Income enhancement from coconut farming: Status and Strategies

Thamban, C. Jayasekhar, S. and Chandran, K.P

ICAR-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod

ABSTRACT

Coconut is predominantly a small holder’s crop in India, especially in states like Kerala, and there are serious concerns about the economic viability of farming in the fragmented coconut holdings. Under the evolving trade liberalization regime it is extremely challenging to sustain the coconut farming in Kerala as a profitable enterprise. A comprehensive rejuvenation programme to replace the old, senile and unproductive palms with quality seedlings of improved varieties in a farmer participatory mode is inevitable for the revitalization of coconut sector in the State. Policies for income enhancement in coconut sector should focus more on competitiveness through higher productivity. One way to achieve this goal is through increasing the net returns from coconut. The coconut based cropping/farming system models have conclusively proved that the scientifically designed coconut based cropping/farming system is capable of generating higher income compared to monocropping for small-holders. Promoting adoption of proven technologies such as on farm recycling of biomass including coconut leaves through vermicomposting, basin management with leguminous green manure plants, drip fertigation etc. would considerably reduce the production cost. It is also needed to enhance the resource use efficiency of the coconut tracts, and it warrants effective implementation of site specific resource management interventions based on the soil health and water availability status. Effective implementation of farmer participatory interventions for integrated pest and disease management in coconut gardens to prevent crop loss also would enhance the net efficiency of the system. To augment the productivity and income from small and marginal coconut holdings through better technology integration it is suggested to have group management of resources as an institutional mechanism, which helps to overcome the inherent weaknesses of fragmented holdings. In the existing scenario of increasing absentee landlordism and withdrawal of farmers from active coconut farming, the group approaches assume paramount importance. The group synergy could be effectively blended in each node of the value chain for restructuring the existing ‘buyer driven’ coconut value chain into a ‘producer driven’ one. The existing farmer producer organizations in coconut sector facilitated by different agencies are to be revitalized for the effective implementation of group initiatives. As an important strategy for enhancing income from coconut farming, the processing and value addition in the coconut sector has to be scaled up manifold. Effective monitoring and management of value chain system with appropriate horizontal and vertical linkages along with price support would play a crucial role in transforming coconut farming into a sustainable and remunerative enterprise.