Coconut Farming in Kerala: Prospects of Extension Interventions

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Abstract

Coconut cultivation in Kerala has been steadily decreasing since the 1970s, in spite of the attempts of various agencies to promote the crop in different ways. Extension interventions in coconut farming had mostly focused on transfer of crop production technologies which included information on high yielding varieties, farming practices and plant protection. Diverse possibilities of value addition that would enhance profitability of coconut farming are not found to be widely propagated among farmers. The general decline in the economic feasibility of coconut cultivation due to dwindling prices and other factors demands greater focus on intensive and problem based extension efforts. Since coconut cultivation has got increasingly confined to marginal holdings, conventional extension interventions will have to be replaced by innovative methods that would harness resources and create synergy of multiple agencies. For instance, group based and participatory practices have proved to be effective in managing widespread pest and disease infestation in the crop. Taking cues from such initiatives, intense area based approaches to enhance the productivity of coconut could be initiated on a large scale. Establishing adequate forward and backward linkages and integrating financial resources would be important steps towards supporting the small and marginal producers. Enhancing the capability of small producers to participate in the value chain by generating local demand of new products have evolved as feasible model in different parts of the country. Successful cases of mechanisation of cultural and post-harvest operations by means of group approaches have put forward several options that can be scaled up in diverse situations. Maximising alternate means of livelihood in coconut based farming systems is another key area of intervention by the extension system. Developing new models of integration of agencies in different contexts seems to be another prospective area. While it is important to improve the existing mechanisms of extension services, new forms of delivery also have to be evolved to address diverse issues that emerge in this sector.