

Crop Improvement in Cashew

CASHEW (*Anacardium occidentale* L.) is found throughout the tropical world and in certain sub-tropical areas with favourable climatic conditions. Originated from Brazil, cashew was introduced to India by the Portuguese in the 16th century mainly for soil conservation and afforestation in the coastal region. After its introduction in to southwestern India, cashew probably spread throughout the Indian subcontinent. Cochin (Kerala) served as a dispersal point for South-East Asia as well (Johnson, 1973). Cashew kernel has a high commercial value and the cashew industry provides employment to millions of people apart from sizeable contribution towards income from agri-business sector. Cashew is primarily grown in Asia, Africa and South America. Asiatic zone mainly includes India, Vietnam and Indonesia as the major cashew producing countries followed by Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. African countries producing cashew are Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Senegal and Madagascar. Latin American countries producing cashew consist of Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Honduras and Salvador.

Presently, cashew is cultivated in 32 countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Australia, covering an area of about 53.13 lakh ha with a production of 41.52 lakh tonnes of raw nuts with an average productivity of 0.78 tonne/ha (FAO, 2012). Though cashew has originated from Brazil, it gained greater popularity in India, Vietnam and some African countries. In 60's India had a major contribution to the world production along with Mozambique and Tanzania. From 1961 to 2013, area under world cashew has increased at a rate of 4.25% Cumulative Average Growth Rate (CAGR). But in 70's Mozambique left the race due to political issues and civil war in the country. In other Asian countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia etc. cashew cultivation became popular. Till 80's, raw cashew nut production witnessed slow and steady growth. From 90's, global Raw Cashew Nut (RCN) production has seen a tremendous growth. The huge production increase has been mainly contributed by Vietnam, the newly emerged RCN producer since 1990. From its humble beginning as a crop intended to check soil erosion, cashew has come out as a major foreign exchange earner in most of the countries. During 60's, India, Mozambique, Tanzania, Brazil and Coted' Ivoire were the only producers of RCN. Till mid of 70's, the same trend continued with some new entrants in the market. In 70's, Indonesia and in 80's Vietnam became one among the new entrants of RCN production in the world.

India is the largest producer of raw cashew nut in the world with 1.01 million ha area under cultivation and 0.75 million tonne production in 2013. The area