

CPCRI: 100 YEARS IN EVOLUTION, FOUNDATION IN THE COLONIAL AND THE MANSION IN THE INDEPENDENT INDIA

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ICAR-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (ICAR-CPCRI), the premier research institution in the National Agricultural Research Systems of India, presently mandated to conduct research in plantation crops (coconut, arecanut and cocoa), had a modest origin with its lineage tracing back to the Coconut Research Station started in 1916 at Kudlu village (of present Kasargod district of Kerala in Southern India) in the South Kanara district of erstwhile Madras presidency. Ever since its inception, it has served the cause of science and society with distinction through exemplary research, generation of appropriate technologies and development of skilled human resource.

The defining moment in history was in 1970, when ICAR established the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute with headquarters at Kasaragod, by merging the Central Coconut Research Stations at Kasaragod and Kayamkulam and the Central Arecanut Research Station at Vittal along with its five substations at Kannara, Mohitnagar, Kahikuchi, Hirehalli and Palode. Consequent to the establishment of the unified institute, the CCRS Kayamkulam was made a Regional Station to work on pest and diseases of coconut, while the CARS at Vittal was also made a Regional Station of the Institute, with a mandate to carry out research on arecanut and cocoa and the Regional

Arecanut Research Stations were converted as Research Centres of CPCRI. In 1964, erstwhile CARS initiated arecanut + cocoa and coconut + cocoa mixed cropping trials at its Vittal, Peechi, Palode and Kahikuchi centres and proved it as profitable and compatible cropping systems for cocoa cultivation. Systematic research on cocoa production technologies was also started during 1970 and the introduction of cocoa as mixed crop under arecanut and coconut has provided sustained production models. For these crops, it is a story of 'parallel evolution' in the early days, then 'co-evolution' and then evolving further as a 'single entity' in the company of one another.

As inevitable in history, it went through several events of reorganization, acquisitions and mergers, secessions and consolidations over the years. In the 1980s, CPCRI not only 'gave birth' to new institutions, but 'nurtured' them well in their infancy and 'mentored' them through adolescence to adulthood. Dedicated research institutions for individual crops or group of related crops will undoubtedly promote better R&D, with more functional autonomy, higher financial allocations, better infrastructure and human resources. The policy has paid rich dividends as can be seen from the present stature and R&D achievements of these 'sibling' institutions like the Indian Institute of

Spices Research (IISR), Kozhikode, Directorate of Cashew Research, Puttur, Indian Institute of Oil Palm Research, Pedavegi and the Central Coastal Agricultural Research Institute, Goa.

The 'loss' of WCGC in the strategic off-shore location of Andaman islands in 2001, Research centre at Hirehalli located in the Maidan region of Karnataka in 2002 and the pristine lands of Research centre at Kannara, Kerala in the ambience of Western Ghats in 2007 may 'hurt' the long-term interests of the institute considering the interests of the ceratin agro climatic regions, requirement of large extent of lands for laying out new field experiments in a

perennial tree crop like coconut, arecanut and cocoa and the acute shortage presently being faced in this regard.

At present, the research and frontline extension aspects of these crops are undertaken under five divisions *viz.*, crop improvement, crop production, crop protection, physiology, biochemistry and post harvest technology and social sciences at the institute. The Regional Station at Kayamkulam (Kerala) is mandated to work on pests and disease problems in coconut, while the Regional Station at Vittal (Karnataka) caters to the R&D in arecanut and cocoa. The three Research Centres - Kahikuchi (Assam),



Fig.1. Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod

Mohitnagar (West Bengal) and Kidu (Karnataka) are for undertaking location-specific research in these crops while the Minicoy (Lakshadweep) centre has been recently remanded to function as a production and demonstration centre for vegetable and fruits in the Lakshadweep islands. CPCRI hosts the Distributed Information Sub Centre (Sub-DIC) under the Biotechnology Information System Network (BTISnet), the Bioinformatics Centre and Agri-Bioinformatics Promotion Centre (ABPC). CPCRI has two Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), one each at Kasaragod and the other at Kayamkulam, extending farm oriented training and support to farmers in agriculture and rural development. Besides, the Agricultural Technology Information Centre (ATIC) at CPCRI, Kasaragod provides a 'single window' delivery system of service to the farmers.

Presently, the mandated crops being limited to coconut, arecanut and cocoa, and the governance much easier with only a handful of research stations under its administrative control, it is now more cohesive and focused as a research unit. The long-term vision is to

develop the institute as a technology generation and repository centre, to showcase, demonstrate and compare world-wide technologies in the commodity chains of coconut, arecanut and cocoa to make India the global leader. The mission is to develop technologies that enhance resource use efficiency, profitability and livelihood security of people who depend on plantation crops.

Aligning with the present day realities that the sector presents, the mandate has been redefined as:

- Basic, strategic and applied research to enhance sustainable productivity, quality and utilization of coconut, arecanut and cocoa,
- Repository of plantation crops genetic resources and scientific information,
- Transfer of technology, capacity building and impact assessment of technologies,
- Coordinate research and validation of technologies on plantation crops through AICRP on Palms.
