

# Coconut sugar may turn life sweeter for farmers

## CPCRI moots project for its large-scale production

R. RAMABHADRAN PILLAI

**ALAPPUZHA:** Coconut sugar, also called coconut palm sugar, could save coconut farmers from the distressing situation arising out of low market prices. A new proposal for taking up a project for large-scale production of coconut sugar has been mooted by the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI).

While Neera, a health drink made from the inflorescence of coconut palms, did complement the efforts for value-addition of coconut, it has not been able to make the desired level of

profitability due to several reasons. It is in this context that researchers in the sector are proposing coconut sugar production as an alternative, perhaps a better one, to improve the farmer's income.

CPCRI Director P. Chowdappa says that coconut sugar made from sap has good demand in the market. The product has a low glycemic index of around 35, almost half that of 'ordinary sugar.'

Blood glucose levels may not rise much due to consumption of coconut sugar. Thus, the product is a better option for people having problems associated with diabetes, he says.

### Neera

The opposition to Neera among some sections of people could be an impediment to the plans for its promo-

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■ With a lower glycemic index, coconut sugar may be a better choice for people

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■ 'Coconut sugar made from sap has good demand in market'

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tion, according to him. Neera has to be produced in a time-bound manner under special supervision to guard it against fermentation into toddy. It has to be either vacuum packed or refrigerated. Production of coconut sugar does not pose such problems.

Central Areca nut and Cocon Marketing and Processing Cooperatives Limited (Campco) has a requirement exceeding 100 tonnes of coconut sugar a month for manufacturing various products. Coconut sugar, chocolate bars and

drinking chocolates have been launched by a joint venture of the CPCRI and Campco.

### Value addition

"One of the main problems confronting the coconut sector is the low level of value addition. There is only 6 per cent value addition now. It has to go up to a minimum of 25 per cent to make the sector profitable," Mr. Chowdappa says.

Value addition is the way to increase income of farmers in Kerala, especially because the productivity in the State is 27 per cent lower than that of the national average while the production cost is higher.

An expenditure of Rs.8.29 is incurred for producing a nut, with labour cost taking the majority share of 58 per cent of it, he says.

# Focus on technology transfer to ryots

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**ALAPPUZHA:** Union Minister for Agriculture Radha Mohan Singh has said that the government will give priority to the Lab to Land programme for transfer of technology to farmers. He was inaugurating a farmers' meeting organised at the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) at Kayamkulam on Thursday, as part of the centenary celebrations of the institute.

Quarterly meeting would be held at the district level to transfer relevant information to the farmers. The government was planning to set up soil testing laboratories in panchayats, he said.

## **For coconut farmers**

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar said agro parks would be set up in all districts. Of these, four would be coconut-based parks. K.C. Venugopal, MP, urged the government to increase import duty on palm oil to help coconut farmers.