

Neera companies plan stir, to meet CM on Wednesday

DC CORRESPONDENT
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The neera producer companies which have long been waiting for the government grant for their processing plants on Thursday said they will take to the agitational path if the agriculture department continued with its efforts to divert funds to paper companies and deny them what was promised in the last year's budget.

Chairmen of nine of the 12 Coconut Producer Companies (CPCs) which have gone ahead with setting up of neera processing plants met in Kochi and decided to give the government one last chance when they would meet Chief Minister Oommen Chandy next Wednesday.

"More than 5 lakh coconut farmers have come under various CPCs with a hope that the neera industry will change their fortunes," said K Shajahan, chairman of the Federation of CPCs Kerala after the meeting. "The gov-

WAITED ENOUGH?



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ernment's denial of grants will lead to the early death of the industry."

The farmers had planned a massive agitation on January 7 but put it off after a request from the chief minister. In the discussions later, the government cleared neera licenses for more federations but there was no word on sanctioning the grant. "If the government does not act now, we will resume our agitation," he said.

Lal Varghese Kalpakavadi,

chairman of Kerala Karschaka Congress, the farmers' wing of the Congress, demanded that the chief minister intervene in the matter immediately and ensure that the funds are released to the CPCs.

"Neera is a product that will help brighten the future of lakhs of ordinary farmers in the state," he said. "There are efforts by certain quarters to prop up dormant companies and divert funds to them. This is highly regrettable."