

## GI Tag Is Not Just a Label – It's a Farmer's Identity and Protection

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### Introduction

In a world increasingly driven by branding and identity, Geographical Indications (GI) tags have emerged as one of the most powerful tools to protect the legacy, origin, and value of region-specific agricultural products. In Tamil Nadu, products like Madurai Malli (jasmine) and Virupakshi Hill Banana are not just economically significant but also culturally emblematic. Yet, many farmers are unaware of what a GI tag means, or how it can transform their market power.

This article highlights the current gaps in awareness, the threat of counterfeit GI products, and how emerging technologies like blockchain and barcode-based traceability can protect genuine farmers and empower local economies.

### Understanding GI Tags in Agriculture

A Geographical Indication (GI) is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities, reputation, or characteristics inherent to that location. GI-tagged products cannot be copied or misused by producers from other regions. In agriculture, a GI not only safeguards traditional practices but also brings economic value.

In Tamil Nadu alone, several GI products like:

- ✓ Madurai Malli (Jasmine)
- ✓ Virupakshi Hill Banana
- ✓ Thanjavur Mattu Thavani Betel Leaf
- ✓ Erode Manjal (Turmeric) have been granted GI status. However, their real economic and marketing potential remains largely untapped.

### Problem: Low Farmer Awareness and Fake Products

Despite the GI registration of these products, a large number of farmers cultivating them are unaware of what GI means. They don't know the:

- **Benefits:** Premium pricing, export value, market identity

- **Legal rights:** Protection from misuse
- **Market potential:** Special GI-markets or branding opportunities

Meanwhile, unauthorized traders and middlemen misuse the GI name by labeling generic or non-GI produce falsely as "GI-certified." This floods the market with counterfeit goods, bringing down the trust and price of genuine produce. Farmers who actually grow the GI-tagged varieties using traditional methods are left with no market recognition or benefit.

### The Solution: Authenticity through Blockchain & Barcode Technology

This is where technology can make a revolutionary impact. Imagine a jasmine garland being sold with a barcode. A buyer or exporter simply scans it and instantly gets details like:

- ✓ Farmer's name and group
- ✓ Place of cultivation (geo-location)
- ✓ Certification status (GI registry ID)
- ✓ Date of harvest
- ✓ Mode of cultivation (organic/conventional)

Such a traceability solution powered by blockchain makes the entire value chain transparent, tamper-proof, and trusted.

### What is Blockchain in GI Products?

Blockchain is a decentralized digital ledger that records transactions across the supply chain. In GI marketing:

- ✓ Each GI product is assigned a unique digital code
- ✓ Data is recorded from farm to consumer
- ✓ It cannot be altered or faked
- ✓ Consumers verify authenticity before buying

### Barcoding & QR Codes

A QR code or barcode can be placed on packaging or labels of GI products. Scanning it reveals:

- ✓ Product origin
- ✓ Farmer details
- ✓ Authenticity certificate
- ✓ GI tag registry link
- ✓ Processing and packaging info

### Current Scenario: Why This Is Needed Urgently

Let us take the example of Madurai Malli

- ✓ It has a GI tag since 2013
- ✓ Cultivated using traditional methods and harvested before dawn
- ✓ Prized for its fragrance and longevity

But in urban markets, flowers from other regions are sold under the Madurai name, leading to confusion and loss of brand identity. The original farmers receive no premium.

Similarly, Virupakshi Hill Banana grown in specific hill belts of Kodaikanal is,

- ✓ Highly nutritious and aromatic
- ✓ Limited in supply and season
- ✓ Recognized as GI for its unique hill ecology

However, regular Robusta bananas from lower plains are often passed off as “Virupakshi Hill” variety. This is unfair and dilutes the credibility of the GI tag itself.

**Table 1: Benefits of GI and Technology for Farmers**

Benefit	Impact
Market Identity	Products recognized uniquely
Price Premium	Better margins for genuine producers
Export Potential	Meets international traceability norms
Consumer Trust	Buyers are sure of authenticity
Reduced Counterfeiting	Digital validation prevents fake labeling

### Conclusion

GI tags are not just ornamental symbols; they are legal, cultural, and economic assets. The lack of farmer awareness and poor market enforcement has so far limited their impact. But with the introduction

of digital authentication tools like blockchain and barcode scanning, we can revolutionize how GI-tagged products are marketed.



**Fig 1: Photo of Madurai Malli farmers harvesting in early morning**



**Fig 2: Image showing fake vs. real GI-tagged Madurai malli**

Let’s imagine a future where every Madurai Malli garland, every Virupakshi banana, and every Erode turmeric pack is traced, tracked, and trusted not just in India, but globally. This will enhance farmer incomes, preserve cultural identity, and protect our agri-heritage from exploitation. It’s time we stop looking at GI tags as paper certificates and start treating them as living proof of a farmer’s identity.

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