

Neera roll-out to be delayed

To take a month to reach market

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KOCHI: It will be at least a month before the first bottle of neera and value-added products from the sweet sap of coconut flowers hit the market after the first batch of licences for tapping was distributed by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy in Kottayam on Sunday.

The first step is to train neera technicians, says Sunny George, chairman of Tejaswini Coconut Farmers' Producer Company Limited, the first producer company to be registered in the country under an initiative of the Coconut Development Board.

Training

He said with each coconut producer company getting licence to tap 1,500 trees, they would need a minimum of 100 technicians each, plus a reserve force to deal with daily tapping requirements.

Training neera technicians was not legal till now under the Abkari rules, which had now been modified to bring neera out of their purview.

Mr. George is optimistic about the availability of potential neera technicians though there is a general scarcity of workers in the agriculture sector.

Kabeer Vayappurath, chairman of the Koyilandi Coconut Farmers' Producer Company, said it would take

- **First batch of licences for tapping given away**

- **Abkari rules modified to bring neera out of their purview**

time to train technicians to tap 1,500 trees, for which the company received licence on Sunday.

One of his other concerns is the marketing of the produce. "This is a new area for our company and we hope to take the lead from the Coconut Development Board," he said.

Mr. George, however, always fears about potential demand for neera-based products. He said on Tuesday that he was receiving enquiries for these products from potential buyers.

Chairman of the Coconut Development Board T.K. Jose said the companies which received the licence would now identify the trees to be tapped for neera. They would have to be numbered by the Excise Department to keep track of the operations of the neera producing companies.

"One of the fears is the quality of coconut trees across Kerala. These trees have been a neglected lot because of the poor price coconut fetched until recently," said Mr. George.