

16.08.2017

THE HINDU BusinessLine

ITC to launch packaged potato, onion, tomato



S Sivakumar, CEO, ITC Limited – Agri-Business Division PV Sivakumar

As it rolls out frozen prawns in select cities, ITC has lined up a few more product offerings — potatoes, tomatoes and onions — in the packaged foods category across the frozen, chilled, cool and ambient shelf-life segments.

ITC Agri Business Division Chief Executive Officer S Sivakumar told *BusinessLine* that the rollout of ITC Master Chef Frozen Prawns is under way in Hyderabad and Delhi. Segregated into different sizes and individually quick frozen, the prawns are offered in 200 gm packs for retail consumers and larger packs for institutional customers.

Of the ₹30,000 crore worth of prawns produced in India, domestic sales are pegged at ₹8,000 crore. Of this ₹8,000 crore, only ₹300 crore is sold in packaged form. While institutional sales would be around ₹200 crore, the rest is consumed by the retail market.

“There is a huge scope for increasing the size of the pie in the frozen market space. In the next three months, we will introduce the frozen prawn products in other top metros like Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai,” he said.

‘Fresh’ misconceptions

In an interview with *BusinessLine*, Sivakumar said there were several misconceptions about ‘freshness’ of perishable commodities. “it typically takes 2-3 days from catching a prawn, to transporting it to the wholesale market and finally reaching retail stores. Ideally, to keep the freshness of prawns and retain the nutrition, you need to freeze them within 15 hours of catching them. If you can do that and store at minus 18 degrees, you can keep them fresh for two years,” he observed.

Potatoes, onions, tomatoes

After prawns, ITC will soon roll out frozen or otherwise processed potatoes, onions and tomatoes. Sivakumar felt that most farmers grew crops based on the previous season’s demand. “Consequently we see prices falling at harvest time. On the other hand, consumers see prices going up soon after. Both farmers and consumers are unhappy,” he said.

“To beat this, we need to replicate what we have done with milk — an end-to-end chain. Earlier, different players were working in silos working at different levels (of creating infrastructure). You need to work on all of these simultaneously. I think it is happening now,” he said.

The firm is also planning to introduce dehydrated onions. “The domestic market size of dehydrated onions is a very insignificant part of the total quantity of onions consumed now,” he said. But, given farmer and consumer dissatisfaction with price volatility, the time is ripe for changing this, he said.



Forest dept opens Ecoshop in Vellore to promote tribals agriculture products

Vellore: With an objective to provide a sustainable livelihood for tribals, the forest department has opened an Ecoshop in the newly inaugurated interpretation centre at Amirthi Zoo.

The Ecoshop has been established with the involvement of a group of 20 tribals from Neeplampattu village in Amirthi Forest Range under the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project, said district forest officer (DFO) Sumesh Soman who inaugurated the shop on Tuesday.

The shop is aimed to promote agriculture products such as ragi, samai and thinai, which cultivated in the tribal villages. "Apart from minor millets, tribal honey will also be sold here and the tribals will also be given training in honey collection. The quality of the products available at the store will be ensured by the department," said Soman. Half a litre of honey is sold for Rs 230 at the shop.

The shop would also provide a platform for tribals of Peenjamanthai, who have been trained by the forest department manufacturing furniture out of Lantana camara, an invasive plant species. Tourists can also place orders for furniture at the shop. "The department placed an order for T-shirt with logo of Amirthi Zoo. It will be also available at the Ecoshop for Rs 200. Tourists can get these T-shirt as a souvenirs. The profit from the shop will go to the local community," Soman added.

The department would expand the shop and rope in more tribals based on the response from the tourists footfall at the zoo.

Soman further said the department, along with a group of youngsters from My Dream Vellore, an NGO, celebrated Independence Day by taking up sowing of seed balls in Kottaimalai Reserve Forest. A total of 1,500 seed balls were sown in the reserve forest to improve the green cover. "Soil, manure and sand mixture have been made to ball and tree seeds placed inside. These balls of the earth have been thrown or distributed in the forest areas after rains, which will germinate and have better chances of survival than sowing bare seeds," Soman added.