

# Navara lands in IP rights row

Govt opposes farmer's bid to gain rights for its conservation

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The nearly extinct rice variety Navara is in the thick of a controversy with the government opposing attempts of a farmer to gain Intellectual Property (IP) rights over its conservation under the Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers Right Act, 2001 (PPVFR Act).

While the government and the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) maintain that Navara is a traditional rice variety cultivated across the State, P. Narayanan Unni, founder of the Navara Foundation and the Navara Eco Farm at Chittur in Palakkad, claim that the variety cultivated by him on his 12-acre farm is an exclusive variety belonging to Chittur.

To support his claim, Mr. Unni cites the plant genome saviour community award presented to him two years ago by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFR).

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar on Sunday said the ownership rights of the Navara rice variety was with the farming community of Kerala and the government had informed the PPVFR against conferring the IP



The Navara rice farm of Narayanan Unni at Chittur.

rights on Mr. Unni. "The rice is being cultivated by farmers across Kerala. A seed bank to conserve such seeds will be established by the government soon," he said.

Mr. Unni refuted reports that he was attempting to wrest IP rights of the rice variety. "What I grow in my field is a unique variety and I do not have any plan to usurp the rights of the government or any other farmer for cultivating and promoting Navara in general. In 2004, I formed a Navara rice farming society with 20 farmers and got entry for it in the Geographical Indication (GI) registry under the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999," he said.

However, KAU sources said Navara was cultivated in eight districts and the university would fight attempts to end community rights over the preservation, protection, and promotion of the seed. "This medicinal rice variety was almost extinct when I took up its cultivation. Non-availability of pure seeds, low yield, and high production costs deterred farmers from taking up cultivation of the rice variety," Mr Unni, who has been running his farm for the past 20 years, said.

Unlike other rice varieties that are white in colour, Navara is deep red and has been cultivated for more than 2,000 years.