

Coconut Board bets on *neera* to avert crisis in sector

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The Coconut Development Board is pinning hopes on *neera* production to help revive the coconut sector, which is reeling under severe crisis.

Neera is the sweet, white-coloured sap tapped from the immature inflorescence of coconut. A rich source of sugar, minerals and vitamins, it is seen as a health drink.

However, the inclusion of this zero-alcohol liquid into toddy in the Kerala Abkari Act has led to misconceptions about *neera*, thereby limiting its tapping in the State.

T. K. Jose, Chairman, CDB, stressed the need to take *neera* out of the purview of Abkari

Act as it is unfermented sap containing no alcohol. A non-alcoholic drink being included under liquor is factually wrong, injustice and irrational, he said.

The technological advances made in the processing and packaging of *neera* ensure that it remains a zero alcoholic drink, he added.

Emphasising the need to treat *neera* and toddy different drinks, the Board suggested that *neera* tapping and production, processing and packaging be undertaken under the auspices of Federations of Coconut Producers Societies.

He pointed out that Defence Food Research Laboratory

and Central Food Technological Research Institute have evolved technologies to preserve *neera* through thermal processing. The Regional Agricultural Research Station at Pilicode under the Kerala Agricultural University has also developed a technology for *neera* preservation and the production of many non-alcoholic value-added products such as soft drinks.

Industry sources said that a committee appointed by the Kerala Government has recommended that *neera* tapping can be allowed but with strict controls. The State Government is yet to take a decision on the report's suggestion.

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