

Coconut farmers plan diabetic-friendly products

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KOCHI: Coconut farmer societies, awaiting amendments to the Kerala Abkari Act for neera production, plan to venture in a big way into making palm sugar, jaggery and sugar concentrate, which opens up the prospects of these products being used in large quantities in bakery and confectionary items.

Diabetic-friendly ice-creams and chocolates; jalebi and laddoo; cakes and cookies are not too distant on the food horizon if abkari rules are amended, said T.K. Jose, Chairman of the Coconut De-

velopment Board on Wednesday. He said studies had proved that sugar from coconut inflorescence was diabetic-friendly.

Neera production has been held up because the Abkari Act, which controls the production and sale of alcohol-containing products and produce including toddy, has not been amended to allow tapping of the unfermented sap from coconut flowers.

The government issued an order on September 23 that the Abkari Act would be amended but the actual order appears still to be caught up in bureaucratic tangles.

Earlier, a committee appointed by the government to study the problems facing the toddy business and the prospects of neera tapping, had recommended opening up the business of neera in the State. Mr. Jose said that neera has largely been touted as a soft drink. But coconut producer companies would be encouraged to produce palm sugar and jaggery as well as sugar concentrate for use in confectionary and sweets production.

Eleven of these producer companies, under the aegis of the Coconut Development Board, have obtained regis-

tration and are awaiting amendments to the Abkari Act to begin neera production.

The board has tested technology for preservation of neera without fermenting for two months in room temperature and for a longer period under refrigeration. The board has completed and tested the technology for neera preservation as well as for value-added products from neera in collaboration with a private institution in Kochi. The board is also in the midst of perfecting its own technology at its lab at Vazhakkulam, near here. Chairman of Te-

jaswini Coconut Farmers' Producer Company Sunny George said on Wednesday that the company was ready to produce neera when the licences for tapping are issued by the government. The company in Kannur is among the first to get the registration for tapping and packaging neera under an initiative by the board.

Similar units have also been registered in Kozhikode, which has two of them; Malappuram, Palakkad, Thrissur, Alappuzha and Kollam, said information posted on the website of the Coconut Development Board.