

Neera Gives a Real High for Farmer Promoters

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The overwhelming response to neera, the non-alcoholic drink tapped from coconut palms, is giving a big push to companies that are gearing up their marketing machinery.

The companies, which are formed by about a dozen farmer federations, are targetting the Sabarimala pilgrimage season to launch the products. Recently, the Malappuram Coconut Producers Company served neera during an iftar in an effort to popularise it.

The Palakkad Coconut Producer Company has introduced its Palm Dew brand through a kiosk in Kochi. The demand is so high that the company is planning to set up another centre in the city.

"In the absence of a processing plant, we are keeping neera at minus 10 degree Celsius temperature soon after tapping it and then transferring it to freezer," said Joji M Thakkadi, director of the company.

This is fraught with risk as the chances of neera getting fermented at room temperature and turning into toddy are high. "Our plant is getting ready at an investment of ₹6 crore. Then, we can centrifuge and pack the product so as to get a shelf life of three months," he added.

The Kaipuzha Coconut Producer Company in Kollam is another company that is going ahead with its processing plant with 10,000-litre capacity.

The company is expecting it to be operational in September. "We are now focusing on training the tappers. This requires different skills than toddy tappers," said company chairman Shajahan Kanjiravilayil.

The state excise department has given permission to each coconut federation to tap 1,500 trees. It is expected to fetch an income of ₹1,000 a month for a farmer from a single palm tree.

The Coconut Development Board (CDB) took this initiative so as to reduce the dependence of farmers on copra and coconut oil, which are subject to price fluctuations. The byproducts from neera like sugar and honey could also provide them additional income.