

# Neera companies get big relief

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOCHI, MARCH 13

After seeing his budgetary proposal to support neera processing companies last year being scuttled by Agriculture Minister K P Mohanan, Finance Minister K M Mani became careful this time. In his budget speech on Friday, the finance minister roped in Kerala Financial Corporation, a financial institution under his ministry, to disburse the 25 per cent equity support to the farmer producer companies. The minister earmarked ₹10 crore for this purpose.

The minister had last year also set apart ₹10 crore for the purpose, to be routed through the ministry of agriculture. The fund remains unallocated though the special working group had recommended to the ministry to process it for special leave for grants.

The budget also promised to support the budding industry by offering financial help to set up processing plants and for training neera technicians. The budget set apart ₹10 crore for providing support for plant and machinery to each coconut producer company to a maximum extent of 25 per cent of the cost or ₹50 lakh whichever is higher. The minister also offered ₹10 crore to subsidise training neera technicians at the rate of ₹10,000 per person. The Coconut Development Board had estimated that it takes approximately

- Equity support up to 25%
- ₹10 crore for training neera technicians
- Subsidy for plant, machinery
- Neera will be an official drink



₹14,000 to train a technician.

The minister announced that packaged neera will be served as one of the beverages of choice in all public functions and government accommodations.

Coconut Development Board chairman T K Jose said he was glad that the government considered the proposals CDB had submitted for the neera sector. "The coconut and agriculture sector have got an unprecedented consideration in this budget," he said.

Mr P Vinod Kumar, chairman of the Palakkad Coconut Producer Company, said the government move was welcome. "The proposal to give us grant for plant and machinery and for offering equity support will be a big breather for us as we had taken loans at unaffordable rates," he said.