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Now, fruits and vegetables are also just a click away

M. Soundariya Preetha



GREEN CLICK:R. Anand, partner of MSV Impex (left), and V. Subramanian, Chairman of MSV Groups, at the launch of Veggiebell, a portal that sells vegetables and fruits online.—Photo: Special Arrangement

It is hassle-free shopping. There is no difficulty of finding a parking space or waiting in long queues at the billing counter. Stressful hours at office do not eat into the shopping time, the shop is not crowded, and there need not be any fear of losing personal belongings as we are busy buying.

The city now has a portal that sells vegetables and fruits online (www.veggiebell.com). Over 50 varieties of vegetables and fruits are on sale on the website. From the daily needs of chilli, onion and tomato to broccoli and mushroom, the portal has it all.

According to R. Anand, Chief Executive Officer of Veggiebell and partner of MSV Impex, several cities in the country have online vegetable markets. Though vegetables and fruits are products that customers prefer to see, touch, feel and then buy, the website offers several advantages.

Online shoppers have to choose the vegetable or fruit, the quantity they need to buy and either place the order online or call up 40008000.

For purchases of Rs. 100 or more, the delivery is free of cost in select areas of the city.

Customers can opt for normal delivery or express delivery. Apart from its farm, the company has tied up with farmers for contract farming and will purchase on a daily basis from farmers in Dharmapuri and the Nilgiris areas. The rates will be updated every day according to the market prices. They can pay online through debit or credit cards or online banking.

Orders should be placed a day in advance for normal delivery.

The portal also sells organic vegetables and some exotic vegetables and fruits.

Customers can buy cut vegetables too that come in three different sets of 250 gm to 500 gm each: basic combo tray, party tray and biryani tray apart from a fruit tray. Those who want to gift vegetable or fruit baskets to friends and relatives can place orders online.

Mr. Anand says the company is already into wholesale supply of vegetables and fruits and also exports some varieties. Veggiebell is a retail initiative.

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CO-4 grass, melia dubia, can generate substantial power for Tamil Nadu

M. J. Prabu



G. Kumaravelu in front of the demonstration plot.

At a time when Tamil Nadu has been reeling under a severe power crisis for over three months, and the problem may have eased with the arrival of wind power over the past week, the existing demand-supply can possibly be addressed through alternate sources. One such solution lies in tapping the right renewable green resource like the humble Napier Bajra grass also called as CO-4.

Released by Tamil Nadu Agriculture University (TNAU) during 2008, CO4 exhibits phenomenal biomass yield," says Dr. G. Kumaravelu, senior Scientific Adviser for Biomass and Bioenergy programme of an international Chennai based business conglomerate called Archean group and former member, State Planning Commission.

This grass can be grown in most soil types, except in heavy clay, highly alkaline and water logged areas. The slips for growing this grass are being produced by the Agricultural/Veterinary University and interested farmers.

"To verify its utility for power production, 5 to 6 months old, mature grass crop was harvested and weighed. The yellow mature stem, with more fibre and lignin content yielded around 200 dry metric tonnes per hectare. An appropriate practice package has been arrived at, within a year, by our trials using biofertilizers, nutrients, biochar and chemical fertilizers with drip irrigation to ensure sustained high yield. About 2,000 acres of grass cultivation can supply raw material to run one 10 MW biomass electric power mill, continuously, all through the year without break," says Dr. Kumaravelu.

Archean — a multinational company — is going to grow this grass along with another fast growing tree, Melia Dubia, as intercrop in several hundred acres in different parts of Tamil Nadu.

"I had demonstrated last year, that about 100 metric tonnes per hectare of biomass could be harvested from one year drip irrigated melia dubia plantations. That again is a comparable world record for tree species. This woody biomass also releases energy of over 4000 Kcal / Kg.

Together, both these highest biomass yielders could be used to generate substantial power for our State," he explains.

The State Government, accepting the innovation in principle, announced in the Assembly, that they would help in setting up a 10 MW power

project using this grass. "With Government's logistic support, we plan to complete planting of 2,000 acres within 12 months time, and erect 10 MW power mill in 18 months time," he says.

In a 15 hectare area in the district, borewells run on solar pumps will be commissioned for fertigation, and crops will be raised under the packages developed by Dr. Kumaravelu. High yielding clones of *Melia dubia* will be planted as a shade crop for the grass and expected to function both as source of planting material and a demonstration plot.

"The clones of *Melia dubia* evolved by me have been found to be admirably suitable for match splits and plywood veneer. The current demand is around 20 lakh tonnes per year and this could only be met by replicating our model all over the State. Therefore, by cultivation of these two, one lakh rupees per acre per year can be ensured for the farmers," says Dr. Kumaravelu.

Therefore, apart from electricity production from stem, the team plans to establish a dairy unit utilizing the leaf as fodder for cows. The cow dung and urine will be recycled to the plantation. Fodder for the free mulch animal scheme announced by the Government can be benefited from this fodder.

This grass is nutritious and relished by cattle and has enhanced milk yield from 1 to 2 litres per day. The waste biomass and leaves can be used to generate methane gas, similar to gobargas. The high sugar content of this grass makes it an excellent raw material for the production of 2nd Generation cellulosic biofuels like Ethanol and Butanol.

Dr. Kumaravelu argues that "if such 10 MW green power mills are established in each of the 300 suitable Panchayat blocks by the Government, it could generate 3000 MW of electricity continuously. Farmers can earn a minimum of Rs.75,000 per acre a year. Willing farmers cultivating the raw material can also be made as shareholders with the power mills to which they supply on the same lines as sugar mills. If facilitated by the Government this is sure to create a cascading effect on rural development," he says.

Those who desire to know more about thi project or desire to visit their demo plots can contact Dr. Kumaravelu at email: drgkumaravel@gmail.com, Mobile: 9600073059.

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Heritage Rice Fest on May 13

There will be a host of events at the 'Heritage Rice Festival' to be held here on May 13. It is the second fest of AJK College of Arts and Science, after the 'Banana Fest'.

The Hindu is the media partner for the event.

While the main event is the fest that will have on display and sale rice dishes made by students of the Department of Catering Science and Hotel Management, there are other events planned to attract the visitors. A cookery contest for women will be held from 3.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Traditional or conventional dishes can be made at home and brought to be judged at the venue. The first prize winner would get two gm gold, while the first runner-up and second runner-up would get one gm gold and a dinner set respectively.

Students will also showcase a vegetable carving demo, sugar art and bottle juggling. Cultural events and fashion show will also be a part of the fest.

The fest would be held at Venkatalakshmi Kalyana Mandapam on Trichy Road from 6.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. Entry fee would be Rs. 20.

Visitors to the fest who would like to donate rice for a cause, could do so at the rice donation booth. For details and registrations, contact 90470-44304.

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Association to fix price of yellow spice

Staff Reporter

The Turmeric Farmers Association of India took a major step towards becoming a national council to regulate the prices of the yellow spice by announcing that it will fix the price on a weekly basis.

The association also decided to conduct a national conference in Erode on July 21 to announce a floor price for turmeric and its future plans. The decision was taken during the meeting of Maha Panchayat, an umbrella organisation of various farmers associations in the State, held here on Friday.

Turmeric growers from across the nation would participate in the conference and a massive procession would be organised from Kodumudi to Erode as a part of the conference. “The conference is a major step towards the fixing of remunerative price for turmeric by farmers themselves,” all-India president of the association P.K. Deivasigamani said.

Floor price

“We have also worked out the structure of the association and decided to follow the National Egg Co-ordination Committee (NECC) model to announce the prices. We will be fixing the floor price for turmeric on a weekly basis,” he added.

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High yield pushes up area under irrigated pulses

G. Srinivasan

Agriculture official attributes the increase to fall in raising rice fallow pulses



GREEN GOLD:A farmer showing his pulses at Vanduvanchery in Thanjavur on Friday.Photo: B.Velankanni Raj

The area under irrigated pulses cultivation has increased in the district. The normal area coverage was high last year too and irrigated pulses were raised on 11,702 hectares in April and May. “This year it is expected to go beyond 12,000 hectares,” said M.Z.Mohammed Yahiya, Joint Director of Agriculture.

He attributes the increase in irrigated pulses to the fall in raising rice fallow pulses, another kind of pulses crop. After machine harvest was introduced for paddy, a five-time increase in the yield

in irrigated pulses was witnessed. T.Paramasivam, a farmer of Vanduvanchery village in Thiruvaidaimaruthur block, has raised ADT5 black gram variety on nine acres of land. He says he will get 1,050 kilos per acre while normal yield in rice fallow pulses is only 200 to 300 kilos per acre.

According to G.Muthu Koori, Assistant Director of Thirupanandal block, there is a phenomenal increase in the irrigated pulses area in his block. "Compared to 208 hectares of irrigated pulses raised in the block last year, this year irrigated pulses have been raised so far on 980 hectares. We expect it to go up to 1,100 hectares."

Chinnathambi, a 75-year-old farmer of Narikudi village in Thirupanandal block, said that he has raised irrigated pulses on two acres of land. He hopes to take 1400 kg of pulses per acre this year. Last year, he took 1380 kg of pulses.

Mr.Muthu Koori said that like the system of rice intensification (SRI) in paddy, now the system of pulses intensification has also been introduced by the government with the aim of increasing pulses production.

New methodology is also adopted in the cultivation and dipping method is followed. There are two types of dipping method - one is manual and another is using machines. In dipping, correct spacing and plant population is maintained. Seeds are sown on ridges and furrows. Mechanical weed management is also done by some farmers.

K.Nedunchezhiyan, assistant director, Kumbakonam block, said this year area under irrigated pulses has gone up to 600 hectares so far compared to 120 hectares last year. "Kumbakonam block suits well for raising irrigated pulses because the soil is sandy clay loam. Application of weedicide is more in this area which removes weeds and favours growth of pulses.

Farmers have opted for pulses because of water shortage. "For paddy, farmers require 1300 mm of water for one paddy crop. At the same time pulses require only 350 mm of water. Besides they get a good income in 65 to 70 days," said Mr. Nedunchezhiyan.

G.Ramadoss, Deputy Director, Government of India Schemes, said that fertility of the soil would be increased due to fixation of atmospheric nitrogen by root nodules of pulses.

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Five horticultural villages to come up soon

Staff Reporter

The district would soon have five horticultural villages for providing assistance to farmers.

Agriculture Minister S. Damodaran had recently announced in the Assembly that model horticultural villages would be set up in 15 districts.

Officials at the Department of Horticulture said that five villages would be selected from the 20 blocks in the districts.

From availability of seed to technical assistance regarding infrastructure in farming, farmers would get assistance from experts for marketing their products.

The villages would also have post-harvest management and value addition of horticultural crop methods and technologies like handling, packaging, transportation and storage of fruits and vegetables.

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'Priority should be given to farm sector'

Staff Correspondent

As a majority of Mandya residents depend on the agricultural sector, priority should be given to farm and health sectors, G. Jayaram, Chief Executive Officer of the Mandya Zilla Panchayat has said.

He was addressing the Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) review meeting here on Friday.

While the meeting discussed various issues, supply of medicine to primary health centres, completion of work on anganwadi centres, silt removal from lakes, supply of seeds and fertilizer, and drinking water supply were given priority.

Officials from the Department of Agriculture said the "department would ensure adequate supply of seeds and fertilizer in Mandya this year". While the demand for fertilizer was about 1.5 lakh tonnes, over 38,000 tonnes had so far been stored, the officials said.

According to officials, the crop loss estimate was pegged at Rs. 37 crore in the district because of unfavourable weather conditions last year.

Mr. Jayaram instructed officials to systematically collect more information on the loss.

Medicines

Zilla panchayat president Suresh Kati Gowda, and chairman of the Standing Committee on Health and Education C. Madappa instructed officials of the Health Department to supply sufficient medicines to the primary health centres in Mandya. Gram panchayats could buy medicines worth Rs. 10,000 for PHCs in case of shortage, Mr. Jayaram said.

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Waive crop loans, urges raitha sangha

The Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha took out a procession and staged a dharna here on Friday, demanding that the government waive crop loans, ensure uninterrupted power supply and distribute seeds and fertilizer for free to farmers.

Members of the sangha, led by its secretary Amaranna Gudihal, took out a procession before staging a dharna on the premises of the Deputy Commissioner's office. Later, they submitted a memorandum, addressed to the Chief Minister, to the Deputy Commissioner.

In it, they said farmers were in distress owing to failure of rain last year.

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Steps to attract youth to farming

50,000 greenhouses to be set up in five years: Mani



Focus on agriculture: Finance Minister K.M. Mani inaugurating a seminar on agriculture development at Thiruvalla on Friday. –Photo: Leju Kamal

Finance Minister K.M. Mani has said that the United Democratic Front will set up 50,000 greenhouses across the State in the next five years with a view to addressing the unemployment problem facing this highly literate State in a time-bound manner.

Mr. Mani was inaugurating a seminar on agriculture development in Thiruvalla on Friday afternoon.

Bio-parks

According to him, wooing the educated unemployed youth to the field of agriculture by setting up innovative Bio-parks on the lines of the Technopark was a major agenda of the UDF government.

The Minister said two Rice-parks would be set up in the State's rice bowls of Palakkad and Kuttanad, besides three Coconut-parks in Thiruvananthapuram, Central Kerala and Malabar.

Value-added products would be produced at these bio-parks at international standards and more youths would be attracted to this innovative venture, he said.

Mr. Mani said it was for the first time in the history of the State a budget allocation of Rs.25 crore had been made for implementing various development projects at Sabarimala.

He said the Zero-Waste Sabarimala Project launched by the government in November last was his dream-project to make the South India's major pilgrim centre free of litters and pollution.

Mr. Mani said funds had been sanctioned for setting up a modern sewage treatment plant at Sabarimala, and for capacity augmentation of the existing plant at Cheriyanavattom near Pampa.

Allocation of Rs.1 crore had been made for construction of a double-storey 'nadappanthal' at Sabarimala.

Roofing of the remaining stretch of the Pampa-Sannidhanam path and construction of a new queue complex between Saramkuthi and Marakkootom were the other projects to be launched this year itself, he added.

Food-park at Konni

The Minister said a mega food-park would be set up at Konni.

Paddy procurement

Responding to a memorandum submitted by Sam Eapen, Upper Kuttanad Nelkarshaka Samiti president, Mr. Mani said the government would soon disburse the money for the paddy procured from the farmers.

Airstrip

Mr. Mani said setting up of at least an air-strip in each district was part of the government's development policy.

A high-speed corridor linking all the 14 districts would also be constructed in the next five years, he said.

Victor T. Thomas, Kerala Congress (M) district president, presided over the function and Mr. Eapen welcomed the gathering.

Lynda Thomas, municipal chairperson; D.K. John, Cherian Polachirackal, Varghese Perayil, and Abraham Kalamannil, KC(M) State secretaries, spoke.

hindustantimes

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With bumper wheat crop, Punjab farmers rich by Rs 14,110 crore



Having achieved a record wheat crop of over 120 lakh tonnes this season, Punjab farmers have become richer by Rs.14,110 crore.

"Punjab farmers are richer by Rs.14,110 crore as the state has created new record of 120 lakh tonnes of wheat procurement. This is all due to the hard work of the state peasantry and favourable weather," a state government spokesman said in Chandigarh.

"The state government has mobilized government machinery to ensure hassle-free procurement and make payment of the produce to the farmers within 48 hours of lifting of their produce from the mandis," he added.

Sangrur district in the Malwa region (south-west Punjab) led in wheat procurement with farmers here getting nearly Rs.1,482 crore. Ludhiana and Patiala districts were second and third, respectively, in wheat procurement with farmers there getting nearly Rs.1,269 crore and Rs. 1,268 crore, respectively.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) releases money to the state government for the procurement of wheat and paddy twice every year. The procurement of wheat is done in April-May while paddy procurement is done October-December.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/854317.aspx>

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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

12 MAY, 2012, 03.44PM IST, PTI

Pistachio declines on subdued demand

NEW DELHI: Pistachio prices fell by Rs 5 per kg in the national capital today due to subdued demand from retailers and stockists. Adequate stocks following fresh arrivals from overseas markets also put pressure on pistachio prices. Pistachio hairati and peshawari fell by Rs 5 to conclude at Rs 925-950 and Rs 1,200-1,250 per kg, respectively.

Traders said subdued demand from retailers and stockists mainly weighed on the pistachio prices.

The following are today's quotations (per 40 kg): Almond (California) Rs 12,300 Almond (Gurbandi-new) Rs 6,200-6,400; Almond (Girdhi) Rs 2,900-3,100; Abjosh Afghani Rs 8,000-20,000.

Almond Kernel (California) Rs 415-420 per kg, Almond Kernel (Gurbandi-new) Rs 300-390 per kg.

12 MAY, 2012, 02.52PM IST,

Arhar pulse price up on selective buying

NEW DELHI: Arhar and its dal prices rose by Rs 50 per quintal in wholesale pulses market today on selective buying.

However, other pulses moved in a restricted range in scattered deals and settled around previous levels.

Traders said selective buying activity mainly helped arhar and its dal prices to trade higher.

In the national capital, arhar and its dal dara variety moved up by Rs 50 each to Rs 3,350-3,650 and Rs 4,750-4,950 per quintal.

The following are today's pulses rates per quintal: Urad 3,300-3,900, Urad Chilka (local) 4,300-4,600, best 4,700-5,200, Dhoya 5,250-5,350, Moong 3,600-4,600, Dal Moong Chilka local 4,350-4,750, Moong Dhoya local 4,900-5,000 and best quality 5,600-5,700.

Masoor small 3,700-4,000, bold 3,850-4,100, Dal Masoor local 4,650-4,750, best quality 4,600-4,700, Malka local 4,400-4,450, best 4,600-4,700, Moth 2,800-3,200, Arhar 3,350-3,650, Dal Arhar Dara 4,750-4,950.

Gram 4,250-4,900, Gram Dal (local) 4,800-4,900, best quality 4,900-5,000, Besan (35 kg) Shakti bhog 1,900, Rajdhani 1,900, Rajmah Chitra 7,100-8,300, Kabli Gram small 4,700-8,200, dabra 2,700-2,800, imported 4,700-5,100; Lobia 4,300-4,900, Peas white 2,850-2,870 and green 2,950-3,050.

Business Standard

Monday, May 14, 2012

Veg oil imports up 73% on low domestic availability

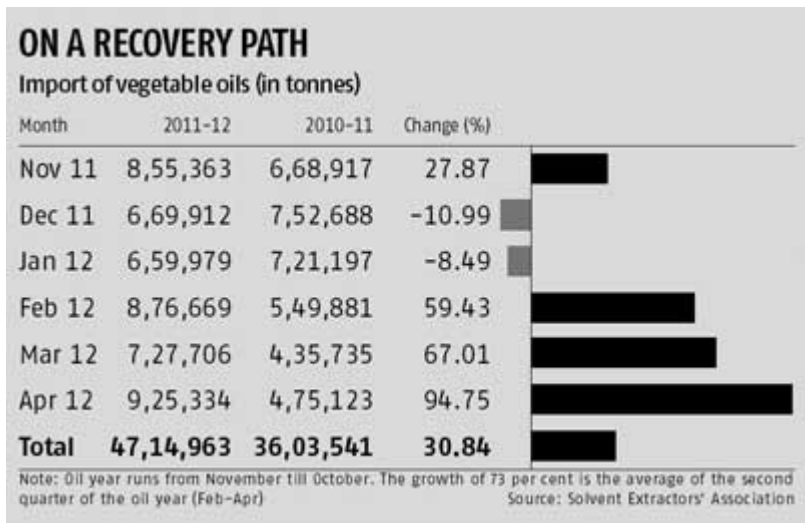
Lower crushing of seeds by local mills affects supply industry asks for government help to prop up prices

Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai May 12, 2012, 0:17 IST

A sustained slowdown in domestic oilseed crushing activity has led to an increase in the import of vegetable (veg) oil in recent months. Consequently, overall import of veg oil shot up 73 per cent in the second quarter of the current oil year (November 2011–October 2012) as against 31 per cent growth in the first quarter, to meet a deficit created by lower production from domestic sources.

Data compiled by the Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA) showed overall veg oil import rose 95 per cent to 897,404 tonnes in April alone, compared with 475,123 tonnes in the corresponding month of the previous year. During the last quarter of the current oil year, import surged to 2.52 million tonnes (mt) compared to 1.46 mt in the same period last year. With a marginal decline in the first quarter, owing mainly to increased availability from domestic sources on intensified local crushing, the overall import of veg oil recorded a 31 per cent increase at 4.71 mt, against 3.6 mt in the comparable period last year.

There is an abundance of oilseed inventory in domestic godowns for crushing. But mills are not keen on procuring seeds at the current price, which makes crushing unviable.



“Around 2.5 mt of soybean is lying with various stockists, traders, farmers and mills for crushing. At the current price of Rs 3,300-3,500 a quintal, soybean crushing is unviable. Since imported soybean oil works out cheaper, traders prefer imports to domestic crushing, which is unhealthy for the domestic industry,” said Rajesh Agrawal, spokesperson of the Soybean Processors’ Association.

Operating currently at 25-40 per cent of installed capacity, domestic soybean crushing mills are losing Rs 6-7 for every kg of refined soy oil production. Owing to farmers’ reluctance on releasing their holdings at a lower price, crushing units are currently abstaining from fresh purchase of soybean. They are operating with just manageable capacity and focusing on the packing and retailing business. Agrawal said the operating capacity of mills sometimes declines to an alarming low of 25 per cent.

An increase in the minimum support price (MSP) last year also held up the oilseed price throughout the season.

Meanwhile, veg oil prices have shot up since the beginning of this year. The average price of RBD (refined, bleached and iodized) palmolein shot up to \$1,205 a tonne in April this year, as compared to \$1,091 a tonne in January. Similarly, the average price of crude palm oil has surged from \$1,041 a tonne to \$1,184 a tonne, crude soybean oil from \$1,206 a tonne to \$1,318 a tonne and crude sunflower oil from \$1,180 a tonne to \$1,295 a tonne.

According to B V Mehta, executive director of SEA, “This year, oil availability from domestic sources has declined due to lower crushing of seeds. Hence, traders are filling the demand gap

through additional imports. Oil availability from local sources was high last year, due to positive crushing parity (conversion margin from seed to oil). This year, the parity turned negative.”

Farmers, however, would release their holdings in about a month when sowing of soybean and groundnut begins with the first monsoon rain. Either the edible oil price would go up or the seed price decline to make crushing activity viable. Meanwhile, Agrawal urged the government to raise the tariff in tune with the market price to help edible oil prices rise marginally in the domestic market and improve the overall crushing condition. The tariff is an indicative price set by the government over which the import duty is imposed. It varies for different veg oils and has remained unchanged for six years.

Amid these circumstances, farmers are likely to bring additional area under kharif oilseed this season. Total acreage under kharif oilseed, therefore, is estimated to rise this season on high realisation last year, said Mehta.

According an estimate by the Central Organisation for Oil Industry & Trade, a trade body, total oilseed output rose 11.95 per cent in the 2011-12 season to 37.36 mt, compared to 36.17 mt in the previous year. Based on a normal monsoon (94 per cent) forecast by the India Meteorological Department, output may rise this year in proportion to the growth in acreage. According to an estimate, farmers are holding nearly 25 per cent of seed in anticipation of higher prices.