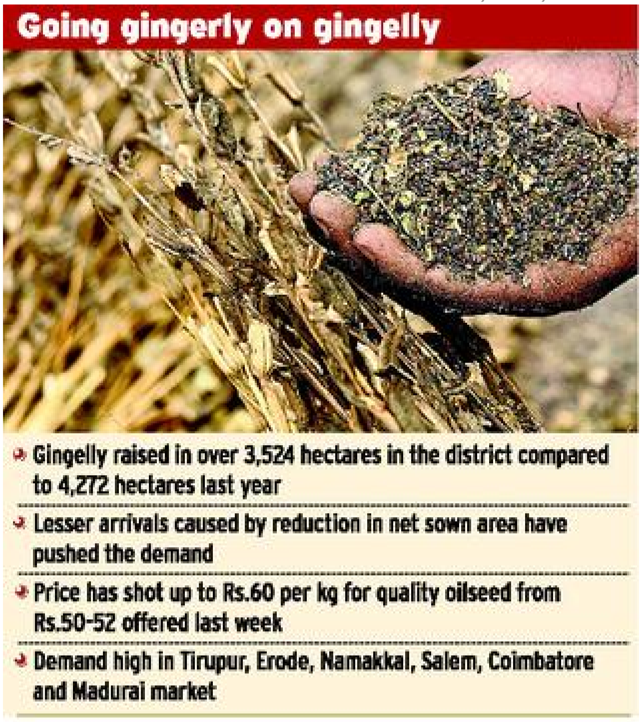
THE HINDU

FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2012

Increasing demand for gingelly offers farmers reason to cheer

L.RENGANATHAN

Wholesale merchants from Kerala, AP, and Karnataka camping in the district



Gingelly farmers in Karur district are hoping to cash in on the increased demand for the oilseed that has resulted in the price of the commodity going up in the regulated market over the past few weeks.

The crop, which is most suited for dry land areas and parched tracts of Thogamalai, Krishnarayapuram, K.Paramathi and Thanthoni areas of Karur district, used to be the most sought after alternative crop for farmers especially during summer.

However, there was a sudden drop in the net sown area of gingelly during the current year. Gingelly has been raised in over 3,524 hectares in Karur district during the current year compared to 4,272 hectares last year.

The reduction in the net sown area of the crop was attributed to the fall in price and non-remunerative returns witnessed during the previous years for the oilseed. The yield is around 620 kg per hectare during the current year, according to sources in the Department of Agriculture.

Till some time ago gingelly fetched farmers Rs.40 to 42 per kg and the farmers were feeling the pinch. That added to the reduction in the net sown area of gingelly as farmers pitched for better returns from sunflower crop.

However, this has aided price stabilisation for oilseed as steadily the demand for the oilseed rose and with lesser arrivals the price simply climbed over the past weeks.

Oil market

Demand from the gingelly oil market in Tirupur, Erode, Namakkal, Salem, Coimbatore, Madurai and Dindigul district boosted the demand for the oilseed in Karur markets.

Wholesale merchants from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are camping in the district to pick up stocks adding to the demand.

All those factors have resulted in the gingelly oil seed price going up from Rs.40-42 some weeks back to Rs.50-52 last week depending on the quality of the oilseed sample . This week the price has jumped to Rs.60 per kg for quality gingelly and farmers are expectedly happy.

“For the past three years we were suffering for want of remunerative price for gingelly. Despite good yield and quality, we did not get attractive price as markets were glutted during the period. When the demand ebbed due to overflow in arrivals, most of the farmers preferred other oilseed especially sunflower to gingelly and along with the area under the oilseed the arrivals too dipped sharply naturally leading to increased demand and better prices," reasons P.Selamba Gounder of K.Paramathi who reaped a bounty during the current week auctions at the market here.

The trend might hold for some more weeks as the arrivals would peak later and if the net sown area of gingelly continued to dip as it did over the past two years then the gingelly farmers could see better prices for their produce.

Mettur level

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 77.59 feet on Thursday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 1,280 cusecs and the discharge, 1,400 cusecs.

Poor pricing of paddy crop irks farmers

STAFF REPORTER
FOCUSING ON ISSUES:A farmer speaking at the grievance day meeting in Tuticorin on Thursday.— Photo: N. Rajesh
Farmers from various blocks across the district aired their grievances at a meeting convened here on Thursday. Collector Ashish Kumar presided over the meeting in which the farmers sought early redressal of their grievances.

Expressing displeasure over delay in settling dues for damaged crop, which was insured, Nalliah, a farmer, sought an early disbursal of compensation for the crop damaged during the North-East monsoon season in the previous year.

S. Kasivelu, District Coordinator, Agriculture Insurance Company of India Limited, Tuticorin, replied that a financial sanction is awaited. Many farmers sought approval for setting up direct procurement centres to market paddy.

M. Rajendran, from Nazareth, said the paddy farmers were badly affected due to poor pricing of the crop. A paddy procurement centre established at Kurumbur on March 25 did not serve the purpose since harvest was done before launching the centre. The buyers were exploiting the ignorance of the farmers and the produce could not even be sold at the price fixed by the government.

He charged that though 142 kg of paddy should be marketed at Rs. 1, 150, the buyers had joined together and were procuring 150 kg at the same price fixed by the government.

Tamilmani from Kurumbur said district administration should convene meetings with rice mill owners, who procure paddy from farmers, to promote a market linkage for better price.

V. Sithavan, a chilly farmer from Vilathikulam, demanded a cold storage facility for preserving chilies, which has a good market value.

Since such facilities were lacking here, the produce was being marketed at a cheaper price.

The long-pending demand for establishing a cold storage is still being neglected by the authorities here, he added.

K. P. Perumal urged the need for a two phase supply of power for agriculture purpose. It was unfair and unjust that a three phase power was being supplied for organising religious festivals but farmers could not avail similar benefits.

The Collector denied the charge that three phase power was being supplied to such festivals. T. Ranjith Singh Dhanraj, Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, attended the meeting.

Artificially ripened mangoes seized

STAFF REPORTER

Calcium carbide had been used to ripen these mangoes

WAGING A WAR:Officials checking artificially ripened mangoes in Tuticorin on Thursday.— Photo: N. Rajesh

Food safety officers busted a racket and seized mangoes that had been artificially ripened in Tuticorin on Thursday.

A metric tonne of mangoes that had been stacked in a godown at market area and ripened by using calcium carbide, a prohibited substance, were destroyed by the officials. A team led by M. Jagadish Chandrabose, Designated Officer, Food Safety and Standards Act, Tuticorin, warned of stringent action against those who indulge in such unlawful activity.

He pointed out that the chemical residue of the carcinogenic substance can easily penetrate in to the mangoes leading to severe health disorder.

Stringent action

He warned that if any consumer was hospitalized after consuming artificially ripened mangoes, the vendor responsible for this would have to undergo five years of rigorous imprisonment besides a penalty of Rs. 10 lakh under the Food Safety Standards Act, 2006.

Pointing out that many vendors use this dangerous substance also to add colour to the mangoes so that it could fetch high price, he said the unscrupulous vendors take advantage of ignorant consumers, who just look for size and colour of mangoes. The consumers should be cautious as intake of such artificially ripened mangoes can lead to ulcer, insomnia, brain dysfunction, nervous failure and also liver problem.

Mangoes with black spots or any visible abnormality should not be preferred at all.

All vendors and those in the food industry must possess a registered license otherwise they would face serious penality, Dr. Chandrabose added.

Tea producers urged to focus on quality

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

All sections of the tea industry should supplement the efforts of the Tea Board in improving the quality of tea, said the Executive Director, Tea Board, R. Ambalavanan, at Coonoor on Wednesday.

He was presiding over a meeting to familiarise tea producers with the on line submission of Form E. Regretting that the image of South Indian tea had over the years taken a severe beating on account of poor quality and inconsistent supply, he said that it should be put behind and an image building exercise undertaken.

A major contributory factor for the quality being compromised is over production.

Adverting to various schemes being implemented by the Tea Board, he said that it was supplying tea machineries with 50 per cent subsidy to unemployed youth and Small Tea Growers Societies.

By way of mitigating the hardships of the growers due to labour shortage and promoting mechanisation, pruning and harvesting machines are being given.

Since the inception of the Quality Upgradation Scheme a sum of Rs. 19.5 crore has been disbursed to a number of factories. He urged factories to adopt villages and make the growers supply high quality raw leaves. He expressed concern over the falling prices of tea produced in Industrial Cooperative (INDCO) tea factories.

Filing returns

Filing returns in Form E is mandatory as per the Tea Marketing Control Order. It will help the Tea Board consolidate data and formulate new schemes.

The Deputy Director, Tea Development, Anupam Das, welcomed the gathering. Around 120 manufacturers from the estate and bought leaf sectors apart from brokers and officials of the United Planters Association of Southern India-Krishi Vigyan Kendra attended.

KARNATAKA

DHARWAD, April 20, 2012

Foodgrains seized

Two persons have been arrested on charges of illegally transporting foodgrains and sugar meant for distribution at fair price shops. They have been identified as Javed Ismail Gokak and Imtiyaz Gous Sonar. The police also seized 59 bags of rice, 20 bags of wheat and three bags of sugar from them. A case has been registered at Dharwad Town police station.

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hindustantimes.com
Friday, April 20, 2012 | Last Updated 10:29 IST

weather

INDIAN CITIES | INTERNATIONAL CITIES

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Partly Cloudy

Friday, Apr 20
Max Min
36.3° | 27.2°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs
Humidity: 79%
Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 6:35
Sunset: 18:03
Barometer: 1009

Tomorrow's Forecast

Cloudy

Saturday, Apr 21
Max Min
35° | 25°

Extended Forecast for a week

Sunday Apr 22	Monday Apr 23	Tuesday Apr 24	Wednesday Apr 25	Thursday Apr 26
36° | 25°	36° | 25°	35° | 25°	35° | 24°	33° | 25°
Sunny	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Cloudy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: Trace
Humidity: 45%
Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 7:14
Sunset: 17:48
Barometer: 1011

THE TIMES OF INDIA
Fri, Apr 20, 2012 | Updated 10.35AM IST

Sugar production goes up in Bihar

PATNA: Sugar production in Bihar has been steadily rising, raising hopes for the revival of the sector which was languishing for a long time.

Two new sugar mills -- one at Lauriya and the other at Sugauli - and capacity expansion at a few existing mills have given a big boost to the sector.

Deccan Chronicle

Malli prices hit rock bottom

A vendor sells malli in Chennai. —Ganesh.

As the season for Madurai malli famous for its fragrance is at its peak, the price of the flower has touched a new low, much to the delight of women in the Temple City.

On Wednesday, it dropped to Rs 70 per kilogram. The price is trickling down over the day. One kilogram was sold at Rs 100 Tuesday.

With a five-six inch length of closely-tied 100 buds costing only Rs 5 in the city, the women are cashing in on buying lengthy strings of jasmine buds from flower-sellers here who are as famous for the skillful art of tying them as the fragrance of the Jasmine. A 100-bud string cost Rs 25 before Pongal.

According to a study carried out by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, the area under jasmine production in the district is 1,220 hectares and the yield is 10,000 tonnes per year.

Thousands of acres of jasmine farms in the Tirumangalam firka account for 15 tonnes of yield per day as of now, says Madurai flower market president S. Ramachandran.

“But this is no good news for us. We have to sell them at even more cheaper prices in the days to come when we will not be able to meet even the transport expenses.

Moreover, many women prefer buying buds in kilograms and tying it themselves as this is the time jasmines are heaped on the roadsides for sale," says flower-seller Meena.

Many cultivators simply do not bother to pluck the flowers as transporting them to the Madurai market would only mean loss. Jasmine cultivators, says Mr Ramachandran, can fetch a standard price for their product only if the government sets up a perfume manufacturing unit.

However, this is happy news for private perfume factories around Madurai which now procure the flowers in large quantities to step up production.

Jasmine takes over city market in sales, fragrance

Come summer, jasmines flood Chennai flower market. Farmers in Gummidipoondi, Chengelpet and Tiruttani send truckloads of jasmine to Chennai.

Nearly 10 tonnes of jasmine arrive at Koyambedu flower market everyday. According to the flower market president D. Arul Visvam jasmine steals the show during this season.

"The price of jasmine has come down heavily now. We sell it for just Rs 30 per kg.

During the November to January season one kg was sold for Rs 500 per kg to Rs 1, 000 per kg," he said.

He said during jasmine season sales of all the other flowers would come down. "Jasmine rules the flower market. Around 100 traders in our flower market would be selling only jasmine for the next one month.

Scores of retailers take away the flowers for cheap prices," he added. As jasmine possesses high fragrance than any other flowers, women love the white small wonder.

Retailers string the flowers with colourful beads and sell small wreaths for Rs 50 also.

Business Standard
Live Markets

Sugar firms fear high losses in coming season
Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai Apr 20, 2012, 00:09

The steady growth in sugar output is, given the set of price controls over the industry, going hand in hand with mounting losses. With an estimated output of 26 million tonnes, the overall loss is expected to surpass Rs 5,500 crore for the current season.

Data compiled by the Indian Sugar Mills' Association (Isma), showed 219 operational mills had produced 24.6 mt of sugar until April 15 of the current season, as compared to 245 working units with an output of 21.7 mt in the corresponding period last year. The bumper cane output this year has resulted in a 13 per cent growth in output so far.

The flip side is losses for sugar mills, given the government-set prices for cane and the controls on sales. The government has, in theory, okayed an additional quantity for export under Open General Licence, but with important details such as how the extra quantity is to be allocated yet to be decided. Exporters feel by the time this is done and the pending quantity from existing quotas gets executed, the markets abroad may turn bearish on prices, with the new season supply to begin soon from Thailand and Brazil.

“Arrears to cane farmers had more than doubled to Rs 9,900 crore as on March 31, as compared to Rs 4,400 crore a year ago (on this date). By the second week of April, these are likely to surpass Rs 11,000 crore, as against Rs 6,200 crore last year,” said Narendra Murkumbi, managing director of Shree Renuka Sugars, the country’s largest refiner of sugar, which also has crushing and refining capacity and cane farming land in Brazil.

A recent report by Icra, the credit rating agency, says no significant change in the price trends seen over the past 18 months is likely for at least the next couple of quarters. In the medium term, sugar price trends will continue to be determined by three factors. First, expectations on domestic sugar production for the coming season (2012-13), to start becoming clearer by end-April, by which time cane acreage for the coming season would be known. Second, global crude oil prices, which determine the raw sugar to ethanol mix in Brazil, the world’s largest producer. Third, the government’s policies on export of sugar and import duties.

“The industry offset these arrears by selling sugar and by-products during the lean season, when the price also recovered a bit. As a consequence, the arrears were reduced to nil by October, when mills started the new season. But the scenario is likely to be different this year. Prices may not rise even during the lean season. Hence, the sugar industry may end this season with an unrecoverable loss of Rs 5,500 crore to create a huge working capital problem for the next season,” said Murkumbi.

Against the average cost of production of Rs 33-34 a kg, mills’ ex-factory realisation is Rs 28-29 a kg across the country. There is additional income equivalent to Rs 2.5

a kg from by-products, such as molasses, rectified spirit, energy, etc, but this still leaves a loss for mills.

Last year, lean season sales proved a saviour for the mills, which helped them clear their cane arrears by November. Sugar realisation during last year's lean season was comparatively better. Also, the average state advised price was 20 per cent lower during last season, at Rs 210 a quintal. During the current season, however, a global supply glut is unlikely to allow sugar prices to move upwards. Hence, the realisation is set to remain under pressure.

"We have not yet worked out the overall estimated loss for the current year. But, the industry would certainly end this year with a massive loss," said Abinash Verma, secretary-general of Isma.

Of the total export allocation of 2.8 million tonnes, the industry has been able to execute hardly 0.6 mt. The current price of sugar in global markets is, at around $600 a tonne, somewhat similar to that at home.

Textile industry keen on FTA with Pakistan
Nayanima Basu & Sharleen D`Souza / Mumbai Apr 19, 2012, 00:00

The country's textile industry is pushing the government to sign a free trade agreement (FTA), or something close to that, with Pakistan. Facing a challenging time in its traditional European market, it is hoping to make up for the loss of business with fresh trade options in that country.

An FTA with Pakistan is already a Prime Ministerial initiative. However, it faces issues and is yet to formally come up on the negotiation table. Both countries had agreed to establish a preferential trade agreement (PTA) during the first meeting between Commerce Secretary Rahul Khullar and his Pakistani counterpart, Zafar Mahmood, in Islamabad last year. Under a PTA, the negotiating countries reduce their tariffs on a particular number of products from the level they maintain with other countries. However, unlike an FTA, a PTA does not slash or eliminate duties from a large number of tariff lines.

The textile sector is looking forward to an FTA with Pakistan since it would help Indian industry to import superior quality cotton from Pakistan. A little over 90 per cent of India’s cotton is genetically modified, popularly termed Bt cotton; this is medium staple. Finer quality is long staple and an FTA would enable India’s yarn makers to import these from Pakistan. Also, export of articles, such as silk and embroidery garment, is expected to go up.

“The apparel sector will benefit for sure if the agreement is signed with Pakistan,” said Rahul Mehta, president of the Clothing Manufacturers Association of India.

“FTA will be beneficial for both countries as there is good demand in Pakistan for Indian textiles,” said A B Joshi, textile commissioner.

It is expected that Pakistan would phase out the ‘negative list’ of imports with India by this December, which would automatically trigger a Most Favoured Nation status for trade. However, officials in the ministry of commerce and industry have said Pakistan might not phase out the list totally but do so gradually. In the negative list, Pakistan has put some of the main items of India's interest, such as textiles, pharmaceuticals and automobile components.

However, the commitment from there is to have textiles as part of a liberalised trade regime. “It is a win-win situation for both countries, as the Pakistanis can sell their products easily to us and vice versa,” said A Sakthivel, chairman of the Apparel Export Promotion Council. Establishing trust would help real business to grow between the countries, said an industry player.

In October last year, the government had opened duty-free imports from Bangladesh for 48 textile items, which had a negative impact on the Indian textile sector; Bangladesh is not dependent on India for any kind of textile import. it would be different in the case of India and Pakistan, with both standing to benefit from the textile trade.

Reduction in 10% sugar levy quota may be delayed
Anindita Dey / Mumbai Apr 19, 2012, 00:02

The sugar industry may have to wait for reduction in the levy quota on sugar sale, as the ministry of consumer affairs is unlikely to take any decision right now. According to official sources, the government would wait for the monsoon and sowing figures for the next season (2012-13) to assess the production estimates before taking a decision

The industry has been demanding a reduction in levy quota from 10 per cent so that they have minimal carry forward stock in the new 2012-13 season. Besides, further exports, sources said, will also have to wait till the time new season estimates arrive.

Meanwhile, the government is yet to decide on changing the parameters for export of another one million tonnes. Typically, the government allocates export quota or permits to factories based on their production in the preceding three years. However, a section of sugar millers from the south and west have demanded the quota be allowed on a first-come-first-served basis. This has been referred to EGoM.

The government has so far allowed three million tonnes of exports in the current season under the open general licence.

The government has been following a policy of partial control and dual pricing, under which a certain percentage of sugar produced by factories is to be sold at a price fixed by the government for the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The government also decides the quantity of non-levy (free sale) sugar allowed to be sold.

The compulsory levy obligation of factories was gradually reduced from 40 per cent to 30 per cent from January 1, 2000. From February 1, 2001, this was further reduced to 15 per cent. The obligation has been 10 per cent of production since March 1, 2002. Mills supply levy sugar at 60 per cent of the cost of production, resulting in an annual industry loss of Rs 2,500-3,000 crore.

The country’s sugar production has increased 14 per cent to 21.16 mt till March 15 in the current marketing year that started October last year, according to industry data. Maharashtra, the largest producing state, has produced 7.3 mt till March 15, which is 13 per cent higher than last year.

Production in Uttar Pradesh is also up by about 13 per cent to six mt.The southern states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have also reported higher output of 3.2 mt and 1.08 mt, respectively. Compared to 419 sugar mills operational on March 15 last year, 476 mills were operational as on March 15, 2012.

CACP suggests MSP rise for kharif crops
BS Reporter / New Delhi Apr 20, 2012, 00:43

To encourage shift in cultivation towards oilseeds and pulses from foodgrains, the Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices has recommended a significant rise in minimum support price of major kharif crops. However, how far that would impact the actual market rates is not clear because experts feel that much of the MSP recommendation is just notional, barring wheat and rice wherein government procures almost 80 per cent of total annual production.

'Centre should revise policy on cotton exports'
Press Trust Of India / Anand Apr 20, 2012, 00:42

Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar on Thursday said the Centre needed to change its export policy regarding cotton. Pawar said he had made a representation on the issue at the highest level and was expecting a positive outcome in eight to 10 days. The Centre had recently banned cotton exports but revoked it following an uproar from farmers.

THE HINDU Business Line

Maharashtra Assembly adjourned over mango farmers' compensation

MUMBAI, APRIL 19: The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly was adjourned twice on Thursday on the issue of providing more compensation to mango farmers in the Konkan region. This crop season there has been a substantial decline in mango yield.

Mangoes from Konkan account for about 40 per cent of the national market. The export market is dominated the Alphonso variety from Konkan. Demand for it is high in the Gulf, the US and Japan.

Raising the issue in the Assembly, Mr Uday Samant, Nationalist Congress Party, said that factors such as changing climate, low temperatures in winter and unseasonal rains in early April brought down yield by 75 per cent. The trees are also getting destroyed by Thrips insects, he said.

He said the farmers should be given a compensation of Rs 1 lakh a hectare. The current agriculture insurance policy should also be updated, so that farmers who lose their crop due to low temperatures could be compensated.

The Horticulture Minister, Dr Vijaykumar Gavit, said that the quantum of compensation would be decided in the Cabinet meeting on Friday. Mango orchards are being surveyed so that the State Government could get an accurate picture. For the next season changes would be made in the insurance policy, so that crops lost due to low temperature can be covered.

Members of the opposition insisted that the minister should announce the compensation amount but Dr Gavit said that the decision would be taken at the Cabinet meeting, leading to the adjournments.

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McLeod Russel to step up domestic tea production

KOLKATA, APRIL 19:
McLeod Russel India Ltd (MRIL) is planning to double its bought-leaf purchases to step up production in the country in the next 3-4 years.

Though not part of any approved corporate strategy, sources suggest that the company is planning to push up global production by around 20 per cent to 120 million kg (mkg) through outsourcing of green leaf.

McLeod has announced that it was looking forward to acquiring estates with a combined capacity of 20-25 mkg abroad, particularly in Africa, to hedge weather risks.

While acquisitions of estates are not considered viable in India at this juncture, MRIL is expanding its processing capacities to step up domestic production, primarily in Assam, through purchases of bought-leaf.

According to sources, Assam tea is comparable to the Kenyan produce. However, the latter fetches substantially higher value than the former. On the other hand, the cost of acquiring tea estates is higher in India. These two factors do not justify acquisition of gardens in Assam, sources said.

Bought-leaf provides an alternative. “We are expanding our processing capacities everywhere to buy more bought-leaf,” a source said, without disclosing the existing ratio of outsourced leaf in MRIL's total domestic production of around 80 mkg.

Currently, MRIL enters into tie-ups with small growers on an annual basis. “It is not a tie-up in terms of a formal arrangement. We are trying to give them the guarantee that we will buy their leaves throughout the year. So, instead of paying weekly or monthly price we work out an average price for the year,” the official said.

Focus is more on quality than cost. “Quality is of paramount importance. And, for that we are ready to pay a premium (for bought-leaf),” he added.

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Desi wheat firm on low stocks

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KARNAL, APRIL 19:
Over 1.25 lakh bags of wheat arrived at the Karnal grain market terminal on Thursday but due to high moisture level, most of the arrivals remained unsold.

New wheat was quoted at Rs 1,285 a quintal, the minimum support price fixed by the Union Government, and 343 and 117 were the varieties that arrived in the market.

On the other hand, low stocks kept desi wheat firm. Tohfa, a desi wheat variety, ruled firm and quoted at Rs 2,280 a quintal, up Rs 10 from previous level. Stocks of desi wheat are almost over and new stocks are likely to arrive within the next one week, said market sources.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat for April delivery decreased by Rs 6 to Rs 1,179, it had touched a low at Rs 1,172 earlier on Thursday. May delivery, on the exchange, decreased by Rs 12 to Rs 1,204.

FLOUR PRICES

Flour prices continued to rule flat and quoted at Rs 1,285 for a 90-kg bag. Branded flour such as Shakti Bhog and Ashirwad were quoted at Rs 200 and Rs 215 for a 10 kg bag, respectively. Similarly, Chokar prices remained unchanged after witnessing a fall earlier this week and sold at Rs 600 for a 49-kg bag

PROCUREMENT IN PUNJAB

Government agencies and private millers procured more than 1.74 lakh tonnes of wheat till April 18. Out of total procurement, 1.73 lakh tonnes in all the procurement centres of Punjab, Government agencies procured 1,73,053 tonnes of wheat (99.9

per cent) till date whereas private traders procured 179 tonnes (0.1 per cent) of wheat.

Coir body calls for effectivestrategy to sustain growth

OUR BUREAU

KOCHI, APRIL 19:
The Indian Coir Association has emphasised the need to formulate a comprehensive strategy to sustain the growth in the coir industry.

Addressing the 54th annual general meeting, Mr John Chacko, chairman of ICA, called upon the State government and the Coir Board to chalk out suitable measures to bail out the industry, which is currently passing through a crisis.

CHALLENGES

He pointed out that a sudden spurt in demand for coir fibre from China had resulted in doubling of raw material prices. This has also affected the quality of the raw material available today. Besides, the industry is facing a severe shortage of skilled labourers following the migration of workers to other sectors.

This, combined with the recession and slowing down of many of the key markets, has resulted in a drop in exports of traditional products, Mr Chacko added.

EXPORTS

The export of coir fibre touched 83,400 tonnes last year from 9,300 tonnes in 2006-07. Last year, exports of coir pith also increased to 158,000 tonnes from 67,000 tons in 2006-07. In comparison, exports of handloom mats have decreased from 43,000 tonnes in 2006-07 to 29,500 tonnes last year, Mr Chacko said.

In order to modernise, he said, the industry needs funds such as the Technology Upgradation Fund that had been given to the textile industry. Both Coir Board and the State government have to work with the MSME Ministry to facilitate this, he added.

Mr Chacko also stressed on the need to develop spinning machines that can substantially increase productivity and help the workers earn higher wages.

NEW MARKETS

Prof G. Balachandran, chairman of the Coir Board, called upon industry players to enhance their marketing efforts and to look out for new markets to garner more revenues. He outlined various difficulties facing the industry and requested all the key players to work together to solve the outstanding issues.

He said that the Board would soon organise a Coir Expo in Alappuzha to showcase products made out of coir as well as to highlight the achievements made by CCRI, the research wing of the Coir Board.

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arm fest at Thodupuzha

OUR BUREAU

KOCHI, APRIL 19:

The Kerala Agricultural Development Society (KADS) will organise Greenfest 2012, an organic fair at Thodupuzha from April 20 to 25.

The objective of the fair, organised in association with public and private agencies, is to attract more youth to farming and allied activities.

The traditional farming methods, which are not known to the present generation, will also be showcased. Mr Antony Kandirikkal, president, KADS, said a seed festival will also be conducted at the fair where the farmers can exchange seeds with others.

Farmers from anywhere in the country can exchange seeds at the venue.

Record price for Vigneshwar CTC tea at special sale

P. S. SUNDER

COONOOR, APRIL 19:
Vigneshwar Estate Tea Factory has created a record at the special auction conducted on Tea Board's e-auction platform among teas that contested for the Golden Leaf India Award.

“Our Super Red Dust Golden Leaf Award-winning tea, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing (SI) Ltd, has been bought by Jay Kay Enterprises at Rs 303 a kg. This is the highest-ever price fetched by any CTC tea of any factory in any public auction in the country,” the Vigneshwar Managing Partner, Mr Ramesh Bhojarajan, told *Business Line*.

“Among CTC leaf grades, our Broken Orange Pekoe Fanning, auctioned by Paramount Tea, has been bought by Jay Kay Enterprises at Rs 213 a kg. This is the highest- price for this grade of any factory in any auction in South India so far,” Mr Ramesh said.

“For four other grades, we have obtained the highest price since our factory's inception 25 years ago. So, there have been several records this time as we enter our factory's silver jubilee,” he said.

“Vigneshwar has done the Nilgiris proud by placing the small-scale sector here in national top-notch tea map. There are *prima facie* reasons to believe that Rs 303 is international price-record. We are examining it with market reports of tea auction centres around the world,” a Tea Board member, Dr S. Ramu, said while complimenting Mr Ramesh.

N sets higher farm output target

OUR BUREAU

CROP PRODUCTION SCHEME FOR 2012-13

Crop	Area (Lakh Ha)	Production (lakh tonnes)	Production Increase (%) over 2011-12
Rice	22	86.5	9
Millets	11	26.95	17
Pulses	10.4	6.55	50
Total food grain	43.4	120	13
Oilseeds	6.6	15	23
Cotton (lakh bales)	1.55	4.2	36
Sugarcane	3.6	493.5	21

CHENNAI, APRIL 19:
The Tamil Nadu Government expects the foodgrain output in 2012-13 to increase to 120 lakh tonnes compared with the estimated 106 lakh tonnes last year.

It has announced a set of programmes including higher area of cultivation, productivity increase, soil health, water supply and input management to achieve the higher target.

According to the policy note on agriculture tabled in the Assembly, the State Government's site-specific systems to ensure that at least a part of the fallow lands are brought under cultivation by increasing irrigation resources.

To increase the productivity, a detailed soil survey is being done to suggest suitable cropping systems and fertiliser application.

Foodgrains output refers to the total output of rice, millets and pulses. The State Government has announced crop-specific plans to increase the output of all these crops.

These include: a rice intensification technique for paddy, which is based on optimal application of water and other inputs to bring down cost of cultivation while increasing output; System of Millet Intensification and increasing area under millets; and improved pulses production by promoting cultivation of pulses as a pure crop.

Similar initiatives are planned for other major crops including sugarcane, cotton and oilseeds.

The State Government will encourage farm mechanisation to address labour shortage.

Machinery will be purchased and hired out to farmers, subsidy will be provided to farmers, farmers' groups and self-help groups to buy agriculture machines and equipment.

The Agriculture Minister, Mr S. Damodaran, announced that the State Government will soon clear the production of ethanol by sugar mills. Ethanol will be supplied for blending with automobile fuel. This will benefit the sugar mills and in turn the sugarcane farmers in terms of cane prices.