

One Kannur farmer and his 33 varieties of pepper

AJ VINAYAK

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Cultivation of different varieties of black pepper is a passion for this farmer from Ulickal (around 50 km from Kannur) in northern Kerala. Biju Narayanan, who cultivates 33 varieties of pepper, returned to farming 10 years ago after working as a mechanical engineer for some years.

Speaking to *BusinessLine* at his farm at Ulickal in Kannur district recently, he said he has a total of 33 varieties of pepper - both bush pepper and vine pepper - at his farm at Kalanki (around 10 km from Ulickal) and in Wayanad district of Kerala put together. His target is to take the total number of varieties to 50 in the next two years, he said.

In his passion to collect different varieties of pepper, he travelled to various pepper-growing locations in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and also collected varieties from the Indian Institute of Spices Research and the Kerala Agricultural University.

The seven-acre farm at Ulickal has become an experimental and demonstration plot for him. Showing the pepper varieties, he said the Kumbukkal (which is a farmer's selection) variety and the

Vijay variety developed by the Kerala Agriculture University are the most-favoured varieties among farmers. Biju Narayanan, who has a pepper nursery at his Ulickal farm, said that he gets a good number of queries from farmers for these two varieties.

On the productivity of various varieties, he said Manjamunda, one of the 33 varieties he cultivates, yields the most: while 100 kg of green berries normally produce around 33 kg (33 per cent) of dry black pepper in other varieties, Manjamunda yields around 41 kg of dry pepper.

Experiments

Biju Narayanan is also experimenting with vertical column cultivation with around eight vine varieties at his Ulickal farm.

Highlighting the advantages, he said a farmer with a small holding can also get good productivity adopting this model. He said he is also experimenting with multi-level integrated cropping pattern in his farm at Kalanki for maximum productivity. For this, he prefers the Kuttiadi variety of coconut (around 40-ft high) for the first level. This is followed by mangostene plants, and shade-tolerant pepper vines.



Biju Narayanan, a farmer from Ulickal (around 50 km from Kannur) in northern Kerala, who cultivates different varieties of pepper, is now experimenting with vertical farming **AJ VINAYAK**