

9 islands in Lakshadweep to be seaweed hub

The Lakshadweep administration has launched a programme to turn its nine inhabited islands into a hub of seaweed cultivation, officials said here on Monday.

Kochi: Prioritising seaweed farming as the driver of development of the islands, the administration, with the technical support of the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), held a demonstration on farming seaweed on the nine islands, a press release from the institute said. The initiative is in line with a study by the CMFRI that revealed the potential for production of quality seaweeds in the serene and pollution-free lagoons of Lakshadweep for high-end utilisation like pharmaceuticals, food and nutraceuticals, the release said.

The indigenous red algae, *Gracilaria edulis* and *Acanthophora spicifera* are being farmed on nearly 2,500 bamboo rafts benefiting 100 families belonging to 10 women self-help groups on the islands. "Known for its unique tuna fish and myriads of beautiful corals, reef fish and other creatures, the marine sphere of the islands is now very likely to be known as the seaweed farming hub of India soon," said Dr K Mohammed Koya, a scientist of CMFRI. Recent studies by the CMFRI revealed an unprecedented growth performance of indigenous seaweed species in various lagoons of Lakshadweep with nearly 60-fold growth in 45 days for *Gracilaria edulis*. Following the success story, the island administration joined hands with the CMFRI for multi-locational trial farming and capacity-building of stakeholders. Thus, experimental-scale trial farming was conducted on the islands of Kiltan, Chetlah Kadmath, Agatti and Kavaratti during 2020-21 with promising results.

"The studies revealed that the island has a potential of producing nearly 30,000 tonnes of dry seaweed per year worth Rs 75 crore by farming only 1 per cent (200ha) of its 21,290 ha of lagoon area (inhabited islands only) at the rate of a modest 150 tonnes per hectare," said the scientist.

Terming it as a climate-smart initiative, he further said the sea being the major sink of carbon and the seaweeds well known for its carbon sequestration properties, the farming of seaweed at such a scale would sequester nearly 6,500 t carbondioxide per day adding a huge carbon credit to the nation while providing a climate-resilient livelihood to the islanders.

Led by coordinated efforts of various departments of the administration such as fisheries, environment and forests and rural development as well as the CMFRI, the demonstration focused on popularisation of seaweed farming, capacity-building of stakeholders and pre-feasibility and impact assessment of such farming for a planned development of enterprise on the islands, the release said.

Providing a sound scientific basis for a sustainable seaweed farming enterprise, the CMFRI and the Lakshadweep Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the institute is into further studies for assessing the carrying capacity of the lagoons, spatial mapping of suitable farming sites, standardising farming methods for year-round farming in deeper areas and means to ensure quality seeding materials of indigenous seaweed species jointly with the Lakshadweep administration.