

A farmer's curious nature results in a new cardamom variety



Mr. Joy Peter a progressive cardamom farmer from Idukki district in Kerala said that our economy is based on agriculture and innovative farmers are very much essential for food sustenance, but unfortunately they do not get enough respect and recognition.

Possessing a scientific bent of mind and curious nature, he spent most of his time experimenting in the field so as to substantially increase the production and income from his farm. He used to grow and experiment with arecanut and coconut crops. But since cardamom was more profitable, he decided to concentrate on it.

Colour retention

The new cardamom variety developed by him named Panikulangara Green Bold No.1 (PGB-1) retains its green colour and size even after drying and yields 6-8 kg of capsules per plant. In his 50 acres Mr. Joy grows pepper, coffee, vanilla, clove, nutmeg and arecanut in 30 acres and cardamom in 20 acres. Earlier, the farmer cultivated traditional Mysore, Malabar, and Vazukka varieties of cardamom. He said that he noted two plants from Vazukka variety bearing thick long leaves, and vigorous growth. He separated two clones each from two plants and planted them in his kitchen for further observation.

He separated about 12 clones and obtained 70 plants by clonal propagation. From these he developed another 1,000 plants and he noticed an increased and uniform production of tillers in them. The variety can be cultivated under drought conditions and is less prone to pest attack.

More tillers

Productive tillers in (PGB-1) are comparatively higher than Mysore and Malabar varieties. As the capsules of innovator's variety are bolder (80 per cent of the capsules are of more than 8mm size) than Mysore and Malabar varieties, farmers growing this variety (Panikulangara Green Bold No.1) have the advantage to generate more profit.

Mr. Joy started commercializing the variety from the year 2000 and so far has sold more than a lakh of seedlings to farmers in Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. The Indian Cardamom Research Institute, Spice Board, in its report mentions that the tillers (in PGB-1) are comparatively higher than traditional varieties. It is less prone to thrips, borers, and azukal disease and can be grown without much care.

Drought resistant

The report further adds that being a short duration variety, 75 days after flowering, it is tolerant to drought and resistant to stem borer also. The crop requires less shade and bears 110-120 number of tillers. The yield per plant is 6-8 kg of capsules that retain an attractive green colour even after drying.

Lack of adequate irrigation facilities poses a major constraint for cardamom cultivation in Idukki district. But the (PGB-1) grows well under rainfed condition and hence is suitable to be grown in the areas where there is a lack of irrigation facilities.

Better than others

Cardamom Research Station, Kerala Agriculture University mentions that the (PGB-1) variety is blight disease resistant and moderately tolerant to thrips, stem borer, and other leaf diseases. The number of tillers is more and capsules less compared to the traditional Njallani variety.

The success of (PGB-1) spurred Mr. Joy to continue research and the farmer developed a cross between (PGB-1) and a wild ginger variety and named it Panikulangara No 2.

Good growth

The cross exhibited good growth and a common disease afflicting cardamom called azhkal (shoot rot) did not occur in this variety. The farmer said that till date he had been marketed about 23,000 seedlings of Panikulangara No 2. The Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Santhapara, Idduki and Prasar Bharti, All India Radio felicitated the farmer for adopting modern agriculture techniques.

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