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10th, August, 2022

Topic: Trial for Coffee Cultivation in Himachal

Importance: Himachal HPAS Prelims and Mains

What is the news?

- The Himachal Department of Agriculture's pilot project to introduce coffee to the hill state was not successful.



Plant survival rate as low as 5-10%

- The department launched a pilot project in 2014 in the districts of Kangra, Mandi, Una and Bilaspur.
- One lakh plants, mainly of the arabica and robusta variety, supplied to over 500 farmers.
- Only the arabica plants survived to some extent in some pockets that were not whipped by cold winds.

Reason:

- The cold climate conditions have marred the prospects of coffee plantation as an alternative cash crop as the survival rate of the plants is very low, ranging only between 5 and 10 per cent.

With respect to this project:

- The department had launched the project in 2014. The plants were sown on a trial basis on 7.34 hectares in

Kangra, Mandi, Una and Bilaspur districts. The area under coffee plantation initially increased four times to 30.12 hectares in 2018-19.

- The department provided one lakh plants to over 500 farmers since 2014, aiming to augment their income as raw coffee seeds fetch Rs 150-200 per kg.

Which varieties of coffee grown in this experimental project?

- The Central Coffee Research Institute in Chikmagalur, Karnataka, had recommended two varieties for growing in the Himachal: arabica and robusta.
- During the trial, it was observed that the robusta variety required more water as compared to arabica and the farmers were told to go for the latter.

Conditions for Coffee Plantation:

- In ideal conditions, the coffee plants must be raised in the shade, protected from frost and cold, and the temperature must vary between 4 degrees Celsius and 35 degrees Celsius. Specific locations were identified in certain districts to grow coffee plants.
- The idea was to grow coffee on the pattern of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as the plants start bearing fruit in four years, while commercial production starts after 10 years.
- A single plant produces 500 gm to 1 kg of coffee and 100 saplings are planted in one kanal (500 sq yards).

Essential growth conditions required for the cultivation of coffee are as follows:

1. Climate
2. Shade
3. Topography
4. Soils
5. Economic

Conditions!

1. Climate: Coffee is a tropical plant that is also cultivated in the semitropical climate. The coffee tree requires heat, humidity and abundant rainfall.



The following weather and rain conditions are necessary for the cultivation of coffee.

(a) Temperature: Growth is most rapid during the warm rainy season and during the dry season, berries ripen and are ready for picking. Bright sunshine and warm weather are necessary for the harvest.

(b) Rainfall: Coffee needs abundant rainfall, i.e., 100 to 200 cm annually. The hill slopes that receive orographic rains are therefore the best for the cultivation of coffee.

2. Shade:

- Direct sunlight is harmful to coffee plants; therefore, they are planted under the shadow of larger trees such as bananas. In Brazil, leguminous plants are used which not only provide shade but also enrich soil with nitrogen.

3. Topography:

- Generally, coffee is grown on slopes from 600 to 1800 meters high. The appropriateness of the slopes to coffee is because they are well drained and also cooler. Water stagnation is very harmful to coffee plants; therefore, the hillsides are best suited for it.

4. Soils:

- Soil is the guiding factor in coffee planting. The ideal soil is one with good underground drainage, and one that is easily realizable. The presence of humus and other nitrogen compounds in the soil is an asset.
- Well-drained volcanic soils like Brazil's terra-roxa, which contain a lot of potash as well as organic matter, are the best.

(News Source: The Tribune & yourarticlelibrary)

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