

# Improved Farm Tools to Save Labour, Enhance Productivity

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THRISSUR: The Research and Development wing of Agricultural Research Station (ARS), Mannuthy under Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) is trying to make a marked difference in the age-old farming practices in the coconut sector, by developing two farming tools- a modified version of the sit and climb coconut climber and a tiller which can open up a basin around palms, thus paving way for farmer-friendly mechanisation of coconut farming. According to ARS head Dr U Jaikumaran, the new climbing machine is an improvement of the earlier version of Kera Suraksha Coconut Climber made of stainless steel. It is lighter, cheaper, quicker and more handy than the earlier version. The new machine is fastened to the palm using flexible steel rope instead of the curved stainless rod used in the previous model. The fastening can be adjusted according to the girth of the palm even while operating the machine, which is an added advantage. The machine costs only Rs 3000 against the cost of Rs 8500 of the older version. "We plan to multiply 100 units of it and test it through 14 Model Agro Service Centres in 14 districts in the state, which are technically managed by ARS, he said. The tool was developed under a NABARD-funded project on Refinement and Testing of KAU Kera Suraksha Coconut Climber. After testing at AgroService centres, the machine will be made available to service coconut farming community through the project costing 15 lakh," he said. Considering the coconut palm population in the state, it is estimated that this machine will improve the employment opportunity by 60%, providing additional employment to 25,000 workers earning Rs 2000 per day. It is also expected to ensure proper care for the palms as well, which may bring out 30% increase in productivity worth Rs 15,400 million, said Dr P Rajendran, Vice-chancellor of the University. The tiller to open up the basin around coconut palm is another improvisation by the ARS. Hitherto unavailable, the machinery with its two/ three rotations around the palm, and two tracks of operations open a basin of 1.8 m radius around the palm in 10 minutes can open 6 basins per hour. This tiller consumes only 1.5 litres of diesel per hour. The cost of opening a basin of coconut will be only Rs 40 whereas the cost of manually opening a basin is at least 125% of it and the dearth of skilled workers has led to a stage where the practice is discontinued.