

Lakshadweep turns to seaweed farming

Large-scale farming of indigenous seaweeds has been launched in Lakshadweep under the guidance of premier marine research body Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) headquartered in Kochi



After fisheries, coconut farming and tourism, the Lakshadweep administration has prioritised seaweed farming as the major engine of development. Seaweed is consumed in many countries, especially in East Asia. It is also used in food additives, medicine, fertiliser and cosmetic goods and to combat beach erosion.

The initiative is in line with a study conducted by the CMFRI which found immense potential for quality seaweeds in serene and pollution-free lagoons for high-end utilisation like pharmaceuticals, food and nutraceuticals, said CMFRI in a statement. It is planning a production of about 30,000 tonnes worth ₹7.5 million in a year. In line with the new plan, a farming demonstration of seaweeds was launched in nine inhabited islands.

The CMFRI said the indigenous red algae, *Gracilaria edulis* and *Acanthophora spicifera*, are some of the species being planned in nearly 2500 bamboo rafts which will benefit 100 families belonging to about ten women self-help groups

“Traditionally known for its unique tuna fish, beautiful corals, reef fish and other creatures, soon the islands are likely to be known as the seaweed farming hub of the country,” said Dr K Mohammed Koya, a senior scientist with the CMFRI.

Recent studies by the CMFRI revealed a big growth of indigenous seaweed species in various lagoons of Lakshadweep with nearly 60-fold growth in 45 days for species like *Gracilaria edulis*. Following this, the island administration joined hands with the CMFRI for multi-locational trial farming and capacity building of stakeholders. Experimental farming was conducted in the islands of Kiltan, Chetlah Kadmath, Agatti and Kavaratti during 2020-21 with good results, said CMFRI.

“Our studies revealed that the island has a potential of producing nearly 30,000 tons of dry seaweed per year worth ₹7.5 million by farming only 1% (200 ha) of its 21,290 ha of lagoon area (inhabited islands only),” said Dr Koya.

To provide a sound scientific basis for sustainable seaweed farming, the CMFRI and the Lakshadweep Krishi Vigyan Kendra began 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 ensuring quality seeding materials, said the CMFRI.

The serene islands were in news for all wrong reasons recently as a section of residents protested three draft regulations brought in by new administrator Praful Khoda Patel, saying they will affect the unique culture and tradition of the island. They opposed the move to make the island a tourist destination besides the ban on cattle slaughter, the two-child norm for local body members, liquor licence, goonda law and other new rules. But BJP leaders from the island said some vested interests were stoking the fire and provoking local people to stall developmental projects on the island.