

Training on direct sowing of paddy

Farmers undergoing training on direct sowing of paddy at Vamban near Pudukottai. A day-long training on direct sowing of paddy seeds through mechanisation was organised under the auspices of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Vamban near here on Thursday. The programme aimed at relieving the farmers of the problems caused due to labour scarcity. Inaugurating the training, R.P.Gnanamalar, Professor and Head, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, said that scarcity of labourers affects paddy cultivation, particularly under direct sowing method. Mechanisation, however, would address the problem to a great extent, she said. Kathiravan, professor of seed sciences, who conducted a demonstration, said that mechanical sowing not only help reduce labour requirement but would also improve economies of seed usage. About 16 kg of seeds would be required for an acre under direct sowing method. It would also eliminate the excess chemicals present in the soil and correct spacing under mechanisation would help register higher yield. Vijayasankar and Pandithurai, scientists, said the farmers should adopt pest and nutrient management techniques to register higher productivity.

Pudukottai gets its first solar-powered pumpset

The first solar-powered farm pumpset in the district, sanctioned under the State government's subsidy scheme, was commissioned at Therukku Rayapatti village near Vadavalam in the district on Wednesday. Collector C. Manoharan, who commissioned the pumpset, said that Rs. 2.37 crore has been sanctioned to the district for being disbursed as subsidy under the scheme. Apart from reducing the demand on power, such pumpsets would help reduce hardship faced by the Tangedco in ensuring quality power supply to remote villages. Interested farmers should approach the Agricultural Engineering Department, he said.

A lightweight, efficient groundnut pod removing machine

Among the many fast growing cash crops, groundnut is always sought after by small farmers. The crop can be grown even during dry seasons and can be harvested in 120 -150 days depending on the region and variety and sold easily either as pods or whole. But the major hardship in growing this crop is harvesting. It is a laborious and time consuming process. The fields need to be made wet the previous day with scant irrigation, so that the soil becomes loose

and the plants along with the pods can be pulled out easily from the soil. Once plucked, the pods need to be stripped from the shell. Stripping the pods is a traditional practice done either by removing the pods manually or hitting the bunches with the help of rods.

Difficult methods

Both these methods are quite difficult and damage the hands and fingers. There is no guarantee that all pods can be removed from the shell. Manually about 20-30 women are required for stripping an acre of groundnut pods. Mr. Mohanasundaram, a small groundnut farmer from Nasiyanur village, Erode district has developed a portable groundnut pod stripper. The machine is powered with a help of a 0.25 HP electrical motor. "The cylindrical type machine is closed on all the sides except for three openings, one on the top and the other two at the bottom. The uprooted plant with the pods is fed through the opening at the top where a spiked cylinder is fitted and through the opening at the bottom the broken pods are collected. The fine dust and other particles are thrown out through the third outlet. It is designed in such a way that two men can simultaneously work on it and is gender friendly," says Dr. P. Alagesan, Programme Coordinator, Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (Myrada), KVK, Erode district.

Spiked cylinder

Stripping is done by holding the pod portion of a bunch manually over the spiked cylinder. The vines along with the groundnuts are held over the spiked cylinder and the pods get removed. The vines are not fed into the machine. After pod removal the bunch is dried and used as fodder for animals. It saves 60 per cent of labour and pod separation time, which ultimately reduces the cost of cultivation. Though there are several models of groundnut pod stripper available in various research institutes, this particular machine is compact (weighs 35kg), and can be transported easily. Winnowing operations can also be done with the support of a special attachment called blower to blow away dust and other fine particles. Using this machine a farmer can harvest an acre area of groundnut in two or three days by engaging his family labourers alone.

Testing

"On-farm testing was conducted by our Kendra, in order to study the performance and the suitability of this pod stripper over the existing models. Stripping efficiency of the machine was tested in various farmers' field and found that 99 per cent of the harvested pods were clean and no broken pods were observed at the time of stripping," says Dr. S. Saravanakumar, agronomist at the institute. The machine reduces the cost of stripping operation from Rs. 2,400 - Rs. 3,000 per acre. With the support of Myrada, the farmer

demonstrated the performance of the stripper to several scientists from at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and State Department officials. In recognition of his innovation the farmer was honoured at the annual Scientific Advisory Committee meeting by the institute.

Price

Priced at Rs. 20,000 a piece the machine has caught the fancy of practically all groundnut growing farmers in the region and other places of the state. Till date the farmer has been able to market more than 250 machines to individual farmers and to several self help groups and farmers' associations. For more details contact Dr. S. Alagesan, The Programme Coordinator, MYRADA Krishi Vigyan Kendra, 272, Perumal Nagar, Pudhuvalliyampalayam, Kalingiyam post, Gobichettipalayam Taluk, Erode district – 638 453, TamilNadu, email: myradakvk@gmail.com, website: www.myradakvk.org and Mr. Mohanasundaram, Perundurai Main road, Backside to the Mariamman Temple, Nasiyanur, Erode, mobile: 9488020646.

Country of flowers

Britain is in bloom. Petunias, phlox, pinks, poppies, geraniums, fuchsias... flowers gaze at you from everywhere — from borders, from street squares, and from street lamps — sporting laden baskets of trailing plants, tubs of flowering plants on compound walls, in patios, and, most beautifully, at quaint old tube stations, lovingly watered by the railway staff. At the tiny Bayswater tube station, with only two platforms and stairs that meet in a small landing on top, at street level is a small bay of boxed and hanging plants, a perfect photo-stop for the milling tourists, and a place to sit down and catch one's breath after lugging one's bags up the stairs of this antiquated station. Scented lavender with its graceful bushy spires beautify traffic islands, and the fantastic buddleia takes over hedges by the railway tracks, bursting into purple blooming tails, perfectly in tune with the colours of Wimbledon. Said to be Britain's biggest hobby, gardening does make the nation special. The Worshipful Company of Gardeners (WCG) is first mentioned in City Corporation records in 1345, coming out of the mediaeval Craft Guild. Indeed, many of the gardens laid out in the old style are called Art and Craft gardens, for their sheer artistry. The aim of the WCG was to promote good gardening, support charitable acts via horticulture, beautify London, and generate new members. Today, not more than 300 members are kept on the rolls, at any given time, making it quite an elite establishment. The prestigious Prince of Wales Trophy is presented to potential professional gardeners who demonstrate a care for the environment, thus encouraging the young to be innovatively eco-conscious. 'Flowers in the City' is the largest horticultural campaign in London, launched by the WCG, yielding tremendous results. From London in bloom, it became Britain in bloom

— first held in 1963 by the British Tourist Board, based on a French initiative. The Royal Horticultural Society has conducted it from 2002, demanding horticultural excellence, environmental responsibility, and community participation from the hundreds of participating groups. These regional groups are finally pared down to about 80, for the national finals, with the results announced in October. Areas safer, cleaner and greener and, simply, better places to be — these are the simple yet effective aims of this huge effort. Advice, support and recognition are available to all participants, and also for business establishments to join in. A significant achievement is the involvement of schools, with children encouraged to come out with original ideas in gardening and suitably rewarded. The campaign recognises the tireless work of the huge volunteer force that cares for parks, squares and public green spaces, improving the bio-diversity of congested cities like greater London. The Churchill Arms, a time-honoured pub with an Irish owner who missed his garden, has a unique garden — its façade boasts hundreds of baskets of flowering plants, going right up to the terrace. Watering is done by an extended hose, the whole effort charming passers-by and tipplers, and netting the owner prizes from the Chelsea Flower Show. Whether one walks the acres of the legendary Kew Gardens or not, one is sure to browse through the plant sales outlet at the entrance to Kew tube station, to pick up an English rose, perhaps the most potent symbol of a green nation and a city in bloom.

Sugar mills not paying stipulated price for cane

The sugarcane growers have criticised the private sugar mills for not coming forward to provide the State Advised Price of Rs. 2,650 a tonne of sugarcane fetched for crushing. They demanded the district administration to intervene and ensure that the private sugar mills extended the price to the farmers. This matter was raised by Nalla Gounder, secretary of the Cane Farmers Association at the monthly farmers grievances redress day meeting held at the Collectorate here on Thursday. The private mills functioning in the district have been continuously refusing to pay the price, he complained. The State Government is expected to come out with new announcement on cane price by October 1 and even now the private concerns are not budging, he added. Condemning the attitude of the private sugar mills, the cane farmers sat in dharna in front of the District Collector V. Dakshinamoorthy at the meeting hall for some time. Following the Collector's warning they withdrew the agitation. A farmer of Vennanthur village said that there is an apprehension among the milk farmers that administration of vaccination to prevent the foot and mouth disease affected milk yield and also the reproductive capability of the animals. The

Collector said that according to veterinary experts, vaccination was the best way to check the foot and mouth disease. The milk yield will be affected only for one or two times. Sivagnanam of R. Pudupatti village urged the Agriculture Department to come out with a booklet explaining the various government schemes for the benefit of the farmers. Boobalan, president of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Commodity Producers Group, said that the crop insurance scheme is very beneficial to the farming community. He demanded monthly pension for the senior farmers under the farmers protection scheme. The Collector promised to forward the demand to the State Government. V. R. Subbulakshmi, District Revenue Officer, S. Krishnakumar, PA (agriculture) to the Collector, and other officials participated in the farmers meeting.

Farm loan fair

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan will inaugurate a mega agriculture loan mela to be organised by the Kalpetta branch of the Corporation Bank on the bank premises from 9 a.m. on Saturday. The Minister will disburse Rs.25,000 each to 1,600 woman beneficiaries on the occasion, V.J. Antony, manager, Corporation Bank, said.

When banana leaves come as a gift

Pesticide-free spread: Kollam district panchayat president S. Jayamohan (left) taking a look at the organically grown 'Njaalipoovan' crops, which are ready for Onam harvest, at the Anchal government farm.— Photo: C. Suresh Kumar
However sumptuous it may be, a Thiruvonam lunch can never be savoured if it is not served on a banana leaf. While the courtyards of many houses still have banana plants, there are also many houses that do not have these plants. Some of those who have the plants, cut the leaves half heartedly because they care for the plant. Very often banana leaves are an eleventh hour ingredient for the Onam lunch and at that hour the price tag on banana leaves is not a problem. That is the reason why huge quantities of banana leaves reach the State from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh during Onam. But for this Onam lunch, the Kollam district panchayat is planning to give four banana leaves as a gift along with the 10,000 plus kits of organically grown vegetable the panchayat plans to sell at fair prices. The kits will contain 10 varieties of vegetables grown in the farms of the panchayat. District panchayat president, S. Jayamohan, after inspecting the banana crops of these farms recently, said that over 5,000 'Njaalipoovan' variety banana bunches were ready for harvest at the Anchal government farm alone. Each vegetable kit would contain a pack of 'Njaalipoovan' banana. This was a much sought-after banana variety which was

very sweet. The leaves of the harvested plants would be cut and distributed as Onam complement along with the kits.

To check plastic use

Mr. Jayamohan said that it was part of an effort from the district panchayat to reduce the use of plastics as many had started using plastic-coated banana leaves to serve Onam lunch. And these were leaves from organically grown plants, he added.

Medha asks Tatas to return land to Singur farmers

After her meeting with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, noted social activist Medha Patkar said on Friday that Tata Motors' authorities should be more liberal in the issue of returning the land of farmers in Singur. The meeting took place at the State secretariat, Nabanna. After the Calcutta High Court struck down the State Government's Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act, 2011, the case is now in the Supreme Court. The law was enacted by the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) government to return a portion of the land acquired by the Left Front government for the Tata Motors' small car factory to 'unwilling' farmers. "I have discussed the issue of returning the land of Singur farmers with the Chief Minister," said Ms. Patkar, who is leading the agitation against the Gujarat Government's effort to increase the height of Narmada dam. Earlier in the day, Ms. Patkar urged Ms. Banerjee to stop the possible changes to the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre. Ms. Patkar was talking to reporters on the sidelines of an event in the city. "We think Ms. Banerjee should stop the changes that Narendra Modi and Nitin Gadkari are trying to bring to the Land Acquisition Act," she said. She claimed that under the Section 24 of the new Land Acquisition Act, Ms. Banerjee had the "capacity to return land to farmers in Singur." Ms. Patkar pointed out that the movement in Singur played a crucial role in AITC's coming to power in the State. "Therefore, she should ensure that their lands are returned," she said. Ms. Patkar's National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) was involved in the anti-land acquisition agitation in 2007 in Singur, spearheaded by Ms. Banerjee. The NAPM also supported the AITC movement against land acquisition in Nandigram in Purba Medinipur.

U.P. sop for private sugar mills

The Uttar Pradesh Government on Friday granted additional help and further concession at the rate of Rs. 6 per quintal to private sugar mills who clear the cane dues till September 2014. The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting presided over by the Chief Minister, Akhilesh Yadav on Friday. Failure to make the payment at the rate of the previously announced SAP (State Advised Price) of Rs. 280 per quintal before the September 31 deadline would invite strict action against the defaulter sugar mills. Principal Secretary (Sugarcane Development and Sugar Promotion), Rahul Bhatnagar said action would be taken as per the provisions of the law. An amount of Rs. 5099 crore as cane dues of 2013-14 crushing season is pending on the private sugar mills. If the dues are cleared it would benefit about 40 lakh cane farmers in the State. Interestingly, the State Government's "additional help and concessions" to the private sugar mills came on a day when the UP Sugar Mills Association (UPSMA), the umbrella organization of 96 private mills, issued a five-page statement on "Why UP sugar are unable to make cane payments on time?". In fact, the UPSMA has dismissed the SAP fixed by the State Government as "arbitrary pricing of cane, more of a populist measure of the Government to maintain its vote banks in the State elections". Demanding the adoption of a "linkage formula" (linking the SAP with the price of sugar and its by-products), the Association has warned that failure to do so would aggravate the cane arrears crisis again next year. Giving details of the concessions granted by the government, the Principal Secretary (Sugarcane Development) told reporters that the fresh benefits would be in addition to the concessions given at the rate of Rs. 11.03 per quintal of cane following the December 9, 2013 cabinet decision. The Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), which is leading the agitation against the non-payment of sugarcane price arrears, has threatened to intensify its stir against the sugar mills. "It is a fact that many cane growers are debt-ridden and are living in miserable condition", Rakesh Tikait, the BKU spokesperson told *The Hindu* on Friday. He reiterated that the arrears have not been paid by the mills. On Thursday, the UPSMA, which is an affiliate of Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), questioned the State Government's move to conduct meetings related to reservation of cane arrears for the next crushing season. The first meeting of Saharanpur district is proposed to be held at Lucknow on September 10. It has decided to boycott the meetings on the plea that it has already been decided to suspend cane crushing operations for the 2014-15 season (which starts in October-November 2014).

University harvests earthworms for better fertilisers

The Mangalore-based Yenepoya University has begun using earthworms to convert organic waste into compost. Hareesh Joshy, an expert in vermi-technology, who oversees the implementation of the project at Yenepoya University, told *BusinessLine* that the university has initiated a project to manage its own organic wastes on its 33-acre campus. The university's vermi-compost unit has six rectangular bins. Each bin can load 750 kg-1,000 kg of organic waste. Joshy said that the each loading will be ready for harvesting vermi-compost in 45 days' time. Vermi-compost can be harvested five to six times in a year from each bin. Around 50 per cent of the loaded organic material will be converted into vermi-compost, he said, adding that around 2,500 kg of compost can be harvested from a bin in a year. Joshy said that the university has spent around Rs. 8 lakh on its vermi-compost unit. He said that if one takes a minimum cost of Rs. 10 a kg on vermi-compost, the university will be saving around Rs. 1.8 lakh a year on fertilizer for plants. Some manufacturers are selling vermi-compost at Rs. 15-25 a kg in the Mangalore market, he said. Stating that the number of earthworms doubles in every three months, he said the extra earthworms can be sold in the market. A kg of earthworm costs Rs. 350-400, he said. Farhad Yenepoya, Director of Yenepoya University, said that the university produces enough vegetation on campus and kitchen waste from hostels. All these organic wastes are put into better use with this vermi-compost unit, he added.

Monsanto awaits clearance to begin field trials in India

Multinational biotech firm Monsanto Company has said that the Indian path to field trials in genetically-modified crops is complicated and confusing. The Narendra Modi Government must review the current situation with regard to policies on GM crops, according to a top official of the company.

Approvals pending

“We have new genetically-modified cotton and corn traits ready for India. We are enthusiastic about the new Government supporting latest technology to

farmers. We hope approvals to hold trials will be given soon,” said Robert T Fraley, Executive Vice-President and Chief Technology Officer, Monsanto Company. Monsanto has been waiting for clearance from the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee for its GM corn and Round-up Ready Flex cotton. The GM corn will help farmers to combat rootworm, with the Bt gene in the plant resisting it. The Roundup Ready Flex cotton, according to the US biotech firm, will help overcome problems of pests and diseases besides controlling weed.

Limited pesticide usage

A roundup ready flex cotton plant withstands the effect of pesticide that is sprayed to kill weeds as its genes are modified to have capabilities to fight these menaces. Also, the number of sprays is reduced to one from a minimum of two in the case of this trait. “We are ready to do field-testing and accelerate at any point. But the regulatory process must be effective and deeply test the process. We are ready to invest in bringing technology to India and prepared to go through the process required for the product to be cleared,” Fraley said, during his interaction with Indian journalists attending the Farm Progress Show at Boone, some 60 km from here in Iowa. However, tests have stopped and things are unclear, he said, adding that the business is not sure when commercialisation will be reached. The Manmohan Singh Government had approved field trials in March but then put on hold the decision for the new Government to clear. Earlier this month, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said confined field trials of GM crop would be allowed soon. Monsanto is prepared to invest more in technology and enter into partnerships but the Government will have to reactivate the process through which “science can in no way be stopped”, Fraley said. Later, in his “Tech talk” at the Farm Progress Show, Fraley said Monsanto had introduced the first GM plant in 1980 and the first modified corn seed was launched in 1990. “Since then, not a single issue with food safety or technology has been reported because of GM crop,” he said. The company is now looking at other fields too such as gene mapping, breeding, crop protection and precision farming. “There have been incredible advances in technology of computerisation of farms,” he said.

DuPont upbeat about crop protection business in India

DuPont says that it will introduce in India one new pesticide product every year over the next decade. These would cover a range of insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and nematicides, based on the \$36-billion US major's proprietary chemistry. "We may be only the sixth largest global agrochemical company behind Syngenta, Bayer, BASF, Monsanto and Dow AgroSciences. But we have the most robust product pipeline that we also want to bring to India," Rik L Miller, President, DuPont Crop Protection, told *Business Line*. India's intellectual property rights regime has registered "marked improvement" in recent times. "Although the prosecution and enforcement mechanism here may not be as strong as in the US and Western Europe, it is encouraging enough for an MNC such as DuPont to operate and introduce new products based on our proprietary chemistry," he said.

Blockbuster product

He cited the example of Rynaxypyr, a patented insecticide molecule marketed as 'Coragen' suspension concentrate solution and 'Ferterra' granular formulation. Rynaxypyr – used against a broad spectrum of lepidopteran insect pests whose larvae bore into and feed on the tender shoots, stems, flower buds and fruits of crops from paddy, sugarcane and soyabean to pulses and vegetables – was launched globally as well as in India in 2008. In 2013, sales of Rynaxypyr crossed \$1 billion globally, of which more than a tenth came from India. "No crop protection molecule in history has achieved annual sales of over \$1 billion in such a short period of time. We are happy that India, too, has contributed to this, with about 6.5 million acres of crop area treated with Rynaxypyr in the country last year," noted Miller. Rynaxypyr – the actual molecule is called chlorantraniliprole – is based on a new class of insecticides known as anthranilic diamides. These basically work on the 'ryanodine receptors' in insect pests regulating the release of stored calcium critical for their muscle function. By binding to these receptors, the diamide compounds cause uncontrolled release and depletion of calcium, leading to muscle paralysis and ultimately death of the insects.

New launch

In the current kharif season, DuPont has launched yet another insecticide Cyazypyr (or cyantraniliprole, as the active ingredient molecule is called), that is being sold as 'Benevia' oil dispersible solution. Cyazypyr is again based on the same anthranilic diamide chemistry, though this product can control both

lepidopteran (borers) and sucking pests (white fly, thrips, aphids, etc).

“Benevia is effective when applied at an early crop stage (within the first 25-30 days window), whereas Rynaxypyr is for later stage (after 60-70 days). We also recommend farmers to use some other insecticide, say Indoxacarb, in between so as to avoid back-to-back application of the same chemistry. This reduces the chances of build-up of resistance by the pests”, Miller explained. The patents of both Rynaxypyr and Cyazypyr are valid up to the early 2020s, which guarantees protection and extra pricing power for the next 8-9 years or so. “The Indian farmer is willing to pay a premium if he sees the product vastly reducing crop yield losses. There is no better proof of this than the adoption rates we have seen for Rynaxypyr,” Miller claimed. DuPont is also introducing this year in India a fungicide ‘Galileo’, mainly for control of rice blast. The active ingredient in this, picoxystrobin, was an original invention of Syngenta. “We subsequently acquired this and developed it further for use against soyabean rust,” Miller added.

Soyameal exports seen plummeting to decade low

Soyameal exports in the current financial year are expected to remain at a decade’s low of just two million tonnes as higher domestic prices have rendered it uncompetitive in international marketplace, according to Raju Choksi, Vice-President (Agri Commodities), Anil Nutrients Ltd, said here.

Declining share

Soyameal has a major share in total oilmeal exports, but since last couple of years, the share has declined. Soyameal exports fell by 19 per cent in 2013-14 and 10 per cent in 2012-13, compared to previous years. Shipments during April-July 2014 stood at 1,07,381 tonnes, down by around 79 per cent, compared to corresponding period of last year as per data available from Solvent Extractors Association of India. Lack of rains since last fortnight is putting the soyabean crop, currently in the flowering stage, under stress. Rainfall in the coming week and one spell in mid-September would be crucial for this year’s crop, he said. Choksi said majority of buyers in Asia are covered for deliveries up to November and December. According to Central Organisation of Oil Industry Trade, crop available for crushing in 2013-14 was 89.80 lakh tonnes compared to 97 lakh tonnes in 2012-13.

New Monsanto offering: Omega 3 fortified soyabean

US biotech firm Monsanto is now trying to connect with consumers of food products with its latest offerings in pipeline. The St Louis-based firm is now looking at introducing soyabeans that are rich in Omega 3 and have lower transfatty acids. "We are in the final phase of getting regulatory approval to these two new products and hope to get it completed in 12-18 months," said Robert T Fraley, Executive Vice-President and Chief Technology Officer, Monsanto Company. The bean which will be rich in Omega 3 has been branded as Soyomega. Omega 3 is a fatty acid found in fish, some seeds and nuts. These acids are required for better functioning of the body and provide health benefits such as reducing risk of heart disease. Fraley said the Omega 3 gene for Soyomega has been derived from an algae. The other soyabean product will be free of trans fatty acid and has been named Vistive Gold. It has got a health profile like olive oil, according to Fraley. One product in the pipeline and of interest to India could be wheat which is resistant to weeds, pests and is tolerant to drought. Monsanto is in the final phase of development of Bolgard III cotton and it could be launched commercially in 2016. This cotton trait will have resistance to pests such as boll worm, pink worm and army worm. The writer is in the US at the invitation of Monsanto

Tea prices lose steam at Kochi auction on slack export buying

Tea prices at Kochi auction continue to witness a declining trend. However, good liquoring teas and those which came under the selection of major blenders was firm to dearer. Others were irregular and lower by Rs. 2-3 a kg and sometimes more, the auctioneers Forbes, Ewart and Figgis said. In sale no 35, the quantity on offer in CTC dust grades was 10,13,000 kg and the arrival was more compared to last week. Though there was an active upcountry demand, export buyers confined to medium and plainer varieties covering a small quantity. With a fair demand, the quantity on orthodox grades was 21,500 kg. The market was lower by Rs. 3 to Rs. 5 and sometimes more. It also witnessed some withdrawals. In the best CTC dusts, good varieties quoted Rs. 100-156, medium category fetched Rs. 70-100 and plain grades stood at Rs. 55-66. The quantity on offer in orthodox leaf grades was 1,35,500 kg and 80 per cent of the commodity kept for the auction was sold. The market for Nilgiri Broken and Whole leaf was irregular and lower by Rs. 5-10 and sometimes more following quality. However, the demand for CTC leaf was good and the quantity on offer was 71,500 kg. The market for bolder broken was firm, while others were irregular and lower by Rs. 2-4 and sometimes more. In the

dust varieties, both Monica SFD and Injipara (Prm) RD quoted the best prices of Rs. 157 . In the leaf grades, Chamraj FOP (S) Green Tea fetched the best prices of Rs. 400 .

Buyer resistance saps rubber

Spot rubber prices finished weak on buyer resistance . Meanwhile, ISNR 20 and latex 60% were flat .Sheet rubber dropped to Rs. 128.50 (Rs. 129) a kg as reported by the traders and the Rubber Board.The grade slid to Rs. 125.50 (Rs. 126), according to dealers. The September futures declined to Rs. 126.60 (Rs. 127.14), October to Rs. 125.38 (Rs. 126.07), November to Rs. 125.50 (Rs. 126.25), December to Rs. 125.89 (Rs. 126.60) and January to Rs. 126.51 (Rs. 127) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.RSS 3 (spot) slipped to Rs. 108.39 (Rs. 108.84) at Bangkok.September futures closed at ¥187 (Rs. 109.29) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 128.50 (129); RSS-5: 124 (125); Ungraded: 116 (117); ISNR 20: 111 (111) and Latex 60%: 89 (89).

Agri-scientists to discuss chickpea promotion at meet

Nearly 250 agriculture scientists are expected to converge here tomorrow to discuss new researches with regard to Chickpea crops and ways to promote it on large scale.The discussion will be held during a three day 19th Annual Group Meet of All India Coordinated Research Project on Chickpea at Rajasthan Agriculture Research Institute here from August 30 to September 1.“Over 250 scientists from various parts of the country are likely to attend the meet in which various issues pertaining to enhancing productivity of Chickpea such as crop improvement, crop protection, food processing, value addition and other issues will be discussed in detail,” N S Rathore, Vice Chancellor of Sri Karan Narendra Agriculture University, Jobner, said at a press conference here.Highlighting the health advantages of the protein-rich Chickpea crops, he said that there was a need to promote the crops on large scale and to disseminate information about it.“This is a very promising crop, rich in protein and provides nutrition in food and also fodder for cattle. “We have developed several varieties of the crop which is used not only in Rajasthan but in other states also,” he said.Scientists will present their research work of 2013-14 and future strategy for 2014-15. “A separate meeting will also be held for the release of new varieties of Chickpea. “Seven farmers will also be felicitated for their significant achievement in the field of Chickpea production,” Rathore added.The meet is being organised jointly by the University and Indian Council of Agriculture Research-New Delhi.

Business Standard

Farm sector growth dips marginally

India's farm sector growth in the first quarter of 2014-15 stood at 3.8 per cent, marginally lower than the four per cent during the corresponding period last year, mainly due to a base effect and slight slowing in the non-crop segment. However, experts said agriculture growth might further falter in the subsequent quarters, as the southwest monsoon has not been satisfactory. A GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 3.8 per cent in the April-June quarter was also on account of a bumper harvest of rice, wheat, oilseeds, coarse cereals and pulses in 2013-14, on the back of a good monsoon in 2013. "I feel even if the agriculture GDP has grown by 3.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2014-15, though lower than four per cent during the same period in 2013-14, it is credible. This is because it shows that despite a high base of 2013-14 (when agriculture GDP grew by 4.7 per cent), the growth has not shown much sign of slackness," said Ramesh Chand, director of the National Centre For Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NCAP). He said not much should be read into the first quarter numbers, as it is based on 2013-14 crop production data, a year when the monsoon was high. In 2013-14, foodgrain production was estimated at a record 264.77 million tonnes, around three per cent more than the previous year. "The same high production might not be maintained as kharif foodgrain output could drop by three-five million tonnes," a senior government official said. Chand of NCAP said agriculture GDP in the second quarter of 2014-15 might even drop to less than two per cent. The southwest monsoon in 2014 was 18 per cent less than normal till Thursday. The India Meteorological Department (IMD), in its latest forecast, had scaled down its projections for the monsoon season to 87 per cent of the long period average (LPA), as against its June forecast of 93 per cent of LPA, due to poor rains in the first 45 days of the four-month season. Both forecasts mean below-normal rain and come with a model error of plus or minus four per cent. The Met office said the worst rainfall this year, bordering on drought, is expected in northwest India, comprising major foodgrain growing states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. It said rainfall in northwest India is expected to be only 76 per cent of the LPA. It classifies any rain shortage over 25 per cent of the LPA as drought. The forecast showed that monsoon deficit in northwest India is expected to be 24 per cent less than normal.

Govt estimates 2-4 mt fall in kharif grain production

As the sowing of kharif crops enters its final phase, the total area planted is estimated at 96.62 million hectares (mha), almost 3.17 mha less than last year. This is mainly due to the below-normal monsoon. In last year's kharif season, 99.9 mha was planted. However, the area under rice, the main foodgrain grown during kharif, was estimated at 35 mha, marginally more than in 2013. "As of now, there does not seem to be a big impact on production due to low rains but all depends on how the monsoon will perform in the last month. Nevertheless, our estimate is, as of now, total foodgrain production might fall by two to four million tonnes as compared to last year because of uneven rain," a senior government official said on Friday. A good spell of rain is required during the vegetative and reproduction stage of these crops, he said. The data, issued by the Union agriculture ministry, showed cotton sowing up to 12.25 mha from 11.16 mha in the comparable period. However, the area sown to pulses remained lower at 9.54 mha, compared to 10 mha a year before. Oilseeds is down at 17.22 mha from 18.67 mha. Both are a cause for concern, as the country is heavily dependent on import of lentils and edible oils. The area planted to coarse cereal is also lower at 17 mha as against 19 mha in the year-ago period. Sugarcane is down at 4.71 mha from five mha in the review period. Sowing of kharif crops begins with the southwest monsoon's onset from June. Harvesting commences from October.

Mustardseed down 0.9% on subdued spot demand

Mustardseed extended losses with prices falling by another Rs 32 to Rs 3,499 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators engaged in reducing positions, tracking a weak trend in spot markets due to subdued demand. Marketmen said besides increased supplies in the spot markets, slackness in demand from oil mills, mainly weighed on prices for the second straight day. At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, mustardseed price for September month contracts dropped further by Rs.32, or 0.91% to Rs.3,499 per quintal, in an open interest of 36,540 lots. Similarly, delivery in far-month October contracts fell by Rs.27, or 0.76% to Rs.3,527 per quintal, having an open interest of 42,100 lots.

Turmeric rises 1% on export demand

Turmeric prices surged over 1 per cent to Rs 6,530 per quintal in futures trade today after speculators enlarged positions amidst rising exports demand. At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, turmeric for delivery in September rose by Rs 68, or 1.05 per cent, to Rs 6,530 per quintal with an open interest of 14,410 lots. The October contract gained Rs 56, or 0.84 per cent, to Rs 6,690 per quintal in 4,780 lots. Analysts said speculators enlarged positions, taking positive cues from the spot market on rising exports demand mainly led to the rise in turmeric prices at futures trade.

Chana down by 0.3% on higher output hopes

Chana prices fell further by 0.35% to Rs 2,816 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators indulged in reducing holdings on higher output hopes. At the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange, chana for delivery in September declined by Rs 10, or 0.35% to Rs 2,816 per quintal with an open interest of 1,22,290 lots. Similarly, the commodity for delivery in October shed Rs 8, or 0.28% to Rs 2,899 per quintal in 32,870 lots. Market analysts attributed the fall in chana futures to increased supplies in the markets on expectations of higher output at major producing belts.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Kharif sowing ends; total crop acreage down at 96.62 million hectare

With sowing of kharif crops almost completed, the total area planted to all summer crops including rice and pulses remains lower at 96.62 million hectare from the year-ago due to poor monsoon. While sowing of pulses, oilseeds, coarse cereals, cotton, sugarcane and jute has completed, the planting of rice would end by next month. As per data released by the Agriculture Ministry, the total area under all kharif crops stands at 96.62 million hectare as of today, as compared to 99.9 million hectare in the kharif season last year. "Barring rice, sowing is almost completed in the kharif season. Rice and cotton area is higher than last year. The acreage under other crops is lower as compared to last year but still higher than normal area of last three years," Agriculture Commissioner J S Sandhu told PTI. Thanks to pick in up monsoon rains, area planted to rice

has increased marginally to 35 million hectare from 34.97 million hectare, while cotton acreage has gone up to 12.25 million hectare from 11.16 million hectare in the review period. However, area sown to pulses remained lower at 9.54 million hectare, compared to 10 million hectare a year-ago. Oilseeds acreage is down at 17.22 million hectare from 18.67 million hectare in the same period. Lower acreage under pulses and oilseeds is a cause of concern as the country is heavily dependent on import of lentils and edible oils. As per the data, area planted to coarse cereals is also lower at 17 million hectare, as against 19 million hectare in the year-ago period. Sugarcane acreage is down at 4.71 million hectare from 5 million hectare in the review period. Sowing of kharif crops begins with the onset of southwest monsoon from June, while harvesting commences from October.

Organic trade likely to touch Rs 6,000 crore next year

India's organic trade is predicted to touch RS 6,000 crore (\$1 billion) by 2015 as states are promoting organic crops in a big way with increasing awareness on good health. States like Kerala are planning to declare one of its districts as fully organic in a few years. The total acreage under organic cultivation in the country went up from 42,000 hectare in 2003 to 5.3 lakh hectare in 2012, said Manoj Kumar Menon, executive director at International Competence Centre for Organic Agriculture (ICCOA), the Bangalore-based organisation working across the entire chain of organic agribusiness. "Currently, the organic trade in India is worth RS 2,500 crore, including exports. The domestic organic trade component is Rs 600 crore. It is growing at a rate of over 40% annually," he said. The number of small and marginal farmers involved in organic farming is around 9.5 lakh and is increasing every year. However, India is still a marginal player in the global organic trade which is estimated at \$60 billion. It is projected to touch \$100 billion next year, according to ICCOA. According to Menon, states like Uttarakhand and Sikkim are encouraging farmers to take up organic farming while Kerala has a big scope in becoming an organic hub. The main crops taken up by the farmers for organic cultivation in the country are spices, tea, coffee and basmati rice. "Other varieties of rice like Njavara in Kerala are increasingly grown in an organic way," he said. Under the invitation of the state government, ICCOA in association with Nurnberg Messe India is organising the organic trade fair Biofach India Organic in Kochi in November for the first time. The annual fair started in 2005 has been so far held in Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore only. Meanwhile, Kerala is taking the initiative to expand organic farming in the state. decided to make Kasar god district fully organic in the next two years. "We have formed clusters of 20-25 farmers and

are giving them training in organic cultivation of fruits and vegetables," said K Prathapan, director of State Horticulture Mission, Kerala. The focus is on local fruits like banana and vegetables like pumpkin, ash gourd, bitter melon, cucumber, snake melon etc. The farmers are also trained to make bio fertilisers. A bio-control laboratory is being set up to produce bio pesticides. Also in the pipeline is the setting up of a laboratory in Thrissur and Kasargod to check the residual toxicity of the products. At present, this facility is available only in Thiruvananthapuram.

Scanty rainfall drives up costs for farmers in Punjab, Haryana

Farmers in rain-deficient Punjab and Haryana have been forced to pay through their nose to protect their standing paddy crop from damage. Many who couldn't afford the steep input costs have replaced their wilting crop with those that would need much less water to cultivate. Paddy is the biggest kharif crop in both states and with monsoon weak, the situation in these grain-bowl states looks grim. Gurbaj Singh Brar from Akalgarh of Punjab's Punjab's Muktsar district talks of the difficult conditions farmers have been up against this season. "There've been so many instances of the paddy crop withering because of scanty rainfall. Those of us who have managed to save our crops have done so paying much more for diesel and other inputs," he said. Amarjit Singh Dhillon of Rahon, Nawanshahr, complains his per-acre cost has surged by Rs 4,000-5,000 because of the unusually dry conditions. "I also faced the problem of more weeds in the paddy crop because of insufficient water. To check the weed, I had to spray chemicals, which added to my expenses," he said. Kamaljit Singh Sandhu of Ratta Khera village in Ferozepur district said poor rainfall impacted cultivation costs. "Farmers spent more to irrigate fields. On the brighter side, scanty rainfall meant crops had lower incidence of disease," he added. The data from Indian Meteorological Department's Chandigarh station are worrisome. Punjab got 65% less rain than normal between June 1 and August 27. The deficiency in Haryana stood at 66%, which has burdened farmers, who now rely on groundwater running diesel pumps overtime to draw tubewell water to irrigate their fields. This has meant added pressure on Punjab and Haryana's fast-sinking groundwater table. The situation is alarming and the Haryana agriculture department says groundwater in at least 68 of the state's 124 administrative blocks has been overexploited. Likewise, the Central Groundwater Board paints a grimmer picture in Punjab. There's overexploitation in 103 of the state's 137 blocks. In the last five years, Punjab faced low monsoon rainfall twice -in 2009 and 2012. Haryana had deficient monsoon in 2009, 2012 and 2013. Although the cost of paddy and basmati

cultivation is significantly up in Punjab and Haryana, output is unlikely to suffer. Scanty rainfall has also hurt other kharif crops in both states like maize, guar, bajra and jowar. The Haryana agriculture department has assessed the loss due to insufficient rainfall at Rs 1,753 crore. Punjab has sought special central assistance of Rs 2,330 crore to tackle losses because of drought-like conditions.

Rabi crops including wheat may face water shortages as reservoirs under last year's level

India's rabi, or winter-sown, crop including wheat may face water shortages as the nation's reservoirs are just two-thirds full with the monsoon season nearing an end. The current reservoir level is in line with the 10-year average and better than the drought years of 2009 and 2012, but way short of last year when the dams were nearly 80% of the full capacity of 155.05 billion cubic metres at this time. While the monsoon brought plenty of rains last year, showers so far in this season is 18% below the 50-year average considered as normal



Monsoon failure hits farmers hard ahead of polls, festivals

While the Election Commission of India decided to pre-poned the dates of Haryana assembly polls in view of the festival season in the last week of October, farmers in the state, hit hard by the failed monsoon, have no reason to even think about festivities this time. Huge deficit of 60% in rainfall this season in Haryana has pushed the farming community, which is 65% of the state's population, into deep financial and mental distress. According to the state agriculture department, there would be an estimated loss of Rs 1,753 crore due to deficient rainfall in Haryana. "I have 18 acres of land but my entire crops of bajra, moong and guar, which are dependent on rainfall, have been almost on the verge of being damaged totally. Do you think my family has any reason to enjoy the festival season," said 52-years old Nafe Singh of Kikral village in Bhiwani district. Nafe said he had spent around Rs 1 lakh from his savings on various farm operations for sowing the crops. He said, "In case my crops fail, it would be difficult to survive the entire year without any income. Even the underground water is not fit for irrigation and there are no other means to provide irrigate crops because we are on the tail of the canal." Story of Mahavir Singh, owner of 5 acres near Narwana town of Jind district, is even grimmer.

He has taken another six acres on lease for a year by agreeing to pay Rs 35,000 per acre. "I had grown paddy over the entire land ? owned and on lease. Poor rainfall has doubled my expenses on diesel and weedicides. I fear that my average yield would also fall this time, which is going to hurt my returns considerably," he said with a despondent look on his face. Due to lack of rainfall, farmers are forced to draw water from the ground using 2.2 lakh pumpsets in Haryana, which would cost Rs 600 crore more to the state's farming community. "Forget about the profit, it would be great if I could recover the amount invested on these 11 acres this time," said Mahavir. He stated that he had to borrow money from his relatives to pay the half yearly installment of his tractor to the bank. His neighbor Sukhdeep Chahal of Faren village near Narwana said he had promised his son, who recently got admission in a law course in Chandigarh, to gift him a motorcycle after the harvest of paddy crop, but it was proving difficult for to pay second semester fee on time. Farmers of south-western zone of Haryana, consisting of Hisar, Fatehabad, Sirsa, Bhiwani, Mahendergarh, Rewari, Jhajjar, parts of Jind, Rohtak and Gurgaon districts, who mostly depend on monsoon are worst hit this time. The area mainly produces jowar, bajra, pulses, guar and cotton among kharif crops. Barring cotton, about 80% of other crops are under stress due to poor rainfall. Those from north-eastern part of the state comprising Karnal, Kurukshetra, Ambala, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra Kaithal, Panipat, Sonipat and some parts of Jind and Rohtak, who have availability of underground water have to spend more maintaining their crop and are faced with the prospects of falling output. This area is mainly paddy and basmati crop.

Jute weighs steps to regain luster

The National Jute Board is looking to diversify into geotextiles for civil engineering activities to provide mills with other options to use their excess capacity. Efforts are on to work with the different departments of state governments so that they include geotextiles in the schedule of rates of tenders, without which contractors will not include the material in construction. The industry produces 16 lakh tonnes of jute products, of which around 9 lakh tonnes are bought by the government for packaging. The rest is sold either in the domestic or the export markets. "In case, the government stops taking these bags, these mills should be given an alternative utilisation. We are thinking of bulk application areas and one of them is geotextiles for civil engineering applications. This will cover slope, roads and for preventing soil erosion," said N. Sengupta, chief finance officer of the National Jute Board. Roads made with jute geotextiles can bring down the project cost by around 10 per cent and ensure zero maintenance for five years. Of all the geotextiles used in the world,

only 4 per cent are natural geotextiles. Jute accounts for about 50 per cent of this natural geotextile, while the rest is coir. The share of natural geotextile is slated to go up to 10 per cent by 2014. "Technologically, we have the standards approved by BIS. The main problem lies with its applications. Until it is mentioned in the schedule of rate during tendering, contractors would not include these materials in construction. And we cannot make it mandatory," he said. So far, around 500 km of roads have been laid in the country with geotextiles.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

Monsoon boost saves kharif sowing

Improvement in monsoon rains, mainly over the central and southern regions, in the last few weeks has helped kharif sowing. With sowing complete for most kharif crops such as pulses, oilseeds and cotton, the total area under the summer crops has declined marginally till now compared to the same period last year. While paddy sowing will continue for the next couple of weeks, there has been marginal decline in the area under pulses and oilseeds, which is expected to result in higher imports for the country.

Click here for graph

An agriculture ministry official said showers in the next few weeks are expected to help standing kharif crops. According to data released by the agriculture ministry on Friday, the total area under all kharif crops is reported at 966 lakh tonne against 998 lakh tonne reported in the same period last year, which is a decline of about 3%. However, paddy sowing has been marginally higher by last year's data at 350 lakh hectare compared to 349 lakh hectare reported last year. More area has been taken up in key rice growing states such as Punjab, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha while less area has been taken up in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. An agriculture ministry official said output of kharif rice, which constitutes about 80% of the total annual output, is likely to match the 916 lakh tonne achieved last year. Total rice production in 2013-14 was more than 1,060 lakh tonne. Pulses sowing declined to 95 lakh hectare till Friday against 100

lakh hectare reported in the same period last year, which is a fall of over 5%.

An agriculture ministry official said while India produced a record 190 lakh tonne of pulses in 2013-14, the output may decline next year by around 5% which may force the government to import around 10 lakh tonne of pulses. In the case of oilseeds, kharif sowing has fallen by 7.5% till now to 172 lakh hectare, with soyabean as the major casualty, recording more than 12% fall in cultivation. However, Indore-based trade body Soyabean Processor Association of India said in its assessment that area under the oilseed would be reduced by 9% compared to 2013 sowing. Cotton sowing has risen by 9% to 122 lakh hectare from 111 lakh hectare in the same period last year. “Decline in sowing areas under oilseeds and pulses would likely result in more