

## **Oyster farming proves a financial boon for women self-help groups in Kerala**

Edible oyster farming seems to be providing sweet rewards for women self-help groups in Kerala, thanks to the initiatives of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute to commercialise the venture in backwaters and estuaries. If the recent bumper harvest of oysters and mussels by a 40-woman group near Kochi from around 16 units is any indication, these groups have successfully reaped an average of 1.5 tonnes from each unit. Currently there are 50 such groups across the State concentrating on oyster farming. Oyster meat is priced at ₹600/kg, while that of mussels is at ₹660/kg. Besides the live consumption of oysters is also on the rise in five star hotels, which is an emerging market.

Oyster farming was popularised in India through the National Agricultural Innovation Project funded by the World Bank in 2005. Later, CMFRI's collateral efforts with the State Fisheries Department made it a profitable aquaculture venture practice along the coastal states, especially in Kerala and Maharashtra. In India, the commercial production of oyster was started in 1995 at Ashtamudi Lake in Kerala with an initial production of around 2 tonnes. Today, the figure has reached around 4,045 tonnes. Globally, China is the leading producer of oysters.

Sunil Mohamed, Head of the Molluscan Fisheries Division, told *BusinessLine* that CMFRI oversees bivalve farming practices and oyster farming technology could very well be used to increase the income of women self-help groups in the coastal region.



---

### **Simple technology**

Edible oyster culture, according to him, is a very simple technology and women farmers can easily understand these aspects through observation and practice.

The successful oyster farming developed by CMFRI is the 'Rack and Ren' method, using bamboo poles. About 25 poles are required to set up a 5x5-square-metre rack. The period between November-December is the ideal time to start farming in Kerala, which could be harvested in May. As there is no need for supplementary feed, oyster farming is less expensive compared to fish farming. The initial capital to set up the farming units is the major expense of the farming, he said. CMFRI has also developed a scientific method to clean oysters after the harvest, called depuration, a process of expelling contaminants from the gills and guts of oysters by providing them with good purified seawater before they are used for consumption.

Oysters are rich in protein, lipids, carbohydrates, minerals (calcium, iron, copper, zinc, phosphorus) and vitamins. They are good sources of Vitamin B 12, Omega 3 fats, iron and zinc, which boost memory and brain functioning. Proteins in oysters are high in tyrosine, an amino acid that is used by the brain to help in regulating mood and adapting to stress.