XXXII Annual Group Meeting of AICRP on Plantation Crops

The 32nd Annual Group Meeting of ICAR–All India Coordinated Research Project on Palms was inaugurated at AICRPP Centre, Horticultural Research Station, Kahikuchi under Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat on September 13, 2023. Dr. V. B. Patel, Assistant Director of General (Fruits and Plantation Crops), Horticulture Science Division, ICAR, New Delhi presided over the function wherein Dr. N. K. Mohan, Hon'ble Member, Agricultural Commission, Govt. of Assam was the Chief Guest. Dr. K. B. Hebbar, Director, ICAR-CPCRI, Kasaragod, Dr. K. Suresh, Director, ICAR-IIOPR, Pedavegi, Dr. R. K. Mathur, Director, ICAR-IIOR, Hyderabad, Dr. V. Venkatasubramanian, Director, ICAR-ATARI, Bangalore, Dr. G. Kathirvel, Director, ICAR-ATARI, Guwahati, and Dr. D. Prasath, Project Coordinator (Spices), ICAR-IISR, Kozhikode were present for the inauguration. Dr. K. U. K. Namboothiri and Dr. P. Chowdappa, former Directors of ICAR-CPCRI, participated in the inaugural session as invited experts. Dr. M. Saikia, Director of Research, Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat welcomed the dignitaries and delegates in which he overwhelmed that in this Assam region having an average of 2300 mm annual rainfall, paddy is slowly being replaced by coconut, arecanut and cocoa which provides increased returns. He opined that coconut demand is increasing for its use in the religious front apart from food uses.

Dr. B. Augustine Jerard, Project Coordinator (Palms), ICAR-AICRP on Palms, ICAR-CPCRI, Kasaragod in his report presented a brief note on the mission of the Project Directorate since its genesis in 1972 on five mandate crops—coconut, oil palm, palmyrah, arecanut and cocoa—in 28 centres distributed across fifteen States/UTs through thirteen State Agricultural/Horticultural Universities, four ICAR institutes and one Central Agricultural University. During the 31st Annual Group Meet of AICRP on Palms held during 16–18 September 2022, three release proposals on improved coconut varieties with desirable traits viz., Dweep Sona, Dweep Haritha and Kalpa Vajra were recommended for submission to the Central Sub-Committee on Seed Standards and Release of Varieties of Horticultural Crops towards notification in the Gazette. The proposals on these varieties have subsequently been submitted by the respective centres to the Central Sub-Committee and are in various levels of consideration.

Three technologies viz., Integrated Nutrient Management for cultivation of dwarf coconut, leaf blight management in coconut and arecanut intercropping options in coconut gardens have emanated from different projects. The total budget outflow during the financial year 2022–23 was 681 lakhs. Review meetings were scrupulously conducted by the nodal centre to monitor the technical programme and budget utilization across the sub-centres. Development and evaluation of Tall × Tall and Dwarf × Dwarf coconut hybrids, coconut-based multispecies cropping systems, location-specific Integrated Farming System models, bioagents for the control of black-headed caterpillar in coconut, crown choke disease in arecanut, and identification of best-performing cocoa clones viz., VTLCH-1 and VTLCH-2 for intercropping in coconut gardens are the

noteworthy contributions made and identified for further studies/promotion. Effective transfer of technology from lab to land through diverse extension tools and modes and need-based diagnostic field visits across the states continued to remain the major strength of this programme.

Dr. V. B. Patel, Assistant Director General (F&PC), in his Presidential Address congratulated the group of palm scientists for doing exemplary work in the sector. He also enumerated the vision of the Government of India to minimize imports and maximize the export potential of plantation crops and products. He desired to focus work on technologies to preserve neera tapped from palmyrah. He also wished that a bouquet of publications viz., "Compendium of Technologies for the Farm Front" across different centres and "Success Stories of Technologies with High Impact" may be brought out in view of completion of fifty years of research under AICRP on Palms. He urged the palm scientists to take concerted efforts to transform India into a developed nation by 2047, marking India's 100th year of Independence through the palm sector in all possible ways.

Dr. K. B. Hebbar, Director, Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod expressed that the centres of ICAR–AICRP on Palms are well positioned in different agro-climatic regions of India to address location-specific problems and highlighted the existing scope for multi-disciplinary and multi-location research. He opined that soil and plant data are very crucial to develop sustainable technologies across growing regions and for precision agriculture in mitigating climate change effects. Dr. K. Suresh, Director, IIOPR, Pedavegi invited the palm scientists to work in tandem on yield improvement in oil palm and to enhance oil content with unsaturated fatty acids. He also expressed the need to work on carbon and water footprints of the plantation sector.

The Chief Guest, Dr. N. K. Mohan in his Special Address underlined the rich biodiversity of the horticultural sector in the Northeastern Region and the role of Britishers in establishing the first tea garden in the country and uplifting the economy of the region. He also narrated the historical importance of how the Ahom Kings contributed to the introduction of coconut and arecanut during their regime from the 12th to 18th centuries from Southeast Asian regions. In the interim period, although coconut was neglected, after Independence the importance of this was greatly felt which paved the way for the establishment of research centres at the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and another at Harwaai in Assam. He applauded these research hubs for addressing maladies in the plantation sector like crown choke disorder, for introduction and promotion of varieties like Kamrupa, and for the array of technologies like multi-tier cropping systems with black pepper to improve the standard of living of small and marginal farmers amidst climatic vagaries. He appreciated the efforts of palm scientists over the years and indicated the need to address future challenges in increasing profitability.

The Aliyarnagar Centre, TNAU, Tamil Nadu was adjudged as the Best AICRP (Palms) Centre for the year 2022–23 and the scientists of the centre were awarded certificates and mementos by the dignitaries. Dr. J. C. Nath, a long-serving palm scientist from the Kahikuchi Centre who is expected to be superannuated during the current year, was felicitated by the President, Project

Coordinator and other dignitaries. The AGM appreciated his significant contributions to the palm sector of the NE region for over two decades, which include improved varieties and technologies for cultivation. Five publications prepared by palm scientists from different centres and the PC Cell, including technical bulletins, booklets and folders on various aspects of palm cultivation, were released by the dignitaries during the inaugural session.

About 80 participants from different AICRP centres and ICAR-CPCRI attended the meeting. Dr. J. C. Nath, Chief Scientist, HRS, Kahikuchi proposed the vote of thanks. The inaugural session ended with the National Anthem. The inaugural session was followed by technical sessions on variety release, genetic resources and crop improvement, crop production, crop protection, post-harvest technology of palmyrah and transfer of technology efforts, followed by a plenary session held from 13th to 15th September 2023.