

Bamboo boom set to bolster fortune of farmers in district

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Coimbatore: Farmers, who are looking to get into tree farming as a long-term investment, can head to city-based Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) from October. In its hi-tech nursery, the institute is growing 30,000 bamboo seedlings and will have 20,000 more ready for distribution by October-end. The seedlings will turn into mature plants in eight years and be ready for harvest, bamboo breeding expert at IFGTB Dominic Savio said. "We brought the seeds from Chhattisgarh and planted them in the nursery. They are of the *Dendrocalamus strictus* variety, called kalsoongil locally. They have adapted well to Coimbatore's climate. We will have 50,000 seedlings ready for sale by October-end," he told TOI. The seedlings will be 1.5ft to 2ft tall before they are distributed to farmers. "They can be directly planted in any land in Coimbatore where there is good irrigation facility. Bamboos just require water since they are deciduous trees with shallow roots," said Savio. IFGTB had received a three-year grant from the National Bamboo Mission to set up the hi-tech nursery and produce 1lakh bamboo saplings from 2018 to 2021. As part of the efforts, the institute had procured nearly 30,000 saplings of five varieties from the northeastern parts of the country and had brought them to Coimbatore by train, Savio said. "The varieties include *Bambusa bambos*, *Bamboo vulgaris* and *Bambusa balcooa*, among others. They have adapted well to the local conditions and are growing well." The varieties are suitable for making bamboo trekking poles and can also be used in furniture industries.

Tree farming is becoming popular among a growing number of farmers, who are not dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and can afford long-term investments. "Bamboos are sturdy. They don't easily get destroyed by too much rain or one season of drought. The newer varieties are fast-growing and require less maintenance," said AL Chokkalingam, who had planted bamboo seven years ago in his farm near Pudukottai. "They also keep the area green and form good land boundaries."

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