

Sweet tidings for coconut growers

Coconut board looks to market neera as a health drink

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BANGALORE: 'Neera', the sweet sap tapped from the coconut spathe, is back in the news as the Coconut Development Board (CDB) of the Agriculture Ministry is now projecting this as a 'health drink', the production of which can boost the fortunes of the country's coconut growers.

Zeroing in on Bangalore to create public awareness about the economic as well as health importance of neera on the occasion of World Coconut Day on September 2, the CDB described the sap as the "future of the country's coconut sector".

According to CDB's Chief Coconut Development Officer Sugatha Ghose, the experience of coconut farmers in Kerala, which is the only State that has allowed tapping of neera, has shown that it is possible to earn a minimum of Rs. 15,000 from a tree per year through neera production compared with coconut sales which can fetch only about Rs. 1,200.

'Economic security'

"Neera can change the very concept of coconut cultivation in India by providing economic security to growers as it has the potential to increase their income 10-fold," he observed. But the more than a century-old Excise rules will have to be amended to allow farmers to tap neera.

The main contention of the Excise Department has been that neera will automatically turn into toddy if left untreated for some time and then the Excise rules will come into play. Incidentally, Karnataka has banned all forms of ar-

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NEERA



Neera is the sweet sap tapped from the coconut spathe

Excise rules have to be amended to allow neera tapping and marketing

Neera tapping at present only in Kerala

Police firing during a protest demanding permission for neera tapping led to the death of two farmers at Vitlenahalli in Channapatna taluk in 2001

Neera and its value-added products are produced prominently in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam

Coconut Development Board says neera tapping will lead to 10-fold increase in growers' income

Neera tapping can create **24 lakh to 28 lakh** additional jobs

Karnataka may introduce courses on coconut processing and management

Ananth Kumar urges Union Agriculture Minister to call meeting of Ministers of all States

THE MAJOR EXPORT DESTINATIONS ARE U.S., CANADA, NORWAY, FRANCE, SOUTH KOREA, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND WEST ASIA

rack. CDB Chairman T.K. Jose pointed out that the board, along with other research institutes, had developed technology for neera production and processing that would ensure a shelf life of nearly one year without letting the neera ferment.

Pointing out that such technologies would help in marketing neera and its by-products in a packaged format to ensure hygiene, he said coconut-growing States should decide to allow neera tapping.

'Green collar' job

According to an estimate by the board, it is possible to create 24 to 28 lakh "green collar" jobs — decent paying

jobs in the farm sector -- in the country through neera production, he said.

Responding positively to this, Principal Secretary, Horticulture Department, Rajiv Chawla said he would try his best to expedite the process of evolving Karnataka's neera policy.

Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizer Ananth Kumar, who inaugurated the World Coconut Day celebrations, urged Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh to convene a round table of agriculture and horticulture Ministers of all States to discuss amending Excise rules to allow tapping and marketing of neera as a health drink.