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■ Liberal Neera Policy Likely in Budget

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BENGALURU: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's tenth budget is expected to bring cheer to coconut growers in the state.

Siddaramaiah may announce a liberal neera policy in the budget to enable growers to market the non-alcoholic beverage, sources said.

The drink is tapped from the coconut palm, and if not consumed within a few hours or stored under controlled temperature, it will ferment into toddy (with alcohol content).

According to sources in the agriculture and horticulture departments, Siddaramaiah has already instructed the officials to study the neera policy in Kerala and Goa.



Permitting commercial tapping, processing and selling of the coconut palm drink would require an amendment to the Karnataka Excise Act.

Coconut growers have long been demanding a favourable policy to market the product, which may come through in the ensuing budget, sources said.

The issue also figured prominently during Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's pre-budget interaction with farmer delegations.

The chief minister has promised a positive response in his budget to allow sale of neera as a healthy beverage, Karnataka Federation of Farmers' Associations president Kuruburu Shantakumar said.

Coconut growers have already registered a company for commercial production of neera that would use a technology developed by the Central Food Technology Research Institute (CFTRI) to improve the shelf life of the drink, he said.

He said, "A liberal neera policy will enable coconut growers to earn an additional income as the product can be used in the manufacture of chocolates, jaggery and many other food products. The liberal policy would also enable farmer groups to obtain loan from banks to set up neera units."