

Neera - the future health drink for Delhi

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India is working up a voracious appetite for soft drinks and other fruit beverages. The Indian soft drink market is poised to grow at an annual rate of 28-30 per cent during the next 30 years. Demand for fruit drinks and packaged juice products has increased considerably during the last few years, while the overall market size of the soft drink market stands at a whopping Rs 65,000 crore. A delectable combination of rising disposable income, changing lifestyles and a young population's growing penchant for indulgence has transformed India into one of the world's fastest growing soft drink and beverage markets.

New Delhi's charm is undoubtedly derived from the city's multicultural and multi-ethnic flair. Even more than in other Indian metropolises, the urbanites living in Delhi reflect the country's population in all its diversity. The 18 million population of Delhi is a giant market for the soft drink and beverage industry. But the difference in taste and culture of this population demands diversity in the products too.

During summer, when the mercury levels soar, ice-cold drinks from exotic mocktails to traditional juices (eg: Indian lemonade, Bael



juice, jal jeera, lassi, tender coconut water, rooh afza etc.) cater to the need of the summer season in Delhi. The people in Delhi, irrespective of their age are fond of aerated/ carbonated drinks, though its regular consumption has found to cause several health hazards. The overcrowded yoga classes, health clubs and aerobics centres in Delhi, prove that there is a large number of people who bother about good and healthy lifestyle. In this context, Neera the health drink needs to be publicised in a big way in Delhi to quench the thirst of the diverse population of this metro.

Neera, also called as palm nectar is the vascular sap collected from immature unopened coconut inflorescence in fresh form. Neera can be consumed in the raw form

as drink. Packed and preserved Neera can be kept in can/bottle up to two months at room temperature. Neera is a rich source of minerals and vitamins. It has substantial amounts of iron, phosphorus and ascorbic acid. Palm sugar, which is made by boiling neera, contains protein, 16 amino acids, Vitamin B, iron, potassium, magnesium, calcium and zinc. It can be useful for treating anxiety, depression and bipolar disorders. The most significant characteristic of neera and its products its low Glycemic Index (GI), an indicator of the extent of sugar absorbed into the blood. While table sugar has a GI of 70, sugar made from neera has a GI of 35. Foods with GI less than 55 are classified as low GI foods, and can be used by people suffering from diabetes and high cholesterol.



Neera Products



Hon'ble Union Agriculture Minister Shri. Radha Mohan Singh tasting Neera

Currently neera has an excellent market potential in the country as well as in other countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Africa, Indonesia, Philippines and other pacific region, where neera is consumed as a health drink. Neera, if promoted and introduced across India, is bound to create a huge market potential as a health drink and as a base for manufacturing value added coconut products like concentrated syrup, sugar, honey etc. which has wide export potential in developed markets like USA and European region.

Understanding the benefits of Neera, Coconut Development Board (CDB) has launched many programmes to popularise it and is participating in various exhibitions and fairs across the country to enlighten the goodness of Neera. During the India International Trade Fair (IITF) 2015 in November at New Delhi, Neera was made available to the people of Delhi from the Thirukochi Coconut Producer Company. During the first five days B2 B programmes were arranged and several trade enquiries were received by the manufactures.



CDB stall with Neera in IITF 2015

The demand for Neera was good during the IITF as there were regular promotional activities through newspapers and FM radio stations. About 25 per cent of the visitors in the CDB stall were aware about Neera and majority of them liked the taste of the same. People between the age group of 30-50 were more eager and curious about the health benefits of Neera. The dealers in New Delhi have got regular customers for Neera after this trade fair. The customers who are aware about the goodness of Neera are travelling miles to reach the outlet to drink Neera. However after the trade fair, the demand for Neera was found to be reducing. Ensuing Winter may be the reason for this set back. As a general trend, people prefer hot beverages during cool winters and the present reduction in demand will overcome during the summer months when the temperature of Delhi start to shoot up. Moreover regular and massive public awareness campaign should be advocated to educate people about Neera and its value added products.

A recent study has suggested that India could prevent an estimated 400,000 people from becoming patients of diabetes over the next decade if the government imposes a 20 per cent extra tax on sweetened beverages. The study by researchers at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), New Delhi, and academic institutions in the US and the UK has also indicated that such a tax on soft drinks might avert 11 million cases of obesity or overweight between 2014 and 2023. In these circumstances a natural health drink like Neera is having an ample scope in a metro like Delhi. Once the people start to taste Neera, it is sure that there will be a huge demand which cannot be met by the present supply and all other carbonated unhealthy drinks will become secondary in the market. ■