

## Lack of Patronage Hits Navara Rice

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**PALAKKAD:** Is organic navara rice an answer to wheat protein gluton allergy? There have been enquiries from around the country by persons suffering from multiple sclerosis. Traditionally, the rice which has medicinal properties has been used in Kerala for treating rheumatic patients and was in good demand during the

month of the Malayalam month of karkidakam. However, the navara rice farmers society in Chittur which has 20 members in its fold complain about the lack of proper patronage.

“Our main grouse was the lack of market linkage both domestically and abroad as in the case of basmati rice even though it had five times more iron, three times more zinc and twice as much fibre than the latter,” said one of the members of the society T A Balasubramaniam.

One of the main treatment modes in ayurveda during karkidakam is the application of ‘navarakizhi’ wherein the body is made to perspire well through massage with heated rice. Different varieties of kizhis are made of herbal powders, leaves and navara. The application of heated ‘kizhis’ could offer relief from back pain, rheumatic diseases, spondylosis , muscle wastage etc. The bran contains anti-inflammatory properties as per the studies conducted by the National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST) in Thiruvananthapuram, says P Narayanan Unny whose 10- acre navara eco farm in Chittur has been cultivating navara for the last 17 years.

The navara rice contained protein, amylose, iron, zinc, manganese and copper. It was also found to have moderately high amount of oryzanols ( 25.60 mg % ) compared to 2.70 m %) seen in ordinary rice grains and good free radical scavenging activity.

This was the result of the nutritional analysis done on the navara rice produced at Chittur here by the Central Rice Research Institute (CRRI), Cuttack, which was given through the Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Dr S Ayyappan. Meanwhile, the convener of the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Cell of the Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics of the Kerala Agriculture University Dr C R Elsy said that,in order to improve the marketing of the navara rice the KAU has decided to prepare a data bank of all navara paddy farmers and traders in the state.

The extent of land under navara cultivation and a photo of the colour of the rice along with telephone numbers and Email IDs were being collected.

Society president P Narayanan Unny said that organic navara was being sold at Rs 400 per kilogram at the retail level. He points out that only 400 kilograms of navara can be produced from one acre of land, but one can get 1,500 kilograms to 2,000 kilograms of paddy from one acre. However, as navara matures in 60 days, if there is sufficient irrigation facilities, two crops of paddy could also be harvested from the same land in a year. Many multinationals have been marketing navara as ‘golden rice’ which is rich in vitamin E.

There is scope for making value-added products which is in good demand in global market, he adds. The navara rice produced by the society had received the Geographical Indication Registration in 2007 along with Palakkad matta. The Horticulture Mission Director Dr K Prathapan said: “We have submitted a Rs 4-crore proposal to the National Medicinal Plant Board for cultivating navara and other herbs in Palakkad and Wayanad districts and it is expected to be sanctioned soon.”