercial crops like arecanut, ginger and rubber for lucrative returns.

The 'Sahyadri Megha' variety will fetch a good price if its nutrition values, aroma, and taste is properly showcased. As it is disease-resistant, the cultivation cost will be low, he added.

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