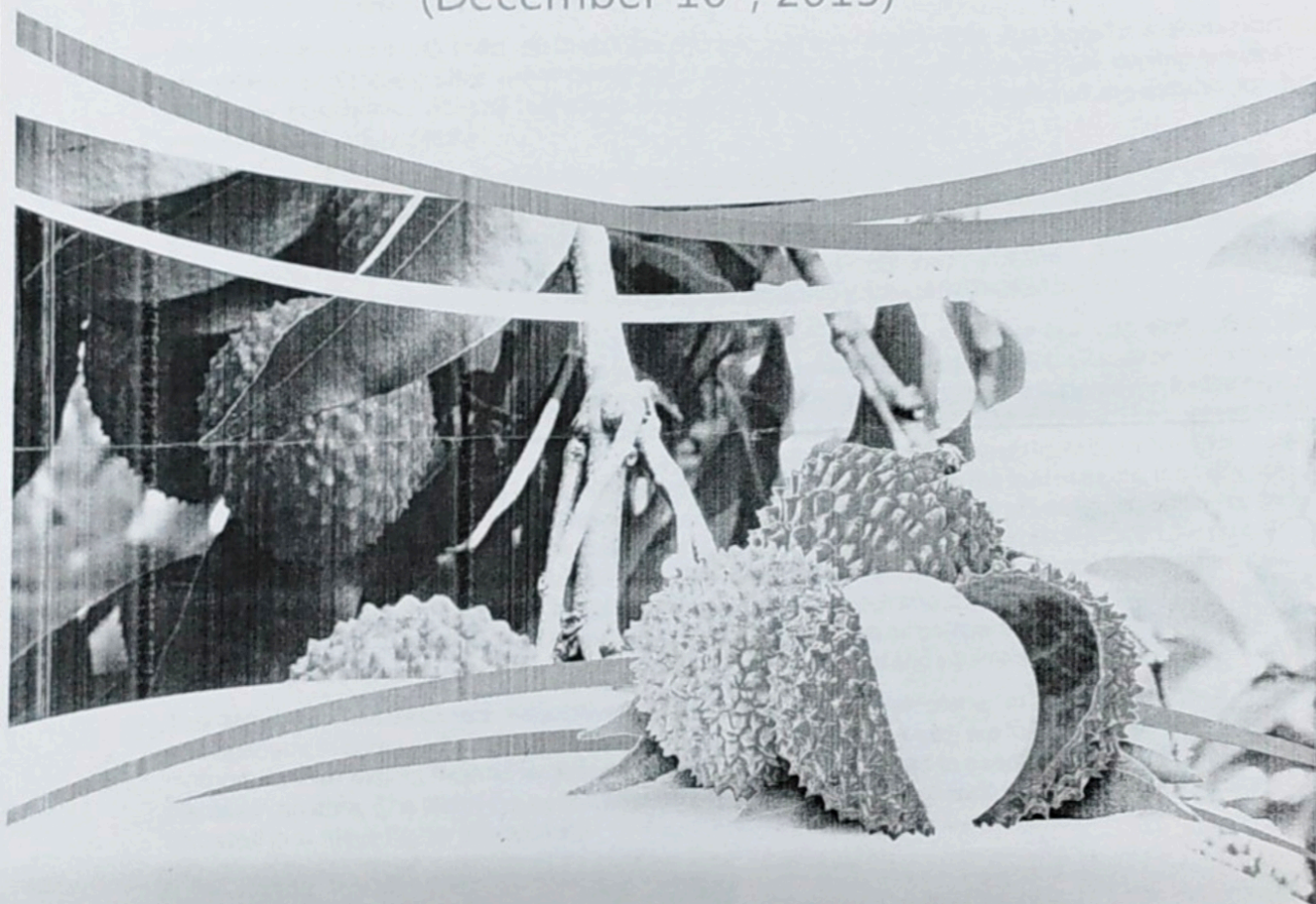


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*13/12/15*

AWARENESS PROGRAMME ON OFF-SEASON LITCHI  
CULTIVATION IN SOUTH INDIA  
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# POTENTIAL OF LITCHI CULTIVATION IN WAYANAD, KERALA

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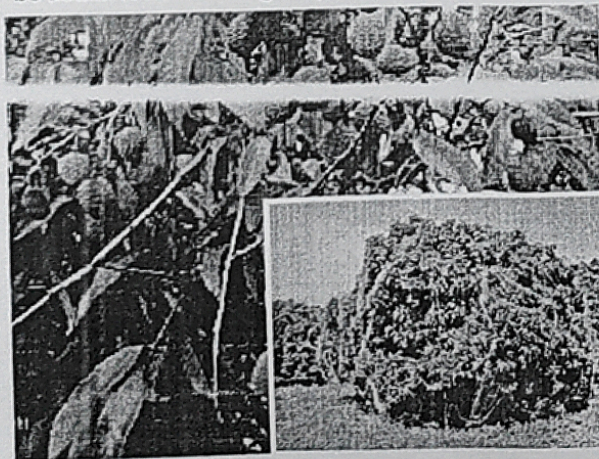
Litchi, with its delicate whitish sweet pulp and spiked red skin, is a summertime favorite in India. The litchi (*Litchi chinensis* Sonn), an important subtropical evergreen fruit crop belonging to the family Sapindaceae, is believed to have originated in China. Since it is highly specific to climatic requirements its cultivation is restricted to a few countries in the world. In India, litchi was introduced in the 18th century through Burma, and from there, it spread to many countries. India and China are the major producers of litchi contributing to 91 per cent of the world's litchi production. Litchi is commercially grown in North India mainly in Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Assam.

When compared to north India, litchi cultivation is not sound in south India. A change in this situation is witnessed during the past few years during which many of the farmers in Wayanad are coming forward to exploit the possibilities of litchi cultivation. The mild subtropical climate in Wayanad are suitable for the successful cultivation of litchi.

In favorable soil and weather conditions, the trees can yield fruits of supreme quality and in huge quantity as well. Litchi trees in Wayanad grow at an elevation of 2500 feet. In the climatic conditions of Wayanad, flowering of the plant starts in September and the fruits mature by November-end. This being the off-season in other parts of the country, the produce from Wayanad and similar areas in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu could fetch premium price. Farmers can thus get attractive prices of 350 to 400 per kg.

In Wayanad there are few farmers who have planted 1 acre to 10 acres of litchi as intercrop with coffee. The performance of litchi trees shows that Wayanad has optimum climatic conditions for off season cultivation of litchi and it has a potential to become major crop in future not only for the domestic supply even for the export. Four varieties of litchi is cultivating in Wayanad, including shahi, china and rose scented. The success of Mr. Kuruville Joseph, a litchi grower in Wayanad has inspired other farmers to take up litchi cultivation. He started planting of litchi and explore the off season benefits. It has huge demand in the fruit markets, the fruits sold at cost of Rs. 200- 250 per kg at farm gate level. The average yield per tree is 200 to 500 kg depending upon the age of the plant. He sold litchi fruits in Bangalore, Cochin and Coimbatore markets. He faced the problem in marketing, mainly the atrocities of middle men, and then started own marketing channel and proper packing system. When fruit reaches directly to customer, they gave feedback about the quality and had lot satisfaction and further got more lucrative prices. The cost of production is high as compared to North India due to cost of nets etc for prevention of fruit damage from the monkeys, bats, birds and squirrels.

The litchi tree has luxuriant vegetative growth, which causes problems in harvesting. Thus, canopy management to achieve the required plant architecture is essential. As we are following high density planting method, we can expect fivefold increase in the yield. When compared to seedlings, nine fold grafts can be planted in an area. The litchi has a short shelf-life. Practices that can enhance post-harvest life of fruits would be useful to achieve higher productivity.



## Conclusion:

Commercial cultivation of litchi holds out promise for the farming community in the hilly areas of Wayanad. However, a lot of constraints need to be overcome to enhance Kerala's share in the litchi market. Due to its highly perishable nature, litchi needs specialized handling and transportation to ensure its prompt marketing and consumption. Promotion of better agronomic techniques to the newly emerging litchi growing belts of south India like Wayanad produce litchis of quality comparable to, and, in some cases even better than that of the north. This will augment the availability of litchi for exports and domestic sale in the off-season.

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