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Govt branches out: One highly beneficial neem tree for 10 Indians

Seeding Change: Need 'Amul' model for neem seed collection to boost coverage, say experts

Sanjeeb Mukherjee | New Delhi



Representative Picture

The central government plans to increase the number of highly beneficial neem trees in the country from the existing one tree for every 50 Indians to one tree for every 10 Indians to meet the rising demand from different sectors for neem oil.

Presently, India has 18-20 million neem trees in the country, of which 40-45 per cent are in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu, among others.

To achieve the target, the number of neem trees has to rise to almost 140 million.

“The exponential jump in neem tree coverage can be done through the distribution of quality seed material and also programs such as vriksh andolans (tree campaigns),” A Arunachalam, director of ICAR-Central Agroforestry Research Institute, Jhansi, told reporters.

He said the country needs to develop a collection pattern for neem seeds on the lines of Amul for milk to boost coverage.

Arunachalam was speaking on the sidelines of the World Neem Summit being held in the national capital. He also said that plans are being made to use neem trees as part of the Centre’s ambitious programme to reclaim a part of the 26 million hectares of identified wastelands in the country.

“Neem trees could be used extensively in this programme for which we could get carbon credits as well,” Arunachalam said.

He said that the ICAR has so far collected 250 high-quality neem seeds from across the world, of which 170 have been graded into different categories. Of the 170 graded, 11 accessions have been identified, which are of good quality and can and should be developed further.

“Already, India has 30-40 patents for neem-based products,” he said.

B N Vyas, director and founder of World Neem Organisation, said that an adult neem tree gives 15-20 kilogram (kg) of seeds upon attaining maturity, which is 10-15 years. From 1 kg of neem seed, 18-20 per cent neem oil can be extracted, while this goes up to 45-50 per cent when extracted from neem kernel.

“The average price of neem seed presently is Rs 150-180 per kg, while the oil is selling at Rs 250-300 per kg,” Vyas said.

Arunachalam said that neem should be promoted extensively, as studies have shown that the temperatures around a neem tree are 3-5 degrees Celsius cooler than the surrounding, which is ideal for being used as shade for livestock, etc.

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