

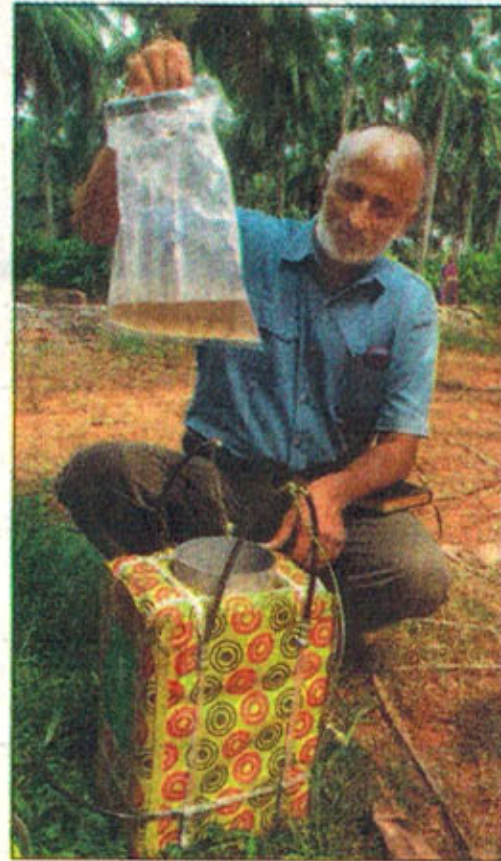
Huge profits beckon coconut growers through Neera

State Budget provides for tapping of natural health drink; new tech may help

Ronald Anil Fernandes

KASARGOD (KERALA): With Chief Minister Siddaramaiah making a proposal in the 2014-15 State Budget on allowing tapping of Neera—the sweet sap harvest from coconut spathe—growers of the tropical tree can look forward to making some good money.

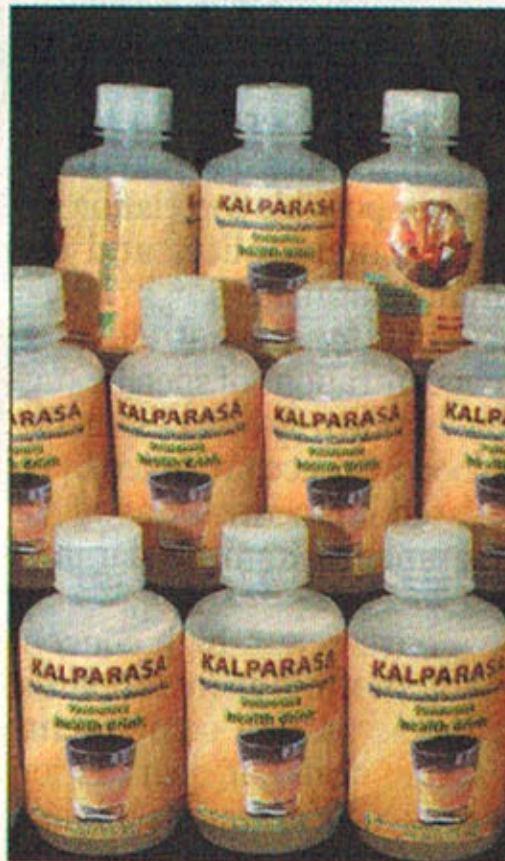
Although India produces 23,053 million nuts a year—highest in the world—the utilisation of nuts or coconut oil has seen negative growth in recent times for various reasons. To address the issue, the Central Plantation Crops Research institute (CPCRI) at Kasargod, Kerala, has come out with a novel method of promoting Neera, which has proven health benefits. The CPCRI is a premier institute under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for conducting basic and strategic research in coconut.



Prof K B Hebbar, of the Central Plantation Crop Research Institute (CPCRI), Kasargod, Kerala, shows an ice box (which is placed on top of coconut tree to collect sap) and a polythene cover containing Neera. The packaged bottles of Neera, the natural health drink, being promoted by the CPCRI. DH PHOTOS

With the bottling technology developed by it, Neera, also known as Kalparasa, can be refrigerated for 45 days (at 6-8 degrees Celsius) without adding any preservatives to it, substantially increasing its shelf life from the present one or two hours.

“With the bottling technology, we aim to introduce Neera as a natural health drink for commercial purpose,” CPCRI director Prof P Chowdappa told Deccan Herald. Just two weeks ago, the institute signed an MoU on Neera technology with two firms—Planet Pvt Ltd



of Andhra Pradesh and Senthil Seeds Pvt Ltd of Tamil Nadu.

Demonstrating the ice box technology, which the CPCRI has patented, Prof K B Hebbar, Head, Plant Physiology, Biochemistry and Post-Harvesting Technology, CPCRI, said that instead of the conventional clay pot, the CPCRI used an ice box (insulated) and a plastic cover was kept inside the ice box with a filter.

The same is placed atop the coconut tree so that the sap drops are collected in the ice box.

Hence, the collected sap re-

Earn Rs 90,000 per tree in 6 months

A farmer, on average, gets 150-200 coconuts per year per tree, which means he can earn a maximum of Rs 2,000. But if he taps Neera (Kalparasa), he can earn at least Rs 15,000-Rs 20,000 per year per tree. “Each spadix would give anywhere between 1.5 litres and 2 litres of sap per day. Each tree can have 2-3 spadix. Even if a tree gives just four litres of sap per day, the farmer will get 120 litres per month. For six months, it will be 720 litres per tree. Considering the fact that one litre of Neera is sold for Rs 125 (in Kerala), the earning per tree for six months would be a cool Rs 90,000, said Prof K B Hebbar, Head, Plant Physiology, Biochemistry and Post Harvesting Technology, CPCRI. Out of the Rs 125 per litre, the coconut tree owner gets Rs 30 per litre and the tapper Rs 25 per tree a day. The remaining Rs 70 goes to marketing and other expenses. But if the coconut tree owner himself markets, he can make some nice profit, he added.

mains cold (4-6 degrees Celsius) until being removed, which is later kept in refrigerator and bottled. The same can be kept for 45 days, he explained.

In addition, experiments have been done to make Neera products such as coconut sugar, coconut jaggery, coconut honey and coconut syrup, etc, edible and of high nutritional value, he said.

An MBA graduate from Tamil Nadu is in the process of marketing and exporting coconut sugar to Germany, according to Prof Chowdappa. Coconut sugar has several benefits over the regular sugar.

DH News Service

What is Neera?

Neera, also called Kalparasa or palm nectar, is a sap extracted from the inflorescence of various species of coconut trees. It is generally extracted before sunrise and is sweet, oyster white in colour and susceptible to natural fermentation at ambient temperature within one or two hours of extraction. Once fermented, Neera becomes toddy. It is widely consumed in India, Sri Lanka, Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar.