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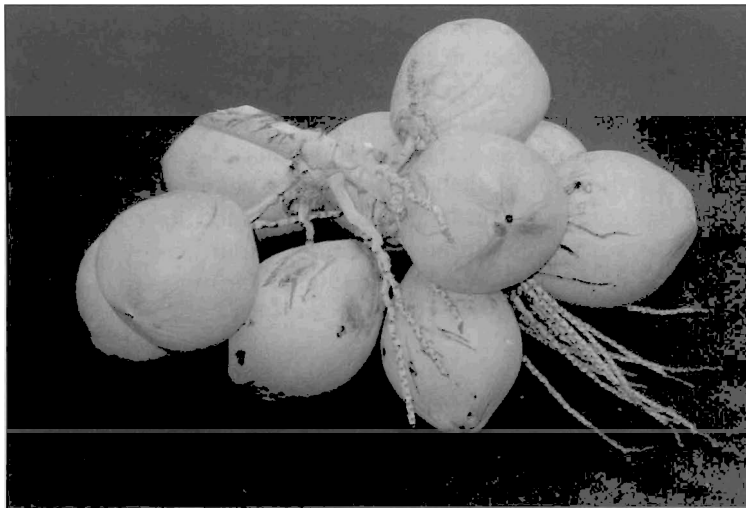
Prospects of Cultivating Dwarf Orange Coconut Cultivar for Tender Nut Production in Lakshadweep Islands

Cultivation of tender nut varieties of coconut has great potential in Lakshadweep Islands due to the flow of tourists to the island. There is no source of regular supply of tender nuts at present. Studies conducted at Minicoy revealed that Orange Dwarf available in Lakshadweep is more or less similar to the COD of Kerala coast except for minor difference. According to Dr. P. M. Jacob and his colleagues Orange Dwarf cultivar which yields 75 nuts per palm per year is the most suitable variety for cultivation in the Island.

Introduction

Coconut is the most important crop of economic importance in Lakshadweep Islands. Coconut occupy nearly 85 per cent of the total land area of Islands and it is the main source of income of Island people. The climate and the soil of Lakshadweep are very ideal for the excellent growth of coconut trees. In spite of the absence of any major diseases and pests, the annual yield of nuts is only 58 nuts/palm. This is mainly due to the high density of planting which has been estimated to be 400-500 trees per hectare as against 170-200 normally recommended for optimum yield in other coconut areas of the country. Every inch of land is occupied by coconut trees of different age groups. The prevailing socio-economic conditions compelled the island farmers to plant maximum number of seedlings in individual holdings.

Experiments conducted at CPCRI Regional Station at Minicoy revealed that spacing has an impact on yield of nuts in coconut. It was found that when seedlings were planted in normal spacing (7.5 x X 7.5 m) the annual yield



A bunch of Orange Dwarf

of nuts was 3.5 times more than those planted in double the density of planting. Though this technology was transferred through department of agriculture, its adoption was not at all

encouraging. Perhaps the prevailing socio economic conditions do not allow the island farmers to cut the excess number of palms so as to restrict the palm population for getting the optimum yield. CPCRI also demonstrated that the locally produced hybrids involving the dwarf and the Laccadive Ordinary (LO) cultivars available at Minicoy, perform better (more than 100 nuts/palm/year) than the local LO cultivar. Planting of the

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hybrids has got limited scope in view of the non availability of vacant land and the difficulty in cutting down the excess number of palms in the existing gardens. Under these circumstances extension of coconut cultivation using quality planting material is not a practical proposition. Hence value addition of coconut may be thought of for increasing production and productivity in the existing coconut gardens of Lakshadweep.

Scope for planting the tender nut variety

At present there is no source for the regular supply of tender nuts in the islands.

In the absence of a suitable tender nut variety, tender nuts are collected from the commonly available Laccadive Ordinary trees. A large number of tourists visit the islands every year and

they do demand tender nut but are not provided on most of the occasions. Taking into consideration of the large number of tourists visiting the islands, cultivation of tender nut variety of coconut has great potential in Lakshadweep.

Scope of Orange Dwarf cultivar as tender nut variety

Studies conducted at CPCRI Kasaragod have shown that Chowghat Orange Dwarf (COD) is the best tender nut variety (Ratnambal *et. al.*, 1995). At present the Orange Dwarf is not widely cultivated in Lakshadweep. It is found in isolated pockets especially close to the vicinity of the mosques and house holds. The islanders also do prefer Orange Dwarf for tender nut purpose, but it is not available in plenty. Studies conducted at Minicoy have shown that the Orange Dwarf available in Lakshadweep is more or less similar to the COD of Kerala coast except for the minor difference in the shape of nuts. It yields 75 nuts per palm per year.

Advantages of Orange Dwarf

1. It is early bearing (30-40 months after planting).
2. It has got a high nut water content (320-360 ml)
3. It has got the maximum total sugars 7.0 per cent as against 4.2 per cent in LO
4. It is easy to harvest the tender nuts without the help of the climber
5. Orange Dwarf nuts are free from the eriophyid mite attack

Planting of Orange Dwarf seedlings is possible to be undertaken by cutting down the senile and unproductive palms in the existing coconut gardens. It is also possible to accommodate more seedlings as it requires 5.5 to 6.0 m

spacing. As they come to flowering in a short period, and the loss of income due



A bearing palm of Orange Dwarf

to the cutting of the palms can be compensated. Also it will generate regular income by way of selling the tender nuts to the visiting tourists. This will indirectly generate employment to the unemployed youth who can start tender nut parlour.

Establishing Seed garden

Taking into consideration of the vast potential of this cultivar, CPCRI Regional Station, Minicoy has already initiated action to establish a separate block of Orange Dwarf palms. This will serve as a nucleus seed garden to cater to the needs of the planting materials for the entire Lakshadweep in the years to come. Action is also being initiated to survey the different islands to identify and characterize the Dwarf Orange population.

Future thrust

Seed gardens may be established in each island under the guidance of the Department of Agriculture, UT of Lakshadweep for the production and distribution of quality planting materials to the island farmers. Efforts may also be made to fill all the future gaps with Dwarf Orange seedlings. It is also desirable on the part of the Department of Agriculture to popularize the scope and importance of planting the tender nut variety in increasing the production and productivity of the island ecosystem.

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BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

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