

Coconut farmers make merry

Neera and its derivatives fetch handsome returns

K.A. Martin

KOCHI: The sweet sap from coconut flowers is swinging fortunes in favour of the beleaguered coconut farmers in the State, numbering roughly 4.2 million. One of them at Muthalamada in Palakkad has earned over Rs.55,000 during August from 17 trees.

Unheard of for coconut farmers, the handsome earnings have bolstered the Coconut Development Board's plans to turn India into a global hub for Neera derivatives over the next five years.

The board estimates that even if one per cent of the 18 crore coconut trees in Kerala are tapped for Neera, it will generate Rs.5,400 crore yearly. A sum of Rs.2,700 crore will go directly to the farmers, Board Chairman T.K. Jose said on the eve of the World Coconut Day celebrations in Bangalore.

He said the estimates were based on the



Tom Thomas, a farmer at Muthalamada in Palakkad, has earned Rs.55,000 from 17 trees in one month.

conservative consideration that a tree yielded a litre of neera a day, Tom Thomas, the happy farmer from Muthalamada, said he saw yields going up to 3.5 litres a day a tree. He is one of the 20,000 shareholders in the Palakkad Coconut Producer Company and among the first 20 farmers who leased their trees for Neera tapping late June.

Farmers who have 15 trees under Neera tapping earn Rs.45,000 a month on

an average with the current price of Neera and its derivatives, P. Vinod Kumar, chairman of the producer company, said.

Mr. Vinod Kumar said Neera tappers too had seen their fortunes improve. The 25 tappers with the company were permanent employees and paid Rs.20,000 a month in salaries and incentives, along with another Rs.5,000 towards their social security net.