

Rubber Board's bio-diversity initiative

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KOCHI: The Rubber Board is considering recommending planters to encourage bio-diversity in rubber plantations without the effort affecting natural rubber productivity.

The Board had taken a long and hard look at questions of loss of bio-diversity to rubber plantations and might, for the first time, recommend planters to allow the growth of weeds, shrubs and medicinal plants along with rubber trees, Rubber Board sources said. They pointed out that farmers, at present, looked at bio-diversity as growing jack-fruit, coconut and some other commercially important trees in rubber plantations but the idea was to encourage the plantations to become "repositories of bio-diversity."

The best recommendation would be to allow shrubs and weeds to grow in the plantations and to place medicinal plants which would remain below the rubber tree canopy. This would not affect productivity, though large trees tend to reduce rubber production substantially.

Meanwhile, Director of the Rubber Research Institute (RRI) in Kottayam, James Jacob, said the Rubber Board had not been recommending or providing subsidy for rubber plantations in food crop areas in north-east India, where rubber cultivations were spread over 75,000-80,000 hectares. Waste land had been identified using satellite data and rubber plantations were recommended only in such areas, he said.

Global rubber plantations, extending about 10 million hectares, offset 1.6 per cent of the annual growth of 0.02 per cent (two parts per million) in green house gas emissions.