

'Agripreneur' in the making

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Umapathy Farms has a legacy of 30 years in coconut farming. The business started by Mr. S Umapathy way back in 1983, has two divisions horticulture and poultry. Horticulture division is focused on coconut hybridization and lemon plantation. The farm, located on Pollachi Road at Palladam in Tamil Nadu, was initially a small farm of around five acres, but today spreads in more than 75 acres. Indian Coconut Journal team catch up with Mr. Raammohan, Head-Marketing of Umapathy Farms. Let's see what the young entrepreneur is all upto.

Could you please tell us about the journey so far?

We are a family owned business involved in coconut farming activates for more than 30 years.

As a part of expanding out farm activities, we conducted a lot of discussions on bringing out a variety, which offers high yield, high quantity of tender coconut, sweet tender coconut and copra content. Above all these, we wanted the palm to have an early yield in spite of the slow growth. It is at this point that we sought the help of Mr. O.V.R. Somasundaram, who is an expert in

the coconut field. He guided us and helped us create a variety which was extremely interesting, as this



combination was unavailable for the commercial market at that point of time. The idea was to combine Gangabondam and West Coast Tall into a DXT hybrid, which is christened Ramganga today. It was really surprising that Ramganga had all the qualities that we wanted in one variety to make a farmer profitable.

We have around 30-35 acres of lemon farming, which is also giving good results. Poultry is another vertical of the farm. Currently we have around 1.5 lakh layer birds, with a

daily production of 90,000 white eggs/day.

What is the Unique Selling Proposition of Ramganga variety?

The Ramganga hybrid variety is the perfect solution for farmers aspiring to develop a farm in which their coconut trees should deliver high nuts per palm, sweet tender coconuts, high quality copra and high-yields of coconut oil.

Gangabondam has alternative bearing character. If you maintain the palm well, you can easily harvest 250 nuts per tree and there are farmers who have harvested more than 300 nuts.

The Ramganga variety is an ideal hybrid for the purpose of commercial coconut farming and the first flowering starts between 24-30 months of planting under good management. The tender coconut from this variety contains 500-750ml of coconut water and the copra content is around 16-18 kgs for 100 nuts. It has the sweetest coconut water in any hybrid variety available in India. Since the growth of Ramaganga is comparatively less, it is easy for harvesting by the farmers. The crown of Ramganga is so stout and dense that the farmers need to spend only less time in tying the bunches. Ramganga is best suitable for neera tapping.

Could you please elaborate on the hybridization techniques that you follow at Umapathy?

We have started the programme in 2004 with just 200 trees and we didn't even have a nursery then. From 200 trees, it has grown to 40 acres now. We do hybridisation using closed pollination method, so that we can eliminate risk of cross pollination. We are really selective when it comes to choosing the male and female parent palms. We select the best



The Ramaganga variety

performing mother palms in our field (Gangabondam) which is then pollinated with the pollen which is taken from high yielding and best performing male tree (west coast Tall) under closed pollination, so that we could get best quality seedlings. We use GBGD, Malayan Yellow Dwarf (MYD) and Chowghat Orange Dwarf (COD) as dwarfs and West Coast Tall (WCT) as the tall variety. GBGD is our speciality.

If you see our tree pattern, it would all be the same. It is not like one tree is exhibiting one character and the other one a completely different character, which shows that our gene bank is good.

We maintain our farms either by Netafim Drip Irrigation Technology or American John Deere Technology for irrigating the nursery. We, at Umapathy, keep the varieties in poly bags as it helps the seeds to grow in a healthier way and also it helps in arresting the rejection percentage. The main advantage of keeping in the poly bag is once the farmer takes it to plant in the farm, he doesn't need to damage the roots. The threat level is much reduced as it allows the farmer to just tear the bag and plant the tree. We are the only nursery following this and we are doing pencil drip irrigation for the seedlings, which helps us maintain the farm by providing the same amount of water all the time throughout the growth stages. Irrespective of the demand, we do sell the seedlings only after 7-8 months as we want to ensure that the farmers are getting the best ones.

Please elaborate on the drive behind getting into value addition of coconut based products, especially Coconut Sugar (Neera Sugar)?

Knowing about the technology developed by CPCRI, Umapathy Farms decided to tap the coconut sap/Neera using the 'icebox technology' from 2014 onwards and



Hybridization-bagged inflorescence

started developing value-added coconut products. Right now out of six litres of Neera, we produce one kg of sugar. In icebox technology we use sealed containers referred as ice box. No anti fermenting solutions are added. Insect breeding and contaminations are restricted, which enables us to collect 100 per cent natural sap from coconut tree, which is then used as raw material for producing sugar, honey and syrup under the brand, Farm Made Foods.

Coconut sugar is claimed to be a complete 1:1 replacement for sugarcane based sugar and has a caramel flavour to it, and tastes very different from sugars available in the market. Our coconut sugar is produced without any preservatives and additives and is 100 per cent natural. The difference between our sugar and the sugars available in the market is that the raw material we use for making coconut sugar is collected in controlled and protected condition, it is insect and dust free, which is not the case in most of palm sugars currently available in the market.



The poly bag nursery

Coconut sugar is the only product which is ready for sale and we have started marketing it through genuine organic shops. Apart from the shops, we are taking orders over telephone bookings. On an average we get two to three calls from customers everyday. Soon it will be available in all the metro cities as we are planning to aggressively start the marketing activities. Rather than just taking one-time orders from customers, we try to follow-up with them by calculating the time they finish using the product, which is actually helping us in maintaining a better relationship with the customer.

Coconut sugar is sure going to penetrate the market and it is going to make waves in the lives of coconut farmers. Without any doubt I can say that coconut sugar is the 'in' thing.