

Wayanad farmers to produce instant coffee

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Kochi: Coffee farmers in Wayanad have come up with an ambitious plan to triple their income by converting their produce into instant coffee and sell it in the ever-growing domestic market.

As the primary step towards this, Brahmagiri Development Society (BDS), a farmers' organisation in Wayanad, has signed an MoU with the Coffee Board a few days ago for the necessary technical assistance and guidance.

Currently, the farmers are getting Rs 120-130 per kg for cured coffee beans (dried, de-husked and then graded), and when they convert it into instant coffee, they would get an additional Rs 240 profit after all expense.

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markets. BDS too plans to market their products under the 'Wayanad' brand.

"You need 2.5 kg of raw coffee to produce one kg of instant coffee. Our product when it hits the market could easily fetch Rs 1,100 - 1,500 per kg," said P Krishnaprasad, former CPM MLA and chairman of BDS. "Almost 70% of Indian coffee is exported and rest is consumed domestically. From 2000, the domestic consumption has recorded a growth at about 5% to 6% per annum, mainly due to growing urbanization. In the future, we expect it to grow by 7%,"

he noted. The Coffee Board had been working with BDS for the past three years on developing their robusta coffee into a finished product to sell it in Indian markets, said K Basavaraj, head-coffee quality, Coffee Board. "We will develop the product, standardize it and the technology. Also, we will help them to improve the quality of produce they grow in estates by giving technical inputs. The marketing and selling will be done by the society."

"We are trying to sell only instant coffee because no one will drink 100% robusta in ro-

asted and brown (R&B) coffee in a filter coffee format. Then, we may need to blend it with Arabica variety from other regions and we won't be able to sell it as a Wayanad GI-tagged product. Hence, the only suitable product will be instant coffee and we will do the research and development for that," said Basavaraj.

As the setting up of instant coffee factory is expensive, the Coffee Board will help BDS to find out a suitable contract manufacturer for them. The Board is also looking at the option of producing it in factories in Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh. "We will identify some instant coffee producers who have extra capacity and they will manufacture the coffee according to the specifications," her added.

Krishnaprasad said that it will take up to five years to gather enough capital by creating farmers' federations and building a brand. BDS may export some of the local produce to generate funds.