'Cashew Can Be Grown Anywhere'

by M Raghuram

Puttur: A research indicates that cashew can be commercially grown extensively anywhere from Kanyakumari to Madhya Pradesh and in North East.

The Puttur-based Directorate of Cashew Research (DCR), a unit of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, has started promotion of cashew cultivation extensively in non-conventional regions and it says the results have been 'extraordinary'.

Brahmoji Rau, a traditional grower of Nanjangud Kasabale, a GI-tagged banana, said, "I will develop a 200-acre cashew plantation in Nanjangudu. I have paid two visits to Puttur DCR after I was told by the scientists here that cashew can be grown anywhere. I am here to learn the scientific methods of cashew cultivation and I am sure things will work out fine.'

Raju and two other farmers from HD Kote and Chamarajanagar have decided to take up cashew cultivation in the arid lands of those districts.

"The ongoing research on expansion of cashew cultivation areas in the country has given us fruitful results. We were able to penetrate non-conventional cultivation areas like Mandya, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Ramnagar and Bengaluru Rural districts. We have introduced small patches in Mandya and other districts during the last three years and some farmers there have already started reaping the first crop. We expect in the next two years they will be full fledged cashew planters," Gangadhar Nayak, scientist at the DCR, told Express.

Till now, cashew has been known as a wild crop sporadically in coastal areas. But, cashew is now being accepted by farmers as a plantation crop and they are ready to convert their lands into cashew plantation, Nayak said.

Director of the DCR P L Saroj was optimistic that in the next five years cashew will become a plantation crop taking the yield from just 720 kg of the nut per hectare to 2,000 kg per hectare. "We have also done some study on consumer behaviour, which indicates that in the last four years the local consumption has increased. The country was exporting 69 per cent of its total output of cashew but now 65 per cent is being locally consumed," Saroj said.

To cater to the crop intensification programme, the DCR has developed a new technique of 'ultra-high-density planting' which can hold 100 plants per hectare. A model of this technique has been developed at the DCR in Puttur which is visited by BSc (Agri) graduates from Mandya and other old Mysuru, Meghalaya, Tripura, West Bengal, Assam and Andamans are on the verge of becoming cashew cultivation areas.

A DCR scientist demonstrating the ultra-high density planting of cashew to farmers from Nanjangud.

Shortfall

The current production of cashew is 7 lakh tonnes, whereas the industry requirement is 15 lakh tonnes per annum. Deficit is filled up by imports from Ghana, Mozambique and other African countries. Under tribal sub-plan of the Centre, cashew plantations are being developed at Puttur, Sullia, Kasargod and Belthangady.