XXXIII Annual Group Meeting of AICRP on Plantation Crops

The XXXIII Annual Group Meet of All India Coordinated Research Project on Palms was organized at Bihar Agricultural University (BAU), Bhagalpur during August 21–23, 2024. Dr. V. B. Patel, Assistant Director General (Fruits and Plantation Crops), ICAR, New Delhi presided over the inaugural session. Dr. D. R. Singh, Vice Chancellor, Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour was the Chief Guest of the event. Dr. P. Rethinam, Former Executive Director, Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, Jakarta, Dr. K. B. Hebbar, Director, ICAR-CPCRI, Kasaragod, Dr. K. Suresh, Director, IIOPR, Pedavegi and Dr. R. K. Mathur, Director, IIOR, Hyderabad were the Guests of Honour.

The programme had a pleasant beginning with the ICAR theme song highlighting the glory of farmers. As a mark of tradition, the dignitaries lighted the holy lamp and inaugurated the function. Dr. A. K. Singh, Director of Research, Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour welcomed the gathering in which he narrated the research accomplishments of BAU for taking palm research to the next level.

The Project Coordinator of AICRP (Palms), CPCRI, Kasaragod, Dr. B. Augustine Jerard in his report presented the mission of the Project Directorate on five crops—coconut, oil palm, palmyrah, arecanut and cocoa—distributed across 28 AICRP centres of 14 states and one Union Territory. Release of coconut varieties VPM6 and Kalpa Survarna, cocoa varieties VTLCH 1 and 2, enriching the germplasm pool with pink-husked coconut and pink nungu genotypes, fostering research for the development of T × T and D × D coconut hybrids, development of location-specific Integrated Farming System models, developing pest and disease distribution maps for early forewarning besides developing Integrated Pest and Disease Management modules for leaf blight and spiraling whitefly in coconut, and identification of promising VTLCP cocoa cultures and oil palm varieties viz., NRCOP 9 and 37 were the noteworthy contributions of 2023–24.

The Project Coordinator projected the new trials initiated on high-density planting in cinnamon and on evaluation of crop boosters to scale up coconut productivity. On the value addition front, palmyrah sap powder, neera concentrate and osmotic dehydration of neera sap are being validated. Effective transfer of technology from lab to land, fostering tripartite Scientists–Officials of the State Department of Horticulture–Farmers' linkage for curbing debilitating diseases like coconut root wilt, and distribution of biocontrol agents across different centres add hue to the programme. Thirty-four research papers, 43 conference papers, 19 extension folders, 41 popular articles and five technical bulletins were published through the concerted efforts of the palm scientists. He added that the total budget outflow during the last year was 755 lakhs.

Dr. P. Rethinam, Former Executive Director, Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, Jakarta highlighted the importance of production of quality planting materials through composite mother palm gardens, value addition, product diversification and by-product utilization in the plantation

crops sector. He urged the scientists to develop location-specific cropping system models to augment farm productivity. He also hinted at the need for bringing out a "Compendium of 50 Years of Research Accomplishments" of the constituent centres of AICRP on Palms.

Dr. K. B. Hebbar invited the scientists to develop economically feasible and socially viable technologies to empower farmers. He also showcased the mission of palm scientists in developing biocontrol strategies to manage pests like black-headed caterpillar and hairy caterpillar in coconut. He underlined the importance of working in tandem with officials of the State Department of Horticulture to provide suitable remedies for maladies at the farm front.

Dr. K. Suresh, Director, IIOPR, Pedavegi lauded the scientists for their contributions and invited them to use technological interventions to tide over challenges at the farm front manifested in terms of price aberrations, pests and diseases, and climatic vagaries. Dr. R. K. Mathur, Director, IIOR, Hyderabad in his remarks advised the scientists to discourage monocropping, bring real-time surveillance reports of biotic stress, and be proactive in reaching out to farmers through IoT applications.

Dr. V. B. Patel, ADG (F&PC) applauded the scientists for their contribution towards the release of four varieties by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. He also drew the roadmap that non-traditional coconut belts with climatic vulnerabilities can offer excellent platforms for screening varieties tolerant to abiotic stress, which should be positively exploited. Production of quality planting materials is the need of the hour, he added.

Dr. D. R. Singh, Vice Chancellor, BAU, Sabour gave a bird's-eye view of the accomplishments of the University and highlighted the status of coconut plantations in the state of Bihar. Farmers can tap the tender nut market during summer and the mature nut demand during festival times in the state. Palmyrah of Bihar is unique with dwarf stature, which eases climbing operations and neera tapping and could be explored further for the betterment of the farming community. He besieged the immense employment opportunities provided by the palm sector and spelled out the need for bioconversion of waste to wealth in plantation crops.

The Coconut Research Station, Veppankulam, Tamil Nadu was adjudged as the Best AICRP (Palms) Centre for the year 2023–24. A handful of publications including three books on coconut and oil palm, two technical bulletins and seven folders and pamphlets were released by the dignitaries.

Dr. S. Ruby Rani, Scientist-in-Charge, Sabour proposed the vote of thanks. About 80 participants from different AICRP centres participated in the meet. The inaugural session was followed by technical sessions on variety release proposals, genetic resources and crop improvement, crop production, crop protection and post-harvest technology.


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