

## Small growers apply for licence to export tea

- Special Correspondent



Russian sip: Over the last decade, Tea Board of India has taken steps to motivate small tea growers to work as collectives.

Small tea growers in India are planning to export their produce on their own strength.

Two self-help groups (SHG) — Jai Jalpesh and Panbari — with 860 small workers in their fold, are readying themselves to apply for export licences. Along with another small tea-growers SHG — Nabajagan — they will showcase their teas for the first time at a Food Expo in Russia. The four-day show World Food Moscow starts September 12. It covers 12 segments including beverages. Tea and coffee are among the key sectors.

Over the last decade, Tea Board of India has taken initiatives to motivate small tea growers to work as collectives, by forming producer-societies or self-help groups, for sustainable green tea leaf trade business. The industry-regulator has also provided infrastructural benefits to the SHGs.

### Bought-leaf factories

In India, there are over 1200 SHGs in the tea sector, but most of them are left to the mercy of bought-leaf factories in the absence of any processing facilities. However these three SHGs have set up small tea-processing facilities with a total capacity of seven lakh tons, according to Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, president of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Association.

Now all the three groups are to participate in the WFM, to showcase their CTC teas for the Russian market.

According to statistics available on WFM's website, with 94 per cent of the population being tea-drinkers, Russia is the world's second-largest tea market. Over 85 per cent of the consumption is black tea, although green teas are also gaining ground now.

### Russian market

Officials at Tea Board said that Russia is India's single largest market, importing an average of 45 million kgs of teas annually. India faces stiff competition from Sri Lanka and Kenya.

However talks with exporters revealed that although Russia had shown a preference for high-priced orthodox teas for sometime, in recent years it is shifting back to the black broken orange pekoe CTC — a flavourful mini roundels of teas made in abundance in North Bengal.

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