

Anyone's Neera not a good idea

NEERA A HEALTH
DRINK, NOT ALCOHOL

DC CORRESPONDENT
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The government's decision to give licence for producing Neera to entities other than those approved by Coconut Development Board may prove disastrous as tapping and production of the drink require expertise, quality control and standardisation for which the Board has taken a series of measures.

A recent GO by the government had allowed Kerala State Beverages Corporation, Kerala Coconut Development Corporation, Kerala Agricultural University, and Agro Industries Corporation, besides bonafide jaggery manufacturers to produce Neera.

This was in addition to

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the permission given earlier to Coconut Producers Societies and Federations under the Coconut Development Board.

"Absence of quality control and standardisation can cost the project dearly, especially when Neera will be competing with soft drinks in the market," said Mr C. Mohankumar, director and head of the biotechnology department of

SCMS College, here, which has a project for producing Neera with the support of Coconut Board.

SCMS had succeeded in developing a technique to preserve natural Neera in room temperature for two months and processed Neera for six month. Currently, it is training a bunch of toddy tappers as Neera technicians. "Neera tapping is different from toddy tapping and we are also giving lessons to them on hygienic tapping methods," he said.

"One can understand the decision to permit the Agricultural University to make the drink. But I am not sure about others. If there are no quality controls, it can end up in giving Neera a bad name," Mr Mohankumar said.



Kochi: Neera is the sweet, oyster white coloured sap tapped from the 'spathe' of coconut. It is a delicious health drink, a rich

source of sugars, minerals and vitamins, according to the Coconut Development Board. The most significant characteristic of the product is its low Glycemic Index (GI is 35), an indicator of the extent of sugar absorbed into the blood.

Foods with GI less than 55 are classified as low GI foods. The global demand for low GI sugar are on the increase and hence neera and coconut palm sugar can fill up this gap.