

CPCRI showcases sprayers mounted on tractors, drones for areca farming

Business Line -31-05-2018-P-16

AJ VINAYAK

Mangaluru, May 30

With the monsoon setting in, arecanut growers prepare for a spray of copper sulphate to protect the crop from fruit rot disease. But labour availability is a major problem. Three years ago, during an interaction with growers, P Chowdappa, Director of the Kasargod-based Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), was asked for a solution. Now CPCRI is ready with two prototypes.

The Institute invited them to its research station at Vitla in Dakshina Kannada district for a demo of a tractor-mounted sprayer and a drone. Chowdappa told *BusinessLine* that the tractor-mounted sprayer developed in collaboration with ASPEE, can spray copper sulphate solution up to a height of 100 ft. Usually arecanut plants reach a height of around 30 ft. A single person can handle the entire spraying operation in the place of three workers needed for manual spraying.

Many a times, banana and cocoa are intercropped. In such cases, driving a tractor-mounted sprayer in the plantations will be a bit difficult. Considering this CPCRI is also trying out a drone model for spraying, he said.

For this, CPCRI is collaborat-



A tractor-mounted sprayer in action at CPCRI research station AJ VINAYAK

ing with the Bengaluru-based General Aeronautics Pvt Ltd (a start-up incubated by the Entrepreneurship Centre of Indian Institute of Science).

Abhishek Burman, founder director and Chief Executive Officer of General Aeronautics, told *Business Line* that the original design of the drone was for paddy and wheat crops. However, General Aeronautics demonstrated its drone at Indian Institute of Oil Palm Research in Andhra Pradesh with encouraging results.

He said that the drone is designed for a 15-litre tank and covers ground swath of 3.5 metres. It takes about four

minutes to spray one acre of paddy and wheat. The drone can cover three-four acres in one sortie. On configuring the drone for arecanut crop, he said the start-up will work with CPCRI.

Chowdappa said CPCRI will evaluate these models further in its farm, and will also incorporate the feedback from farmers before coming out with the final version.

On the tie-ups with different organisations for planning and implementing such models, he said CPCRI needs expertise in electronics and mechanical engineering. That is why CPCRI is collaborating with other partners, he said.