

## Chennai: Food safety raids hurt mango sales

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CHENNAI: The sale of mangoes has sharply declined this summer. Traders attribute the dip to tough action taken by food safety officials on shopkeepers, who ripen mangoes using harmful chemicals.



Sudden inspections and seizures of mangoes by State Food Safety Department

officials have prevented many small vendors from selling mangoes, or in some cases, closing down the shops. “Compared with last two years, the sale of mangoes in the market alone has dipped by a good 30 per cent,” said M Abdul Khader, head of the Koyambedu vegetable vendors’ association.

Of the 817 shops that sell only fruits at Koyambedu, around 400 deal only in mangoes. “Last year, around 20 trucks used to come to deliver mangoes alone, but this year that number has reduced to almost half. Even after so many raids, there are still some shops which ripen mangoes using chemicals like Carbide stones and Ethylene powder,” said Abdul.

After a recent meeting with all fruit vendors, Food Safety Wing officials asked all vendors to construct heating chambers to ripen the mangoes without the use of any chemicals. Syed Khadeer built such a chamber at the cost of H10 lakh. “The chamber I built is automatic and it can hold 50 cartons of mangoes at once”, said Syed, a fruit vendor who deals in raw mangoes.

While officials have only seized mangoes that were ripened using chemicals, from the next batch of raids such erring shops will be permanently closed and the licence of those vendors will be cancelled, said S Rajendran, the District Revenue Officer. “There are around 20 private heating chambers in and around Koyambedu that these vendors can use. We found that only 25 per cent of total fruits is being sent to these chambers. After this, we conducted sudden raids for two days and seized around 10 tonnes of mangoes,” said Rajendran.