

Today Farm News

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TNAU VC calls for a revolution in farm machinery



K. Ramasamy (centre), Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, releasing a souvenir at the inauguration of 'Calorie 2012', an all-India seminar on 'Engineering Interventions for Profitable Agriculture' at the TNAU in Coimbatore on Tuesday. —Photo: Special Arrangement

In addition to the second Green Revolution, the country is in need of an agricultural machinery revolution to tide over the present farm labour crisis and improve the efficiency of farm

operations, K. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), said here on Tuesday.

Inaugurating a two-day “Calorie 2012”, an all-India seminar on “Engineering Interventions for Profitable Agriculture” at the TNAU, the Vice-Chancellor said that there was a proposal to train Standard X students who had failed the examination, for two years in repair and maintenance of agricultural machinery, thereby enabling them to start machinery rental and repair services in rural areas. This was a good strategy to retain youth in villages.

“Under the XII Five Year Plan, it is planned to launch the Pan India Science and Technology Missions across the nation. These missions will be launched to include four major areas, viz., affordable health care, energy and environment, research and development for water, and food and nutrition. The National Mission on Energy and Environment will give thrust to bio-fuels co-operatives in rural areas, development of energy efficient technology and bio-energy,” Mr. Ramasamy said.

Pioneer

Pointing out that TNAU was a pioneer in assessing the wind potential for the entire State for erecting wind mills, the Vice-Chancellor said the R&D efforts on bio-energy and bio-fuels would receive major impetus in the coming years. The Department of Nano Science and Technology of the university would work to develop bio-sensors, to be applied to crop health and animal health.

S. Radhakrishnan, Chairman, Institution of Engineers (India) Coimbatore, called for the need to manufacture indigenous design and fabrication of farm machinery rather than import them from other countries.

Experts from the Institution of Engineers (India) and TNAU, also spoke.

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State sanctions Rs. 98 cr. for Badvel water scheme

The State government sanctioned Rs. 98 crore for a mega drinking water scheme in Badvel in Kadapa district, Congress MLA of Badvel P.M. Kamalamma said on Thursday.

Drinking water was being supplied from Pennar river to people in the fluoride-affected areas in Badvel, Gopavaram and Atlur mandals in Badvel constituency, she said.

The Congress leader assured supply of drinking water from Brahmamsagar reservoir under Telugu Ganga project to Kasinayana, Porumamilla and Kalasapadu mandals in the constituency.

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Rotten meat processing centre found



Sniffing it outThe civic body seized four tonnes of unhygienic mutton and 1.5 tonnes of rotting beef on Thursday —Photo: Special Arrangement

Four tonnes of unhygienic mutton and 1.5 tonnes of rotting beef were seized by officials of the Chennai Corporation on Thursday at the Central Railway Station.

The Corporation had commenced raids on Wednesday, in trains coming from Andhra Pradesh and seized 2,130 kg of rotten meat smuggled into the city for sale. The unhygienic meat from rotting carcasses was seized from parcels transported in the trains.

Officials of the civic body have now started tracing the source and destination of the consignment. As a few of the addresses have been found to be false, officials are yet to identify those responsible for the trade.

One of the processing centres in Chintadripet has been traced, and the health department of the Corporation will issue a notice to the centre. As there are reports of supplies of unhygienic meat to popular hotels too, the civic body is planning to chalk out a detailed proposal to tackle the challenges posed to public health because of this trade.

When the civic body's health officials tried to destroy the unhygienic meat, some traders resisted. However, the products were finally destroyed at the Kodungaiyur dump yard.

Some of the mutton seized on Thursday was also found to be sourced from Ajmer in Rajasthan, as part of measures taken by popular hotel chains to get the meat at affordable prices.

"The mutton was completely spoilt as the train took two-and-a-half days to reach Chennai. The meat was not certified by a veterinary surgeon of an authorised slaughterhouse," said an official of the Corporation.

The civic body is likely to take measures tackle this problem by holding a meeting with representatives of hotels. The samples collected on Thursday have been sent to a laboratory of the Meats Department of the Government Veterinary College for an assessment of their microbial count.

Even as civic body officials were conducting raids on the trains, many labourers associated with the illegal trade were supplying the meat products through several alternative routes in the city on Thursday.

The supply points of the meat — structures along the Coom — have been temporarily shifted to other areas by traders.

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Professor sows seeds for food security



Investing in the future Once the seeds sprout, they are transplanted into discarded plastic packets and given away to anyone who wants them—Photo: Special Arrangement

Loyola College is lined with rows of trees that start at its front gate, continue past the church, skirt the playing fields and hostels and end at the Loyola Institute of Business Administration (LIBA) that is nestled in the farthest corner of the lush green campus.

Behind the open air auditorium of the LIBA campus, however, is a sparse patch of soil that houses something very different — tiny saplings that rear their diminutive, perky heads from plastic packets arranged close together.

The saplings are the result of an enterprise called the Indo-International Initiative for Billions of Fruit Trees (IIBFT). The man behind it, Dr Alagu Perumal Ramasamy, director of IIBFT and professor of international business at LIBA, explains the origins of the name. “Food security is a burning issue in our country and across the world. IIBFT believes in planting not just trees but fruit trees. Not only do they prevent soil erosion and offer shade, but they also can supplement the nutritional needs of a family,” he says.

This initiative follows a simple model of functioning. “I collect seeds, dry them, plant them in old plastic packets and then donate them to the nature clubs of schools and colleges. Not only do I donate saplings, I also impart the knowledge required to raise them,” he says.

His efforts have borne fruit, literally. Several city schools and colleges, including Loyola, Good Shepherd and Vivekananda Vidyalaya now have fruit-bearing trees on their campus. But this is not enough, Dr. Ramasamy says. “I want to take this initiative to every educational institution in the city and expand it to include other cities too,” he says.

The volunteers of this enterprise meet every Sunday to sow the seeds. Once the seeds sprout, they are transplanted into discarded plastic packets and given away to anyone who wants them. We also conduct sessions in educational institutions where we teach children to plant and look after the saplings.”

The best thing about this exercise is the minimum investment required, volunteers say. “Some seeds, soil, water, discarded plastic packets and a few hours of our time are all that are required,” says Nishanthi, a volunteer.

“We are trying to involve the larger community in this mission. We start at the school level so that our children grow up to become environmentally aware citizens. It is also about creating a sense of ownership so people begin to respect trees and treat them better,” Dr. Ramasamy says.

Besides educational institutions, corporates are also being persuaded to adopt fruit trees. “Infosys has already adopted 500 trees,” says Chris, another volunteer.

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Turmeric auction cancelled



Farmers staging a demonstration in front of the regulated market in Erode on Thursday.— PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN

Turmeric auction at the regulated market here was cancelled on Thursday after more than 100 farmers blocked the Bhavani main road demanding remunerative prices for the yellow spice, and in protest against the alleged irregularities in the market.

The prices, which hovered around Rs. 6,700 a quintal a few weeks ago, fell to Rs. 5,700 a quintal on Thursday. It was said most of the traders quoted Rs. 5,000 and below for the turmeric put up for auction at the regulated market.

“Traders have quoted Rs. 3,500 to Rs. 5,000 a quintal, which is not remunerative for us,” the farmers said.

Alleging that the traders had formed a syndicate and had brought down the prices, farmers wanted the district authorities to conduct a probe.

The markets in Erode get most of the turmeric for auction from farmers in Southern districts of Tamil Nadu. The farmers in Erode and neighbouring districts have stopped bringing the turmeric to the market after the Turmeric Farmers Association of India, an organisation formed on the lines of National Egg Co-ordination Committee, conducted a national level conference in August and announced Rs. 9,000 a quintal as the floor price for the yellow spice.

The initiative was taken up following drastic fall in the prices. The association had asked the farmers not to sell their produce below the floor price.

But farmers from Southern districts including Madurai, and Dindigul continued to sell the produce.

Traders said that the supply and demand were the reasons for the fluctuations in the price. “The prices fell as there is no significant demand for turmeric in the country. The price of Rs. 5,700 is offered only to high quality turmeric. Traders have nothing to do with the price fluctuations,” said Erode Turmeric Merchants Association president RKV Ravishankar.

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Weather

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Friday, Sep 14

Max Min

33.6° | 27.7°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 84

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:57

Sunset: 06:10

Barometer: 1007

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Saturday, Sep 15

Max Min

34° | 27°

Extended Forecast for a week

Sunday Sep 16	Monday Sep 17	Tuesday Sep 18	Wednesday Sep 19	Thursday Sep 20
33° 26°	32° 27°	31° 27°	30° 27°	30° 25°
Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 06:05

Humidity: 94

Sunset: 06:26

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1001



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GM crops: Look before you leap



GM crops are inimical to food security. Claims of their success are baseless. The Government is promoting the interests of the MNC seed industry.

Agrarian distress in our country is not news anymore, neither are farmer suicides. Since the neo-liberal policies began in the 1990s, more than 2.5 lakh farmers have committed suicide. Majority of them are small and marginal farmers doing rainfed agriculture.

In a country where more than 60 per cent of the population is dependent on agriculture, the reality is that while year-on-year agriculture production is increasing, our farmers are in serious distress.

Last year, our food production touched a record 235 million tonnes. But surprisingly the number of hungry also seems to have risen in recent years.

VIEWING THE CONTEXT

It is in this context of ensuring food and livelihood security that we should view the current debate on GM crops. The debate, while it has seen ideological positions for and against genetic engineering, has also thrown up the question of appropriate technologies.

Is this the kind of technology that we should embrace to empower our farmers and bring food security to our country, or should we be looking at solutions that are sustainable?

Is the current government in a hurry to adopt this technology which is a subject of controversy due to various reasons — ranging from the potential impact on human health to the real issue of the exercise of monopoly on the seed sector, by multinational biotech seed companies?

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture took up this issue to find out whether GM crops should be part of our agriculture.

The Standing Committee, with 31 members from the ruling and opposition benches in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, started its deliberations in the end of 2009.

This was when the debate around GM crops was raging due to Bt Brinjal, the first GM food crop in the country to have reached commercialisation stage. Bt Brinjal was put under a moratorium by the then Union Minister for Environment Jairam Ramesh, but the debate on GM crops continued as the country had close to 72 crops that were genetically modified and in the research pipeline.

Some of them were also undergoing open field trials. The Standing Committee, over the next two-and-a-half years, went through close to 467 memoranda from various stakeholders totalling some 15,000 pages, travelled to many States to understand and listen to various stakeholders, and to check the ground reality.

The final report was adopted unanimously at a committee meeting on August 3 and tabled in Parliament on August 9, 2012.

The report critically analyses the need for risky technologies such as genetic engineering in agriculture to ensure food security and improvement of farm livelihoods, and comes to the conclusion that GM crops, with their potential threat to the health of the citizens, biodiversity and farm economies, do not have a role in ensuring food security.

They could also put the livelihood security of farmers and farm labourers under threat.

MNC POWER

One of the eye-openers for the committee was our visit to Yavatmal to hold a public consultation to understand the reality behind Bt cotton, the first and the only GM crop commercially cultivated in our country.

While promoters of the technology, such as the biotech seed companies, and even the government consistently maintained that Bt cotton had increased production and productivity of cotton and lifted cotton farmers out of distress, what we saw was a different story.

Rising input costs with seeds and other inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides — which are essential for Bt cotton hybrids — and falling yields, have actually increased the burden of farmers in Vidarbha and other rainfed regions.

The committee's investigations from yield data provided by the government institutions also found out that the national level yield has actually stagnated in the last five years when Bt cotton area increased. Added to this were cases of increased attack from secondary pests and other new diseases.

The last 10 years of Bt cotton also establish the fact that monopolies in the seed sector could be a matter of great concern. In the current scenario, 93 per cent of Bt cotton has the proprietary

gene of Monsanto, the American seed giant, which is the world's largest seed company. This monopoly has also given Monsanto the power to arm-twist governments to increase prices of seeds.

The company had even taken the State government of Andhra Pradesh to court over increasing its royalty per packet of Bt cotton seed.

The systematic wiping out of non-Bt seeds from the market and aggressive marketing techniques, along with the failure of our public sector institutions to provide ample quantities of seeds, have pushed farmers into the hands of the unscrupulous seed industry, which only sells Bt cotton seeds.

Strangely, this 'lack of choice' for the farmer is drummed around as farmers accepting Bt cotton. It is essential that an independent and comprehensive analysis of the 10 years of Bt cotton is done at the earliest.

REGULATORY FAILURE

The existing GM regulatory system with the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under the Ministry of Environment and Forests as the nodal agency to approve the release of GM crops, and the Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) located within the Department of Biotechnology under Ministry of Science and Technology as the risk assessment agency, has come under heavy criticism. The regulatory apparatus has been unable to put in place a scientific risk assessment system and carry out effective ground monitoring of GM crops.

Fingers have been raised at the systematic rigging of the regulatory system due to conflict of interest, lack of clear policy direction and an unscientific approach towards approval of environmental releases of GM crops, including experimental trials permitted in open fields.

In the approval for various Bt cotton hybrids in the past 10 years and the process run by the regulatory system on Bt Brinjal, it is evident that regulatory agencies seem more inclined to favour the industry.

Added to this is the lack of accountability and liability that has provided a field day for promoters of such GM technologies to get away with violations that could affect food and environmental safety.

It is shocking to see that instead of learning from these regulatory lapses, the government, in the last one year, has been trying hard to introduce a new Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Legislation (BRAI Bill, 2012) in Parliament, which would provide for a single-window clearance system for GM crops.

BIOSAFETY AUTHORITY

The need of the hour is an all-encompassing biosafety authority which will not restrict itself to just approving products of modern biotechnology.

The main mandate of the authority should be ensuring biosafety by protecting biodiversity, human and livestock health and environment, while regulating products of modern biotechnology.

It should be created through an Act of the Parliament, which is extensively discussed and debated before acquiring the shape of a law.

Until then there should be no environmental releases of any GM crops, including those in the garb of field trials.

(The author is a CPM MP, and Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture.)

Business Standard

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FERTILISER SHORTFALL MAY HIT AGRI OUTPUT

The shortfall in supply of fertilisers has raised concerns of a dip in agricultural output, especially paddy in the current kharif season even as marked improvement in monsoon rains have helped the state to cover more than 80 per cent of the targeted sowing area so far.

“We are confident that the targeted kharif sowing area will be achieved but the major problem now is the deficit in supply of fertilisers to the state,” said R S Gopalan, director (agriculture).

So far, we have received only 50 per cent of urea against our demand and this will definitely impact the kharif production this year, he rued.

By August end, the state has received about 212,015 tonne of urea against the requirement of 342,490 tonne during April- August period.

The state government has targeted food grain production at 7.65 million tonnes during this year's kharif. This year's target included 7.22 million tones of cereals (6.38 million tonne rice,

0.65 million tonne maize and 0.17 million tonne ragi) and 0.43 million tonne of pulses (0.13 million tonne arhar, 0.11 million tonne mung and 0.14 million tonne biri).

On the shortage of fertilisers, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has already sought the intervention of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for supply of full quota of urea by September. However, due to the even distribution of rains during the year, the kharif sown area this year has surpassed the previous year's sowing area coverage. The total kharif sown area presently stood at 5.67 million hectares- ha (as on September 7) compared to 5.62 million ha sown in the same period last year.

Paddy- a key kharif crop has been sown over 3.4 million ha area against the target of four million ha. Similarly, pulses, oilseeds, fibers, vegetables and spices are sown on 0.63 million ha, 0.214 million ha, 0.14 million ha, 0.14 million ha and 0.61million ha. This year, the targeted kharif sowing area includes 0.74 million ha of pulses, 0.38 million ha of oilseeds, 0.14 million ha of fibres, 0.32 million ha of vegetables and 0.81 million ha of spices.

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CACP FOR 23% JUMP IN FY14 SUGARCANE FRP

The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) has recommended a Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of Rs 210 per quintal for sugarcane for the season beginning October 2013. This would be an increase of Rs 40 from the price fixed for the next sugar season, beginning next month. Officials said the major reason behind such a recommendation was to correct an anomaly in cane pricing over the years, making the FRP almost irrelevant with the exception of a few states.

The proposal comes at a time when domestic sugar prices have firmed up on anticipation of lower output projection. According to data with the department of consumer affairs, the wholesale sugar price in the capital has surged 19 per cent this calendar year, to Rs 3,850 per quintal. FRP is the minimum price that cane farmers are legally guaranteed. Sugar mills are free

to offer any price above this. CACP's recommendation is with the agriculture ministry and would then go to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs. Usually, the government accepts the cane price recommended by CACP.

The FRP is followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. That has implications for mills operated by Renuka Sugars, Rajshreee Sugars, Birla Sugars (Oudh and Upper Ganges) and Bannari Amman Sugars, among others. In general, the entire sugar industry will benefit from the increase in FRP, as the levy sugar price is calculated on the basis of FRP for the industry, including for mills where there's a State Advised Price (SAP), as in UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana and Tamil Nadu. Levy sugar is currently Rs 1,905 per quintal and it might also see an increase corresponding to the FRP.

The SAP is much more than the FRP. For the 2011-12 sugar season, the FRP was Rs 170 per quintal, while the SAP in UP, the biggest sugarcane producing state, was Rs 240 per quintal. The CACP proposal is expected to bridge the gap between FRP and SAP. The difference disadvantages mills in SAP-states, since their cost of production is higher but they have to compete with sugar produced in FRP-paying mills. In years of low sugar prices, mills often fail to pay the SAP and the arrears in this regard get accumulated, which discourage a further round of cultivation.

The concept of FRP was introduced in October 2009 and it replaced the one of a Statutory Minimum Price.

It is fixed after taking into consideration the margins for cane farmers on account of risk, as well as profit on the cost of production, including transportation expense.

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ONIONS MAY BE EXPORTED WITHOUT AGENCIES

Onion exporters may get to export without routing it through agencies, in a move being considered by the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT). At present, consignments are regulated by canalsing agents or state trading agencies.

This is even when exports are under the open general license (OGL) and the government has removed any cap on the export price. Without canalysing agents, exporters could directly ship the consignment and produce the papers to DGFT, said sources.

They said onion exports till date this year have been around 800,000 tonnes. The monsoon resurgence has revived hopes of a moderate crop and at the same time increased the chances of rotting of the crop in various storage houses across the country.

“Too much onion could not be supplied in the domestic market as it will not be remunerative, cost-wise,” said an official source.

Prices have been falling in the wholesale market due to arrivals from storages since August-end. Traders and farmer, who have stored onion are in a hurry to offload the stock, fearing damage in storehouses. Incidentally, the fresh harvest of onion has also started arriving in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

On the other hand, sources said, exporters have complained that the state trading agencies designated to handle exports are engaging in procedural delays, which is increasing the transaction cost as well.

“There is an urgency to export now since prices are relatively low in the international markets and are falling in the domestic market, to,” explained an onion trader.

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Montek's comment on Kerala paddy fields draws flak



Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia's statement on utilisation of paddy fields for purposes other than agriculture at the Emerging Kerala meet has raised a controversy.

Environment and farmers organisations under the banner of 'Save our Rice Campaign' have termed the statement "highly irresponsible". The Green organisations said that such statements coming a top official of the topmost planning body of the country, shows that there are plans that could destroy Kerala's natural resources and food security base.

This approach of the Planning Commission fostered by the policies of the present State Government will have very serious implications on the food and water security of the state.

“Ahluwalia’s statement shows his total ignorance about the importance of paddy wetland ecosystems of Kerala in terms of water security, local economy and biological richness,” they said in a statement issued here today.

The local self-governments are aware on the need of conservation of paddy wetlands for ensuring water security. The debate across the state on this issue eventually led to the promulgation of the Paddy and Wetland Conservation Act in 2008. Kerala’s very rich and unique paddy eco-systems have been massively destroyed in the last 30 years and now the state produces only about 15 percent of its domestic food requirements. However, there has been an increasing awareness about the importance of paddy cultivation and thousands of farmers, and even school children have come back to paddy cultivation.

“Agriculture is a state subject and the statement from the Planning Commission vice-chairman is totally irresponsible. It is an affront to the officials, scientists, planners and farmers of the state, who has been taking all efforts to protect the paddy and wetlands,” said Usha S , national convener of the Save Our Rice campaign, which is a network of various organisations, farmers, rice experts, consumers and millers working towards the sustainability of paddy cultivation.

“Kerala’s highest priority should be to protect its paddy wetlands. The greater importance of paddy ecosystem is its rich biodiversity and its productivity. This cannot be overlooked,” she said.