

CDB on a Mission to 'Tap' the Potential of Coconut Sector

by Alex Mathew

Kochi: With the commercial launch of Neera - a global health drink - the state is expected to earn up to ₹5,400 crore a year from tapping around 1 per cent of the estimated 18 crore coconut trees in the state. It proves true that the intensive neera promotion campaign by the Coconut Development Board (CDB), established under the Union Agriculture Ministry for the integrated development of coconut cultivation and industry, has started to reap rich dividends, by marking a positive impact on the state's economy.

The state has to move steadfast if it has to become a top player in neera and its value-added products segment, CDB chairman T K Jose said. "The scope of



A toddy tapper collecting neera from a coconut tree

neera and its value-added products is immense. Unfortunately, we are yet to tap the unexploited potential of it. Though India is the largest producer of raw coconuts in the world, when it comes to processing for value-addition in coconut, we are at the 24th or 25th position. Indonesia,

one of the largest producers of coconut, has earned over ₹12,000 crore during the last fiscal through the import of sugar from neera to European and several countries. Named Coconut palm sugar, they market it as an alternative to sugar having a low Glycemic Index (GI is 35)," he said.

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CDB INSTITUTE

CDB institute of Technology at Vazhakkulam in Aluva provides technical support and promotes efficient technologies in coconut processing for integrated development of coconut sector in the country. The thrust area now is the processing of neera and the production of value-added products from neera.

"There are several issues that affect the neera production and processing in our state, with the shortage of neera technicians being the prime factor. The lack of new varieties of high-yield coconut trees also attributes to the crisis. The intense shortage of technical professionals in food

technology is also a worrying factor. Spreading awareness among the public on the uses of neera and its value-added products is a requisite. If we could find a solution to these issues, we could reap loaded benefits," he said. The CDB chairman said though there are institutions that offer course in coconut processing in countries like Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, we lack such facilities in our country.

Replanting and Rejuvenation

The aim of CDB's replanting initiative is to improve the productivity from coconut trees by cutting down the old, senile and unproductive palms and replanting them with quality seedlings and the rejuvenation of the existing farms.

With a view to tiding over the shortage of coconut palm climbers, the CDB has been on a massive drive to train youths in developing skills in palm climbing and plant protection activities. The programme, under the 'Friends of Coconut Tree' banner, has entered its fourth phase and envisages training to 20,000 youths across the country. The CDB is in the process of forming three-tier Farmer Producers Organisations.

As of now, there are 6,786 coconut producers' societies, 564 coconut producers' federation and 17 coconut producers' company in the coconut growing states in south India. In future, the schemes and programmes of the CDB will be implemented through FPOs and it will reach the grassroots-level.