

■ Each palm can fetch ₹21,000 a year

Neera can turn out millionaire farmers

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This is good news for coconut farmers in the state. If you have 100 coconut palms for neera tapping, you can be a double millionaire in a year! Each palm will get you a cool Rs 21,000 (it can go up to Rs 35,000 and even higher if the palm is a DxT variety) a year by just handing over it to a farmers' society for tapping the health drink. If it's only 25 palms, still it will get you roughly Rs 4.5 lakh a year. This is when the palm is tapped for just 100 days a year.

Take for example a farmer in Muthalamada, Palakkad, who gave 17 palms for neera tapping. He was handed over a cheque worth Rs 55,000 last month. If the same palms were tapped for toddy it would have fetched him only Rs 5,100. One acre of coconut farm has roughly 80 palms.

When contacted, P. Vinodkumar, chairman of Palakkad Coconut Producer Company Ltd, a cooperative enterprise



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of coconut farmers, told DC that only 300 palms were now being tapped in Muthalamada and the produce was mostly being supplied to Kochi through a cold chain. The centrifuge plant of the company where bottling was expected on large scale would become functional only by June 2015. Prior to this, by December this year filtered neera in glass bottles would be made available across the state by the company. A litre of neera would cost Rs 125 for a

buyer.

Vinodkumar, however, said that as per a policy, the company would accept only 10% of the palms of a farmer for tapping to ensure that there should not be any shortage of nuts.

Meanwhile, the neera plant of the SCMS Group at Kalamassery, near, here, is expected to go fully operational before Onam. Plants by coconut farmers' producer companies are expected to come up in nine other districts as well by next year.