

SWEET BOND

# KAU's tie-up with Cadbury completes 36 glorious years

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CHOCOLATE is timeless, both in terms of its place in history and the allure it holds for people of all ages. A key ingredient in homemade goodies to flavoured health drink mixes, fondness and demand for chocolate never seems to taper. Produced from cocoa beans, chocolate is a delicacy the world over.

Among the first in the country to grasp the importance the food product holds, Vellanikkara Kerala Agriculture University (KAU) has a collection of cocoa plants from 20 countries from which it produces nearly 35 lakh saplings every year. Its cocoa germplasm is the largest in Asia.

Along with 11 gardens set up exclusively for research in cocoa, the university has a collaboration with Cadbury, owned by Mondelez International, that has completed 36 years.

"This is probably the first public-private research collaboration in the farming sector in the country," says Dr B Suma, professor at KAU. Most of the saplings grown here are bought by farmers in Andhra Pradesh, which is the largest producer of cocoa in the country.

It was in 1974 that KAU set up the Cocoa Research Centre. The pace of activity picked up after Cadbury extended its support in terms of funding in 1987, leading to the establishment of the Cadbury Cocoa Research Project (CCRP). So far, the initiative has helped develop 15 high-quality varieties with six more expected to be released soon.

"In the 1980s, Kerala was the largest producer in the country. But lack of support from the state and central governments and other factors saw production dwindling. While other crops receive subsidies and allowances from the gov-



### PIECE OF THE ACTION

State	Area under cocoa farming*	Production**
Andhra Pradesh	39,714	10,903.15
Tamil Nadu	32,080	2,802.45
Kerala	17,366	9,647.40
Karnataka	14,216	3,719.10

\*hectares \*\*metric tonnes 2020-21 data

ernment, cocoa suffers from lack of promotion," says Suma. A farmer in the country gets about ₹190-200 per kilogram of cocoa beans and the price has held steady for many years.

Urging farmers in the state to take up cocoa cultivation, the KAU professor said that it ensures a steady income throughout the year without much effort. "It can be planted

as an intermittent crop and cocoa beans are not seasonal. The university provides technical assistance and saplings can also be bought from here," said Suma.

A cocoa sapling costs ₹20 and those distributed by the university are about five months of age.

According to the Directorate of Cashewnut and Cocoa Development (DCCD), annual cocoa demand in the country is around 70,000 metric tonnes, of which only 25,000 to 35,000 metric tonnes is met domestically. Imports make up for the shortfall.

Considering chocolate's never-ending allure, the university has proposed setting up a model processing unit to make value-added products from cocoa beans. It is the university that first introduced the concept of homemade chocolate in the country and it continues to impart training in value addition.



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