

Agriculture scientists urge govt. to lift moratorium on Bt Brinjal



The Hindu In this file photo Scientist C. Kameswara Rao is seen signing a poster requesting Prime Minister to lift moratorium on commercial production of Bt Brinjal, at a press conference in Bangalore. Photo: K. Murali Kumar

The government should remove all constraints in the research and development work of biotech crops and lift moratorium on commercial release of Bt Brinjal, agri-biotech scientists and industry bodies said on Monday.

In a day-long conference on 'Biotech Crops for Food Security in India', the scientists from the U.S., Switzerland and India noted that biotech crops would play a major role in ensuring food security of India.

The conference also adopted 'The Bangalore Declaration' urging the government to "take urgent measures to remove unjustified and arbitrary constraints that jeopardise the functioning and development of the Indian agri-biotech R&D".

Through the declaration, scientists demanded the government accept the recommendation of GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee) on commercial release of Bt Brinjal and lift the moratorium.

The meet was organised by Foundation for Biotechnology Awareness and Education (FBAE) and supported by Association of Biotech Led Enterprises — Agriculture Group (ABLE—AG).

"It is imperative that constraints such as requirement of the permission of State governments even for field testing of biotech crops approved by the regulator, and the threat of legal action against the use of indigenous germplasm to develop biotech crops for indigenous use are removed expeditiously," FBAE Secretary C. Kameswara Rao said.

The scientist and biotech companies also hailed the recent statement by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about the potential of genetic engineering in raising farm production and urged him to ward off protest from anti-GM crops group, which they said was mainly based on "unscientific grounds".

Many globally renowned biotechnologists and scientists lamented that the issue has been stuck in India due to "stumbling blocks" put in by some NGOs.

Participating in the conference, Autar Matto of USDA, Washington, allayed apprehensions over the safety of GM crops from health point of view and said the agri-biotechnology has been supported even by U.N. agricultural body, FAO.

Klaus Ammann, Professor of Biodiversity and former Director of the Botanical Garden, University of Bern, Switzerland, said, "A large number of scientific papers demonstrate the environmental safety of GM crops; they are as safe as conventional crops."

Highlighting the need for the poor to be fed adequately, Gurudev S. Khush, World Food Prize Laureate, in his key note address said, "There will be 9 billion people on this planet in 2050."

To feed that many people will require doubling of food production, he added. "To meet this challenge we must increase the yield potential of our food crops and close the yield gap", Mr. Gurudev said.

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Agricultural equipment distributed to beneficiaries

Special Correspondent

Vellore Collector Ajay Yadav distributed agricultural inputs worth Rs.3.74 lakhs, including agricultural machinery, micro irrigation equipments, seeds and inputs required for setting up demonstration plots to 25 beneficiaries at a function organised by the Department of Agriculture here on Monday.

According to an official release, 100 rainguns (a portable sprinkler irrigation system) and 100 fixed sprinkler irrigation systems costing a total of Rs.41.93 lakhs have been allotted to Vellore district for distribution to small and marginal farmers under the Pulses Micro Irrigation Scheme.

The inputs are in the process of being distributed to the farmers.

A target of 100 hectares has been fixed for the district for setting up precision farming in sugarcane under the National Agricultural Development Programme at a cost of Rs.25.075 lakhs.

Inputs were being distributed under the scheme on a 100% subsidy to small and marginal farmers and 75% subsidy to other farmers. A sum of Rs.two lakhs has been allotted to the district for distribution of 20 power weeders for removing weeds in sugarcane fields to farmers. A sum of Rs.20,000 is given as subsidy under the scheme.

K. Thamizhchelvan, Joint Director of Agriculture (in charge) participated in the function.

100 rainguns and 100 fixed sprinkler irrigation systems have been allotted to Vellore district for distribution

Share

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Cattle scheme boosts daily milk production

Special Correspondent



The State has been registering a rise in milk production consequent to the implementation of 'free cattle scheme' introduced by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, said T.K.M.Chinnayya, Minister for Animal Husbandry.

Speaking at the valediction of the regional-level exhibition on concept-based livestock and fisheries technologies held in Srirangam on Sunday, Mr.Chinnayya said that with the introduction of free cattle scheme, daily milk production has gone up by 25,000 litres in the State. Due importance was being accorded to the development of veterinary health services, he added. A total of 385 veterinary sub-centres would be upgraded into veterinary dispensaries and 843 veterinary doctors' posts would be newly created.

The department has also planned to develop related infrastructure through construction of buildings and dispensaries at an outlay of Rs.25 crore. With a thrust on developing fodder cultivation, the State government has allotted special funds to raise the fodder on an additional 24,000 acres.

The State government, he said, has ensured transparency in the implementation of the free cattle scheme and allotted Rs.232 crore for purchasing 60,000 cows. During the current financial year, 12,000 cows would be distributed in 21 districts. This apart, about Rs.925 crore had been allotted for distribution of 28 lakh goats to the economically weaker sections. During the current financial year, one lakh women would get four lakh goats.

Turning to the objective of the exhibition, the Minister said that 60 stalls had been set up to explain the various ongoing schemes. Compact discs and guides on breeding cattle and safe handling of fish were also distributed to villagers.

Farmers underwent training on breeding rabbits, white pigs and other income generating activities.

Students of agricultural engineering get hands-on experience in farming

Special Correspondent



Ground reality: Students of Agricultural Engineering College, Kumulur, interacting with a farmer.

A group of final year under-graduate students of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) Agricultural Engineering College, Kumulur, near here spent about three weeks at villages in different parts of the State and gained hands-on experience in farming. The programme was based on TNAU curriculum.

Under the programme, 50 final year B.Tech (Agricultural Engineering) students, including two women, stayed in Sirugamani, Vamban, Vriddhachalam, Nidamangalam and Kattuthottam villages. The students gained first-hand experience on the technologies carried from lab to land and also collected data on farm, SRI method of rice cultivation, advanced irrigation technologies and indigenous technical knowledge of farmers.

Students were impressed on experiencing the system of rice intensification followed by Muthulakshmi from Mettupatti, Pudukottai district, vegetables and onion farming under drip fertigation by Kathiresan from Kullakudi, Tiruchi district, rice and fish based integrated farming system practiced by Tamilazahan of Surrakottai, Thanjavur district, system of sugarcane initiative followed by Narayanaswamy, Cuddalore district, and relay cropping of blackgram adopted by Thangaraj of Mellathirupallakudi, Tiruvarur district.

According to Dean, A. Tajuddin, students also visited various small and large scale agro-industries. Dr. Tajuddin pointed out that according to the data collected by the students, in Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts, tractors dominated in field preparation and in Cuddalore and

Pudukottai districts, power tillers dominated and in all the districts and the farmers were in need of mechanical power weeders.

The farmers were also interested in mechanical sugarcane harvesters.

Kannappan, professor and head, Department of Agricultural Sciences, said that farmers are in need of more training on SRI and SSI, agricultural food processing and farm mechanisation.

S. Somasundaram and Kamaraj, who organised the programme, pointed out that the survey made by the students showed the presence of cono-weeders in the villages.

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Training in beekeeping

Staff Reporter

The Department of Agricultural Entomology of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University will organise a training in beekeeping on March 6 on the university premises.

Rearing

According to a university release, hands-on training will be imparted in identification of bee colonies and their rearing, artificial group rearing of bees, queen bee rearing and production techniques, and identification of natural enemies of bees and their management.

Interested candidates have to reach the Department of Entomology before 9 a.m. The fee of Rs. 150 has to be remitted.

A certificate will be given at the end of training.

Candidates can call 0422-6611214, or e-mail to entomology@tnau.ac.in for details.

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Mettur level

The water level in the Mettur Dam stood at 81.47 feet on Monday, against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 630 cusecs and the discharge, 1,823 cusecs.

COIMBATORE, February 28, 2012

Going bananas over banana at food fest

The fare was attractive and exhaustive



M. Krishnan, Chairman of Sri Krishna Sweets (P) Limited, and President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (left) taking a look at the display of varieties of bananas for sale at the 'Banana Fest' of AJK College of Arts and Science at CODISSIA Trade Fair Complex in Coimbatore on Sunday. Also seen are Ajeet Kumar Lal Mohan, Secretary (right), and R.S. Lal Mohan, Trustee, of AJK Educational Institution, Coimbatore (second right).— PHOTO: S.SIVA SARAVANAN

How many ways can you eat a banana? The ones who visited the 'Banana Fest' at CODISSIA Trade Fair Complex on Sunday got answers to the question posed by the organisers.

And, those who provided the answers were not professional caterers, but students. Almost a 100 varieties of dishes were prepared by boys from the Department of Catering Science and Hotel Management of AJK College of Arts and Science in the kitchen of 'E' Hall of the complex.

From starters, soup, salads, rice, noodles, dosai, idli, adai, to desserts, there was an array to savour by those who came with the curiosity what the fest with the special theme was all about. And, they did not go disappointed.

The students were like busy bees going about giving the last touches as the crowd started trickling in much before the appointed time. And, the aroma wafting from the freshly prepared fare made visitors make a beeline for dinner even as early as 6 p.m. The fare was attractive and exhaustive enough to cater to all age groups.

The most preferred were those special dishes that catered to the taste buds of the children. The banana sherbet was also a great hit.

M. Praveen Das, student of the Department, said preparing for the fest was an experience of a kind.

Happy

While they had practised preparing certain dishes in college, there were a few others they had made straight away at the venue. And, the production team was happy that those dishes too had come out “perfect”.

While the prepared dishes drew people in droves, there were many who were interested in the ripe bananas that were displayed for sale. There were volunteers to explain the characteristics of each variety and the visitors got to choose from the normal to the exotic including Peyam, Thuluvan, Singam, and Matti, besides others.

Inaugurating the fest, M. Krishnan, Chairman of Sri Krishna Sweets (P) Limited, and President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Coimbatore, said the fest provided a different experience all together for the city residents.

“The expectations of people are very high when it comes to food fests. It is irrespective of the fact that it is prepared by students. Hence, this is a bold effort by the college,” he said.

Entertainment was provided by students of the Department of Costume Design and Fashion.

A fashion show where girls, boys and children walked the ramp. A sari embellished with banana fibre was displayed during the show. There were also cultural programmes and magic show. Students of AJK Institute of Management managed the whole show, which saw more than 4,000 footfalls. *The Hindu* was the media partner for the fest.

MYSORE, February 28, 2012

400 acres of teak plantation destroyed in forest fire

Forest fire is said to be raging in the Anechowkur range forests of the Nagarahole National Park, according to information received here on Monday.

Following this, around 400 acres of teak plantation has been destroyed in the Chandanagiri, Chowdihalla, Hebbala, Kumbarakatte and Byadarakoppa areas, sources in the Forest Department said.

Ground fires

Ground fires could have devastated the bio-diversity of the area. The burning of dried up bamboo clumps worsened the situation. Certain acres of coffee plantations at Tavarekere and Bhimanamane Moole areas too have been ravaged.

Though the assessment of loss is yet to be made, it would certainly have killed a large number of reptiles, birds and smaller insects, sources told *The Hindu* .

Visit

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), B.K. Singh, is expected to visit some of the affected areas on Tuesday and day after.

Forest watchers and staff have swung into action and even the services of mahouts have been requisitioned to douse the fire, the sources said. While fire had come under control in a few areas, it appeared to spread in certain other areas.

Destruction

Reports of forest fires have come in from the Napoklu, Cheriyaarambu and Kandakere areas in Kodagu where large clumps of dried bamboo have been devastated on both private and forest land.

Reports of ground fire destroying large areas of forestland close to Madikeri city too have been received.

Fire Force personnel were called in to extinguish fire from spreading into residential areas.

MYSORE, February 28, 2012

Bamboo cultivation in State to get a push

Bamboo cultivation in the State is set to be taken up in a big way, thanks to the initiative of the National Bamboo Mission (NBM). A team of 25 forest officials, below the rank of Range Forest Officers, will attend a training programme at the Institute of Wood Science Technology (IWST), Bangalore, on February 28 and 29 on various aspects of cultivation.

The officers will be trained on implementation of the schemes under the NBM, scientific raising of seedlings, management of bamboo resources and assets and the identification of species suited for local conditions in the bamboo-growing regions of the State, Keshavamurthy, Chief Conservator of Forests and Director, NBM, told *The Hindu*.

Resource persons from the IWST would train the officials and the NBM would sponsor the programme.

A similar two-day training programme involving selected farmers from different bamboo-growing regions of the State on manufacturing skills had been proposed at the IWST on March 2 and 3, he said.

However, the IWST was yet to confirm the schedule.

Mr. Keshavamurthy said trainers from north eastern regions would be invited to guide artisans in skills and capacity building.

The NBM had been organising district-level workshops, including the one which concluded here a couple of days ago.

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, G.V. Sugur, who is in charge of the NBM, said the Union Government had spent Rs. 12 crore in the last three years to encourage bamboo cultivation in the country.

A farmer could even get Rs. 8,000 per hectare as incentive under the NBM for bamboo cultivation, he said.

weather

Delhi - INDIA

Today's Weather



Sunny

Tuesday, Feb 28

Max Min

25° | 12.5°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 55%

Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 7:14

Sunset: 17:48

Barometer: 1008

Tomorrow's Forecast



Sunny

Wednesday, Feb 29

Max Min

26° | 11°

Extended Forecast for a week

Thursday Mar 1	Friday Mar 2	Saturday Mar 3	Sunday Mar 4	Monday Mar 5
26° 12°	26° 11°	27° 13°	27° 14°	28° 12°
Sunny	Sunny	Sunny	Sunny	Sunny

28 FEB, 2012, 02.51AM IST, MADHVI SALLY & SUTANUKA GHOSAL, ET BUREAU

Lower supplies likely to lift tea prices 10-15%

AHMEDABAD/KOLKATA: Consumers may have to pay about 10-15% more for tea soon as wholesale prices rise on the back of a faltering supply. "There is a shortage of tea in the country. We think prices of good premium teas will go up by Rs20 per kg to Rs 210-Rs 220 per kg.

Similarly, low-end teas will go up by Rs15 per kg to Rs100. But there will hardly be any appreciation in orthodox tea prices. At the retail end, we see prices to go up as well but it will largely depend on companies and buyers who are operating at the auctions," Indian Tea Association chairman CS Bedi said.

Dhunseri, one of the large players in western India and sells under the brand name Lal Ghora and Kala Ghorahas, plans to increase prices. "Within the next two months, our packet tea prices will increase by 10%," said Dhunseri Tea chairman CK Dhanuka.

He said, "The cost of production will rise from the next season due to the upward revision in the wages of tea workers. The input cost is also going up. We have to pass on this price hike to consumers." Dhunseri sells 3 million kg of tea in packets.

"Most companies carry tea stock till May and start procuring after that. If wholesale prices increase, companies will have to take a call by May-June on retail prices. The company will pass on the hike in phases - it will increase prices by Rs2-3 for 250 gram in May-June and effect a similar hike in September-October. Small players may even blend cheaper tea with good quality tea," Kolkata-based Goodricke Group MD and CEO Arun N Singh said.

The company sells CTC and orthodox tea in bulk apart from instant and branded tea. McLeod Russel India, the world's largest tea producer, is preferring to wait.

"With negligible carryover stock in Indian market, prices in auction are likely to increase," said Azam Monem, the company's director. The company produces approximately 100 million kg of tea a year from estates in Assam and West Bengal in India, Vietnam, Uganda and Rwanda.

There was no increase in retail prices for some time though there was an appreciation in the prices of loosely-sold tea largely consumed in eastern India. The size of the branded retail tea market in India is around Rs 7,000 crore with Tata Global and Hindustan Unilever being the largest players.

Industry sources say that generally these two companies take a call on prices and other tea

processors follow them. Annually, India's tea consumption is increasing by 3-4 %. India's per capita tea consumption is 700 gram while Gujarat's is higher at one kg.

Business Standard

Tuesday, Feb 28, 2012

Minor commodities catch traders' fancy, prices zoom

Mentha oil, barley among favourites FMC rules out speculative trading

Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai February 28, 2012, 0:33 IST

Narrow commodities, including mentha oil and barley, have suddenly become favourites of traders at the derivative exchanges, attracting huge participation in the past few months, thereby, pushing the price in upward circuit. But, unlike guar seed and guar gum contracts, industry stakeholders deny any speculative trading in these contracts.

Used primarily in derivative form as menthol, mentha oil prices almost doubled in the past six months, while barley prices rose 17 per cent during the same period. Both commodities are produced in very few states for domestic use.

The consistent appreciation in prices is significant as the commodity market regulator, the Forward Markets Commission (FMC), recently unearthed massive irregularities in similar narrow commodities — guar seed and gum. Taking serious note of the irregularities, like margin funding, FMC recently suspended three Rajasthan-based traders for a period of 6-12 months.

“Prices of mentha oil and barley are driven purely by fundamentals. Hence, we do not see any action of investigation of traders’ account in case of these commodities,” said an FMC official.

“FMC used all its powers to penalise the culprit in case of guar. But, the prices continued to rise. This indicates the commodity had supportive fundamentals, too,” he added.

Despite regulatory actions against some Rajasthan-based leading traders, guar seed and

gum prices for near-month delivery on the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) set a new record at Rs 18,096 a quintal and Rs 58,700 a quintal, respectively. These commodities have surged over 300 per cent in the past six months.

According to Ajay Kedia, an analyst with Kedia Commodity, mentha oil is trading firm and eyeing the Rs 2,000 a kg level soon due to strong stockist demand against small arrivals in major mandies. The commodity has gained over 44 per cent so far this year to quote at Rs 1,906.9 a kg on Monday at the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Strong demand from international markets and the domestic pharmaceutical industry along with waning supplies in major mandies added sharp gains in spot market, which is currently reflecting in mentha futures as well. The total arrivals are currently estimated at around 200 drums, down 50 drums from last week.

“Mentha production in 2011 was earlier estimated at 42,000 tonnes and later revised to 36,000 tonnes in October last year, as against the output of 28,000 tonnes in the previous year. In the last few days, prices of mentha have witnessed a sharp rise due to hoarding by local stockists anticipating further rise in prices on account of limited supplies during March-June. Sowing of the crop has commenced and fresh arrivals will only start from July,” said Naveen Mathur, associate director, Angel Broking.

ON A HIGH NOTE					
	Price (Rs/qtl)			Open Interest (In tonnes)	
	Sep 1, '11	Feb 25, '12	% chg	Sep 1, '11	Feb 25, '12
Guar seed (Jodhpur)	4,339.00	17,364	300.18	364,530	28,820
Guar gum (Jodhpur)	14,021.00	55,340	294.69	67,550	5,585
MCX mentha oil (Rs/kg)	1,150.00	1,826	58.78	3,282,120	2,410,200
Barley (Jaipur)	1,178.60	1,378	16.92	6,360	1,580
Pepper	33,367.00	36,230	8.58	11,747	7,579

Note: Prices are of near-month future on NCDEX & MCX, MCX mentha oil open interest is

in kg

Compiled by BS Research Bureau

India is the world's largest producer and exporter of mentha oil, widely used as a flavouring agent in food products, including confectionery. Export of mint products, including menthol, menthol crystals and mint oils in the past three years was 17,000-20,000 tonnes, valued at Rs 1,200-1,700 crore. Apart from India, other countries that produce this oil are China, Brazil and the US. There is growing export demand for mentha oil.

Although, the fresh estimate of the current season crop is yet to be assessed, Vibhu Ratan Dhara, an analyst with Bonanza Commodity Brokers, feels the output has been damaged severely due to a cold waves in February. Earlier, the output was estimated 150,000 tonnes higher this season at 1.5 million tonnes.

After a steep decline early this month, open interest in barley started rising and was at 1,580 tonnes on February 25, from a mere 320 tonnes on February 11. Earlier, in January this year, open interest in barley was over 6,000 tonnes.

Pepper has also witnessed huge surge in the last few days on favourable fundamentals.

According to a report, pepper production in India is expected to be down 10.4 per cent to 43,000 tonnes in 2012 from 48,000 tonnes in 2011. Average (February 2012) arrivals in the domestic market, till date, have declined to 6.95 tonnes, compared to 12.39 tonnes in the last month. On the other hand, average offtake in February improved to 36.97 tonnes, compared to 6.95 tonnes in January.

Pepper gains 1.89% lower crop estimates

Press Trust of India / New Delhi February 27, 2012, 15:33 IST



Pepper prices gained 1.89% to Rs 37,240 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators creating huge positions, supported by lower crop

estimates.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, the April contract for pepper rose by Rs 690, or 1.89%, to Rs 37,240 per quintal with an open interest of 2,753 lots.

The March contract jumped up by Rs 540, or 1.49%, to Rs 36,770 per quintal in 4,226 lots.

Analysts said the rise in pepper prices at the futures trade was mostly attributed to speculations of lower crop estimates and rising demand in the spot market.

Jeera up 1.03% on spot demand

Press Trust of India / New Delhi February 27, 2012, 15:28 IST



Jeera prices rose by Rs 142.50 to Rs 13,13,982.50 quintal in futures trade today as traders created fresh positions buoyed by pick-up in spot demand.

However, estimates of higher output this season restricted the gains.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, the March contract for jeera moved up by Rs 142.50, or 1.03%, to Rs 13,982.50 per quintal with an open interest of 11,475 lots.

The April contract traded higher by Rs 110, or 0.78%, to Rs 14,240 per quintal in 11,490 lots.

Analysts said fresh buying by traders on expectations of a rise in demand during the ongoing marriage season mainly pushed up jeera futures prices.

Pepper prices may rise 39% on low output, hoarding

George Joseph / Kochi February 28, 2012, 0:01 IST

A steep fall in production, followed by large-scale hoarding by farmers in a bullish market has upset the local black pepper trade.

According to sources, the price of Asta grade pepper is likely to cross Rs 500 per kg by next month.

The market on Monday quoted Rs 360 per kg as against Rs 230 last February. The price increased 250 per cent in the last 24 months.

According to reports, production from Kerala and Karnataka, the two states which contribute more than 80 per cent of the total output, would be low. Production in Kerala would come down by 50 per cent this time, while in Karnataka, it is expected to drop by 40 per cent.

A leading Kochi-based stockist told Business Standard he had so far collected only 27 tonnes of fresh crop against seven-eight tonnes daily in the last harvesting season. Harvesting season in Kerala will end next month. Whatever is being brought to Kochi terminal in Kerala is old stock.

Benny, a farmer from Idukki, a key pepper-producing district of Kerala, said in some parts of the district, production dropped by 60 per cent and the price increase would not benefit the producers since the stock was low.

Last season, Benny said, he had a stock of 1,250 kg; this time it is down to 500 kg.

High wage demand by labourers has forced farmers to withdraw from pepper cultivation and concentrate on less labour-intensive crops like cocoa, he said. According to him, production would drop 50-60 per cent in Idukki.

This season, overall production is expected to be in a range of 20,000-25,000 tonnes against regular output of 45,000 tonnes. The domestic market consumes around 35,000 tonnes of pepper a year.

While market sources expect tight supply throughout the year, experts say prices would touch a new high.

Since India is the most expensive source, there is no effective overseas demand, except local demand from north India. The current Indian price for Asta grade is \$ 7,900-8,000 per tonne, which is the highest in the world.

The Indian situation has aided the Vietnamese farmers to quote higher prices.

The price of 500 GL pepper increased to \$6350 a tonne, 550 GL to \$6,700 and Asta grade increased to \$7250.

Since there is normal production in Vietnam, it will get the maximum benefit of the sea change in the world market scenario.

Brazil and Indonesia are giving indications of rising prices as the stocks are low there, too.

In the last season, pepper prices increased fairly well due to low production in Indonesia. Production in that country was below 10,000 tonnes last year against normal production of 20,000 tonnes.

According to leading exporters, the situation is repeating in India this time, making the global market fairly bullish for the full year.

THE HINDU Business Line

Spot pepper turns hot; hits record high

G. K. Nair

Kochi, Feb. 27:

The pepper futures market continued to remain hot with the spot hitting on Monday the highest ever price. The spot price for garbled touched Rs 365 a kg and ungarbled Rs 350 a kg. The previous high was on Dec 17, 2011 when it touched Rs 360 and Rs 345 a kg respectively.

Heavy tug of war between both the bull and bear operators and consequent good circular trading was visible from the 98 per cent increase in the volume traded today. At the same time the open interest was not much when compared with the turn over, market sources told *Business Line*.

Strong domestic demand was there and interstate dealers from Tamil Nadu were covering directly from the primary markets at terminal market prices on cash and carry basis and hence there were no arrivals at the terminal market.

On the terminal market platform spot pepper was traded at Rs 357-360 a kg. As the sellers were asking for Rs 365-370 a kg buyers withdrew, they said.

End users who remained uncovered based on the advice of expert analysts that the pepper prices would drop to Rs 270 a kg levels once the new crop arrived at the market were reportedly

covering now hand to mouth now from the investors who are holding farm grade pepper on the exchange platform.

The market has shot up on strong domestic demand which is usually on an average 3,000-4,000 tonnes a month and 4,000-5,000 tonnes during the peak demand season. "In fact, there is no merchandise available to meet the demand now", the trade claimed.

Mar contract on the NCDEX rose by Rs 570 to Rs 36,800 a quintal. Apr and May increased by Rs 555 and Rs 650 respectively to close at Rs 37,105 and Rs 37,350 a quintal.

Total turn over increased by 8,990 tonnes to 18,153 tonnes. Spot prices soared by Rs 600 a quintal to close at Rs 35,000 (ungarbled) and Rs 36,500 (MG 1) a quintal and touched the highest ever levels in its trading history.

Indian parity in the international market was at \$7,850 a tonne (c&f) for the Europe and \$8,150 a tonne (c&f) for the US and remained out priced.

Local demand turns trend in sugar

Our Correspondent



Mumbai, Feb. 27:

Bearish sentiment was brought to a halt at the sugar market on Monday with prices rising Rs 10-15 for fine quality at spot and naka level.

Mill tender rates were up by Rs 10-15 on improved local demand. Market sources said the sentiment turned bullish on expectations of higher retail demand from Wednesday. Local

dispatch was higher than arrival due to higher demand. The Vashi APMC Market will remain closed on Tuesday in support of a bandh.

Mr Jagdish Rawal of B. Bhogilal and co said improved overall demand helped reverse the bearish trend. With temperatures rising across the country, domestic and commercial consumption are expected to rise in coming days.

Free sale quota for March is expected to announcement soon. Even a marginal raise in quota against current month will be absorbed by an increase in demand, keeping the sentiment firm.

Sources said selling pressure at mill level for exhausting current month's free sale quota has been eased by higher dispatches. Prices at other producing centres also improved.

Currently, the Vashi market carries an inventory of about 100-120 truckloads (each of 100 bags). Last year for March, a total 16.84 lakh tonnes declared for free sale. Market traders are expecting higher quota than the last two months on higher production this year.

Emerging opportunities for sugar exports will support firm sentiment in coming days. World sugar prices have been improving since last week. At the international market, May-12 futures closed higher to \$661.40 (\$652.20) and August-12 futures closed to \$637.50 (\$628.60) on Friday.

Arrivals in the Vashi market were 50-52 truckloads and local dispatches were around 54-55 truckloads. On Saturday evening, about 24-25 mills sold more than one lakh bags in the range of Rs 2,730-2,800 (Rs 2,730-2800) for S-grade and Rs 2,840-2,880 (Rs 2,840-2,880) for M-grade. Mill tenders were expected slightly up on higher demand.

Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade Rs 2,872-2,942 (Rs 2,872-2,932) and M-grade Rs 2,986- 3,036 (Rs 2,981- 3,026).

Naka delivery rates: S-grade Rs 2,815 - 2,880 (Rs 2,830-2,860) and M – grade Rs 2,935-3,000 (Rs 2,940-2,990).

African raw cashew prices drop on slack demand

G.K. Nair



Kochi, Feb. 27:

The cashew market last week witnessed limited activities as the buyers were keen to buy at the lowest range of prices, while the sellers were hesitant.

Demand at higher levels were only for small quantity. Consequently, the prices remained unchanged; W240 were from \$3.70 to \$3.90; W320 from \$3.30 to \$3.45; W450/SW320 from \$3.15 to \$3.30; SW360 from \$2.85 to \$3.00; splits and butts from \$2.30 to \$2.40 and pieces from \$2.05 to \$2.15/lb (f.o.b.).

Buying interest

“There was good buying interest at the lower end of the range but only a few processors were selling at those levels.

Some processors were able to sell at the top end of the range but again, the volume was small.

“Most of the business were for nearbys but some were done for April forwards as well,” Mr Pankaj N. Sampat, a Mumbai-based dealer told *Business Line*.

Raw cashew nuts

Prices for India and Vietnam raw cashew nuts (RCN) are very high.

On the back of negligible buying interest, African RCN offers came down with Tanzania offering at \$1,250 a tonne (c&f), Benin and Ghana from \$950 to \$1,000 (c&f) and Ivory Coast (IVC) at around \$850 (c&f).

“We feel these prices can only be taken as indicators and real prices will be known only when movements start in end March/early April. We do not expect RCN prices to come down too much, unless all the northern crops are good,” he said.

In the last couple of weeks, there has been some business in the US and Europe for delivery April forwards but the volumes traded have not been very large. Most buyers want to see the trend of retail off-take before taking on large positions for forwards.

Also, they feel that with the large northern crops starting in a few weeks, prices should ease. Shellers are also not in a hurry to make any large sales until they have an idea of 2012 RCN pricing.

Demand scene

If the demand remains slow in March/April, it is possible that kernel prices could drift lower by another 5-10 per cent during the peak arrival season, but “we feel that such a decline would be temporary”. Current kernel prices are below the 2011 average and close to the 2010 average and if prices go down by another five per cent they will be below 2010 average, he said.

The lower levels can be sustained only if the RCN prices come down substantially (keeping in mind that processing costs which are about 40 per cent of current kernel price are unlikely to go down).

Usage in 2011 was significantly lower than 2010 in most markets, including India, due to higher prices, reduced availability amid tough economic/financial situation in Europe and the US.

“Things are improving in the US and if there is no further deterioration in Europe, we can expect usage in these two regions to pick up in second half of the year. Lower prices will certainly push up usage in Asia. Overall, we would not be surprised if 2012 usage is higher than 2011,” the trade claimed.

Predicting prices for any commodity at any time is difficult and more so in current situation, when there are so many uncertainties, especially on external factors.

“But, we would like to set the ball rolling for a poll on the 2012 price range. We feel that for most of the year kernel prices will be in the \$3.25-3.75/lb range.

“Drop to \$3 or below will be temporary unless there is a big crisis and demand does not pick up at all.

“Rise to \$4 or above will happen only if there is big problem in northern crops with RCN prices moving up from current levels,” Mr Pankaj said.

Fisheries body conducts workshop on commercialisation of agri-tech

Our Bureau

Kochi, Feb. 27:

The Zonal Technology Management and Business Planning and Development (ZTM-BPD) Unit, South Zone at Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), conducted a meeting-cum-workshop on Evaluation of Agricultural Technologies for Commercialisation on February 24 and 25, 2012 at Kochi.

The AgrIP2012 workshop was aimed at equipping the scientific community from 22 ICAR Research Institutions in South India and for evaluation and pro-active systematic management of technologies and Intellectual Property assets. It was attended by Scientists and Research Associates from ICAR institutes of the four southern States.

The workshop was inaugurated by Dr A. S. Saroja, Principal, Government Law College, while Dr T. K. Srinivasa Gopal, Director of CIFT gave the presidential address. Dr S. Saxena, Principal Scientist (IP & TM), ICAR, New Delhi and Dr R. Kalpana Sastry, Principal Scientist and Head ARSMP, NAARM, Hyderabad, felicitated the gathering.

An online resource titled “IPChannel”, dedicated to disseminate information regarding Intellectual Property Rights and Technology Management was released during the function. Dr Leela Edwin, Member Secretary, ZITMC welcomed the gathering and Dr C. N. Ravishankar, Principal Investigator, NAIP-BPD Unit gave the vote of thanks.

Prices dip at Coonoor tea sale

P. S. Sundar



Coonoor, Feb. 27:

At the final auction for February conducted by Coonoor Tea Trade Association, about 82 per cent of the 10.83 lakh kg on offer was sold with prices dropping by Rs 3 a kg.

“Market was down up to Rs 5 a kg for whole leaf orthodox and irregular for other orthodox grades. High-priced CTC leaf grades eased Rs 2-5 and others, Rs 2-3. Primary orthodox dusts eased Rs 3-5. CTC dust market was irregular with prices oscillating up and down Rs 2-3,” an auctioneer told *Business Line*.

Among CTC teas from bought-leaf factories, Homedale Estate, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped when Paras Tea Co bought for Rs 156 a kg. Vigneshwar Estate got Rs 146, Hittakkal Estate Rs 141, Blue Mont Speciality Rs 138 and Darmona Estate Rs 137. In all, 104 marks got Rs 100 and more.

Among orthodox teas from corporate sector, Chamraj got Rs 215, Curzon Rs 191, Kairbetta Rs 176, Havukal Rs 173, Prammas Rs 171 and Kodanad Rs 166. In all, 35 marks got Rs 100 and more.

On the export front, Pakistan bought selectively for Rs 51-81 a kg and the CIS Rs 51-61.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs 50-55 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs 85-146 for brighter liquoring sorts. They ranged Rs 55-58 for plain dusts and Rs 85-141 for brighter liquoring dusts.

Rise in frozen shrimp exports drives growth in seafood sector

Our Bureau



Chennai, Feb. 27:

The higher contribution of shrimp exports to the overall seafood products export is supporting growth of the sector, according to Ms Leena Nair, Chairman, Marine Products Export Development Authority.

In the current 2011-12 financial year, up to January, estimates show that frozen shrimp exports grew 22 per cent more in quantity as compared with the corresponding period in the previous year with exports at 1.59 lakh tonnes (1.30 lakh tonnes); valued at Rs 6,928 crore (Rs 4,957 crore). The growth in value is nearly 40 per cent.

During the year, South East Asia has emerged the largest export destination replacing European Union which has moved to the second place. However, there is an element of concern here as exports to the South East means that the Indian product is being further processed and re-exported. Indian exporters are losing out on these margins, Ms Nair said.

Efforts are on to add value further, she said. Against the overall seafood exports of \$2.8 billion in 2010-11 the exports in the current year are likely to exceed \$3.5 billion.

Mr Elias Sait, Secretary General, Seafood Exporters Association of India, said while the rupee-dollar movement had contributed to the growth in overall value, there had been a real increase quantitatively in frozen shrimp exports.

The industry is looking at expanding value addition.

Budget expectation

The seafood processors are hoping for measures to bring down the costs for the farmers and processors. Reduction in import duties on aquaculture equipment like aerators, and specific inputs like feed were some of the major demands, he said.

The seafood industry representatives were addressing media persons on the eve of the inauguration of the 18th India International Seafood Show to be held on February 28.

The event coincides with the 40th year of operations of the MPEDA and the SEAI. Over 210 exhibitors will be showcasing their products with more than 1,100 foreign delegates expected to participate in the event. A major contingent from Japan, with more than 100 delegates, is expected, he said.

Agri scientists urge govt to lift moratorium on Bt-brinjal

PTI

Bangalore, Feb 27:

The government should remove all constraints in the research and development work of biotech crops and lift moratorium on commercial release of Bt-brinjal, agri-biotech scientists and industry bodies said today.

In a day-long conference on 'Biotech Crops for Food Security in India', the scientists from the US, Switzerland and India noted that biotech crops would play a major role in ensuring food security of India.

The conference also adopted 'The Bangalore Declaration' urging the government to "take urgent measures to remove unjustified and arbitrary constraints that jeopardise the functioning and development of the Indian agri-biotech R&D".

Through the declaration, scientists demanded the government accept the recommendation of Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) on commercial release of Bt Brinjal and lift the moratorium.

The meet was organised by Foundation for Biotechnology Awareness and Education (FBAE) and supported by Association of Biotech Led Enterprises — Agriculture Group (ABLE—AG).

“It is imperative that constraints such as requirement of the permission of state governments even for field testing of biotech crops approved by the regulator, and the threat of legal action against the use of indigenous germplasm to develop biotech crops for indigenous use are removed expeditiously,” FBAE Secretary C Kameswara Rao said.

Many globally renowned biotechnologists and scientists lamented that the issue has been stuck in India due to “stumbling blocks” put in by some NGOs.

Sugar decontrol panel may submit report in six months: PMEAC

PTI



The PMEAC Chairman, Dr C. Rangarajan. (file photo)

New Delhi, Feb 27:

An expert committee on sugar decontrol is likely to submit its report in the next six months, the Prime Minister’s economic advisory panel Chairman, Dr C. Rangarajan, has said.

In January, the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, had formed an expert committee, under the chairmanship of Dr C. Rangarajan, to examine the issues related to decontrolling of the sugar sector.

“I think we are meeting after one month again. In the next six months, we hope to submit the report. This is a preliminary meeting, we discussed various issues facing sugar sector,” Dr Rangarajan told reporters today after the meeting.

On the deliberation in the meeting, Dr Kaushik Basu, Chief Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, said: “We are serious about this (sugar decontrol). Many countries like Brazil have really flourished and we want this to happen in India.”

Apart from Dr Rangarajan and Dr Kaushik Basu, members of the committee include secretaries to the Department of Food and Agriculture, Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) Chairman, Mr Ashok Gulati, former Agriculture Secretary, Mr Nand Kumar, and the EAC Secretary, Mr K.P. Krishnan.

“Shared feeling is that potential of this sector has not been realised in India. We will write serious report. I am keeping my fingers crossed, things will happen,” Dr Basu noted.

The sugar industry is under government control, right from the level of production to distribution. Apex sugar industry bodies ISMA and NFCSF are seeking partial decontrol of the sector, including freedom to sell sugar in the open market and doing away with the levy obligation for Public Distribution System.

Under the levy obligation, sugar mills are required to sell 10 per cent of their output to the government at below-cost rates for supply to ration shops. Mills supply levy sugar at 60 per cent of the cost of production, resulting in an annual industry loss of about Rs 2,500-3,000 crore.

The industry has also been demanding removal of the monthly release system under which the Food Ministry allocates quantity of sugar to be sold in the open market every month.

Sugar production in India, the world’s second largest producer but the largest consumer, is estimated to touch 26 million tonnes against the annual demand of 22 mt.