Dragon Fruit, a saviour for Kachchh Farmers

What is the issue?

The dragon fruit, also called kamalam, is intrinsically organic, survives Kachchh's trying climate and is valued for its unique health benefits

What are the geographical conditions of Kachchh?

- Kachchh is the second largest district of India. It covers 25 per cent of the area of Gujarat.
- **Climatic conditions -** Temperature varies from 3 °C in winter to 50 °C in summer.
- The monsoon is very erratic and the rainfall averages 300-350 mm a year.
- Frequent occurrence of drought or scarcity conditions is a common feature.
- It falls under semi-arid zone and is known for its extreme climatic conditions
- **Geomorphology -** The water resources are limited to 3% of the State's total resources.
- None of the Kachchh Rivers are perennial.
- Due to the proximity of the Arabian Sea and the very less rainwater replenishing the groundwater, salinity ingress is rapid in this district.
- According to the Central Ground Water Board, Kachchh is one of the districts with issues like salinity, fluoride, chloride, iron and nitrate. This influence the cropping pattern and agriculture production.

What are the main economic activities of Kachchh region?

- Agriculture is the main source of livelihood and animal husbandry is also an equally important occupation.
- One of the emerging area is the horticulture sector.
- Farmers are now investing in large tracts of land to engage in horticultural.
- Repatriating farmers (who once migrated to Maharashtra) bring in technological knowhow to maximise production with minimal resources.
- One major advantage for farmers in Kachchh is the relatively less incidence of pests and diseases due to the extreme climate.

- *Talukas* like Anjar, Abdasa, Nakhatrana, Bhuj and Mandvi have better aquifers and cultivate a variety of horticultural crops that range from mango, sapota, citrus fruits, date palm, banana, *kamalam* (dragon) fruit, guava, pomegranate, papaya and custard apple.

What Dragon fruit (Kamalam) is?

- Dragon fruit has its origin in Central and South America and has spread to Asian countries.
- The fruit is fleshy with tiny black seeds. While the fleshly part is consumed, the skin is discarded.
- The *kamalam* plant grows nearly five to six feet in height during which time it requires support.
- *Kamalam* plantation requires moisture and hence regulated watering by micro irrigation system serves the plantation well.
- The plant starts yielding from the first year onwards and the yield increases every year and reaches an average of 20-25 kg per plant by the fourth year.
- The weight of each fruit ranges from 150 to 300 grams.
- The season starts in late June and continues till November.
- The kamalam plant's lifespan is 25-30 years.

Why Cultivating Dragon Fruit looks promising?

- **Draught withstanding capacity –** Introduced in 2014, *kamalam* is rapidly catching the attention of the farmers because the plant can survive the punishing summer.
- In India, *kamalam* fruit cultivation is now gaining momentum including in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu.
- **Market Availability -** The red flesh variety is preferred in the export and domestic markets as it contains lycopene, which is believed to be an immunity enhancer and lowers the risk of cancer and heart disease.
- While the wholesale price ranges between ₹100 and ₹150 per kg, in the retail market, the price is ₹250-300 per kg.
- **Health benefits** - The naturally organic *kamalam* is considered more as a health fruit because it is rich in Vitamin C and is believed to be helpful in improving the platelet count during infectious diseases.
- **Emerging Uses -** . Recently, a horticulturalist in Kachchh experimented the use of discarded skin of the fruit in toiletries and beauty care products.
- If this experiment is successful, the scope for setting up units to further

process the fruit would emerge.

How farmers innovate to maximise profit?

- In the early days, Kachchh farmers used a 5 foot pole with a wire and concrete rings to support the plant.
- Approximately, an acre of land would have 550 poles.(₹600 per pole)
- However, now farmers install iron poles and wires like in grape orchards, and discarded scooter tyres replace the concrete rings.
- These modifications have resulted in halving the initial costs.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/dragon-fruit-a-saviour-for-kachchh-farmers/article37828526.ece