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‘Rajarajan 1000' well suited for late samba crops

Special Correspondent

ARIYALUR: The ‘Rajarajan 1000' system of cultivation is ideally suited not only for the scheduled system of cultivation but also for the delayed cropping pattern. Farmers of Kattaiyankudikadu village near Sendurai, have been successfully raising the late ‘samba' by adopting this system .

Paddy growers of the village used to raise ‘samba' during late October every year. But, the delay in the onset of north east monsoon coupled with poor storage in the local irrigation tank, had forced the farmers to forego the crop for the current season.

However, following the sharp showers in the last week of November and early December last year, the Agriculture Department officials had motivated the farmers about the advantages of the ‘Rajarajan 1000' system, and farmers have raised ‘ADT-45'— a late samba variety — under the ‘cereal development programme.'

Agriculture Minister Veerapandi S.Arumugam, who visited the fields at Kattayankudikadu village, near Sendurai, on Monday, enquired with the farmers, on the strategy being adopted by them under the ‘Rajararajan 1000' method .

Farmers said that the concept of drying and wetting (‘Kachalum patchalum') together with the periodical clearing of weeds had brought about a transformation in the cultivation practices. The use of Cono Weeder for smothering weeds was yet another benefit that has accrued to them under the ‘Rajararajan 1000' method. Farmers expressed hope that the yield this season would be at least 50 per cent more than the usual.

The Minister appreciated the efforts taken by the villagers in adopting the ‘Rajararajan 1000' concept, and advised officials to keep a track of the growth of the crop for guiding farmers to achieve a higher yield.

S.Sivakumar, Joint Director of Agriculture, said that an integrated approach was being adopted under the ‘Rajarajan 1000' method, with the joint efforts of officials handling the cereal development programme, Agricultural Technology Management Agency, and the National Agriculture Development programme. Mohan, Agriculture Officer, Government of India schemes, said that leaf-charts were being distributed to farmers to track the growth of paddy crop. Focus was on top-dressing of crops using fertilizers.

Mr.Veerapandi Arumugam distributed agricultural implements to farmers at Kumilzhiyam village, and identity cards under joint schemes being implemented by the Central and State governments.

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TNAU gets its first U.S. student

Amutha Kannan

Megan Elizabeth Fenton

COIMBATORE: This university has seen students from many countries. But not from the United States. That vacuum was filled when Megan Elizabeth Fenton from Penn-Yann, New York, walked into its portals.

She has travelled all the way to Coimbatore to pursue a master's degree at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU). Megan registered as a full-time student for the post-graduate degree programme in agronomy on Wednesday.

While the movement of Indian students to foreign shores, especially the U.S., for higher education is on the rise with every academic year, the reverse is not comparable to it. Even some of the students who come from the country on exchange programmes do so for attending short-term courses.

In this scenario, the girl, an agricultural science graduate from Cornell University, the U.S., has come to India on her own initiative.

The university has nearly 30 students from countries such as Africa, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Iran and Iraq. Though their entry began more than four decades ago, there has not been a single student from the U.S.

According to Vice-Chancellor P. Murugesa Boopathi, it is a matter of great pride. “It goes to show that the infrastructure and other facilities in TNAU are on a par with international universities. A student coming here from the U.S. is unique in the sense that even with the best facilities available in her own country, she has chosen to pursue it here”.

While those from other countries choose to study at TNAU for better academic and research prospects, the case with Megan is different. She was one among a group of students who came on a visit to India under the aegis of the International Agricultural Rural Development (IARD) programme of Cornell University and TNAU two years ago when she was a student of agricultural science in the former.

Inspired by the research and extension activities of TNAU, she decided to pursue any kind of programme here. Owner of 400-acre of agricultural land which Megan manages with a partner, she has both theoretical and practical knowledge of the subject. She also worked as an extension worker for a year before applying to TNAU. Her goal, however, is to become a teacher in international agriculture. Having decided her career chart, Megan took it upon herself to get admission in TNAU. “My most favourite teachers were those who have had practical experience. So, I believe that my work on my farm and also as an extension worker will help me be a good teacher. ”.

“I did not know where to begin. I sent an e-mail to the Dean of Post-Graduate Studies sharing my desire. He advised me on the application procedures and also gave me the provision to join the course mid-way,” Megan says.

According to Dean C. Udayasooriyan, Megan will be in class along with other PG students pursuing agronomy. Since she has joined mid-way, she will begin with the second semester and then do her first semester with the next batch of students. The second year will be research-oriented, both in the field and in the laboratory.

Megan has to obtain 55 credits from the papers she chooses to pursue under the Choice-based Credit System and her research work put together.

She was chosen by a Recognition Committee, set up to select such students who do not have to undergo an entrance test or other such selection formalities. Students from foreign countries will be admitted only if they apply through the embassy, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, or Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

A thoroughly ‘scared yet excited' Megan is all set to start her course. She reached Coimbatore on January 14 to see Pongal being celebrated. She is yet to come out of the euphoria of the three-day extended celebrations with a family of her IARD Indian counterpart Priyadarshini Murugan in Sulur.

She vows to go back to her country with the knowledge of agriculture, the Tamil language and the culture of the Tamils.

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Review local levies to contain inflation, Pranab tells States

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: In the backdrop of food prices, especially those of vegetables, fruits and milk, going through the roof, Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee's meeting with State Finance Ministers turned out to be a blame-game of sorts with the Centre and the

Opposition-ruled States trading charges on the cause of the price spiral.

Initiating discussions at the pre-budget consultation meeting with the States here, Mr. Mukherjee sought the abolition of octroi, mandi tax and other local levies to rein in the price spiral.

The Opposition-ruled States, however, demanded lowering of Central taxes on petroleum products such as petrol and diesel as high fuel prices were the prime cause of high inflation.

Asking the State governments to end the local levies to help bridge the gap between farm-gate and retail prices and thereby play their due role in containing inflation, Mr. Mukherjee said: “I would urge you to review all local levies like mandi tax and octroi duty, which add to the prices of food articles and impede smooth movement of essential commodities…there is a need for you to urgently look into supply management of items that are driving the current round of food inflation, in particular local factors that are widening the gap between wholesale and retail prices.”

As abolition or lowering of levies would mean less revenue in the kitty, even as it may help in containing inflationary pressures, the States noted that the high prices were owing to the Centre's policies.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank said: “Price rise is not a subject of States. It is totally the Centre's subject. We are ready to sit with the Centre and arrive at solutions. Inflation is high because of the Centre's export-import policy,” he said.

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Sushil Modi demanded that the Centre cut duties on petroleum products to help contain inflation.

“Inflation, particularly in food and primary articles...fuelled by petrol and diesel increases has been a particular worry for all of us. While price increase due to international price movements is to some extent understandable, the commensurate increase in taxes, which are levied ad valorem, can be avoided,” he said.

Mr. Modi suggested that the five per cent import duty on crude oil be abolished and the excise duty on petroleum fuels be levied at a flat rate instead of the current mechanism of imposing taxes on an ad valorem basis.

‘Reform laws'

In his address, Mr. Mukherjee also referred to the bottlenecks in the supply chain and asked the States to review and reform their farm produce and marketing laws.

He pointed out that the States needed to take steps to ensure agricultural growth and create efficient distribution and marketing infrastructure. Alongside, there was also a need to cut down on foodgrain wastage, he said.Going into specifics, Mr. Mukherjee pointed out that government-regulated markets not only imposed taxes and facilitated large commissions and fees for middlemen, but also prevented retailers from integrating their enterprise directly with farmers.“This leaves no incentive for farmers to upgrade and inhibits private investment in the agriculture sector. Farmers and consumer both lose in the process,” he said.

‘Work in coordination'

Haryana Finance Minister Ajay Singh Yadav said the States should work in coordination to deal with the problem of hoarding, which has been adding to the rising prices issue.

“There are bigger States like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. We have to work in coordination with the Centre to remove the problems of hoarding,” he said.

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Paddy harvest to extend up to mid-February

Farmers forced to raise crops behind schedule 25,000 hectares brought under cultivation

PERAMBALUR: Harvest of paddy in the district is expected to be behind schedule this year. Normally, paddy harvest commences with the ‘Pongal' festival but, the delay in the onset of monsoon in Perambalur and Ariyalur districts has forced the farmers to raise the crops three months behind the schedule.

A total of 25,000 hectares has been brought under cultivation – 10,000 hectares in Perambalur district and 15,000 hectares in Ariyalur district. Farmers of Jayamkonadm and Andimadam have raised CR 1009 variety; while those in Tirumanur, and T.Pazhur have opted for CO-43 variety. The ADT-39 variety has also been raised in a few belts. In Perambalur, the cropping pattern has mainly centred around short-duration crops, with farmers choosing CO-43, ADT-45 and ADT-43 varieties.

Official sources said that harvest of paddy was yet to pick up in most of the villages. Harvest had been taken up only in 10 per cent of the total paddy area in these districts. The harvest would extend up to late February or even early March, the sources said.

The damage caused by the rain in late November and early December had further delayed the process of harvest. Farmers had to re-transplant the saplings for raising the paddy , sources said. Veerapandi S.Arumugam, State Agriculture Minister, inspected the paddy fields in parts of Sendurai in Ariyalur district recently and also distributed implements to the farmers.

Pudukottai

The situation in Pudukottai district is similar to Ariyalur. Apart from the delayed monsoon, the damage caused by blast disease in the district has added to the problem.

Official sources said the farmers had raised BPT 5204 variety, followed by ADT-39. A vast extent of paddy fields in Manalmelkudi and Avvudaiyarkovil had been affected by blast disease.

Sources said that the harvest has commenced only on about 8,000 hectares and would extend up to mid-February.

“A few villagers in Manalmelkudi had raised the crop only a fortnight ago,” source said, indicating that the harvest would be seriously delayed this season.

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“Explore newer areas to increase rubber production”

Special Correspondent

“India among leading countries in rubber production, consumption”

Product range of rubber industry covered around 50,000 items Non-availability of labour in rubber plantations is becoming a major issue

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R.K.Raman, chairman of the expo, explaining the products displayed at a stall to

Maharashtra Governor K. Sankaranarayanan at the ‘India Rubber Expo 2011' in Chennai on Wednesday.

CHENNAI: Rubber and rubber-based industries occupied a prominent place in the global economy, said K. Sankaranarayanan, Governor of Maharashtra, here on Wednesday.

Speaking after inaugurating the ‘India Rubber Expo 2011' at the Chennai Trade Centre here, Mr Sankaranarayanan said the country was among the leading countries of the world in terms of production and consumption of rubber.

The product range of rubber industry covered around 50,000 items, which were widely used and were indispensible for modern life.

Available statistics showed that the country ranked fifth in the world with regard to rubber planted area.It was also the fourth largest producer of natural rubber, next only to Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. India had recorded highest productivity in rubber production from 2006 irrespective of the sub optimal agro climatic conditions. The rubber industry had integrated with the world industry successfully.

This integration had exposed the Indian rubber industry to challenges such as international cost, competitiveness and quality enhancement. At the same time it has brought opportunities for the industry. More in-house research and development collaboration with research institutions were necessary, he said. The country has a great potential in rubber products in terms of local availability of natural rubber, fast growing market, scope for value addition and avenues for export. Though the country is the second largest consumer of natural rubber, the per capita consumption of natural rubber was only around one kg as compared to the world average of 3.12 kg and that of Japan 11.51 kg; that of US 6.95 kg and that of China at 5.80 kg.

Non-availability of labour in rubber plantations is becoming a major issue.

In Malaysia the authorities had to shift from rubber to palm oil production due to this problem. Newer areas in the country needed to be explored to increase the production, he said.

The spiralling price of natural rubber in the last one year caused serious concern, said Arun Mammen, Managing Director, MRF Ltd. Mr. Mammen said scientists and rubber technologists should look into the alternatives. Similarly, the rubber growers should also find ways to increase their productivity in the next few years, he said.

The future of the rubber industry was linked to the growth of automobile industry and hence a road map was needed to face the challenges of the industry, he said. On the occasion K.M.Philip Award was presented to R.K.Raman, chairman of the expo. The award carried a citation and a gold medallion. Kishor Jhalardia, president, Chemicals and Cracker Division, Reliance Industries and Joerg Strassburger, Managing Director, Lanxess India, were among those who spoke.

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Spices Park to boost cardamom, pepper trade

R. Ramabhadran Pillai

Facilities for storage, grading and marketing

PUTTADI (IDUKKI): Advanced technology adopted at the Spices Park, being readied for inauguration here, will provide a new dimension to processing of cardamom and pepper, two of the prime spices widely consumed within and outside the country. The park will be declared open at an official function within a few weeks.

Apart from processing, the facilities offered at the 12-acre park include storage, grading and marketing. There are separate godowns and processing plants for cardamom as well as pepper. Banking services and marketing are among the other facilities at the park, built at a cost of Rs.27 crore.

Electronic auction of cardamom has already begun at the park. Sixty terminals have been set up at the administrative-cum-auction building. Registered auctioneers and approved buyers are taking part in the auctions conducted at the auction centre.

The processing and associated activities will help boost export in a big way, said J. Thomas, Director, Research, Spices Board, who is coordinating the initial operations at the Spices Park. “Through the Spices Park, spice farmers will be empowered with infrastructure facilities for cleaning, colour sorting, grading, packing, warehousing and marketing, which will fetch a better price realisation for their produce. Due to the upgraded processing facilities, the overall quality of the finished products will be improved.”

Since the park is coming up in the spice growing regions, the proximity of the processing units in the park would enable to forge a closer and lasting relationship among the growers, traders and exporters. Value-addition will lead to capabilities for export of garden-fresh spices, he said.

All the stakeholders of the cardamom and pepper industry will benefit from the functioning of the park. The growers will benefit most, according to him. Majority of cardamom growers belong to the small and marginal categories. They can bring the produce to the park, clean, colour, sort and grade it. If there is no immediate sale, the farmers can store the produce in the ‘puf godown' where the temperature and humidity can be controlled to secure longer preservation.

The growers can grade and pack their produce in their own brands carrying details of good agricultural practices and bar code, which add value. The replacement of manual grading and sorting will be a boon to the growers as well as exporters. It will enable upcountry buyers and exporters to get quality material within a reasonable time.

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International Tractors to expand

Special Correspondent

Plans to set up a new unit in Bihar

To invest Rs.100 crore on two projects Expansion will be completed by this year-end

NEW DELHI: International Tractors Limited (ITL), makers of Sonalika brand of tractors, on Wednesday said it would invest Rs.100 crore to enhance its production capacity to meet future demand. The investment will help the company increase its production capacity to 1-lakh tractors from 60,000 units annually at present.

“Besides enhancing capacity of our existing Hoshiarpur facility, we will establish a new manufacturing facility in Bihar with an annual production capacity of 20,000 units. Overall, Rs.100 crore will be invested on these two projects,” said ITL Vice-Chairman A. S. Mittal. ITL is India's third largest tractors and agriculture equipment manufacturers.

“The Bihar plant, which will be functional by next year, will strengthen our presence in the eastern region, while the process of upgrading Hoshiarpur plant will be completed by 2011 end,” Mr. Mittal said. The company produces tractors of capacity ranging from 30 hp to 90 hp.

“All the brands of Sonalika group are doing well in its respective segments across country during April-November 2010-11. We expect our tractor sales to cross 51,000 units by the end of the current fiscal. So far, we have achieved 17 per cent sales growth and sold 25,872 tractors,” Mr. Mittal added.

ITL exports its Worldtrac 90 RX to the U.S., Australia, Europe and various African and South American countries. It has an international distribution network of over 1,800 dealers in over 65 countries.

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Agriculture under climate change is key agenda of 12th Plan

Staff Reporter

Hybrid crops can boost production: Kasturirangan

Bangalore: Efforts to boost agricultural productivity in the country must be seen in the context of climate change, a key agenda in the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2012-2017), said K. Kasturirangan, member of the Planning Commission.

Pincered

While agricultural productivity must increase by 2 per cent a year if it has to meet projected demands, the goal is complicated by climate change which is expected to bring about a 2 degrees Celsius rise in temperature and a 7 per cent decrease in rainfall, he said.

“Climate change is likely to bring about a 13 per cent fall in agricultural productivity,” Dr. Kasturirangan said at the launch of a book on Karnataka's crop yields at the University of Agricultural Sciences here on Wednesday.

Agriculture must therefore be addressed in the context of water availability, pest management, improved farming practices, credit and support prices and access to knowledge, he added.

The strategy to augment production and productivity must include the promotion of hybrid varieties that are tolerant to droughts, floods or salinity that are forecast to be brought about by climate change.

Methods such as precision farming and drip irrigation could dramatically boost productivity, he said.

There is no reason why a region like Vidarbha, which receives copious rainfall, should not become “a horticultural or floricultural hub”.

Production of several key crops in the country will have to be substantially increased in order to meet the demand, which is expected to double by 2050.

While rice needs to see a 30 per cent increase in production, pulses needs a 140 per cent rise and oilseeds a 250 per cent boost.

Key role

Dr. Kasturirangan released a book, Bridging of Yield Gaps in Major Agricultural crops – Strategies for Karnataka.

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1,500 villages identified for training in zero budget farming

Staff Correspondent

They are in districts under Gulbarga division

Gulbarga: Hyderabad Karnataka Development Board has drawn an ambitious plan to train progressive farmers of 1,500 villages across the region in zero budget agriculture to help farmers get better yields and remunerative prices for their produce.

Subhash Palekar, the proponent of zero budget farming, will train the farmers in Gulbarga from February 17 to 20. This programme will be conducted in association with the Red Gram Growers' Association of Karnataka.

“With zero budget farming technique, we intend to improve the income levels of these farmers,” HKDB secretary Shalini Rajneesh said in a release.

With the help of the Karnataka State Remote Sensing Application Centre at Gulbarga, HKDB has identified 1,500 out of 4,124 villages in Gulbarga Division that neither have any irrigation facilities nor have any watershed development programmes. At least one progressive farmer from these villages will be trained in zero budget farming.

The number of villages identified under the scheme include 446 in Gulbarga, 114 in Yadgir, 177 in Bellary, 297 in Bidar, 248 in Raichur and 131 in Koppal, Ms. Shalini Rajneesh said in the release.

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‘Buy damaged paddy at MSP'

Staff Reporter

Guntur: CPM Central executive' committee member V. Srinivasa Rao warned that the State government would have to incur the wrath of farmers if it did not buy the paddy damaged during heavy rains last year, at Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Speaking at the indefinite hunger strike camp of CPM district secretary D Rama Devi and Tenant Farmers' Association secretary Y. Radhakrishna outside the Collector's office , Mr. Srinivasa Rao said the farmers had been in deep distress as MPs and MLAs of the ruling party had given priority to protecting their own interests and sought to know how many more farmers would have to commit suicide before the government took concrete action.

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Minister holds talks with pineapple farmers

Special Correspondent

KOCHI: Representatives of pineapple farmers who met Agriculture Minister Mullakkara Ratnakaran on Wednesday sought protection for their farms from anti-pesticide protestors.

Leaders of the Pineapple Farmers Association at Vazhakkulam told the Minister and the Director of Dgriculture at a meeting in Thiruvananthapuram that the protestors were blocking pineapple farmers from carrying out their work under the pretext that the farms used Endosulfan and other environment-damaging pesticides.

At several places in the State, pineapple farms had been attacked by local people who wrongly believed that the farms used toxic chemicals and pesticides.

Baby John, president of the association, told the Minister that farmers only followed the ‘package of practices' formulated by the Kerala Agricultural University and the Agriculture

Department. They were not using Endosulfan or any other pesticide that was harmful to humans. He claimed that pineapple was the only commercially grown fruit in Kerala that did not contain any toxic elements.

He said that ‘mealy bug' was the major pest that attacked pineapple farms and urged the KAU to suggest an alternative pesticide if the present one being used by farmers were not satisfactory.

G. Surendran, Director of Agriculture, and T.R. Gopalakrishnan, Director of research at Kerala Agricultural University, were among those who attended the discussion. The officials pointed out that the package of practices was being updated.

The farmers' association urged the government to analyse samples of pineapple sent to laboratory to see if they contained toxic material harmful for humans. This was necessary to remove people's suspicions about pineapple. The Minister and officials agreed to get pineapple samples analysed and let the people know of the results.

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No plan to release exotic fish varieties into reservoirs

Staff Reporter

KOCHI: Exotic fish varieties will not be introduced in reservoirs as part of the reservoir fisheries programme, said P. Krishnaiah, Chief Executive Officer, National Fisheries Development Board.

Talking to mediapersons here on the sidelines of the Asian-Pacific Aquaculture and giant prawn conference, Mr. Krishnaiah said that the board was in favour of releasing only the fish varieties like the Indian carps that were available in the country. The State governments could select the fish varieties that were to be released in their reservoirs, he said.

There were criticisms that the release of fish varieties in reservoirs in ecological hotspots would upset the fish diversity of the region and may eventually lead to the loss of some endemic varieties.

The board had received the objections raised by the Kerala Forest Department regarding the release in four reservoirs in forest areas of the State, he said.

Mr. Krishnaiah said that no assessment regarding the impact of release in fish biodiversity was carried out in the State.

The board was for protecting the fish wealth and its biodiversity. The board has offered to support the State by offering Re.1 per fingerling for the reservoir project. It had also provided around Rs.30 crore for the State government for the construction works of fish markets and fishing harbours.

The project for setting up commercial hatcheries of Karimeen (Pearl Spot) also received board's assistance, he said.

K.R. Viswambharan, Vice Chancellor of the Kerala Agriculture University, said that the Asian Pacific conference would give a boost to the fisheries sector of the State. The farmers' meet organised as part of the deliberations provided effective platform for the farmers to directly interact with the international experts from aquaculture and allied sectors, he said.Nearly 300 farmers participated in the discussions.

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FARMER'S NOTEBOOK

Lightweight device performs six types of field operations

M.J. PRABU

The machine seems to be a good alternative to human labour

— Photo: Special Arrangement

Good alternative:Specially built ploughs are provided for ploughing the fields.

Till a few years back a farmer's entire family used to work in the fields and he could manage the harvest. But today, unable to make a living from the rain dependent farms, many small-holders are in difficulty and moving into the already cramped towns and cities in search of work. At times, fields are left practically unattended,” says Mr. Ajay Jakhar, Chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj, New Delhi.

“It is akin to being caught between the devil and the deep sea for them. They cannot sell their lands as they are their only source of security, and cannot make a net profit from their crops either,” he adds.

What can a farmer do in such a piquant situation?

Mr. Shamrao Parhate from Madhya Pradesh says, “labour shortage problem literally forced me to develop a multipurpose agriculture machine that can do several operations.”

Becoming popular

Named 'Shivraj,' the lightweight device performs nearly six types of agricultural work, and is becoming popular among farmers of Chhindwara, Nagpur and Wardha districts in Maharashtra.

It is a multipurpose tool frame drawn by a pair of bullocks. Different accessories can be attached to it for performing several operations, such as shallow ploughing, interculturing, weeding, sowing, residue collection, groundnut digging, and soybean harvesting.

With a little modification, it turns into a sprayer as well.

“About 0.27 hectare can be readied in an hour using this machine which is priced at Rs. 12,000, inclusive of attachments,” says the farmer, adding “there are many innovative features in Shivraj.”

A provision for different seed rates and desired plant-to-plant spacing, disconnecting the seed metering drive using a locking lever to avoid seed losses, changing the angle of penetration into the soil during ploughing are some of them.

Special ploughs

Specially built ploughs are provided for ploughing the fields.

“Three plough bottoms can be attached at a time, and the full weight of the machine is put into the ploughing process and the angular back support ensures that the plough does not bend when in use,” he explains.

Harrowing is done by steel tyres that break the upper soil crust and uproot weeds. The residue gets collected by a special attachment operated by a hand lever at the rear of this equipment.

Removing waste

“When the vehicle moves forward, it collects uprooted stalks, weeds and crop residue. When the lever is lifted, the collected material drops in a heap to be carried away or burnt,” explains Mr. Parhate.

The seed drilling attachment consists of seed box, drilling unit, seed conveying PVC tubes and furrow openers.

The drilling unit derives its power from central shaft of driven wheels through a belt-and-pulley mechanism.

Plant-to-plant and row-to-row distance can also be adjusted.

Weeding and intercultural operations are done by fixing suitable blades according to the need of crop being handled.

Groundnut digging

“For groundnut digging, the blade enters four to five inches deep in the soil, cuts the roots allowing the pods to be retained along with the plant. For soybean harvesting, an attachment drops the cut crop to one side for manual collection,” explains Mr. Parhate who is in the process of patenting the machine.

“Parhate's innovation comes at an ideal time when the country is hard hit in terms of sourcing manual labourers.

“The machine seems to be a good alternative to human labour,” adds Mr. Ajay.

For more details readers can contact Mr. Shamrao Parhate, Pandhurna, Chinndwara, Madhya Pradesh, phone: 07164-220308, Fax: 07164-220637, mobile: 09424648655.

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Driptech launches new low-cost drip irrigation systems

Driptech has launched retail sales of their low-cost drip irrigation systems in India.

Driptech is an award- winning US-based company that designs and manufactures low-cost, high quality drip irrigation systems for smallfarmers in Karnataka, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu.

Retail sales

The company is launching retail sales of their low-cost drip irrigation systems through dealer network of Godrej Agrovet in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Sales commenced last month in Hubli, and are beginning this month in Nasik, Aurangabad, and Sangli.

Driptech micro-irrigation systems provide highly uniform water application even with low pressure (such as provided by an elevated tank).

Increasing yields

After switching from flood irrigation, yields typically increase 30 per cent and water usage declines 60 per cent.

Additional benefits include less labour, less fertilizer requirement, and higher crop quality. The simplicity of the design reduces costs to less than half of that of commercial drip irrigation, makes clogging rare, and allows system installation by any local plumber.

Farmers can recoup the price of the system in as little as six months, with significant increases in income over the next three years, the lifespan of the product.

Distribution network

The CEO of Driptech, Peter Frykman, said: “We are very pleased to reach smallholder farmers in Maharashtra and Karnataka through the distribution network of Godrej Agrovet.

Mr. Balram Yadav, Managing Director of Godrej Agrovet, noted: “Drip irrigation is central to improving food security, protecting water resources, and increasing the prosperity of India's farmers.”

Executive Vice President for Strategy & Business Development at Godrej Mr. Mark Kahn added: “Driptech micro-irrigation systems address a segment of farmers in India that is largely underserved.

It makes quality affordable systems available to smallholder farmers. The clogging is almost nonexistent, which is a major improvement over existing systems.” For more details readers can log on to www.driptech.com

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http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/seta/2011/01/20/stories/2011012050251700.htm

FARM QUERY

Wasteland development

Is there any place in Tamil Nadu where wasteland development work has been done?

S. Gabriel,Delhi

Wastelands in Melaneelithanallur block in Tirunelveli district have been turned profitable and farmers able to earn money from available resources. This has been made possible by Mr. David Raja Beula, Assistant Director of Horticulture, Kadayam through a project called Nellai David's eco micro economic model on wasteland development in one thousand hectares. The components of model can adjusted to attain maximum income based on the market situation. For more information you can contact Mr. David at microeconomicsdavid@yahoo.co.in, mobile: 9486285704.

Date:20/01/2011 URL: http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/seta/2011/01/20/stories/2011012050271700.htm

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Bee hive

PHOTO: G. KARTHIKEYAN

How is it that not one drop of honey leaks from the bee hive?

D. SAMPATHKUMAR,Pollachi, Tamil Nadu

Bee hives are made up of bee wax in the form of a regular congregation of hexagonal cells, about 3-5 mm across and about the same depth. These cells are built by the "worker" bees using the wax they themselves produce. They also produce the honey from the nectar of different flowers carefully collected by them.

The nectars are essentially and mainly dilute sugar solutions which are concentrated by the bees into honey. They store it in the hive cells and further concentrate it evaporating the water content by prolonged fanning of the open cells.

This renders the honey quite thick and viscous. The honey also possesses very high surface tension with the walls of the cells.The honey is so viscous that it does not flow by its own weight even if the hive is held with the open face of the cell downwards. In order to understand this, consider a single cell which is a "tubular" structure with one end closed and the other open.For the mass of the liquid in such a tube to flow, it has to deform by partly sliding along the walls. Such a process needs the liquid to have fairly low viscosity and low surface tension.On the other hand honey has extremely high viscosity and very high surface tension, preventing the necessary deformation of the mass of honey in the cell.It is the correct combination of high viscosity and surface tension of honey and the size of the cells together with the waxy material of the cell walls that hold the honey from leaking out of the hive.PROF. H. K. SAHU *Chennai Mathematical Institute, Chennai*

Date:20/01/2011 URL:
http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/seta/2011/01/20/stories/2011012050141600.htm

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Fisheries management makes coral reefs grow faster

— photo:AP

The impact: Reefs with large numbers of grazing sea urchins reduced the abundance of beneficial crustose coralline algae

Overfished reef systems have more sea urchins — organisms that in turn eat coral algae that build tropical reef systems. By contrast, reef systems closed to fishing have fewer sea urchins — the result of predatory fish keeping urchins under control — and higher coral growth rates and more structure.

These were the findings of an 18-year study of Kenya's coral reefs by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the University of California at Santa Cruz.

The destroyer

The paper appeared in the December 2010 issue of the scientific journal Ecology. The authors found that reefs with large numbers of grazing sea urchins reduced the abundance of crustose coralline algae, a species of algae that produce calcium carbonate.

Coralline algae contribute to reef growth, specifically the kind of massive flat reefs that fringe most of the tropical reef systems of the world.

The study focused on two areas — one a fishery closure near the coastal city of Mombasa and another site with fished reefs. The researchers found that sea urchins were the dominant grazer in the fished reefs, where the predators of sea urchins — triggerfish and wrasses — were largely absent.

The absence of predators caused the sea urchins to proliferate and coralline algae to become rare.

“These under-appreciated coralline algae are known to bind and stabilize reef skeletons and sand as well as enhance the recruitment of small corals by providing a place for their larvae to settle,” said Dr. Tim McClanahan, WCS Senior Conservationist and head of the society's coral reef research and conservation program.

“This study illustrates the cascading effects of predator loss on a reef system and the importance of maintaining fish populations for coral health.” The study also focused on the effects of herbivorous fish — surgeonfish and parrotfish — on coral reefs.

While these ‘grazing' fish did measurably impact the growth rates of coralline algae in reef systems, they also removed fleshy algae that compete with coralline algae.

Reefs with more sea urchins grew significantly slower than ones with more complete fish communities, according to a Wildlife Conservation Society press release.

Greater effect

The authors also found that the grazing effect was stronger and more persistent than the strong El Niño that devastated coral reefs throughout the tropics in 1998 (the study extended from 1987 until 2005).

The study shows that managing coral reef fisheries can affect coral reef growth and improving the management of tropical fisheries can help these reefs to grow and persist in a changing climate.

Published: January 19, 2011 23:36 IST | Updated: January 19, 2011 23:36 IST
January 19, 2011

Driptech launches new low-cost drip irrigation system

Driptech has launched retail sales of their low-cost drip irrigation systems in India.

Driptech is an award- winning US-based company that designs and manufactures low-cost, high quality drip irrigation systems for smallfarmers in Karnataka, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu.

Retail sales

The company is launching retail sales of their low-cost drip irrigation systems through dealer network of Godrej Agrovet in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Sales commenced last month in Hubli, and are beginning this month in Nasik, Aurangabad, and Sangli.

Driptech micro-irrigation systems provide highly uniform water application even with low pressure (such as provided by an elevated tank).

Increasing yields

After switching from flood irrigation, yields typically increase 30 per cent and water usage declines 60 per cent.

Additional benefits include less labour, less fertilizer requirement, and higher crop quality. The simplicity of the design reduces costs to less than half of that of commercial drip irrigation, makes clogging rare, and allows system installation by any local plumber.

Farmers can recoup the price of the system in as little as six months, with significant increases in income over the next three years, the lifespan of the product.

Distribution network

The CEO of Driptech, Peter Frykman, said: “We are very pleased to reach smallholder farmers in Maharashtra and Karnataka through the distribution network of Godrej Agrovet.

Mr. Balram Yadav, Managing Director of Godrej Agrovet, noted: “Drip irrigation is central to improving food security, protecting water resources, and increasing the prosperity of India's farmers.”

Executive Vice President for Strategy & Business Development at Godrej Mr. Mark Kahn added: “Driptech micro-irrigation systems address a segment of farmers in India that is largely underserved.

It makes quality affordable systems available to smallholder farmers. The clogging is almost nonexistent, which is a major improvement over existing systems.” For more details readers can log on to www.driptech.com

hindustantimes

Press Trust Of India
New Delhi, January 19, 2011
First Published: 20:50 IST(19/1/2011)
Last Updated: 20:58 IST(19/1/2011)

CII suggests measures to tame food inflation

Industry body CII today said that India and its neighbouring countries should sign a special accord for import and export of perishables to tide over the demand-supply mismatch.

"A special agreement should be signed between India and the neighbouring countries - for import-export of perishables," CII prescribed in a 10-point recommendation to tackle inflation.

This would be a confidence building measure and would ease demand-supply challenges of similar commodities between India and the neighbouring countries, it said. Food inflation, which stood at 16.91 per cent as on January 1, continues to be quite high in the current year despite normal monsoons.

This compares oddly with high inflation witnessed last year when almost half of the country had witnessed drought-like conditions that affected prices of cereals and pulses. While stating that recurrence of inflation is due to "deeper structural problems", CII said that in the short-term, government should lower import duties and tariffs on agri-products, which are now hovering around 30-50 per cent.

In order to ensure easy availability of fruits, vegetables and other perishables, including fisheries, CII has asked full exemption of these items from the provisions of the APMC Act. APMC Act allows each state to sell agri-products only in government-regulated markets.

CII also suggested that the state governments should take stern enforcement measures to curb hoarding and speculative trading. Besides, the industry body said the Centre should encourage the states to help build infrastructure, especially cold storages, to save on wastages which would help boost supplies and thereby help in price moderation. "The Government should move towards a unified national market and allow free movement of fresh produce across the country without any taxes whatsoever," it said.

Most importantly, CII said, time was ripe to usher in market reforms by compressing the agri-commodities' value chain. "The model of creating a marketing platform at village level needs to be promoted where the buyers will come to the producer groups directly rather than farmers going outside to sell their produce," CII said.

http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/652308.aspx

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Clear

Thursday, Jan 20

Max	Min
30.6°	19.2°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs	Sunrise: 6:35
Humidity: 74%	Sunset: 18:03
Wind: Normal	Barometer: 1010.0

Tomorrow's Forecast

Cloudy

Friday, Jan 21

Max	Min
31°	20°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Jan 22	**Jan 23**	**Jan 24**	**Jan 25**	**Jan 26**
26° | 19°	25° | 19°	25° | 21°	25° | 22°	26° | 22°
Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Thu, Jan 20, 2011 | Updated 07.31AM IST

20 Jan, 2011, 01.18AM IST, Jayashree Bhosale,ET Bureau

Farmers vexed as traders keep away from jaggery

PUNE: Jaggery is now about 25-35% cheaper compared to the prices this time last year in Kolhapur and Anakapalli markets because stockists have turned cautious due to the losses they incurred last year.

Kolhapur cane farmers who crush their cane for jaggery have started protests complaining of losses. Of the jaggery manufactured in Shahupuri jaggery market of Kolhapur, 80% goes to Gujarat, the top consumer. This year, Gujarat stockists have not procured jaggery till now as they suffered losses last year. “There are no orders from Gujarat as the traders there suffered losses of up to `1 lakh per truck last year,” said Nimesh Ved, former president, Shahupuri Market Association.

Butchi Raju of the Immidisetti Ramkrishniah Sons, Anakapalli, said, “The kind of losses stockists suffered last year is unheard of in the last 50 years. We purchased jaggery at an average rate of `35/kg while the average selling price was `19/kg.”

Post-Sankranti, there is not much demand for the sweetener and low sugar prices are keeping the consumers away from jaggery. “The total arrival till January 15 at the Kolhapur APMC was 13.17 lakh rave (a lump of 30 kg) as against 13.74 rave during the corresponding period of the previous year. The average price this year is `24/kg as against `32/kg last year,” said Kolhapur APMC secretary RT Patil. The supplies are less by 60,000 rave, mainly due to the delay in the beginning of the crushing operations caused by unseasonal rainfall.

The average jaggery price on January 18 in the Anakapalli jaggery market, the second largest jaggery market in the country, was `19/kg as against the average price of `24/kg in the Kolhapur APMC on the same day. The Kolhapur jaggery commands a higher price due to its quality and brand value. Organic jaggery is getting up to `30/kg in Kolhapur.

Rajaram Patil, president, Shree Chhatrapati Shahu Sahakari Gul Kharedi Vikri Sangh (the cooperative of jaggery manufacturers in Kolhapur), said, “Farmers will have to operate the jaggery units even though they are making losses because they have paid labourers. Now we want the government to step in to control the falling cane prices. A farmer who sells cane to sugar mills is getting `2,000/tonne as first advance while a farmer who crushes his cane for jaggery and gets `2,400/quintal for the sweetener spends half of the money on production and transportation cost.”

20 Jan, 2011, 01.14AM IST, Sutanuka Ghosal & Madhvi Sally,ET Bureau

Good harvest cools potato prices

KOLKATA & CHANDIGARH: Though onion prices are yet to cool down, potato prices have dropped at the retail end. An early good crop of potatoes in Punjab, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh has pushed down the prices. While in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, mandi prices of the Pukhraj variety are hovering around Rs 2.50-2.75 per kg, the mandi price is about Rs 4 - 4.50 per kg in West Bengal. Potato prices in southern India are ruling at Rs 14-16 a kg.

According to industry officials, supplies will pick up by the second week of February across the main centres of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Sachid Madan, director, Technico Agri Sciences, a subsidiary of the cigarette-to-hotel major ITC, said potato production was likely to remain at 32 million tonne and prices would be firm. “Prices will correct when cold stores open by February,” he said while adding that the processing varieties will be harvested by the second week of February.

“The prices of processing varieties such as Chipsona and Lady Rosetta are ruling at `10 a kg in

Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh whereas in Uttar Pradesh the prices are at `6.5-7 a kg," he said.

Bengal is expecting a 95-lakh-tonne production this year as well. "Weather has been favourable. Though the sowing area is slightly less this year, we expect production will be around 95 lakh tonnes," said Sanatan Santra, president of West Bengal Progressive Potato Traders Association.

At a Ludhiana mandi, Rajesh Khanna, owner of Ramji Das Benarsi Das, said potato was sold for ` 6 a kg in January first week but the price has gradually fallen. On Wednesday, spot prices were quoted at `2.50-2.75 per kg for the early-crop Pukhraj variety. He added that prices were ruling at `4- 4.50 a kg in West Bengal and `4.50 at the Khandauli mandi in Agra.

20 Jan, 2011, 01.11AM IST, Shramana Ganguly Mehta,ET Bureau

Cotton inventory to dip to 35L bales this season

AHMEDABAD: The minimum balance stock of cotton will drop to 35 lakh bales in the current crop season, putting price pressure on domestic mills that pay `50,000 per candy (a candy weighs 356 kg). The ending stock that has already come down to 44.5 lakh bales (each of 170 kg), way below the mandated 50 lakh bales, would further fall owing to late crop arrivals and possible exports, a senior textile ministry official has indicated.

"There is no bloody stock (cotton) in the market," said a ministry official privy to the sector. The cotton-dependant $62-billion Indian textile and clothing sector will have 329 lakh bales of crop this season. Of that, 58.5 lakh bales have already been exported while the ending stock needed to maintain a healthy balance, has come down to 44.5 lakh bales. "That might eventually fall to 35 lakh bales," the official said.

Cotton supplies have not kept up with expectations. So far, 162 lakh bales have arrived in the market. Although the supplies are better than last crop year when 152 lakh bales had arrived by this time, the consumption by Indian mills has gone up significantly. Mills now require about 25 lakh bales of cotton per month against 20-23 lakh bales about a year ago.

“Prices rule high at `50,000 per candy because of the shortage of the crop,” textiles secretary Rita Menon told ET. “The Cotton Advisory Board’s (CAB) estimate of an ending stock of 44.5 lakh bales is generous. We need a minimum stock balance to last two and half a months which make it 60 lakh bales.

The textile ministry is adamant that a balance of 55 lakh bales must be maintained as an ending stock. But, with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade issuing fresh licences to export 19 lakh bales, the exports have exceeded 58 lakh bales, sqeezing the ending stock,” she added.

Prices have jumped 40% in one week ever since the market is speculating a shortage in supply for local consumption owing to exports. With bilateral pressures mounting from Pakistan and Bangladesh, market is abuzz with rumours that the Indian government is allowing further export of cotton to the neighbourhood.

“A majority of over 39 lakh bales that were registered for exports with the textiles commissioner office wereshipped to China, Bangladesh and Pakistan,” textile commissioner and CAB chairperson AB Joshi said.

19 Jan, 2011, 06.14PM IST,REUTERS

India oilseeds, soyoil jump on global markets, demand

MUMBAI: Indian oilseeds and soyoil futures jumped on Wednesday, tracking overseas gains and on healthy demand in local spot markets, analysts said.

Malaysian palm oil rose to a fresh one week high on Wednesday, tracking comparative oils higher on persistent uncertainty about whether output can keep pace with robust demand. At 5:28 p.m., US soy futures were 1.02 percent higher at $14.37-¾ per bushel. "Concerns over soybean crop in Argentina due to bad weather and hopes of good Chinese demand are supporting oilseed complex," said Sudha Acharya, analyst at Kotak Commodities . A trade delegation from China will sign agreements in Chicago on Thursday to buy an unspecified amount of U.S. soybeans, the US Soybean Export Council said in a statement.

Argentina's drought-hit 2011 soybean crop could fall to or below 46 million tonnes from 54.5 million tonnes in 2010 unless much more rain falls, Hamburg-based oilseeds analysts Oil World said on Tuesday.

February soybean on India's National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange ended up 1.09 percent to 2,502 rupees per 100 kg. In the Indore spot market, soyoil was up 2.4 rupees at 640.5 rupees, while soybean rose by 10 rupees to 2,402 rupees per 100 kg.

India's oilmeal export jumped 94 percent in December from a year earlier, its sixth straight monthly rise, on robust demand from traditional buyers in Japan, Vietnam and Indonesia, data from a leading trade body showed. February soyoil finished 1.1 percent higher at 655.05 rupees per 10 kg, while April rapeseed rose by 0.65 percent to 2,953 rupees per 100 kg. In the Jaipur spot in Rajasthan, the country's top rapeseed producer, price was up 2.5 rupees at 579.3 rupees per 20 kg. The acreage under rapeseed as on Jan. 14 stood at 7.1 million hectares, compared with 6.4 million hectares during the same period a year ago, data with farm ministry showed.

19 Jan, 2011, 09.37PM IST,ET Bureau

Sugar output up 15% upto Jan 15. could pave way for exports soon

New Delhi: India’s sugar production for 2010-11 has gone up by 15% upto January 15 comapred to the same period in the previous year, smoothening the road to early reconsideration of the Centre’s recent decision to hold off a proposal to allow sugar exports upto an initial 5lt under the OGL scheme.

A food ministry official said that sugar production upto January this crop year has risen to 8.4 mt. In the thick of record food inflation which rose to 18.3% on the back of high vegetable and fruit prices and under intense attack by Opposition parties, the Centre last week decided to send to the food ministry proposal on free sugar exports to an empowered group of ministers (EGoM) to review. This, despite evidence being presented by the food ministry that sugar spot and futures prices have been dropping in the last fortnight.

A date has yet to be set for the much awaited EGoM meeting in a year when, for the first time in one and half decades, the industry finds itself in a position where it is sitting on projections of plenty at home and global sugar prices are ruling firm on fears of low influx from Brazil and Australia. Once the EGoM takes a favourable decision on the first tranche of OGL sugar exports, it is expected to lead to a higher second tranche quantity and thus pressure down global prices on the back of higher supplies from India.
Crucially, the move undermined the food ministry's own estimate that production for the year would be in the 24-24.5mt range, much higher than an annual consumption level of 23mt. To boot, the food ministry had estimated that the carryover of sugar into the year was to the tune of 5mt, increasing total availability to a high 29mt and thus allowing for, according to industry, an export of around 2mt of sugar. Curiously enough, despite apparent and intense political concern about the record food inflation and soaring food essential prices, a meeting of key ministers at the PMO (including Home minister P Chidabaram) nonetheless decided to allow export of sugar to the tune of 3lt under the Advanced License Scheme . Southern sugar mills, mainly those that have yet to fulfill their commitments, upto March 31.

Business Standard

Thursday, Jan 20, 2011

UP mills operate at low capacity on slow cane arrivals

Ajay Modi / New Delhi January 20, 2011, 0:42 IST

Labour shortage, cold weather add to woes.

Sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh (UP), country's second-largest producer, are operating at 65-70 per cent capacity owing to shortage in sugarcane arrivals.

"Labour availability has been an issue for the last 8-10 days due to the cold weather. Consequently, cane harvesting has been affected and arrivals have been low. Most mills in districts like Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Meerut, Bijnor, etc have been operating at a capacity ranging between 65 and 70 per cent," said a UP-based miller. Usually, mills in the state operate at over 90 per cent of the capacity around this time of the season. The country's top sugar companies — Bajaj Hindusthan, Balrampur Chini and Triveni Engineering — have their operations in the state.

Triveni Engineering's 16,000 tonnes crushed daily (tcd) capacity Khatauli sugar plant in Muzaffarnagar, for instance, crushed around 9,000 tonnes of sugarcane on Tuesday. Similarly, Bajaj's 12,000 tcd Kinauni plant in Meerut crushed around 7,100 tonnes of cane on Tuesday.

The low operating capacity will add to the production cost of millers and also lead to a prolonged crushing season. "We need to incur fixed cost even if the operating capacity is low. A prolonged crushing due to delayed arrival adds to our overall production cost," said another sugar miller. Industry officials, however, anticipate the situation to get better with improvement in weather.

To crush more as gur demand weakens

The state gur producers have been lacking in action in the current season. Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the two states, that were major market for the UP gur, have seen a revival in gur production. "The enthusiasm is low among gur producers as producers from Gujarat and MP are able to sell at lower rates since their production cost is low. Consequently, producers from

Surat are now catering to Haryana which was a major market for UP gur. Similarly, MP is selling gur to eastern UP rather than buying from there," said Arun Khandelwal, president, Federation of Gur Traders, Muzaffarnagar, Asia's largest jaggery market. Khandelwal said the situation would cause a diversion of cane from gur units to sugar mills. Usually, gur producers see a diversion from mills since they make prompt cash payment unlike the mills who pay after two weeks.

THE HINDU Business Line

Business Daily from THE HINDU group of publications

Thursday, January 20, 2011

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Back **Spot castor zooms on tight supply**

Our Correspondent

Rajkot, Jan. 19

Spot as well as futures prices of castor zoomed on short supply and delay in arrival of the new crop.

Prices have been rising constantly in the past 10 days and spot castorseed prices touched an all-time high.On the Rajkot Commodity exchange (RCX), March contract increased Rs 127 a quintal to Rs 4,070 from Tuesday's close of Rs 3,947.RCX spot rate touched Rs 4,565 against Rs 4,427, a gain of Rs 138 a quintal.On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, castorseed for March shot up by Rs 164.50, or 4.01 per cent, to Rs 4,270.50 a quintal, with an open interest of 5,270 lots.February month contract jumped Rs 165 to Rs 4,604, with an open interest of 6,904 lots. Arrivals were down from 40,000 bags to 25,000 bags on Wednesday in Gujarat.

spot demand

The RCX President, Mr Raju Pobaru, said: “Demand in spot is huge as shippers are buying to complete their orders. But supply is poor. Futures increased on the back of spot. It will not come down till spot prices decline.”

lower arrivals

“Cold and untimely rain affected the yield of the castor crop this year and as a result, the season started late by two months. At present, lower arrivals are pushing castor futures and spot prices higher. In the near future, chances of a decline in the prices are removte,” said Mr Harilal Chaganlal, a senior member of RCX.

Date:20/01/2011 URL: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2011/01/20/stories/2011012052072200.htm

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Back **Short supply fears in rubber overriding price rise**

Demand shortage seen at 5 lakh tonnes by 2015.

Felicitation:Mr K. Sankarananarayanan (centre), Governor of Maharashtra, handing over the K.M. Philip award to Mr R.K. Raman, Chairman, IRE 1011, at the India Rubber Expo 2011, in Chennai on Wednesday. From left are Mr Kishore Jhalaria, President of Reliance Cracker and Chemical Division; Mr Peter Philip, Managing Director, Philips Tea and Coffee; Mr K.M. Philip (seated), doyen of the rubber industry; Mr Arun Mammen, Managing Director, MRF Ltd; and Mr Vinod Simon, President, AIRIA. — Bijoy Ghosh

Our Bureau

Chennai, Jan. 19

Rubber product manufacturers are concerned more about availability than price, said Mr Vinod T. Simon, President, All-India Rubber Industries Association.

Addressing the media on the sidelines of the launching ceremony of India Rubber Expo 2011, he said though the rubber price is going up steeply, availability of the raw material is a bigger issue.

Shortage looming

“There was a supply gap of 0.5 tonnes in 2009-10. Though the country produces 8.5 lakh tonnes of rubber annually, the demand was nine lakh tonnes. Triggered by the country's growing auto sector, the demand is expected to go up to 9.5 lakh tonnes in 2010-11, thereby widening the gap to 1 lakh tonnes that needs to be bridged through imports.

“At this rate, India will face a shortage of at least five lakh tonnes of rubber by 2015,” he said.

Duty cut

However, he said the Government's recent announcement on duty cut (to 8 per cent from 20 per cent earlier) came as a breather.

Talking on the expo, which was inaugurated by the Governor of Maharashtra, Mr K. Sankaranarayanan, here on Wednesday, he said this year it is spread over 15,000 sq.mt with over 300 participating companies from India and around the world.

And the organisers expect over 20,000 visitors from over 30 countries.

About 40 eminent rubber technologists, scientists and experts from the rubber industry – Indian and international, will speak at the conference sessions on current global situation of natural and synthetic rubbers, likely trends in the future and action already in place.

A buyer-seller meet has also been organised along with CAPEXIL, which is expected to bring together at least 30 international buyers and sellers, Mr Simon said.

Date:20/01/2011 URL:
http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2011/01/20/stories/2011012050911000.htm

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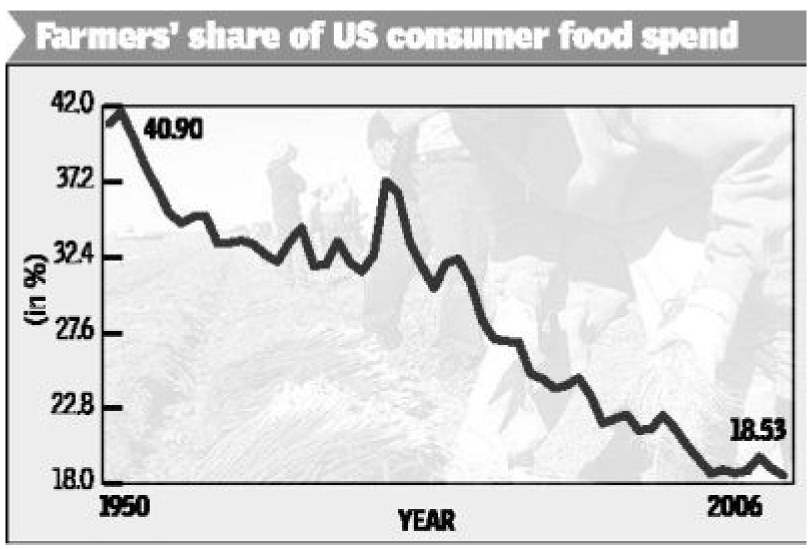
Back **Big Retail, no panacea to food inflation woes**

Harish Damodaran



Every crisis begets magic bullet solutions proffered by assorted gurus, economists included. The latest one concerns food inflation, where there is understandable indignation over the presence of too many intermediaries between the field and the fork. Such an extended value chain benefits neither the consumers (who pay through their nose) nor the farmers (who hardly gain even when retail prices go up).

The obvious remedy to this lies in 'compressing' the value chain. But how? This is where the consensus expert view is veering around to giving greater play to organised retail, including allowing 100 per cent foreign direct investment. It is believed that enabling big retail chains to buy directly from farmers and bypass the mandis would bring about the desired compression.

The case for organised retail could not, in fact, be stronger today, given the demonstrably poor conduct of the commission agents at Lasalgaon or Delhi's Azadpur mandi during the recent onion saga.

What the above argument misses, though, is an alternative possibility: Big Retail may well eliminate middlemen, thereby helping consolidate a fragmented post-harvest value chain. But would consolidation inevitably lead to compression — meaning a narrowing down of the gap between farmgate and retail food prices?

What growers reap

The evidence at least from the US — home to the likes of Walmart, Kroger, Supervalu and Safeway — suggests otherwise.

The chart shows how much of what American consumers spend on domestically-produced food actually accrues to farmers. In 1950, US farmers received over 40 cents for every food dollar spent at supermarkets. Today, that is down to about 19 cents.

Take milk. Currently, fresh whole milk is retailing at around $3.3 a gallon (Rs 40/litre). The farmer's share in this is just $1.45 (Rs 17.5/litre) or below 45 per cent. It is the same in eggs, where only $1.1 of the $2.7 store price for a dozen reaches the poultry grower. The ratios are lower at 31-32 per cent for meat products, 17-18 per cent for fresh fruits and vegetables, and 7-8 per cent on cereals and bakery items.

How does one explain the declining farm value shares despite the advent of Big Retail? One reason could be the very replacement of the earlier layers of intermediaries by a single Walmart or Safeway. This, probably, may have ended up conferring greater pricing power to these chains vis-à-vis farmers as well as consumers. The result: Consolidation sans compression.

But it is also a fact that modern retail, by itself, imposes an array of additional costs as the raw produce moves from the farmgate to the retail point. These include not just expenses incurred in handling, grading, cleaning, processing, packaging and transport of the product at each stage, but also its financing, insurance, warehousing, refrigeration, marketing, brand promotion, labelling and shelf display. Either way, the evidence points to a widening, not compression, of farm-to-retail price spreads.

Spreading it better

The spreads, if anything, are less in India in respect of many farm commodities. Dairy farmers of Amul get roughly Rs 26 on a litre of full-cream milk retailing at Rs 34 in Delhi and Rs 32 in Ahmedabad. Similarly, on the Rs 35 we pay for a kg of sugar, the cane grower in Uttar Pradesh realises nearly Rs 22.

Even on rice, bread or edible oils, the farm value shares would easily exceed 50 per cent. It is largely in fruits, vegetables and pulses that both growers and consumers get a poor deal.

How much of difference would the entry of Big Retail, then, make? To start with, they are unlikely to dispense with intermediaries, given the fragmented holdings and sheer number of farms in India – 130 million, as against 2.2 million in the US. The dependence on primary or even secondary-level produce aggregators will, hence, continue. Even if some rationalisation of the sourcing chain happens, it may not work to the farmers' advantage, as they would now be confronting more consolidated buyer pressure.

Compression from below

Instead of trying to compress the value chain from Big Retail downwards, a better way to do it, perhaps, is to start from 'below' — from the farmers upwards.

This is precisely what the National Dairy Development Board attempted during the 1990s, when it set up 300-odd 'Safal' retail outlets all over Delhi to market fruits and vegetables directly sourced from growers' associations a la Amul. But the project has failed to meet initial expectations: Of the 300 tonnes sold daily through its outlets, more than half is procured from the mandis, and only the rest comes from farmers.

The Safal venture has also been flawed in its emphasis on investing in large marketing and handling infrastructure in Delhi and Bangalore — rather than putting up more purchase centres, pack-houses and pre-cooling facilities close to where the produce is grown.

The resulting imbalance has led to its Rs 150-crore, state-of-the-art auction market in Bangalore running at barely 15-20 per cent capacity. The Safal National Exchange, billed as the first-ever electronic spot market for perishable commodities, was forced to even shut down two years ago.

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Back **Egg prices cut to avoid stockpiling**

Gayathri G.Chennai, Jan. 19

After ruling flat for almost a week at Rs 3.02 a piece, the price of wholesale egg has been slashed by 10 paise to Rs 2.92. This is help poultry farms from possible accumulation of stocks.

Sources attributed the cut in price to the holiday season when there was no truck movement to other States and slack consumption in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka – major markets for TN's shell egg trade – on account of Makara Sankaranti. Added to this is the cut in supply to the noon meal scheme due to the Pongal holidays. The trade supplies 70 lakh eggs to the noon meal scheme every day.

Mr R Nallathambi, President, Tamil Nadu Poultry Farmers' Association, said: “We don't see a further cut in prices and if at all it (slashing down the rates) happens, it won't be more than another 10 paise.”

The National Egg Co-ordination Committee has maintained the rates for layer birds at Rs 31/kg (Rs 32/kg), while the Palladam-based Broiler Coordination Committee has fixed the prices of live chicken at Rs 48/kg from last week's Rs 46. Namakkal and Palladam are the benchmarks for poultry prices in the country.

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Back **Spices Park to boost output**

Our Bureau

Kochi, Jan 19

The newly set up Spices Park at Puttady in Idukki district by the Spices Board is expected to boost the production of the globally known spices such as black pepper and cardamom in a big way besides giving new issues on storage, processing and marketing.

The Park which is to be inaugurated next month was set up at an investment of Rs 27crore on 12.5 acre, which was purchased and leased out to the Spices Board for a period of 30 years by the Cardamom Development Trust out of the cardamom development fund, a voluntary contribution made by the cardamom growers in the Idukki district. The location is well positioned in terms of availability of raw materials.

Establishing regional crop-specific Spices Parks is a well-conceived approach to have an integrated, centralised operation for post-harvest management, processing for value-addition, packaging, storage and marketing of spices and spice products. Through the Spices Park, the spice farmers will be empowered with infrastructure facilities for cleaning, colour sorting, grading, packing, warehousing and marketing which will fetch a better price realization for their produce, Spices Board officials said.

Improved quality

Due to the upgraded processing facilities, the overall quality of the finished products will also be improved. The processing facilities for value-addition to be established in the park will lead to enhanced processing capabilities of the spice industry which would facilitate the export of garden-fresh spices in value added forms. Since the Park is coming up right in the spice growing regions, the proximity of the processing units in the park would enable to forge a closer and lasting relationship among the growers, traders and exporters.

Cardamom growers to benefit

The cardamom growers will be the main beneficiaries from the Spices Park. Cardamom being a peculiar crop adapted to the particular agro-eco climatic condition in Idukki district, has limited scope for expansion to other areas. Ninety nine per cent of cardamom growers are in the small and marginal categories. They can bring the produce to the park, clean, colour sort and grade it. If there is no immediate sale of the produce, the farmers can store cardamom in the puff godown where longevity of colour is ensured even for one year.

The growers can also grade and pack their produce in their own brands carrying the details of Good Agricultural Practices and bar code, which add value and sustainability for their produce in the market.

The facilities at the park included Electronic auction for Cardamom; Cardamom processing building and raw material godowns; finished good godowns; Black Pepper processing plant; White Pepper production unit; a bank branch with core banking and ATM; a business centre, etc.

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Back **Pepper futures up on limited supply**

G. K. Nair

Kochi, Jan. 19

Pepper futures on Wednesday moved up on good buying support amid limited availability and despite liquidation from the previous close.

Even the bulls themselves said to have liquidated and yet the market closed higher.

It was explicit from the way 17 tonnes of new pepper arrived this morning were traded like hot cake, that the buyers were starving for the material. The arrivals of the new crop were not up to the mark and hence what ever came to the market was absorbed immediately, market sources told Business Line. It was traded at Rs 201 to Rs 205 a kg.

Small quantities of new pepper were being moved out directly from the primary markets also to Indore, Patna, Ranchi, Gaya etc. Because of the limited availability the buyers were aggressively covering, they said.

Arrivals continued to remain thin as the major growers who had sold old stock at Rs 215- 220 a kg earlier are said to be holding back for better prices. Besides, those having rubber are getting high prices and hence could easily afford to hold back their pepper, traders said.

Added to this, acute shortage of skilled labour for plucking the pepper has also become a factor to squeeze the supply, they said. The new crop harvesting in Karnataka is expected to commence from mid-Feb. The crop there is also said to be at previous year's levels, they said.

The cold wave conditions prevailing in the north Indian states have slowed down the domestic demand which was expected to pick up after the Makar Sankranthi.

Similar, weather conditions in the US and other overseas markets are also negatively affecting buying activities.

Total turnover increased by 3,538 tonnes to 10,820 tonnes. Total open interest dropped by 211 tonnes showing liquidation to 12,229 tonnes.

January open interest dropped by 640 tonnes to close at 666 tonnes showing switching over and liquidation. February absorbed 307 tonnes while switching over to March was 25 tonnes.

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Back **Improved buying boosts chana**

Our Correspondent

Indore, Jan. 19

Chana (gram) gained Rs 20-25 in Indore mandis on improved buying and scattered demand from millers and retailers. In the spot, chana was quoted at Rs 2,470-2,475 a quintal as demand picked up at a lower rate. On Tuesday, chana prices had zoomed to Rs 2,500-2,510 a quintal in the morning driven by fear of low yield but in the evening prices crashed to as low as Rs 2,450 a quintal with decline in demand at higher rate. With stocks of chana still lying in physical market, chana on the futures market was subdued.

On the NCDEX, chana January and February contracts slid to Rs 2,551 and Rs 2,597 a quintal as traders did not show interest in buying at the higher rate. However, the prospects for chana sown in the State for the second time after damage to the crops in the first sowing, appear to be promising, said a chana trader. Because of rains and unfavourable weather condition, the arrival of new chana in the State has been delayed by a month and in all likelihood, the new chana will not come into the market for 20 days. Moreover, because of increasing demand at an all-India level and increase in minimum support price, chana prices may not drop below Rs 2,350 a quintal, said another trader.

Firm trend in pulses

Among other pulse seeds bullishness continued in tur with its meagre arrival and rise in demand. In the spot, tur further gained Rs 100 at Rs 4,300 a quintal. Other pulse seeds ruled firm with moong quoted at Rs 5,000, masur at Rs 3,550 and urad quoted at Rs 4,200 a quintal respectively.

On the other hand dollar chana or chickpea ruled firm on the back of weak arrivals and improved demand. In the spot, dollar chana, depending upon its quality, quoted at Rs 4,200-5,300 a quintal, while in container dollar chana 42/44 count and 44/46 count quoted at Rs 5,650 and Rs 5,600 respectively. Arrival of dollar chana in Indore mandis continues to be on the lower side with merely 700 bags coming on Wednesday.

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Back **Sugar slips further on poor offtake**

Mumbai, Jan. 19

Sugar prices on the Vashi wholesale market declined further by Rs 10 a quintal on Tuesday at the spot level, and by Rs 10-20 at naka delivery.

Continued lack of demand and selling by mills weighed on the market sentiment, making it bearish. Mills are trying to reduce the burden of the current month's higher quota of 17 lakh tonnes by reducing the rates but are not getting the expected response from the buyers.

Mr Jagdish Rawal of B. Bhogilal and Co said higher quota was increasing the pressure at the mill level with the due dates nearing, but less than expected local demand kept stockists at bay for fresh buying, increasing the stock burden for producers.

Mill tender rates on limited buying declined by Rs 10-15 a quintal. Sugar prices since last Friday have been declining continuously. Upcountry buying was also absent.

Sufficient inventory on the Vashi market at about 50-60 truckloads kept traders at bay, as fresh buying may lead to further decline in sugar price.

On Tuesday evening about 14-15 mills came forward with tender offers and sold only about 75,000- 80,000 bags of sugar in the range of Rs 2,720-2,770 for S-grade and Rs 2,780-2,820 for M-grade a quintal.

Some mills seized the offer, while others kept tender offers open. There was talk of some buying by upcountry traders in rail rake quantity.

Arrivals at the Vashi market were lower at about 38-40 truckloads (each 100 bags) and local dispatches were about 30-32 truckloads. Lower demand has increased the market inventory, forcing traders to sell at lower price. There was no change in freight rates.

According to the Bombay Sugar Merchants Association, sugar rates were: Spot: S-grade Rs 2851-2,891 (Rs 2,861-2,901) and M-grade Rs 2,892-2,951 (Rs 2,891-2,951). Naka delivery rates: S-grade Rs 2,820- 2,850 (Rs 2,830-2,850) and M-grade was Rs 2,850-2,900 (Rs 2,870-2,900).

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Back **Dearth of N. India orders grinds turmeric**

Erode, Jan. 19

Turmeric prices decreased Rs 200-300 a quintal on Wednesday. At the Erode Turmeric Merchant Sales Centre, the root variety price dipped below Rs 14,000 a quintal. Sales were tepid too, said Mr R.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

Spot turmeric prices will drop further at Erode, even as the fresh crop has started coming to the market.

“All the bulk buyers and other traders are eagerly waiting for fresh orders from North India, but till date no orders have been received. Hence, the bulk buyers are staying away from buying at Erode,” he said.

In the Regulated Market, out of the 337 bags that arrived, old crop made up only 50. The fresh number eight crop fetched around Rs 12,000 a quintal, whereas the Mysore variety was sold at Rs 12,500-13,000 a quintal. The Salem hybrid variety (unpolished) fetched around Rs 13,000 a quintal. A further dip in prices is likely in the coming days. At the Regulated Marketing Committee, prices decreased by Rs 1,000 a qunital on Tuesday, but they rose about Rs 500 a quintal on Wednesday.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association Sales yard, the finger variety fetched Rs 8,009-14,534 a quintal and the root variety Rs 7,509-13,985 a quintal. Out of the 653 bags that arrived, 217 were sold.At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 14,300-14,915 a quintal and root variety Rs 13,800-14,414 a quintal. At the Regulated Marketing Committee, the finger variety sold at Rs 14,197-14,939 a quintal and root variety Rs 13,519-14,514 a quintal. Out of the 337 bags that arrived, 205 were sold.

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Back **Rice rules steady on lukewarm trading**

Karnal, Jan. 19

After witnessing an uptrend at the beginning of this week, the rice market on Wednesday ruled steady and prices were firm.

Prices of aromatic and non-basmati rice were unchanged. Pusa-1121 steam ruled at Rs 5,250-5,300 a quintal, Pusa-1121 sela at Rs 4,300-4,500, and Pusa-1121 at Rs 5,200-5,250.

Pusa (sela) ruled at Rs 3,200-3,250, and Pusa (raw) around Rs 4,250. Basmati sela quoted at Rs 5,800, and basmati raw, Rs 6,800.

Because of lukewarm trading, the prices ruled unchanged, said Mr Amit Chandna, Proprietor, Hanuman Rice Trading Company.

While the market may witness a rally in the first week of February, major changes in prices are unlikely this week, he added.

Prices of brokens of 1121 variety were: Tibar was at Rs 3,400, Dubar at Rs 2,400, and Mongra at Rs 1,700.

For the brokens of Sharbati variety, Tibar quoted at Rs 2,600, Dubar was at 2,100 and Mongra, Rs 1,500.

Permal sela ruled at Rs 1,800-2,150, while Permal steam sold at Rs 2,100-2,200 a quintal.Sharbati sela sold at around Rs 2,700 and Sharbati steam at Rs 3,100 a quintal.

Paddy trading

Around 3,000 bags of PR sold between Rs 1,040 and Rs 1,060.About 1,500 bags of Sharbati ruled at Rs 1,500-1,550.Sugandha-999 arrived in about 2,500 bags, and quoted at Rs 1,500-1,600.Around 2,500 bags of Pusa (duplicate basmati) quoted at Rs 2,000-2,100, around 6,000 bags of Pusa-1121 at Rs 2,100-2,550, and about 3,000 bags of pure basmati, Rs 2,200-2,700.

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Back **Aqua farmers asked to get exposed to global practices**

Kochi, Jan.19

Dr P. Krishnaiah, CEO, National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), has called upon rural farmers to take advantage of the knowledge and experience gained from the Asia-Pacific Aquaculture Meet organised in Kochi.

Inaugurating a farmers' meet in connection with the international Aqua meet being held for the first time in India, he said exposure to international practices will help farmers to enhance production and product diversification.

Dr K.R.Viswambharan, Vice-Chancellor, Kerala Agricultural University, said enhancing fish production is pertinent in today's world where food security is a major challenge. The general public needs to be made aware of the nutritive values and medicinal content of fish.

About 300 farmers from different states took part in the farmers meet. Experts from Bangkok, the US, Australia, the Philippines and Norway presented papers, which were instantly translated into regional languages.

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Back **Rubber user industry in a dilemma over imports**

M.R. Subramani

Chennai, Jan. 19

The natural rubber user industry finds itself in a dilemma to import 40,000 tonnes of the commodity before March 31 at a concessional Customs duty of 7.5 per cent.

“Prices in the global market are higher than the domestic price by at least Rs 25 a kg. This is a tricky issue as far as imports are concerned,” said Mr Rajiv Budhraja, Director-General of the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association, on the sidelines of the India Rubber Expo 2011.

Last month, the Centre gave its nod for the import of 40,000 tonnes of rubber under the tariff rate quota at concessional duty as part of its plan to keep a lid on rising domestic prices. The normal duty for rubber imports is 20 per cent.

On Monday, the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade issued guidelines for import and it will mainly depend on the consumption during 2008-09 by each unit. The usage has to be certified by the Rubber Board. The registration for imports began on Tuesday and will end on January 24.

Spiking prices

On Wednesday, prices for ribbed smoked sheet (RSS) 4 grade rubber hit a record Rs 227 a kg. In contrast, the comparable RSS 3 grade in the global market ended at Rs 252.08 a kg.

“Price apart, the problem will be finding rubber in February. From February to April, it is wintering season,” said Mr Budhraja.

Wintering season

Wintering season is generally a period of low production.

Rubber prices globally heat up on rising demand and lower supply. Rubber production was up a meagre five per cent at 10.7 million tonnes in 2010.

In India, projections for production during the current fiscal have been pruned to 8.51 lakh tonnes from initial estimates of 8.93 lakh tonnes as output was affected during September-October, said Mr Toms Joseph, Deputy Director (Economic Research) of the Rubber Board, during a session on Rubber Outlook at the expo.

Crude oil prices

The rise in crude oil prices is also influencing the rise in natural rubber prices. This is because synthetic rubber, the substitute for natural rubber, is derived from petroleum products.

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Back **Lower volume on offer at Coonoor tea auction**

P.S. Sundar

Coonoor, Jan. 19

A volume of 9.54 lakh kg will be offered for the third sale of the Coonoor Tea Trade Association's (CTTA) auction to be conducted tomorrow and Friday, reveals an analysis of the listing by brokers.

This is the lowest volume in over a year. In 2010, the lowest volume was 9.87 lakh kg offered on November 18. It is 4.68 lakh kg less than the last auction's offer and 5.37 lakh kg less than the offer this time last year.

Of the 9.54 lakh kg on offer, 6.60 lakh kg belongs to the leaf grades and 2.94 lakh kg to the dust grades. As much as 8.71 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 0.83 lakh kg, orthodox variety. The proportion of orthodox teas continues to be low in both the leaf and dust grades. In the leaf counter, only 0.51 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 6.09 lakh kg, CTC. Among the dusts, only 0.32 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 2.62 lakh kg, CTC.

Fresh tea volume

In the 9.54 lakh kg, fresh tea accounts for 9.09 lakh kg and 45,000 kg comprises teas remaining unsold in previous auctions. Arising from deep winter in the CIS, hot tea consumption has increased, creating a demand pressure at the Coonoor auctions. “Although at Minus 15 degrees Celsius, water ways have frozen making tea movement difficult, traders in Russia are keen to buy as stocks are fast depleting due to increased winter consumption. We are also buying to meet future demand”, an exporter told Business Line.

As absorption has been higher in the recent weeks, increased global supplies have not adversely affected Indian trade yet. “According to our compilation of data from various producing country sources, global tea production in 2010 was 113 million kg more than in 2009. But, Indian supplies were down by 13 million kg. Increased absorption has kept the market looking upwards”, Mr Rajesh Gupta, Director, Global Tea Brokers, said.

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Back **Sheet rubber hits Rs 227/kg on short covering**

Aravindan

Kottayam, Jan. 19

Spot rubber prices increased to a new high on Wednesday. The market firmed up further on fresh buying and short covering following the sharp gains in the domestic and international futures. Meanwhile, in the global market the key Tokyo and Shanghai rubber futures hit all-time highs amidst supply concerns and strong demand.

According to reports, TOCOM could hit ¥500 shortly as the start of the wintering season in major producing countries could reduce output.

While the rise in rubber prices cheers the producing sector as a whole, small industries based on the raw material are struggling to survive. At the same time, growers are suffering due to the shortage of skilled tappers since youngsters are not interested to join the profession. The unexpected and intermittent changes in weather have been another challenge faced by them during the season.Sheet rubber closed firm at Rs 227 (225) a kg, according to dealers. The grade increased to Rs 228 (225) a kg, as quoted by the Rubber Board.

FUTURES IMPROVE

The February series improved to Rs 234.70 (231.61), March to Rs 240.70 (236.76), April to Rs 249.79 (245.08) and May to Rs 255.75 (250.36) a kg for RSS 4 on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) slipped to Rs 252.28 (252.78) a kg at Bangkok. The January futures for the grade flared up to ¥465 (Rs 256.77) from ¥452.8 a kg during the day session but then remained inactive in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange (TOCOM).

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 227 (225); RSS-5: 220 (218); ungraded: 211 (208); ISNR 20: 223 (220) and latex 60 per cent: 153 (152.50).