Today's Paper » NATIONAL » ANDHRA PRADESH

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Sericulture dashes farmers' hopes

G. Nagaraja

Feeling the pinch:A tribal farmer works in his mulberry crop at T. Gangannagudem in the Agency of West Godavari district.—Photo: A.V.G. Prasad

The hopes raised by government agencies over the prospects of sericulture landed Sunnam Varalakshmi, a Koya woman farmer, in deep trouble.

Hailing from this Agency village, which lies in Jeelugumilli mandal, she raised mulberry crop on her one-acre plot after getting an assurance that she would receive 100 per cent subsidy from different government agencies for construction of sheds for rearing of silkworms within two months of transplantation. Thereafter, she would earn an income ranging from Rs. 10,000 to 30,000 a month.

“Plants keep growing, but there is no place for rearing worms. I have been investing on the crop for the last six months, but the prospects of getting returns appear bleak,” laments Varalakshmi.

Officials promised to release a grant of Rs. 1.04 lakh i.e. Rs. 50,000 from the Sericulture Department, Rs. 30,000 from Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) and Rs. 24,000 from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for shed construction two months after transplantation of mulberry plants.

The Sericulture Department promised to release Rs. 6,000 from her subsidy amount as first instalment by the time she finished building the basement while the ITDA made it clear that it would release its subsidy component only after completion of construction. “As I have already invested a lot, I am left with no money for building a shed,” Varalakshmi said.

Sericulture has been promoted in 100 acres involving tribal persons in Jeelugumilli mandal by the Sericulture Department, NABARD and ITDA jointly. It is proposed to build 44 sheds in seven to eight habitations, including T. Gangannagudem.

The price crash, soaring labour cost and shortage of farm hands have forced Yandra Rajendra Prasad, a non-tribal from Rachannagudem, to abandon the mulberry crop which he raised in three acres. “It requires workers at every stage— feeding worms, watering and pruning of plantations and collection and grading of cocoons from trays,” he said. The daily wage has gone up to Rs. 200 per hand while the price of cocoons crashed from Rs. 300 to Rs. 150 a kg within one year. “I would have landed in a debt trap had I continued with the activity,” he added.

Share

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Demand to roll back fertilizer price hike

Expressing anguish over the steep hike in fertilizer prices, the Jammu & Kashmir unit of the CPI (M) on Friday demanded an immediate roll back.

“We express deep anguish over the steep hike in prices of fertilizer. We demand its immediate rollback”, said the party State Secretary Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami.

He said the sudden and unexpected increase in the fertilizer prices will have a detrimental impact on farmers of the State, who he said were eking out their living from the small land holdings that too under the constant threat of vagaries of weather.

Sowing

He said that price hike in the MOP fertilizer rates from Rs.550 to 1200 per quintal and from Rs.1,260 to over 1,900 in respect of DAP fertilizer has come as a bolt from blue to the farmers, who were readying themselves for sowing rabi crops.

The increase in the diesel oil has equally marred the interests of the peasants, he added.

He said agricultural activities will receive a severe jolt in Jammu & Kashmir if prices are not controlled on time.

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Prices of vegetables up by 40 per cent

K. Lakshmi

Traders attribute hike to less crop yield and depletion of water resources during summer

OUT OF REACHSoaring prices of vegetables translates to lesser purchase for many. -Photo: K. Pichumani

With the arrivals at the Koyambedu wholesale vegetable market dipping since the past few days, the cost of many vegetables has escalated by 30-40 percent, forcing consumers to be frugal in their purchases.

Different varieties of tomatoes, which were priced around Rs.15 until recently, now cost around Rs. 24 a kg. Traders attributed the price hike to less crop yield and depletion of water resources during summer. The Koyambedu market, which normally receives 60 truckloads of tomatoes daily, got only 45 lorries from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka on Thursday.

The hike has meant cut in the budget for vegetables in many households. P. Sunitha, a resident of Choolaimedu, said: “I buy more quantity of vegetables that are relatively cheaper. I cannot decrease purchase of tomatoes as I use them daily. I have started growing greens and vegetables at home to supplement my needs.”

Some of the hotels too have started replacing cheaper vegetables to fit in the meal price.

According to S. Chandran, a wholesale trader, the cost of most vegetables increases every summer owing to the gap between demand and supply. Even affordable ones such as cabbage are priced around Rs.10 a kg in the wholesale market. Beans, sourced from Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh and from Karnataka, are also priced high at the wholesale market as the yield has decreased by half, they said.

Carrots, brinjals and ladies fingers are out of the reach of most people. However, the prices of onions and potatoes remain stable, providing some solace to the consumers.

The prices of vegetables are higher by at least Rs. 5 a kg in the retail market. Vendors said this was essential to cover increasing labour and transportation charges. “Many customers now think twice before buying a kg of vegetables and expect the prices to drop. We cannot afford to give curry or coriander leaves free of cost to regular customers as they are also expensive,” a vendor said.

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Cotton prices to remain above support price

Special Correspondent

So no need to intervene, says Cotton Corporation of India

Coimbatore Mayor S. M. Velusamy (right), Chairman of Southern India Mills' Association S. Dinakaran (second right), B.K. Mishra, Chairman and Managing Director of Cotton Corporation of India (third right) and Deputy Chairman of the association T. Rajkumar (left) at Texfair 2012, in Coimbatore on Friday. –PHOTO: S. SIVA SARAVANAN

The Cotton Corporation of India does not expect a need for its support price intervention for cotton in the near future this season (October 2011 to September 2012).

B.K. Mishra, Chairman and Managing Director of the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), told presspersons here on Friday that its operations so far this year was commercial and was at a small level. At this juncture, there was no need for support price operations. Cotton prices were Rs. 800 to Rs. 1000 a quintal more than the support price. The purchase by mills was low now.

The CCI had already finalised the CSR activities for 2012-2013. Next year, as part of the activities the corporation could look at promotion of long staple cotton, jointly with associations such as the Southern India Mills' Association (SIMA). With prices not increasing as high as last year, the area under cotton in the country could come down next year. Last year area increased by 10 per cent and it come down by maximum 10 per cent for the next season.

Inaugurating Texfair 2012, a four-day textile machinery, spares and accessories event organised by SIMA here on Friday, S.M. Velusamy, Mayor of Coimbatore Corporation, pointed out that Tamil Nadu had 47 per cent spindleage in the country and the industry here competed with those in Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan. The textile clusters in this region played a major role in the country's textile sector.

Diven G. Dembla, vice-president of Indian Textile Accessories and Machinery Manufacturers' Association, said according to a survey conducted by the Textiles Committee, the total estimated production of textile machinery, parts and accessories during 2010-2011 increased by 31 per cent to Rs. 6,150 crore as against the production of Rs. 4,245 crore during 2009-2010. Import of textile machinery declined from Rs. 6,500 crore during 2009-2010 to Rs. 5,806 crore in 2010-2011. On the export front, the segment saw an increase from Rs. 582 crore to Rs. 650 crore.

N. Natarajan, president of Textile Machinery and Mills Stores Merchants Association, said the SIMA should look at an international textile machinery exhibition here. N. Subramaniam, Member of the Governing Council of Textile Machinery Manufacturers' Association, said the Government should not permit import of low quality machinery.

S. Dinakaran, Chairman of SIMA, said the association planned to organise a large-scale machinery exhibition soon here. The Indian textile sector should find a techno-commercially viable solution for pollution, strengthen its technology in weaving and processing and invest in technical textiles.

T. Rajkumar, Deputy Chairman of the association, said the event had 150 exhibitors. Seminars would be organised on March 3 and 4.

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100% subsidy for micro irrigation systems

Special Correspondent

The Horticulture Department would provide cent per cent subsidy for setting up micro irrigation systems for farmers raising horticulture crops, Collector Jayashree Muralidharan said.

Small and marginal farmers would be given Rs.43,816 for installing micro irrigation systems in an acre.

Such farmers would also get 75 per cent subsidy for installing the equipment for additional areas up to four acres. For other farmers, 75 per cent subsidy would be provided.

Farmers from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities, women, ex-servicemen, and differently abled persons would be given priority.

All applications received would be registered at the block level.

Applications could be submitted to officers of the horticulture, agriculture and agricultural engineering department in the respective areas, a release said.

Small and marginal farmers raising horticulture crops to get Rs.43,816 for an acre of land

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Coconut research station to be set up

R. Vimal Kumar

The district is all set to get a coconut seed production unit and an exclusive research station soon to boost coconut productivity and income levels of coconut farmers in the region.

“The facilities will be set up by Coconut Development Board over an expanse of 86 acres tentatively identified near Udumalpet. Steps are on to transfer the land, which is presently under the control of State Government, to the Board, for setting up the projects,” Joint Director of Agriculture P. Thangaraju told *The Hindu* .

The coconut seed production unit, according to Mr. Thangaraju, will be of immense help to the farmers to procure good quality planting materials on demand.

Apart from producing seedlings of desired cultivars suitable for the locality, it will also be able to act as a hub for disseminating coconut cultivation and processing of different region-specific hybrid coconut varieties.

Mr. Thangaraju said that establishment of a research station would help study variety adaptability in Tirupur and nearby districts which in turn could enable development of better yielding coconut varieties as well as crop management technologies.

Water saving technologies, development of pest-resistant crops and improvement of nutrient management in soil will be the other areas of research.

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Optimisation of farm input stressed

A Correspondent

Optimisation of input in farming was stressed at a seminar, ‘Karshikam 2012,' organised by the Kerala Agriculture University (KAU) in association with the Department of Agriculture at Aishwarya auditorium at Sulthan Bathery recently.

The programme was organised as part of a seven-day study camp for the National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers of six colleges under KAU.

Delivering the keynote address, P.V. Balachandran, Director (Extension), Kerala Agriculture University , said that the present agrarian crisis in the district was not an isolated case, but the crisis felt across the country where agriculture was the main source of livelihood.

He said the increasing input cost and low returns from produces put the farmers in peril. Hence, sustainable input use was the need of the hour.

Overdose of fertilizers

Many farmers applied heavy doses of fertilizers and pesticides to the cash crops, especially to ginger and pepper, without considering the absorption capacity of the soil.

The practice had not only affected the fertility of the soil adversely, but also helped the pathogens to multiply substantially, Mr. Balachandran said.

Optimising input was essential to revive soil fertility as well, he said.

As many as 200 NSS volunteers would conduct detailed farm surveys in 5 panchayats — Ambalavayal, Noolpuzha, Mananthavadi, Thondarnadu and Thavinjal — in the district.

KAU scientists would prepare appropriate plans for technology transfer and farmers' empowerment in Wayanad based on the data collected during the survey, he said.

Precision farming

The former MLA and an exponent in precision farming K. Krishnankutty said that the district had a vast potential in precision farming and the farming community should come forward to implement the method.

District panchayat president K.L. Poulose inaugurated the seminar.

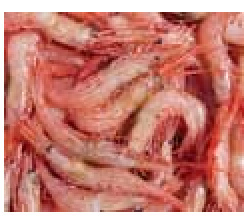
KAU scientists led classes on various topics.

Business Standard

Mar 03, 2012

US raises anti-dumping duty on Indian shrimp imports

George Joseph / Kochi March 3, 2012, 0:34 IST



The US government has raised the anti-dumping duty on import of frozen shrimps from India. The average duty has been increased to 2.51 per cent from 1.69 per cent. Announcing the results of the sixth administrative review (AR), the US Department of Commerce (DoC) reduced the duty for Falcon Marine Exports, the mandatory respondent for the review, to zero. The revised duty is applicable from February 2011 to January 2012.

According to exporters here, this would have little impact on seafood exports to the US as DoC had already decided to modify the method of calculation of anti-dumping duty. This decision of DoC will be effective from 2013, when the seventh administrative review completes.

DoC is modifying its methodology regarding the calculation of weighted-average dumping margins and anti-dumping duty assessment rate. This would, in effect, reduce the duty to a minimum level from the next round of the review.

The new method of calculating duty may lead to de-minimum duty (below 0.5 per cent), which in effect is zero anti-dumping duty.

The US anti-dumping duty on frozen shrimp imports f

FCI steps up measures for storage of wheat

Vikas Sharma / Chandigarh March 3, 2012, 0:32 IST

The Food Corporation of India (FCI), the country's largest grain procurement agency, has adopted a number of measures to create space for the new wheat stocks in Punjab and Haryana, India's two leading producers of the foodgrain.

Apart from direct supply of wheat from the procurement centres to consuming states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, the public sector agency has encouraged private investment in warehouses through the Private Entrepreneur Godown (PEG) Scheme. Under this scheme, FCI ensures full occupancy of warehouses until the investor achieves breakeven level. The scheme received good response in Haryana and Punjab as FCI estimates two million tonnes (mt) of new storage capacity will be created by March.

While investors in Punjab are building 1.2 mt of storage space, which would be handed over to FCI soon, in Haryana, too, 0.49 mt of new capacity is scheduled to be created by the end of this month.

Currently, the two states have storage capacities of 20.5 mt and 2.7 mt, respectively, under FCI's supervision, in both covered godowns and open plinths.

Additionally, the grain procurement agency has also intensified direct milling of paddy, chiefly in order to create space for fresh wheat stocks. Instead of paddy storage, FCI plans to stock rice, which occupies one-third space compared to paddy. "The situation would be difficult for handling procured foodgrain during this season as Punjab and Haryana are estimated to reap a bumper crop this year. Various efforts are underway to tackle the situation," said an FCI official in Chandigarh.

Foodgrain stocks in Punjab are estimated to be 1.4-1.5 mt higher than the mandatory buffer norm in the state as on April 1. Thanks to good paddy production in the state last year, the situation has turned even more serious.

FCI's foodgrain management policy received all-round condemnation last year due to spoilage from water logging of nearly 100,000 tonnes of paddy stored in open plinth. The corporation is making efforts to avoid a repeat this year.

In an intensified milling effort, FCI has milled around 37.7 per cent of the total paddy procured as on March 1 this year, compared to 24.2 per cent milled until the same time last year. The agency has directly transported 0.75 million tonnes of wheat to various consuming destinations from procurement centres in Punjab.

However, they maintain measures are underway to ensure adequate storage is available for wheat in the coming season.

Besides faster transportation of stored foodgrain through rail and road, FCI officials maintain they are eyeing the space with rice millers, available after milling of paddy.

Since storage required for rice is almost one-third that of paddy, faster conversion of paddy to rice would ensure more space for storage of wheat . Till April, FCI plans to mill another 20 per cent of the stored paddy, thus, creating additional space for wheat. Offtake of existing stock has also improved.

FCI officials in Haryana say the offtake for storage stock of paddy and rice has increased in the past few months. Compared to offtake of 1.09 tonnes of wheat and 0.03 tonnes of rice in February, the total offtake was 0.58 tonnes of wheat and 0.02 tonnes of rice in November.

Similarly, in Punjab, 1.42 mt of stock till now has been liquidated as against an average of 1.2 million tonnes in the past three months preceding February.

While Punjab is eyeing production of 16.7 mt, wheat production targeted by Haryana is 11.8 mt. FCI is looking to procure 11.5 mt of wheat in Punjab this year, as against 10.95 mt procured last year. In Haryana, FCI officials maintain the target is seven mt. FCI officials estimate total inventory to be 2.2 mt on April 1, against 1.87 mt last year.

High refined oil imports hurt local refiners

Trade body demands rise in import duty to avoid closure of domestic refining units, save half-a-million jobs and Rs 10,000-cr investment

BS Reporter / Mumbai March 3, 2012, 0:31 IST

Increasing import of refined oil is posing a serious threat to domestic edible oil refineries, thereby jeopardising new investments of about Rs 10,000 crore in the sector.

In February, the total import of refined, bleached and diodised (RBD) palmolein was recorded at 250,000 tonnes, compared to an average 110,000 tonnes a month of arrivals in the first three months of the current oil year (November 2011-October 2012).

“The surge in import is hitting the domestic refineries, who have built up massive capacities over the last several years. If the trend continues for long, it would result in shutdown of domestic refineries,” said Sushil Goenka, president, Solvent Extractors’ Association (SEA), the apex trade body of the vegetable oil industry.

The huge surge in import of refined palmolein is seriously affecting the working of the domestic industry. To protect the industry from this issue, SEA has urged the government to levy market-linked import duty or raise tariff value to $1,200 a tonne.

The rate of import duty was fixed in tandem with the market price five years ago. Despite over 150 per cent increase in the basic price, the import duty is collected on the basis of old tariff rates. The tariff value of RBD palmolein was fixed over five years ago at $484 a tonne, compared to the prevailing price of $1,130 a tonne. Hence, the actual duty being levied on imported refined oils worked out to around three per cent only, thus making the import of refined edible oils more competitive than crude edible oils.

Additionally, SEA has also sought 16.5 per cent import duty, similar to that levied by the Indonesian government. India imports maximum edible oils from Indonesia."Edible oil import in consumer packs should immediately be banned," said Goenka.

The non-revision of tariff value is denying the industry the duty difference between crude palm oil and refined palmolein, as recommended by the Tariff Commission. The duty differential of 7.5 per cent between crude and refined oil was relevant before the Indonesian government revised their duty structure on export of palm products.

Under the new plan, Indonesia has introduced an export duty of 16.5 per cent on crude palm oil (CPO) against eight per cent on bulk palmolein and two per cent on packed palmolein. The trade body said that in view o f this development, there is an urgent need to increase the duty on RBD palmolein to 16.5 per cent, ban the import of packaged palmolein and bring the tariff value in line with current prices.

India has a refining capacity of more than 12 million tonnes (mt) per annum at its ports itself, which is being expanded by an additional three mt. Against this, India imports seven mt, thus, utilising only 60 per cent of its total capacity. The low tariff value on refined edible oils has resulted in increased import of about one mt of refined edible oils. Closure of the refining industry will jeopardise the lives of over 500,000 workers and investments of Rs 10,000 crore.

The basic aim of the Indonesian government in implementing the new duty structure is to encourage setting up new refining and packing industries there inorder to generate more employment opportunities. Indonesia is aiming to add value and to earn more revenue through local taxes, as many more allied industries will be set up for manufacturing packing material, etc. However, this will lead to closure of Indian edible oil units.

UP sugarcane dues touch Rs 4,436 cr

Virendra Singh Rawat / New Delhi/ Lucknow March 3, 2012, 0:23 IST

Uttar Pradesh sugarcane farmers' dues have touched Rs 4,436 crore in the ongoing 2011-12 crushing season.

The dues are pending on both the private and cooperative sugar mills numbering about 125.

Taking cognisance of the situation, the government has asked the sugar mills to provide their payment schedules, while directing them to speed-up payments. Interestingly, cooperative mills are bigger laggards in clearing farmers' dues. They have collectively paid about Rs 686 crore against total dues of Rs 1,220 crore, which is 56 per cent payment. The private mills have paid about Rs 9,103 crore against Rs 13,005 crore, which is about 70 per cent.

However, it has to be borne in mind that sugar mills, as per rules, get 14 days to settle sugarcane payments without inviting interest penalty.

The state's sugar production stands at 5.35 million tonnes (MT) and so far 60.15 MT of cane had been crushed. The recovery rate this season stands at about 8.86 per cent, lower than 9.01 per cent last year.

Industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association has said that UP sugarcane arrears had reached "uncomfortable levels" mainly due to higher cane prices in the state.

Besides, the recovery had been lower this year, since the government had ordered mills to operate "very early", which had resulted in losses and lower revenue realisation from same quantity of cane crushed.

This year, UP is targeting sugar output of 6.5 MT against 5.9 MT during 2010-11. State cane commissioner Kamran Rizvi is confident that the crushing season would extend beyond April 15.

On November 8, 2011, UP had hiked cane State Advised Price (SAP) by almost 20 per cent. The price of early variety of cane was increased Rs 40/quintal to Rs 250/quintal.

SAP of common variety, which accounts for over 60 per cent of total cane production, was increased by Rs 35/quintal to Rs 240/quintal. Early variety and rejected variety of cane account for about 20 per cent of production each. The price of rejected variety was fixed at Rs 235/quintal.

The government feels the hike would result in cane payments of over Rs 15,000 crore to farmers during 2011-12 crushing season against Rs 13,000 crore last year much to the consternation of millers.

THE HINDU Business Line

Palm oil may test resistance

March 3, 2012:
Malaysian palm oil futures on Bursa Malaysia Derivaties exchange ended lower on Friday on profit-taking ahead of the Bursa Malaysia Palm Oil Conference next week where analysts are expected to present views on vegetable oil markets. Surging energy prices continue to support the edible oil markets. Energy prices slipped lower on Friday after surging 5 per cent to an 11-month high a day earlier, as fears of a supply disruption from Saudi Arabia eased. However, concerns over economic growth due to higher energy prices could cap gains going forward as the consuming countries begin to depreciate making cost of imports higher. Cargo surveyors have reported up to a 10.5 per cent drop in February exports from a month ago even though demand from China and India has been resilient.

CPO May futures are higher perfectly in line with our expectations. As mentioned in the previous update, a close above 3,240 Malaysian (MYR) a tonne has opened the possibility of rise higher towards 3,700 MYR/tonne in the coming months. No change in view. Initial resistance is at

3,350 MYR/tonne, from where a corrective decline can be seen. Support is now seen in the 3,245-50 MYR/tonne zone followed by important support at 3,215 MYR/tonne. Favoured view expects prices to find support in the 3,240-45 MYR/tonne and subsequently rise higher towards 3,350 MYR/tonne levels. Unexpected fall below 3,210 MYR/tonne could postpone the bullishness temporarily.

We believe the impulse that began from 1,427 MYR/tonne, which hit 4,486 MYR/tonne ended and a prolonged corrective move has possibly ended at 1,335 MYR/tonne. In the big picture, a new impulse began from 1,335 MYR/tonne and the third wave with a projected objective of 3,900 MYR/tonne has been met. A corrective wave “B” has met one potential target near 3,465 MYR/tonne. A wave “C” kind of a decline ended at 2,755 MYR/tonne itself. A possible new impulse has begun now with immediate near-term targets in the 3,350-65 MYR/tonne range and long-term targets at 3,700 MYR/tonne. RSI is in the neutral zone now indicating that it is neither overbought nor oversold. The averages in MACD have gone above the zero line of the indicator indicating a bullish reversal. Only a cross-over again below the zero line again could hint at resumption in the down trend.

Therefore, look for palm oil futures to test the resistance levels.

Supports are at MYR 3,245, 3,215 and 3,175. Resistances are at MYR 3,310, 3,350 and 3,425.

(The author is the Director of Commtrendz Research and also in the advisory panel of Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd (MCX). The views expressed in this column are his own and not that of MCX. This analysis is based on the historical price movements and there is risk of loss in trading. He can be reached at gnanasekar_thiagarajan@yahoo.com.)

12th Plan will see shift from primary to secondary agriculture: ICAR

CHENNAI, MAR 3:

The country would witness a shift from primary to secondary agriculture in the 12th Five Year Plan beginning this April, which would provide value addition to the sectoral products, Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) said on Saturday .

“The secondary agriculture would be providing value addition to agricultural products, creating facilities for primary processing and stress management in agriculture. The 12th Plan (2012-

2017) will see the shift from primary to secondary agriculture," ICAR Director General Mr S Ayyappan told reporters here on the sidelines of a function.

"The value addition could be by grading the different quality of products, cold storage facilities to take up primary processing and taking steps to control soil and water degradation," he added.

Concerned over the shortage of manpower in the agriculture sector, ICAR is planning for a national agriculture education project, he said.

"One thing we see is the manpower shortage. So, we have to improve the course curriculum, faculty competence, infrastructure development such as hostels, hands-on and skill development and student exchange programmes," Mr Ayyappan said.

Mr Ayyappan said ICAR was thinking over the concepts of 'Farmer First' and 'Student Ready' to bridge the gap between the educational institutions and the industry needs.

Aspiring to produce quality agricultural graduates who can become "agri-preneurs" in the next Five Year Plan, he said, the government is spending nearly Rs 8-10 lakh for a bachelor degree student, Rs 12-15 lakh for a post-graduate student and Rs 20 lakh for research students.

The 12th Plan would also focus on rain-fed agriculture for capacity building, he added.

Time for India to 'spice up' nutmeg output, says experts

PUNE, MARCH 3:

In the backdrop of the reverses suffered by Grenada in the production of nutmeg, India can now take a lead in increasing the area of cultivation of the expensive spice commodity, according to experts.

Grenada (an island country in the Caribbean), which along with Indonesia, was a major producer of nutmeg, has lost much of its leadership in the sector after being hit by hurricane

Ivan which damaged its nutmeg trees, said a presentation made at the recently held 11th World Spice Congress here. The meet was hosted by Spices Board of India.

“After a series of hurricanes lashed Grenada (an island country in the Caribbean), about 90 per cent nutmeg trees were damaged. Of the damaged trees, 40 per cent were toppled, 25 per cent “injured”, 30 per cent inaccessible and 5 per cent died.

“Prior to hurricane Ivan, the nutmeg sector provided income to about 30 per cent of Grenada’s population and earned 22.5 per cent of its total merchandise export,” said a paper presented at the congress noted, quoting an International Trade Corporation (ITC) report.

Stating that India was better positioned to surge ahead in the nutmeg sector, the paper said: “The production area (for nutmeg) in India hit the peak of 16,400 hectares in 2008.

With a sectoral expansion of around 11.2 per cent, India, for whom the Arab counties have has been a major export destination, is in an advantageous position“.

In the last three years, the prices of nutmeg have gone up by 200-265 per cent globally, it pointed out.

Nutmeg is used as condiment, particularly in sweet foods, and as a standard seasoning agent in many dishes, while its fleshy outer cover is crystallised or pickled or made into jellies.

It is also used as a drug because of its stimulant, carminative, astringent and aphrodisiac properties.

In India, nutmeg is used in sweet as well as savoury dishes in temple rituals, while in Indonesia the commodity is used to make jam, cooked with sugar and crystallised to make candy.