

Improving cassava, the bread of the tropics

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN



The Hindu IMPORTANT CROP: Cassava is the staple food of about 500 million Africans. Photo: K.K. Mustafah

Recently I received an email from Mr Bill Gates and was torn between the horns of a dilemma. On one horn, I was all agog with excitement that he seems to know me.

The other horn was the worry that it might be the usual spam mail from the ubiquitous rich widow from Cote d'Ivoire, who would share her fortune if only I emailed her my bank details.

Curiosity overriding caution, I recklessly opened the mail to find it to be the 2012 Annual Letter from Bill Gates, detailing the activity of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

What it described was a remarkable commitment of \$2 billion to helping poor farm families, most of which are led by women, boost their productivity while preserving the land for future generations. Compare this with a total of \$3 billion per year spent by the entire world on researching the seven most important crops. Of these, cassava (or tapioca) is one. It is the staple food of about 500 million Africans; Nigeria is the world's largest producer of this tuber.

And it has been affected by two virus-infected diseases, both carried by white flies — the Cassava Mosaic Disease affecting the (edible) leaves, and the other Brown Streak Disease which rots and kills cassava roots.

The Gates Foundation is committing money to help win these and to increase cassava's nutritional content and reduce its inherent toxins.

Cassava is eaten in many parts of India as well. We call it *Kuchi Kizhangu* or *Maravalli Kizhangu* in Tamil, *Kappa* in Malayalam, *Kavva pendalam* in Telugu, *Mara Genasu* in Kannada and *Simla Alu* in Hindi. Its powdered form is tapioca, and when it is made into pearls, we call it *sago*, *sabudana* or *Jawwarisi*, and make *sabudana vada*, *upma*, *payasam* and so forth.

Just like potato, maize and chillies, cassava too is an import to the rest of the world, a gift by Portuguese sailors who brought it from Brazil to Africa and Asia. Within centuries, it replaced traditional African crops as Africa's most important food crop, and has come to be called "Bread of the Tropics" and when disease strikes it, it hits the health and livelihood of millions of people.

It is thus vital not only to conquer these diseases but also improve the nutritional content in this plant.

The book "Nutritive values of Indian Food and The Planning of Satisfactory Diets," the Bible of India's Food Science (and perhaps the most useful book published by Indian science agencies for its people), lists that 60 per cent of tapioca is water, and each edible portion offers 157 calories coming from 389 carbohydrates, 1.2 g minerals, 0.6 g fibre, 0.7 g proteins and 0.2 g fat.

Thankfully it is rich in calcium. Eating it day in and day out might fill the stomach but not offer enough nutrition.

It is towards this challenge that the international group termed Biocassava Plus has been put together, with the aims to (a) increase by six-fold the content and bioavailability of zinc and iron, (b) increase four-fold its proteins content, (c) increase by ten-fold the vitamin A and E content, (d) develop virus-resistant varieties of cassava, (e) delay the post-harvest deterioration of cassava tubers, and (f) decrease by ten-fold its cyanogens content.

Item (f) above is particularly important. Raw cassava contains two types of compounds which generate the mortal poison HCN upon decomposition. The indigenous people of Brazil and Africa have found ways to remove the poison.

Peeling the roots, soaking them in water for a couple of days, then drying and cooking solves much of the problem. (Is this not eerily reminiscent of the paralysis caused by eating kesari dal (*lathyrus sativus*); fortunately for us, IARI scientists have found ways to make toxin-free varieties of its plants).

Tapioca, which is processed from cassava in a similar way, is also safe.

Biocassava Plus is an international collaborative endeavour, with team members from the National Root Crop Institute of Nigeria, Kenya Agricultural Institute, and the Danforth Plant Science Center at St Louis, MO, USA. The team has been able to make some exciting advances; one of them is to increase the levels of an enzyme in cassava roots which increases the amounts of protein and free amino acids while reducing residual cyanogen levels (*Narayanan et al., PLoS One 6, e21996, 2011*) and the other is to use miRNA technology to increase the resistance of the plant to attack by the viruses (*Patil et al, Mol Plant Pathol 12, 31-41, 2011*).

These are two fine examples of the use of the latest arsenals of molecular biology in the service of the poor.

For a composite review of the advances made in the field, please see *Sayre et al, The BioCassava plus program: biofortification of cassava for sub-Saharan Africa. Annu Rev Plant Biology 62, 251-72, 2011*.

Such advances in plant sciences cannot be done by selective breeding or grafting alone.

We need to use the latest methods of biotechnology — be it introducing new genes, knocking out existing genes, adding material to the soil (biofortification), or other such methods.

Tests in the lab and in the field, followed by safety studies are essential before releasing it to the world. Biocassava Plus has decided to do all these and expects to release its products only by 2017.

And we hope these will be freely available to all, and not be owned by monopolies, since half the controversy today about biotechnologically developed materials is about ownership and monopoly.

The Gates Foundation is supporting the activities of Biocassava Plus — an example of the commitment of the world's richest to help serve the world's poorest.

One therefore expects that it will ensure that Cassava 2.0 will be freely available to
all.dbala@lvpei.org

Published: February 2, 2012 01:58 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 02:17 IST

'Provide 100 days employment only during lean agriculture season'

M. J. Prabu



The Hindu Mr. Ajay Jakhar, Chairman, Bharat Krishak Sangh. Photo: M.J. Prabu

Labour shortage has become a major worry for farmers

While the government seems to laud itself claiming that the 100 days National rural employment scheme popularly called as NAREGA is a big success in villages, a study conducted by Bharat Krishak Sangh in Delhi revealed that the expenditure of candidates for Panchayat elections increased 10 fold since work started under the employment scheme, and that most people elected as Sarpanch (Panchayat President) bought a multi utility vehicle within months of being elected.

Corruption

“These are a direct consequence of leakages such as corruption and acceptance of sub-standard work in our country's agriculture field,” says Mr. Ajay Jakhar, Chairman of the Krishak Sangh.

“Realizing this, I believe Jean Dreze, who is credited with proposing this scheme, was compelled to observe that “Narega is a pro-people law implemented by an anti-people system.”

People who influence and make policy must be aware of ground realities. A policy must not be designed to be implemented by an utopian non-existent system.

As a consequence even the good components in half-baked policies are eventually eroded by ill-informed choices and poor governance,” he says.

It is clear that if the government needs to continue to give direct employment to the masses then this scheme is an acknowledgment of the failure of all rural development schemes since independence. “Farming is no more dignified as more farmers look for govt. jobs and bride grooms from the other sectors.

“Over Rs. 100,000 crore spent on employment generation programmes are definitely not value for money spent; considering opportunities lost and other alternative investment options ignored. If it is an economic stimulus or a subsidy can be debated,” says Mr. Jakhar.

Rather than such expenditures, investments could have been made in increasing rural prosperity and productivity which would have also created self-employment opportunities.

Spin off effect

“The employment scheme gives a minimum wage rate to anyone ready to do some minimum labour. It is giving them some safety valve, which is good but the spin off effect for the farmer is that labour shortage has become one of his biggest worries,” he adds.

“We realized this problem and everybody acknowledges it today. We proposed simple terms within the ambit of the scheme to safeguard farmer interest;

“The 100 day employment will only be guaranteed in the lean agriculture season. Positive consequences of inclusion are:

Simple strategy

“There will be no shortage of labour in the peak season of harvest and sowing. People will get employment in the lean season when there is less opportunity of work. This will ensure higher number of available workdays in a year for the people without extra budgetary support,” he exhorts.

Cropping patterns change as seasons vary across geographies. “Fearful of the central government always generalizing, we further proposed that the District Collector in consultation with State Agriculture University should be directed to notify 150 days of the year when employment cannot be given,” says Mr. Jakhar.

There is demand from some quarters for enunciating a 'wage sharing' scheme - labour demanding work can be engaged by the small farmers who will pay 50 per cent of the wages and the balance 50 per cent can be paid by the Government, according to him.

In theory, this sounds good like most policies. But in practice the ground reality is that "this provision will be exploited for personal gain by influential people in the villages and the proposed benefits will not be available to the genuine small farmers," seems to be his conviction.

Provide governance

The Government should provide governance and an atmosphere conducive for employment generation rather than provide direct employment.

"We cannot not quantify or ignore the social cost that India will have to eventually pay for providing jobs to large sections of society who get paid to work less and inefficiently," he says.

To interact readers can contact Mr. Ajay Jakhar: at Chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj, A-1, Nizamuddin West, New Delhi-110013, e-mail : aj@bks.org.in , mobile: 09810144555, phones : 011-65650384 and 46121708.

Published: February 2, 2012 02:01 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 02:01 IST

Farm Query: Milk yield in cattle

Is there any simple, natural remedy to make cattle yield more milk?

Jayasudha, Karnataka.

A farmer Mr. Mannubhai Vankar feeds his cattle with leaves of Hibiscus(in the form of powder) to increase milk yield . The leaves are shade dried and ground into fine powder. About 125g of powder is given orally for 15 days (or 150g for five days). to achieve better milk yield. For details contact Mr. Mannubhai at Kaliya, Vankar and Bhariya Phadiya, Shahera Taluk, Godhara, Panchmahal district, Gujarat -389 210 Mobile : 9979564629.

Published: February 2, 2012 01:59 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 01:59 IST

Managing pineapple disease in sugarcane

Pineapple disease in sugarcane cultivation is a common occurrence in India. The disease has been reported to cause 15-20 per cent losses in sett germination and 10-15 tonne losses per hectare in yield. In India, the disease has been reported from all major sugarcane growing states.

Recently the disease has been found in serious proportion in sugarcane plantations at Girwali village in the Tahasil Ambajogai, district breed of the Marathwada region, Maharashtra.

Germination loss

Survey reports revealed about 85-90 per cent losses in germination of the sugarcane setts. The disease is caused by a fungus which is soil borne and the name "pineapple" disease has been derived due to the scent / odour produced by rotting / decaying sugarcane setts, which is similar to the scent of ripped pineapples.

The fungus affects sugarcane setts primarily within one week of planting and infects mainly through cut ends and spreads rapidly.

Occasionally, the disease occurs in standing crop in patches giving uneven field appearance of the crop. The stalks of the standing cane if damaged mechanically or physically are also prone to it. The fungus spreads rapidly throughout the standing canes, foliage turns yellow and ultimately canes wither. Ratoon crops may also be affected.

Management

Maintain good field hygiene and sanitation. Use healthy setts with at least three nodes obtained from disease-free fields for rapid germination.

Grow resistant / tolerant varieties. Maintain proper drainage in field. Avoid injury / damage to setts. Avoid too deep planting.

Treat the setts with organomereurial fungicides before planting, to protect the cut-ends from invasion by the fungus.

Pre-treat the setts with hot water which will stimulate germination of buds, hasten growth and overcome the competition with the pathogen.

Application of press mud at the rate of 25 tonnes per hectare one week before planting can significantly reduce the sett rot and increase the number of tillers, millable canes and cane yield also.

A.P. Suryawanshi & Utpal Dey,

Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani Maharashtra – 431402

Published: February 2, 2012 01:35 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 01:35 IST

Heat peaks shrink wheat yields

PTI

More intense heat waves due to global warming could diminish wheat crop yields around the world through premature ageing, according to a study published recently in *Nature Climate Change*.

Current projections based on computer models underestimate the extent to which hotter weather in the future will accelerate this process, the researchers warned.

In some nations, the grain accounts for up to 50 per cent of calorie intake and 20 per cent of protein nutrition, according to the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), near Mexico City.

In 2010, drought and wildfires in wheat-exporting Russia pushed world prices of the grain to two-year highs, underscoring the vulnerability of global supplies to weather— and climate-related disruptions.

Greenhouse experiments have shown that unseasonably warm temperatures — especially at the end of the growing season — can cause senescence, the scientific term for accelerated ageing.

Excess heat beyond the plant's tolerance zone damages photosynthetic cells.

Fluctuations in wheat yields in India have also been attributed by farmers to temperature, most recently a heat wave in 2010 blamed for stunting plant productivity.

To further test these experiments and first-hand observations, a trio of researchers led by David Lobell of Stanford University sifted through nine years of satellite data for the Indo-Ganges Plains in northern India. He subsequently used statistical techniques to isolate the effects of extreme heat on wheat.

They found that a 2.0 Celsius increase above long-term averages shortened the growing season by a critical nine days, reducing total yield by up to 20 per cent.

“These results imply that warming presents an even greater challenge to wheat than implied by previous modelling studies, and that the effectiveness of adaptations will depend on how well they reduce crop sensitivity to very hot days,” the researchers concluded.

The world's nations, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), have said that Earth's average temperature should not exceed the pre-industrial benchmark by more than 2.0 degrees C if dangerous warming impacts are to be avoided.

Published: February 1, 2012 19:08 IST | Updated: February 1, 2012 19:08 IST

Silk from cashew pest can boost income

Special Correspondent

Cashew farmers can boost their income by supplying *Cricula trifenestrata*, a minor pest found in plantations, for silk production, according to the Kerala Agricultural University.

Cricula trifenestrata, a moth, is an occasional defoliator of cashew.

A team of scientists with the KAU's Cashew Research Station at Madakkathara, led by Gavas Rajesh, has found that the moths are found

in large numbers in cashew plantations in Kannur district.

Preliminary tests conducted by the Silk Mark Organisation of India and the Central Silk Board reveal that silk threads made from cocoons of *Cricula trifenestrata* are of a high quality, scientists say.

Moth larvae, or caterpillars, make cocoons. The caterpillars are dark grey with red oral claspers. Their segments are separated by dark

brown rings, and they grow to a length of 5 cm. On completing the larval phase, the caterpillar makes a cocoon of golden yellow silk.

The cocoon is found on the stem, branches or leaves of cashew trees. The moth lays its eggs in a neat row along the outer edge of the

cashew leaf.

Wild silks are referred to in the country as 'Vanya' silks. Tasar, Muga and Eri are the popular Vanya varieties. “Cricula too can be a Vanya silk source,” Dr. Rajesh says.

He and Gregory Zacharia had won the Best Presentation Award at the First International Symposium on Cashew held in Madurai recently by the International Society for Horticultural Sciences and the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

Published: February 2, 2012 00:00 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 04:17 IST

18 agricultural service centres to be established soon in Erode district

Staff Reporter

Farmers urged to register their requirement of agricultural machinery

The Co-operative department has opened 13 agricultural service centres in the primary agricultural co-operative credit societies (PACCS) in the district this financial year.

Joint Registrar of co-operative societies S. Babu, speaking at a field training programme held in Ammapet near here recently, said the department had planned to open another 18 centres in the district soon.

A sum of Rs. 20 lakh would be provided as grant to the PACCS to purchase modern cultivation equipment and rent them to the farmers through the centres.

The government allotted over Rs. 80 crore as grant to 400 societies in the State to purchase modern equipment to mechanise various agricultural operations and overcome the shortage of farm labourers, he added.

Mr. Babu appealed to the farmers to approach the nearby societies and register their requirement of agricultural machineries.

This would enable the department to procure equipment marching the farmers' requirements.

Earlier, a team of officials demonstrated the functioning of the machine used for the transplantation of paddy seedlings.

Officials also interacted with the farmers and answered their questions on mechanised paddy transplantation.

Erode District Central Co-operative Bank Special officer K. Renuga, Deputy Registrar V.C. Gomathi, and senior officials from the department were present.

Published: February 2, 2012 00:00 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 04:17 IST

Mettur level

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 84.87 feet on Wednesday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 841 cusecs and the discharge 5,007 cusecs.

NELLORE, February 2, 2012

Prawn farmers advised to go for staggered crops

For ensuring better returns, the Andhra Pradesh State Prawn Farmers' Welfare Association (APSPFWA) has asked the prawn seed producers to stagger their crops in two stages this season instead of going for it at one go.

The first half of crop may be taken up in February, March and April while the second half may be planned for June, July and August.

This measure is expected to help the farmers tide over any crisis arising out of low prices because of excess production from one-time crop.

APSPFWA president Duvvuru Radhakrishna Reddy and secretary A. Kondala Rayudu said that problems could crop up if farmers took up one-time cultivation. Supply of ice and adequate cold storage facilities were also becoming difficult during excess production, which ultimately caused a fall in the prices and affected returns to farmers, they said.

Mr. Radhakrishna Reddy said that the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) had given permission to more hatcheries following a representation by the Rythu Sangham for increasing supply to Venami prawn seed growers.

With this, the number of hatcheries had gone up from 24 to 76.

As per the guidelines, the brood stock (mother prawn) should be imported from Hawaii and may be used for seed production here after quarantine. But there may be practices when the brood stock is collected locally for producing the seed, which will not give the desired yields causing losses to farmers.

Mr. Radhakrishna Reddy said that the feed manufacturers should come forward to buy the prawn seed produced by farmers for making it profitable for the latter.

Only such efforts would make prawn cultivation attractive for growers, he added.

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- *Excess production in one-time crop may lead to fall in prices: APSPFWA chief*
 - *Adequate cold storage facilities will be difficult if production is in excess*
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Published: February 2, 2012 00:00 IST | Updated: February 2, 2012 04:25 IST

Farmers advised to go for organic manure

Staff Reporter

K.C. Kalappa, member of South Indian unit of Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), advised the farmers to go for natural and organic manure to retain the fertility of the soil and also to reduce input costs.

Model farm

During his visit to the model farm of a progressive farmer Rammohan Naidu at Brahmanakalva village in Ramachandrapuram mandal recently, he saw the organic manure making unit run by Welfare Organisation for Rural Development (WORD) at the site. He explained to the farmers that KVIC was providing 25-35 p.c. subsidy on natural manure and allied products. With just cow dung and garden waste as the input material, farmers can turn the world a green place, he explained.

WORD Secretary K.Gangadharam said farmers could prepare 'Jeevamrutham' and 'Ghana Jeevamrutham' themselves by using dung and urine obtained from indigenous cows, besides vermicompost from naturally grown earthworms.

He invited farmers across the state to take part in the training programme on 'natural farming' to be conducted in Tirupati from Feb 18-22.

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By IANS

01 Feb 2012 05:56:10 PM IST

'Inflation will come down to 6-7 % by March'

NEW DELHI: The overall inflation will be around 6-7 percent by March while economic growth in the current financial year will be around 7 percent, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said Wednesday.

"We are hopeful that by the end of March, the headline inflation will be between 6 and 7 percent while the growth rate may be around 7 percent plus," Mukherjee said here during a meeting with economists as part of the pre-budget consultation process.

The consultations are held to receive views on the various policies to be incorporated in the upcoming financial year 2012-2013.

The headline inflation based on the wholesale price index (WPI) fell to a two-year low of 7.47 percent in December as compared to 9.11 percent in the previous month as per the latest available data.

Food prices have declined in January year-on-year raising hopes of further easing in inflationary pressure.

Annual food inflation was recorded at -1.03 percent for the week ended Jan 14. This was the fourth consecutive week of decline in general food price. Food inflation was at -0.42 percent for the week ended Jan 7 and at -2.9 percent and -3.36 percent consecutively in the previous two weeks.

Chief Economic Adviser Kaushik Basu Tuesday said the overall inflation would come down below 7 percent in January mainly due to the drop in food price. January inflation figure will be released by the middle of this month.

Addressing the senior economists, Mukherjee said Indian economy was passing through a difficult time and the growth would fall to around 7 percent against the budgetary target of 9 percent.

"The current year was a challenging year as we had to face the problem of inflation, fiscal deficit and maintenance of sustainable and inclusive growth," the finance minister said.

He said due to volatility of international crude prices, the euro zone crisis and overall slowdown in the growth process in developed economies, the emerging economies including India had also to face adverse impact of global slowdown, according to an official statement released after

the meeting.

On progress on reforms, the finance minister said in the era of coalition politics, "decisions are taken through consensus as you have to carry others with you."

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Business Standard

Thursday, Feb 02, 2012

Cardamom output may be at all-time high this year

Sharleen D'Souza / Mumbai February 02, 2012, 0:09 IST

Cardamom production is expected to be at an all-time high this year, as farmers chose to plant more of the spice due to good prices received last year.

Production is expected to rise 30 per cent to 21,000 tonnes, compared to 16,000 tonnes last year. The earlier high was in 2004-05, when India had harvested 17,500 tonnes. The normal consumption in a year is 12,000-14,000 tonnes; and thus, carryover stock is also expected to be more.

Last year, farmers realised higher prices for the spice, up to Rs 2,000 a kg, which made planters increase the acreage. However, due to this season's bumper crop, prices have plummeted to a one-and-half year low of Rs 600 a kg.

The current prices may be the bottom and stockists and planters have begun to store 7 mm and 8 mm quality of cardamom, expecting higher returns in the months to come, as the export scene is brightening up.

During April-November, 3,100 tonnes of small cardamom were exported compared to 570 tonnes in the same period in 2010, a rise of 207 per cent. During the same period, 475 tonnes of large cardamom were also exported, compared to 380 tonnes in the corresponding

period in 2010, a rise of 48 per cent.

"I expect at least 5,000 tonnes of small cardamom to be exported from India by March, as Indian cardamom is better in quality than Guatemala's," said Mulraj Ruparel, a Mumbai-based exporter. The major importers are West Asia, Japan and Europe. Mostly, there are only four pickings of the crop in a season, but this year due to a bumper crop there will be a fifth picking as well.

Govt releases 1.6 mn tonnes sugar for Feb

Press Trust of India / New Delhi February 01, 2012, 15:10 IST

The government today allocated 1.61 million tonnes of sugar for sale in the open market and distribution through ration shops for the current month.

Sugar allocated to meet the demand of this month is, however, lower than 1.72 million tonnes released last month.

Out of total quota released for February, the Food Ministry has earmarked 1.4 million tonnes for sale in the open market (called non-levy sugar) and the remaining 212,000 tonnes would be for ration shops (called levy sugar).

"The government has decided to make available 1.61 million tonnes of sugar (levy sugar 212,000 tonnes and non-levy sugar 1.4 million tonnes) for the month of February, 2012," an official statement said.

This quantity of 1.61 million tonnes is sufficient to meet the internal demand of sugar this month, it added.

The ministry has directed sugar mills to sell the entire non-levy quantity released in the current month itself.

Sugar mills contribute 10% of their contribution to the government for distribution through ration shops.

The sector is controlled by the government, which decided every month the quantity of sugar to be released in the open market.

Sugar production in India, the world's second largest but the largest consumer, is expected to be 24.5 million tonnes in the 2011-12 season (October-September), higher than the annual demand of 21.5 million tonnes.

High global prices to push natural rubber exports

George Joseph / Kochi February 02, 2012, 0:07 IST

The natural rubber (NR) market is set to take a U-turn, with India, a net importer till now, likely to increase its exports, since global prices are ruling higher than domestic prices for some weeks.

The market here quoted Rs 190a kg for RSS-4 grade on Wednesday, while in Bangkok spot trade it was quoted at Rs 202 a kg. A couple of weeks before, the domestic price was higher by Rs 14-16 a kg than the international tags. This change may trigger a rise in export from India.

Analysts also say if lower domestic prices prevail for a longer period, India may be an attractive centre for importing nations.

The Thai government's decision to intervene in the market to bail out growers had triggered a spurt in international prices.

In January, the Thai government decided to procure 200,000 tonnes of rubber to arrest a fall in prices. The government plans to spend \$535 million for market intervention to boost prices.

On January 24, the Cabinet granted 15 billion bahts at zero interest to rubber cooperatives and the Rubber Estate Organisation for market intervention operations.

The money is for purchasing RSS-3 grade sheet rubber with an aim of pushing prices up to 120 baht a kg, after keeping 200,000 tonnes of stock. Thai NR prices have since advanced to their highest level in 12 weeks.

According to experts here, this is the major factor behind the sharp increase in global prices. According to N Radhakrishnan, former president, the Cochin Rubber Merchants Association, Chinese buying was earlier expected to decrease thanks to the lower economic growth there. This caused a fall in prices, as excess production was estimated for this year. According to the latest forecasts, Chinese consumption is likely to go up and there might not be a glut in the NR market. This also supported the recent rise in prices.

The Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries projects only a marginal growth of 0.3 per cent in production for January-March of 2012. So, most of the physical factors governing the global market favour a rally in prices in the quarter.

A whopping 320 per cent increase was recorded in rubber exports during April-December period of the current financial year. A total of 22,472 tonnes were shipped in the period, as against 7,293 tonnes in the same period last year.

There has been a slowdown in import, as only 133,693 tonnes were brought in compared to 166,463 tonnes last year.

In April-December, 717,485 tonnes were consumed domestically, as against 708,705 tonnes in the same period last year. Total production in the nine-month period was 679,100 tonnes, as against 651,150 tonnes earlier.

FMC may ban 2 more traders over guar price manipulation

Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai February 01, 2012, 0:49 IST

The Forward Markets Commission (FMC) is likely to impose a trading ban for at least six months on two more Rajasthan-based traders, in addition to similar action taken some days earlier against two others. This follows a probe into irregularities in the trading of guar seed and guar gum, largely on the National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX).

Around three dozen traders and the entities they represented were probed in this regard. Around 30 were let off with a warning and one, it has been decided, should be exonerated. Of the remaining four, two have already been punished, as reported earlier this month.

These are Shresth Commodities & Financial Services Pvt Ltd and Vinod Commodities Ltd. The former is a member of the SCFS, MCX, NCDEX and ICEX; it has been suspended for six months from any trade, including its director, Subhash Jain. The latter is a member of MCX, NCDEX and ACEL; it has been banned from any trading for a year, as has its director, Vinod Singhvi.

As for the other two, mentioned at the outset here, they made their defence in the second week of January. "We were not convinced with their responses and, hence, decided to suspend them from active participation in commodity trading. The period is being worked out and will be announced soon," said a senior FMC official. Besides manipulation of guar seed and guar gum prices, an FMC official said those being proceeded against were also involved in frequent client code modifications. FMC fears the possibility of margin funding in cases where some industrialists and large traders transfer money into the account of a small person or entity and trade in commodities on the latter's behalf. The manipulators manage to corner huge quantities of guar gum and seed through different accounts for price rigging, while the person who allows use of his account gets a small sum.

THE HINDU Business Line

20-30% of potato crop seen hit in Punjab due to rains

Press Trust of India



Chandigarh, Feb. 1:

Punjab potato growers, who dumped their produce on the road in December in protest against low rates, expect a sharp fall in output of the tuber due to unfavourable weather last month.

“Rain in the month of January has dealt a severe blow to potato growers in Punjab and it is going to have a damaging effect on overall production of crop in Punjab. We think the crop loss may be between 20-30 per cent,” Confederation of Potato Seed Farmers President Mr Sukhjot Singh Bhatti told PTI on Wednesday. Potato growers said the rain mainly damaged potato varieties like Pukhraj and Jyoti in the crop-growing belt of Jalandhar and Kapurthala, which are known for growing seed potato.

“The maximum impact of rain was visible in the areas of Adampur, Bhogpur, Kartarpur, Kapurthala and Shakot,” said another potato grower. Jalandhar Potato Growers Association President Mr Jaswinder Singh Sangha demanded that the State Government carry out a loss assessment in affected areas for awarding suitable compensation. With untimely rains damaging crop, harvesting of the tuber has been delayed by 10 days. “Crop harvesting normally starts around January 24-25, but because of rain, farmers have now delayed the harvesting by 10 days,” said Mr Bhatti. Punjab grows potatoes over an area of over 80,000 hectares, with annual output of 21 lakh tonnes, and it is a major grower of seed potatoes, which are supplied to other states. Having already faced heavy losses due to low prices of potatoes, Punjab farmers say the drop in production will further compound their woes. “Earlier, we had to throw our crop on the road because of low rates and now, lower yield will turn out to be another big blow for growers,” Mr Sangha said, adding that the crop loss could be between 30-40 per cent.

Punjab farmers threw potato crops in large quantities on roads in December last year, after market rates fell due to oversupply.

Spot rubber rules steady



Kottayam, Feb. 1:

Spot rubber continued to show an almost steady trend on Wednesday. The under current was sluggish following a weak closing on NMCE. Meanwhile latex 60 per cent, the only gainer of the

day posted moderate gains in the absence of sellers tracking the positive reports from the global markets.

Global natural rubber production is estimated to rise 3.2 per cent in 2012 to 10.450 million tonnes, slightly better than the previous estimates of 10.415 million tonnes because of higher production in Vietnam. Sheet rubber finished flat at Rs 189 a kg according to traders. The grade closed unchanged at Rs 189.50 a kg both at Kottayam and Kochi according to Rubber Board.

In futures, the February series declined to Rs 189.71 (192.60), March to Rs 193.75 (196.44), April to Rs 199.90 (203.30), May to Rs 203.65 (206.00) and June to Rs 201 (206.25) a kg on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) closed firm at Rs 202.56 (200.06) a kg at Bangkok. The February futures improved to ₹303.0 (Rs 196.60) from ₹301.5 a kg during the day session but then remained inactive in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 189 (189); RSS-5: 184 (184); ungraded: 179 (179); ISNR 20: 189 (189) and latex 60 per cent: 116 (114).

Tender coconut parlour in Infopark



Kochi, Feb. 1:

The tender coconut parlour which opened in Infopark Campus by the Coconut Development Board proved to be popular on the first day itself with hundreds of Infopark-based employees relishing the taste of pure, unadulterated and natural tender coconut water. The kiosks are

managed by the Coconut Producers Society, Mudalamada, Palaghat. Mr Gigo Joseph, CEO of Infopark, Mr K. Kurian Senior Technical Advisor of Infopark and Additional Commissioner (Horticulture) of Central Agriculture Ministry, Mr Om Prakash were present on the occasion.

The Coconut Development Board is planning to set up 5,000 similar parlours across the country to facilitate marketing of coconut products. Fresh tender coconuts will be directly supplied to the parlour by a pre-designated Coconut Producers Society which consists of 40-100 coconut farmers of a particular area who will work as a unit in the production and marketing of their coconut produce, a release said.

Sugar output may top 26 million tonnes, says ISMA

Our Bureau



New Delhi, Feb 1:

Sugar output in the current 2011-12 season may exceed its initial projections of 26 million tonnes on higher cane area across the country and better recovery in Maharashtra, the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said on Wednesday.

“Sugar production in 2011-12 would be at least 26 million tonnes with an upward bias, if any,” ISMA said in a statement. This is based on the recent review of the current sugar production up to January 2012 in various States and based on the feedback of ISMA's industry members.

ISMA drew a comparison between last year's actual production and reports of the yield, the trend in sugar recovery and diversion of sugarcane to alternate sweeteners such as *gur* and *khandsari* while finalising its assessment.

In the October-January period of 2011-12, sugar production has touched 13.27 million tonnes, up 17 per cent over the corresponding period last year.

Top three producing States - Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka are expected to produce 9 million tonnes, 6.8 million tonnes and 3.8 million tonnes respectively, ISMA said. So far output in Maharashtra is up by 14 per cent to 4.68 million tonnes, while in UP the production is higher by 17 per cent to 3.72 million tonnes. In Karnataka, the output is up 21 per cent to 2.12 million tonnes over the previous year.

MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra leads the top three sugar producing States in recovery of sugar. In the current season recovery in Maharashtra is estimated at 10.95 per cent as against 10.45 per cent in the previous year. However in UP, the recovery is slightly lower at 8.64 per cent as against 8.92 per cent in the previous year. The lower recovery in UP is attributed to the start of the early crushing season in the state.

ISMA had initially pegged the 2011-12 output at 26 million tonne, up from 24.2 million tonne in the previous year. ISMA's estimates are higher than the Government's forecast of 24.6 to 25 million tonnes. The annual demand for sugar in India is pegged at 22 million tonnes.

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Govt releases 16.12 lakh tonne sugar for Feb



The Food Ministry has earmarked 14 lakh tonnes for sale in the open market and the rest 2.12 lakh tonnes would be for ration shops.

New Delhi, Feb 1:

The Government has allocated 16.12 lakh tonnes of sugar for sale in the open market and distribution through ration shops for the current month. Sugar allocated to meet the demand for this month is, however, lower than 17.16 lakh tonnes released last month. Out of total quota released for February, the Food Ministry has earmarked 14 lakh tonnes for sale in the open market (called non-levy sugar) and the remaining 2.12 lakh tonnes would be for ration shops (called levy sugar). "The Government has decided to make available 16.12 lakh tonnes of sugar (levy sugar 2.12 lakh tonnes and non-levy sugar 14 lakh tonnes) for the month of February, 2012," an official statement said. The Ministry has directed sugar mills to sell the entire non-levy quantity released in the current month itself.

Sugar production in India, the world's second largest, is expected to be 24.5 million tonnes in the 2011-12 season (October-September), higher than the annual demand of 21.5 mt.

AP cane farmers shifting to palm oil

K. V. Kurmanath



Farmers in water-rich Andhra area expect that over 30 per cent of sugarcane area would be converted to palm oil, maize and sunflower.

Hyderabad, Feb. 1:

Farmers never lose hope. If one crop fails, they quickly turn to another. Sugarcane growers in Andhra Pradesh, who have declared a crop holiday, are not going to stop farming next season. Instead, they are switching to palm oil, maize and sunflower.

Farmers in water-rich Andhra area expect that over 30 per cent of sugarcane area would be converted to these alternative crops.

“Palm oil plantation looks lucrative as demand for edible oil is only growing. It has a very long life of up to 20 years, saving the recurring investment costs for farmers,” Mr Sharma, a sugar cane farmer from Krishna district, told *Business Line*. Mr O.P. Goenka, an expert on edible oil industry and former President of the Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI), acknowledges this development. “We are hearing this from farmers. This augurs well for the country that is spending huge amounts of foreign exchange on edible oil imports. We do not however know how much of land is being shifted to palm oil. This will go a long way in sourcing edible oil domestically,” he said.

Conflicting views

While the Government is claiming that sugarcane area has gone up by 11 per cent following huge gains from ratoon crop (crop from sprouts of previous crop), farmers say that the reality is completely different. “Sugarcane farmers are not happy. They are disgusted with negative returns. They are looking at alternatives. Some of them have already switched,” Mr Sharma said. Sugarcane was grown in 2 lakh hectares in 2010-11. Despite a fall of 23 per cent in plantation that shrunk the fresh area to 82,000 ha (1.07 lakh ha), growth of 65 per cent in ratoon crop at 1.18 lakh ha (71,622 ha) increased overall area, the Government argued.

The State Agricultural Plan for 2011-12, however, pegged the area down at 1.70 lakh ha.

Maize, sunflower in Telangana

Telangana, the major sugarcane growing area, too is witnessing a shift. “They are looking at sunflower and maize as alternatives in Telangana. Sugar factories here are struggling to get cane here this season itself,” Mr P. Appireddy, Convener of Telangana Sugarcane Farmers’ Association, said. According to him, sugarcane area in the State plummeted to sub-one lakh hectares level from about 2.40 lakh hectares in 2006-07. Farmers’ organisations have projected a total crushing of 110 lakh tonnes of cane this year as against 120 lakh tonnes last year.

“Next year, it could touch 70 lakh tonnes, severely impacting production of sugar. Plantation in almost areas under almost all sugar factories has come down,” Mr Sharma said.