

## Why Are Pomegranates Special?

By Kaitlyn Waring || HAF Volunteer



Pomegranate tree from Akrich Nursery (Al Haouz province, Morocco), 30 September 2024; Photo by Elia Neuscheller

As pomegranate month comes to a close, it is an important time to recognize the significance that the fruit holds in society today as well as to spread awareness of the benefits of pomegranate cultivation.

For centuries, pomegranates have held a unique significance across cultures and religions worldwide, celebrated for their medicinal, economic, and cultural values. In [Christianity](#), for example, the numerous seeds of the pomegranate represent the unity of the church and a community of believers. Similarly, in Islam, pomegranates are mentioned in the Koran three times as examples of the good things created by God. In Judaism, pomegranates are a metaphor for the richness of the promised land. During the Jewish New Year, it is customary to eat the fruit one seed at a time, symbolizing their hopes for fulfilled wishes. Similar reverence of pomegranates has been seen across religious texts and ancient civilizations spanning the globe.

Beyond cultural significance, pomegranates have also been recognized for their [medicinal](#) and nutritional benefits. Preparations of different parts of the plant, including the flower, fruit juice, rind, and bark, have been used to treat a wide variety of conditions, especially gastrointestinal kinds. Rich in vitamins, antioxidants, and fiber, pomegranates also offer nutrients and anti-inflammatory properties that promote overall health and well-being.

Despite being one of the earliest cultivated trees, pomegranates remain an essential agricultural crop today due to their growing requirements and economic viability. For one, their resilience to drought and adaptability to

climates with cool winters and hot summers make them particularly valuable in arid regions. With relatively low water requirements and minimal inputs, pomegranate farming is both environmentally sustainable and economically viable. In drought prone regions like India, North Africa, and the Mediterranean, [farmers](#) have reported increased incomes after expansion of pomegranate cultivation due to strong market demands and higher fruit price.

Pomegranates offer farmers the opportunity to diversify their crops, moving away from subsistence farming towards a higher-value production and more sustainable agricultural production. The significance of pomegranates is only increasing as they are well suited to adapt to the harsher climatic conditions brought about by climate change. Currently in Morocco, there is a disconnect between farmers producing pomegranates and them processing and exporting their harvests, meaning farmers cannot take advantage of the high value that pomegranates can create.

For example, the Oulad Abdellah cooperative in Morocco's Beni Mellal region produces 12,000 tons of pomegranates annually, yet the majority of production is consumed in local markets and very little quantities are exported. Additionally, between 2023 and 2024, the [High Atlas Foundation](#) (HAF) distributed 56,329 pomegranate trees in 10 regions for 228 villages across Morocco, benefitting over 1,800 farming families. Despite the region's fertile soil and ideal climate for pomegranate cultivation, the lack of high-value industrial processing infrastructure prevents these farmers from realizing the true economic potential of their products.

Therefore, to seize the opportunity for improvement, HAF proposes to build a modern production system in Beni Mellal, the country's epicenter of pomegranate production, to produce organic pomegranate products like juice, concentrate, seed oil, and peel powder, both for export to the EU and for domestic sales. With local sourcing of raw materials and a gradual increase in scale of processing, this proposal has the potential to generate an annual revenue of 36 million dollars at full capacity, 41 percent of which would be net margin for farmers to directly benefit from. Not only will this improve the incomes of farmers and their families, but its benefits will spread across communities in the form of tax revenue for local governments, infrastructure improvements, and stable employment opportunities for the marginalized rural population, with an emphasis on women.

While pomegranate month is ending, pomegranate cultivation offers an opportunity to create lasting sustainable benefits for many farmers around the world. Far beyond agriculture, pomegranates can be the first step in a transformative process of development, influencing progress in other critical areas like women's empowerment, water and school infrastructure, and overall health of communities. Just as they were so valued many centuries ago for their diverse benefits, pomegranates can once again become an important staple in people's lives.

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