



Edible Oil and Pulses Import Duty Cut Sparks Farmer Concerns Ahead of Bihar Elections

The central government's recent decision to slash import duties on crude edible oils and allow free import of yellow peas has sparked unease among farmers, who fear worsening losses. On May 30, import duty on crude edible oils was cut from 27.5% to 16.5%, aiming to lower edible oil prices and boost domestic refinery capacity.

However, farmers like Ramesh Patil from Latur, Maharashtra, say the move deepens their plight as soybean prices continue to trade below the minimum support price (MSP), forcing many to sell at a loss for the second consecutive year.

Farm activist Vijay Jawandhiya alleges the duty cuts are politically motivated, linked to the upcoming Bihar elections, with the government historically reducing duties before polls to keep essential commodity prices low. He cited past actions like onion export bans and previous edible oil duty reductions in 2021 as similar examples.



control efforts unfairly penalize farmers. "Inflation control is necessary, but it should not come at the expense of farmers who bear the brunt," he said, expressing frustration over the government's lack of meaningful engagement with farmers' concerns.

As edible oil prices remain high—mustard oil at Rs 186/litre and palm oil at Rs 133/litre—farmers worry that duty reductions may benefit consumers and processors, but not those cultivating key oilseeds and pulses. The policy shift highlights the delicate balance between controlling inflation and safeguarding farmer livelihoods amid election-year pressures.

No Scientist Greater Than a Farmer: Agriculture Minister Chouhan

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, addressed farmers in Dehradun as part of the Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan, an outreach initiative under the Union Government.

Speaking at the Himalayan Cultural Centre, Chouhan emphasized that the real field of agricultural research is not confined to labs but lies in the farms, asserting, "There is no scientist greater than a farmer."

Highlighting the campaign's focus on grassroots engagement, Chouhan announced that 16,000 agricultural scientists are being mobilised to visit villages across India. These teams—2,170 nationwide and 75 in Uttarakhand—are assessing regional soil, climate, and crop patterns to better inform policy and innovation through real-time farmer feedback. He assured Uttarakhand farmers that their need for crop protection through fencing will be prioritised under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Chouhan praised the state's horticultural

progress, noting that Uttarakhand's apples rival those from Kashmir and the native fruit Kafal is gaining international attention due to its medicinal properties. The Minister also underscored the value of traditional grains like Mandua (finger millet), advocating for increased production, seed quality improvement, and robust marketing. He emphasised the role of organic farming and the global demand for nutritious, chemical-free food.

Further, Chouhan encouraged the use of soil health cards, balanced pesticide use, and fertiliser application based on scientific advice. He concluded by promising to return to Uttarakhand on June 14 for the upcoming agricultural fair to continue engaging with farmers.

The event saw participation from top state officials and scientists, including Uttarakhand Agriculture Minister Ganesh Joshi and representatives from ICAR and Govind Ballabh Pant University, marking a collaborative step toward a sustainable agricultural roadmap for the state.

Scaling New Heights in Agri-Innovation and Sustainability



FIL Group operates in multiple sectors like agriculture, food & beverages, and health. Which sector do you see growing the most in the future?

At FIL Industries Private Limited, we believe that true progress lies in the synergy between sectors rather than the growth of one over the other.

Through our diversified presence across agriculture, food & beverage, health, urban mobility, and global trade our aim is to enable people – from farmers to retailers, craftsmen to customers, tourists and commuters – with innovative and sustainable solutions to transform their lives.

Rather than focusing on a single vertical, we aim to nurture sustainable, holistic growth across all our domains—bringing innovation to agriculture, value to the food chain, world-class urban mobility to destinations, and care to communities. Each sector reinforces the other, enabling us to create a resilient and inclusive ecosystem.

FIL is India's largest apple integrator and a leading producer of apple juice concentrate. What steps are you taking to strengthen this leadership?

Our strategy is comprehensive, future-focused, and rooted in innovation. We continue to invest in advanced agricultural practices, notably promoting high-density apple plantations with globally benchmarked rootstocks to improve both productivity and fruit quality. We're also expanding our post-harvest infrastructure—this includes controlled atmosphere

storage and India's largest apple sorting, grading, and packaging facility—to maintain quality from orchard to market.

FIL Group, founded in 1989 by Syed Mohammad Iqbal Bukhari, has grown into a diversified company operating across agriculture, food & beverage, travel, and health. It is India's largest apple integrator and leading producer of apple juice concentrate. The company began its agri-input operations in Jammu & Kashmir, offering solutions like stone fruit nurseries, crop nutrition, and crop protection with a focus on sustainable practices.

FIL has formed strategic global partnerships, including a JV with French firms for an apple rootstock nursery and a collaboration with Spain's Kimitec for biotechnology solutions and bio-waste management. In the FMCG space, FIL manufactures fruit juice concentrates, ready-to-serve beverages, and packaged drinking water. The company is also a key player in the Government of India's Apple Cluster Development Programme, aiming to strengthen the apple value chain through end-to-end solutions, including storage, value addition, logistics, and marketing. It pioneered Controlled Atmospheric (CA) Storage in India and runs the country's largest apple sorting and grading facility. With six manufacturing and thirteen distribution facilities nationwide, FIL continues to innovate across its agri and food businesses.

Our partnership with DALIVAL, a global leader in stone fruit nurseries, enabled us to establish India's first integrated stone fruit nursery in J&K. This initiative is transforming conventional growing practices through high-quality planting material and genetic innovation, while giving farmers access to global expertise to enhance yield and resilience.

Our alliances with FIATS and Kimitec focus on embedding eco-conscious, science-backed technologies into our agri-input solutions. This includes bio-based crop protection and nutrition

In this special coverage, Syed Junaid Altaf, Group Executive Director of FIL Group, shares insights into the company's journey, its role in transforming India's apple ecosystem, and the vision driving its sustained growth in agriculture and food processing.

products that reduce chemical dependency while maintaining high productivity.

These collaborations allow us to bring international technology and know-how thus creating efficient, sustainable, and profitable farming models that support today's growers and prepare them for the future.

How is FIL ensuring that its farming methods are both productive and environmentally friendly?

Sustainability is at the heart of FIL's agribusiness model. To ensure this balance, we are adopting and promoting precision agriculture techniques, which allow for the optimal use of resources like water, nutrients, and crop protection inputs. By encouraging high-density plantation systems and offering scientifically formulated biomolecules and agri inputs developed in collaboration with global leaders, we help farmers achieve better yields with minimal ecological impact. Furthermore, our nurseries incorporate disease-resistant plants to reduce reliance on chemical inputs.

We also provide growers with comprehensive advisory services that focus on soil health, integrated pest management, responsible nutrient application and time-to-time weather monitoring and the strategies to address climate change. In addition to the aforementioned, our emphasis on post-harvest management, through controlled atmosphere storage and state-of-the-art grading and packing facilities, reduces wastage and enhances the shelf life of the produce.

Our collaborations with global partners too focuses on introducing cutting-edge biotechnology solutions, including bio-stimulants, biocontrol and smart fertilizers, thus empowering farmers with advanced tools and practices that ensure higher yields and improved quality.

FIL has entered the FMCG market with fruit-based beverages and packaged drinking water. How do you plan to grow in this competitive space?



Entering the FMCG market was a natural extension of FIL Industries' expertise in agriculture and food processing.

Our state-of-the-art infrastructure enables us to produce products that meet global standards, while our diverse product portfolio allows us to cater to a wide range of consumer preferences. Whether it's fruit concentrate, functional drinks, 100% natural fruit beverages, or packaged drinking water, we are well-positioned to meet the evolving demands of the market.

Our 360-degree marketing approach ensures that our brand resonates with today's consumers. We are leveraging both digital and traditional platforms to build awareness, trust, and loyalty.

Moreover, we have built a strong distribution network and a dedicated sales team that ensures our products reach markets efficiently and consistently. This is supported by a robust and agile supply chain, with easy access to high-quality raw materials sourced directly from our integrated agri operations, giving us both control and consistency in quality.

Can you tell us more about the Apple Cluster Development project? How is it helping to improve apple farming and make India a stronger player in the global market?

The Apple Cluster Development Project, awarded by the National Horticultural Board, is a game-changing initiative focused on revitalizing apple farming in India, particularly in Jammu & Kashmir. Located in Shopian, the project spans 21,000 hectares and involves over 50,000 farmers, and is designed to leverage the geographical strengths of the region and drive integrated, market-led development across the entire apple production process, from pre-production to post-harvest and marketing, all to ensure that Indian apples meet global standards.

A key feature of the project is the empowerment of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) through professional management, technology



Only farmers who are able to deliver fresh and quality products to the market will justify the trust of their customers

access, and market linkages. This collective model strengthens farmers' bargaining power and fosters community-wide growth. The project also champions global best practices, introducing high-density plantations, advanced irrigation, and nutrient management to improve yield, quality, and sustainability.

Robust infrastructure like cold chains, controlled atmosphere storage, grading lines, and packhouses are being developed to reduce post-harvest losses and ensure consistency. Additionally, private sector partnerships are encouraged, enabling anchor firms to collaborate with FPOs for streamlined supply chains and improved market access. The project not only boosts farmer incomes and employment but also positions India as a competitive, self-reliant force in the global apple market.

FIL introduced Controlled Atmosphere (CA) storage in India. What other new technologies are you investing in to improve fruit storage and reduce waste?

We pioneered Controlled Atmosphere (CA) storage in India revolutionizing the preservation of apples and perishables. Building on this, we focus on pre-harvest innovation, using data-driven tools like satellite imagery, soil tests, and weather insights to optimize fertilization and irrigation. Healthier crops lead to better storability and reduced waste. We continue to invest in advanced technologies to redefine fresh produce storage and transportation. One key innovation is the integration of IoT-based solutions across our storage and logistics infrastructure. Real-time sensors monitor cold storage units, detecting deviations and reducing spoilage. To support farmers against unpredictable weather, we've introduced parametric crop insurance, using predefined weather indices for

quick, transparent payouts. This empowers farmers to adopt better practices with financial protection.

We also intend to strengthen the cold chain with automation in logistics, such as GPS-enabled reefer trucks and route optimization, ensuring faster, more efficient transport with minimal quality loss. These efforts demonstrate our commitment to reducing waste, empowering farmers, and adding lasting value to the supply chain.

FIL started working in J&K to help farmers with pre-harvest challenges. What are the biggest problems Indian farmers face today, and how is FIL working to solve them?

Indian farmers face persistent pre-harvest challenges, including declining soil health, limited access to quality planting material, and climate-driven weather unpredictability. FIL began its journey in Jammu & Kashmir with a clear focus on addressing these issues at the grassroots.

Our approach blends on-ground support with end-to-end agri-input solutions, backward integration, and constant innovation. By introducing high-quality stone fruit nurseries, FIL has transformed apple and stone fruit cultivation, giving farmers dependable access to superior planting material. Our crop nutrition and protection products help boost soil fertility, improve yields, and promote healthier crops.

Strengthening this vision are our global partnerships with DALIVAL (France) and

Kimitec Group (Spain). These collaborations have enabled us to bring advanced nursery systems, biomolecules tailored for Indian conditions, and parametric apple insurance—appleINSURE for the farmers.

By combining international expertise with local insight, FIL is building a resilient, sustainable agricultural ecosystem—one that prepares farmers to thrive in a rapidly changing climate while ensuring higher productivity and long-term prosperity.

We believe that our all-encompassing approach will augment the development of the horticulture sector in Jammu and Kashmir and are hopeful of becoming a global hub for apple cultivation.

In addition, we are also working closely with farmers in the horticulture value chain in Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Uttarakhand.



FIL has partnered with Kimitec for bio-waste management. What solutions are you working on to reduce agricultural waste?

As part of our backward integration efforts, FIL Industries has partnered with Spain's Kimitec to transform bio waste management in India, converting waste into a valuable resource that supports sustainable and regenerative farming practices. Through this collaboration, we are working to develop biotechnology-driven solutions that transform farm residues into high-value products such as bio-stimulants, bio-control agents, and smart fertilizers. These innovations not only reduce reliance on chemical inputs but

also promote natural soil health, enhance crop productivity, and minimize environmental impact.

As part of the partnership, FIL and Kimitec are exploring the establishment of a dedicated R&D facility in India, where global expertise and local insights converge to create scalable bio-waste management models. With Kimitec's AI-powered MAAVI Innovation Centre and FIL's strong farmer network and market presence, the joint effort is positioned to deliver practical, residue-free, and sustainable solutions that help farmers manage waste more efficiently and responsibly, especially in apple-growing regions where crop enhancement is a prime focus. By converting waste into opportunity, we aim to build a greener agricultural future that benefits both farmers and the ecosystem.

Does FIL plan to expand its agriculture or food processing business outside India? What new products or markets are you focusing on?

Yes, we're actively exploring global expansion in agriculture and food processing, with a focus on emerging markets in West Africa and Southeast Asia. These regions offer strong potential for the introduction and investment in modern greenhouse farming and sustainable plantation models to enhance productivity while minimizing environmental impact.

Our expansion in these markets reflect FIL's long-term vision to extend its agri-expertise globally and build a more sustainable future for horticulture across borders.

On the domestic front we are also looking at partnership opportunities to expand operations in the horticulture value chain including plantations and greenhouses in regions such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal.

Plans are also afoot to introduce our innovative solutions to underserved areas such as the North Eastern states ensuring broader access to our expertise in crop nutrition, protection, stone fruit nurseries and post-harvest management including food processing. These initiatives aim to diversify our offerings and support local economies through job creation and resilient agricultural systems.

Copeland and Ecozen Launch Solar-Powered Cold Storage to Support Indian Farmers

Copeland, a global leader in sustainable heating and cooling solutions, has joined hands with agri-tech company Ecozen to bring solar-powered cold storage systems to rural India. The partnership aims to address key challenges in the agriculture sector by providing off-grid refrigeration that helps farmers reduce food waste and maintain the quality of perishable produce.

Smart Cooling with Solar Power
The innovative cold rooms are powered by Copeland's ZBW variable speed compressors, integrated with Ecozen's solar and thermal energy technology. These systems:

Run efficiently without grid electricity, cutting energy use and operational costs. Offer faster cooling during high-load periods and ensure reliable performance, even in low sunlight or monsoon seasons. Have already been deployed across India with over 300 units, saving an estimated 22 tons of CO₂ emissions per 5-ton cold room.

Real Benefits for Farmers
These systems play a crucial role at the first mile of the supply chain, rapidly cooling produce right

after harvest. Crops like dragon fruit can now be stored safely and sold later at up to four times the off-season price, helping farmers increase their income significantly.

Jagadish Keswani, President – India, Middle East, and Africa for Copeland, said, "With growing demand for perishable goods and e-commerce, India's agri-sector needs energy-efficient storage. Our partnership with Ecozen is helping farmers protect their harvest and reduce energy costs through reliable, solar-powered solutions."

Alok Nikhade, AVP, Technology at Ecozen, added,
"This collaboration has made our cold rooms smarter and greener. Together, we are enabling farmers to cut waste, extend shelf life, and improve profitability—driven by clean energy."

Driving Rural Sustainability
As India looks toward sustainable agriculture and climate-resilient technologies, the Copeland-Ecozen alliance presents a strong example of how renewable energy can empower farmers, reduce carbon footprints, and build a more efficient cold chain for the future.

Instamart Launches Certified Organic Staples with Bharat Organics in Major Cities

Swiggy's quick commerce platform Instamart, has partnered with Bharat Organics to bring a range of certified organic staples to digital consumers across India's metros and Tier-1 cities. The collaboration, facilitated by a memorandum of understanding with the National Cooperative Organic Limited (NCOL), marks Bharat Organics' first large-scale entry into online grocery retail.

Through this tie-up, 21 organic food products—including pulses, spices, cereals, oils, jaggery, and herbal teas—will be made available on Instamart at prices significantly below market rates. For instance, organic tur dal will retail at ₹240 per kg, compared to the prevailing average of ₹290-₹300 per kg.

Each pack will carry a QR code linking to real-time lab test reports, verifying the products as pesticide-free and compliant with over 245 residue benchmarks, setting a new standard for transparency in India's grocery segment.

Instamart CEO Amitesh Jha said the partnership supports both consumer health and farmer welfare. "It helps us promote healthier living while enabling better market access for India's organic farming

communities," he said. The initiative also aligns with the government's White Revolution 2.0 goals to strengthen cooperative farming through sustainable and tech-enabled market access.

Bharat Organics, which follows a farmer-first profit-sharing model where nearly 50% of profits go directly to member farmers, already has a strong offline footprint in Delhi-NCR through 10,000+ retail outlets, including over 300 Safal stores. This partnership marks a major push into digital retail for the cooperative brand.

Ashish Kumar Bhutani, Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation, called the launch a "meaningful step forward" in bridging traditional agriculture with modern retail. NCOL MD Vipul Mittal added that Instamart's reach and consumer trust make it the ideal platform to connect conscious buyers with clean, lab-tested food.

With rising demand for healthy, traceable food, the Instamart-Bharat Organics partnership aims to redefine how Indian households access and consume every day staples.

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