

Collective effort to count more from coconut



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Coconut is a crop that can be utilized for a wide variety of usage from medicine to cosmetic; food to nutrition and from shelter to protection of natural resources. The count is infinite. The raw material required is a healthy high yielding coconut palm. The plant attains the status of a crop when it is cultivated on large scale by providing adequate quantities of inputs at appropriate times.

Nowadays the coconut farmers are striving hard for getting good yield in the light of climatic vagaries, high incidence of pests and diseases, lack of agricultural labour especially for harvesting coconuts and neera and other plant protection operations, unstable market prices, etc. Though these obstacles can be tackled to a certain extent with the available technologies and information with proper management, the anticipated impact could not be obtained in terms of reflection in the sustainable income from coconut farming. One of the main reasons is the lack of collective action at field level towards pest and disease management, scheduled harvesting, aggregation of farm produce, identification of proper profitable market, value addition, byproduct utilization, etc.

Collective action in the real sense is collective labour. It is natural for different kinds of people to have different types of thinking. Agriculture especially coconut cultivation if taken up in a collective manner can realize better yields and better income through varied activities, which cannot be taken up by individuals. The individual members will be motivated to perform well if their effort will lead to obtaining a valued goal which in turn result in valued group outcome and in a valued individual outcome. The collective labour improves the knowledge of the participants on the action they carryout and shares

the burdens of other individuals.

The Coconut Development Board (CDB) under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India encourages the coconut farmers to form farmers' collectives and facilitates formation of three tier Farmer Producers' Organisations (FPOs) in coconut sector viz., Coconut Producer Societies (CPSs), Federation of Coconut Producers Federations (CPF) and Coconut Producer Companies. The main objective of formation of FPOs in coconut sector is the socio economic development of coconut farmers through productivity improvement, cost reduction, efficient aggregation, processing for value addition, better by-product utilization and efficient marketing of the produce. About 40-100 coconut growers in a contiguous area with a consolidated minimum of 4000-6000 palms can form CPS. 15-25 such CPSs by aggregation can form a CPF having 1,00,000 bearing palms, and further to CPCs having 10 CPFs and 10,00,000 bearing palms. As on 31.10.2017, a total of 9473 CPSs and 733 CPFs have been formed and registered with the Board in different States. 67 CPCs have been established by FPOs. They involve in nursery raising, aggregation of producers, marketing, processing for value addition in coconut for virgin coconut oil, coconut oil, coconut hair cream, coconut milk, Neera and Neera based products, etc.

The efforts of CDB in formation of FPOs in coconut sector has initiated transformational effort by adding value to the coconut farmers by empowering them to become a vibrant self sustaining and prosperous agricultural community. These FPOs due to the higher access to the government and other organizations can disseminate and share the knowledge gained and adopt the technologies in coconut sector for the

immediate benefit of the members. They can help in mass adoption of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) and integration of coconut based farming system. The FPOs are also expected to collaborate with technical and financial institutes, research institutes, management institutes and other consultancies for acquiring the expertise required to move in the right direction during their initial stage. They can also impart training to the youth for making available enough technicians for Neera tapping, plant protection activities, etc.

With the formation of more collectives of coconut farmers several benefits are expected to arise out of which a few are listed below.

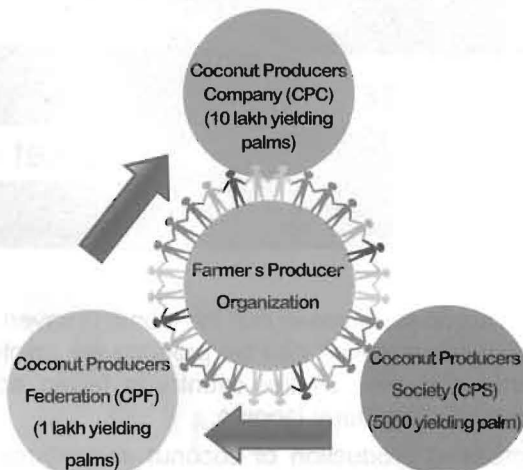
Increased coconut production is envisaged by dissemination and adoption of scientific management practices including timely and adequate application of irrigation, nutrient and plant protection measures. The water conservation technologies and adoption of suitable irrigation system will increase the production. The information on financial assistance/ credit facilities for different components under different schemes of the State/ Central Governments for fertilizers, seeds/ planting materials or pesticides, investment for a water source or improved irrigation systems or farm mechanization benefits increased production. Increased production yields increased income to the farmer. Increased income will attract more investments in the venture either by way of expansion of area of cultivation under coconut or for improvement in current production technologies being adopted. This will again increase the production.

Increased production and income will also lead to better management by the farmer which will improve the quality of coconut viz., size, shape, volume of water, oil content, TSS of tender coconut water, nuts free from deformities due to pests, diseases and other nutritional disorders, which will fetch higher price.

As coconut and few compatible intercrops like dried cocoa beans, nutmeg, other spices, grams, etc. can be stored for a longer time, storage yards may also develop as part of improved market facilities that allow the products to be sold at a time when prices are more favorable. Further, this also will attract more FPOs to band together to build storage facilities or for aggregation of farm produces, or for improved market infrastructure.

The increased nut production will lead to increased marketing activities and improved infrastructure in roads and logistics. This will in turn help the farmer producers and the manufacturers to transport and

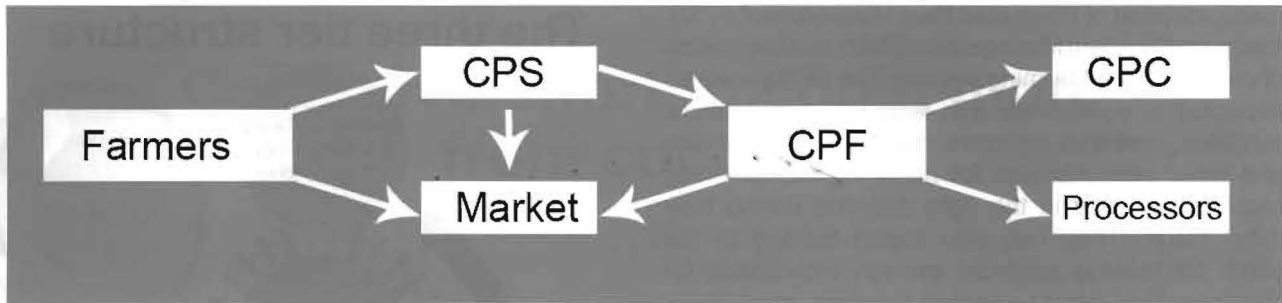
The three tier structure



sell the products at a location where higher returns are expected, thus a change in locational value of coconut is expected out of the proactive functioning of these FPOs.

Increased production leads to increased market surplus which can pave way for flourishing coconut processing industries through value addition. Thus brings a change in the form of coconut being sold from raw coconut to copra, coconut oil, VCO, milk, cream, honey, shell related products, etc.. As the technology dissemination among coconut farmers from their FPOs would enable the farmers to venture to value addition, which may fetch them higher prices than in the benefits in change in time of sale or change in location of sale. Even a simple processing facility such as a grading shed or dehusker adds benefit through changing the form of the coconut as a produce to sorted nut or a primary level processed nut. The better ones can be sold at higher price for direct consumption where the size matters and inferior ones can be diverted for processing industries, where the composition like oil content matters. In this process, the total value of the coconuts is increased.

Cost reduction in coconut cultivation can be achieved by investment in agricultural machinery to reduce labor costs, which is a major part of the expenses. Installation of tubewells, drip irrigation system, use of mechanized ploughing equipments, mechanized harvesting devices, weed cutters, dehuskers, coconut leaf petiole threshers, etc. are some examples that coconut farmers can adopt on purchase of these machineries on a community



basis. This does not mean that the labour is saved but the labour thus saved can be productively involved for other activities, as the country is facing acute shortage of agricultural labours.

Increased production of coconut and intercrops in a particular region would pave way for better infrastructure like better feeder roads or highways which may reduce the cost of moving the produce from the farm to the consumer. This benefits the farmers, truckers and consumers as well.

The information on plant protection measures, post harvest storages, etc. that are to be disseminated among the farmer members of the FPOs would reduce the losses. This is achieved by improving the physical condition of the palms or reducing the death of palms due to red (palm) weevil/ bud rot which may be lethal, if timely actions are not taken. At the same time coconut production would also be increased. The replanting and rejuvenation programme being implemented by the Board, though may not substantially increase the production in a short span, will surely avoid the losses due to the old and senile palms. This will prevent loss of income to the farmers.

The current contribution of coconut in India's GDP is about Rs.2,50,000 million (US\$ 3788 M) to the country's GDP. The increased coconut production at farm level as well as value addition taken up by the apex level Coconut Producers Companies coupled with the developmental activities of various departments of the Government would increase the coconut sector share in agriculture sector.

About Rs.43,654 million (US\$ 661 M) is reported as the export revenue from coconut, coconut products including coir products during the year 2016-17. The extension of supply chain coupled with market information to be disseminated from the centre would enable enhanced levels of foreign trade, which may contribute to the exchequer.

Increased production/ area under cultivation and

related activities will generate more jobs at various levels of production, processing and marketing. The skill levels of the people will be enhanced as required by the industry they are related to. The increased production/ job opportunities leads to better income for the stakeholders of which major part may be invested in better health care and education of their family members.

Improvement in farm management technologies will facilitate higher production, value addition, and improved logistics which allow settlement of people in aggregation apart from creation of new job opportunities. This will lead the concerned government institutions to provide additional facilities to the dwellers for better health as a result of more rural health centres, better nutrition, reduced incidence of waterborne disease as a result of improved rural water supplies, better education by construction of schools, etc.

Coconut is cultivated in a total area of 20.96 lakh ha in India. However the area coverage under the FPOs in coconut sector is too little. Thus the momentum of collective effort by formation of Coconut Producers' Societies, Federations and Companies is to be increased and the activities taken up by them are to be widened up with clear focus. At the same time there should be collective effort from CDB and other related institutions in the research, extension, marketing, infrastructure and rural development sectors for developing technologies for reduced cost of cultivation, market research on consumer acceptability, product basket for different domestic & global markets, techno economic feasibility studies for establishment of processing units for more valuable and convenient coconut products. It is also the need of the hour to make adequate provisions in the policies for handholding these FPOs in coconut sector for the sustainable income to the coconut farmers of the country and for a collective impact as a whole. ■