

Winemakers eye Bihar litchis

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PATNA, 2 MAY: Winemakers across the country are making a beeline for a Bihar produce: litchi. The state that produces 70 per cent of the total litchi grown in India now has wine-manufacturing companies seeking out the Muzaffarpur-based National Litchi Research Centre. They want to use the technique devised by the centre to manufacture wine from the luscious berries.

Bangalore-based Raya Eco Care Private Limited, that specialises in manufacturing organic litchi honey, is the latest to approach the National Litchi Research Centre. The company has already leased a litchi farm spread over 130 acres from the farmers of Kanti and Motipur blocks in Muzaffarpur. It has also bought land to set up a processing plant in the district.

"We have approached the National Litchi Research Centre seeking a transfer of technology. If the centre doesn't share the technology with us, we will buy it from Europe or China," Mr Rajesh Kumar of Raya Eco Care Private Limited said over the telephone from Bangalore. He said his firm already had the knowhow for making wine from apples and would like to venture into the production of litchi-flavored wine.

Other than Raya Eco

Care Private Limited, liquor baron Vijay Mallya's Kingfisher and Litchika International have approached the National Litchi Research Centre to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Centre director Mr KK Kumar said a colleague had developed litchi-flavoured wine by mixing the berry's pulpy extracts with spirits. He said the Union agriculture ministry was willing to allow the centre to transfer the technology to private firms for making litchi-flavoured wine.

Bihar alone hosts 54 per cent of the area under litchi cultivation in India. According to a government report, litchi is grown on more than 26,000 hectares of land in Bihar and the state's annual litchi production is around 3 lakh tonnes.

