

Himachal » Community

## Rejuvenate shrinking tea gardens: Virbhadra

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Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh presides over the State Tea Development Board meeting in Shimla on Friday. Tribune photo

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#### **Shimla, April 8**

Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh today said apart from exploring the possibility of growing tea in the non-traditional areas, there was a need to expand, improve and rejuvenate the existing tea plantations in Kangra so as to make them profitable for owners.

This was stated by Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh while presiding over the State Tea Development Board Meeting held here today. “There there was a need to expand the tea cultivation area as has been observed that the tea gardens of Kangra were physically shrinking and diversions have paved

the way for dwelling units,” he said. He said the tea gardens will no longer be profitable ventures, if these are not rejuvenated and new plantations made.

The members of the Tea Board raised the issue that tea gardens were being abandoned due to lack of adequate manpower. The Chief Minister assured that he would take up the matter with Tea Board of India regarding the subsidy on tea plantation machinery, including the mechanical harvesting equipment and pruning machines, to the tea growers who own less than 10 hectares of area under tea plantation. He said though the Kangra tea was the most liked and popular, the holdings with individual growers were small and the 10-hectare norm for subsidy needed to be relaxed.

On the suggestion of the members to study the model of Uttarakhand Tea Development Board Model (UTDB), wherein the tea plantation had been undertaken on forest, panchayat and individual land by taking it on lease for a particular time period and the grant to small and marginal farmers, the Chief Minister assured that the details would be sought soon.

“The Kangra Tea itself is organic by default. Therefore, the need of the hour was to popularize it more through entrepreneur development workshops and programmes and through trade fairs, buyers and sellers meets and other national and International events,” he stressed. It was also decided to organize a national seminar and exhibition for promoting the magnificence of Kangra tea in November in association with the tea growers.

The Chief Minister said the latest equipment may be explored so as to bring them in use for the benefit of tea growers. It should be ensured that the land under tea plantation did not decrease. Besides, all possible assistance will be provided to the tea growers of the state, he said.

Additional Chief Secretary Upma Chaudhary invited concrete suggestions for promoting Kangra tea and regulate marketing for the same. She said an initial proposal of around Rs 7.20 crore had been sent to the Tea Board of India for all type of assistance to small and marginal tea growers and was being followed from time to time. She said the tea plantation had also been done at Holta near Baijnath and efforts were to explore more such areas climatically suitable for the tea plants.

Agriculture and Power Minister Sujan Singh Pathania and Chief Secretary P Mitra were also present.

