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Tripura planter bets on hand-rolled orthodox tea variety

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Agartala, May 23: Successful completion of a pilot project on hand-rolled orthodox tea has encouraged a 25-year-old planter in Tripura to go for full-scale production of the costly and delicate variety.

A consignment of hand-rolled tea produced by the young entrepreneur in Unakoti district had recently fetched Rs 12,500 per kg, the highest ever in the state. For hand-rolled tea, the plucked leaves are first spread out in a thin layer and allowed to wither. Each leaf and a bud or two leaves and a bud are then rolled gently in the palms. Sold under the brand name of Neermahal, the tea is produced in a factory run by a cooperative society at Pancham Nagar village in Unakoti district.

Sumedha Das, a graduate in agriculture science entrepreneur and owner of Neermahal Tea, said when samples were sent to a few exporters, Amritsar-based Shahjada Exports Limited, having links in the markets of Europe and Gulf countries, took an interest. "We produced 5.5 kg hand-rolled tea and the entire production was purchased by them at Rs 12,500 per kg," Das told PTI. The process for making hand-rolled tea is delicate and the yield is very less in comparison to CTC or other varieties, she said.

"When I saw buds coming out after pre-monsoon rain, I tried my hand for making hand-rolled tea. Only one or two tender leaves and a bud is plucked and then spread out in a thin layer and allowed to dry," Das said. It took almost a week to dry the leaves naturally, which were then hand-rolled, Das, whose family owns a tea-estate called 'Shova Bagan' and is in the tea planting business for generations, said "I did it on an experimental basis and not for commercial purposes.

Now, I understand that it can be produced commercially. The buds started coming out after the recent rain and I am planning to do it in a bigger way", she said. Das said, she has plans to produce this high-value commercial tea for Gulf countries and Europe from next year.