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FARMER'S NOTEBOOK

Onion variety that yields well and is drought resistant

M.J. PRABU

Government's version of trying to control price rise is not helping



Wide popularity: Manaram chowdhary with his new onion variety.

An onion cannot be dismissed as just another vegetable.

“In fact no other vegetable seems to be backed by a strong lobby like the humble onion. Especially in our country, Governments can be toppled and unseated if the vegetable records a meteoric price rise. When onion price fluctuates it becomes front page news,” says Mr. Manaram Chowdhary from Sikar, Rajasthan.

Decade of work

The farmer developed an onion variety after nearly a decade of trial and error and says these ones yield well, are drought resistant, and fetch a better price compared to the other local varieties.

Named Rashidpura, the variety attained wide popularity in the northern states of Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana for its distinctive taste and strong smell.

“I tried cooking them and found them delicious. But their shelf life was short. I then preserved some bulbs by drying them and sowed them in the next season.

Water scarcity

“Though I did cultivate the local varieties, acute water shortage made me experiment with a variety, whose requirement of water was less and which could survive the drought conditions that are prevalent in our area,” he adds.

The three wells in his 10-acre farm were unsuitable for growing wheat, bajra, and other crops in addition to onions.

He says that he observed that the plants from this particular variety were maturing earlier (110-115 days) than the other varieties (125-135 days) and yielded well — 40,000 kg bulbs per hectare — than the commercially cultivated varieties (25,000-30,000 kg per hectare), even under water-stress and low irrigation conditions.

He stabilised the characteristics over a period of ten years (1983 to 1993) by performing repeated selection. Once he was satisfied with the yield stability of the variety, and the drought resistant characteristic of the variety, he named it Rashidpura.

Consumer awareness

“As of now the availability and awareness among consumers for this particular variety are relatively low compared to the other popular ones. This variety can also fetch a good price like the other local ones and farmers should realise this and start cultivating it,” says the farmer, adding, “this variety is usually used to spice soups, salads and pizzas due to its peculiar taste.

“Urban consumers seem to prefer these variety and the requirement for this type of onion is also expected to increase. Farmers would definitely benefit from growing this variety of onion”.

Appreciation

Officials from the agriculture extension department in Sikar and research station, Durgapur (Jaipur) appreciated the variety developed by Mr. Choudhary.

“Several onion farmers end up ploughing their crops back into the soil in frustration as they are not able to get a good price for their produce. The weather also creates problems for us.

“It suddenly starts raining during peak summer and sometimes there is little rain for years together,” says Mr. Sundaram Verma, Honey Bee Network collaborator Rajasthan.

False claim

“The transport cost to the mandis does not even make up for our investment expenditure. The Government's claim of trying to control the rise does not seem to be of much help to poor farmers.

“The media must also throw light on plight of onion cultivators, their problems, and new methods if any, to increase area of cultivation and encourage other farmers to start cultivating onion, instead of just reporting on price rise and how it affects consumers and the Government's reply and control mechanism to the same,” adds Mr. Manaram.

For more information readers can contact Mr. Manaram Chowdhary, Village Sanvloda Ladkhana, District Sikar, Rajasthan at 09799237178.

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Biological control a safe component of IPM

Biological control means use of living organisms to manage crop damaging living organisms (pests). Some of the common biocontrol agents are

Parasitoids

These are the organisms which lay eggs in or on the bodies of their hosts and complete their life cycles on host bodies. As a result of this, the hosts die. A parasitoid may be of different type depending on the host developmental stage in or on which it completes its life cycle.

For example, egg, larval, pupal, adult, egg-larval and larval pupal parasitoids. Examples are different species of Trichogramma, Apanteles, bracon, Chelonus, Brachemeria, Pseudogonotopus.

Predators

These are free living organisms which prey upon other organisms for their food. Examples are different species of spiders, dragon flies, damsel flies, lady bird beetles, chrysopa spp, birds etc.

Pathogens such as fungi, viruses and bacteria cause diseases in their hosts as a result of which hosts are killed. Some nematodes also cause diseases in some insect pests.

Among viruses, most important examples are of nuclear polyhedrosis virus (NPV) and granulosis viruses. Among bacteria, Bacillus thuringiensis (B.t.) and B.Popillae are common examples. Disease causing agents of pests can be mass multiplied in the laboratory at a low cost in liquid or powdered formulations. These formulations are called biopesticides and can be sprayed like ordinary chemical pesticides.

Conservation

This is the most important component of biological control and plays a major role in pest suppression. In this process, natural enemies present in nature are protected from being killed. The different practices required to protect the natural enemies are as below.

- Collection of parasitized egg masses and placing them in bamboo cage-cum-bird perches for allowing emergence of parasitoids and withholding of pest larvae.
- Chemical spray should be adopted as last resort . Only selective and relatively environmental friendly (REF) pesticide should be used where necessary.

- As far as possible strip or spot application of pesticides is to be carried out. Adjustment of time of sowing and harvesting to avoid the peak season of pest attack.

- Growing trap crop and inter-cropping also help in conservation of defenders.

Sunitha. N. D& Jagginavar. S. BCollege of Agriculture Bijapur, Karnataka

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FARM QUERY

Jackfruit growers association

Can you kindly give the contact details from where I can get more information on Jackfruit growers association in Karnataka?

J. Sunitha,Chennai

Contact the Rural bioresource complex project, Tubagere Hobli, Doddabalapur taluk in Bangalore Rural District, University of Agricultural Sciences, Gandhi Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Bangalore-65, email: k_n_srinivasappa@hotmail.com, phone: 080-23624078 for your details.

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Water first for agriculture, not industry, in Maharashtra

Mumbai: In a decision termed “historic” and “revolutionary” by Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan, the State government has changed its policy on water allocation, giving priority to agriculture over industry.

Mr. Chavan announced the decision in the Legislative Council, where the controversial Maharashtra Water Resources Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2011 was passed on Wednesday.

Reversing its earlier move to divert irrigation water for industrial use, Mr. Chavan said that as per the changed order of priority, water would be allocated first for drinking purposes, followed by agriculture and then industry.

With this amendment, the Bill would be re-tabled in the Assembly.

“Food security and farmers are our top priority. That does not mean we give any less importance to industry. If need be, we will buy water for industrial purposes, but will not divert irrigation water,” Mr. Chavan said.

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Paddy harvesting in full swing in Theni district

K. Raju

Cultivated on over 14,000 hectares in Cumbum valley

— file photo



MECHANISATION:With shortage of labour, farmers are forced to harvest with mechanised

THENI: Paddy harvesting was in full swing in Goodalur, Chinnamanur and Veerapandi areas.

However, harvesting was at the finishing stage at Uthamapalyam and Cumbum.

Many farmers were busy selling paddy to private traders. But procurement was picking up after the assembly elections only, because traders were afraid of carrying huge cash with them to

procure paddy between March-end and first two weeks of April, owing to restrictions on cash movement by the Election Commission.

The farmers had knocked the doors of all offices, including Election Commission and office of the Governor and the Central Government, to open a procurement centre to enable farmers to sell their produces without any trouble.

After hectic appeals and demands, the government opened procurement centre. After the election, traders had started procuring grains from the field itself.

Paddy was cultivated on more than 14,000 hectares in the valley, stretching from Goodalur to Veerpandi, six km away from Theni, district headquarters. With timely onset of the southwest monsoon, abundant blessings of rain god and comfortable storage in the Periyar dam, farmers did not find much difficulty in raising the second crop this season. From raising nurseries to transplantation, farmers did not face water shortage.

Even at the peak summer, water level in Periyar dam (117.8 feet on Wednesday) was very promising for farmers in the valley. However, haphazard rain in certain pockets hit the yield. In some pockets, yield was abysmally low. Meanwhile, there was an inflow of 208 cusecs and no discharge from the dam. The level in the Vaigai dam was 53.28 feet (71 feet) with an inflow of 35 cusecs and a discharge of 60 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 3,738 mcft. Uthamapalayam recorded 33 mm of rainfall followed by Periyar dam 24.2, Tekkadi 7.6 and Gudular and Mettupatti 4 mm each.

But shortage of labour too has been haunting big, small and marginal farmers. Implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was the main reason for the acute shortage of labour, felt farm owners.

With less work and assured wages, many women workers preferred NREGS work to private farms even if they got more wages. We are ready to pay twice the wages offered by NREGS. But agriculture labourers do not turn up, according to the owners.

Acute labour shortage forced farm owners to mechanise most of their agriculture activities from transplantation to weed removal and irrigation to harvesting.

Now, harvesting machines have been working in full swing in many parts of the valley. However, small and marginal farmers have been facing troubles in harvesting the standing crop as they could not use machines owing to lack of proper path to reach their farms. Moreover, machines could not harvest crops in very small areas. With no options, small farmers have been hunting farm labourers to complete harvesting. At the same time, summer rain too has been posing a grave threat to standing dry crops.

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More farmers take up maize cultivation

Staff Reporter

Water requirement for the crop is less, say agriculture officials

PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN



A significant number of farmers in Erode district have taken up maize cultivation this year. —

ERODE: The assured returns with low investment have lured a number of farmers in Erode district to take up maize cultivation during the current season.

Maize is grown in more than 12,000 acres in different parts of the district.

The acreage under maize in Erode district is expected to go up significantly this year as a large number of farmers in Ammapet, Bhavani, Nambiyur, Sathyamangalam, Bhavanisagar and Anthiyur blocks have taken up the crop.

Price

“The good demand in the market is one of the major reasons that has attracted more farmers to this crop. The price of maize hovers between Rs. 7 - Rs. 10 per kg. And the yield will be around 3,000 to 4,000 kg per acre,” agriculture officials here say.

Due to several plus points like minimal pest influence, easy availability of hybrid varieties and good demand for maize in the market, more farmers are shifting from other crops to maize.

Besides, farmers require less manpower for maize cultivation and harvest when compared to other crops. The water requirement for the crop is also less, agriculture officials say. The maize grain is fetching good price for the past few years due to the growing demand for it from the cattle feed manufacturing industry. Apart from being used as food, a significant quantity of maize grain is being used for the cattle feed.

Compared to investment, the returns from maize crop is quite promising. An acre will involve an investment of around Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 15,000 and assures a return of Rs. 28,000 to Rs. 30,000, officials say.

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Farmers told to adopt hi-tech floriculture techniques

Special Correspondent

Workshop on floriculture held in Panaji Rs. 4.5 lakh to be given to build a poly-house

PANAJI: Despite a huge demand, a total area of 25 hectares – accounting for 1 per cent among other horticultural crops – has been allotted to floriculture in Goa, said N P Singh, Director, ICAR Research Complex, Goa recently.

Mr. Singh was addressing the inaugural session of a workshop on “Floriculture: An attractive prospect of revenue generation in Goa”, conducted at ICAR Complex on Friday.

The workshop suggested roadmap for the floriculture in Goa including farmer-friendly land reforms like contract farming, tenancy issues, and providing government support for the progressive and interested farmers.

Mr. Singh emphasized the need for hi-tech floriculture by making use of subsidies from the State and Central schemes. He said ICAR, Goa Centre would extend full technical support to the interested farmers in this regard. In the course of the workshop, experts revealed that Goa has suitable conditions not only to grow flowers but also the foliage to cater to a large annual demand for flowers from tourism and social sectors.

The experts in the workshop chalked out a five point roadway to tap floriculture prospects in the State, which will be forwarded to policy makers at the earliest for further action.

Above 60 farmers participated in the day-long session on floriculture organised by ICAR Research Complex, Goa, Department of Agriculture, Government of Goa, and, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Anjali Parasnis, Head of Western Region, TERI, Satish Tendulkar, Director Agriculture, Goa and A. Sandaliya, Regional Manager, NABARD were present.

The scope for the sale of cut flowers is predominant in Tiswadi, Bardez, Salcete, and Mormugao taluks while loose ones sell better in other areas, it was informed in the meeting. The climate of Goa has also been found to be suitable for cut flowers, loose flowers, and cut foliage. Jasmine and marigold are traditional flowers grown in the State over the years, while orchids, anthuriums, and gerberas are being produced on a commercial scale in cost-effective shade nets and polyhouses.

The speakers stressed that farmers have to be sensitized about the importance of horticulture as also about the availability of subsidies, and schemes from government.

Mr. Tendulkar said the State would provide Rs. 4.5 lakh for building a polyhouse in a 1,000 sq m area for floriculture with the farmer having to pay only Rs.50,000.

The other points of the roadmap for the profitable floriculture in Goa included request to the Agriculture Department for setting up centralised procurement facility especially for high value crops like flowers in Goa, request to change the subsidy procedure especially when the land is not on the name of the beneficiary, possibility of announcing support price for the flower crops as in cereals, and plantation crops instead of subsidy to the specific group of farmers who don't have the land on their own and requesting the The ICAR Centre has also developed “Production Technology” for three flowers- Gerbera, Anthurium, and Lililum, and “Open Field Technology” for Gladiolus which was also demonstrated to farmers and experts. These technologies have the potential to increase the income of farmer many-fold.

According to the scientist M Thangam, Gerbera flower sown in 200 sq metre will give a profit of Rs.30, 000 to Rs.45,000 a year.

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'Cooperative banks must focus on farm loan recovery'

Staff Correspondent

Farmers should be enlightened about this: Manjunatha Gowda



President of the Karnataka State Cooperative Apex Bank R.M. Manjunatha Gowda speaking at a training programme for members of primary agriculture cooperative societies in Shimoga on Wednesday.

Shimoga: President of the Karnataka State Cooperative Apex Bank R.M. Manjunatha Gowda has said that cooperative banks should accord priority to recover agriculture loans.

Recommendations

The cooperative banks will be kept outside the purview of loan and interest waiver schemes after the implementation of Prof. Vaidyanathan Committee recommendations.

It is the responsibility of cooperative banks to enlighten farmers in this regard, he said after inaugurating a two-day training programme for members of primary agriculture cooperative societies here on Wednesday.

Interference

Political interference in the functioning of cooperative institutions should be minimised as stated by the Vaidyanathan committee, he said.

It was unfair to blame the secretary and staff members of cooperative institutions for poor progress in recovery of loans and loopholes in accounting. The management of cooperative institutions should play a responsible role in this regard, he said.

President of the District Cooperative Central Bank Agadi Ashok, directors Yogish and Saraswathi Nagaraj, Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies Ashok, and Chief Executive Officer of Kodachadri Rural Development Trust Rajeshwari were present.

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'Bagair hukum' farmers plan agitation

Veerendra P.M.

It is in protest against the delay in giving them title deeds and ownership rights

3,000 farmers to take out a padayatra to Shikaripur on May 1 They will go on a fast in Chief Minister's hometown

Shimoga: Farmers engaged in “bagair hukum” cultivation have decided to take out a padayatra from Shimoga to Shikaripur in protest against the delay in giving them title deeds and ownership rights.

A meeting of “bagair hukum” farmers held here on Wednesday under the aegis of the Karnataka People's Forum for Land Rights decided to launch a Gandhian model of struggle for regularisation of “bagair hukum” cultivation. Nearly 3,000 farmers from various districts of the State will gather in Shimoga on May 1 and march towards Shikaripur, hometown of Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa. The farmers decided to go on a fast in Shikaripur. “We will not leave Shikaripur till title deeds are given,” said Rajashekhar Naidu, secretary of the Karnataka People's Forum for Land Rights.

The State government invited applications in 1999 from farmers for regularisation of “bagair hukum” cultivation of barren land classified as C and D land. A total of 10,92,616 “bagair hukum” farmers, mostly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, had submitted applications seeking regularisation of 26,55,277 acres of land.

According to information provided by the Statistics Department, 2,82,287 applications have been rejected, 7,53,727 kept pending, while 73,177 are under process. It is said that the officials rejected the applications on technical grounds. As most farmers engaged in “bagair hukum” cultivation are illiterate, they could not provide the details sought by the government. Moreover, there has been a delay in the formation of taluk-level land grants committee. “Bagair hukum” farmers from north Karnataka, in association with the Karnataka People's Forum for Land Rights, have filed a writ petition in the High Court against the delay. The applications submitted by farmers in 2009-10 seeking regularisation of land being cultivated by them under the Forest Rights Act are yet to be cleared.

In all, 82,936 such applications have been submitted in the district alone. Sources said that more than 90 per cent of the applications had been rejected.

The sources said that it was mandatory under the Act for non-Scheduled Tribes to prove their dwelling on the forestland for more than three generations. As there was no scientific process of documentation during pre-Independence period in the Malnad region, farmers could not provide

records showing that they had been living on the forestland for three generations. Farmers displaced by projects, including reservoirs across the Sharavathi and Varahi, could not produce documents, the sources added.

Applications for regularisation of unauthorised cultivation of land under the Forest Rights Act have to be forwarded through village-level forest committees. But the committees are yet to be formed in many villages in the district. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote to Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa in 2009 to expedite the process. Farmers from Shikaripur, who spoke at the meeting, said Mr. Yeddyurappa managed to win the Assembly elections for the first time in 1983 by organising a padayatra from Shikaripur to Bangalore seeking regularisation of “bagair hukum” cultivation. As Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Yeddyurappa fought for regularisation of “bagair hukum” cultivation. However, after his party came to power in the State, not a single title deed had been given to farmers engaged in “bagair hukum” cultivation, they said.

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Uncertainty pulls down cotton prices

M. Soundariya Preetha

COIMBATORE: Cotton prices, which were increasing for the last few months, have declined during the last two days.

Prices of Shankar-6 variety of cotton that was Rs. 61,800 a candy on April 1, 2011, slumped to Rs. 56,500 a candy on Tuesday.

“Prices are expected to decline further as there is a lot of uncertainty in the Tamil Nadu market,” says K.N. Viswanathan, secretary of the South India Cotton Association. Tamil Nadu is one of the largest consumers of cotton because of the large number of textile mills here. The yarn movement is slow here because of the pollution problem faced by the garment units in Tirupur; increased power cut duration and decline in yarn demand even in the international market. Some of these issues can be solved only with assistance from the State Government. The initiatives that the new Government will take will be known only after a month. Hence, cotton

ginners in Andhra Pradesh or in the Western States are unsure of how the market will move here. With uncertainty on demand, they have reduced the prices. The farmers have also slashed the prices.

Cotton arrivals will continue for a couple of weeks or a month. However, the quality has also come down and there is no buying from the exporters and the domestic textile mills. In such a scenario, prices can decline further, he says.

Further, with the cotton consumption by textile mills reducing, the stocks for the end of the season (September 2011) may increase slightly, he adds.

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Paddy crop withering in tail-end areas

Staff Reporter

Administration blamed for present situation

Photo: A.V.G. Prasad



In distress: A tail-end farmer under the Krishna-Eluru canal in his withering paddy field at Koteswaradurgapuram village in West Godavari district.

ELURU: The district administration comes under a sharp focus in the wake up of the standing paddy at the tail-end of the Krishna-Eluru canal withering for want of water.

The canal was closed for 10 days from April 10 following breaches to its bunds near Pedaoutupalli.

As a result, the tail-end fields under Eluru rural mandal withered at the stage of flowering. According to Yerneni Nagendranath of the Andhra Pradesh Rytanga Samakhya, an extent of 1,000 acres was completely damaged due to lack of water in Eluru rural mandal only.

Parvataneni Ranga Rao of the Sitampet Project Committee said the crop could have been saved had the administration provided the Godavari water for fields under the Krishna canal in time. Recalling how the irrigation authorities dealing with the Godavari western canal and the Krishna-Eluru canal worked hand in hand to resolve a similar water crisis and saved the standing paddy crop when Ponnammal Malakondaiah was the district Collector some 10 years ago, he said such coordination was now missing.

Mr. Ranga Rao said the Water Users Associations (WUAs) representing the tail-end fields under the Eluru canal proposed to lift the Godavari water into the Krishna canal at the eastern locks during the period of the canal closure in the current rabi to save the crops from withering. "But the administration has turned a blind eye to our pleas," he lamented. Around 70 cusecs of surplus water in the Godavari western canal was available with which sufficient water could have been provided for paddy crop in 7,000 acres under the jurisdictions of Chataparru and Jalipudi Project Committees, he said.

Even as the higher ups in the Irrigation department allowed the tail-end farmers to pump out Godavari water, the farmers, mostly the poor sharecroppers, could not come forward to engage motors and generators for want of money, Mr. Ranga Rao said.

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Grow pepper as sole crop, says Rane

Farmers advised to approach research institute for proper diagnosis Pepper crop should be protected right from the beginning

PANAJI: A State-level training programme on 'Pest and Disease Management of Major Spice Crops of Goa' was inaugurated on Wednesday at ICAR Research Complex for Goa.

Research institute

Pratapsingh Rane, Speaker of Goa, presided over the function and North Goa MP Shripad Naik was the chief guest. Experts advised farmers to approach the research institute nearest to their locality for proper diagnosis and advice on the disease problems. Farmers interacted with the experts and their problems were discussed.

N. P. Singh, Director, ICAR Research Complex, Goa said the use of bio control agents in the management of spice diseases as other methods don't prove to be effective. Mr. Rane who is a progressive farmer himself said that Goans grow spices traditionally in the areca nut gardens. He said the pest and diseases need to be managed to get economical yield and suggested that pepper may be grown as sole crop. He said complete calendar of operations for black pepper cultivation need to be developed and disseminated among the farmers.

Management practices

Scientists from Indian Institute of Spices Research, Calicut delivered talks on the management of diseases, insects, pests, and nematodes in important spice crops.

Incidence and management practices in pepper foot rot and quick wilt caused by a fungus *Phytophthora capsici* were discussed. The experts informed the farmers that the pepper crop should be protected right from the beginning i.e. from the nursery by different strategies like soil solarization, addition of biocontrol agents, regulation of shade and application of fungicides.

Foot rot infection

Once foot rot infection takes place, it would be very difficult to control this disease.

Madhav Sahakari, Managing Director of Goa Dairy shared his experience in spice cultivation and suggested that bio agents could form an integral part of the organic certification.

Area under food crops paints bleak picture

Staff Reporter

KOCHI: Research data on area under food crops in Kerala as a whole paints a bleak picture of future food security as acreage under food crops shrinks rapidly and cash crops like natural rubber spread over large swathes of cultivable land.

Acreage ratios, area under a particular crop as percentage of the total cropped area, of rice, tapioca and cashew have declined continuously between 1980-'81 and 2008-'09, say research data from the Agricultural Market Intelligence Centre of Kerala Agricultural University.

The acreage ratio of rice fell from 27.79 during 1980-'81 to 8.69 during 2008-'09, while natural rubber went up from 8.24 to 19.20 during the period. In absolute terms, rubber is the most widely cultivated crop in the State (5,12,000 hectares) after coconut (8,19,000 hectares). Rice comes third at 2,29,000 hectares and pepper fourth with an acreage of 1,75,000 hectares.

Tapioca, once the common man's food in Kerala, is no longer a welcome addition to the food basket as indicated by a fall in its acreage ratio from 8.49 to 3.24 between 1980 and 2009.

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Gales devastate banana groves in Kulithalai belt

Staff Reporter

Crops at Manhattai, Parali and Myladi villages badly hit

KULITHALAI: Gales devastated banana crop raised in several hectares in the Kulithalai region of Karur district over the past two days. Farmers, it is estimated, have lost several lakhs of rupees in the non-seasonal havoc.

Banana is a major crop raised in several acres in the Kulithalai belt of Karur district.

Several tracts of fertile lands in the region spread across Marudur, Rajendram, Kumaramangalam, Kulithalai, Kottaimedu, Vaiganallur, Manathattai, Vadhiyam, K. Pettai, Thimmachipuram, Kandiyur, Myladi, Parali and Ezhunootrumangalam villages are usually covered by banana crop. Harvested banana bunches are being transported mainly to destinations in Kerala and all parts of the State from here.

Gales have been the bane of the banana growers and on Monday night the hot and humid climate gave way to strong winds and hail also bringing heavy rains to the region.

While rains are welcome for the growers the gales are anathema to the banana crop. Every season during monsoon period several hundred acres of banana crop are lost to the winds as gale uproot the crop in a frenzied play.

“Though it was only summer and the weather was just sweltering and dry, on Monday night everything changed and strong winds began to lash banana crops in our village.

We realized that problem was at hand but could do little at that time. Though we used to provide bamboo support to the banana crop, gales uproot the trees and the support causing havoc on our purses,” laments K. Chandrachoodan of Kottaimedu village.

In many fields around 50 to 70 plants have been damaged and the worst sufferers are those farmers whose adult crops have been uprooted as they had tendered to the crops for several months only to lose out to nature's fury. A few farmers are ruing their fate as the crops were nearing harvest stage in their fields in Manathattai, Parali and Myladi villages. “While we try to salvage whatever we could from the devastation, only governmental support can offset our loss. We plead with the authorities to properly enumerate the loss and we insist that because in the past several farmers whose fields were damaged received either no compensation or inadequate compensation. The administration is in flux, we do not know what will happen next and from whom we have to seek remedy apart from the officials,” observes T. Rajendran, a farmer belonging to Parali. What the farmers and especially the banana growers seek from the government is a proper assessment of the damage to the crop and quick remedy or compensation.

Ensuring that is the officials' duty and only that would provide succour to the banana growers, who have been left to the mercy of nature.

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Sugarcane cultivation cools local climate

G.R.N. SOMASHEKAR



Besides being an eco-friendly substitute for gasoline, sugar canes in fields reflect sunlight back into space, lowering the temperature of the surrounding air as the plants 'exhale' cooler water.

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Vanilla: preserving a world favourite flavour

R. Eswarraj



Scientists are working to create new and robust methods to clone some economic species and some rare species of vanilla by tissue culture. The study concentrates on the most common cultivated vanilla orchid, *Vanilla planifolia*.

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19 reasons that can spark off a global food crisis

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The number of people living in poverty has risen to more than 44 million worldwide since just June 2010. Overall, close to 3 billion people live on less than \$2.5 (about Rs 110) a day.

Even as half of humanity struggles to figure out where its next meal might come from, the latest World Bank report dedicated to food prices is also not encouraging at all.

In four months from October 2010 until dsklfjhwagjkl'wajgJanuary 2011, food prices have seen a sharp increase. Global inflation has accelerated in most regions.

Inflation in the Eurozone last year averaged 2.7 per cent. In the United States, where economists have long feared the existence of deflation, the annual price increase in March amounted to 2.7 per cent as well.

Emerging economies also show a hefty food price increase. In India, consumer prices over the past 12 months increased by nearly 9 per cent, while in February this number was at 8.3 per cent.

Annual inflation accelerated in China as well and amounted to 5.4 per cent.

So what is going to happen to our world when hundreds of millions more people cannot afford to feed themselves?

Most people are so accustomed to supermarkets that are packed with massive amounts of really inexpensive food that they cannot even imagine that life could be any other way.

Unfortunately, that era is ending. Here are 19 reasons why a harsher global food crisis looks real and imminent

Source: <http://www.rediff.com/>

hindustantimes



Press Trust Of India

New Delhi, April 20, 2011

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Agri growth may cross 4% this yr: Pawar

India's farm growth may cross 4% in 2011-12 on the back of monsoon rains, which are expected to be normal this year as per the Met Department.

"Our efforts will be to maintain 4% agriculture growth this year and beyond that if monsoon cooperates," Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said in New Delhi.

The growth target for the previous fiscal was also 4% but the country's agriculture output expanded by 5.6%, helped by good rains.

Pawar said farmers are ready to sow Kharif (summer) crops. There are adequate quantities of vital inputs like fertiliser and seeds.

In the backdrop of record wheat production in 2010-11, Pawar said the government would consider the demand for allowing export of the grain.

"The government will definitely apply its mind whether to enter international market where prices are quite favourable for export of wheat..." he said.

Agriculture Secretary P K Basu, who was present at the Centre's meeting with the state cooperative ministers, also pitched for allowing wheat export.

"We have enough stocks and we can easily export two million tonnes of wheat and rice," he said. The government had banned export of wheat since 2007 to keep prices under check. There are also restrictions on overseas shipment of non-basmati rice, sugar and pulses.

While food inflation remains an area of concern for the government, prices of these commodities have been stable. Pawar made a case for relaxing some restrictions on export of cotton, sugar and rice in the wake of adequate stocks and the opportunity available for farmers to take advantage of higher global prices. The minister said the Food Corporation of India (FCI) has ample wheat stock of 14 million tonnes, as against the buffer norm of seven million tonnes as of now.

The government's wheat procurement will definitely be 24-25 million tonnes in 2010-11, he said, adding that the arrival of wheat would increase in the next two-three days.

On farm loans, Pawar said credit flow to farmers has increased to Rs 3.72 lakh crore till February of the 2010-11 fiscal. The target for the last fiscal was Rs 3.75 lakh crore.

The commercial banks have dispersed Rs 2.68 lakh crore of loans to farmers, cooperative banks Rs 65,055 crore and regional banks Rs 38,637 crore till February of the FY'11, he added.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/687533.aspx>

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 84%

Wind: Normal

Thursday, Apr 21

Max Min
35.9° | 26.4°

Sunrise: 5:53

Sunset: 18:22

Barometer: 1008.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Friday, Apr 22

Max Min
36° | 25°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday

Apr 23



33° | 25°

Rainy

Sunday

Apr 24



31° | 26°

Rainy

Monday

Apr 25



29° | 26°

Rainy

Tuesday

Apr 26



29° | 25°

Rainy

Wednesday

Apr 27



28° | 26°

Rainy

Short-term loans for farmers at 1 per cent

April 21, 2011 11:14:31 AM

Staff Reporter | Bhopal

The State Government on Wednesday issued order for providing agricultural short term loans to farmers at one per cent interest rate. Madhya Pradesh is the first State in the country to provide farm loan at such nominal interest rate. As per the order, short term loan would be provided through cooperative banks from year 2011-12 to the farmers who have been repaying their farm loans regularly on time.

According to the order, the basis of calculation of interest grant in aid to primary agricultural credit societies would be the base rate (11 per cent year 2011-12). For calculation of the grant in aid received from the State Government the grant in aid would be calculated in this manner after examination of district cooperative bank wise audited details. The district cooperative banks whose base rate is less than the base rate fixed by the State Government would be given the grant on actual base rate and the remaining district cooperative banks would be given the grant by making calculation on the fixed base rate.

Microfinance firms move in to help farmers

April 21, 2011 11:14:33 AM

With the help of NGOs, microfinance companies are aiming to capture a lucrative market that offers phenomenal returns, writes *Jamal Ayub*

After initial pitfalls and accusations of foul play, the Microfinance Institutions (MFI) are setting shop in virgin territories like Madhya Pradesh.

With the help of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), a new look and prefabricated swan song is reaching out to the low income clients, microfinance companies are aiming to capture a lucrative market that offers phenomenal returns. However, serious questions of MFIs' extracting 'hyperprofits off the poor' remain unanswered.

Data provided by the central chapter of Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) Madhya Pradesh reveals that 19 MFI companies are operating in 24 districts of the State.

"Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) is a self-regulatory organisation set up by leading Microfinance Institutions in India to promote microfinance and achieve larger financial inclusions goals," said CEO MFIN Alok Prasad.

Prasad acknowledged that it is a "young industry" and mistakes were made in States like Andhra Pradesh, where a significant number of farmers' suicides are attributed due to serious irregularities and arm-twisting methods for recovery of money adopted by the MFIs.

The MFIs now look forward to change tactics, their self-regulatory body MFIN affirms that they are already required to follow all prudential norms as well as consumer protection practices laid down by the RBI.

The MFIs are playing the waiting game. The Malegam Committee, constituted by the Reserve Bank of India released its recommendations in January this year. The directives of the RBI would delineate a regulatory framework as to how the sector moves forward. For the moment, the MFI industry is short of funds as investors are refusing to invest in an uncertain business environment and are turning to untouched places like Madhya Pradesh.

The business of MFI boomed when promised a return in investment ranging from 21 per cent to 36 per cent. The unsecured loans were given to thousands of poor people and had a dream default ratio of less than 1 per cent.

Prasad said, "The poor are far better at paying back the loans than the affluent class." However, like Prasad, the MFIN falls short to underline the fact that the poor are also being given loans at

no less than 18 to 24 per cent, almost 10 per cent higher than what a normal bank give to the affluent class. The Malegam Committee in its directives has recommended that the margins of the MFI be not more than 10 per cent.

This unfairness is not the only reason agonising the civil activists, who are challenging the role of MFI in the rural sector. The activists suggest unlike Andhra Pradesh and the rural banking infrastructure is very weak in Madhya Pradesh. This means the MFI can give loans at higher interest rates.

The loans are not only confined to money lending. The 'allied' products sold by the MFIs would have a detrimental effect on the local economy.

Bharatiya Samruddhi Finance Limited (BSFL) is a major MFI operating in the country and has shelled out loans of over Rs 150 crore in Madhya Pradesh.

BSFL MP in-charge Rahul Dixit said that as an MFI, they are not only limited to micro credit lending. The untapped rural market has an immense potential and their products include easy loans, savings, pensions and remittance services are also being provided as a complete package with the micro credit in Madhya Pradesh.

The approach is straightforward people, profit and products. It is not just as simple as a loan.

A field executive with a leading MFI on the condition of anonymity said that 80 per cent of the loans are sanctioned only after the consumer accepts the "combo products package" as a part of the loan.

Loan linked micro-credit depends on the type of loan required by the people. Many agro-based loans are bundled with soil testing, training deals for which the MFIs have a tie up with different agencies. It all means for every sale a commission received by the field agent, which comes from the pocket of the poor farmer.

The MFIs also tie up with livelihood service provider (LSP) to train and facilitate the customers like in the case of a tailor shop or a local grocery store.

Loans provided for dairy farms are bundled with insurance, vaccination and health check up deals of the animals, all included in the one-time fees charged along with the loan. All the add-ons are usually compulsory and have to be paid for until the total loan is repaid. All this means added business for the MFI and ever-increasing hidden cost for the poor.

The field executive also said that the "social work mentality" of the NGOs is a hindrance when it comes to achieving the targets set by the MFI. He said that the NGOs have to understand that under recovery cannot lead to a sustained business model and have to imply more pressure to recover the loans.

The scope of MFI in Madhya Pradesh is ever more potent in the context of the crisis faced by MFIs in other parts of the country.

Traditionally in the State moneylenders charge interest rates up to 60 per cent per annum, the lending rate of 24 per cent by the MFI is a huge business opportunity.

The promoter and chief executive officer of Trident Microfin Puli Kumar admits that lack of fresh funding from banks, States such as Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are their focus areas' growth.

Trident Microfin MP in-charge A Ramesh said that within a year of its presence in Madhya Pradesh, they have reached 21,000 households and disbursed about Rs 20 crore in loans. The recover rate is a very healthy 98 to 99 per cent, he added.

Ramesh said that more Self Help Groups (SHGs) would be formed across the State as his company plans to open 100 new branches and reach about one lakh households in the coming year. The MFI would offer soft loans, educational loans, personal loans, individual loans and business loans in the form of micro-credit.

However, the MFIs refuse to talk about farmer suicides attributed to MFI loans. They claim it is a political issue and their focus is on the 'potential' that the Madhya Pradesh market offers.

Ramesh is quick to point out that the banking system is very weak in the State as it neglects the

people in rural areas and unlike in Andhra Pradesh the Government support for micro-credit is almost non-existent in the State.

The MFIs to minimise the risk have turned to the NGOs who lend to people involved in their project areas. Minimised risk and prompt recovery can make the NGO an easy profit of 2 to 10 per cent on every loan disbursed.

A typical risk-pooling and marketing arrangements that is designed to service low income people and businesses not served by typical social or commercial insurance schemes questions the motive of NGO getting into the streak of making money through micro-credit lending.

The MFIs who are under pressure from the NGOs to change their 'NGO mindset', are facing a dilemma of maintaining a social mission against serving the interests of for-profit investors. The migrating out of not-for-profit associations (like NGOs) and into for-profit companies (like banks) has potential consequences for-profit investors. They, like many other MFIs have a tie up with NGOs, which operate different community based projects. The dichotomy of a not-for-profit-NGO shelling out loans is driven by pressures resulting from venture capitalists and other private investors which is characterised by quick growth, high profits, high cost (interest and remunerations especially for senior staff), IPOs and quick exits.

A new for-profit structure for the old not-for-profit NGO makes the alteration in social dynamics of the trade. Action for Social Development (ASA) micro credit programme is predominantly spread amongst the rural tribals in Jhabua, Ratlam, Barwani, Ujjain and Chhatarpur.

ASA works for land and water resources development and getting into institutional credit for agriculture was a natural direction course.

The achieve convergence and sustainable livelihood for the cliental the Micro credit lending was taken up in ASA's livelihood project area.

ASA practice of lending has not been very prudent business wise as its recovery percentage is just 80 per cent, far below the industry average of almost 99 per cent. The NGO has provided loans of about Rs 1.50 crore. With its micro credit clientele ASA is used as a typical risk

mitigation tool for the borrower because in case of eventuality, repayment of loan is always at jeopardy.

BSFL MP in-charge, Rahul Dixit Ramesh brags that to serve their business interests even big corporate giants create entities formed as social organisations. BSFL's social organisation is called Indian Grameen Services (IGF) and it lends at interest 27 per cent and cross promotes the BSFL package.

If there is an intention to start microfinance operations, the NGO has to be willing to change to what is needed for achieving the objectives. Companies like Trident Microfin and BSFL like many others realise that traditional NGO cannot fulfil their needs, hence they have floated off shoots, which are under the larger umbrella of the corporate entity.

BJP organises 'sit-in' against Centre's National Agriculture Insurance Policy

April 21, 2011 11:14:44 AM

Staff Reporter | Bhopal

State unit of the Farmers Cell of Bharatiya Janata Party organised a sit-in demonstration in the entire district headquarters of the State against the new National Agriculture Insurance Policy announced by the Central Government and handed over memorandum addressed to the prime minister to the district collectors demanding to make the policy farmers oriented.

Cell's State president Banshilal Gurjar while leading the demonstration in Dhar said, "Manmohan Singh Government is joking with the farmers by proclaiming the second phase of the green revolution. Farmers of the country are being financially exploited in the name of new agriculture insurance policy and the Indian agriculture is being done hollow forcing farmers to get away from the agriculture business." Gurjar further said that as per the provisions of the new agriculture insurance policy declared by the Centre, farmers are not able to get relief from the losses due to natural calamities. India is agriculture based country; over 65 per cent of its population depends on agriculture. Agriculture is continuously becoming non-profitable business forcing farmers to do away from villages to cities, he added.

In Indore, the demonstration was led by Ravi Ravaliya and Shanker Lalwani, in Ujjain the demonstration was led by senior BJP leader and former union minister Satya Narayan Jatia, in Rajgarh Gotam Tetwal, in Bhopal Bharat Rajput, in Sehore Shanker Sharma and Maan Singh Pawar, in Betul Rajendra Paliwal, in Ratlam Naresh Rajpurohit and in Mandsaur Himmat Singh Dangi led the demonstration.

Demonstrations were also carried out in Jabalpur, Sewni, Dindori, Jhabua, Neemuch, Shajapur, Bhind, Shivpuri, Umariya, Guna, Ashok Nagar, Sagar, Damoh, Tikamgarh, Panna and Khandwa districts and memorandum addressed to prime minister were handed over to the collectors.

Business Standard

Thursday, Apr 21, 2011

Raw cashew nut exports decline 5% in FY11

Mahesh Kulkarni / Chennai/ Bangalore April 21, 2011, 0:49 IST

Strong domestic demand and shortage in raw cashew nuts has led to decline in India's cashew kernel exports in the 2010-11 financial year. The second-largest exporter of cashew kernels in the world witnessed a marginal drop of five per cent in volume to a little over 100,000 tonnes during the year. In 2009-10, India's cashew kernel exports stood at 108,120 tonnes.

Though the Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI), under the ministry of commerce, is yet to compile export data from customs offices at various ports, industry analysts estimate exports for FY11 at about 102,000-105,000 tonnes. In value terms, however, Indian exporters are likely to register higher earnings by about 10 per cent to over Rs 3,200 crore compared to Rs 2,906 crore in 2009-10.

"The share of Indian cashew in the international market is on the decline for a couple of years mainly due to slackening demand from the US and the European Union. The growth in demand

from Japan was steady while it was negligible from Australia. The main growth this year came from West Asia and Arab countries,” Pankaj Sampath, of Samsons Trading Co, a Mumbai-based trader, told Business Standard.

The average unit value realisation was higher by 27 per cent to Rs 350 a kg as against Rs 275 a kg in the previous year for Indian exporters.

Another major reason for drop in exports was due to shortage of raw cashew nuts. “The supply situation is very tight from West African countries. The harvesting of domestic crop has just begun and going by the early predictions, the production could be around 500,000 tonnes,” he said.

The crop in Kerala and Karnataka is reported to be normal this year, while it is below normal in Maharashtra, Goa and Konkan region. The Directorate of Cashew and Cocoa Development (DCCD) expects the domestic crop at around 700,000 tonnes for the year, about 11 per cent more than the last year.

This year, the area under cashew nut has gone up to 920,000 hectares compared to 890,000 hectares in 2010, a growth of 3.3 per cent. The DCCD has been adding around 20,000 hectares under the cashew every year for the past three years.

“The exporters are not much worried with slump in exports as they are generating huge returns from the domestic market. The consumption in the country is on the higher side due to high disposable incomes,” a Mangalore-based exporter said.

Prices of cashew kernels in the domestic market are hovering between Rs 375 a kg and Rs 475 a kg (ex-factory) depending on the grade of cashew. Typically, the W320 grade cashew kernels are currently traded at around Rs 500 a kg (ex-factory).

Farmers adopt new technology for high groundnut output

Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai April 21, 2011, 0:40 IST

In what could revolutionise groundnut farming system in India, a few dozens farmers in Gujarat have adopted Chinese-born mulching technology which has the capacity to yield up to three times more output than the existing conventional techniques in India.

Initially, the planting was done on pilot basis in 50 acres just to experience the benefit of this technology. The initial growth in roots, stems and leaves was satisfactory. Hence, farmers believe the plants under mulching sheets will yield higher as compared to the plants under open air.

Developed by Chinese agri scientists, Mulching Technology requires groundnut plants to be covered with special mulching plastic sheets for moisture protection and maintaining plant growth for maximum yield. Agriculture with mulch in the tropics promotes plant health and vigor; and improves nutrient and water retention in the soil, encourages soil microbial activity and worms, and suppresses weed growth. When properly executed, mulching can significantly improve the well-being of plants and reduce maintenance as compared to bare soil culture. Mulched plants have better vigor and, consequently have improved resistance to pests and diseases.

“This technology has the capacity to yield 2-3 times higher output than the conventional techniques of groundnut farming. This means, the technology can revolutionise entire groundnut farming in India,” said Nilesh Vira, Chairman of Indian Oilseeds and Produce Export Promotion Council (IOPEPC).

Grown mainly through age-old farming techniques, groundnut yield in India currently at 700-900 kg per hectares (ha) is less than one-third of the world’s average of 2,200 kg per ha. Comparatively, average groundnut yield in China today stands at 2,300-2,400 kg per ha while the same in the US and Argentina is 3,000 kg per ha and 2,800 kg per ha respectively.

“We have adopted this technology on trial basis in Gujarat. If it works out well this kharif season, the new technology in groundnut planting will be extended to other parts of the country as well,” said Vira.

The biggest advantage of this technology is that the crop does not have to dependent on monsoon. The irrigation is done through mechanical means. Hence, the crop can be grown in off-monsoon season as well.

Storage issues may spoil the food party

Kunal Bose / Kolkata April 21, 2011, 0:37 IST

According to the third advance estimate, India's foodgrain production in the current farm year (to end in June 2011) will be a record 235.88 million tonnes, including an all-time high wheat output of 84.27 million tonnes against 81.47 million tonnes projected earlier. Ahead of the wheat harvest, the country had buffer foodgrain stock of 47 million tonnes at the start of 2011 in the central pool.

A buffer close to double the size of minimum stock requirements in January was more than sufficient to discharge obligations under the targeted public distribution system (PDS) and various welfare schemes of the government. Now, with the storage capacity at the country's disposal, it may be in a situation of embarrassment of plenty, allowing food to rot in the open as wheat harvesting gains pace. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has announced a number of initiatives to create new storage capacity using government agencies and the private sector in order to cut wastage of foodgrain, which in the absence of sufficient number of silos and proper sheds are perforce kept in the open in many places.

Of all the new storage facility building moves, the most important one is to fast track creation of 15 million tonnes of capacity involving private parties and warehousing corporations. At this point the storage deficit is for over 8 million tonnes of grain. How much of India's food is wasted after harvesting? Mukherjee says 40 per cent of fruits and vegetables is perished on farms because of inadequate 'storage, cold chain and transport infrastructure.' According to one estimate, a third or more of food is wasted in developing countries.

So, when the country is having bountiful food crops and storage will remain an issue, it is in order that Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar should be nudging the government to restart export of wheat. India, the world's second-largest producer and consumer of wheat, put a stop to export of the grain in 2007, in the wake of low production of 69.4 million tonnes in 2006 and 75.8 million tonnes in the following year.

Wheat production in the next three years was not big enough either to have justified resumption of exports. The ban was an attempt to boost domestic supply when bad weather and or pest were taking a toll on the crop. But, conditions this year have changed because of a good crop and a highly comfortable buffer.

While releasing the latest food estimates, Pawar said the government now had to take a serious view of 'storage, allocation to states and exports.' Some moderation in food inflation also makes

a case for wheat export. Prices of cereals and pulses, the production of which are forecast to be up 18 per cent to 17.3 million tonnes are likely to fall with the arrival of new crops. But, when it comes to food price inflation in the country, the real culprits are fruits, vegetables and poultry items.

Pawar's urgings for wheat exports may not spur the government to act fast. An official of Roller Flour Millers Association has rightly said that New Delhi's risk appetite on issues relating to food is 'very low'. For instance, Pawar first floated the idea of resumption of sugar exports in mid-December. But, the official notification permitting export of 500,000 tonnes of sugar came in only yesterday.

Food articles being highly politically sensitive their price rises could bring people into the streets. Countries, including our own practise export switch on and off depending on the harvest size. Suspension of overseas sale of food articles is, however, done without sparing a thought for how the move would impact the importing countries. Generally food surplus countries would not be blamed if they see in food shortages and high prices the tinderbox for protests.

When a country puts a ban on food exports to give relief to its people, it amounts to shifting of risk to perennially food deficit countries. There are clear evidences that costly food – wheat prices are near to 30-year highs – added a dimension to upheavals in the West Asia. The market may not have run out of steam as poor weather visits the US wheat belt and the winter-spring drought could lay waste to a portion of the Chinese crop. Prices will take another leap from here if China starts importing wheat. The world has now experienced the second food price spikes since 2008. Nearly two dozen countries, including some in south and south-east Asia witnessed violent riots triggered by sharp run up in prices of cereals last time.

The Economist has given a list of things that happen during a food crunch like 'panic buying by importers' to stock up and a 'weaker dollar making imports cheaper in local currencies.'

Food inflation once it starts because of crop failures and strained supply situation sets in motion a vicious cycle. High food prices create public unrest as happened in the West Asia which in turn create condition for rise in energy prices and since that is the major cost element in making nitrogenous fertiliser, farming becomes that much more expensive.

The challenge for policymakers and scientists is to evolve a strategy to break the cycle. Unquestionably the strategy will have to be built around a new green revolution.

Nashik grape exports dip 58%

Tushar Pawar / Mumbai/ Nashik April 21, 2011, 0:08 IST

Earns foreign currency amounting to Rs 100 crore

Nashik district, the grape capital of India, has recorded a fall of 58 per cent in export of grapes in FY 2010-11 (December-April season) as compared to that of last year due to unseasonal rains that had hit the vineyards during November 2010, causing production losses from 30 to 70 per cent in vineyards in Nashik district, earning foreign currency amounting to Rs 100 crores.

Nashik district is known for producing large quantity of grapes as it shares 55 per cent of total export of grapes from the country and 75 per cent of total export of grapes from the state.

“Grape export from Nashik has been badly affected due lower production caused due to unseasonal rains during last November. Till date this year (April 19, 2011), 15,000 metric tonnes of grapes have been exported to Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan, Dubai, Sri Lanka and Maldiv,” Dhananjay Wardekar, Agriculture Officer, Office of the Joint Director, Nashik division, told Business Standard.

The number of grapes exporting firms this season was around 106. Around 12,888 vineyards, each admeasuring from 0.40 hectare to 1.20 hectare, were registered in 2010-11 season by the Office of the District Agriculture Superintendent, for export of grapes. Around 1,204 Phyto Sanitary certificates, which are compulsory for grape exporters as per guidelines of APEDA, had been given to these exporters.

In 2010-11, the total area under grape cultivation in Nashik district was 50,000 hectares. Around 4 lakh mt of grapes were produced in the district. Out of 50,000 hectares, around 37,617 hectares in the district had reportedly suffered the production losses of more than 50 per cent, while rest of 12,383 hectares of vineyards suffered losses of around 30 per cent.

Access to food biggest challenge for Food Security Bill: Swaminathan

Agartala, April 20:

Access to food will be the biggest challenge in implementing the Food Security Bill, eminent agriculture scientist Dr M.S. Swaminathan said today.

“Fortunately, the country has substantial stock of foodgrain but what concerns is access to food or purchasing capacity of the consumers,” Dr Swaminathan told a workshop on ‘Agricultural Development of Tripura – Challenge & Prospect’ here.

Dr Swaminathan said money power or purchasing capacity would be the greatest challenge for implementing the Food Security Bill, which should legally entitle the citizens to get food, he said.

The Bill has three components — availability of food, good access to people and absorption of food, he said adding food absorption includes supply of clean drinking water, total sanitation, healthcare and literacy.

The Bill, which seeks to provide legal entitlement for cheaper food grains to poor households, has been hanging fire because of differences between the Centre and the states over the poverty estimates.

An empowered group of Ministers is likely to finalise the draft of the Food Security Bill on April 25.

Asserting that there was a need for enhancement of productivity with less use of land and water, Dr Swaminathan said there should be an effort to boost post harvesting mechanism like marketing facility and access to technology.

Terming the eastern belt – Bihar, Chattisgarh and West Bengal – as sleeping giants of the country's agriculture treasure, Dr Swaminathan said, “Time has come to supplement the country's food stock by these states“.

Dr Swaminathan said MNREGA could play a great role in building assets in the village level like digging ponds and harvesting rain water which would help in increasing productivity.

He said climate change and global warming could pose a serious challenge to productivity because the risk of flood and drought was increasing due to change of climate.

The renowned scientist said there was need to train risk managers at panchayat level so that they could advise people on the problems of climate risks.

The Tripura Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, who was also present at the workshop, said the State government was contemplating creation of Village Knowledge Centres in all villages where farmers could get sufficient knowledge about agriculture and good farming.

The Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, said Tripura government was contemplating to create Village Knowledge Centre in all villages where farmers could get sufficient knowledge about agriculture and good farming. The State Agriculture Minister, Mr Aghore Debbarma, the Professor of Indian Statistical Institute, Dr V.K. Ramacharan, and the Vice-Chancellor of Central Agriculture System Research, Prof S.N. Puri, attended the inaugural function of the workshop.

Sales of complex fertilisers soar thanks to new subsidy regime



New Delhi, April 20:

Sales of complex fertilisers have registered a 20 per cent jump in 2010-11, following the introduction of a nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) regime.

The fiscal that ended on March 31 saw fertiliser firms selling 98.3 lakh tonnes (lt) of complexes, containing various proportions of nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), potash (K) and sulphur (S). This was roughly a fifth more than the 81.9 lt they did in 2009-10.

On the other hand, despatches of conventional fertilisers such as urea and di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) recorded lower growth – 6.7 per cent and 9.3 per cent respectively – while even falling by 16.8 per cent in the case of muriate of potash (MOP).

The spurt in complex sales is largely being ascribed to the NBS, effective since April 1, 2010. Under it, subsidy is provided on fertilisers based on their N, P, K or S content. This was as against the earlier system, where the subsidy was limited to specific products (urea, DAP, MOP) with no real linkage to nutrient content.

Value proposition

The NBS subsidy is currently Rs 27.481 for a kg of N, with these at Rs 29.407 on P, Rs 24.628 on K and Rs 1.692 on S. That translates into a subsidy of Rs 16,648 on a tonne of the popular NPK complex, 12:32:16, enabling it to be retailed at around Rs 9,500. Lower prices (against Rs 10,750 for DAP) and the presence of K (unlike in DAP, which only has 18 per cent N and 46 per cent P) makes it a value proposition for farmers.

“Not only farmers, even companies are finding attractive to market complexes because their prices can be raised quietly without inviting the attention that DAP or MOP would,” an industry source noted.

The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (Iffco) – the leading player in complexes along with Coromandel International Ltd – has virtually stopped making DAP at its Kandla plant, which is now only producing 10:26:26 and 12:32:16 complexes. Even MOP is being increasingly incorporated into complexes, as evidenced by imports that have gone up despite the dip in direct sales.

The other indicator of the increasing preference for complexes is imports, which touched a record 11.7 lt in 2010-11. The importers included Indian Potash Ltd (7.38 lt), Iffco (1.32 lt), Zuari Industries (0.77 lt), Mangalore Chemicals & Fertilisers (0.31 lt) and Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilisers (0.30 lt), besides the likes of Nagarjuna Fertilisers that do not manufacture complexes.

According to the source, complex sales would have easily scaled the 100 lt-mark, but for the political upheavals in North Africa and West Asia.

“The disruption in supply of rock phosphate, phosphoric acid, ammonia and sulphur from these countries impacted our production. Moreover, the cost of these raw materials, too, went up,” he added. As a result, the year-on-year sales growth for complexes, which amounted to over 29 per cent during April-January, slowed down to 20 per cent by the fiscal-end.

DAP price increase?

Meanwhile, most companies are said to have effected, or are planning to, increase retail prices of DAP by around Rs 600 a tonne for the coming kharif planting season. The maximum retail price, excluding local levies, will go up from Rs 10,750 to Rs 11,350 a tonne. In addition, firms are passing on the one per cent excise duty levied in the recent Union Budget to the farmer.

Organic returns



Recognition: Coffee flowers in full bloom at a plantation of the Andhra Pradesh Coffee Development Board in Visakha Agency in Visakhapatnam. Araku brand coffee has become popular and won international awards after adopting organic farming.

Mechanisation helps sugar mills tackle rising cane harvest costs



A file photo of a load of sugarcane.

Chennai, April 20:

Runaway increase in labour cost for sugarcane harvest has hit growth of area for the crop in Tamil Nadu. Mechanisation is emerging the only long term option, say sugar millers.

Labour for harvest that was around Rs 375-400 a tonne at the start of the season has increased to about Rs 550 and even Rs 600 in some places. This is about a third of the sugarcane price that farmers get, making it unattractive to them. In addition to the cost, the shortage of labour aggravates the problem.

During the current season, the State Government has fixed the price for sugarcane at Rs 2,000 a tonne, including transport charge, linked to a sugar recovery of 9.5 per cent. This is nearly twice the price paid in 2006-07 when the State Advised Price was Rs 1,034 a tonne, linked to 9 per cent sugar recovery. Labour was around Rs 100 then, according to industry figures.

The increase in labour costs has eroded the benefit of higher sugarcane price. Leading sugar mills are looking at mechanisation of harvesting as a solution.

Thiru Arooran Sugars has inducted about 30 harvesting machines in the last few years across its four mills. It now has 22 in operation, and is adding eight more during the current season, said Mr Ram V. Tygarajan, Chairman and Managing Director, Thiru Arooran Sugars. "Without mechanisation, there is no future for sugarcane," he says.

Tamil Nadu's peak sugarcane output of about 258 lakh tonnes in 2006-07 is not likely to be repeated in the near future. Mills are struggling to get to 160 lakh tonnes.

Sakthi Sugars, among the earliest to mechanise, has 10 machines in operation and is considering more. Nearly half the harvesting at one of its mills has been mechanised, according to its Vice-Chairman and Managing Director, Mr Manickam.

Mechanised harvesting costs around Rs 300-400 a tonne, in addition to the advantage of assured availability. But for now, due to the high costs of machines individual service providers cannot offer harvesting services, as they do for paddy cultivation which is almost completely mechanised. Typically, a set of sugarcane-harvesting machines, including the cutting machine and accompanying loaders, can cost up to Rs 1.25 crore-1.5 crore, he says.

Challenge

Mr Tyagarajan says companies face the challenge of investing ahead of cane availability, as that is the only option to increase cane areas now. This year's planting will be dependent on the harvesting capacity of sugar mills. Increasingly, farmers, too, are accepting the idea of mechanised harvesting, and are changing the cultivation practice to enable mechanisation.

The mills are now working on increasing efficiency and output of the harvesters, which are new to the field conditions here, he says.

According to industry sources, one machine does the job of about 60-65 workers. A pair of workers can cut up to 1.5 tonnes of sugarcane a day, while a machine cuts 150 tonnes in 12 hours. But the machines are capable of cutting up to 400 tonnes. As is the norm for mechanisation, large blocks of land and level conditions are ideal, but that is often not the case.

Mills charge around Rs 350 a tonne, while the actual cost could work out much higher. But costs could be controlled with increasing efficiency. In a cutting season lasting about 160 days, the machines should cut about 40,000 tonnes, but now the operators are managing about one-fourth of that capacity.

ICAR initiates Rs 350-cr plan to tackle climate change



Dr B. Venkateswarlu
Hyderabad, April 20:

With impact of climate change beginning to reflect on agriculture, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has initiated a Rs 350-crore national programme to help farmers sustain agriculture, particularly in dryland.

An ICAR arm, Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA), is coordinating with 21 institutes under ICAR umbrella to implement the NICRA (National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture) project.

“The initiative is aimed at enhancing the resilience of Indian agriculture covering various crops, livestock and fisheries to climate variability by developing and applying better production technologies, Dr B Venkateswarlu, Director of CRIDA, said. Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, he said the programme would be implemented in the two remaining years in the 11th Five-Year Plan and through the next plan. Studies would assess vulnerability of crops and zones to climatic changes and extreme events. It would also include rapid and largescale screening of crop germplasm including wild relatives for drought and heat tolerance.

The idea was to pick at least one village in 500 districts. In Andhra Pradesh, initial studies would cover some villages in five districts, including Nalgonda and Anantapur. Of the Rs 350-crore outlay, the Government had sanctioned Rs 200 crore for 201-11 and Rs 150 crore for 2011-12.

Futures lift physical rubber



A file photo of a rubber plantation.

Kottayam, April 20:

Physical rubber prices improved on Wednesday. The market was reacting to the moderate recovery in domestic and international futures. But most of the traders were reluctant to increase their commitments before the long weekend holidays falling along with Easter. Prices recovered partially on fresh buying and short-covering at lower levels.

Sheet rubber improved to Rs 240 (Rs 235.50) a kg according to traders. The grade concluded at Rs 239 (Rs 236) a kg both at Kottayam and Kochi, as quoted by the Rubber Board.

RSS-4 rebounded with the May series rising to Rs 244.99 (Rs 237.23), June to Rs 249 (Rs 241.43), July to Rs 249.99 (Rs 242.13), August to Rs 242.90 (Rs 235.83) and September to Rs 232.65 (Rs 229.21) a kg on the National Multi-Commodity Exchange.

RSS-3 (spot) closed firm at Rs 263.02 (Rs 257.26) a kg at Bangkok. The April futures for the grade recovered to ¥456 (Rs 244.57) from ¥435 a kg during the day session and then to ¥458 (Rs 245.68) in the night session on Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rates (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 240 (235.50); RSS-5: 236 (233); Ungraded: 232 (228); ISNR 20: 233 (231); and latex 60 per cent: 147 (146).

Raw cashew prices slip on better supplies



Business Line Raw cashew

Kochi, April 20:

Cashew prices slipped by a few cents last week mainly in reaction to positive developments in Ivory Coast (IVC), as improved raw material supply from the country could cool prices. However, not much business was done at lower levels.

Some processors sold W320 at around \$3.90 (f.o.b) while some others were able to sell at higher levels. But, there was not much change in other grades and business took place for W240 at around \$4.40; W450 at around \$3.80; Splits & Butts at around \$3.40 and Pieces at around \$3.25 (f.o.b).

The raw cashew nut (RCN) market was very quiet as shellers waited for results of the IVC developments. There was no change in price levels. Guinea Bissau was at around \$1,600 a tonne, Benin at around \$1,525 a tonne and IVC/Ghana at around \$1,400.

Shipments so far have been much lower than normal, trade sources said.

“If movement picks up pace in the next few weeks, we can expect reasonable activity (so far, most shellers have been reluctant to buy any significant volume due to the uncertainty of

movement). Prices for India and Vietnam RCN have come down from high opening levels but that is more due to lower quality rather than an actual price decline,” Mr Pankaj N Sampat, a Mumbai-based dealer told *Business Line*.

After a 20 per cent increase in 6 months and about 40 per cent in one year, it is reasonable to expect some decline – more so when a big problem/ bottleneck on supply side is getting resolved, he said. But it would not be realistic to expect a major correction immediately.

Processing costs

A significant portion of the recent price increase is due to increase in processing costs. Also, raw material prices in the last six months have been substantially higher than average price of last 2-3 years. So a large price decline is possible only when RCN prices come close to that average. An immediate large decline in RCN prices seems unlikely because shellers may not be able to delay buying any longer, as most are already running at low capacity. Brazil is an additional factor in West African RCN market, he said.

Cashew usage in the US, Europe and some other markets is expected to be lower because of a shift to other products due to higher prices. Effect of this may not be felt immediately as retail prices in these countries do not reflect the full price increase.

Goa to host Konkan fruit festival



Panaji, April 20:

Goa will host the Konkan Fruit Festival, showcasing over 150 varieties of fruits produced in the region, from April 29 to May 1, organisers said.

“Around 200 farmers from Goa and Konkan region will participate in the festival to be held on the street along the Mandovi river. This festival is an annual affair,” Mr Miguel Braganza, Secretary, Botanical Society of Goa (BSG), told PTI. He said almost 60,000 footfalls are expected for the festival, which will be held over three days.

Organisers expect that a variety of popular fruits such as mango, jackfruit, kokum, chickoo, annona among others will be on display, to educate people about the rich horticultural bio diversity in the western ghat region.

Mr Braganza said almost 50 varieties of mango itself will be on the stalls.

30 mango varieties

Goa-based farmer, Mr Srihari Kurade, will display 30 varieties of mangoes produced at his farm in Cuncolim village, 40 km away from here. Another farmer Mr Prabhakar Keni will showcase varieties of mango, cashew and jackfruits, he said adding that farmers from Maharashtra's Deogad, Kudal and Mutt areas of Konkan belt will also make their presence for the festival.

Cashew fruit brewery

Giving a typical Goan touch to the festival, organisers have roped in the Goa Tiatre Academy, which will present Konkani songs based on fruits during the festival. In yet another highlight, they will be displaying hurrak, the brewery produced from cashew fruit, at a special stall.

Various government, semi-government organisations and NGOs working in the field of horticulture including the BSG, State Directorate of Agriculture, Corporation of City of Panaji, Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), Regional Fruit Research Station, Vengurla, Konkan Krishi Vidyapith, Dapoli have joined hands to host the festival.

Nabard takes up bee-keeping project to help Girijans

Visakhapatnam, April 20:

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) has taken up a bee-keeping project in Visakhapatnam district to help Girijan families from this year, according to Mr P. Mohanaiah, Chief General Manager, Andhra Pradesh.

He was talking to the press here on Wednesday after interacting with self-help groups of women (SHGs) in the AP Grameena Vikas Bank here. Mr J.R.P. Sreedhar, Regional Manager of AP Grameena Vikas Bank, also participated.

Mr Mohanaiah said 500 Girijan families would be provided equipment and training in Araku valley of Visakhapatnam district and it would benefit the landless Girijan families in particular.

The bank would also take up dairy development programmes in a similar manner.

He said the bank was implementing the seven-year horticulture development programme in the tribal tracts to benefit Girijans.

Girijans, with a holding of one acre, would be provided finance and inputs for seven years to raise orchards.

As many as 38,000 Girijan families would benefit and each family would earn at least Rs 10,000 a month. So far, Rs 140 crore had been spent on the programme.

Watershed projects

The other major project taken up by Nabard in the State was the watershed development programme being implemented in 16 districts at a cost of Rs 400 crore.

He said 440 such watershed projects had been grounded in the State.

The aim was to bring 4,80,000 hectares under the programme.

He said Nabard had provided refinance to the extent of Rs 3,500 crore to co-operative banks and grameena banks in the State for crop loans during 2010-11 and the target for the current financial year was Rs 4,000 crore.

It had provided Rs 2,100 crore in the form of investment credit to the rural sector and Rs 1,230 crore had been sanctioned for the rural infrastructure development fund in 2010-11.

The targets for investment credit had been raised to Rs 2,500 crore and Rs 1,400 crore for the RIDF for the current financial year, he added.

Natural rubber up on global cues

New Delhi, Apr 20:

Natural rubber prices on Wednesday rose by Rs 3 to Rs 239 a kg in the domestic spot markets on back of rise in prices in global futures and spot markets.

The prices of natural rubber yesterday were ruling at Rs 236 a kg in the domestic markets, according to the Rubber Board.

“Rubber prices internationally are facing speculation which is responsible for the rise in prices in both the futures and spot markets,” Indian Rubber Dealers Federation President, Mr George Vally, told PTI.

Futures and spot markets in India are following the trends in the global markets, he added.

The rate of natural rubber in the international physical market at Bangkok today rose by Rs 5.76 to Rs 263.02, compared to Rs 257.26 a kg yesterday, Rubber Board data said.

Similarly, TOCOM, rubber futures prices for May delivery were ruling at 457.8 yen a kg (Rs 245.30/kg), up 3.4 yen (Rs 1.82/kg) from their last trading price.

Wheat procurement in Punjab continues to remain low

Chandigarh, Apr 20:

Wheat procurement in Punjab continued to remain sluggish, with crop buying reaching just 11.98 lakh Metric Tonne (MT), 83 per cent lower than what was in corresponding period of last season.

Government agencies and private millers procured 11.98 lakh MT of wheat so far compared with lifting of 69.02 lakh MT last year.

Out of total procurement, government agencies procured 11.95 lakh tonnes of wheat, which accounted for 99 per cent of total lifting while private traders procured just 3,456 MT.

FCI had been able to procure 1.43 lakh MT of wheat.

According to an official, Patiala with 4.61 lakh tonnes was leading in procurement, whereas district Sangrur was at second slot with lifting of 2.61 lakh MT.

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Mr Braganza said hurrak is produced by traditional 'lawani' method in the state's Sattari taluka.

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