

# ARECANUT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT A SUCCESS STORY

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**T**HOUGH arecanut is grown in a number of countries namely India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines and some of the Pacific islands, it is only in India that R & D efforts on this crop have ever been undertaken. Arecanut is of considerable economic importance to thousands of small farmers of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Assam. The present area under this crop in India is 185,000 ha. Almost the entire quantity of 191,000 tonnes of arecanut produced is consumed for chewing purposes within the country itself.

At the time of partition in 1947, India lost about 50 per cent of its area under arecanut in Bengal. During the early 50's India's production of arecanut was about 60,000 tonnes which met only about half the



A middle-aged plantation of arecanut with young plants in foreground

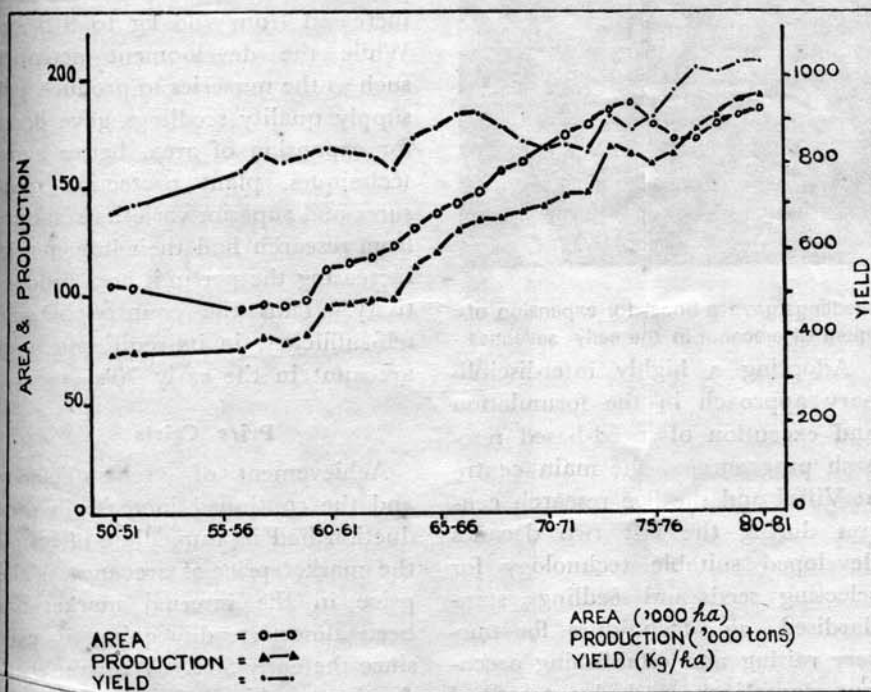


Fig. 1. Area, production and yield of arecanut

requirement of the country. The deficit was met by imports. In the year 1951-52 India imported arecanut valued at Rs 57.5 million. Seized with this problem of foreign exchange drain and also taking into account the economic importance of the crop, the Government of India established the Indian Central Arecanut Committee during the year 1947 to look into the research and development needs of the crop and take suitable action so as to make the country self-sufficient in this commodity.

### Research Efforts

For tackling the major problems confronting arecanut industry, the Central Arecanut Research Station, Vittal (now Regional Station of CPCRI) was established during the year 1956. Subsequently four Regional Stations in the major agro-



Cacao in areca garden. Intercropping in arecanut gardens generates employment and augments the income of the farmers



Areca nut nursery. The distribution of quality seedlings gave a boost for expansion of area. We became self-sufficient in our requirement of arecanut in the early seventies climatic regions of the country to tackle regional problems were also established. The regional stations in Kahikuchi (Assam), Mohitnagar (West Bengal) Hirehalli (Karnataka), and Peechi (Kerala) came into being during the period 1957 to 1959. A Regional Station exclusively for conducting research on the Yellow Leaf Disease of Arecanut was also established at Palode, during the same period.

Adopting a highly interdisciplinary approach in the formulation and execution of need-based research programmes, the main centre at Vittal and the five research centres during the last two decades developed suitable technology for selecting seeds and seedlings, standardised agro-techniques for nursery raising and establishing arecanut plantations, worked out control measures for a number of pests and

diseases and evolved better varieties. The first improved variety 'Mangala' was released for cultivation in the seventies. Working out a pattern of inter and mixed cropping in arecanut, involving both annuals and perennials in general and arecanut and cacao in particular constituted an important milestone in the progress of research. Concurrently, the Arecanut Committee organised large-scale production and distribution of quality arecanut seedlings and promoted other production activities through various schemes aimed at adoption of better management and crop protection practices. These research and development efforts had considerable impact on production and productivity of arecanut in the country.

#### Self-Sufficiency in Arecanut

Production of arecanut which was 76,000 tonnes during 1956-57 got doubled in about 14 years. The production during 1970-71 was 1,41,000 tonnes. The increase in production has been due to both increase in area and increase in productivity. During the same period the per hectare yield increased from 788 kg to 918 kg. While the development activities such as the nurseries to produce and supply quality seedlings gave boost for expansion of area, better agro-techniques, plant protection measures and superior varieties resulting from research had their influence in increasing the per unit area productivity. Thus the country became self-sufficient in its requirement of arecanut in the early 70's.

#### Price Crisis

Achievement of self-sufficiency and the continued increase in production had its immediate effect on the market price of arecanut. The price in the internal market has been almost steadily going up ever since the early 50's. With the production touching a figure of 1,41,000 tonnes during 1970-71, the market

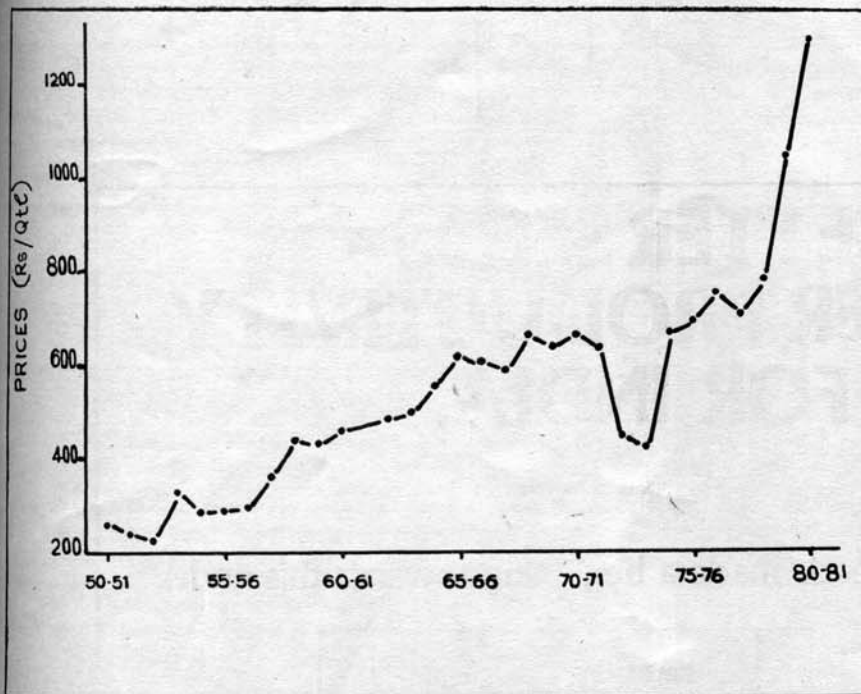


Fig. 2. Average annual wholesale price of Mangalore Supari

showed a downward trend and in the year 1973-74 it crashed to 2/3 of the earlier price. Nearly three million people who depended on this crop for their livelihood were in panic.

#### Solution through Co-operation

After detailed discussions in different platforms and panels, it was decided to promote a co-operative

society of arecanut growers of Karnataka and Kerala states to handle the procurement and marketing of arecanut. It was hoped that by procuring arecanut directly from the growers and supplying the same to the consumer at the nearest point possible, the margins of the middlemen, the delay in movement which will add to the costs, unnecessary handling expenses and many

other avoidable expenses could be saved and it would be possible to offer a better price to the producer. With active support from the Governments of Karnataka and Kerala, the Central Arecanut Marketing and Processing Cooperative Limited, Mangalore, popularly called as 'THE CAMPCO' thus came into existence in the year 1973. The CAMPCO entered into market in November 1973 and succeeded in lifting up the market in a remarkably short period. Within three months the market rates were restored to the pre-fall level. Since then CAMPCO has succeeded in offering the arecanut growers a steady price proportionate to the production costs. It may be mentioned in this context that the Chairman of CAMPCO, Shri V. Subraya Bhat, an arecanut grower himself, along with the two successive Managing Directors, Shri Sangameshwara and Shri Desai gave leadership with determination and proved beyond all doubts that a well-managed Co-operative Society can succeed even in an open market, competing with private sector and safeguard the interest of its members.



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