



CRZ for coconut farming.”
The one question that arises about hybrid seeds is whether they are susceptible to weeds and pests and require extra care. However, Lobo maintains that hybrid seeds are here to stay and says: “Today, whatever we eat right from vegetable to fruit are all hybrids.” As far as the use of pesticides in maintaining the plant goes he says that all plantations need adequate pest control. “The best pesticides are organic pesticides.”

While Lobo promotes organic farming he also says, “Organic farming does not give quick and therefore may not be ideal for commercial cultivation purposes where the farmer is dependent on the yield for his survival.” He also clarifies that one should not assume that hybrid seeds cause traditional seeds to die out. “You can still grow traditional seeds. Hybrid seeds will help the farmer commercially.”

VIRGIN COCONUT OIL
Virgin Coconut Oil (extracted from fresh kernel) is steadily being rated as the healthiest oils in the world. It contains lactic acid which is otherwise only found in mother's milk. Virgin coconut oil can fight against 16 types of viruses including HIV. It is also good for hair loss as it contains Vitamin E and is also used in weight loss diets as it is easier to metabolise

Bangalore-based David Lobo of DeeJay Farm is on a mission to increase coconut production in the country with hybridised coconut varieties, that start bearing fruit at the end of the second year. The fruit is three times larger than traditional coconut varieties. Finally, and most importantly, the trees are of dwarf variety. NT BUZZ looks into the advantages of this 'kalpavriksha'

The coconut tree just got shorter... and better

BY ARTI DAS | NT BUZZ

A picture portrait of scenic Goa is incomplete without the coconut palm tree. Coconut tree is also called the 'kalpavriksha' as every part of the tree finds use. Sadly, the very tree is slowly growing to be a nuisance to its farmers because of difficulties faced in caring for the tree which affects productivity. The height of the coconut tree, which is its unique feature, has now become a curse for farmers because of the shortage of manpower in the state when it comes to plucking the fruit of the tree and non-availability of labour to look after coconut plantations.

Taking these drawbacks into consideration, David Lobo of Bangalore-based DeeJay Farms, started a small experiment at Madurai, Tamil Nadu, some 30-odd years ago, a venture that has now yielded excellent

results. “More than 30 years ago I met late professor Anthony Dias, a UN expert from USA, who told me about hybridisation of coconut seedlings. It took me six years to come up with hybrid coconut seedlings. Even though the variety is of hybrid type it has not been genetically modified”, says Lobo, who was in Goa recently. He owns a farm in the Salaulim village, Sanguem.

Lobo has developed three types of coconut seedlings - DeeJay Samporna, DeeJay Pushkala (specially meant for production of tender coconuts) and DeeJay Vishwas.

These seedlings give better yield and start flowering after two years of planting. “The advantage these hybrid varieties have is that they start fruiting when just two-feet in height. It is much shorter compared to a traditional variety. Additionally the average tree

starts fruiting after six years or so. But, in the case of the hybrid varieties the farmer will start earning profits after five years of planting, as fruiting begins earlier. One tree gives 250 nuts per year”, says Lobo.

The other features of the hybrid varieties are: when harvested for tender coconuts yield improves by approximately 30 per cent. Tender coconut at 7 months contains 500 ml of sweet coconut water. Its kernel and copra content is approximately 200 grams per nut and approximately 5 tonnes of coconut oil per hectare.

Explaining the process of hybridisation, Lobo informs the hybrid is a result of cross breeding dwarf and Benaulum coconuts varieties. Benaulum is the best coconut variety. “Our hybrids are called DeeJay dwarfs and are patented”, says Lobo.

“When a tree starts flowering we manually remove all male flowers as these will not turn into fruits. This process is called emasculation. Then pollination is carried out by hand so as to increase nut output. The characteristics of palms and nuts are recorded in our laboratories to help take the research further”, informs Lobo, who promotes these hybrids under the banner DeeJay Farm. These he maintains are the best option, especially for small farmers in a place like Goa. Lobo states that these hybrids will help small farmers get quicker results and help Goa to better utilise its potential to become a leading coconut producer in the country. “Goa can use its fallow land and land under

He also pointed out other advantages as far as supplementary edible products like coconut oil, palm sugar and toddy were concerned.

“Coconut oil commands the highest retail and wholesale price in India due to demand, and hence little is exported. Palm sugar or coconut jaggery is merely a cottage industry today. However, the market for palm sugar is huge and growing in the West, as it is a low glycaemia sugar and of very high value. And as for toddy, the DeeJay hybrid produces 7 litres to 11 litres of sap per palm per day. But, one should not tap the tree for sap for more than 300 days a year as it will affect the health of the tree.”

Lobo further points out that as diabetes is on the rise globally and in India, opportunities for the production of palm sugar grow in relation to the supply of the DeeJay hybrid. Furthermore, as more of the developed world seems to become lactose intolerant or gluten intolerant, different products can be made from coconut that replaces all dairy and wheat products. Coconut butter, oil, cream, mild, yogurts are some examples. Coconut flour is gluten free and very high in protein, a healthier and better replacement to wheat (gluten laden) flour.

NON EDIBLE PRODUCTS OF THE COCONUT TREE

- Coconut, coir, pith and wood are steadily becoming raw material of choice in the fields they support.
- Coir is replacing petroleum products in the manufacturing of dash boards for cars and trucks.
- Coconut pith is the product of preference for landscapers, horticulturists, hydroponics, floriculturists, etc.
- The coconut palm is the only plant that can produce either bio-petrol or bio diesel.