

Today Farm News

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Floriculturists seek time to repay loans

Members of the Nilgiris District Floriculture Small Farmers

Association have sought time to repay their loans.

In a memorandum submitted to the district Collector, president of the association N. Viswanathan and secretary N. Krishnamurthy, pointed out that due to various reasons about 500 flower growers have been affected and they are finding it difficult to repay their loans. They have been seeking relief from the government for the past three years.

Since one of the major contributory factors for the floriculturists being pushed into a corner is the poor quality of the planting materials, the government has evolved a scheme to produce such materials in the Nilgiris itself with the help of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and the flower growers association. For this, it has set aside a sum of Rs. 1.80 crore.

Expressing confidence that when the distribution of planting materials commences under the scheme, things will start looking up for the floriculturists, they urged the administration to espouse their cause and get them one year's time to repay loans. Until then the banks should put on hold measures to recover loans.

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Amend crop insurance scheme

Congress leader B. Shivaram said here on Tuesday that the crop insurance scheme needs to be amended to protect the interests of farmers. The relief paid to farmers was meagre compared to the premium they pay, he said at a press conference here.

Mr. Shivaram said farmers of Hassan district, most of them potato growers, had together paid Rs. 1.87 crore as premium during three years — 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 — to insure their crops. An equal amount was paid by the State government as its share of the premium. “The total premium paid in the three years is about Rs. 3.75 crore. But the relief that the farmers got during these years is only Rs. 20.16 lakh,” he said. The crop insurance policy itself was flawed, he said. “But none of the people’s representative in the district, including those who shed tears at the plight of growers, has bothered to address this issue,” he said.

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A golden date



Thirty km from Coimbatore, on a two-and-a-half-acre farm in Vanjipalayam, a farmer tends to his date palms, over 10 feet high. Two hundred palms grow in neat rows, each boxed in by thin sprinkler pipes and separated from each other by eight meters. While the trees stand barren

now, barely a month ago, each was laden with 50 to 80 kg of shiny yellow dates, nicknamed 'honey balls'.

Bite into one and its crunchy flesh gives way to a wholesome sweetness quite unlike familiar sun-dried dates.

They're officially named Barhi dates and their cultivator, K.G. Murugavel, is among the few to organically grow them in South India.

Murugavel's family have been farmers in Tirupur district for three generations.

He was one too until the garment industry lured him away. Twenty years later, industry hardships led to losses and Murugavel returned to agriculture.

Only this time, he chose Barhi dates over his family's traditional turmeric crops. "During my travels to promote garment exports, I heard of Barhi dates. They were originally found in Israel and are valued for their medicinal properties that can relieve joint and muscle pains," says Murugavel.

Tissue culture saplings

Barhi saplings are today cultivated through tissue culture and are available primarily in the Gulf nations. In February 2009, Murugavel imported 200 saplings from the UAE and planted them on his farm. "Growing tissue culture plants is a little like looking after test-tube babies. They need extra care," says Murugavel.

Each sapling is sown in a hole first filled with organic manure, ash and sand. They are distanced such that an acre holds no more than 60 saplings. Sprinklers are placed below the canopy of the palm and they are watered once in three days.

Neem cakes and other organic manures are applied once every three months.

Murugavel is meticulous about his methods of cultivation and says turning organic was an unquestioned choice.

"The most successful farmers today are organic ones.

“Look at any organic palm and there’s a life in it that the same plant, grown inorganically, won’t have,” he says.

Murugavel adds that he’s taught himself the techniques of Barhi cultivation, primarily through the Internet.

With his 12th standard education, he runs a comprehensive website detailing his business. Murugavel’s efforts gave fruit within 28 months of planting, a time-period he calls unusually fast for Barhi dates.

In the first year, his palms grew to a height of eight feet and bore 20 kg each. The yield doubled in the second year.

When fully mature, the palms reach 20 feet and could yield to yield 200-300 kg each. Barhi dates are harvested annually in July and August. This year, each kg cost Rs. 300 and Murugavel’s entire produce was sold out within September.

“Barhi dates require no processing. They are plucked at three stages of ripeness, packed in plastic containers and sold at our farm gate.

“We haven’t tied up with any retail organisation yet,” he says. Murugavel’s clients are primarily from Tamil Nadu. “Erode, Avinashi, Palani and Coimbatore are just a few km away so people come all the way and pick them up.” Hotels in Coimbatore are also Murugavel’s customers since they say his dates are import quality.

Training farmers

Outside Murugavel’s whitewashed home sit rows of imported saplings, each worth Rs. 3,300. They are meant for the 20 farmers he’s training across Tamil Nadu in organic Barhi cultivation. Murugavel works with them till their first harvest, teaching them the nuances of planting, pollination and pest control.

“Barhi grows well in soils that can host the palm family, such as coconut trees. The sapling is also well-suited for 30-40 degree temperatures. Our land has both and the market for Barhi in India is growing,” he says.

For now, Murugavel's is one of the few families in Tirupur returning to agriculture from the garment industry. It's a trend he hopes will grow.

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Enrolments for biotechnology will see a rise in three years



Biotechnology education in the State is undergoing course correction and will get its shine back in a couple of years, chairperson, Karnataka Vision Group on Biotechnology, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, said in Bangalore on Tuesday.

There was a temporary dip in enrolments to biotech courses, she conceded. However, much of the curriculum was not aligned with industry needs. The 10 finishing schools sponsored by the State government would have a positive impact.

“They will expand the graduate programmes. We broke the vicious cycle [of oversupply of ill-trained biotech graduates to the industry with finishing schools. In three years, you will see enrolments rising dramatically,” she told an event to announce Bangalore BIO India.

She was clarifying the estimated 40 per cent decrease in admissions to certain related courses such as B.Tech in biotechnology in the State — a frontline bio-cluster in the country.

BIO 2013

BIO 2013, organised by the State government and the Vision Group, is slated for February 4 to 6 next year. The organisers expect a 20 per cent growth in the number of exhibitors. The 13th edition of the event will have the theme “Biotechnology for a better tomorrow” and focus on issues for the emerging markets. Ms. Mazumdar-Shaw said that intellectual property-related issues would be one of the key areas as biotechnologists are “prolific in filing patents”.

Ms. Mazumdar-Shaw, who is considered the spirit behind the event and a leading light of the sector, said that India needs to take the lead in the area considering its relevance across a variety of sectors from food to medicine.

The domestic biotechnology industry employed one lakh people and was valued at Rs. 20,000 crore, more than half of this revenue coming in from biopharmaceuticals (Rs. 12,000 crore), besides bio services (Rs. 4,000 crore), bio-agriculture (Rs. 3,000 crore), industrial biology (Rs. 700 crore) and bioinformatics (Rs. 300 crore). Karnataka, with 7,000 scientists, offered a large number of opportunities with its industries and institutions, she added.

Subir Hari Singh, Additional Chief Secretary, promised that the State would support the growth of biotechnology with infrastructure and manpower.

I.S.N. Prasad, Principal Secretary, Department of Information Technology, Biotechnology and Science and Technology, said that Bangalore BIO 2013 format would have the academia and the industry, including IIMB, National Centre for Biological Sciences and i-STEM, as partners in relevant sessions.

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A world of difference



Some decades ago, Punjab was feted as the food bowl of the country, where wheat, sugarcane and paddy grew in lush, fertilizer-rich farms. Today, the State stands as an example of what has gone wrong with the Green Revolution. “From a State of five rivers, activists say it has become be-aab (without any rivers). The groundwater levels have reached an alarming stage,” says Kavitha Kuruganti, convenor, Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA).

“When a house is in flames, you will use any water, even sewage, to douse the flames. That’s how fertilisers came in when we faced food shortage. But, now we have enough stock of grains. Why do we continue to poison our fields?” asks organic farmer Madhu Ramakrishnan.

“You eat cornflakes thinking you’re doing your body a lot of good. Have you paused to wonder if the corn has been imported from the U.S. or Argentina? Most of that corn is genetically modified,” said R. Selvam, coordinator of the Tamil Nadu Organic Farmers Federation speaking about Genetically-Modified (GM) crops.

All three speakers, along with organic pioneer G. Nammalvar, president Vanagam, were present at a recent symposium organised by the Department of Geography, Nirmala College for Women, to commemorate the golden jubilee of Rachel Carson’s, *Silent Spring*. The book raised concerns about pesticides and environmental pollution.

The Green Revolution, initiated by Dr. Norman Borlaug, introduced high-yielding seeds and promoted fertiliser use to increase production. This resulted in farmers moving away from multi-cropping where they raised millets, cereals, pulses and vegetables to single-crop agriculture. Today, statistics show that the land suffered, pesticides triggered health issues and many debt-ridden farmers committed suicide.

Enjoy Nature

Madhu, who has been an organic farmer for 15 years, said the time is ripe to look at farming from a different perspective. Besides focussing only on harvest and growth, we should also learn to enjoy what Nature gives us voluntarily, he said. “Sadly, many farmers today don’t know farming.”

R. Selvam spoke about farmer suicides, failing crops, dependence on MNCs and the destruction of native seeds. Giving examples from the country and abroad, he said farmers must unite and stay firm on their decision to reject GM seeds.

“Did you know genes can jump crops?” he asked. The GM seeds of one company are tweaked to resist a group of weeds. But, if the genes from the crop jump to the weed, the weed becomes resistant to the recommended herbicide. In such cases, farmers have to use herbicide manufactured by a second company to tackle the problem. Ironically, the first company gives them a subsidy for the same. We’re back where we began,” he said.

Kavitha presented statistics to narrate the ill effects of the Green Revolution. She also spoke of suicides (250,000 farmers have committed suicide since 1995), the growing incidence of cancer among farmers and the average monthly income for farmers in Punjab that is just Rs. 4,960. She said how tested blood samples revealed the presence of six to 13 different pesticides.

She added, “By viewing the farm as a factory with inputs and outputs, we have done away with agriculture that was integrated with Nature.” She explained how gynaecologists found that in many villages of Punjab, an increasing number of women have had spontaneous abortions in the past 10 years.

Sustainable farming

Kavitha said it is time we shifted to a more sustainable agriculture — where millets are cultivated, stored and distributed locally. It is vital to speak to the youth, she said, because even if five per cent of them developed interest in this kind of farming, it would make a world of difference, at least in the next generation.

“We have produced more and perished,” she said. In Punjab, in the Malwa belt, kids have turned grey and girls reach menarche at the age of eight,” she pointed out.

What is agriculture?

Agriculture, she said, should serve many purposes, including issues such as farmers’ income, protection of resources and diversity, quality and safety of food. “It should be farming, where the

focus is not productivity. And, agriculture that gives farmers a sense of confidence and social status.”

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Meet discusses ways to repair damage caused by mining



Deputy Commissioner V.P. Ikkeri has said that there is a need to improve agricultural and horticultural activities in the district, which had been adversely affected by mining.

He was speaking at a meeting at the zilla panchayat auditorium here on Tuesday to discuss the Rs. 10,428-crore plan drawn up by S.C. Joshi, Director, Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST), which is a part of the Indian Council of Forestry, Research and Education (ICFRE), Bellary Deputy Commissioner Amlan Aditya Biswas, and other officials, for the rehabilitation and reclamation of areas that had been severely affected by mining in Bellary, Chitradurga and Tumkur districts.

Mr. Ikkeri said that the mining had also adversely affected dairy farming in the district. Mining in the district had also affected the health of many people.

Bellary Deputy Commissioner Amlan Aditya Biswas said that as per the Supreme Court directions, a Rs. 10,428-crore had been drawn up for rehabilitation and reclamation of 11 taluks affected by mining in Bellary, Chitradurga and Tumkur districts.

Training

As most of the mining firms in these districts had no environmental experts to minimise the damage caused to the environment, there were plans to open institutes to train youth in environment protection who would guide the mining firms, he said.

Superintendent of Police M.N. Nagaraja said that the Police Department should be given 20 more vehicles and modern equipment for monitoring mining operations in the district. He sought permission for opening three more check-posts at different places for keeping a tab on transportation of iron ore.

Regional Transport Officer Thembad urged officials to ensure that the trucks carrying iron ore were fully covered. He suggested that iron ore could also be packed in bags like cement for transporting.

Janardhana Swamy, MP; Ravikumar, president of the zilla panchayat; Narayanswamy, chief executive officer of the zilla panchayat; district-level officers and members of various non-government organisations, were present.

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Tomato prices crash at markets



JUICY NEWS: People buying vegetables at a Uzhavar Sandhai.— FILE PHOTO

: The price of tomatoes is unbelievably at a low price in uzhavar sandhais.

Ranging from as low as Rs four and five a kg, the vegetable is flooded in markets for the last two to three days. It is likely to continue for a few more days or even more, according to officials in the agri-business marketing (ABM), which manages the uzhavar sandhais here.

Not only tomatoes, but drumstick, green chillies, ladies-finger and a few other commodities are selling at a relatively low price in the recent past, said Deputy Director (ABM) C. Murthy here on

Tuesday. The reason is mainly due to high production of tomatoes by the farmers and secondly, with no festivals around, the arrival in sandhais is at a very high level.

Officials at uzhar sandhais in B.B. Kulam and Anna Nagar in the city said that the tomatoes (country variety) were selling at Rs 7 and Rs 8, while Andhra variety was available from Rs 4 to Rs 5 per kg. Two days ago at the wholesale market in Oddanchatram, Dindigul district, the tomatoes were in large stocks that many farmers even fixed Re 1 as their sale price per kg.

The drum stick price was anywhere between Rs.10 and Rs.15 per kg (depending on the size), brinjal sold at Rs.16 and Rs.18, ladies-finger at Rs.12 and Rs.14. The price of chillies and carrot too was available at a new low this season. The officials said that tomatoes sold at as high as Rs.60 per kg many years ago, but after the uzhar sandhais were established, the vegetable touched up to Rs.35 to 40 per kg. The present price of Rs five per kg was unbelievably low priced.

Consumers happy

While consumers purchased more tomatoes in the uzhar sandhais as the price was low than other vegetables, the farmers' were unhappy. Marimuthu from Alanganallur said that last month, the price was above Rs.15 per kg. The government, though giving us good support, could consider storing tomatoes in cold storage containers on such occasions. The supply is more than the demand. When the situation improves, the farmers will stand to gain, he noted.

However, officials said that with no guarantee on uninterrupted power supply, the suggestion of cold storage cannot be given a thought in such a volatile situation. Instead, the farmers can examine the possibility of preparing alternative food products from tomatoes through women SHGs and benefit, they noted.

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Provide relief to c growers in three months: HC tells Centre

PIL seeks direction on implementing panel's recommendations

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday directed the Union government to take action within three months to give relief to the distressed arecanut growers in the Western Ghats region, and in Uttara Kannada district.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Vikramajit Sen and Justice B.V. Nagarathna issued the directions while disposing of a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by Sachin Meega and others of Chikmagalur.

The petitioners had sought directions to the Union government to implement the recommendations made by Gorakh Singh Committee to waive farm loans of certain categories of arecanut growers in the Western Ghats region of Shimoga, Udupi and Chikmagalur districts who suffered losses due to the yellow leaf disease.

Countering perception

“There is a public perception that financial institutions are reluctant and [are] extremely slow in giving relief to agriculturists, whereas relief to the industries is given with alacrity. We think that this perception needs to be countered by taking positive steps where due to crop loss agriculturists are driven to commit suicide...,” the Bench observed.

Among other recommendations, the committee had suggested to the Union government in 2009 to waive the loans of arecanut growers in the region who have less than 4 hectares of plantation and also consider providing them fresh farm loans.

Meanwhile, the court also directed the government to implement the scheme, formulated by the Ministry of Finance, to improve productivity of arecanut-based farming system in Uttara Kannada district, when the Ministry of Agriculture informed that this scheme was prepared in January 2012 to implement it through the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and State Level Bankers’ Committee.

Noticing that this scheme was not yet implemented completely, the court observed that “it is a matter of regret that although a scheme has been devised by the Ministry, its implementation has not been completed.”

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Cane farmers seek hike in procurement price

: Sugarcane growers appealed to Pugalur Sugar Mill to increase the procurement price of cane for the current season.

Growers from Karur, Erode and Tirupur district have also pointed out that with rise in open market price of sugar there was every reason to effect a price rise.

At a meeting of sugarcane growers affiliated to the Pugalur mill held here recently, the president of Erode and Tirupur District Sugar Cane Growers Association, M.V. Shanmugaraj, and Pugalur Sugar Mill Sugarcane Growers' Welfare Association president N.K.M. Nallasamy pointed out that sugarcane growers had emphasized the need for the factory to revise the procurement price for the current season by taking into account the ground reality.

Losses

Despite those persuasions, the management has not effected a rise in procurement price of cane bought from growers who were facing strain. With steep hike in cost of production, farmers were suffering losses and needed to be supported, they argued. The meeting resolved to ask the management for a hike of Rs.200 per tone over and above the State government fixed procurement price, but regretted that there was no reaction from the management so far on their demand.

The growers were disappointed with the attitude, the resolution noted.

Meeting

The meeting also resolved to meet again on October 15 to chalk out further course of action for the growers if the management continues to ignore the reality.

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Intermittent cuts pull the plug on industrial and farming operations

Industries could be given at least 12 hours of nonstop supply'

TANGEDCO is educating consumers and public on what 'Alternating Current' (AC) is all about. In the industrial Karur district, it 'alternates' power supply and load shedding every one-and-a-half hours roughly, giving a new dimension to AC power supply. Throw out electricity jargons such as the sinusoidal wave or the cycle-simply power outages are tormenting people and industries alike.

Power is available agonisingly intermittently, battering process industries and agriculture operations besides giving sleepless nights to residents.

Blue metal crushers, textile and allied units, mosquito net weaving, bus coach building as also agriculture and agro processing industries here, have had to bear the brunt of rampant load shedding that lasts up to 12 hours a day.

“It takes more than 30 minutes to re-start the blue metal crusher after every load shedding. When the basics are through and the crusher is just into operation mode, comes the next power stoppage that also affects uniformity in crushing. Without distinction small and major blue metal crushers numbering around 100 in the district are suffering due to the frequent power cuts,” says a leading crusher unit owner.

Being a continuous process, the mosquito net manufacturing units could not avoid collateral loss that amounts to Rs.2,000 every time power snaps as the HDPE raw material on the production line is reduced to waste, points out Mosquito Net Manufacturing Unit Owners’ Association president A. R. Malayappasamy. Using auxiliary power is a costly affair and turns the product unaffordable. Our generators consume 12 litres diesel per hour and if we are to use generator sets for 12 hours daily, then the working cost skyrockets, he opines. There are around 75 extruders or filament manufacturing units and around 4,000 mosquito net weaving units employing more than 50,000 labourers every day.

Mr. Malayappasamy says TANGEDCO could try to supply power for 12 hours continuously for at least the units in the industrial estates so that they can expect what will be in store for a particular duration.

Already the automobile industry is absorbing recessionary trend and the current power crisis has only enlarged the scope of our woes, points out Bus Coach Builders Association president P. Palanisamy. Karur has a reputation for quality bus coach building activity nationwide and the speed of coach building has been dented by the frequent power cuts, he notes. The delivery schedule is delayed by about a week due to power cuts.

Default or delay in handing over completed coaches will attract penalty in case of government job works and we fear that could eat into our already diminishing returns, Mr. Palanisamy adds.

Farmers at the head of Cauvery delta in the Kulithalai area are now having the cake but are not able to eat it. Water is flowing down the Cauvery but they could not irrigate fields as frequent power cuts stop them from providing continuous irrigation to paddy, banana and sugarcane fields in the region. Three phase power supply is available for just about 10 hours a day.

Already in some places the electrical control device to switch on and off pump sets when power is supplied has caught fire due to voltage fluctuations even when power is available intermittently, complains president, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Paadhukaappu Sangam, Kulithalai A.V. Gopaladesikan.

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Machine planter sows the way

Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) organised a field demonstration on machine planting in paddy crop at Nachalur village near here on Tuesday. The programme is a sequel to the mechanisation of paddy cultivation meant to overcome shortage of manpower and labour in agriculture operations.

The highlight of the demonstration was the use of paddy power weeder for weeding operation, battery operated sprayer for plant protection and mechanical harvester for harvesting.

The demonstration was to create awareness among farmers of the need for mechanisation of agriculture and the need to adopt modern techniques in reducing the burden of farming, according to the KVK experts who organised the programme.

The farmers understood that the machine planter could cover a lot more area in a short time that could be of great use to them, noted KVK programme coordinator J. Diraviam.

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Farmers gherao engineer

Farmers gheraoed irrigation engineer P.N. Patil in his office on Monday demanding water supply from Kanher Dam in Satara district. The farmers said the engineer and other officials stopped water supply from the right canal despite many requests. They said they sacrificed their

land for the dam, and now the officials could not ill-treat them. The farmers ended their protest after Mr. Patil promised to immediately restart the water supply to the farms. — Correspondent

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Won't allow field conversion: union

The Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSKTU) would not permit any more conversion of paddy fields and wetlands in the State, said M.V. Govindan Master, State general secretary of the union.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, the KSKTU leader alleged that the reported move to set up an international airport in 350 acres of paddy field at Aranmula was nothing but hollow promises of the State-supported land mafia in the name of development.

He alleged that the United Democratic Front government was sabotaging the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act enacted by the previous Left Democratic Front government. The dissenting notes raised by the 'green' MLAs in Congress and senior Congress leader V.M. Sudheeran was a welcome move to protect the State's interests and to check the handing over of government land to real estate groups and multi-national companies, he added.

Mr. Govindan Master said the KSKTU was for providing land to all landless poor people in the State. The government should also provide not less than one acre each to all tribal families in the State.

The KSKTU leader said the wetlands and paddy fields (puncha) had been acting as major water reservoirs across the State and their conversion had badly depleted the groundwater, and polluted wells, even in villages.

State meet today

The 20th State meet of KSKTU will be held at Comrade V.R. Sivarajan Nagar (Geethom auditorium) at Adoor from September 26 to 28. Leader of the Opposition V.S. Achuthanandan will inaugurate the delegates' session on Wednesday. Communist Party of India (Marxist) State secretary Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate a public meeting at the new private bus stand (Captain Lakshmi Nagar) at the valedictory session on Friday.

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Scheme sought for coconut growers

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president Ramesh Chennithala, on Tuesday, demanded a comprehensive scheme for coconut growers.

Mr. Chennithala, who called on Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, indisposed for some days now, told him that coconut growers faced a crisis as the prices had been falling.

The KPCC president also handed over a letter containing his demands to Mr. Chandy.

Mr. Chennithala said coconut cultivation was a source of income to many farmers.

In the last eight months, the prices of coconut fell to uneconomic levels. After accounting the production costs, coconut cultivators got only 50 paise a coconut. The area under cultivation had also come down drastically, not to mention production and productivity.

In the last ten years, 8,145 hectare of land had gone out of coconut cultivation, he said.

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Call to protect small farmers

Misplaced priorities and lack of proper production plans weaken the agriculture sector, K. Krishnankutty, chairman of the State Committee to formulate the Agricultural Policy has said.

At a three-day workshop on 'Commodities futures market in Agriculture,' at the Kerala Agricultural University here on Tuesday, he said under the present conditions in the State, farmers would not be able to survive without government support.

"The farm scenario in the State is pathetic. Palm oil import and ban on coconut oil export have thwarted the hopes of coconut growers. Product diversification remains in laboratories because of policy issues. Blind aping of technology will not save us," he said.

He noted that farmers in the State had no rights to decide the cost of seed, fertilizers and even the price of their produce. "All these factors are decided by corporates. Even the 12th Plan approach paper is against small and marginal farmers," he said.

P.V. Balachandran, Director of Extension, KAU, said the university would initiate steps to institute farmer produce marketing agencies.

The workshop, jointly organised by the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, Hyderabad, and KAU, will conclude on Thursday.

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ICRISAT honours staff on 'Loyalty Day'

Over 100 staff members associated with organisation for 5-40 years given awards

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) observed 'Loyalty Day' here on Tuesday to honour its staff for their dedicated service to the institution as part of its 40th anniversary celebrations.

Led by board chair Nigel Poole, members of ICRISAT's governing board and management gave away awards to over 100 staff members who were associated with the organisation for five to 40 years. In his address, Prof. Poole said: "We are on an unrelenting journey in the quest for better livelihoods for the poor in the dry lands. It is imperative for us to embrace new ways of thinking and doing things through an inclusive process of cultural change."

Symposium

With the help of the staff members' hard work the fruits were being enjoyed by millions of smallholder farmers in the dry lands, he noted.

Director General of ICRISAT William D. Dar said great teams would have great depth.

"Nothing hurts when we are winning and winners pay the price of excellence, relevance, influence and dedication. These are all on the price tag of ICRISAT," he stated.

Capped with the theme "A journey to prosperity in the dry land tropics," the week-long celebrations began with a science symposium on Monday.

The sixty-seventh governing board meeting of the organisation will be held later this week.

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Biotech crops beneficial to farmers, says report

Crop Biotechnology has resulted in significant economic and environmental benefits to farmers over the last 15 years, according to a study conducted by UK-based PG Economics Limited, a provider of advisory and consultancy services to agriculture and natural resource based industries.

PG Economics director Graham Brookes said in the absence of crop biotechnology, maintaining global production at 2010 level would have required 13.97 million hectares additional area to meet the requirements. Crop biotechnology had several advantages like higher yields, lesser production risks and enhancement in the income levels while its facilitation of no till factor enabled lesser usage of fuel that, in turn, contributed to reducing emission of green house gases. He was discussing about the seventh annual report on global economic and environmental impact of biotech crops developed by the PG Economics. The Meeting of Parties (MOP 6) to the Cartagena Protocol scheduled to be held in the city from October 1 to 5 would play a significant role in deciding the future of plant biotechnology in the country, Satguru-Cornell Foundation CEO Vijaya Raghavan who was accompanying Mr. Brookes said.

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Seeds Bill: State to consult stakeholders

The State Government will consult all stakeholders before enacting a comprehensive Seeds Bill, Agriculture Minister Kanna Lakshminarayana said here on Tuesday.

Speaking at a function held in connection with the 17th annual general meeting of the Seedsmen Association, he said that a committee had been constituted to look into the issue. After receiving its report, Government would seek the opinion of various stakeholders. Referring to the sale of spurious seeds, he sought the cooperation of the seed industry in combating the menace and warned of stringent action against manufacturers of such products.

He expressed disappointment that 85-90 per cent cases booked against seed companies pertained to technical lapses rather than sale of spurious seeds.

Mr. Lakshminarayana said there was an abnormal increase in cotton cultivation this year.

P. Sateesh Kumar, President of the Association, said Andhra Pradesh was the seeds hub of the country and produced 40.51 lakh quintals during 2011-12. Although, there was a 35-40 per cent increase in the area for paddy cultivation, he said there was no shortage of paddy seeds.

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Tamil Nadu moves Supreme Court for release of Cauvery water

With Karnataka refusing to release water as per the directions of the Cauvery River Authority headed by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the Tamil Nadu government on Tuesday moved the Supreme Court for a direction to Karnataka to release 2 tmcft of water daily for 24 days till the onset of the north-east monsoon.

The State pointed out the failure of Karnataka to release 9,000 cusecs as per the Prime Minister's direction and said it was constrained to file the present application. A direction to release 48 tmcft at the rate of two tmcft a day on the basis of the pro rata formula forthwith was absolutely imminent failing which Tamil Nadu would not be able to sustain the samba crop after having already lost the kuruvai crop.

It said pursuant to the September 10 order of the court, Karnataka initially ensured less than 10000 cusecs at Billigundulu from September 12 but thereafter made good the shortfall by ensuring 10000 cusecs till September 20.

It said "during the current year as on September 15, as against 122.32 tmcft of water to be ensured at Mettur Dam, as per the interim order of the Tribunal, Tamil Nadu received only 19.40 tmcft, resulting in the loss of entire Kuruvai cultivation. Even assuming that there is distress in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu ought to have received an additional 48.50 tmcft up to September 15 as per the Distress Sharing Formula devised by the CWC."

The State said a meeting of the Cauvery River Authority was held on September 19, when Chief Minister Jayalalitha submitted before the CRA that as of June 1, 2012, Karnataka had utilised about 36.30 tmcft of water for summer irrigation, besides utilising all the inflows during those months, contrary to the orders of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal.

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Kiran provides assurance to farmers



Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy on Tuesday assured farmers that standing crops would not get affected even in an acre in the ayacut due to lack water supply while speaking at Gannavaram in Krishna district as part of his 'Indiramma Baata' programme. – **The Hindu**

26.09.2012 Sep

Workers' body against paddy land conversion

The Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSKTU) would not permit any more conversion of paddy fields and wetlands in the State, said M.V. Govindan Master, State general secretary of the union.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, the KSKTU leader alleged that the reported move to set up an international airport in 350 acres of paddy field in Aranmula was nothing but hollow promises of the State-supported land mafia in the name of development.

He alleged that the United Democratic Front Government was sabotaging the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act enacted by the previous Left Democratic Front Government. The dissenting notes raised by 'Green' MLAs in Congress as well as the senior

Congress leader, V.M.Sudheeran, against it was a welcome move to protect the State's interests and to check handing over of the Government's land bank to real estate groups and multi-national companies, he added.

Mr. Govindan Master said KSKTU was for providing land to all landless poor people in the State. The Government should also provide not less than one acre each to all tribal families in the State.

He said there was no shortage of land in the State for distribution among the landless poor. Government should acquire all those private plantations that have expired the lease period, besides strictly treating possession of all private land bank exceeding the limit of 15 acres a person as excess land, he said.

The KSKTU leader said the wetlands and paddy fields (puncha) have been acting as major water reservoirs across the State and their conversion have badly depleted the ground water table, and not to speak of the pollution of wells even in villages.

He alleged that the Emerging Kerala had given licence to convert verdant forests into concrete jungles, posing a serious threat to the so-called 'god's own country'.

He said KSKTU would join hands with like-minded groups to launch a massive campaign to protect the remaining paddy land and wetland in the State.

He said the Government should identify and acquire those excess land allegedly amassed using foreign funds as well as money allegedly supplied by certain terrorist outfits in different parts of the State.

K.Ananthgopan, Communist Party of India (Marxist) district secretary, and K.P.Udayabhanu, KSKTU general convener, were also present.

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Efforts on to obtain patent for Ongole-breed cattle

The Department of Animal Husbandry is making efforts for obtaining patent for the semen and embryos of the Ongole-breed cattle amid attempts to smuggle these world-renowned bovine species to other countries.

Applications to this effect have already been filed, which helps in scuttling the plans of some foreign countries to claim exclusivity for producing Ongole bulls.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, Director of Animal Husbandry M.V. Reddy said there were a few instances of the species being smuggled and killed for consuming them as meat. The Animal Husbandry and other departments were alerted about this. Farmers were immediately involved in protecting these robust animals.

A large number of these animals used to be deployed for tilling agricultural lands. But the demand for these cattle, of late, had come down because of the thrust being laid on farm mechanisation, Mr. Reddy said.

Surplus milk

Stating that milk production in the State had registered a healthy growth of 7.88 per cent last year, he said it was higher than the national average. The AP Dairy Development Cooperative Federation was having surplus milk at its disposal even during the summer. Due emphasis was laid on establishment of mini-dairies and dairies of medium scale were being promoted to tap the potential.

Farmers were being encouraged to grow fodder. The State stood first in the production of emu birds, accounting for almost half of the national figure.

26.09.2012 Sep

Curtain comes down on Krishi Mela

The four-day mega agricultural event, Krishi Mela 2012, came to an end with a felicitation ceremony for best farmers here on Tuesday, according to a press release by the University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad.

Shivakumara Swami of Kapotagiri and Jaya Mruthyanjaya Swami of Panchamasali Peetha honoured the following winners: Ganapathi Gutteppa Talgund of Uttara Kannada, Muttanna Beerappa Pujar of Haveri, Gudadappa Mailarappa Lingashettar of Gadag, Chandrashekharayya Prabhayya Jadimath of Belgaum, Siddappa Dundappa Balagonda of Bijapur, Ramesh Boopal Savadi of Bagalkot, and Doddappa Nagappa Bandiwad of Dharwad district.

In the women's category, the winners are Bhagirathi Ramakrishna Bhat of Uttara Kannada, Bebakka Hemanna Barangi of Haveri, Kasturi Shivayya Hiremath of Gadag, Basamma Ningappa Jakkannavar of Dharwad, Shashikala Mallikarjun Nadagoudar of Bijapur and Renuka Bheemappa Maraditota of Bagalkot district.

This ceremony was followed by an interactive session on various agriculture-related issues, the release added.

26.09.2012 Sep

Provide relief to arecanut growers in three months: HC tells Centre

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday directed the Union government to take action within three months to give relief to the distressed arecanut growers in the Western Ghats region, and in Uttara Kannada district.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Vikramajit Sen and Justice B.V. Nagarathna issued the directions while disposing of a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by Sachin Meega and others of Chikmagalur.

The petitioners had sought directions to the Union government to implement the recommendations made by Gorakh Singh Committee to waive farm loans of certain categories of arecanut growers in the Western Ghats region of Shimoga, Udupi and Chikmagalur districts who suffered losses due to the yellow leaf disease.

Countering perception

“There is a public perception that financial institutions are reluctant and [are] extremely slow in giving relief to agriculturists, whereas relief to the industries is given with alacrity. We think that this perception needs to be countered by taking positive steps where due to crop loss agriculturists are driven to commit suicide...,” the Bench observed.

Among other recommendations, the committee had suggested to the Union government in 2009 to waive the loans of arecanut growers in the region who have less than 4 hectares of plantation and also consider providing them fresh farm loans.

Meanwhile, the court also directed the government to implement the scheme, formulated by the Ministry of Finance, to improve productivity of arecanut-based farming system in Uttara Kannada district, when the Ministry of Agriculture informed that this scheme was prepared in January 2012 to implement it through the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and State Level Bankers’ Committee.

Noticing that this scheme was not yet implemented completely, the court observed that “it is a matter of regret that although a scheme has been devised by the Ministry, its implementation has not been completed.”

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TNAU to reach out to farmers

In an effort to bridge the gap between farmers and the university, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, plans to provide facilitation to enable individual farmers to double their income and increase productivity.

“We will use the workhorse of the university to bridge the gap between farmers and the university. This will be done in collaboration with the departments of agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries. We will provide secondary agriculture training to students,” Vice-Chancellor of TNAU K. Ramasamy told reporters during the sidelines of an on-site workshop on

Recombinant DNA Technology and Bioinformatics at Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, on Monday.

TNAU was ready to come to individual farmers and would be more open to farmers, he noted. "Farmers can take up some kind of value addition such as backyard poultry or milch cows. We will provide a market chain for the produce, value addition and price fixation," he mentioned.

So far, TNAU was concentrating on facilitating research scholars, staff and faculty, he said, adding that from now on, concentration would be given to empowering students.

"We are also coming up with an exchange programme for students and staff with known established Indian universities and international institutions. We are also creating a corpus for empowering research. Experts in agriculture from across the country can come and teach as visiting professors. We are looking at 700 experts for this," he said.

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Floriculturists might get holiday period to pay back loans

UDHAGAMANDALAM: About 500 floriculturists across the Nilgiris district see a ray of hope as they are likely to get a significant moratorium period for their defaulted loans availed from various nationalized banks across the district.

A petition, under the banner Nilgiri District Floriculture Small Farmers Association (NDFSFA) sought a 'holiday period' for repayment of their default loans and handed it over to the Nilgiris district collector and to the bankers as well in a bankers' meet held on September 18, attended by representatives from RBI as well as NABARD.

The petition said around 500 floriculturists have incurred loss in floriculture cultivation and are not able to repay the loans borrowed from various nationalised banks. "We approached the government seeking loan waiver. However, the government after examining our grievances has come out with a proposal at a cost of Rs1.8crore to supply quality seedlings to the farmers to grow cut-flowers and make profit out of it", said N Viswanathan, NDFSFA who represented the small floriculture farmers at the bankers' meet.

"We strongly hope with quality flower saplings we would make profit to repay our loans. We seek at least one year of holiday period for the same," he added.

Floriculturists say their business has failed because planting materials supplied by private parties were sub standard, there are no proper marketing channels, absence of base rate for flowers, rise in prices of manure and pesticides.

Rajkumar, lead bank manager of the Nilgiris district told the TOI, "In the bankers' meet, we insisted to submit the GO for the amount sanctioned by the government for developing quality seedlings in the Nilgiris to supply to the floriculture small farmers". He added, "Once the GO is produced we will take up the matter with the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) and they in turn with the RBI". According to him, once the decision is arrived by the SLBC we will pass on it to the farmers who have availed loans from the various banks.

According to K Mohan, joint director, horticulture department, a sum of Rs1.8crore has been sanctioned in- principle by the government to develop a floriculture farm at [Katterly Government](#) farm near Coonoor. The proposed scheme will develop mass multiplication of carnation mother plants for the production of 30 lakh plants. "We are yet to receive the GO pertaining to the scheme", he said adding, "Once the GO is released the work pertaining to the scheme will be started immediately".

According to the official, the saplings will be distributed to the farmers at cost price. "International standard will be maintained while producing the saplings", said Mohan.

When tea prices plummeted during 2004, many farmers in the Nilgiris had uprooted their tea plantations, leveled hilly tracts and created greenhouses to grow ornamental flowers because of the growing demand for the cut- flowers in the international market. However, about 525 floriculturists in the district cultivating cut- flowers like carnation, liliun and gerbera on over 6,000 hectares of land are in a fix now. In 2004 the farmers shifted to floriculture encouraged by the government's offer of sops for crop diversification.

Loans amounting over Rs.50 crore given by the banks in the district to floriculturists have become 'non-performing' as most of them are unable to repay the loan.

26.09.2012 Sep

Crop sowing remains weak despite pick up in rainfall

COIMBATORE: Though the cumulative rainfall in the south-west monsoon is only 5% below normal, sowing has remained weak during the season. The overall area under cultivation declined 5.6% to around 98.2 million hectares (till September 21) for the kharif crop.

While the area under cultivation dropped 4.5% year-on-year (y-o-y) for rice, it has fallen by 12.5% and 7.8% y-o-y respectively for coarse cereals and pulses. The area under rice, coarse cereals and pulses stood at 36.4 million hectares, 17.6 million hectares and 10 million hectares so far in the season (till September 21).

The area under oilseeds dropped 2.1%. But the area under sugarcane increased by 3.7%. The volume growth in summer (kharif) crop, which accounts for about 50% of the annual agricultural output, tends to track the area under cultivation.

Despite the area under coverage being lower for rice, excess [stocks](#) will mean that the government will be able to prevent adverse impact on rice prices by offloading the inventory. But the poor coverage in pulses and cereals would mean trouble. "The lower area under coverage for pulses and coarse cereals is a key concern from a [food inflation](#) perspective," observers said.

"The impact of the weak summer crop will be reflected in agricultural output for the quarters ending September and December 2012," analysts at [Morgan Stanley India](#) said. "We expect winter crop output (quarters ending March and June 2013) to be normal with improvements in rainfall since August having lifted water reservoir levels above normal levels."

Total live storage in the 84 important reservoirs is at 74.4% of the storage capacity at Full Reservoir Level (FRL) as of September 20, 2012, compared to 85.3% during the same period last year and the 10-year average of 69%. The improvement in reservoir levels will benefit the winter (rabi) crop output.

26.09.2012 Sep

IIT-Madras working on new solar cell for domestic, agriculture use

CHENNAI: The Indian Institute of Technology - Madras is working on perfecting the technology to use solar photo voltaic cell for domestic and agriculture use. IIT-M director Bhaskar

Ramamurthi said the institute was working with three private drip irrigation companies on developing a technology that would integrate borewell pumps with solar PV cells.

On the occasion of the 60th foundation day of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) on Tuesday, professor Ramamurthi said there was a need to meet domestic power consumption using solar power to tide over power shortage in the country. "Residential, commercial and agriculture sectors are most affected by power cuts. It's crucial to remove or reduce basic electricity needs from the grid. Schools and colleges should all go off the grid and only use it as a back-up," he said.

He disputed the argument that drawing solar power was expensive. He said the use of diesel generators hiked the cost to Rs15 per unit, which could go up to Rs30 a unit unless used optimally. Inverters are almost as expensive at Rs14 a unit. In contrast, over the last three years the generation of solar power, apart from land costs, is Rs4.35 per unit. This is equal to the generation of power from a thermal unit. Taking into account the cost of storage, the total cost could rise by another Rs4.

He said there were some technical issues with using solar energy which cannot be stored, but which could be overcome in a year's effort by engineers. He called upon interested scientists to work on making the solar power project a success.

Former director of the [Central Leather Research Institute](#) G Thyagarajan asked institutions like CSIR and the IIT to play a greater part in helping small industry players to adopt safe practices. "Where is India's claim of a huge technological power if it is not able to help hapless people in the cottage industry," he asked. India's technological prowess could help prevent accidents like the fire at a Sivakasi fireworks factory

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Weather

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Sunny

Wednesday, Sep 26

Max Min

35.8° | 25.4°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 75

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:58

Sunset: 06:01

Barometer: 1011

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Thursday, Sep 27

Max Min

30° | 26°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday Sep 28	Saturday Sep 29	Sunday Sep 30	Monday Oct 1	Tuesday Oct 2
31° 26° Rainy	31° 26° Rainy	31° 25° Rainy	28° 25° Rainy	30° 26° Rainy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 0

Humidity: 61

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:11

Sunset: 06:12

Barometer: 1012



Business Standard

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18.09.2012 A.M

18.09.2012 Sep

Plan Panel wants regulatory mechanism to allow GM use



As the debate over whether Genetically Modified crops should or should not be used in the country rages on, the Planning Commission in its draft document for the 12th five-year plan has advocated putting in place proper regulatory mechanism and operational protocols in before permitting the use of GMOs in Indian crops.

The Commission which sets the general agenda for the government in its five-year plan documents has however warned that such a mechanism should only be put in place only if it is generally agreed that advantages of GM crops outweigh precautionary misgivings.

It also said that as significant breakthroughs are required to cope with increasing stress, particularly in rain fed crops, it is necessary to remain abreast with latest advances in biotechnology, which mainly do not involve the use of GMO.

In India, the government has permitted the use of GMOs in cotton. However, it has not been that forthcoming in implementing the same for food items.

Few years back, a move to allow commercial production of GM brinjal was put into the back-burner because of inadequate scientific data. Since, then there has been no other crop which has been cleared for commercial cultivation though field trials of many are continuing.

“With more than 90 per cent of the cotton area now under BT and cotton production more than doubling over the last decade, there is no doubt general farmer acceptance or its being a clear case of technological transformation unlike other rainfed crops,” the Commission said in its draft report.

However, it must also be noted, the Commission said that even if the entire increase in cotton since end of 9th plan is attributed to BT, this contributed less than 25 per cent increase in productivity gains in rainfed crops during the 10th and 11th plan even excluding horticulture.