

ICAR- CIARI conducted National Webinar on Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture

ICAR- Central Island Agricultural Research Institute (CIARI), Port Blair in collaboration with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), A&N Regional Office, Port Blair has conducted a National Webinar on 'Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture for Health and Nutrition' on November 25, 2020. Dr. Pooja Bohra, the Organizing Secretary of the event, informed that the event was organized to create awareness among the city dwellers about scientific management practices for their gardens in urban and suburban areas.

Immunity is an in-built mechanism to protect ourselves from the infection of pandemic diseases such as COVID-19. It is well known fact that herbs, spices and fruits are known to have beneficial effect on boosting the immunity. During lockdown period, many citizens dwelling in and around city areas have started growing such plants in their backyards and have been immensely benefitted. However, due to lack of scientific knowledge about cultivation of important immunity boosting species, most of the stakeholders could not reap complete benefits and hence, webinar was planned by involving experts from premier research institutes of our country. Dr. B.A. Jerard, Director, ICAR-CIARI, in his presidential address informed the gathering about the relevance and timeliness of this event in the present situation.

During inaugural event of the webinar, the Chief Guest, Mr. V. Mashar, General Manager, NABARD, Port Blair emphasized the role of such horticultural crops in boosting immunity. He also suggested that suitable models in urban and peri-urban spaces need to be developed and their economic viability could be worked out to enable growers to generate income from such limited areas.

Under technical sessions, Dr. G.R. Smitha, Senior Scientist from ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru explained in detail about various technologies developed in the country pertaining to vertical farming, rooftop gardening, soil less culture, hydroponics, micro-greens cultivation *etc.* She also covered importance of various medicinal herbs, their agronomic practices, harvesting and postharvest handling for home and backyard gardens. Several practical tips discussed on these aspects by Dr. Smitha were well appreciated by the participants.

Dr. B.A. Jerard, Director has highlighted in his lecture, the role and importance of various soilless substrates suitable for urban gardening. He emphasized the ample availability of coconut in the various parts of the islands and potential use of coir-based products and their uses in promotion of urban gardening in the islands. Dr. Ajit Arun Waman, Scientist, ICAR-CIARI, spoke about the opportunities for peri-urban horticulture. He explained about the role of native horticultural diversity, high value crops, intensive cultivation techniques, possibilities of nursery operations and postharvest processing on the rooftops and backyards. He suggested involvement of educated youth in the urban horticulture for improving profitability of the sector.

Participants from seventeen states/ UTs of the country including Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Lakshadweep Islands, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttarakhand and West Bengal registered for the event and actively participated through detailed discussions. The programme ended with vote of thanks by Dr. Pooja. The event was facilitated by ITMU and AKMU of the Institute.