

ICAR–IIMR and Gourmet Popcornica Collaboration Paves the Way for an Aatmanirbhar Popcorn Maize Ecosystem

Category: Business

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- Reduced reliance on popcorn imports has saved valuable foreign exchange for the Indian exchequer.
- Scientific cultivation practices, mechanisation, and end-to-end farmer engagement have improved efficiency, yield, kernel quality, and expansion ratios, enhancing farmer prosperity.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) – Indian Institute of Maize Research (IIMR), in collaboration with Gourmet Popcornica Private Limited, India's largest popcorn company, is witnessing the successful outcomes of a strategic partnership aimed at strengthening India's popcorn maize value chain, enhancing farmer incomes, and advancing India's ambition to become a global hub for high-quality popcorn maize production.



Mr. SBP Pattabhi Rama Rao, Managing Director, Gourmet Popcornica in the corn fields

ICAR-IIMR Recognises Gourmet Popcornica for Stellar Contribution Towards Making India aatmanirbhar in Popcorn Maize

On ICAR-IIMR's Founder's Day on 9th February, 2026, Gourmet Popcornica received an award for its ongoing work with in the popcorn maize ecosystem. The Award recognises staff, progressive farmers and India companies for contribution in the extension and expansion of Maize in India.

The award was presented by Dr Hanuman Sahay Jat – Director of Maize, ICAR-IIMR to Mr. Y Yugandhar – CEO Crop integration, Gourmet Popcornica and Mr. K Mahiadhar Reddy – Director, Gourmet Popcornica.

Luminaries present at the Award Ceremony included the Chief Guest for the event, Vice Chancellor of PAU, Dr. Satbir Singh Gosal, Dr Sian Das (former Director of IIMR), Dr Nachiket Kotwaliwale (Director – ICAR -CIPHET), Dr Ashok Mehta (former Director of ICAR), Dr Sarabjeet Singh (progressive agri machinery entrepreneur) and Mr. O P Choudhary (Senior Soil Scientist, PAU), and other senior scientists from PAU and IIMR.

Over the last decade, India's popcorn maize market has expanded from 50,000 tonnes to over 130,000 tonnes. This growth has been largely driven by the successful development and domestication of high-expansion popcorn maize cultivation. Earlier, nearly 100 percent of the popcorn consumed in India was imported. Today, domestic production accounts for nearly 65 percent of the market, significantly reducing reliance on imports and creating a new and sustainable income stream for Indian farmers.

Over the past five years, ICAR-IIMR's scientific and agronomic expertise, combined with Gourmet Popcornica's decade-long experience in large-scale high-expansion popcorn maize

cultivation, has strengthened specialised value chains such as popcorn maize. This collaboration demonstrates the importance of science-led partnerships in diversifying farmer incomes and reducing import dependence.

The partnership formally began in February 2021 with the signing of agreements for IIMR-bred popcorn hybrid's, reflecting ICAR-IIMR's commitment to translating agricultural science into tangible economic outcomes for farmers. Over the last four years, with the guidance of ICAR-IIMR scientists and its own breeding team, Gourmet Popcornica has developed new hybrids with high yield, high popping and resistance to diseases/ pests. The partnership aligns with national priorities under Atmanirbhar Bharat, promoting rural livelihoods, value-added agriculture, and export readiness.



Mr. SBP Pattabhi Rama Rao, Managing Director, Gourmet Popcornica Pvt. Ltd.

What began as an effort to produce world-class popcorn in India has now evolved into a national opportunity. With ICAR–IIMR’s research excellence and Gourmet Popcornica’s on-ground operational strength, India is poised not only to meet domestic demand but also can emerge as a trusted exporter of

premium-quality popcorn maize. *The long-term objective is to position India as a net exporter of premium popcorn maize to key Asian markets.*

Currently, Gourmet Popcornica works closely with over 17,500 farmers and cultivates popcorn maize across more than 36,000 acres in nine states across India. Through structured contract farming, capacity-building programmes, sustainable packaging initiatives, and responsible sourcing practices, the company ensures product integrity, supply reliability, and measurable farmer impact.

With a vision to become India's most trusted gourmet popcorn brand, Gourmet Popcornica is fostering a vibrant, *aatmanirbhar* ecosystem where farmers prosper, institutions excel, and consumers enjoy high-quality popcorn experiences rooted in sustainability and innovation by the support of ICAR-IIMR .

About Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), based in New Delhi, is the apex body for coordinating, guiding, and managing research and education in agriculture and allied sciences in India. It manages research and education in agriculture, horticulture, and fisheries in India. Established in 1929, ICAR operates 113 institutes and 74 universities, playing a key role in the Green Revolution and enhancing food security through scientific advancements.

For more information, visit icar.org.in.

About Gourmet Popcornica

Gourmet Popcornica is a Chennai-based agri-to-consumer company building India's popcorn value chain – from hybrid seed and farmer partnerships to kernel processing, storage, cinema supply and branded retail products. It is the number one producer of popcorn maize in India and the fourth largest in the world. Founded in 2014, Gourmet Popcornica combines global popcorn know-how with local cultivation to deliver consistent, high-quality kernels and ready-to-eat gourmet popcorn for cinemas, foodservice, retail and e-commerce.

Working closely with 17,500 farmers, Gourmet Popcornica currently cultivates over 36,000 acres of popcorn maize, across five states in India. The company prioritises product integrity, supply reliability and farmer impact through contract farming and capacity-building programmes and pursues sustainable packaging and responsible sourcing across its operations.

With a vision to be India's most trusted gourmet popcorn brand, Gourmet Popcornica is creating a vibrant, aatmanirbhar ecosystem where farmers prosper, institutions excel, and consumers everywhere enjoy unforgettable, high-quality popcorn experiences, rooted in sustainability and innovation.

For more information, visit gourmetpopcornica.in.

