

C.S. Narayanankutty



**Besides maintaining soil moisture and enrich fertility, it will enhance income**

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) here has underscored the need to go for extensive cultivation of cocoa as an inter-crop in the vast stretches of coconut, areca nut, and oil palm groves in the country to meet the steady rise in demand for the produce in the global market and to effectively tide over adverse market fluctuations faced by cultivators.

Cocoa cultivation requires no additional land as it can be grown as inter-crop in coconut, areca nut and oil palm groves, CPCRI director

P. Chowdappa has said, as the premier research institute under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is poised to host the valedictory session of its year-long centenary celebration here from Saturday.

Cocoa cultivation also helped maintain soil moisture and enriched fertility by shedding leaves, besides arresting weed growth in the gardens, he said.

“We have 2.13 million hectares of coconut, 4.85 lakh hectares of areca nut, and two lakh hectares of oil palm in the country,” Dr. Chowdappa said.

#### Cocoa farming in India

The CPCRI introduced cocoa cultivation in India way back in 1969.

During the 1980s, there was only one company — The Cadbury’s India Ltd. — that procured cocoa beans to manufacture chocolate.

“But today, there are a number of leading firms like Campco, Amul, and Nestle soliciting top-grade cocoa beans that fetch Rs. 200 a kg in the market,” he said.

The 1980s saw cocoa cultivation stretching up to 23,000 hectares. However, the market went down primarily owing to just one firm soliciting the produce. Lack of processing units also stagnated the cocoa market, he said.

#### Immense potential

“Today, India can cash in on the situation by emerging as a global leader in the face of sharp fall in the cocoa production in South American, West African, and South East Asian nations, owing to a host of diseases plaguing cocoa plants,” he added.

At present, cocoa cultivation could fetch an additional Rs.one lakh per acre a year against the annual income accrued in the range of Rs.25,000 and Rs.35,000 per acre of coconut and areca nut produce, he said.

The CPCRI, he said, had developed a technology to manufacture sugar, from Neera extracts, a much sought-after product by diabetic patients, in the light of Neera being misused to make toddy as the health drink could only be preserved under cold conditions.

The institute has also received Rs.8 lakh from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) to set up a bio-pesticide and fertilizer unit on its premises against the backdrop of Kasaragod being declared as the first organic district, he said. The unit was expected to be functional by next year.

He suggested that farmers use coconut husks around the palm base to maintain moisture level with the State bracing up for an intense summer.

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