

R&D ON BETTER USES OF ARECANUT-VARANASHI EFFORT

Varanashi Krishna Moorthy and Ashwini Krishna Moorthy

Varanashi Research Foundation (Regd.)

Adyanadka – 574 260, D.K. Karnataka, INDIA.

E-mail: varanashi@sancharnet.in

Web: www.varanashi.com

Introduction

The recent fall of arecanut price is of concern to every arecanut grower. The price reduction will not only affect the grower but also others in the entire arecanut growing belt. Over production and the propaganda about the health hazardous nature of the arecanut are the main reasons for price crash.

Today, the traditionally used “pan” has been replaced and swept over by the pan masala and gutka, which have reached the mass consumption level. This has resulted in major shift for the demand of the arecanut from individual “Panwala” to pan masala/gutka industries. A welcome development! But unfortunately, due to additives in the panmasala/gutka (tobacco and other items?), the product is supposed to be a health hazard and so certain states have banned it’s sales and consumption. Under such circumstances, promotion of better uses of arecanut is the only way.

Statutory problem to promote better uses of arecanut

In 1993, the government of India under food adulteration rules, 1955, brought a blanket rule, which states every package of supari, and advertisement relating thereto shall carry following warning:

“Chewing of supari is injurious to health”

This statutory rule is based on adverse study reports on consumption of panmasala/gutka as well as only arecanut. In fact, there is enough evidence to say that arecanut consumption as pan along with betel leaves and other spices after every meal is health promoting. These texts also say arecanut should not be used alone. Further, one should not continuously chew it. When the rule was made these points were over looked. So, efforts are to be made to delete the rule so that health promoting arecanut products could be popularised.

“Taambula” in Indian diet

The practice of chewing arecanut and betel leaves is very ancient and its mention has been made even in Mahabharatha. Arecanut is used in many religious occasions. Probably, its medicinal properties might have contributed to its time-immemorial use for masticatory purpose.

Information from Ayurvedic Sources

- Regular use of arecanut chewing keeps away bad breath and foul odour of the mouth. The practice also strengthens the gums.
- Arecanut is a digestion-stimulant, which discourages gas accumulation in the stomach.
- Because of the improvement in digestion, it increases alertness.
- Arecanut chewing prevents fat deposition in the body thus helping to maintain the body weight.
- It favours blood circulation due to which it helps to impart glow to the skin.
- It is reported that being a nervine tonic, areca is a good aphrodisiac.

Today to safeguard arecanut growers one need to sustain the demand for arecanut. There may be so many short-term plans to overcome the crises. However, the long-term plans would be

of finding better universal use. The ancient texts could give the lead. Accordingly, our research needs to be prioritized.

Varanashis and arecanut

Varanashi Research Foundation (VRF) is collecting information on the better uses of arecanut since last twenty years. Four years ago, VRF got actively involved in developing non-tobacco product based on ayurvedic principles using arecanut as the main ingredient. Two products namely (1) spiced sweet arecanut and (2) sweet arecanut with dry betel leaf (dry pan) were developed. Even though they fall under sweet supari category, they differ vastly from the general scented supari because only natural ingredients are used in these products. Trial production on a pilot unit and consumer acceptance test was also done to the first product named as "Varanashi Herbal Supari." The following opinion has emerged from the consumers.

- It is a stimulant and improves the alertness.
- Wards off bad breath and foul odour of the mouth.
- Improves taste and digestion.
- Keeps away gas trouble and constipation.
- Is a good substitute for beedi, cigarette and other nicotine products.

The products are ready for large-scale production and market penetration awaiting appropriate partners for the venture.

References

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