The Indian state of Maharashtra has proposed to establish a horticulture development body.

A proposal for the body had been sent to the state cabinet for approval, according to Maharashtra horticulture minister Vinay Kore, who made the announcement at Mahawine 2009, a grape and wine industry conference.

"The new body may be a corporation or a board, which will be decided by the cabinet," Mr Kore explained. "The principal purpose behind the move is to encourage the development of the produce, establish good management practices and to streamline the marketing activities of the growers."

The development body would focus on the issues facing the horticulture sector, said Mr Kore. He added there was a movement to separate horticulture from agriculture in India, as seen in the National Horticulture Mission.

Horticulture is a large sector in Maharashtra – Mr Kore said the state produced 40-50 per cent of India’s grapes, 25 per cent of the country’s bananas and 60 per cent of pomegranates.

Marketing and branding were an important aspect for a new horticulture development board, according to Mr Kore. The state would push for a separate branding scheme under the National Horticulture Mission (NHM).

"Three years ago, the government allotted Rs 15,000 crore (US$1.1bn) for NHM. Maharashtra was allotted 18 per cent of the money (Rs 2,700 crore). There is a lot of unutilised money that can be used to fund the scheme to create a brand," Mr Kore said.

He said a proposal for such a marketing initiative would be sent to the central government within two weeks.

"The state has done a lot to increase production but we are yet to exploit the marketing potential. While we do need to increase production, we need to pay more attention to marketing," he added.

Mr Kore also said the distribution network for horticulture, fruits in particular, needed to be improved, and called on private companies to spearhead development efforts. Good Agriculture Practice development was also an important step for the domestic market, he said.