

KAU to seek three-year tax holiday for Neera

Launches training programme in Neera tapping and production

PROMOTING NEERA

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has taken the first step towards commercialisation of Neera and Neera-based products with the launch of a training programme for Neera technicians at the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Pilicode, recently.

The university is seeking a three-year tax holiday to popularise the non-alcoholic drink made from the unfermented sap produced by coconut flowers.

The first batch of 30 trainees, 10 each from Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur, and Kasaragod districts, will acquire the skill and knowledge in Neera tapping and produc-

tion from the two-week training programme. This core group will serve as master trainees to train technicians from across the State.

The KAU is scheduled to launch Keramrutham, its brand of Neera, on November 1. The university claims its technology is the safest method for arresting the fermentation of coconut inflorescence sap. A KAU spokesperson said Keramrutham would be promoted as a superior and more delicious health drink than tender coconut water. It contained 15 to 18 per cent of total sugars, 1.3 mg per 100 ml of Vitamin C, 90.5 ppm (parts per million) of potassium, 60 ppm of calcium, 15 ppm of phosphorous, 45 ppm of iron, and 9.5 ppm of sodium, which were appreciably higher than tender coconut water. The spokesperson said Keramrutham could be marketed as a natural sports drink as well.

Inaugurating the training

- Keramrutham scheduled to be launched on November 1

- Call for campaign to highlight health benefits of Neera

programme at Pilicode, Sony Sebastian, Member, Executive Committee, KAU, said commercialisation of Neera technology would have a critical and measurable impact on Kerala's economy. A pressnote quoting him said tapping 1 per cent of the 18 crore coconut palms in the State for Neera production would require 1 lakh Neera technicians. He said it would add Rs.4,000 crore to the State exchequer every year.

Delivering the presidential address, Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran said KAU proposed to request a tax holiday

for three years on Neera to popularise the product. As a health or soft drink, Neera was likely to attract State VAT of around 12 per cent. Dr. Rajendran said a Government Order would be required to waive the tax.

V.K. Raju, Director of Research, KAU, said Neera would require a major promotional campaign to highlight its health benefits. He said the government could help the cause by procuring Neera for distribution among convalescing patients in hospitals, adolescents, and children in anganwadis, and as a revitalising drink for students and sportspersons. It could direct the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation, the Kudumbasree Mission, and other establishments to buy Neera-based products from KAU and arrange for their commercial popularisation through these outlets.