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■ Kerala Coconut Farmers to Ramp up Marketing of Neera And Neera Honey

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KOCHI: In a move beneficial to nearly nine lakh coconut farmers in the state, the consortium of coconut producing companies has decided to actively market the byproducts of Neera and Neera Honey, whose demand has reportedly increased in both domestic and international markets. To initiate the project, the Palakkad Coconut Producer Limited (PCPL) is negotiating the first round of procedures to ink an agreement with a Mumbai-based firm for a 2.5-tonne deal of Neera Honey.

Neera Honey is a rare natural product containing Vitmain A, B and C and a rich source for iron to anaemic patients. It is also used in pharmaceutical formulations and as sweetener in confectionery like ice creams.

"The agreement with the Mumbai-based firm will be signed on August 20. Initially, they have placed an order for 2.5 tonnes of Neera Honey, a deal worth `15 lakh," said B Padmanabhan, a member farmer with PCPL. The company in Mumbai has enough sources to distribute the product in foreign countries also, said Padmanabhan on the prospects of overseas marketing. Regular orders from the company will help PCPL as well as the coconut farmers depending on it, he added.

The consortium of coconut producing companies itself has bagged an order from Delhi for 50,000 bottles of Neera, the unfermented sweet sap from coconut flowers. Initially, the units under the consortium- Kaippuzha, Thiru Kochi and a soon-to-be-operational plant at Kuttiyadi- will undertake the supply of the order.

A project of special purpose vehicle (SPV) is underway and with the implementation of it, the consortium will be able to handle bulk orders.

According to Coconut Development Board chairman T K Jose, the board is getting enquiries for Neera from overseas destinations including Dubai, Europe and London.

"Large scale export requires proper action plan. The safety standards set by each country will be different. We need refrigerated containers to transport them, first of all. But in India, we would be accountable to the Food Safety Standard Authority of India. Therefore, we plan to tap the domestic market before exploring export potentials," Jose said.