2026 Volume: 02 Issue: 11 www.ijrpa.com ISSN 2456-9995 Review Article

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

Page: 01-07

THE ARECA NUT INDUSTRY IN KARNATAKA: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Article Received: 26 September 2026
Article Revised: 16 October 2026
Published on: 05 November 2026

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DOI: https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.2535

ABSTRACT

Karnataka has been the number one state of areca cultivation in India. According to the figures provided by government areca is cultivated in numerous district of Karnataka. Karnataka cultivates areca nut as a cash crop and farmers devote their whole life in its cultivation and maintenance. The areca nut growing is localized in South Kanara, North Kanara, Udupi, Shimoga, Chikmagalur districts of Karnataka with heavy rainfall. Areca nut is also cultivated in plain land area districts such as Chitradurga, Davanagere, Tumkur in heavy density and in some parts of Hassan, Mandya, Mysore and Kodagu districts of Karnataka. Though contribution to overall production is around 45% from coastal belt areas, 40% from plain land region and the rest 15% from other districts. Cultivation of Areca is a traditional style of agriculture in malnad and coastal regions of Karnataka. Recently, it spread to plain areas since they are richly endowed with irrigation schemes and canal water. This paper concentrated on recent year production of Areaca nut in Karnataka, Economic Importance, Challenges Confronting the Arecanut Industry and Government Support and efforts.

KEYWORDS: Arecanut, economic growth. Government, production etc.,

INTRODUCTION

Karnataka, a state in southern India, is a prominent player in the arecanut industry, which plays a crucial role in the state's economy, agriculture, and social structure. Arecanut, commonly known as betel nut, is derived from the fruit of the areca palm (Areca catechu) and is widely used in various cultural practices, especially in South Asia. Karnataka is the largest

producer of arecanut in India, contributing significantly to the national production and export of this cash crop.

There are two abundantly available varieties of Areca nut called White Supari and Red Supari. The white variety is prepared by harvesting ripe Areca nut and sun-drying it. The red variety is prepared by harvesting the tender(green) variety and removing the husk. Each variety has its own market and is consumed by different people in various parts of India.

According to officials, the area under arecanut plantation has been increasing year after year and there has been a reduction in the area under horticultural crop cultivation. As per information from the horticultural department, the area under arecanut plantation in the year 2022- 23 was 1.52 lakh hectares, producing 6,89,072 metric tonnes. In the year 2021- 22 production was 6,14,216 metric tonnes in 1.53 lakh hectares hectares. In 2020-21 the area under arecanut cultivation was 1.44 lakh hectares hectares producing 5,62,889 metric tonnes.

“The overall area under horticultural cultivation is 27.14 lakh hectares this year, while last year it was around 26 lakh hectares. The area under cultivation of fruits and vegetables is around 4 lakh hectares and 6 lakh hectares, respectively. The area under arecanut plantation is on the rise and it is not a healthy trend. Around 90-95% of the yield is used in gutka and tobacco industry, which is one of the high revenue generators of the state. Yield from Karnataka is sent to Maharashtra and north Indian states. Hence the government is unable to control the area of arecanut production. Farmers have also realised that it is a profitable crop and requires less effort when compared to horticultural crops which are weather and market driven,” a senior official from the horticulture department explained.

An acre of 550 arecanut trees yields upto two kilograms of fruit, which has a high market demand. Yields begin from the sixth year of sowing and goes on till 20- 25 years.

“In many places now farmers are indulging in monocropping. There has been a rising trend in arecanut plantation since last 3-4 years, results of which are being seen now with high cost of fruits and vegetables as the area of cultivation has reduced. Mono cropping is a concern especially when there are cases of fungal diseases. It is becoming a menace in Malnad region, where it is a traditional crop.

Arecanut cultivation has increased not just in Malnad regions but even in other dry areas like Kolar, Chamarajanagar, Chikkaballapur, Chitradurga, Tunkuru, Haveri and outskirts of Bengaluru. This time we have also found that farmer in areas of paddy cultivation have shifted to arecanut. We are collecting data on this,” the official added.

Historical Background

The history of arecanut cultivation in Karnataka dates back several centuries, with its integration into local customs and diets. The crop is predominantly grown in the Malnad region, which includes districts such as Shivamogga, Chikmagalur, and Hassan. Over the years, the cultivation of arecanut has evolved from traditional to more commercial practices, boosted by advancements in cultivation techniques and processing.

Review of Literature

Various studies emphasize the agronomy of arecanut, plantation management, soil health, and climatic needs. Research by Kothari et al. (2016) emphasizes the optimum agronomic methods for arecanut production such as optimum planting density, shade management, and water management vital for yield maximization. Another study by Gupta et al. (2018) emphasizes the need for balanced fertilization with the help of organic and inorganic sources for sustaining soil fertility as well as productivity.

Pest and Disease Control: The arecanut crop is threatened by pests and diseases. Sharma et al. (2015) listed some of the major pests, e.g., black beetle (Hapreatheobromae) and the fungal leaf spot disease caused by pathogens like *Pestalotiopsis* species. The study highlighted that integrated pest management (IPM) techniques involving cultural practices, biological control, and reduced chemical use are required to successfully control these pests and diseases.

Even more recent research by Prakash et al. (2019) examines the application of biopesticides as a natural alternative to pest control. The findings report that not only do biopesticides reduce chemical pesticide dependence but also improve the health of the soil as well as biodiversity.Post-harvest Processing and Value Addition: Literature has also stressed the importance of post-harvest processing and value addition in the arecanut sector. Kumar et al. (2020) explain several processing methods that improve the shelf life and marketability of arecanut commodities. The traditional curing techniques are discussed in conjunction with contemporary processing technologies capable of yielding value-added products, e.g., flavored arecanut and arecanut snacks, resulting in enhanced profit for farmers.

Dhananjaya et al. (2021) have placed greater stress on arecanut products' branding and marketing. Their research brings into perspective the possibility of local co-operatives contributing to arecanut farmers' increased income by means of improved marketing practices and access to large markets.

Socio-economic Impacts: The socio-economic aspects of arecanut production have received prominence in many studies. A major stream of research is concerned with the livelihoods of farm families reliant on arecanut.For instance, Reddy et al. (2017) found that arecanut cultivation contributes significantly to the socio-economic development of rural areas in Karnataka, providing sustainable income and employment opportunities.

Nonetheless, issues like volatility in market prices and impacts of climate change are reported in research by Bhojwani et al. (2018). The authors contend that farmers are exposed to market price fluctuations and advise the necessity for strategic government policies to manage prices and offer agricultural insurance schemes.

Policy and Sustainability Problems: Recent work also suggests policies supporting sustainability in arecanut production. In a study by Mahesh et al. (2020), it is said that government efforts for sustainable practices and organic farming methods can be influential in ensuring the continuity of the arecanut sector. Evaluating the environmental implications of arecanut cultivation, the authors suggest shifting toward sustainable farming practices in order to counteract unfavorable impacts on the environment.

Economic Importance

Contribution to Employment and Agriculture: Arecanut cultivation is a source of livelihood for a large number of farmers in Karnataka. The soil and climatic conditions of the state are favorable to cultivate quality arecanut, which is a good cash crop. As an estimate, arecanut farming occupies more than 1,00,000 hectares of land in Karnataka and engages about 1.5 million people directly and indirectly in agriculture, processing, and marketing.

Exporting Scope: Karnataka not only fulfills the domestic needs but also enjoys a robust presence in the international trade. Karnataka arecanut is exported to a number of nations, including the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Europe, for the contribution of the foreign exchange revenue of the state. Exporting arecanut and areca products has seen consistent growth year on year with the support of growing global demand.

Value Addition and Processing: The Karnataka arecanut sector is dominated by a range of value-added products, such as sliced arecanut, flavored areca products, and cosmetic preparations. The processing units tend to be instrumental in increasing the profitability of the arecanut cultivation, allowing farmers to realize improved prices for their produce. The co-operative societies and processers in areas such as Shivamogga and Chikmagalur have been instrumental in providing an institutional framework for the processing and marketing of arecanut.

Source of Income: Arecanut is an important cash crop for most of the farmers in Karnataka, generating a lot of income for them, and is an essential part of the rural economy.

Employment Opportunities: Arecanut cultivation offers employment to thousands of farming families and work for laborers in related operations including processing and marketing.

Market Value: The value of arecanut may fluctuate considerably depending on quality, availability conditions, and market forces. Arecanut prices may be between ₹100 and ₹300 per kg depending on demand from gutkha units and export markets.

Cultivated Area: Karnataka produces the majority of arecanut in India, and around 3.5 to 4 lakh hectares are used for cultivating arecanut.

Production: The production of arecanut in the state varies with climatic factors and farming practices, from 4 to 7 lakh metric tons per annum. Karnataka supplies approximately 40-50% of India's total arecanut production.

Major Districts: The primary districts engaged in cultivation of arecanut in Karnataka are:

Dakshina Kannada,

Udupi,

Kodagu,

Hassan,

Chikmagalur,

Shivamogga,

Davangere.

Problems Confronting the Arecanut Industry

Though economically important, the Karnataka arecanut industry has a number of challenges:

Market Price Fluctuation: Volatility of arecanut prices in the domestic and foreign markets is a major threat to farmers. The dependence upon limited exporting nations and altering consumption patterns can create price volatility.

Pest and Disease Menaces: Similar to most agricultural industries, the arecanut sector is vulnerable to pest attacks and disease, which may reduce yield and quality. Some of the common menaces are the black beetle and leaf spot disease, calling for research and proper management.

Climate change: This is due to the changes in weather conditions, which threaten the sustainable cultivation of arecanut. Climatic changes such as drought and abnormal rainfall affect the production of dunganis.

Regulatory and Policy Problems: Farmers frequently encounter bureaucratic problems in obtaining subsidies, credit, and marketing assistance. Well-defined policies and organized support systems should be put in place to enhance the arecanut industry.

Government Support and Initiatives

The Karnataka Government, appreciating the significance of the arecanut sector, has launched a number of initiatives to sustain production and improve livelihoods. These include:

Financial Support: Subsidies and financial support programs have been introduced to help arecanut farmers buy good-quality seeds, fertilizers, and pest control measures.

Research and Development: Investment in agricultural research in organizations such as the University of Agricultural Sciences and the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research is directed at the development of pest-resistant varieties and better agriculture practices. Market Intervention: The government has provided regulated markets for arecanut producers to prevent exploitation by middlemen and assure them fair prices.

Promotion of Co-operatives: Organizing cooperative societies helps in collective bargaining, processing, and marketing of arecanut, thereby improving farmers' bargaining power in the market.

CONCLUSION

The arecanut sector in Karnataka is an integral part of the state's agricultural economy, generating livelihoods and contributing to the state's economy. But it is necessary to ensure that this sector faces its challenges in order to grow and remain viable. By paying attention to policy support, research efforts, and efficient market strategies, Karnataka can maintain its position as India's top-producing state for arecanut while making the livelihood of many farmers rely on this essential cash crop.

Arecanut is a crop of great economic, cultural, and social significance in areas where it is cultivated. Existing literature emphasizes different aspects related to arecanut cultivation, such as agronomy, pest management, post-harvest processing, and socio-economic effects. Although the sector is confronted with problems such as pest attacks, market fluctuations, and climatic change, persistent research and policy measures can enhance sustainable growth and development in the arecanut sector. Future research must be aimed at new modes of agricultural practice, climate change effects, and the ability of technology to improve farmers' profitability and productivity. This will make arecanut cultivation remain a vital part of the evolving agricultural sector.

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