

# Govt to focus on value addition in farm sector

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**Thrissur:** The state government is laying high emphasis on value addition as well as identifying the unique agricultural products of Kerala to reverse the trend of downward growth in agriculture sector in the state.

As per the official figures the contribution of agriculture and allied sectors to the state domestic product (SDP) was 14.3% in 2011-12, which came down to 12.30% in 2014-15, and as per the provision estimates it has been estimated to slide to 10.96% in 2015-16.

According to state planning board member Prof K N Harilal, agriculture in Kerala has been facing a host of challenges, including land fragmentation, shortage and high cost of labour, and fluctuation of price of produces. In Kerala, many people, including the small holders, have acquired land as an asset and not as a productive unit, Harilal points out.

As per a rough estimate more than 1.5 lakh hectares of cultivable is remaining fallow in Kerala, said Prof Mohandas, former director the college of banking and cooperation of the Kerala Agriculture University.

Agriculture minister V S Sunil Kumar said developing entrepreneurship and promoting value addition of agriculture produces can make major contribution to lure younger generation to agriculture and to revive growth in the sector:

"Youngsters may not be keen to directly enter farming activities, but they can be ready to start agro-processing units using modern technologies. This will ensure steady demand and price for agri-produces which in turn would encourage more people to return to farming," the minister said.

He pointed out that currently less than 5% of the agriculture produce is being value-added in Kerala, whereas in the developed regions the share is as high as 70%. The government's plan is to push it up to 30% at least in the next



KAU staff arrange honey products for the workshop-cum-exhibition on agro processing and value addition in Thrissur on Tuesday

## Guv to inaugurate 'Vaiga' today

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Kerala Agriculture University campus at Vellanikkara in Thrissur will host the five-day long second edition of 'Vaiga' (value addition for income generation in agriculture), an international exhibition-cum-workshop from Wednesday. Governor Justice (ret'd) P Sathasivam will inaugurate the event.

Agriculture minister V S Sunilkumar said that the fact that not even 10% of agriculture products produced in the state undergo processing and value addition remains as a matter of grave concern. "The state government is gearing up to meet the challenge and promote the growth of agricultural sector through processing and value addition," he said in an article sent to media on the eve of inauguration of Vaiga-2017. The minister said agricultural growth during the last decade had not been much promising both at state and national level. The income generated by farmers from agriculture was low and the causes attributed to income loss are non-availability of agricultural products in the market, fleecing by middle-men, distress sales, etc. he said. The decision to continue Vaiga conference as an annual affair was taken after realising that the first edition provided a solid platform to launch several initiatives in the agriculture sector. The current edition will also have session where new research by agriculture scientists will be presented and debated how to use them in the field level. Experts and farmers from countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Malaysia are expected to participate. **TNN**

couple of years, he said.

Fruits and vegetables worth Rs 40,000 crore are getting wasted annually in the country in the absence of processing facilities, according to K B Sheela of KAU. This shows the critical importance of launching processing industries, she added.

The government is also trying to identify the unique qualities of several farm products of Kerala and to ensure their marketing after getting geographical indication (GI) tag, the Sunil Kumar said.

According to Prof C RElsy, coordinator, IPR Cell of the KAU, GI tags have already been acquired for seven prod-

ucts—Travencore Jaggery, Chengalikkodan nenthuran banana, Kaipad rice, Pokkali rice, Vazhakkulam pineapple, Wayanad gandakasala rice and Wayanad jeerakasala rice. The minister said efforts are also on to get GI tags for several other products like Nilambur teak, Marayur jaggery, Attapadi red gram, Attapadi dolichos bean, Tirur betel leaves, Edayur chilly and Kodungallur Pottu Vallari (snap melon).

Sunil Kumar said the government will also promote mechanization, and will soon launch a programme to develop skilled manpower for operating machines.