

Coconut growers wait for their sweet deal

Absence of State policy on extraction of neera is an impediment for growers



WORLD COCONUT DAY

Coconut is grown in 18 States and 3 Union territories in India

12.15 million hectares under cultivation, 90 per cent of it is in south India

Coconut industry is worth Rs.10,000 crore

SCENARIO IN STATE

Coconut plantations spread across 5.06 lakh hectares in Karnataka, and in Tumakuru alone it is spread across 1.32 lakh hectares

Karnataka stands second in coconut cultivation in the country

State produces 589.25 crore coconuts out of which Tumakuru produces 100 crore coconuts per year

THE PROMISE OF NEERA

Currently, farmers get 150 coconuts per palm per year

Rs. 1,500 per year from one tree through traditional selling of coconuts

Neera will add an additional Rs. 7,200 per palm per year for the farmers

USES OF NEERA

Making jaggery, sugar, honey, chocolates and halwa

A nutritious drink that can flush out excess cholesterol

Anti-fermentation agents are added to ensure the neera doesn't turn into toddy

The process for the 'Sweet Neera' policy or the amendment to the Excise Act is yet to start in the State. - FILE PHOTO

S. Bhuvaneshwari

TUMAKURU: Promises to bring about a policy to extract "Sweet Neera" - a natural intoxicant sapped out of coconut trees - have yet to fructify for farmers in the State. Coupled with wildly fluctuating coconut prices, farmers are yet to find a State policy that may have sweetened their moods on World Coconut Day on Wednesday.

Hopes had risen after Chief Minister Siddara-

Farmers will be benefited and can get a regular income to meet their day-to-day expenses by extracting neera.

B.S. DEVARAJ, State Secretary of Karnataka Rajya Raittha Sangha

maiah said while presenting State Budget this year that amendment will be made to the Excise Act to permit the

The policy should mimic the Kerala policy, where farmers are seeing a profit of Rs. 50 per litre extracted. Stringent laws against fermentation of neera will deter turning this into toddy.

ANEKATTE VISHWANATH, State Convener of Sihi Neera Prasarana Samiti

members of the coconut producers' companies, federations and societies to extract neera. However, the

process for the 'Sweet Neera' policy or the amendment is yet to start.

Neera is especially important for the farmers as it will give a steady monthly income irrespective of prices of coconuts in the wholesale market.

State Convener of Sihi Neera Prasarana Samiti, Anekatte Vishwanath told *The Hindu* that the policy must be modelled after the one in Kerala. In the coastal State, members registered in Coconut Development Board can extract sweet neera and sell for Rs. 35 (for 200ml bottle) in the market.

The policy even prohibits the fermenting of neera into toddy. This system has allowed farmers to get a profit of Rs. 50 per litre per day from one coconut tree. Each tree can give four litres of neera, added Mr. Vishwanath.

State secretary of KRRS B.S. Devaraj told *The Hindu* that in Karnataka, farmers can get a profit of up to Rs. 7,200 per tree per year if neera extraction is allowed.

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