
Roadmap for the Development of Feni

A Plan for Action

Prepared by

**The Committee appointed by the Government of Goa vide order No.2/8/2013-
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1. Introduction

Feni is one of the last of the world's most exotic spirits and best known country liquors in India. It is a drink that shares a history of at least two hundred years and has been imbibed into folklore and heritage of Goa. Feni is a distilled spirit and comes in two expressions: the Cashew Feni (distilled from the fermented juice of cashew apples) and Coconut Feni (distilled from the fermented coconut toddy). The word *Feni* itself, is attributed to have been coined comes from the descriptive word *fenn* (bubbling foam or froth seen in the toddy or cashew ferment). However, according to some, feni was a term originally used by toddy tappers to qualify the strength of the *soro* (alcohol) and not the produce itself.

Feni was for long considered a drink of little sophistication, and has only in the last decades caught the intrigue of travelers as a unique souvenir from Goa. Today there has been a push to 'premium-ise' the drink by stakeholders who are now emphasizing a focus on the quality of the distillate, as there is a renewed interest among travelers, Goan's and the spirits industry about the exotic complexity of this centuries old drink.

Coconut toddy, concentrated in natural sugar naturally and rapidly ferments, is distilled into a distilled alcohol called Coconut Feni. Coconut Feni is distilled all over Goa, but is very popular in South Goa. Coconut Feni is believed to have been distilled before Cashew, and the techniques of distilling Coconut Feni were adapted to distill the introduced exotic cashew fruit that was not native to Goa or India. Cashew is believed to have been introduced to the Malabar Coast by the Portuguese from Brazil in the 16th Century, subsequently travelling up the coast into Goa - then part of the Portuguese Empire. The cashew apple with high levels of sugar allows rapid fermentation, thus making it an excellent product to distill as well. The distillation of the fermented cashew apple juice into Feni is the exclusive cultural repertoire of Goa. A tremendous number of families depend upon Feni distillation for their livelihood, thus, making it an important economic activity. Cashew and coconut planters, big and small, employ local laborers with the requisite skills for harvesting and the distillation process. The traditional community involved in distilling palm Feni is called '*rendier*' (toddy tappers). The art of making Feni has been passed across successive generations - and it is a venerated cultural tradition..

On 27/02/2009, Cashew Feni was successfully registered as Geographical Indication (GI) and granted the certificate for registration under the Geographical Indication Act 1999, which falls in class 33 for Alcoholic Beverages and registered under GI No.120. It was a moment of pride as this was Goa's first GI and happened to be the first alcohol to be registered as GI in India and from India. The emphasis for the registration of Coconut Feni as Geographical Indication (GI) needs to be pressed. Both Cashew and Coconut Feni are widely accepted as a produce of the nation that deserves to be protected under the World Intellectual Proprietary Laws of Geographical Identification GI of Feni would ensure that feni remained rightfully and exclusively Goan .

However although Cashew Feni has got its protection as a registered GI under the Act, the stakeholders in this activity/ business have not been able to draw the actual benefits of the registration till date. There needs to be a comprehensive plan of action needed to be drafted to steer the industry towards the direction of attaining tangible benefits of this registration - a hope often expressed along with an expectation of a future of plenty where feni would replicate the global success of Tequila.

The Government has therefore constituted a committee under the Chairmanship of the Commissioner of Excise with the following members to chalk a Road Map for drawing the benefits of the GI and advice in the development of Feni. It is also decided to include coconut feni in this process.

1.	Dr. B. R. Barbudhe, Scientist of Indian Council of Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR) Ella Goa	Member
2.	Director of Agriculture or his representative	Member
3.	Director of Tourism or his representative	Member
4.	Director of Food & Drugs Administration or his representative	Member
5.	Director (S&T) or his representative	Member
6.	Director of Health Services or his representative	Member
7.	Shri Mac Vaz, Goa Cashew Feni Distillers & Bottlers Association	Member
8.	Shri Tukaram Haldankar, Valpoi Distiller & Bottler of Feni	Member

Before submitting its report to the Government the Committee decided to convene a Stakeholders Meet to obtain the suggestions/ inputs/ ideas from various writers, historians, cultural ambassadors and all other stakeholders of Feni for chalking out the roadmap for the development of Feni. Accordingly, the Stakeholders Meet was convened on 23rd January 2016 at the Community Hall Taleigao and the event was held with co-ordination and assistance of Goa Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development (GIPARD) Ela, Old - Goa.

While preparing this report certain inputs and references have been sourced from various studies made on Feni, a few which have been listed below.

Reference/Resource:

1. Geographical Indications and Localisation: A case study of Feni by Dr. Dwijen Rangnekar
2. Researching Reality Internship - Centre For Civil Society - Feni Industry - by Ranauq Sahu.

2. Background

It is observed that Feni production has significantly declined in the recent decade. Considering the fact that there is otherwise an increase in revenue in the other segments of liquor industry the decline of Feni production is unexpected and the case examined thoroughly.

On the 23rd of May, 2009, Feni became the first and (till date) only Indian beverage to have obtained the GI (Geographical Indicator) status. In India, the articles that possess the GI status are protected by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999. The idea behind giving a product the GI status is that it creates a situation where it is possible to:

- Enable better product differentiation.
- Augment market power and create more financial opportunities for those involved.
- Enable the government to play the role of facilitator, with appropriate policy mechanisms.

Also, if a product is registered, the entities involved in its production and distribution stand to have a more robust protection mechanism in case there is any infringement.

Benefits of GI status

Feni also has similarities and the potential like Scotch whisky which started off humbly as something that was brewed locally in Scottish villages and today, with big investments in marketing, manufacturing processes, education, training, research, etc; it went from being local liquor brewed from barley to being the global brand that it is today. The rationale behind giving Feni the GI tag was the same. It was expected that with this, the brand value would soar, and consequently, the Indian and overseas market for Feni would grow (a la scotch, champagne, cognac and tequila), and the people involved in its production would benefit.

The Feni Industry:

From the organized commercial angle there are four major stakeholders in the Feni industry - Distillers, Bottlers, Wholesalers, and Retailers. Around three-fourths of the Feni is generally sold by Distillers, unbranded directly to barmen and consumers. Whereas a large proportion of Distillers also sell unbranded Feni to Bottlers, who brand and resell branded to Retailers and Wholesalers all over Goa. Thus there is no single organized market for the Distiller.

Despite recent advancements in the Spirits industry, the Feni industry has largely remained for the most part unorganized, scattered, and family-owned. The skill of Feni-making had been passed from generation to generation, and is a cultural and culinary tradition for Goans and it is not unlike a cottage industry, in many ways. The businesses are small and self-financed. Owing to the smaller distilleries being family-owned, there are different production techniques that different distillers practice, which gives different varieties of Feni a flavour and character that are uniquely their own. Also, the product testing mechanisms vary across the board. Just like any other traditional Spirit, the quality and alcohol content varies considerably in Feni depending the source.

Another major consequence of the bestowing of the GI status is that some large distilleries have slowly gotten into the Feni business. The labourers who were primarily involved in traditional brewing are gradually taking up employment in these distilleries. Consequently, there is a shortage of skilled labour that has played its role in pushing out the local brewers who operate

out of smaller distilleries which, more often than not, are located in their cashew plantations themselves. This might end up creating a situation where Feni becomes a homogenized, corporatized product, allowing for little or no flexibility in its character and taste.

The uniform standards issue was resolved by scotch makers by way of blending - so maybe the Feni industry can take a leaf out of their book and make a certain grade of Feni for export purposes, while allowing the smaller brewers to get into the alcohol market within India. These smaller entities, provided that they raise enough money by way of trade within the country, can then focus on issues like global branding and marketing - they may not sell in the numbers that the larger distilleries achieve, but they can focus on creating a premium market for their product. Another issue is that the smaller distillers, in a valiant effort to keep their businesses afloat, are resorting to cost-cutting measures which end up having an adverse impact on quality.

Considering all the above aspects and the suggestions received from various stakeholders, the Committee has decided to submit its recommendations for the development of Feni as follows:

3. Recommendations

A. Immediate Action to be taken by the Excise Department:

1. False claims as regards to Maturity of liquor on labels:

Rule 16[Goa Excise Duty Rules 1964] prescribes the procedure for recording of labels. The nature, quantity and strength of the contents in the bottle are required to be indicated on the label.

As observed, some Cashew / Coconut Feni brand labels indicate the 'Maturity of Feni' by indicating years of maturation; eg 5 years, 8 years etc. In most cases the manufacturers do not have any arrangement/mechanism for maturity of the liquor and the claim made is entirely false.

The Committee recommends that unfounded claims of 'maturity' without any basis should be immediately stopped so as to maintain the reputation of Cashew / Coconut Feni.

For this to be enabled, the Committee recommends the following:

- I. All claims should be clearly defined.
- II. Documentary evidence should be provided to substantiate any claim.

2. Certifying maturity of Cashew / Coconut Feni.

With no defined mechanism / procedure / accreditation at present to certify the maturity for Cashew / Coconut Feni, even genuinely matured Cashew / Coconut feni can be mistaken as a false claim.

The Committee recommends that a proper mechanism should be set up for this purpose.

For this to be enabled, the Committee recommends the following:

- I. Set up of a recognized agency or institution in order to verify / accredit claims of maturity.
- II. Create a defined mechanism for the agency / institution to verify / accredit any claim.

3. Provide for a standard range for strength of Feni to be distilled and sold while enforcing the same.

Rule 71(2) [Goa Excise Duty Rules 1964] provides that the license shall be granted to the bidder who undertakes to manufacture the highest quantity of liquor of 25° under proof or corresponding quantity of lesser strength.

It is observed that due to practical difficulties faced by the distillers it is not always possible to distil the liquor at exactly at 25°UP (Under Proof) or 42.8% v/v.

The Committee recommends the prescribing of a set range with a minimum and maximum limit.

For this to be enabled, the Committee recommends the following:

- I. The distillers can use the Grav Hydrometer to measure strength of Cashew / Coconut Feni.
- II. Bottlers can use the Gay Lusaac Alcoholmeter to measure the strength of Cashew / Coconut Feni.
- III. Strength of bottled Cashew / Coconut Feni and Urrac should be enforced by competent authority.

Classification of Distillate	Hydrometer (Grav) @ 20° C	Alcoholmeter (Gay Lusaac) @ 15° C	Calibrated @ 29°C (Alc % v/v)
Urrac	14° - 16°	27° - 34.5°	23 - 30
Cashew Feni	18.5° - 19.5°	45.5° - 49.5°	40 - 45.5
Coconut Feni	18.5° - 19.5°	45.5° - 49.5°	40 - 45.5

4. Ensure the purity and integrity of Cashew / Coconut Feni.

Excise Department grants licenses for manufacture of country liquor other than Cashew / Coconut Feni with spirit. By law Cashew / Coconut Feni cannot be blended with any kind of ethyl alcohol, other spirits or artificial essence.

The Committee recommends that it should be ensured that licensed country liquor blended with spirit, is not sold as Cashew / Coconut Feni.

For this to be enabled, the Committee recommends the following:

- I. Purity and integrity of bottled Cashew / Coconut Feni and Urrac should be enforced by competent authority.

5. Maintain paperwork and proper records.

Excise rules provide that all valid and prescribed documentation and proper paperwork should be maintained scrupulously with regard to the production and transport and sale of feni by bottlers and distillers. It has been observed that this is not practiced at all levels within the industry.

The Committee recommends that it should be ensured that licensed country liquor blended with spirit, is not sold as Cashew / Coconut Feni.

For this to be enabled, the Committee recommends the following:

- I. Successful bidders cannot sublet distillation rights to individuals.
- II. All Distillers / successful bidders should maintain proper Transport Permits.
- III. Only Cashew / Coconut Feni distilled by traditional distillers can be bottled and sold as 'Feni'.

- IV. Clear MRP should be disclosed on the Cashew / Coconut Feni brands.
V. Cashew / Coconut Feni brands should satisfy conditions laid down by other government agencies.

6. Undertake a survey if necessary through a reputed external Agency or Management Institute for preparation and maintenance a database of all stakeholders.
- i) Cashew Juice Extractors / Coconut Toddy Tappers.
 - ii) Traditional Distillers/ Successful bidders / registered toddy tappers.
 - iii) Bottlers

It is observed that there are no records maintained in respect of total number of cashew juice extractors, toddy tappers, distillers and bottlers. In order to have an inclusive policy taking all stakeholders into account the database is absolutely necessary.

The Committee understands that there is a dearth of quantifiable and reliable data available on the Cashew / Coconut Feni industry. In order to create a knowledge base, learn lessons from and in order to capitalize it is necessary that a thorough study is undertaken that would benefit the Cashew / Coconut Feni industry.

For this to be enabled, the Committee recommends the following:

As such it is recommended that a survey should be undertaken immediately either through an Institution as a project or a reputed private agency for compilation of this record.

4. Formulation of a Feni Policy:

The Committee felt the need of having a Feni policy in place so that there is a clear and well articulated vision for the development of Cashew / Coconut Feni. The policy would include in its ambit standardization of Cashew / Coconut Feni, production, packaging, fair price control mechanism, promotion and marketing, research, etc. The idea is to create a roadmap for Cashew / Coconut Feni on the similar lines as 'Tequila' and 'Scotch Whisky' for which a lot of ground work has to be initiated.

The Committee recommends that a draft Feni Policy should be prepared. As the Policy would require technical inputs and a lot of ground work to be undertaken, it is proposed that this work may be entrusted to a suitable Consultant in this field or to can be taken up as a project by Goa University or any other reputed Institution. After the draft Policy is approved by the stakeholders and the Government, the same could be thereafter notified for implementation.

For implementation and enforcement of the policy, a legislation incorporating the policy would be required to be put in place in the form of a Feni Act or in the alternative the Goa Excise Act could be suitably amended to incorporate the Policy.

Some of the suggestions and ideas which were gathered from the Stakeholders and the Committee members which needs to be included in the policy are as under:

1. As FSSAI Registration is now compulsory for all liquor products Feni Distillers would now have to necessarily obtain FSSAI Certification.
2. Assistance of ICAR and FDA to be taken for prescribing a **Basic Standard** requirement for FENI
3. This basic standard should not be allowed be compromised at any cost irrespective of the methods used for distillation.
4. While Registering the Label with Excise Department (in case of bottling) or sale of liquor by traditional distillers to the Bottlers- FDA shall issue along with FSSAI registration- a FENI STANDARD certificate.
5. Distillation of FENI - could be classified under 3 categories
 - i) Traditional (employing fully traditional methods and implements)
 - ii) Semi-Traditional (employing semi traditional methods and some modern implements)
 - iii) Commercial (Mechanized methods of distillation)
6. The FSSAI Certification for liquor should also certify the prescribed Feni Standard in the case of Feni. The standard submitted for GI Registration can be used for the purpose.
7. FDA laboratory to be upgraded for this purpose. Necessary provision of funds to be made for the purpose.
8. State Certified Feni Logo to be designed and approved.

9. Distillate of Cashew should be classified into 2 types based on its strength, namely:

Classification of Distillate	Hydrometer (Grav) @ 20° C	Alcoholmeter (Gay Lusaac) @ 15° C	Calibrated @ 29° C (Alc % v/v)
Urrac	14° - 16°	27° - 34.5°	23 - 30
Cashew Feni	18.5° - 19.5°	45.5° - 49.5°	40 - 45.5

10. Distillate of Coconut Toddy should be classified into 1 types based on its strength, namely:

Classification of Distillate	Hydrometer (Grav) @ 20° C	Alcoholmeter (Gay Lusaac) @ 15° C	Calibrated @ 29° C (Alc % v/v)
Coconut Feni	18.5° - 19.5°	45.5° - 49.5°	40 - 45.5

11. Streamline the procedure and process of Auctioning the Feni Distillation Rights and Juice extraction licensing. Monitoring and Enforcement mechanism to be strengthened.

12. Prescribe/ suggest methods, mechanism for maintaining standards: kits, measuring the strength of liquor, maintaining temperature, mechanism for maturation, hygiene etc.

13. Ensure that no adulterated or spurious Feni is sold by implementing Hologram/ Bar Code Stickers on bottles/ caps.

14. Training in best practices/ Scientific methods for distillation of quality Feni to be imparted to traditional distillers.

15. Research/ innovation Laboratory to be set up for demonstration as well as for carrying out research for new and innovative methods of distillation.

5. Action Plan

FENI - Heritage Spirit of Goa

Another aspect which requires immediate attention is that even though Feni is exported and sold all around the globe, most of the States within India do not allow it to be retailed. As such, Feni can be exported outside India but not within the country. This is due to the fact that Feni has been categorized as country liquor and the other States do not permit the import of country liquor in their respective States.

One of the striking features of Feni is that it is woven in everyday life of every Goan. There are various traditional and social uses of Feni, medicinal practices, cooking and many more aspects associated with Feni. This heritage and cultural association of Feni needs to be highlighted and promoted in the right way. It is unfortunate that Feni has been always been branded as a poor man's drink which instead should have been placed on a higher pedestal and given its rightful due which can only be possible by classifying it as a **Heritage Spirit of the State**.

1. Declare Feni (both - Cashew & Coconut Feni) as **Heritage Spirit of Goa**.
2. Necessary amendment to the Goa Excise Duty Act and Rules 1964 should be carried out to incorporate this status of Heritage Spirit for Feni.
3. **Sensitization of all States** - The intention and necessity of declaring Feni as Heritage Spirit should be made known to all the States with a request for its acceptance as a High Quality heritage spirit which has the potential and markets similar to the world famous liquors like Tequila and Scotch whisky.
4. **Compilation of the Heritage of Feni** by publication of a 'Coffee Table Book' by taking inputs from renowned writers, photographers, publishers in this field.
5. **Feni Distillation Tours**: During the Feni-distillation season, tours could be organised in collaboration with the Tourism Department to the Feni Distillation sites; which would help promote Feni as well as fetch some income to the traditional distillers.
6. **Promote traditional distillation**: Difficulties faced by traditional distillers in distilling Feni by traditional methods to be determined. The required implements, earthenware, utensils should be made easily available by promoting and incentivising production and manufacture of such items.
7. **Promotion through regular Festivals** by Tourism Department like; Cashew and Coconut Festivals, - Request Tourism Department to continue and support such festivals and if possible to hold it in other parts of the Country.
8. **Subsidy for investment in Distillation infrastructure**: The input costs for investment can be prohibitive to small distillers for the seasonal distillation of Feni. This can be mitigated by providing a subsidy for the same.

D. Development of Coconut Feni

1. Pursue GI Registration for Coconut Feni through Goa Science and Technology Department.
2. Standardization of coconut Feni should be taken on the same lines as being done for Cashew Feni
3. Feni policy shall also include Coconut Feni
4. Formulate schemes for incentivizing the activity of Toddy Tapping and for the Welfare of Toddy tappers.
5. Promote dwarf coconut tree saplings
6. Conduct coaching clinics for toddy tappers.
7. Conduct safety workshops for toddy tappers.