

Lending a helping hand to coconut farmers

Project Kalpavriksha covers almost 6,000 ryots in T.N., Kerala

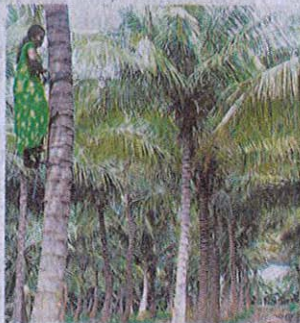
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For R. Prabhu, a farmer who has nine acres under coconut trees at Kodingam, a village located 25 km from Pollachi, there are several challenges in maintaining the farm.

Water availability is a major issue, he says. Ground water is available at 1,000 feet and he has been using borewell for water supply for almost 20 years. Mr. Prabhu raises both traditional and hybrid varieties of coconut trees. Apart from the challenges in managing water supply, he says, there have been pest attacks on hybrid trees for which he used common pesticides available in the market.

Guidance to farmers

However, about seven months ago, he came across a poster at a local dairy society about a project called Kalpavriksha that offered guidance to coco-



nut farmers free of cost. He called up the number given and a field person visited the farm. "By following the methods he suggested, the pest problem had reduced by 50% to 70%," said Mr. Prabhu.

He has also downloaded the Kalpavriksha mobile application to know about copra rates. Consumer products company Marico started working on a project in 2014 for coconut farmers and in a year, had 125 farmers in Thanjavur area under its ambit, apart from six agronomists.

Last year, the project was given shape and unveiled as Kalpavriksha. It now covers almost 6,000 coconut farmers in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

On an average, the yield had increased 18% for the farmers, claims Udayraj Prabhu, executive vice president, Marico. "We want to improve it by about 50% and double the income of farmers." The project has field staff in almost 750 villages who visit coconut farms, advise farmers on best practices, disease and yield improvement. It has a digital library and toll free number. The number of farmers who drop out of the project is about 10%. Going forward, Kalpavriksha will not only cover more farmers and agronomists but will also bring on its platform start-ups, financial institutions, and government agencies. Some of them can extend their service at a cost to the farmers, he said.