

Published: November 14, 2011 00:00 IST | Updated: November 14, 2011 04:22 IST

## **Government to accord highest priority to agriculture**

Special Correspondent

Despite the implementation of several programmes and spending crores of rupees on the agriculture sector, the income level of farmers has not registered any perceptible improvement, said Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Sunday.

Delivering the inaugural address at the two-day conference of Collectors and police officers at the Secretariat, she said, "The GDP contribution of the agriculture sector is still low, compared to the percentage of population depending on agriculture. Therefore, my government accords the highest priority to the primary sector."

According to her, the focus was on improving productivity by adopting scientific agronomic practices, popularising better water use, farm mechanisation and strengthening the post-harvest infrastructure and agro-based industries. Stating that these initiatives would certainly ensure a second green revolution, she asked the Collectors to play a pivotal role by working closely with the farmers and ensure the government's goal of tripling their income in five years.

Agriculture, local body administration, health, education and minority backward classes would continue to be the prime focus of the State government. This government would fully focus on key issues such as eliminating poverty, bridging the rural-urban divide in infrastructure and income gap, achieving gender equity, skill building and employment generation, she said.

In order to insulate the poor and downtrodden from the adverse impact of price rise, she said a few essential commodities were distributed at subsidised cost. She asked the Collectors to closely monitor the scheme's implementation, deal with pilferage and leakages stringently and weed out bogus cards periodically.

Ms. Jayalalithaa said her government had formulated several innovative schemes to reduce dropout rates among school students even at the higher secondary level. The government

supplied educational aids and laptop computers so that rural and poorer urban children were not deprived of the facilities that were available to well-off children.

On the health sector, she said universal healthcare was possible only if the district administration was responsive and ensured the delivery of services effectively and added that a new health insurance scheme would be launched soon.

“The expectations of the people are the prime focus driving this government. Various facilities and basic amenities such as toilets, drinking water, hostel buildings and school conditions should be inspected by the Collectors regularly to ensure that these are well maintained and create conducive atmosphere for the children to perform well. Sanction has been accorded for the construction of hostels for SC, ST and Backward Class students. The Collectors should ensure that these are completed in time and also that quality is assured,” she said.

While urging the Collectors and district officials to cooperate and coordinate with each other, she said the Collectors should guide the local bodies in the identification of felt needs and prioritisation of projects and ensure that the works were executed in time without compromising on quality. The focus on local body administration would be providing drinking water, solid waste management, provision of roads and connectivity.

The objective of the conference was to primarily focus on effective maintenance of law and order; efficient delivery of public services; speedy and inclusive economic growth; building infrastructure and accelerating economic development and putting the State on a faster trajectory of growth, she said.

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## **Alagiri to write to Manmohan on higher subsidy for fertilizer**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Sharing the concern of farmers over the spurt in the prices of fertilizers and shortage in the domestic market, Union Fertilizer Minister M.K. Alagiri said on Sunday that he would write to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seeking higher government subsidy and to bring down the prices by fixing a Maximum Retail Price (MRP).

He said in a press release that fertilizers were sold in India based on international prices as 90 per cent of DAP fertilizer and 100 per cent of potash were imported.

## **NBS scheme**

Mr. Alagiri attributed the rise in fertilizer prices to the government's decision to introduce Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme. A decision to decontrol the prices of di-ammonium phosphate, muriate of potash and complex fertilizers was taken at a Cabinet meeting held last year and this was opposed by him. As a result of the scheme, the government fixed the subsidy once a year, while manufacturers and importers were given a free hand to fix the MRP.

Moreover, the rise in prices was also due to non-availability of sufficient stock, global changes, especially in the Middle East, and a global shortfall in the production of fertilizers and inputs. Hence, he had asked his department to review the NBS scheme introduced by the Union Finance Minister last year.

The Minister said the old fertilizer policy based on concessions was better, as there was scope for fertilizers to be given to farmers at affordable prices, and fertilizer manufacturers got revenue proportionate to their investment. Further, DAP, potash and complex fertilizers were subject to MRP fixed by the government, and subsidy was also fixed in line with those prices.

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## **Corn and cotton crop survey conducted**

Officials of the Agriculture Department and faculty members of the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University have conducted a survey of the cotton and corn crops in the district following reports of pest attacks after the recent spell of rain.

The team had surveyed the crops at Sithali, Kunnam, Periya Venmani, Pudevettakudi, Thungapuram, Karaipadi, Vayalur and Vayalapadi villages and recommended suitable remedial measures, Collector Darez Ahmed said in a press release.

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## **Planting of saplings begins**

Staff Reporter



Rotary District Governor V. Arumugapandian inaugurating the sapling planting exercise at Puliyangudi in Tirunelveli district.

To accomplish one of Rotary International's long-term objectives of making the globe greener and making it the best place to live by reducing the atmospheric carbon levels, the Rotary District 3212 has started planting of 1,11,111 tree saplings in six districts under its jurisdiction.

In a simple function held at Tenkasi last Friday (11-11-2011), Rotary district governor B. Arumugapandian formally inaugurated the programme.

It will continue in the districts of Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga, Virudhunagar, Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari by 70 Rotary Clubs as part of Rotary International's 'Go green and environmental protection' campaign.

Apart from the Rotarians, school and college students, and the public will be engaged in the noble exercise for which the Department of Forest has supplied the saplings at a subsidised cost. Rotary Club of Puliyangudi's P.S. Sankaranarayanan, who spearheaded the planting of over 1 lakh saplings in and around Puliyangudi last year and nurturing the saplings till today, has borne the entire cost of the programme

Members of various Rotary Clubs participated in the function.

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## Farmers demand higher support price for paddy

Staff Correspondent

*'Without MSP of Rs. 2,500 a quintal, we cannot survive'*

The Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) has decided to organise an emergency meeting of its State committee on Tuesday in Bangalore for holding a State-level dharna in protest against the failure of the Union and State governments in fixing a scientific minimum support price (MSP) for paddy.

Speaking to presspersons here on Sunday, Chamarasa Malipatil, vice-president of the State unit of the sangha, said the Union Government had recently announced the enhancement of the MSP for paddy by Rs. 80 a quintal. It was a move to divert the attention of farmers, who have been demanding that the MSP be raised to Rs. 2,500 a quintal of paddy, he said.

Mr. Malipatil said both the Union and State governments were aware of the problems faced by the farmers, who had been overburdened by the increasing price of fertilizer, agricultural inputs and labour cost.

The cost of paddy cultivation had been on the rise and the farmers would be put to heavy losses if the governments failed to fix a scientific price for paddy. Many farmers had already given up paddy cultivation and switched over to other crops such as cotton.

Mr. Malipatil said enhancing the existing MSP (which is between Rs. 1,030 and Rs. 1,000 a quintal) by Rs. 80 a quintal would not help the farmers come out of the present crisis. The State Government, which announced an additional payment of Rs. 100 a quintal of paddy on the MSP fixed by the Centre, had also failed to release any funds in this regard.

Paddy growers would be able to survive if the MSP for paddy was enhanced to a minimum of Rs. 2,500 a quintal. Otherwise, the cultivation of paddy would be reduced drastically, affecting the economical growth of the State, Mr. Malipatil warned.

On the water shortage faced by the tail-end farmers under the Tungabhadra Left Bank Canal (TLBC), he said the Government should convene a meeting of the Tungabhadra Irrigation Consultative Committee (ICC) immediately with the involvement of farmers, and take a final

decision on the period of availability of water in the TLBC for the sowing of summer (rabi) crops in the command areas.

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- *'Centre's hike of Rs. 80 a quintal not enough'*
  - *Farmers burdened by increasing costs: KRRS leader*
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## **Rain lays vegetable crops to waste**

A Correspondent

*Harvest abandoned as vegetables decay due to water-logging in fields*

Vegetables cultivated in hundreds of acres of land in Vattavada, known as the vegetable bowl of Kerala, were destroyed after incessant rain last week resulted in water-logging of the fields, especially in the low-lying areas.

### **Large-scale loss**

The main crops that face decay are carrot, cabbage, potato and beans items. In some fields, farmers have abandoned the crops and bundles of decayed carrots and cabbage were seen lying on the roadsides. Large-scale crop decay was reported in areas like Chilanthiyar and Pazhamthottam as well.

The farmers in Vattavada depend on vegetable cultivation to eke out a living. A greater area had recently been brought under cultivation due to the intervention of the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, Keralam (VFPCK). The Kudumbasree units here had formed joint liability groups and brought over 50 acres of fallow land under cultivation.

VFPCK district manager Bindu Chandran told *The Hindu* on Sunday that the worst affected crops were beetroot and cabbage.

“They had almost ripened but due to the incessant rain last week, the farmers could not begin the harvest,” she said.

## Farmer exploitation

Vattavada had been in the news following reports of the exploitation of the farmers by businessmen from Tamil Nadu, who pay in advance for the crops and collect them when harvested at a nominal price fixed by them. Though VFPCCK had opened Karshaka Swayasraya Vipani at Vattavada, only a fraction of the total production gets there as many farmers seek advance payment from businessmen at the time of sowing.

Vattavada panchayat vice-president Mohandas said that an initial estimate showed that carrot in 400 acres, potato in 150 acres, cabbage in 200 acres and various beans varieties in 300 acres had been destroyed.

The farmers will be unable to sow in the next season and they should be provided financial assistance, he said. Vegetables sent to the Aluva and Perumbavoor markets were returned due to their poor quality, delivering another blow to the farmers here.

### 'No harvest'

"I have left nearly four acres of crops without harvesting as it will not earn me anything," Muthusawmi, a farmer said. "I will be unable to sow in the next season," he said, adding that though there had been no rains for the last four days, the damage had already been done.

Thirukumaran, another farmer, said that he had harvested nearly an acre of carrot crop, but it was of no use and the merchants said that even the better quality produce would begin to decay by the time they reached the markets. Bundles of decayed vegetables lying on the roadsides are a proof of the farmers' plight, he said.

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- *Beetroot, cabbage crops worst affected*
  - *Panchayat official seeks financial assistance for farmers to sow for next season*
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## Average kuruvai yield is more in Thanjavur

G.Srinivasan

*Samba transplantation in full swing; fertilizer stock adequate*

Kuruvai harvest has been completed in 40,283 hectares in the district and the average yield has gone up compared to the last three years. V.Balasubramanian, Joint Director of Agriculture, Thanjavur, attributed the increase in the yield to three factors - early opening of the Mettur dam, frequent rain, and absence of pest or disease.

He said the average yield in the conventional method of cultivation was 6,431 kg per hectare. This was 927 kg per hectare more than the average yield in the last three years.

The average yield in the year 2008-09 was 5,843 kg per hectare, in 2009-10, 5,122 kg, and in the year 2010-11, 5,547 hectares. The average yield for these three years was 5,504 hectares. The yield was more in system of rice intensification (SRI) method of cultivation with the maximum being 9,100 kg per hectare. The average yield in SRI method is 7,623 kg per hectare.

Samba transplantation is going on in full swing in the district.

The plan is to raise samba and thaladi in 1,35,000 hectares - samba in 1,05,000 hectares and the rest for thaladi. So far transplantation has been completed in 1,03,399 hectares.

Transplantation in rest of the areas would be completed in another 10 days, Mr.Balasubramanian said. "We hope to get a good yield in samba too."

He said there is no dearth of fertilisers in the district. Available stock as on Sunday is 22,280 tonnes while the requirement is 24,600 tonnes for the month of November. Available stock is 13,309 tonnes of urea, 4,169 tonnes of di ammonium phosphate, (DAP), 1,882 tonnes of potash and 2,920 tonnes of complex. The requirement is 14,600 tonnes of urea (for the month of November), 2,400 tonnes of DAP, 3,800 tonnes of potash and 3,800 tonnes of complex.

Mr.Balasubramanian said on Sunday, 2,600 tonnes of urea from Rashtriya Chemical Fertilisers reached Thanjavur by rail and was being distributed to various centres.

About 2,600 tonnes of SPIC urea, 2600 tonnes of potash from Tuticorin, and 1300 tonnes of MFL urea would reach here on November 14, 15 and 16.

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- *Harvest completed on 40,283 hectares*
  - *Plan to raise samba and thaladi on 1,35,000 hectares*
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## Garbage to be converted into manure and bio fuel

P. Sudhakar

*Private firm to implement solid waste management project*



SOLUTION SOON: Corporation employees working at the garbage dumping yard at Ramaiyanpatti on the outskirts of Tirunelveli.

To deal with problems cropping up from the Ramaiyanpatti garbage dumping yard on the outskirts of the town, the Corporation has proposed to execute a solid waste management programme by involving a private agency, which will convert the degradable refuse into bio manure and green fuel.

According to an estimate, nearly 130 tonnes of the 160 tonnes of garbage generated within the Corporation limits is being collected and dumped at the Ramaiyanpatti garbage yard despite frequent agitations being staged by the people living near the facility. As the garbage dumped at

this point for the past several years provides a potential breeding ground for house flies and since foul smell emanating from the yard is felt intolerable, the police officials used to pacify the agitating crowd even though they block traffic on the busy Tirunelveli-Sankarankoil highway.

Moreover, the water discharged from a sewage treatment plant near the garbage dumping yard, which was established to treat the sewerage pumped from the underground drainage system, into the Kodagan Channel also triggers the farmers' protest since they use the water for irrigation.

After their repeated appeals to the urban civic body went in vain, the Ramaiyanpatti residents have approached the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court against the dumping of garbage in the residential area. Since the Supreme Court of India has instructed all corporations across the country to have effective solid waste management programme in their jurisdiction for converting the degradable refuse into manure, the petitioners believe that the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court's verdict would put an end to their decade-old ordeal.

To avoid all these law and order and legal issues, the corporation has proposed to establish a solid waste management yard at Ramaiyanpatti to convert a portion of the garbage into manure and take the non-degradable refuse to recycling.

When the Corporation recently floated tenders for identifying the contractors for the solid waste management programme, Madurai-based AAPL Infra Private Limited has been shortlisted for implementing it.

This firm will convert the degradable garbage into bio manure and green fuel and treat the water from the underground drainage to be used for cultivating fodder and other greenery.

“The infrastructure to be developed under this programme on 12 acres of land to be provided by the Corporation on lease for 20 years will be on the basis of ‘Build, Operate and Transfer,’ said corporation sources.

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## **Farmers demand higher support price for paddy**

Staff Correspondent

*‘Without MSP of Rs. 2,500 a quintal, we cannot survive’*

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- *'Centre's hike of Rs. 80 a quintal not enough'*
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## Rains lay waste to vegetable crops

A Correspondent

*Farmers abandon harvest as crops decay due to water-logging*

Vegetables cultivated in hundreds of acres of land in Vattavada, known as the vegetable bowl of Kerala, were destroyed after incessant rain last week resulted in water-logging of the fields, especially in the low-lying areas.

The main crops that face decay are carrot, cabbage, potato and beans items. Large-scale crop decay was reported in areas like Chilanthiyar and Pazhamthottam as well.

The farmers in Vattavada depend on vegetable cultivation to eke out a living. A greater area had recently been brought under cultivation due to the intervention of the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, Keralam (VFPCCK). The Kudumbasree units here had formed joint liability groups and brought over 50 acres of fallow land under cultivation.

VFPCCK district manager Bindu Chandran told *The Hindu* on Sunday that the worst affected crops were beetroot and cabbage. "They had almost ripened but due to the incessant rain last week, the farmers could not begin the harvest," she said.

Vattavada had been in the news following reports of the exploitation of the farmers by businessmen from Tamil Nadu, who pay in advance for the crops and collect them when harvested at a nominal price fixed by them. Though VFPCCK had opened Karshaka Swayasraya Vipani at Vattavada, only a fraction of the total production gets there as many farmers seek advance payment from businessmen at the time of sowing.

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The farmers will be unable to sow in the next season and they should be provided financial assistance, he said. Vegetables sent to the Aluva and Perumbavoor markets were returned due to their poor quality, delivering another blow to the farmers here.

“I have left nearly four acres of crops without harvesting as it will not earn me anything,” Muthusawmi, a farmer said. “I will be unable to sow in the next season,” he said, adding that though there had been no rains for the last four days, the damage had already been done.

Thirukumaran, another farmer, said that he had harvested nearly an acre of carrot crop, but it was of no use and the merchants said that even the better quality produce would begin to decay by the time they reached the markets. Bundles of decayed vegetables lying on the roadsides are a proof of the farmers' plight, he said.

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### Farmers briefed on rice intensification

K. Manikandan



Educative: Officials of the Agriculture Department of St. Thomas Mount Block demonstrating the method of System of Rice Intensification.

K. Manikandan

A demonstration of System of Rice Intensification (SRI) was made by officials of the Department of Agriculture of St. Thomas Mount Block at Nanmangalam on Wednesday last. The demonstration was made in paddy fields of Purushothaman. Suresh Bright, Assistant Director of Agriculture of Mount Block, made the demonstration. He said that farmers these days had to produce more grains as the expanse of cultivable land was shrinking at a rapid pace due to urbanisation.

Through SRI, the cost of cultivation could be reduced, while at the same time, the yield and subsequently profit could be increased. As the 'samba' season was fast approaching, it would be immensely beneficial for farmers to go in for SRI. According to K. Vijayapriya, Agriculture Officer of Mount Block, for cultivate paddy on one acre of land, it was enough to raise the

nursery on just one cent with two kilograms of paddy seeds. Through the raised bed method, mat nurseries could be raised. A. Malaiarasan, Deputy Agriculture Officer and Iyappan, Assistant Agriculture Officer, were among other officials present on the occasion. More than 25 farmers took part in the awareness programme.

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## **Mushrooms in big demand in city market**

Ravi.P.Benjamin

*Awareness has increased about the benefits of the fungi*

Mushrooms have become a favourite food among health-conscious people, thanks to the awareness created by experts about their benefits.

Mushrooms until a few years ago had very few takers and were not a very popular item on the menu. Things have changed since then as the demand for mushrooms is soaring and markets are importing mushrooms from Hyderabad.

As the fungal offshoot arrives in Rythu Bazzars and other places, they are sold like hot cakes and 'no stock' board greets you in a couple of hours.

The mushroom culture wing of the Department of Horticulture rose to the sudden demand for mushrooms in the markets and stepped up training programmes for housewives and unemployed youth for creating awareness on its culture and marketing the product and its by-products.

### **Good for diabetics**

"Mushrooms have high protein content, are easily digestible, have less carbohydrates, are rich in vitamins and minerals, cholesterol-free, affordable and have nutrients equal to non-vegetarian food", says Horticulture Assistant Director S. Ram Mohan.

To top it all it is good for diabetics as it is cholesterol and sugar-free and rich in fibre.

Oyster Mushroom, Maharaja Mushroom and Milky Mushrooms are the three varieties available in the market.

The Maharaja Mushroom costs about Rs.120 per kilogram and the other two Rs.80 and Rs.100 respectively. The city climate is suitable for mushroom culture and the backyard kitchen gardens can undertake the culture for family consumption. For commercial culture 1 to 10 cents of land is required. The Horticulture department supplies quality mother spawns for cultivation.

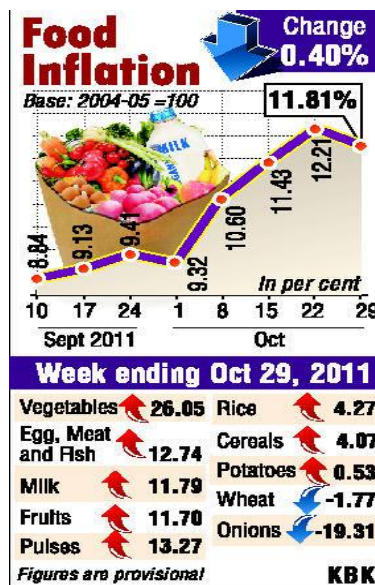
Subba Rao from Vijayawada who attended the training programme says that private trainers were charging Rs.3,000 for a week's training while he had received free training from the horticulture department. Being the lone training centre with well equipped laboratory facilities, youngsters, farmers and housewives are clamouring for training and are coming from as far as Vijayawada, Godavari districts, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts and even from Orissa to Visakhapatnam. Narayana, a mushroom trader says that there is a new found love for the once ignored product due to increased health consciousness among the people.

He says that his shop in Rythu Bazaar alone sells Rs.2,000 worth in the morning hours every day.

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- *Private trainers are charging Rs.3, 000 for a week's training in mushroom cultivation*
  - *A trader in Rythu Bazaar sells Rs.2, 000 worth in the morning hours every day*
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### Food inflation falls to 11.81 per cent



Food inflation eased marginally to 11.81 per cent for the week ended October 29 from 12.21 per cent in the previous week but the fall brought no relief to the common man as prices of almost all edibles such as fruits, vegetables, milk and pulses continued to rule at high levels.

The only solace that the WPI numbers appeared to offer to the consumer is that food inflation during the like week of 2010 was way higher at 12.68 per cent. As per official data, vegetables continued to rule dearer by 26.05 per cent on a yearly basis while prices of pulses were higher by 13.27 per cent, fruits by 11.70 per cent, milk by 11.79 per cent and cereals by 4.07 per cent. The protein-rich items also remained costlier by 12.74 per cent

### **PTI Adds**

Eggs, meat and fish also became 12.74 per cent more expensive on an annual basis, while cereal prices were up 4.07 per cent.

However, onions became 19.31 per cent cheaper. Wheat prices were also down 1.77 per cent year-on-year during the week under review.

Inflation in the overall primary articles category stood at 11.43 per cent, compared to 12.08 per cent in the previous week. Primary articles have over 20 per cent weight in the wholesale price index.

Inflation in non-food articles, including fibres, oilseeds and minerals, was recorded at 6.41 per cent during the week under review.

Fuel and power inflation stood at 14.50 per cent during the week ended October 29, unchanged from the previous week.

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### **Let's make climate change talks inclusive**

M. S. Swaminathan, Kanayo F. Nwanze





*The Hindu* Climate-resilient sustainable agriculture requires knowledge. Successful projects such as these can provide a model for others to follow. Knowledge transfer that brings the benefits of research from the laboratory to the farm is essential.

*Price volatility and the persistence of widespread and hidden hunger underline the need for enhancing the productivity and profitability of smallholder agriculture in an environmentally sustainable manner.*

When world leaders sit down again to discuss climate change, we hope that the people who live and work on the world's 500 million small farms will be with them, at least in spirit. Their voice — and the issue of agriculture as a whole — has, for too long, been missing from the conversation. But without increased support to smallholder farmers now, the number of hungry people will grow, and future food security will be placed in jeopardy.

The upcoming 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 — marking the twentieth anniversary of the landmark Earth Summit that produced Agenda 21, “a roadmap” for sustainable development — will both need to ensure that agriculture and the world's smallholder farmers are high on the agenda if we are to overcome the many challenges we face in achieving the Millennium Development Goal 1.

## The front line

In the last 20 years the global population has risen from about 5.3 billion to seven billion; the reality of climate change has been accepted beyond doubt; and the number of hungry people in the world has remained stubbornly around the one billion mark. Meanwhile, aid to agriculture has only just recently begun to pick up after decades of stagnation. More needs to be done — a lot more — and supporting smallholder farmers must be at the heart of any agenda.

The rural poor across the world, including India, have contributed little to human-induced climate change, yet they are on the front line in coping with its effects. Farmers can no longer rely on historical averages for rainfall and temperature, and the more frequent and extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, can spell disaster. And there are new threats, such as sea level rise and the impact of melting glaciers on water supply.

How significant are small farms? As many as two billion people worldwide depend on them for their food and livelihood. Smallholder farmers in India produce 41 per cent of the country's food grains, and other food items that contribute to local and national food security. Small farmers cannot be ignored, and special attention must be given to the most vulnerable groups — particularly women, who make up a large percentage of farmers in the developing world.

Small farms also add up to big business: In the world's 50 least developed countries, agriculture is the backbone of the economy, accounting for 30 to 60 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and employing as much as 70 per cent or more of the workforce. Addressing the plight of smallholders isn't just a matter of equity, it's a necessity if we are going to be able to feed ourselves in the future. Smallholders farm 80 per cent of the total farmland in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. If we don't help them to adapt to climate change, their achievements — feeding a large portion of humanity — will be endangered.

With appropriate support, smallholders can play a key role in protecting our environment, for example through actions that contribute to carbon sequestration and limit carbon emissions (planting and maintaining forests, engaging in agro-forestry activities, managing rangelands and rice lands, and watershed protection that limits deforestation and soil erosion).

To continue farming in a sustainable way in the face of climate change, rural women and men need to be given the resources to cope with the challenges. Smallholder farmers need support such as resilience-building technologies (including drought- and salt-tolerant seed varieties and new methods of rainwater harvesting), and training in sustainable practices of conservation

agriculture, such as minimum-till farming to reduce erosion and moisture loss. Investing in adaptation measures now will be far less costly than in the future.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the M.S. Swaminathan Foundation, together with the government of India and other partners, have undertaken a range of projects to do just that.

For example, in Tamil Nadu, we have been supporting rural communities to produce and market nutri-cereals like millet, which can easily grow in dry and arid environments. We worked with smallholder farmers to use simple techniques to increase their yields, while also helping rural women create and market modern recipes — for example, a millet malt drink now being sold in major health food stores in India. The result has been not only increased food for the community, but also increased income and non-farm employment opportunities.

To help farmers adapt to increasingly dry conditions, a programme in Chhattisgarh has expanded cultivation of traditionally produced Niger seed oil, which grows well in areas that receive little rain. Land and forest regeneration were promoted to improve soil structure and moisture levels, and solar energy technology and biogas digesters have been introduced, which reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as the need for fuelwood. Another project in the northeast has helped restore degraded *jhum*land and has benefited almost 40,000 households in 860 villages.

Climate-resilient sustainable agriculture requires knowledge. Successful projects such as these can provide a model for others to follow. Knowledge transfer that brings the benefits of research from the laboratory to the farm is essential.

Programmes targeted at vulnerable groups such as women and tribal communities are particularly important. IFAD-supported programmes and projects in India promote tribal development by building and strengthening grassroots institutions that enable vulnerable people to plan and manage their own development, negotiate improved entitlements, and broaden their livelihood opportunities. Conferences and talks among world leaders can do many things but they don't feed people. We hope that leaders will keep in mind those who do: the smallholder farmers. Price volatility and the persistence of widespread, endemic and hidden hunger underline the need for urgent attention to enhancing the productivity and profitability of smallholder agriculture in an environmentally sustainable manner. This is the pathway to

increasing agriculture's contribution to climate change mitigation as well as to sustainable food security.

*(Prof. M.S. Swaminathan is Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, and Chairman, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. Kanayo F. Nwanze is President, International Fund for Agricultural Development, a U.N. agency and international financial institution dedicated to helping poor, rural people overcome poverty.)*

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*By Athul Lal A G*

*13 Nov 2011 02:23:57 AM IST*

### **Farmers live on borrowed time**

KALPETTA: Amidst the arecanut and coconut garden sprawling over 1.37 acres of land in Thrikkeppatta lies the house of farmer P S Varghese who had committed suicide.

At first sight one would wonder why a man who owned this much land and a beautifully-built house would end his life for having a financial debt of just over Rs 3 lakh; perhaps, an amount of debt every Kerala family might have. An inquiry into this question would expose the other aspect of farmer suicides in Wayanad: the psychological, social and cultural factors and efforts to sustain the changing lifestyle.

The house of Varghese had roofing with asbestos sheets but he had managed to make it appear like a terrace building from a distance, even from the courtyard. "Be it in farming or in other matters, he had maintained certain standards. He had always talked about giving quality education to children and conducting their marriages properly. Perhaps, all these concerns coupled with consecutive loss in farming might have... Anyway, we could have avoided that even by selling a portion of our property," said Jessy, Varghese's wife, who has been working as a medical representative for the last 11 years and has three daughters - Renju, Sinju and Basily.

The story of deceased farmer C P Sasidharan in Mothakkara is somewhat different as he had

never told anybody about his borrowings from private sources, not even to his wife Yasoda. "He did not like being enquired about those things. When someone comes, he used to talk to them outside the house. We came to know about such debts amounting to Rs 3 lakh from the suicide note only," said Yasoda.

Sasidharan had been an active CPM worker and had a cordial relationship with the locals. "A week before his death, Sasidharan mobilised a sum of Rs 5000 to help one Vellan of the tribal hamlet who was admitted to hospital. Such a man could not keep that enthusiasm about his own life," said Sasi, the brother-in-law of Sasidharan.

Clinically, these suicides are related to adjustment disorders with emotional disturbances. These are egoistic suicides due to mental stress, family problems and alcoholism besides agrarian crisis, says psychiatrist and former director of Institute of Mental and Neuro Sciences (IMHANS), Kozhikode, Dr Suresh Kumar, who has done extensive research in suicide in Wayanad. Dr Suresh adds, "Majority of farmers is under stress as they could not cope with the changed lifestyle. During the 1970s and 80s, they earned well and had a good living. Now, due to repeated crop failure, they fail to maintain their lifestyle and in turn resort to pseudo finance planning like using bank loans and money borrowed for high interest to sustain high quality lifestyle instead of investing in agriculture. The ego gets shattered when there is financial crisis. They cannot accept even a slight insult to ego. They suffer a mental breakdown and commit suicides."

According to relatives, two among the three deceased farmers had been victims of alcoholism as well. "Often, these are not well-thought attempts but impulsive. The thinking will be tubular and the majority will consume alcohol during the time, which gives a pseudo energy to remove all inhibitions leading to suicide," he said.

## **Pepper prices to stay firm on lower output**

### **Excessive rainfall leads to a fall in Kerala output**

The buoyancy in pepper prices in the last few months has been attributed to the general shortfall in output in the producing countries. The trend is likely to continue, given the forecast of a lower crop for the next year.

Production in India for 2011-12 has been predicted at 43,000 tonne, which is around 5,000 tonne lower than the previous year's. Excessive rainfall has led to a drop in production in the main producing region of Kerala. International Pepper Community has estimated that the global pepper output may decline by 6,500 tonne to 3.10 lakh tonne.

### **Near-month futures show a bullish trend**

Domestic spot prices have remained above 300 per kg since mid-August. After reaching 358 per kg in the second half of October, the prices witnessed a gradual fall. They dropped to 335 per kg with a slight improvement in the supply situation as more carryover stock came into the market.

But the forecast of a lower crop has pushed up the prices again. On November 11, spot prices rallied to 342 per kg. Near-month futures are showing a bullish trend. Indian parity in the international market was in the range of \$7,450 to \$7,500 per tonne, about \$300 lower than Vietnam's.

### **Exports grew at 12% during April-August 2011**

Indian exports have been on the rise in the last few months and inventory is almost exhausted. Exports in April-August 2011 period showed 12% rise at 8,750 tonne. Vietnam and India were

the only countries that showed a rise in exports.

### Harvest to pull prices down in Dec-Jan

The availability of Vietnamese and Indian crops in December-January could pull the prices down to a certain extent. But the absence of inventory in major producing countries like Vietnam and India, coupled with a lower crop in India, could perk up the prices.

## THE HINDU Business Line

### US' Briggs and Stratton buys Indian farm machines maker

R.Yegya Narayanan

*Premier Power estimates acquisition value at \$3 million*

Coimbatore, Nov. 13:

Coimbatore-based agricultural machinery manufacturer Premier Power Equipments and Products Pvt Ltd has been acquired by the US-based Briggs & Stratton for about \$3 million.

The company designs, manufactures and markets farm equipment such as tillers, weeders, pumpsets, mini combine harvester, transplanters and gensets.

It was also sourcing products from Briggs & Stratton and was a distributor for B&S engines and has a dealership network across the country.

Mr Rajkumar Arumugam, Managing Director, PPE& PPL (now a 100 per cent subsidiary of Briggs & Stratton), put the value of the acquisition at about \$3 million in cash. The Coimbatore company had a sales turnover of nearly \$1 million last year.

He said that the core customer base of Premier was small and marginal farmers requiring specialised machines for land preparation, irrigation, weeding and harvesting.

Adverting to the market potential for the agricultural machineries in the country, Mr Arumugam said that the demand for farm machines was growing due to the labour shortage and by the encouragement given for mechanisation through subsidies.

While not spelling out details of the investment plans, he said that a substantial investment has been lined up for the capital expansion programme aligned with the company's growth plans and it has 'planned even more investments in the next five years for new product development and capital expansion'. He expected the employee strength to get a boost in view of planned growth.

Asked about the market size of the agricultural machines in India, Mr Arumugam put it around \$8.5 billion including all machineries, much of which is accounted for by tractors.

He felt that the acquisition of Premier was a 'very strategic move' not only for the Indian market but for the other nearby markets such as Africa and South Asia with Premier becoming the hub for most of the growth initiatives in this region.

The acquisition also provided the US parent an opportunity to enter the agricultural machinery segment as B&S was mainly into the engines, generator and lawn and garden segments.

Briggs & Stratton based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the US, was the world's largest manufacturer of gasoline engine for outdoor power equipments. Its wholly-owned subsidiary Briggs & Stratton power products group, LLC is a designer and manufacturer of lawn, garden products etc.

In a press release, Mr Todd Teske, Chief Executive Officer of Briggs & Stratton Corporation, said the acquisition was a step forward 'in executing our strategy to expand in developing regions of the world in order to diversify our product and geographic portfolio of the business' and the acquisition would power its future growth in the country.

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### **Govt proposes minimum support price for oil palm**

VISHWANATH KULKARNI & HARISH DAMODARAN

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Aims to incorporate it in 12th Plan



## India's edible oil Imports

	<b>Qty*</b>	<b>Value**</b>
1990-91	4.85	322.22
1995-96	10.62	2,261.93
2000-01	41.77	5,976.53
2005-06	42.88	8,960.99
2006-07	42.69	9,539.90
2007-08	49.03	10,301.08
2008-09	67.19	15,837.47
2009-10	80.34	26,483.32
2010-11	67.36	29,442.16

\*Lakh tonnes; \*\*Rs crore.

New Delhi, Nov. 13:

The Centre plans to bring oil palm under the ambit of the minimum support price (MSP) mechanism. This comes even as concerns are mounting over a spiralling edible oil import bill and the apparent potential of oil palm cultivation to bridge the growing domestic supply-demand gap.

"We have been asked to prepare a detailed report on MSP and other strategies for promoting oil palm cultivation in the country. We will complete the report in the next three weeks so that it can be incorporated under the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2012-13 to 2016-17)," the Chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), Dr Ashok Gulati, told *Business Line*.

Oil palm is the only crop capable of yielding four tonnes or more of oil in a hectare. Indigenous oilseeds such as groundnut or rapeseed-mustard, by comparison, can give at the most 600-800 kg.

"We are today importing more than Rs 29,000 crore worth of edible oil, with demand increasing three times faster than that of cereals. Given the higher expenditure elasticity for it on account of rising incomes as well as changing food habits, the import bill could reach Rs 300,000 crore in the next 10 years, assuming a business-as-usual scenario. If you want to save on that, you will

have to act now and it can happen only if oil palm cultivation is taken up on a war-footing,” Dr Gulati noted.

But that is not easy, as oil palm is not an annual or seasonal crop. The oil palm seedlings that are planted take 1.5 years to start flowering and yield fresh fruit bunches (FFBs, from which the oil is extracted) only from the fourth year.

The yields are also low initially and start rising only from the seventh year. The yield from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> year of plantation averages out to around 20 tonnes of FFB/hectare, giving 4 tonnes of crude palm oil (CPO) at an oil recovery of 20 per cent.

“The MSP mechanism here has to be designed differently. In the first four years, you'll have to give something to the farmer for the opportunity cost on account of his not growing some other crop and foregoing revenues in the process. Besides, we may have to extend a capital subsidy for the initial investments in good quality seedlings, drip irrigation and other one-time expenses during the first four years,” Dr Gulati explained.

As regards the MSP – to be applicable from the fourth year – Dr Gulati said that it will have to be based on a long-term import parity price (IPP) of CPO. Since global CPO prices are volatile, there would be the need to fix a trigger point. The moment international prices fall below the long-term IPP (which has to be worked out), a tariff would kick in, so that imports do not come in below that rate.

According to Dr Gulati, the IPP is bound to go up with CPO prices getting locked with global energy prices, courtesy palm oil being increasingly diverted towards production of bio-diesel. That would make domestic oil palm cultivation all the more viable. The CACP estimates the production cost to work out to about Rs 44,000 a tonne, which is less than ruling landed price of roughly Rs 50,000 for imported CPO.

The 2011-12 Union Budget has provided Rs 300 crore for bringing 60,000 hectares area under oil palm plantations. “We need to be more ambitious and invest, may be Rs 3,000 crore over the next five years and Rs 10,000 crore over 10 years. It has to be done if we want to save on Rs 300,000 crore of imports,” Dr Gulati added.

Currently, oil palm acreage in India is about 1.75 lakh hectares as against the estimated potential of 10.3 lakh hectares.

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### **Lower prices may impact cotton planting next year**

M.R. SUBRAMANI



**Mumbai, Nov. 13:**

Cotton plantings in the country could be lower next year since the average price for the natural fibre is likely to rule lower this year.

“Globally, cotton production this year will be above consumption. The average price will be lower but it will be higher than historic lows,” said Mr Terry P. Townsend, Executive Director of International Cotton Advisory Committee.

The ICAC has projected global cotton output for this season that began in August at 27 million tonnes (mt), while estimating consumption at 25 mt. India's share in production is seen at 6 mt (355 lakh bales of 170 kg each) and in consumption 4.5 mt (281 lakh bales)

Cotton prices, which increased to a record \$2.19 a pound in March this year, have dropped to 55 per cent to \$0.9605, discouraging growers.

Higher prices last season encouraged growers in the country to increase area under cotton to 118 lakh hectares from around 111 lakh hectares last season and around 95 lakh hectares the previous season. In Brazil, the area under cotton has increased by over 60 per cent this year.

“More growers have responded to higher prices this year. A similar reaction next year will lead to drop in acreage,” said Mr Townsend, who is here to attend the Fifth World Cotton Research Conference.

“In India, production has peaked and we expect the area to decline. But consumption will go up and the gap between production and consumption will narrow,” he said.

The ICAC is concerned over the declining share of cotton in global textiles trade. During 1960s, cotton made up two-thirds of the total textiles trade with silk, wool and polyester making up the rest. However, currently cotton enjoys only a one-third share, having given way to polyester.

“Polyester is being consumed more than cotton now because it is cheaper than the natural fibre,” he said.

Asked how the ICAC viewed the ban on Indian cotton exports, Mr Townsend said that his organisation was vehemently opposed to such intervention process.

“Subsidy for cotton in the US, some measures taken by China to curb trade and India's export ban are highly detrimental for growth in cotton,” he said.

He also criticised “some elements in the industry” for running a campaign to ban cotton exports. “The industry has gained from various Government policies. But going on a campaign to ban exports is an effort to hide its inefficiency behind trade policies,” Mr Townsend said.

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***More growers have responded to higher prices this year. A similar reaction next year will lead to drop in acreage. – Mr Terry P Townsend, Executive Director of International Cotton Advisory Committee***

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### **Pepper perks up on demand, limited supply**

G.K. Nair

Kochi, Nov. 13:

Pepper market reacted sharply last week, after remaining bearish in the week before last, pushing up the prices of all contracts on the exchange.

There have been calculated moves to pull the prices down, despite firmer overseas markets. Bearish propaganda influenced weak long position holders to panic-sell. All such players had liquidated and left the market.

Investors holding positions did not show interest to liquidate and, instead, were switching over to nearby positions because of “good badla,” market sources told *Business Line*.

Overseas buyers looking for quality material aided demand for Indian stocks, opting, for example, for the Malabar Garbled.

Availability in India continues to be limited as the growers and primary market dealers, who can afford to hold for long, do not want to part with their produce till they get their anticipated price.

This phenomenon has resulted in a squeeze in ready pepper supply.

Meanwhile, the domestic demand is met by sales by upcountry dealers who are reportedly releasing their pepper stocks at current prices, which are slightly below origin prices. Arrival of the new crop is expected by mid- December /early January.

All the contracts on the NCDEX showed an increase last week on good buying support. November, December and January contracts went up by Rs 1,615, Rs 1,450 and Rs 1,135 respectively to close at Rs 34,300, Rs 34,850 and Rs 35,145 a quintal.

Spot prices also recovered last week by Rs 600 a quintal to close at Rs 32,800 (ungarbled) and Rs 34,300 (garbled) a quintal at the weekend.

Indian parity in the international market was at \$7,400 a tonne (c&f) and remained competitive.

IPC report

Black pepper prices continued to fall with the exception of local prices in Brazil, an International Pepper Community (IPC) report said. This decline is after the pepper prices achieving a peak in October.

Pepper crop in India will start in December/January. Market situation in India influences on price developments in other producing countries.

In Vietnam, black pepper prices also decreased, with levels roughly same to that happening in India, with a very limited activity.

In Lampung prices were relatively stable, but the volume of transaction was very small. Farmers holding small stocks still expect a better price. WHITE PEPPER

Market for white pepper also continued the bearish trend. In Bangka, white pepper price was stable, while in other source prices decreased up to 3 per cent.

Price indications for different origins(\$/tonne) (c&f) New York last weekend were: MG1 asta – 7,625-7,725; Vietnam asta – 8,000-8,050; Vietnam asta new crop – 7,825-7,850

Brazil asta – 7,200 (f.o.b); Brazil B1 – 7,150 (f.o.b); Brazil B2 – 7,100 (f.o.b). Vietnam white pepper (double washed)- 10,200; Muntok - 10,200; Ecuador – 10,200

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## Showing farmers the way to Samruddhi

G Chandrashekhar

*BASF INITIATIVE*



Win-win: BASF gained 60 per cent annual growth in business with plant protection products from soya bean and farmers in the company network increased their yields by 30 per cent and net incomes by 60 per cent

Ludwigshafen, Germany, Nov. 13:

Networking with farmers to understand their specific input needs and educating them on best agronomic practices is the sure way to

prosperity, not only for the farmers but also for the company. This is what BASF, a global chemicals giant, discovered five years ago; and thus was born the Samruddhi (prosperity, in Sanskrit) project.

Starting with soya bean in Madhya Pradesh (known as the country's soya bean State) where crop yields are as low as 1,000 kg per hectare, the project is now transforming the lives of a few lakh growers who are the recipients of the company agronomic guidance.

“We discovered that reasons for low yields were manifold including

inappropriate fertiliser application, excessive seed rates, improper use of crop protection chemicals and so on in addition to a general lack of knowledge about good agricultural practices,” Mr Sandeep Gadre, Business Director for South Asia's Crop Protection division, told *Business Line*.

Pointing out that BASF gained 60 per cent annual growth in business with plant protection products from soya bean and farmers in the company network increased their yields by 30 per cent and net incomes by 60 per cent, Mr Gadre said the Government of Madhya Pradesh has supported the Samruddhi project following its resounding success.

Now, the project has spread to cover potato and onion, Mr Gadre said adding that Maharashtra will be the focus of attention for onion. The project implementation includes town-hall type meetings with growers as well as on-farm field trials by company's agronomists.

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## **Tea prices decline at Kochi auction on arrivals**

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**Kochi, Nov. 13:**

Arrivals rose at the Kochi leaf tea auction to 2,97,500 kg even as dust arrivals remained average at 11,54,000 kg. Prices declined across the board at the CTC dust auction but the quantum of decline was lower for good liquoring grades. AVT remained active on good liquoring CTC dust teas while Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation and Vimal Tea lent fair amount of

support. There were enquiries from loose tea traders even as Hindustan Unilever and Tata Global remained selective. Exporters were active on bolder grades at lower levels. Upcountry buyers remained subdued. Primary grades were steady at the orthodox dust auction while other grades quoted lower with several withdrawals.

### **Leaf Auction**

Good high-grown grades were barely steady while all other grades fell sharply at the orthodox leaf auction. As the price plummeted by over Rs 10-15 a kg, there were heavy withdrawals across grades. Few medium grades quoted at last week's levels while others continued to quote lower. Exporters to CIS and other traditional destinations remained subdued and bought little quantities. HUL operated in medium and smaller broken and whole leaf grades. High priced teas quoted lower at the CTC leaf auction while medium grades remained barely steady. Exporters operated at lower levels while HUL was selective. Upcountry buyers lent fair amount of support.

### **Top Prices**

Injipara Premium SRD quoted the top price at the dust auction at Rs 133 followed by Injipara RD at Rs 131, Injipara SFD at Rs126 and Pausparai SFD at Rs 116. At the leaf auction, Chamraj OP fetched the top price at Rs 198, followed by Chamraj FOP at Rs 190, Sutton OP at Rs 166 and Havukal BOPF at Rs 160.

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