

Production hit, Wayanad arecanut farmers in distress

Sharp decline in yield owing to fungal diseases triggered by rain

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A sharp decline in production owing to various diseases affecting arecanut palms coupled with heavy rain casts a shadow over the lives of farmers in Wayanad district, a major arecanut growing region in the State.

The tender arecanut harvesting season usually starts by the middle of August, but many farmers are yet to begin preparations for the harvest as they fear that the income and expenditure are unlikely to match.

"Arecanut production in the district has fallen enormously owing to various diseases, especially yellow leaf disease, bud rot, and premature nut fall or Mahali disease," says P. Chandran, a farmer at Panamaram.

Farmers in the district prefer to harvesting arecanut in the tender stage, mainly to maintain the quality. The widespread prevalence of Mahali, owing to



Tough times: A farm worker spraying Bordeaux mixture against Mahali disease on an arecanut palm at Vazhavatta in Wayanad district.

heavy rain this year, has adversely affected production.

Excess rain

"The district received nearly 62% excess rain this year so far comparing with the corresponding period last year," says P. Rajendran, Associate Director of Research at the Regional Agriculture Research Station, Ambalavayal.

The high humidity caused pathogens like phytophthora fungus spread widely, affecting the arecanut palms. Moreover, the root system of the plant gets damaged owing to flooding in low-lying

areas, triggering yellow leaf disease.

The yield had declined by more than 65% this year compared with last year owing to the diseases, says Mr. Chandran.

Though Agriculture Department officials suggest application of Bordeaux mixture against Mahali disease, many of the farmers could not do it on time because of the heavy rain that lasted weeks.

According to the department, 70% of the cultivated area of 12,730 hectares in the district has been affected by yellow leaf disease.