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## **Significance of Arecanut Crop in the Agrarian Economy of Kerala**

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**Abstract:** *Arecanut is used by all sections of people as masticator either alone or in combination with betel leaves, lime and tobacco. It is an essential requisite for several religious and social ceremonies and also in human and veterinary medicine. The arecanut palm grows in different climatic and soil conditions and is grown in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Myanmar. According to the recent data on area and production of arecanut in different countries, India stands first with a total area of 445 thousand hectares producing about 730 thousand tonnes of arecanut. In India, among the arecanut growing states, Kerala, Karnataka and Assam account for 95 per cent of the total area and 90 per cent of the total production. In earlier days, India was an importer of arecanut; now it is exporting which accounted 7057 tonnes valued at Rs. 81.19 crores.*

**Key Words:** *Agrarian Economy, Arecanut, Kerala.*

### **Introduction**

Kerala is predominantly an agricultural state. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood. It contributes nearly 48 percent of the state's income and sustains nearly 48 percent of the total work force in employment. Agriculture supplies raw materials for a number of industries like rubber, coir, cashew, etc. It supplies less than 50 percent of the food grains requirements of the state and supplies fodder for a large cattle population. Again, agricultural commodities account for 75 percent of the foreign exchange earnings for Kerala. It is also a main source of revenue for the state government. Economic development of Kerala, thus, depends to a considerable extent, upon the development of agriculture.

In Kerala, arecanut is cultivated in all districts and the proportion of area in the state is very high compared with other states (Karunakaran, 2015). In terms of income, it occupies an important place in the economy of Kerala. Arecanut is predominantly a small farmer's Crop. Since more than 75 per cent of the holdings are of less than two hectare in size (GoI, 2015), any change in its cultivation either in terms of area, production or productivity will seriously affect the weaker sections of the agriculture population of the state. Due to the importance of this crop, the present study is an attempt to analyse the significance of arecanut cultivation against the background of the agricultural sector of Kerala. More specifically the following are the two important objectives of this paper:

1. To analyse the arecanut cultivation in Kerala among the major states in India and
2. To analyse the significance of arecanut crop in the state against other important crops in the background of the agricultural sector of Kerala.

### **Methods and Materials**

The study is based on secondary data and was collected from various research publications, different magazines, journals and official web-sites and publications of Govt of India and Kerala.

### **Arecanut Cultivation and its Importance in Kerala**

Arecanut is an important commercial crop which occupies a special position in the culture and social life of the people of Kerala. It is used by all sections of people as masticator and is an essential requisite for several religious and social ceremonies. It is also used as an input in agro-based industries. The crop's commercial value is enhanced by the fact that apart from being used as masticators, it is also used in the manufacture of human and veterinary medicine, dyeing clothes, ropes, etc., manufacture of liquor, ply board manufacture, preparing sweets, savories and biscuits, preparing chewing gum, tooth paste and pan-masala which find wide application in various industries like textiles, dyes and chemicals.

**Table 1: Statewise Distribution of Arecanut Area and Production  
- 2013-14**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Area (in '000 hectare)</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Area</b>	<b>Production (in '000 tonnes)</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Production</b>
1	Andhra Pradesh	0.48	0.11	0.26	0.04
2	Assam	68.04	15.28	89.00	12.19
3	Karnataka	218.01	48.99	457.56	62.68
4	Kerala	100.01	22.47	100.02	13.70
5	Maharashtra	2.20	0.49	3.58	0.49
6	Meghalaya	17.11	3.84	24.68	3.38
7	Tamil Nadu	6.70	1.50	8.62	1.18
8	Tripura	4.70	1.06	9.92	1.36
9	West Bengal	11.39	2.56	21.16	2.89
10	Goa	1.74	0.39	2.90	0.39
11	Mizoram	10.14	2.28	6.05	0.83
12	Nagaland	0.22	0.05	0.12	0.07
13	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	4.23	0.95	5.88	0.81
14	Pondicherry	0.06	0.01	0.08	0.01
15	All India	445	100.00	730.00	100.00

Source: Computed from Cocoa, Arecanut and Spices statistics, Directorate of Cocoa, Arecanut and Spices Development, Kozhikode, Kerala.

Arecanut husk, the outer cover of the areca fruit, is used for fiber, hard boards and plastics, pulping and pepper boards. It is also used as an inferior fuel and mulch. Possibilities exist also for using areca husk as manure. Leaf sheath, another raw material obtained from the arecanut palm, is widely used now-a-days for making ply-boards, decorative veneer panels, picture mounts, house sandals, gin washes, brief cases, bags, tea and coffee trays, file boards and many other fancy and utility products. Arecanut stem and leaf forms a useful building material in the villages (Jose and Jayasekhar, 2008).

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Because of the hardness and golden cover of arecanut stem, the timber can be used for making a variety of elegant utility articles. The leaves are great source of organic manure also.

The significance of arecanut also lies in the fact that Kerala is the second largest producer of arecanut in the country. She ranks second in the case of area under cultivation. Table 1 gives the state wise distribution of arecanut area and production during 2013-14. The data presented in the table reveals that the state accounts for 22.47 percent of the area under arecanut in India contributing to 13.70 percent of national production.

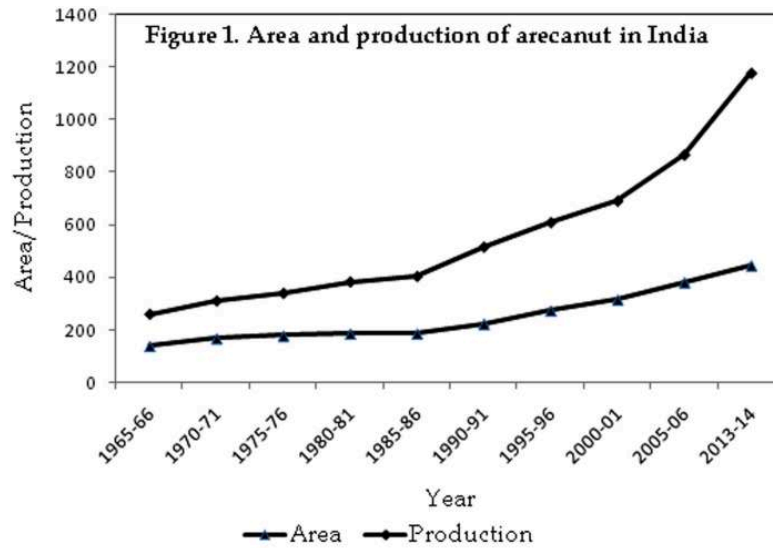
**Table 2: Area and Production of Arecanut in Kerala as a Percentage of Area and Production of Arecanut in India (1965-66 to 2013-14)**

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Year	Area in '000 hectare in India	Area in '000 hectare in Kerala	Percentage of Area in Kerala	Production in '000 tonnes	Percentage of Production in Kerala
1965-66	138.1	64.5	46.71	119.9	40.2 33.52
1970-71	167.3	85.8	51.28	141.0	53.0 37.59
1975-76	177.5	76.6	43.15	160.0	47.7 29.81
1980-81	185.2	61.2	33.04	195.9	53.1 27.11
1985-86	185.6	56.8	30.62	216.2	50.3 23.26
1990-91	223	64.8	29.06	290.1	65.3 22.51
1995-96	273	76.1	27.87	333.5	77.4 23.21
2000-01	315.2	87.4	27.73	373.1	87.9 23.56
2005-06	381.1	108.2	28.39	483.1	119.3 24.69
2013-14	445.0	100.01	22.47	730.00	100.02 13.70

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Source: Computed from Cocoa, Arecanut and Spices statistics, Directorate of Cocoa, Arecanut and Spices Development, Kozhikode, Kerala.



**Table 3: Districtwise Area and Production of Arecanut in Kerala in 2013-14**

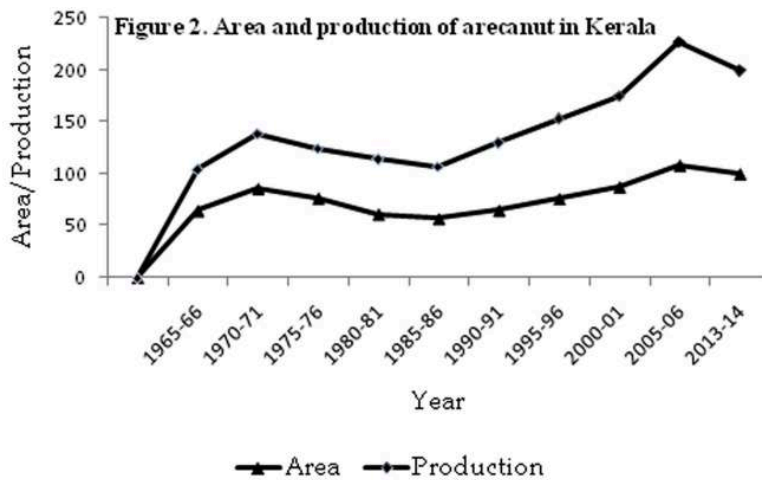
Sl. No.	Districts	Area (in hectare)	Percentage of Total Area	Production (in tonnes)	Percentage of Total Production
1	Thiruvananthapuram	1001	1.00	476	0.48
2	Kollam	1913	1.91	1251	1.25
3	Pathanamthitta	1210	1.21	833	0.83
4	Kottayam	1581	1.58	1103	1.10
5	Alappuzha	1304	1.30	513	0.51
6	Ernakulam	4463	4.46	3924	3.92
7	Idukki	2381	2.38	1795	1.79
8	Trissur	6424	6.42	4268	4.27

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Sl. No.	Districts	Area (in hectare)	Percentage of Total Area	Production (in tonnes)	Percentage of Total Production
9	Palakkad	9562	9.56	8402	8.40
10	Malappuram	18644	18.64	18838	18.84
11	Kozhikkode	9897	9.89	8875	8.88
12	Wayanad	12181	12.18	3985	3.98
13	Kannur	9959	9.96	12103	12.10
14	Kasaragod	19488	19.49	33652	33.65
15	State	100008	100.00	100018	100.00

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Source: Computed from Cocoa, Arecanut and Spices statistics, Directorate of Cocoa, Arecanut and Spices Development, Kozhikode, Kerala.



The area and production of arecanut in Kerala as a per cent of area and production of arecanut in India over 1965-66 to 2013-14 are given in table 2. The data per cent in the table confirmed the mixed trend in area and production of arecanut in the state.

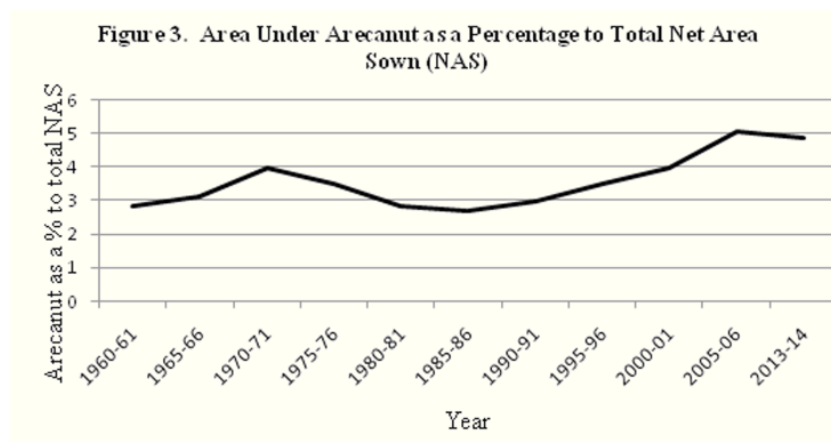
**Table 4: Area Under Arecanut as a Percentage to Total Net Area Sown**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Net Area Sown</b>	<b>Area under Arecanut</b>	<b>Percentage of area under Arecanut to Total Net Area Sown</b>
1960-61	1923.72	54.26	2.82
1965-66	2064.34	64.48	3.12
1970-71	2169.00	85.82	3.96
1975-76	2189.17	76.62	3.50
1980-81	2179.59	61.24	2.81
1985-86	2190.99	58.69	2.68
1990-91	2190.89	64.8	2.96
1995-96	2190.79	70.9	3.51
2000-01	2190.69	87.4	3.99
2005-06	2132.48	108.2	5.07
2013-14	2050.99	100.01	4.88

Area in '000 hectare

Source: Computed from (i) Statistics for planning (various issues), Department of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram. (ii) Economic Review (various issues), State Planning Board, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

In Kerala the area and production of arecanut is spread in almost all districts. Table 3 shows that Kasaragod ranks top in area and production of arecanut. The per cent of arecanut production and area is lowest in Thiruvananthapuram district.



**Table 5: Area under Arecanut as a Percentage of Total Area under Important Plantation Crops.**

Year	Arecanut	Coconut	Rubber	Cashew nut	Pepper	Coffee	Tea
1960-61	6.12	56.48	13.86	6.13	11.25	1.89	4.24
1965-66	6.14	55.81	14.24	8.32	9.49	2.25	3.76
1970-71	6.74	56.46	14.07	8.06	9.23	2.48	2.95
1975-76	6.02	54.46	16.20	8.57	8.50	3.28	2.96
1980-81	4.73	50.34	18.38	10.92	8.35	4.48	2.79
1985-86	4.04	48.48	22.73	9.48	8.36	4.52	2.39
1990-91	3.98	49.57	25.28	4.11	10.35	4.61	2.12
1995-96	3.84	49.53	24.32	5.59	10.38	4.46	1.87
2000-01	4.59	48.64	24.92	4.84	10.62	4.45	1.93
2005-06	5.58	46.68	24.95	4.23	12.33	4.33	1.81
2013-14	5.89	47.68	32.32	2.34	4.95	5.03	1.78

Source: Computed from (i) Statistics for planning (various issues), Department of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram. (ii) Economic Review (various issues), State Planning Board, Govt. of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.



In Kerala, arecanut is one important perennial crop employing 4.88 per cent of the Net Area Sown (NAS) (Table 4). Among the important plantation crops, the per cent of area command by arecanut is 5.89. This is clear from table 5 which presents area under arecanut as a per cent to total area under seven important plantation crops.

### **Conclusion**

A unique feature of Kerala's agriculture is that the cropping pattern in the state has shifted in favour of commercial crops. In this shift, plantation crops increased considerably. Arecanut is an important commercial crop in Kerala. It finds a place in all religious, social and cultural functions of the people. Kerala accounts for 23 per cent of the area under arecanut in India contributing to 14 percent of national production. During the past five decades, the arecanut cultivation in Kerala underwent expansion in area under cultivation associated with increase in production. The analysis of inter-district performance also supports this. A comparison of the compound growth rates of arecanut productivity during the five decades revealing slight increase in the growth of arecanut productivity and supporting it. Realising the significance of arecanut crop in the agrarian economy of Kerala policy efforts may be taken on the part of the authority to protect and uplift this crop.

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