

Today Farm News

20.09.2012 A.M

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## Improving yield through ISF management

Integrated soil nutrient management envisaging supply of all the essential plant nutrients in balanced proportions using manures, fertilisers and biofertilisers would not be sufficient today for improving and sustaining soil fertility and health.

### Can be effective

It is important for farmers to remember that integrated practices could prove to be effective only if the soil texture is loamy or at least clayey loam or sandy loam besides being nonsaline with the soil reaction in the neutral range of pH 6.5 to 7.5 or at least between 6.0 and 8.0 and the organic matter status not lower than 2 per cent.

Even if all the essential plant nutrients are supplied in sufficient amounts and desirable proportions, the bioavailability of these nutrients in balanced proportions for absorption by the crops depends upon the physical, chemical and biological properties of the soil.

So, the overall soil environment must be taken care of, to ensure better performance of the crops.

Most of our arable soils are not loamy in texture, being either sandy or clayey. Excessive drainage accompanied by the loss of nutrients through leaching and low water-holding and nutrient-holding capacities are the major problems of sandy soils limiting plant growth.

Poor drainage accompanied by anaerobic conditions and hard pan formation in the subsoil zone are the major problems of heavy clayey soils.

They must be improved towards loamy texture through soil breeding technology, salinity must be reduced in some soils to alleviate the physiological drought and to ease the absorption of water and nutrients by the plant roots.

### **Optimal level**

Soil acidity and alkalinity must be reclaimed and the pH must be maintained in the range of 6.5 to 7.5 so that the availability of nutrients will be optimal.

Scope for extending the area for agriculture is limited due to diversion of more lands every year for non-agricultural purposes. However, our country has a number of hybrids and good growing varieties of all crops readily available at all ICAR institutes.

So, the only possible scope to maximize crop production with the available varieties is hybrids of crops, efficient water management and plant protection measures.

(K. Kumaraswamy, former Professor of soil science & Agrl. Chemistry, TNAU Coimbatore, email: kkkswamy9@yahoo.co.in, mobile: 94436 52332)

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### **Training on millet seed production held**

A three-day training on millet seed production and marketing was organised recently at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU). Nearly 30 seed growers from various blocks of Coimbatore district participated.

Inaugurating the training, S. Lakshmi Raj, Joint Director of Agriculture, Coimbatore District, highlighted the importance of including millets for daily consumption as they contained nutrients

like phosphorus, calcium, carbohydrates and other minerals, essential for normal growth, as compared to rice.

He urged farmers to increase millet production and productivity by adopting improved varieties and production technologies.

K. Elango, Deputy Director of Agriculture, Coimbatore District, stressed the importance of value addition through 'Initiative for Nutritional Security through Intensive Millets Promotion' (INSIMP) programmes, implemented in different centres jointly by the State Department of Agriculture and TNAU.

### **Exposure visit**

K. Krishnaveni, professor, Seed Science and Technology, Department of Market Extension, TNAU, arranged for an exposure visit to the Millet Breeding Station, Seed Processing Unit of TNAU, and a certified seed field of maize at Sengalipalayam village to witness the application of modern farm technologies.

### **Handbook**

They were also taken to the Post Harvest Technology Centre of TNAU, where they were given an exposure to value-added products in sorghum, cumbu, thenai, varagu, samai and other minor millets. A handbook on millet seed production, value addition and marketing was distributed to seed growers.

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**Organic SRI motivates seed production by small farmers**



At a time when farmers are heavily depending on State owned seed corporations and private seed companies for their seed needs every cropping season, a group of organic farmers in Nallangalpatti village in Tamil Nadu is engaged in a silent revolution to completely reverse the situation through collective action.

They are not only involved in producing their own seeds and exchanging it among themselves, but also supplying the seeds to Government owned seed farms.

Thus, they have proved once again that farmers are the masters in taking all characteristics and aspects in mind for developing quality seeds, multiplying them and saving them for reuse.

### TARGET VILLAGES

Nallathangalpatti is a small village of Puliur Panchayat of Kulathur taluk in Pudukkottai District and has around 70 farm families. This village has been one among the target villages of Kudumbam, an NGO working with resource-poor farmers in establishing sustainable agriculture alternatives in Pudukkottai District.

Over the years, Kudumbam organised a mixture of capacity building programmes like village awareness creation meetings, on-field demonstrations of bio input preparation and facilitating farmers' field schools for the farmers' group of this village.

The process of participatory learning and sharing methods had motivated and acclimatized them to organic farming methods. Paddy has been the predominant crop for this village under irrigated condition.

Vegetables, black gram and groundnut are also grown. Under rain fed condition groundnut, red gram, varagu, and cowpea are grown.

During 2003, Kudumbam initiated steps to introduce SRI (System of Rice Intensification) method in this village. Since, it was a new technology at that time, it approached one of the experienced organic farmers' groups in that village and discussed with the farmers whether they would be interested in experimenting with SRI.

The Organic Farmers Group (Iyarkkai Vivasaaayegal Kuzhu) came forward and expressed its interest in experimenting with SRI method of paddy cultivation.

## LONG EXPERIENCE

Though, the farmers' group had long experience in organic farming methods, initially the farmers were a little reluctant in experimenting with a technology like SRI. Hence, the farmers' group decided to experiment involving two farmers.

In the same period of time, the State initiated steps to popularise SRI method in paddy cultivation.

“The major difference between the Nallathangalpatti farmers' group and the State sponsored SRI programme was that the latter's focus has been SRI with application of chemicals while the Nallathangalpatti farmers confined SRI to organic methods,” says K. Suresh Kanna, deputy director of the NGO.

## BETTER YIELD

Since the two farmers' fields were already practicing organic farming, with the application of the SRI method they have increased their yield from 22 bags/acre to 32 bags/acre.

Thus, the increased yield motivated them to continue organic SRI method in the following season along with another 5 farmers from their group.

The successful organic SRI paddy cultivation by this farmers' group has attracted many outside visitors to their paddy fields including many local, state and central agriculture officials who appreciated their work.

After seeing the cultivation methods and better grain quality, the local agriculture officers suggested the farmers to sell the seeds to the Government seed farm at Kudumiyamalai as it would help fetch better income. The officials also helped the farmers enter into an agreement with the seed farm.

All the registered farmers are supplied with seeds from the farm. The district seed certifying officer also makes periodical visits (at least 3 visits) during the cropping season and offers his

technical advice to the farmers. Thus, the linkages have started from 2007 and the farmers started to cultivate paddy exclusively for seed promotion purpose.

## MORE INCOME

“When we sell our paddy as seed we are able to get more — between Rs.350 and Rs.400 per bag, says Mr. Govindaraj, the leader of the farmers’ group.

“Hence, the price for the 10kgs is extra gain for us, if we sell it as seeds,” says Dharmaraj, another farmer of the group.

“As we are informed by the State Seed Farm well in advance about the type of paddy seeds and the quantity required, we are able to supply the required quantity according to their needs without any problem,” says Mr. Govindaraj.

The success in paddy has motivated them to involve in seed production for other crops like black gram and groundnut. During the last five years, the farmers’ group has supplied around 60 tonnes of Ponni paddy, 80 tonnes of ATD paddy variety and one ton of groundnut seeds.

For more details readers can contact Mr. Govindaraj, Nallathangalpatti village,

Puliyur Post, Kulathur Taluk, Pudukkottai District, Mobile: 98436-84992

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**For him, the fruits of labour are sweet and sour**



M. Ragunath with the grapes he had grown on the terrace of his house at Gandhipuram in Coimbatore.— Photo: M. Periasamy

Not always are the fruits of labour sweet. For M. Ragnath it is sweet and sour as he has succeeded growing grapes on the terrace of his house on Gandhipuram Second Street. "I took it up as a challenge," he refers to the decision to grow grapes.

When he decided to do something green and shared the decision with friends, a good number of them said that he could not grow grapes. "It was impossible," was what they said, he recalled.

Sometime last October-November after making up his mind, Mr. Ragnath, a photographer and videographer, went to Thondamuthur to buy shoots from grape farmers.

He made grape cuttings and planted them in the tank he constructed. "I did everything needed to grow the creepers – from constructing tanks to erecting the support structures to watering to now harvesting," he says.

As the plants grew, he also went about collecting anything and everything that could aid the growth – cow dung, used cement bags, poles, etc. "I collected cattle waste wherever I found them. And in doing so I did not feel shameful."

Mr. Ragnath did what he felt right and did not seek help. But he said to himself that he would not use fertilisers or pesticides – and to this day he had been true to himself. "I wanted it to be completely organic because I love environment-friendly agriculture."

His commitment won him appreciation and also gained him friends. "Neighbours and all those who came to know of my growing grapes, came forward to help me. Some of them gave wooden poles, a few others dung and others moral support."

In keeping with the public contribution, Mr. Ragnath has started sharing the fruits of labour with all those who helped him, and also students. "I chose students because through the grapes and the growing of it, I wanted to create environment awareness among them." He has shared the fruits with the students of the Punitha Mariannai High School.

Father D. Peter Mariadass, the School's correspondent and head master, says that more than 100 students and a handful of teachers had visited Mr. Ragnath's terrace-garden and were inspired to take up similar work on their terrace. The school management was also contemplating to do so.

Mr. Ragnath says that his green thinking has its roots in the Siruthuli movement. He has also planted saplings on Gandhipuram streets and those saplings had grown to trees to provide shade.

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### Price of small onion falls

The increase in the arrival of small onion in the markets has led to a significant fall in its price.

The harvest of small onion has already begun in TN Palayam, Modakurichi and Kodumudi, which are the largest onion producing blocks in the district. Most of the farmers have reported good yield this year, which is one of the primary reasons for the huge arrivals in the market.

The price of small onion, which hovered around Rs. 30 a kg three weeks ago, has come down to Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 a kg in the wholesale markets following the heavy arrivals.

Retail prices are barely reflective of wholesale rates and people in the district are spending Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 to purchase a kg of onion at the neighbourhood stores.

Despite the fall in the price, many farmers say the current rates are reasonable and they will be able to make a small profit. "Farmers in the district cultivate small onions in more than 1,200 hectares. The average yield is four tonnes per acre," says Deputy Director of Horticulture Robert Vincent.





Kitchen crisis: Shortfall in production has led to an increase in egg prices.— File photo

Dwindling fish landings and a shortfall in egg production have led to their prices spiralling out of control in the State, which meets the bulk of its demand for eggs and, to some extent fish, through imports from neighbouring States.

Eggs are selling at Rs.3.95 a piece in the wholesale market in Kochi, maintaining a steady level for the last 10 days. Higher prices of raw materials for feed and increasing egg production costs have resulted in farmers hiking egg prices by 10 paise per piece over the last two weeks.

The retail price of Rs.4.50 or more does not look like going down below Rs.4 in the near future. The wholesale price swayed between Rs.3.40 and Rs.3.50 a piece about a month ago. But it has also now gone up, said a leading egg trader in Kochi.

He said that returns from egg trade had dipped considerably. Egg producers say that they need to get at least Rs.3.50 a piece to run the business without loss.

Production of duck eggs too have dropped. Farmers cite lack of manpower for rearing birds for the drop in production. The retail price of duck egg is at Rs.6 a piece. Ernakulam district requires around 15 lakh chicken eggs a day. The district also needs around 1.5 lakh duck eggs a day. Traders also referred to the fluctuations in the international market impacting the price rates here. Shortage is often experienced when the demand for exports go up, they said. Egg

dealers said that the prices might go up if the lorry owners demand an increase in transporting charges in view of the recent diesel hike.

### **Fish prices**

Fish prices too continue to soar, though fishing boat owners describe the current season as better than average when compared to the last three years.

Sardines, an all-season favourite and the poor man's staple in Kerala, was selling at Rs.120 a kg in the retail market. The wholesale rate at the Champakkara market in the city on Tuesday was Rs.2,500 for a basket of 30 kg, the effective rate nearly Rs.100 a kg as the basket usually contains only about 25 to 27 kg, the rest of the weight being accounted for by the presence of ice.

Mackerels, the other popular variety, were selling for Rs.120 a kg.

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### **Oil palm, lucrative option for Tirunelveli farmers**



High-yielding: Oil palm fruits being harvested at Ambasamudram in Tirunelveli District recently.

For the first time, farmers in the district, who started cultivating oil palm four years ago, have now successfully harvested the fruits of *Elaeis guinensis*, a native crop of West Africa and an 'introduced crop' in Tamil Nadu.

As Joint Director of Agriculture, Tirunelveli K. Soundararajan inaugurated the harvest of oil palm crop at Ambasamudram recently, 253 kg of oil palm fruits were harvested from 1.40 hectare even as an assured price of Rs. 7,206 per tonne was being offered under the buyback arrangement.

Since India imports around 50 lakh tonnes of palm oil from Malaysia and Indonesia every year, it causes huge spending of foreign exchange. In order to control the foreign exchange spending at least to some extent, the Government of India introduced the cultivation of oil palm in Tamil Nadu and a few other States.

On its part, the State government has executed a tripartite agreement with palm oil producers and the oil palm farmers for regular supply of oil palm seedlings to the farmers and regular buyback of oil palm fresh fruit bunches from the farmers. Godrej Agrovet Limited is the company responsible for Tirunelveli district for the supply of quality oil palm seedlings free of cost to the farmers and collection of fresh fruit bunches from the farmers at the 'government assured price.'

Oil palm starts bearing fruits at the age of four and continues to yield up to 30 years. Inter crops such as black gram, green gram, cow pea can be raised up to the third year for additional income.

Farmers can cultivate 143 oil palm seedlings on one hectare. Oil palm crops do not require protective fence as cattle do not eat them. The crop produces a new leaf and new flower once in fifteen days and hence harvesting of oil palm can be taken up regularly once in fifteen days. A well maintained oil palm garden produces 45 - 60 tonnes of fresh fruit bunches every year, which is procured under buyback arrangement at the assured price of Rs. 7,206 per tonne now. Thus a farmer may get Rs. 3.25 lakh to 4.50 lakh per year from one hectare of oil palm garden.

The Joint Director of Agriculture also reveals that no other crop fetches such a high amount of subsidy as the oil palm. The Government of Tamil Nadu is extending subsidy to the tune of Rs. 1.21 lakh per hectare of oil palm cultivation. It includes planting material subsidy of Rs. 10,000 per Ha, area expansion subsidy of Rs. 6,000 per Ha, borewell subsidy of Rs. 50,000 per unit, electrical / diesel pump subsidy of Rs. 10,000 per unit, drip irrigation subsidy of Rs. 15,000 per Ha, intercropping subsidy of Rs. 10,000 per Ha, integrated pest management / integrated nutrient management subsidy of Rs. 5,000 per Ha and Rs. 15,000 subsidy for establishing vermin-compost unit in the oil palm gardens.

Further the Government also distributes second year cultivation maintenance subsidy of Rs. 3,500 per Ha, third year maintenance subsidy of Rs. 2,850 per Ha and fourth year maintenance subsidy of Rs. 3,250 per Ha.

Lured by the subsidy, farmers in almost all blocks except Alangulam have now cultivated oil palm in the district as paddy cultivation is gradually losing its sheen due to belied monsoons.

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After bitumen, it is jackfruit now



Sweet cargo: Divisional Railway Manager Rajesh Agrawal flagging off a passenger train that also carries a cargo of jackfruit to north India.— Photo: S. Gopakumar

The New Delhi-bound Kerala Express left from Thiruvananthapuram Central on Wednesday with one tonne of jackfruit as part of the Kairali Queen initiative launched by Railways to transport ethnic agricultural produce to the northern and distant cities.

Divisional Railway Manager Rajesh Agrawal flagged off the train. The jackfruit was procured by the Jackfruit Promotion Council that is spearheading the popularisation of the fruit.

### **For farmers**

Mr. Agrawal said the move would be beneficial to the farmers, Railways, and non-resident Keralites residing in the north.

As per an understanding reached between the council and the Railways, a fixed space in trains up to three tonnes would be provided to the council.

The loading and marketing of the fruit will be managed by the council.

Chairman of the council and district panchayat vice-president Roufas Daniel, council general secretary Pankajakshan, Agriculture Department Additional Secretary N. Vijayan, and Joint Director K.C. Rugimini were present on the occasion.

The movement of jackfruit comes close on the heels of the first exclusive goods train Kairali Black that transported bitumen from Ernakulam to Bhutan. Railways are gearing up to transport latex from Kerala to Delhi as part of a move to ensure quick and efficient transport of freight from the State.

### **Saving time**

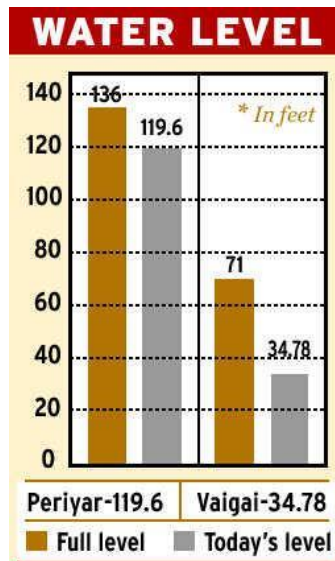
It has been found that two-thirds of the time can be saved if freight is moved through the rail network and it will immensely benefit the economy of the State and the business community.

Compared to the 10 days needed by a truck to go from here to Delhi, an exclusive goods train can take the cargo to the national capital in five days.

Railways have found that Kerala-based products have very strong market in places such as Mumbai, Delhi, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Chandigarh, Amritsar, and Jalandhar.

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## Water level



Water level in the Periyar dam on Wednesday stood at 119.60 feet (136 feet) with an inflow of 193 cusecs and a discharge of 400 cusecs. The level in the Vaigai dam was 34.78 feet (71 feet) with an inflow of 125 cusecs and a discharge of 60 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 3,031 mcf. Kallandiri recorded 50.2 mm of rainfall followed by Thaniyamangalam 31, Mettupatti 20.4, Melur 19, Pulipatti 10, Kuppanampatti 6, Sattaiyar dam 5, Andipatti 4 and Madurai 1.6 mm.

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## Banana fibre workshop shows the ropes

: Indian Overseas Bank Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) organized a training workshop for women's self help groups in banana fibre product making and value addition for banana fibre in association with Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Puzhutheri, near here recently.

More than 20 participants gained hands on experience in fibre rope making and other hand product crafting using banana fibre.

Representatives from an export firm from Tiruchi shared their expectations on the products besides assuring to buy back the products if they meet international quality standards.

Director, IOB RSETI, K. Chandrasekaran, who was Chief Guest, enquired about the skill participants had acquired, cost economics for production of banana fibre rope and other handicraft items.

He urged the women to take up the enterprise actively by seeking financial assistance from commercial banks apart from utilising government schemes.

Lead District Manager S.M.Murugesan and NABARD Assistant General Manager A. Parthiban, interacted with the participants as well as the representatives from the exporting firm on the opportunities available for marketing banana fibre products. They also assured their support to SHG groups in setting up enterprises along with KVK.

A roadmap for the banana fibre enterprise was worked out in consultation with the participants, wherein KVK would approach the necessary authorities on behalf of the women for the provision of requisite infrastructure for the enterprise.

The participants were issued certificates by the Director, RSETI and the KVK Programme Coordinator J. Diraviam. The Export firms purchased the banana fibre rope produced by the women. The valedictory programme as well as the training programme was organized by KVK Specialist R. Anitha.

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### Plans afoot for inland fishing

A special plan to develop inland fishing in the district will be implemented under the Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water Resources Management (IAM WARM) project.

The plan aims to increase inland fishing harvest by ten folds from the current level. A special subsidy would be released for creating facilities for inland farming including construction of fish markets. Improving livelihood through ornamental fish rearing is part of the scheme.

A two-pronged strategy will be adopted to achieve the goals, according to official sources.

Firstly, the farm ponds in South Vellar, Pambar, Agniyar, and Ambuliyar would be utilised as fish rearing fields . “We have planned to select the beneficiaries from among the members of the ‘water user committees’, progressive farmers, and other eligible enterprising individuals,” says an official source.

Six beneficiaries would be selected for setting up rearing farms in their own lands from each of the Agniyar and Ambuliyar sub-basins and five each from the South Vellar and Pambar sub-basins, source said.



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Weather

Chennai

## Chennai - INDIA

### Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Thursday, Sep 20

Max Min

34.0° | 25.7°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 71

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:57

Sunset: 06:06

Barometer: 1009

### Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Friday, Sep 21

Max Min

33° | 26°

### Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday

Sep 22



30° | 26°

Rainy

Sunday

Sep 23



33° | 26°

Rainy

Monday

Sep 24



32° | 26°

Rainy

Tuesday

Sep 25



33° | 26°

Rainy

Wednesday

Sep 26



30° | 27°

Rainy

### Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 0

Humidity: 79

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:08

Sunset: 06:19

Barometer: 1008



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**Sugar futures trip on profit-booking sales**



Sugar futures declined 0.3 per cent to Rs 3,546 a quintal on Tuesday amid profit booking as the October contract on the NCDEX has gained about two per cent in the last one week. Sugar prices in the Kolkata spot market were up by 0.76 per cent at Rs 3,829 a quintal due to the revival of demand at lower levels.

The expiry of the September sugar contract on Thursday was postponed to Friday on account of a possible closure of the various spot markets due to the strike call given by various political parties.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs is likely to consider a proposal on Friday to raise sugar prices sold through ration shops. If approved it would be the first hike in about a decade.

The Indian Sugar Mills' Association has forecast sugar production to fall by 8 per cent at 24 million tonnes in 2012-13 against 26 mt achieved last year.

Sugar futures may gain due to improvement in demand ahead of the festive season. A month-long delay in cane crushing in Maharashtra may also support prices. However, sufficient supplies and improved rains may cap a sharp upside in sugar prices.

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**India most vulnerable to water stress among G20, says HSBC report**



Among the G20 nations, India is most vulnerable to water stress and disruption of global water supplies driven by climate change, according to a report published on Wednesday by HSBC.

The report, which used data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Resource Institute, looks at both national usage and supply figures, as well as specific sub-national levels on water usage to capture a nation's water "stress".

While other nations have lower availability per capita at the moment (Saudi Arabia, South Africa and South Korea) it is usage that makes India particularly vulnerable, with the largest dependence on agriculture in the G20, and usage of around 25 per cent of all water used for agriculture globally. "By 2030, we estimate that water withdrawal for agriculture will have increased by 64 per cent but water availability per capita will have shrunk from 1,560 cubic metres to 1,287 cubic metres per capita, dangerously near the 1000 cubic metres per capita levels the UN determines as water scarce," notes the report.

India currently has the highest rate of ground water abstraction in the G20 of 251 km<sup>3</sup> per year – more than twice the second placed China.

While population growth forecasts for the next four decades would suggest that on its current trajectory world average fresh water per capita would still be plentiful at around 6,940 cubic metres per capita, climate change is disrupting patterns.

Past hydrological trends – on rainfall and evaporation – are no longer a good indicator of future availability. Water cycles are intensifying so that "dry regions are getting drier and wet areas are getting wetter." Supply disruptions will happen at a local level.

HSBC argues that going forward the access and use of water will "increasingly become a differentiating factor for economic productivity and the ability of companies to operate."

For India this will prove troublesome with the uncertainty over water impinging on economic productivity, and investors factoring in water risks.

"Changing water patterns are already revealing local vulnerabilities such as the forced closure of power, oil, gas and textile facilities this year," it warns.



Kharif foodgrain output may be lower than last year's 130 million tonnes (mt), as scanty rain in the early part of the monsoon hit plantings. Last kharif, the country had harvested 129.94 mt foodgrains, including 91.53 mt of rice.

Poor rain posed a serious challenge in achieving production targets for the current kharif season, said Agriculture Secretary Ashish Bahuguna on Wednesday at a workshop on improvement in agricultural statistics.

For 2012-13, the Government had set a conservative production target of 250 mt, half of which was expected to be met from kharif. Last year, the total foodgrain production, including rabi, stood at 257.44 mt. Rice and wheat production touched a record 104 mt and 93.9 mt, respectively.

Last week, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar had said that foodgrain production was expected to be lower than last year and output of pulses and coarse cereals was also likely to be affected.

RISE IN ACREAGE

Kharif sowing has almost ended and harvest is set to begin in early October. The Government expects to announce the advance kharif estimates next week.

Though the late revival in monsoon has helped increase acreage of key kharif crops such as rice, it would augur well for rabi plantings of mustard and wheat due to higher moisture levels in soil.

The monsoon deficit, which stood at 29 per cent at the end of June, reduced in August due to widespread rains and currently stands at six per cent.

Poor rain during the key sowing period of June and July affected kharif sowings. Latest data from the Agriculture Ministry estimate the shortfall at 5.4 per cent over last year.

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Record monsoon rain turns desert lush green



*Jaisalmer usually gets 165mm rain but this year figures reached 220.7mm.*

JAISALMER: Rajasthan's desert region has gone from grey to green in little more than a month. In a dramatic late surge in the [monsoon](#) here, the threat of drought that loomed large over the region in mid-August has given way to gushing rivers and water bodies filled to the brim in Jaisalmer and Barmer districts.

As on September 18, monsoon rainfall in western Rajasthan was 15% above normal, almost all of it coming since the second week of August. As late as August 22, the region had a rain deficit of 25%, with most villages facing severe water crisis that prompted the state government to declare a drought.

It hasn't stopped raining since. So much so that many places were faced with problems of water-logging. Jaisalmer on an average gets 165mm of rain but this year the figures reached to 220.7mm.

Weekly deviations from normal rains in the district between August 8 and September 12 were 268%, -44%, 37%, 300% and 381%. The story was no different in Barmer, which has recorded 202mm of rain.

Ironically, when a central study team visited the region on September 5 to take the stock of drought, the rains had not till then showed its full measure. The situation had prompted team leader U K Singh to remark, "There will be no crops. The rains did not occur on time and farmers are faced with a lot of problem."

But no sooner had the team returned, the heavens opened up. There was water logging in low lying areas, roads were flooded and the sand was swept under railway tracks. People here are now praying for the rains to stop. There is a good crop but more rains might ruin it.

The desert in twin district of Barmer is more green than it has ever been. According to Dr J P Singh, a scientist with the Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI), "This could be a sign of climate change. In times to come, the cultivation time may shift."

This year's pattern — heavy rain in the second half of the season — has more or less been the norm in the past three-four years. As a result, many desert villages in the region are looking greener than ever before.

District collector Shuchi Tyagi said the late surge in rains has solved the problem of fodder and water. It is hard to imagine that the threat of drought loomed in this very region a little more than a month ago.



CHANDIGARH: [Farmers' unions](#) and green activists have strongly opposed the ongoing field trials of genetically modified Bt maize in Haryana, demanding immediate suspension of such trials.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) on Wednesday threatened to launch a state-wide agitation against the move, claiming that many states, including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and [Madhya Pradesh](#), have already denied permission for such trials.

"We may even destroy such crops," announced Gurnam Singh, state president of BKU, adding that this is just an attempt of multinational companies to control Indian crops and agricultural operations through the genetically modified seeds and patents.

According to BKU, at least six ongoing GM field trials are being conducted by various multinational seed companies at various agricultural research stations under the aegis of Choudhary Charan Singh Agriculture University, Hisar. University vice-chancellor K S Khokhar said the trials are being conducted with due permission from the state government.

Explaining the reasons for their opposition, [Greenpeace](#) India activist Neha Saigal said, "Open field trials can lead to contamination of regular crops. Thus, hurriedly and tactly conducted GM maize field trials may end up in obliterating the traditionally tested seed varieties."

Saigal said ever since BT brinjal was put under a moratorium, the GM seed producers, marketing companies and their supporters in the state and Central government have intensified efforts to get GM crops introduced in India through such backdoor methods.

Khokhar said the seeds produced by many such companies are under field trials. "We will send the results of trials to the Union ministry of environment for further action.... GM crops are not a bad idea. By and large scientists are in favour of these crops. In a few countries, these crops were introduced even 30 year ago," he said.

There may be various reasons for opposition to such trials, including ignorance on the part of protesting farmers.