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THE HINDU

Paddy, red gram yields go up

In the past five years there has been an increase in paddy yield in the district, though there has not been any drastic change in the extent of cultivation. Data available with the Agriculture Department reveals that from 2,553 ha in 2009-10, the area has marginally decreased to 2,538 ha last year. But the production has gone up from 10,467 metric tonnes in 2009-10 to 13,680 tonnes in 2013-14.

In red gram, the yield has increased several tonnes. The area under the crop too has multiplied. From 282 ha in 2009-10 and 290 metric tonne (mt), they have increased to 679 ha and 989 mt in 2013-14.

Officials say that the reason in increase has to do with the initiatives the Agriculture Department has taken – introduction of modern technology, conversion of fallow lands into cultivable lands under government scheme, and encouragement to farmers to adopt integrated nutrient and pest management systems.

They also attribute the increase in area and yield to the farmers' festival (*Uzhavar Peruvizha*) the Department had been conducting in the past to educate farmers on modern agriculture technology, hybrid seeds available, etc.

In the past year alone, the Department had conducted 265 such festivals.

As for the increase in red gram yield, the officials said that the noticeable change had to do with the Department focussing extensively on the crop, as the Central Government had chosen Coimbatore under the national food security mission to grow red gram.

The *cholam* yield has increased but its acreage had comedown in the past five years. As of 2013-14, the yield stood at 27,788 metric tonnes.

The crops where the district had decrease in yield are *cumbu* (spiked millet), millets (all), green gram , gingelly, and sugarcane. The officials say monsoon failure was one of the reasons for the low crop yield.

Weekly cotton trading resumes

Weekly cotton trading has resumed at the Thuraiyur Regulated Market in the district to help farmers sell their produce without depending on intermediaries during the current harvest season.

Cotton trading was introduced at the regulated market in February this year after persistent demands from growers. Besides, farmers had alleged that there was delay in payment from traders and under-measurement. Hence, this trading addressed a long-felt need of growers as most of them till then had to depend on traders, who charged a commission. The auction at the regulated market is conducted by way of closed bidding to eliminate any malpractice. Farmers need not pay any commission for the trading. The introduction of the trading evoked a good response in the previous harvest season (December to March), when about 1,200 quintal of cotton totally worth Rs.57 lakhs was traded at the weekly auctions.

Cotton cultivation has been increasing gradually in the district and the crop has been raised on about 16,453 hectares during the current season as against the normal area of about 10,000 hectares in rain-fed areas. About 10,000 hectares were covered during the last season. The crop is grown mainly in Thuraiyur, Musiri, Uppilliyapuram, Manachanallur and Pullampadi areas. The auction at Thuraiyur helps farmers to transport their produce easily without much expenditure.

Collector Jayashree Muralidharan, in a press release, said about 1,359 kg of cotton was auctioned at the first auction held on Wednesday this week. The cotton brought in by farmers fetched a minimum price of Rs. 37 a kg and a maximum of Rs. 40.16 a kg depending on the quality.

The auctions would be conducted every Wednesday till the end of the harvest season, according to R. Chandrasekaran, Deputy Director, Agri Business and Marketing. He indicated that the Department is exploring feasibility of organising weekly cotton auction at the Manachanallur Regulated Market also.

Control of leaf spot in turmeric plants

Oct-Nov is the season for the disease

Leaf spot of turmeric is the most important disease of turmeric. It has become a major constraint in successful cultivation of turmeric. The disease has resulted in drastic reduction in rhizome yield.

Oblong brown spots with grey centres are found on leaves. Severely affected leaves dry and wilt. The disease usually appears in October and November.

Planting space

Proper spacing should be maintained (for single row planting: 45cm between rows and 15cm among plants and 4cm depth and Broad ridge system or paired row system under drip irrigation the farmers follow broad ridge system of planting in which 120 cm broad ridge are formed and two rows of rhizomes planted at a spacing of 15 x 45 x 45 x 15 cm and 4 cm depth.

Select seed material from disease free areas. Infected and dried leaves should be collected and burnt. Crop rotations should be followed whenever possible and far as possible use only rhizomes from known sources .

Cultivate resistant/tolerant varieties. Proper spacing should be maintained. *Pseudomonas fluorescens* and *Trichoderma harzianum* can reduce the disease when the disease pressure is low.

Leaf extract

Leaf extract of Ashoka (*Polyanthia longifolia*) and bulb extract of onion (*Allium cepa*) can be reduce the disease

Treat seed material with mancozeb at 3gm/litre of water or carbendazim at 1 gm/litre of water, for 30 minutes and shade dry before sowing.

Spray mancozeb at 2.5 gm/litre of water or carbendazim at 1gm/litre; 2-3 sprays at fortnightly intervals.

Spraying Blitox or Blue copper at 3 gm/lit of water was found effective against leaf spot.

Rhizome treatment with carbendazim and mancozeb (0.1 per cent) and and foliar application of propiconazole (0.1 per cent) at 45 and 90 days after planting (DAP) can help reduce the disease.

(Dr. Utpal Dey, Department of Plant Pathology, Vasant Rao Naik Marathwada Krishi Vidyapeeth, Parbhani, Maharashtra, email: utpaldey86@gmail.com, Mobile: 8275824103.)

Sensitisation programme in using green manure



Scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra explaining the importance of application of green manure in crops at a function at Vamban near Pudukottai on Thursday.

Application of green manure helps reduce cultivation cost as farmers are spared of using chemical fertilizers. However, not all farmers are keen on embracing the technique as they look to reap high yield through the use of chemical fertilizers.

With a view to sensitise farmers to the importance of green manure, a day-long training programme on green manure seed production was organised under the auspices of Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Vamban near here on Wednesday.

Inaugurating the training, R.P.Gnanamalar, Professor and Head of the Kendra, said that inorganic fertilizers were not only costlier but also caused severe harm to soil health.

Green manure not only offered the right alternative to inorganic fertilizers, it also improved productivity, she said. M.Kathiravan, Assistant Professor of Seed Science and Technology, explained the method to be followed in green manure seed production.

Application of *sesbania aculeata* commonly known as *daincha* was found to be effective in increasing productivity in sodic soil, he said. The green manure promotes aeration of soil and drainage in fields and improves water retention capacity of soil.

Call to dedicate festival to small tea growers

With opposition from small tea growers to the conduct of the 2014 Tea and Tourism Festival mounting, a call has been made by the Kotagiri based Nilgiri Documentation Centre (NDC) to celebrate it as a 'Festival of Hope'.

Adverting to the arrangements being made for the three-day festival, which is scheduled to be inaugurated on Friday, and the opposition it has attracted from the small tea growers on account of the low prices which their produce has been fetching for some time now, NDC Director Dharmalingam Venugopal has pointed out that the festival was originally mooted not only to promote Nilgiri teas but also to celebrate the contribution of the Nilgiri people in providing two unique products to the millions of visitors to the district from India and outside.

The Festival was expected to showcase the current developments in the tea industry as well as issues affecting the tea and tourism sectors in the district. Somehow, the contributions and the issues of the small tea growers never found their due space in the festival so far.

The organisers should seize the current opportunity to dedicate this year's festival to the humble small tea growers, especially the family small grower, who have sustained their contribution despite heavy domestic and global challenges in the past two decades. They have steadily increased their share in the production and productivity.

The Festival should showcase the contribution of small growers through Indcoserve and Bought Leaf Factories. It should highlight the best practices in production, productivity, pricing and value addition from all parts of the district. Select small growers with best practices and innovative products can be honoured on the three days. Apart from inviting the tribes to perform

their music and dance, tribal and indigenous small growers from the four taluks can be invited to take part in the festival.

An Open House can be permitted on all days for anyone to share their views and experiences on the small growers' issues. Tea festivals and museum often showcase only how the green leaf is transformed into exquisite teas but they do not show how the green leaf is grown under often inhospitable weather, in dangerously hilly terrains and plucked every week mostly by women with scarred fingers who toil from dawn to dusk surviving on just a little rice and tea.

The Tea Board should highlight the new plan that has been announced by the centre for the development of small growers. It should also highlight its various handholding plans and programmes for the small growers, including all aspects of mini tea factories.

This year's festival should be a festival of hope. The various groups representing the small growers who have understandably given a call to boycott the festival should reconsider the decision and join the festival in large numbers to highlight their contribution and issues.

Meanwhile a Kannerimukku based small farmer Kakki Shanmugam contended that if the Union Ministry of Commerce in general and the Tea Board in particular had been vigilant over the years the small tea growers would not be in an unenviable position now. The organisers said that a rally would precede the inauguration of the festival.

Celebrate it as a 'Festival of Hope', says Kotagiri based Nilgiri Documentation Centre

Centre's Rs.5,800-crore investment plan, a big boost to solar power

Even as the solar power industry is expecting more favourable policy and funding support in the upcoming Union Budget, Central Government's proposed spend to the tune of Rs.5,800 crore in solar sector is expected to give a much-needed fillip to the industry.

It has been proposed to establish 1,000 MW of grid-connected solar PV power projects by Central Public Sector units (CPSUs) and other government organisations. These projects are to be established with VGF

(viability gap fund) support of Rs.1,000 crore over a period of three years (2015-18).

Organisations such as NTPC, NHPC, CIL, IREDA and Indian Railways, among others have agreed to set up solar plants.

In addition to central PSUs, Defence organisations will also be joining the solar bandwagon. With Rs.750 crore support through VGF under the National Solar Mission, Defence establishments under Ministry of Defence and Para Military Force under Ministry of Home Affairs will set up over 300 MW of grid-connected and off-grid solar PV power projects during 2014-2019. . These two schemes will have to use only locally made PV cells and modules, a move aimed at helping the domestic manufacturers.

Meanwhile, Centre has also proposed to establish 25 Solar Parks, each with a capacity of 500 MW and above with a target of over 20,000 MW of solar power installed capacity over a period of 5 years (2014-19). This scheme is expected to entail an investment of Rs.4,050 crore. 12 States — Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Odisha — have so far given consent for building Solar Parks.

Industry experts point out a wave of optimism in the industry and expect 2015 would be an eventful year for the sector. Pashupathy Gopalan, Head of Indian operations and President-Asia Pacific, SunEdison, feels that India has developed enough talent pool over the past 5 years to execute solar projects rapidly. So, solar is not a new technology anymore and the concept of mega solar plants is very much happening. “It is not something which is difficult. And, solar projects generally use unusable barren land. Those are the lands that are not used for agriculture and located away from cities,” he added.

World Bank approves \$75 million credit to State

Focus on increasing economic opportunities for SC/ST farmers

The State has received a shot in the arm to boost its efforts to enhance agricultural incomes of small and marginal farmers and ensure increased access related to health, nutrition, sanitation and social entitlements.

The World Bank has approved \$ 75 million credit for the Andhra Pradesh Rural Inclusive Growth Project, a project designed with focus on increasing

economic opportunities for small and marginal farmers, especially from SC and ST households, covering 5,000 villages in 150 most backward mandals.

As part of the implementation, investments would be made in developing a network of social enterprises for food, nutrition, sanitation and other social enterprises operating at community and district-level.

The project would support the government in its efforts at creating an enabling policy framework with real time analytics across sectors through the various missions established. On the human development front, investments would be made in improving access to services in health, nutrition, water & sanitation.

The A.P. Rural Inclusive Growth Project envisaged linking of small and marginal farmers to urban markets and make them competitive across the value chain so that they would be able to take advantage of potential benefits from allied sectors like horticulture, livestock and fisheries.

Investments would be made in increasing nutritional content of products like milk, vegetables and poultry.

The project would specifically support in increasing incomes of 2.5 lakh small & marginal farmers by at least 50 per cent by enhancing productivity and improving their access to markets.

Focus would be on producers who have built up productive assets and have the potential to exploit growth opportunities for high value commodities including red gram, milk, poultry, small ruminants, fisheries, turmeric, cashew and coffee.

The project is also aimed at working towards improving the coverage and service delivery of social protection entitlements for 5 lakh poorest households, mainly hailing from SC/ST communities.

One of the key aspects of the project was to invigorate and create local markets by connecting rural producers and enterprises with rural consumers.

Another major feature would be enhancing the quality of consumption by poor households by making nutrient rich snacks available through nutria-shops and creating awareness on the benefits of these products.

Emphasis would also be on the human development side with community led approaches to improve access to water and sanitation in 1,000 targeted villages adopting saturation mode to cover all households and rural institutions such as schools, anganwadi and health centres besides helping them achieve open defecation free status.

The efforts would be underpinned by investments in ICT and mobile-based service delivery systems for social accountability, better targeting, increased transaction efficiency and effectiveness.

It will be utilised for A.P. Rural Inclusive Growth Project to focus on increasing economic opportunities for small, marginal ryots

Sweet lime turns sour for Anantapur farmers

Distressed ryots are planning to go in for cotton from next crop season



Dried citrus fruit trees due to shortage of water at Gandlaparthi village in Kanaganapalli mandal of Anantapur district.– PHOTO: R.V.S. PRASAD
Fourtyeight-year-old Narayana Reddy of Gandlaparthi Kottapalli village of Gandlaparti mandal in the district is a sad

man today, after chopping off all fruit bearing sweet lime trees in his 15-acre farm.

“I will go in for cotton (cotton is a rain fed crop in the district) from the next season on. All that sweet lime has left me with is debts in the last three

years. Unless my borewell is recharged, I can't even consider going back to sweet lime," said Narayana Reddy, who says his brief tenure as a farmer independent of rains was over.

Elsewhere in Nallamada mandal of the district, Suryanarayana Reddy has sunk in more than 15 borewells in the last two years alone, the

last one reaching a depth of 900 feet and costing him Rs 5 lakhs, only to see the little water empty to a trickle in three months. He has decided to leave his mango farm dry and go in search of work in Bangalore.

This is the story of several thousands of farmers across the district, who shifted to horticulture over the years, taking the suggestions of the Horticulture Department and the government, in an attempt to break away from the vagaries of nature, at least reasonably, says Narasimhulu, a farmer and social activist from the district.

While some have chopped away those trees which were in their prime fruiting age, some have left it dry while another section is spending lakhs of rupees on watering the plants by transporting water from other places through tankers, in the hope to sustain the plants until the next rainy season in hope of good rain.

"Six years of continuous drought has wreaked havoc on the people while the yet unkept promise of debt waiver leading to banks not lending a pie this year, has meant 'zero' circulation of money and an absolute lack of employment, both in the rural and urban areas of the district", said Govindarajulu, a former civil servant and also a member of the Ananta Abhivrudhi Sadhana Committee (AASC).

Tobacco ryots bat for drip irrigation

They are worried over depleting groundwater levels

The posh and palatial multi-storied buildings adorned with high-end electronic gadgets and sleek cars of premier brands bear the signs of affluence brought in by tobacco cultivation in this village tucked away in the upland tracts of West Godavari district. Of course, the 4 to 5 decades old history of prosperity comes under question, thanks to the fast depleting groundwater levels. "The alarming water situation poses a serious threat not only to our prosperity but also tobacco cultivation," says Parimi Gopichand, head of a joint family with 75 acres of tobacco-grown area, irrigated with

eight bore wells. The water levels got depleted up to 800-1,000 ft from 250 ft in the last decade or so mainly because of the rapid tobacco crop expansion with groundwater as the main source, the 75-year old Gopichand said.


The depleting groundwater tables forced the farmers to go for high-capacity motors ranging up to 30-35hp to exploit the scarce liquid to irrigate the crops. The village is said to be having more than 1,000 bore wells, of them at least 8-10 failed in the recent past. Mr. Gopichand urged the government to create level playing by bringing tobacco also under the coverage of drip irrigation scheme with 90 per cent government subsidy. The Andhra Pradesh Micro Irrigation Development Corporation (APMIDC) extends the scheme to several crops such as maize, banana and oil palm, excluding tobacco.

‘NRI villages’

The village, with nearly 10,000 acres of tobacco area with more than 1,000 bore wells, is considered to be the capital of the flue-cured Virginia tobacco in the whole northern light soil (area. The cluster of Chinnayagudem, Sangayagudem and Gandhinagar have earned a nickname as ‘NRI villages’ with more than 1,000 people from three villages went abroad to make it further big with the backup of tobacco-induced wealth. Achanta Seshagiri Rao, another tobacco farmer from Gandhinagar, seethes with heartburn against the government for its alleged bias in implementing drip irrigation scheme.

Area under paddy cultivation set to dip in TS

CULTIVATION OF MAJOR CROPS IN RABI (in hectares)			
Crop	Normal extent	Normal till Dec. last week	Actual cultivation
Paddy	6.50	0.48	0.35
Maize	1.52	1.01	0.88
Bengalgram	1.08	1.08	0.69
Groundnut	1.70	1.58	1.22
Jowar	0.61	0.58	0.47
Sunflower	0.28	0.25	0.09
Chilli	0.24	0.20	0.16



Cultivation of paddy in the ongoing rabi season in Telangana is expected to come down by about 20 to 25 per cent because of persisting power shortage and depletion of groundwater table in the State.

The Agriculture Department in association with the power distribution companies is already running a publicity campaign in villages for over a month now discouraging paddy cultivation during the rabi season. Of the 13.09 lakh hectares of normal cultivation of all crops in the season, paddy alone amounts to nearly half of it at 6.5 lakh hectares with groundnut (1.7 lakh ha), maize (1.52 lakh ha) and bengalgram (1.08 lakh ha) being the other major crops.

Only about one lakh hectares out of the normal extent of paddy cultivated in rabi is under command area and the rest is cultivated under borewells. The Agriculture Department's hope stems from the fact that the farmers had faced problems due to erratic power supply in kharif, though it did not affect paddy cultivation much.

“We are educating farmers in villages to go for irrigated-dry (ID) crops instead of water-intensive paddy crop, keeping in mind both power shortage and groundwater depletion. Farmers are being explained that production of one kg rice would require about 4,000 litres of water against 400 litres

required by an ID crop. Income-wise too, farmers get Rs. 8,000 per acre for paddy and Rs. 11,000 per acre for an ID crop like maize”, B. Janardhan Reddy, Commissioner of Agriculture, said.

Fluctuation in power supply, particularly low voltage caused by overloading, has resulted in the burnout of about 15,000 transformers in Telangana during the kharif season. Besides, the groundwater table has dipped by an average of 2.7 metres till November-end this year compared to the same period last year.

Stress (exploitation) on groundwater is high in Medak district where it went down by an average of 5.61 metres followed by Nalgonda (5.04 m), Ranga Reddy (4.81 m), Warangal (3.86 m), Karimnagar (3.81 m), Nizamabad (3.8 m) and Adilabad (3.16 m). Only in Khammam (1.32 m) and Mahabubnagar (1.61 m) districts the average fall in groundwater table is less than 2 metres.



Food Corporation of India being kept on a debt diet

FCI procurement operations could come to a halt by February unless it is paid a good part of its outstanding dues of a record Rs 58,000 crore soon. (Reuters)

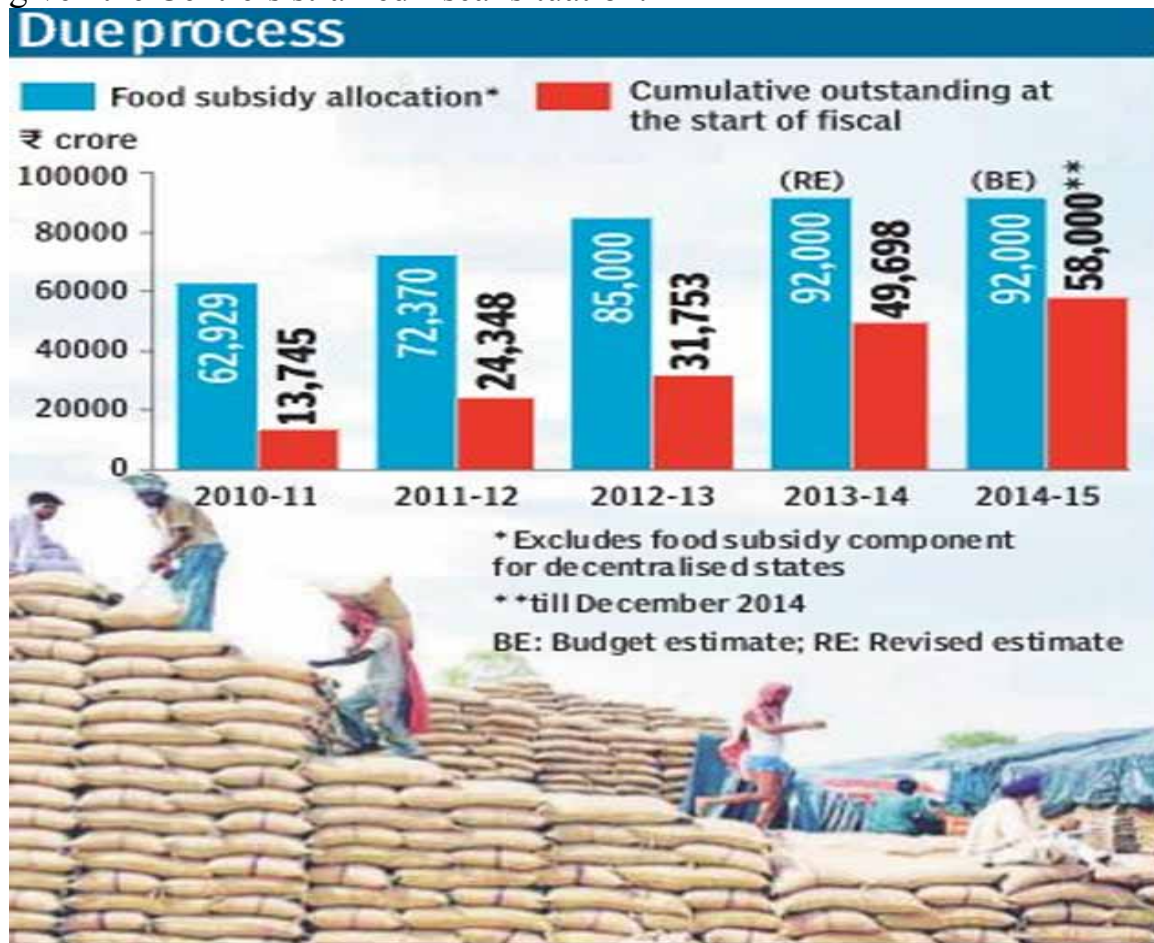
The Food Corporation of India’s (FCI) procurement operations could come to a halt by February unless it is paid a good part of its outstanding dues of a record Rs 58,000 crore soon.

For the Centre, which has admitted to a tax revenue buoyancy overestimate of R1 lakh crore, and could face a shortfall of R20,000 crore in disinvestment receipts, the demand from the FCI could not have come at a worse time.

Official sources told FE that for FCI, which is somehow managing the minimum support price (MSP) operations of wheat and rice at present thanks to the three short-term bank loans of R20,000 crore taken since the start of the current fiscal, the ability to sustain the operations is already waning. These loans carry an interest of 11.28%, which gets added to the government’s food subsidy burden.

The food ministry has requested the finance ministry for R1.47 lakh crore (including R92,000 crore budgeted for FCI’s MSP functions and overall

food subsidy arrears from previous years) in the current fiscal, a tall order given the Centre's strained fiscal situation.



The fall in global commodity prices including oil has come as a godsend for the finance ministry; nevertheless, it has a hard task at hand in meeting this year's fiscal deficit target of 4.1% of GDP, given that the deficit in April-October stood at over 90% of the level projected for the full year and there is an acknowledged need to keep productive public spending robust.

FCI was made to spend hugely to keep grain stocks much higher than buffer levels by the previous UPA government and this had inflated the food subsidy bill in the last three years. Although the corporation has managed to reduce stocks by a quarter from record levels two years ago, its plan to offload excess grain stocks in the open market is hanging fire due to sufficient availability of wheat with private traders coupled with states' inability to lift rice meant for the poor.

Meanwhile, in the next couple of months, rice procurement needs to pick up in eastern states while the wheat purchase operations for the rabi marketing season (2015-16) will commence from April 1.

The FCI's cost of operations of procurement, storage and transportation of foodgrains has been steadily rising due to factors such big annual increases in the MSPs offered to farmers (the MSP hikes turned moderate from the 2012-13 kharif season) and its holding of excess grains stocks.

“The finance ministry's allocation of food subsidy (Rs 1.15 lakh crore of which Rs 92,000 crore is to be disbursed to FCI) is not enough for the FCI to meet its day to day expenses,” a food ministry official said.

While open market sales of wheat was supposed to garner many thousand crores for the government, it has so far managed to sell only 1.5 million tonnes of wheat against the target of selling 10 million tonnes by end-March, 2015. FCI had exhausted its cash credit limit of Rs 54,500 crore from designated banks before it resorted to short-term loans. “FCI incurred expenses of more than Rs 7,400 crore towards interest payment in the last fiscal because of huge borrowings from banks,” the food ministry official said. The funds crunch comes at a time when FCI is required to augment procurement operations for the implementation of the food security Act, the implementation of which, incidentally, has been post deferred to next fiscal. The law, which aims to supply around 60 million tonnes of rice, wheat and coarse cereals to about 84 crore families and will subsume the current schemes, is expected to cost around Rs 1,25,000 crore annually. FCI at present distributes subsidised foodgrains to more than 40 crore families under the Targeted Public Distribution System.

Food and dining trends of 2014

The year 2014 saw not only hotels hosting Organic Farm Markets, but also standalones bringing them into their menu.

From organic food to ancient grains, tapas to molecular gastronomy, spiced flavoured beverages to edible flowers and unexplored regional cuisine, Food and Beverages (F&B) in 2014 was a mélange of the old and the new.

What goes out comes back in vogue. The old is the latest new and classics are timeless. If any year has proven each of the above adages to be true with a generous sprinkling of its own new flavours of course, it has been 2014. With the year all set to leave center-stage, we look at some of the interesting concepts that held the food world's attention year long and that of diners too.

GOING ORGANIC

Circa 2009, a famous brand advertisement made fun of organic aloo. Clearly they didn't know that exactly five years hence, it would be the buzz word on every dining table, with the F&B world turning back to the good old time, where food was produced organically and chemical free. The year 2014 saw not only hotels hosting Organic Farm Markets (with Karen Anand helming a four city drive), but also standalones bringing them into their menu. In fact, says Vikas Seth, Corporate Executive Chef, Dish Hospitality, "Organic food became the symbol of food being fresh, healthy and flavourful."

Of course the whole drive led to the year's another trend- Single Source Produce. Says Zubin D'Souza, Executive Corporate Chef, Mars Enterprises, "2014 saw single-origin food as one of the big trends in the food & beverage industry. Procuring food from a single farm or a single region was given a lot of importance, more so as it translated into better quality, better tasting food." In fact, adds Indrajit Saha, Executive Chef, Sofitel, "More F&B outlets began stocking products like wine and chocolate made from a single source as it not only established a certain credibility to the product but also consistency in the end product."

DE-CONSTRUCTING A DISH STORY

Deconstructed. The most heard word on every Chef's table in 2014 (and last leg of 2013) was more like a spillover from 2011, when the concept made its debut on the Indian dining table with the humble apple pie breakdown. Since then the thrill of presenting a dish – Indian and otherwise – with each of its elements showcased in a unique fashion has held the fancy of both the diners and the chefs. The indulgence of course reached its pinnacle in 2014. Says Anjan Chatterjee, Founder & MD Specialty Restaurant, "Deconstruction added a new dimension to the process of creating and dining. Suddenly, food turned into an indulgence that if on one hand egged the chefs to be more creative with plating it encouraged diners to discover flavours in a whole new way. In fact, today the whole element of surprise is what attracts diners to explore new places, and deconstructing helped in creating that experience."

MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY MAKES WAVES

It was in 1999, when the modern-day Molecular Gastronomy made its appearance in India. Alas, a few experiment aside, the technique made little waves in the food world. That was till 2013, when suddenly Molecular

Gastronomy took people's attention by the nose – with Indian cuisine playing the proverbial Pharaoh's boat.

Thanks to Culinary benchmarks like Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra and a few others, Indian cuisine finally dropped its 'huge portion, oil laced' appearance for a chic outing. Indian food suddenly took the world by surprise with its easy flavour marriage and unique presentation. And with it the 2000 export technique suddenly became a skill to master for many in the food business. And words like spherification, flavoured foams and smoke infusions a common feature in the dining space with Indian chaats, sweets and even beverages using the technique to make the experience memorable. Says Zorawar Kalra, Founder & Managing Director, Massive Restaurants Pvt. Ltd (that owns Masala Library and Farzi Café), "Suddenly, people – diners and chefs – discovered how one could use concepts like molecular gastronomy and other sciences to ring in a new dimension to each Indian dish presented and up the dining experience. Chefs became experimental, kitchens became lab and the concept of Progressive Indian Cuisine was born. In fact, restaurants began focusing on offering high quality dining experiences, at par with international standards with a better understanding and implementation of this science."

In the coming years, adds Zorawar, "showcasing lesser-known Indian cuisine using modern techniques while preserving the ancient culinary traditions will be biggest trend."

Agrees Paul Kinny, Director Culinary, Pallazzio Hotels & Leisure Ltd, who feels that molecular gastronomy will reach a new level with Indian cuisine exploding the world scene in 2015 as it will become a useful tool in preserving the traditional flavours without making the classic dishes look mundane. "The arancini has already shown how science can be used to make food more interesting."

LESSER KNOWN CUISINES GO BIG

After an influx of oriental and North Frontier cuisine restaurants, 2014 saw a slew of restaurants that celebrated lesser known cuisines like Soda Bottle Openerwala (Parsi/Mumbai – Irani cuisine); Potbelly (Bihari); Yeti (Himalayan cuisine), Amreli (the Indian bistro) and more. It also saw a lot of five star hosting festivals that had lesser known cuisine like Rampuri, Dakshini. In fact, the old southern favourite The Konkan Café opened with a new menu that extended upto Calicut getting the Mappila cuisine in its fold. "Lesser known regional cuisine was the new trend in the F&B world – and it was not just limited to Indian cuisine, but spanned across the world as well..

Like the Burmese, Greek, Ethiopian, African and Mauritian too”, says Riyaaaz Amlani, Founder & MD, Impresario Foods, who feels that “Pop Up Restaurants were a big way of celebrating these lesser explored culinary worlds.”

In fact, adds Riyaaaz, “in the coming years, more and more restaurants in hotels and standalones will experiment with local flavours like Oriya, Assamese, Bihari and other community cuisine as more diners will be looking at newer flavours and styles to experience. And it will play in key role in keeping them interested.”

Agrees Chef Sabysachi Gorai, Founder, Fabrica By Saby. “2014 actually saw people exploring cuisines other than the Punjabi cuisine that has ruled the roost for quite a few years. The year largely focused on the coastal cuisine. Besides coastal, Parsi and North Eastern cuisine also gained popularity with common dishes Vada Pav becoming the new cool.”

SMALL BECOMES THE NEW BIG

From sliders to personalised plating, bite sized dishes or finger food were big in 2014. The idea, says Chetan Sethi, Owner Zaffran, “of dining and not plain eating finally seems to be catching up in the market that till date has remained price-portion sensitive. People have begun enjoying menus that do not restraint them and can be had on the go as well.” Sethi’s Kebab Korner By Zaffran is an attempt at making North Frontier cuisine more befitting to the fast paced life of today.

Agrees Kalra, who began Farzi Café based on the concept of Tapas, which became the most instagrated menu in the past few months. “A tapas menu is high on flavours because of the sheer mix of ingredients and flavours in different temperature. That culinary foreplay has seen a rise in popularity in the recent time. And while the portion size may be an issue today, but it’s going to be the trend in 2015.”

Seconds Chef Gorai, who introduced the concept of tasting menus – which popularised small tasting portions – in the metropolitan diners a few years back. “Diners want to explore more cuisines today and having those in small portions are the best way to go about it as it allows more flavours to be put on plate and indulge in,” says the celebrated chef who feels the only downside to the trend is the immense customization and consistency that go into sustaining the trend.

THE RISE OF THE LOCAVORES

2013 end saw the rise of local ingredients, with more chefs using locally produced ingredients in international cuisines to bring forth better flavours. This changed the way food was presented as simple flavours saw more takers than complex dishes. Even Chef Sergi Arola decided to go hugely local with Arola by using Indian tomatoes and the naan for his menu in place of exporting ingredients from Spain. Ask him why and he would cite the ‘tartiness’ of Indian tomatoes that are better than those found in Spain.

By the mid of 2014, this trend turned on its head again with diners demanding dishes made with local ingredients, which in turn brought to fore ancient grains like the Quinoa, kholabri, spelt, foxtail millet and nuts like pistachio into the commercial kitchens. Says Vijay Malhotra, Executive Chef, ITC Maratha, “Forgotten foods and forgotten grains like rajgira and amaranth were big in 2014 with diners became more intrigued with the taste and the story behind these lesser known grains. For the chefs, of course, it gave them alternatives to play around with, which added to the dish. So a bed of potatoes could be replaced with polenta or cous cous.

Adds Kedar Bobde, Executive Chef, Hyatt Regency, “The reason for their popularity wasn’t only the refreshing new experience that these grains and ingredients provided but also the health factor. Diners were quick to realise that these could be a guilt-free indulgence. In fact, the rediscovery of these ingredients began the trend of vegetable based sweets like a beetroot tart or Schezwan pepper flavored ice cream.”

This new discovery led to another trend – the rise of the Superfoods. “Lesser preferred ingredients like kale, beetroot and ugly-looking vegetables like elephant foot and yams became the talk of the town. Beetroot juices and spinach puree became the choice for plating instead of the food colours,” says Manish Tewari, Corporate Chef, PVR Cinemas.

Yet another trend that Superfood spawned was the “Art on a plate” concept, says Chef Gorai, as chefs began using a lot of ingredients such as pureed beetroot, blue curaco syrup, spinach puree etc to present food more interestingly.” Adds Chef Kinny, “2015 will be the year to look out for unexplored root vegetables like celery root, parsnips and kohlrabi; as they jostle for attention with Nigella seeds, seaweed, matcha and oysters.”

Agrees Chatterjee, “Diners have taken a shift from visiting fine dining restaurants to exploring cuisines that are high on proteins and less on carbohydrates.

Suddenly food that use quicker cooking techniques have become the new fad. Dimsums and tandoor food has found acceptance than good old frying.”

Result, says Chef Kunal Kapur, “There has been noticeable shift in people turning to vegetarian food as there are newer options to indulge in.”

COMFORT FOOD GOES CLASSIC

While Japanese and Burmese food became the centre of haute food in Mumbai and Regional cuisine in Delhi, 2014 certainly belonged to the good old nostalgic Indian dishes like the Natraj ke dahi bhalla, kebabs, jalebi , Nizamuddin ki biryani and recreations from childhood favourites like Parle G and Maggi.

A trend, which began with Mumbai’s first Gastrobar, Long & Short in InterContinental Marine Drive and the hangout Dudefood in 2013 that brought the Mumbai Biryani and the college- style burger back in vogue, finally raised its bar with Farzi Café that turned Maggi, posh.

“The thing about comfort food is that it’s nostalgic and can never go out of fashion. And even when diners prefer experiential and experimental dining these days, comfort, presented uniquely, garners brownie points for the memory it is associated with,” says Kalra, whose Farzi Café Posh Maggi and Parle G Cheesecake became the most pictures dishes of 2014. And this, says Chef Kapur, “will remain a classic trend that will remain a fixture year after year. What will change of course is the dish, which is likely to go regional with already a few culinary gems disappearing from the home dining table.”

CULINARY TOURISM

As per the new report on Food Tourism issued by the UN World Tourism Organisation states that “over a third of tourist spending is devoted to food”, which clearly shows how important the cuisine of a destination is today. In fact, says Chatterjee, “Gone are the days when sights and nature would entice people. Today a major section of travelers travel for food – and not just gourmet food, that was the key a few years ago – but for local tastings.”

Concurs Kalra, whose own travel itinerary often constitutes traveling to traditional, old restaurants to “realise the real flavours of a place. And more often than not these small traditional places preserve those better than bigger brands,” says the restaurateur.

According to Amlani, “the reason that 2014 saw a good bunch of Pop Up Restaurant successes is because of the authentic flavours that the concept brought to the fore and egged people to explore places.” A proof of this rising phenomenon is also the social groups that encourage people to visit places to merely explore the food.

Coorg, North East and Kashmir, says Chef Gorai, have been the few places that have been explored now more for food than just their natural beauty.

In fact, these experts agree, with amateur cooks rising in numbers, the coming year will see people exploring both known and lesser known places to discover the joy of food and be a part of the culture consumption.

High-fat diet not good in pregnancy

A study has found that high-fat diet and obesity during pregnancy compromise the blood-forming stem cell system in the liver of the developing baby

A study has found that high-fat diet and obesity during pregnancy compromise the blood-forming stem cell system in the liver of the developing baby responsible for creating and sustaining lifelong blood and immune system function.

“The results offer a model for testing whether the effects of a high-fat diet and obesity can be repaired through dietary intervention, a key question when extrapolating this data to human populations,” said Daniel L. Marks, professor of pediatric endocrinology at Oregon-based OHSU’s Doernbecher Children’s Hospital.

Several years ago, Marks and his colleagues developed a mouse model that closely mimics the high-fat, high-simple-sugar diet currently consumed by many young women of child-bearing age.

Their subsequent research demonstrated that maternal overnutrition in mice significantly reduced the size of the foetal liver.

On the basis of this information, Marks partnered with another stem cell expert Peter Kurre.

Together, they discovered the complex changes that occur as a result of maternal high-fat diet and obesity put significant constraints on the growth and expansion of blood stem cells in the foetal liver, which ultimately compromises the developing immune system.

“In light of the spreading western-style, high-fat diet and accompanying obesity epidemic, this study highlights the need to better understand the previous unrecognised susceptibility of the stem and progenitor cell system,” Kurre explained.

The findings may provide broad context for the rise in immune disease and allergic disposition in children, the authors said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Foods that can cause food poisoning

Much maligned as the number one excuse for missing work, food poisoning is a real phenomenon, especially for us urban folk.

It can lead to diarrhea, nausea, vomiting or cramping within 48 hours of consuming any contaminated food or drink. In some unfortunate cases, it can be life threatening too. Yes, food poisoning is no pretty sight. But, are you aware of which foods to be wary of to avoid food poisoning? They lurk everywhere. Here's a quick list of foods that can cause food poisoning if you don't take care of how you consume them...

Eggs. This in no way applies to all eggs. As with other foods, sometimes eggs can be contaminated by certain harmful bacteria - Salmonella being the most dangerous. If you consume a raw egg that is infected, you could show symptoms of severe food poisoning. To prevent this - always buy eggs from a clean and credible store, wash mildly and store in a refrigerator as soon as you get home. Always cook eggs well before consuming them, and ensure that you resort to proper medication at the first instance of any food poisoning symptoms.

Tuna. Tuna can be contaminated with scombrototoxin, which can lead to cramps and headaches. Make certain that tuna is kept cool (on ice) after being caught because if it gets too hot it can release toxins, which will be difficult to kill by cooking. Undercooked tuna is also cause for concern. To avoid food poisoning from tuna, ensure that it's refrigerated well, and cooked thoroughly. Also, attempting raw tuna dishes without being sure of how and where the fish came from is dubious.

Oysters. Oysters and other shellfish in general are seen as potent food poisoning threats that could catch you completely unaware. The quality of the water in which they breed has a lot to do with this phenomenon. If the water they are filtering on is polluted, then chances are the oysters are contaminated. Food poisoning caused by shellfish can lead to symptoms like vomiting, fever, diarrhea, amongst others. Take care to buy them from well-established and clean sources.

Potatoes. Food poisoning from potatoes is very rare, but not impossible since raw potatoes can sometimes be of a 'wild' variety that contains toxins to ward off predators. Most breeders control this toxicity in potatoes, but even farmed potatoes could turn green, change colour and display properties of being contaminated. Cooking at high heats takes care of these toxins, which is why you must be wary of the potato's colour and texture before adding it in a raw state to any food.

Cheese. Cheese can easily be contaminated with bacterias such as Salmonella or Listeria, which can, in very extreme and rare cases also lead to miscarriages. No wonder, pregnant women are advised to stay away from cheese varieties such as blue-veined, camembert, brie and feta. Make sure you are not purchasing loose cheese from the market. Always go for branded sealed packed cheese, and do check for its expiry date.

Berries. Some people can be allergic to berries while others might be fond of berries to the extent that they don't mind eating frozen berries - and that is where the germ called Cyclospora lurks, which is an easy cause of cramps, dehydration and diarrhea. Cyclospora can be present in all kind of berries strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries.

Include pumpkin in your diet to lose weight

So the only day you can think of a pumpkin is Halloween, is it? Well, this vegetable has more uses than just scaring people away. If you are on a diet, pumpkin is one of the most beneficial vegetables that you can gorge on.

To utilize pumpkin as a weight loss food, you will need to substitute it for a food in your diet that is higher in calories. Take for instance, if you are having a high-protein salad for dinner as a part of your weight loss regime, you can replace it with a healthy pumpkin soup. Not only is this vegetable low in calories but it is also high on fibre.

Since it is high on fibre, it helps in keeping appetite in check by slowing down overall digestion. The disease fighting nutrients in pumpkin like vitamins, potassium and magnesium help in improving your immunity too. Isn't it a superfood? Wondering how to cook it make it a delight for the taste buds? There are a lot of different things that one can do with a pumpkin. Though the traditional pie is not the one which you would want to binge on if you are planning to lose weight, there are a lot of other dish that will help

you achieve your goal. Here are a few recipes made out of pumpkin that will help you in losing weight:

The pumpkin wonder soup-

Roast some cumin seeds and then crush them. Take a spoon of olive oil and saute three pieces of garlic in it. Take a cup of pumpkin puree and add it to the sauteed garlic. Add a pinch of freshly grated ginger to it and add half a cup of water to the mixture. Add salt and let it boil for a while. Add a pinch of black pepper and savour the delicious soup.

The simple Indian pumpkin broth

Heat a small spoon of oil and put medium-sized pumpkin pieces to it. Fry a little and add a teaspoon of ginger and cumin paste and salt to it. After frying the spices for a while, add water to it. Keep stirring it the pumpkin pieces become soft enough. Have this broth twice a day with chapatis.

Your favourite cookie speaks volumes about you

From oatmeal raisin to oreo, there are numerous cookies for everyone and each type reflects your personality.

Here's what your favourite cookie says about you, reports *huffingtonpost.com*:

Oatmeal raisin: You are traditional and even a bit old-fashioned. You are not overly adventurous, and like to cozy up with a book in front of the fire for a good time.

Biscotti: You are a little tough, or at least you seem that way to people who don't know you well. If they took the time to get to know you, they'd see that you are a big softy when you want to be.

Macaron: You are chic and sophisticated and you kind of know it. You look good in everything, no matter the occasion.

Oreo: You are playful and fun and can hang out with anyone.

Peanut butter: You are very intelligent, but also very disarming. You work well under pressure and handle crises with patience and composure.

Rainbow cookie: You are just misunderstood because you are just trying to have a little fun.

Chocolate chip: You are as close to perfection as someone can get. You are loved by everyone because you are classic.

5 foods we think are totally healthy. Are they?

You may have already made the switch from white bread to brown bread in a conscious bid to eat healthy and save your diet. But have you thought the brown bread you pick up every time from your local general store could well just be a brown colour bread?

Blame our new found consciousness for healthy eating that has led FMCG companies to up the ante by inundating the market with a host of high nutrition foods and then suavely marketing them as essential lifestyle products. From heart-healthy cooking oil, crunchy granola bars, fruit-flavoured yoghurt, to dry fruit-sprinkled muesli, we have begun hoarding everything that screams 'low calorie' in a last ditch effort to save our health.

Despite the number of hours at the gym we wonder where we are going wrong. Well, the reason behind this is foods we think are healthy, but are actually not. Delhi-based wellness expert Dr Shikha Sharma helps us identify such foods and their possible substitutes.

Healthy food trap: Brown bread

After it slowly sunk in that white bread is bad for health as it is made of all purpose flour and can lead to obesity, high cholesterol and diabetes, we made a reluctant transition to brown bread. Now, it turns out the brown bread locally available is no more than regular white bread coloured brown by using chemicals. By having brown coloured bread regularly for breakfast you are doing your body no good, worse still if you are exercising as well.

Break free with: Multi-grain bread or porridge (dalia)

Dr Sharma advises you rather get used to the more coarse multi-grain bread which may not be the most appetising in the first place, and may not make for the perfect toast with your egg or greens. Better still, if you can have a bowl of dalia or porridge everyday by stirring in a few vegetables of your choice. It is wholesome breakfast food.



Healthy food trap: Breakfast cereals

You have been stocking all sorts of breakfast cereals for a while since you discovered parathas are lousy for breakfast. But reconsider a moment. Not all breakfast cereals on the market are low-calorie, or the least bit healthy. When buying breakfast cereals be extremely picky about the ingredients of your pack; check for the sugar content, artificial colouring, salt, fibre and fat content. It is always advisable to steer clear of the sugar-frosted, chocolate-coated varieties as you don't want your first meal to do anything but pump sugar into your body.

Break free with: Oatmeal or wheat flakes

A bowl of oats in the morning is good for those suffering high cholesterol and diabetes, provided you don't add extra sugar to it. The high fibre content in oats balances the blood sugar, and relieves people prone to depression. You can even alternate it with wheat porridge which is a nice change from run-of-the-mill breakfast cereals.



Healthy food trap: Flavoured yoghurt/milk

Your local dairy shop will first produce a strawberry-flavoured yoghurt cup when you ask for yoghurt. Such is the hoopla surrounding every food that's flavoured. Its novel and apparently healthy. But it is only preposterous to think that they contain real fruit pulp and probably as good as plain yoghurt. All your strawberry, blueberry and mango flavoured yoghurts are loaded with sugar and chemicals to get the desired colour and sweetness, for real fruit pulp can never be that sweet. The same goes with flavoured milk.

Break free with: Plain yoghurt or fruits

Plain yoghurt preferably set at home is the ideal and the only way you should have yoghurt if you are truly concerned about healthy living. Fruits are another healthy addition to your diet provided you do not squeeze the pulp out every time.



Healthy food trap: White rice

Devoid of nutrition, white rice is nothing but a refined grain that has been stripped of its vitamins, minerals and fibre. Cooked white rice is all starch that easily converts to glucose in our body and shoots up our blood pressure, or gives a tummy bulge. White rice should especially be avoided by those who are carb sensitive as even a little bit of rice could make them feel full, and even fat. Also, white rice leaves you hungry too soon as your body takes very little time to break it down and digest it.

Break free with: Brown rice

If rice is a must for you, switch over to brown rice as it is healthier and less fattening. Brown rice is not as refined as white rice, and hence retains some of the nutrition. Besides, it takes longer to deliver the glucose into your bloodstream allowing your blood pressure to stay unaffected.



Healthy food trap: Granola bars

Crispy cereal bars are all over the market and are marketed as a healthy snack option, one that satisfies our sugar craving. The truth is granola bars are simply loaded with refined sugar. They of course do a lot of favouring and add muesli among other cereals to it, but ultimately it is a sugar bar packaged with cereals. You can have them once in a while to purge your sugar urge, but don't get addicted.

Break free with: Dry fruits or sprout salad

Sweet craving can be sated with dates, raisins, and dry apricot among other dry fruits. But if you wish to have something more filling, make a quick sprout salad by taking a bowlful of sprouts, squeezing in half a lemon, small shreds of green chilli and onion, and tossing it together.

Carbohydrates, dairy, sugar and oil are our established dietary villains; we could do better by tweaking our diet routines to include less of these and more of others.

Recipe: Banana chips

An all time snack that is loved by all

Preparation time:30 mins

Cooking time:10 mins

Serves:4-6

Recipe Ingredients:

- oil for deep frying - ½ tsp black pepper powder - Rock salt(sendha namak) according to taste - 5-6 raw bananas

Recipe Method:

- Peel the bananas and put them in plenty of salted iced water for 10 mins.
- Slice bananas with a chip slicer into water.
- Keep for 10 minutes, remove out water fully.
- Spread out on a kitchen cloth to take off moisture.
- Heat up oil in a wok till smoky.

Recipe: Salsa Soup

Preparing salsa soup involves a few simple steps

Ingredients:

2 firm, good quality juicy tomatoes, roughly chopped
2 cloves of garlic
2 hot green chili pepper
1/2 tsp cumin powder
2 tbsp olive oil
Red chilli powder
Cumin seed
Chopped onion
Corn/Black bean

Method:

First, you need to prepare salsa sauce. In a blender, add 2 firm, good quality juicy tomatoes (roughly chopped), 2 cloves of garlic, 2 hot green chili pepper, 1/2 tsp cumin powder. Process till it is chunky. Add some minced coriander leaves to the prepared mix. Use this speedy salsa for the soup.

Soup preparation:

- Heat 2 tsp olive oil in a deep, heavy pan.
- Add a pinch of red chilli powder and about 1/2 tsp of cumin seeds to the oil and let them briefly sizzle.
- When the cumin sizzles, add chopped onion (half of a medium sized onion)

and fry till soft. Now add your salsa.

- Cook the salsa for couple of minutes, stirring constantly so that it does not burn or stick.
- Add salt to taste.
- Bring this soup to a full boil and reduce heat to medium low.
- Squeeze in a few drops of lime and add corn/black bean.
- Simmer the salsa soup until the corn/bean is completely cooked.
- Bring this soup to a full boil and reduce heat to medium low.
- Turn off heat and stir in a bunch of chopped cilantro.

Recipe: Mutton stew

When raindrops are falling pitter-patter and you are in a mood for something really nourishing and hot, nothing can beat the aroma and taste of home-made mutton stew. And just in case, you think it takes hours to make this delicious stew, you couldn't be more wrong! It's a simple dish and even an amateur cook can make it.

Ingredients:

Fresh mutton: 1 kg.
Coarsely chopped onions: 4
Finely chopped garlic: 1 tablespoon
Badi elaichi: 2
Cinnamon stick: 2
Peppercorns: 8 - 10
Bay leaves: 2-3
Ghee: Two tablespoons
Salt: To taste

Method:

Wash the mutton and put it in a pressure cooker, along with all the ingredients (except ghee). Add one and a half glass of water, put the lid and pressure cook on slow flame for 12 minutes. Close the gas and open the

cooker when it cools down. Check if the mutton is done and the onions have turned into thick paste, clinging to the meat with gay abundance. If there is extra water left, let it evaporate on slow flame. Add desi ghee just before serving and enjoy the exotic aroma and amazing taste.

Stay healthy with these drinks

The thought of taking time for a healthy breakfast rarely breaks the stride of the jet-setting business traveler. Why not opt for a few healthy drinks that are loaded with nutritiotional benefits instead.

Balance Smoothie

Ingredients

70 g Banana, 250 ml Orange juice, 5 ea Baby spinach leaves, 1 tsp Cocoa powder, 125 ml Soya Milk, 2 tbs (20 g) Ground Almonds

Method

Blend the banana, baby spinach, almond and cocoa powder with the Soya milk. Then add the orange juice and blend until completely smooth. Serve chilled.

The nutritionist's comments

Banana is rich in the important electrolyte potassium. A diet rich in potassium seems to have a blood pressure lowering effect. Banana is also rich in the water soluble fiber pectin's and acts soothing on the gastro intestinal tract. Pectin's have a cholesterol lowering effect too.

Nutritional information

Energy 1520 kJ, Protein 12 g, Fat 11 g, Carbohydrates 53 g, Fibers 4 g

Health Smoothie

Ingredients

60 g Banana, 100 ml Fresh squeezed orange juice, 120 g Strawberries, 6 Mint leafs, 125 ml Soya milk, 2 tbs (20 g) Ground Almonds

Method

Blend the banana, strawberries and mint leafs with the soya millk. Add the orange juice and almond and blend until completely smooth. Serve chilled.

The nutritionist's comments

Apart from the great sweet taste of summer, strawberries offer support for optimal health due to the phytonutrient that gives the vibrant red color in the skin of the berry. Strawberries tend to give us protection against inflammation and heart disease.

Nutritional information

Energy 1290 kJ, Protein 11 g, Fat 12g, Carbohydrates 39 g, Fibers 5 g

Good energy juice

Ingredients

400 g Beetroot, 40 g Baby Spinach, 500 g Carrots, 100 g Apple red, 1 Tsp Chopped dill

Method

Cut the beetroot, baby spinach, apple and carrots and extract juice with a extractor. Add the chopped dill. Mix until juice is smooth. Add a table spoon of crushed ice and stir before serving.

The nutritionist's comments

This juice is rich in healthy vegetables and helps you balance the blood sugar and gives you great energy and helps enhance your mood. Spinach helps detoxify hormones and beetroot supports digestion, which is important for absorbing nutrients.

Nutritional information

Energy 2141 kJ, Protein 8,5, Fat 4, Carbohydrates 115, Fibers 23

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Empty promises to farmers in distress



Back breaking: Government's neglect of agriculture KK Mustafah
Both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have reneged on loan waiver promises.

When Messrs Chandrababu Naidu and K Chandrasekhar Rao, chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana respectively, promised to waive farm loans, there was no reason to distrust them.

The Election Commission clearly directed the politicians not to make any promises that could not be implemented. They thought all the farm loans would be written off once they formed their respective governments.

But that was not to be. After a lot of dithering, the Andhra Pradesh government has made a paltry allocation of ₹5,000 crore against its conservatively estimated requirement of ₹45,000 crore, while its Telangana counterpart released ₹4,250 crore — the first of four annual tranches — against ₹17,000 crore that are needed.

When the governments could not hide the fact that the loan waiver was beyond their means, they tried three things to wriggle out of their promise.

One, they found excuses for non-implementation, such as unfairly blaming the banks and the Reserve Bank of India for their non-cooperation. After all, banks are the institutions that accept deposits from the public to lend to the needy. They can't meet their obligations to depositors when borrowers default.

The RBI cannot ask the banks to reschedule the loans according to the State governments' wishes. The regulator has to follow its own norms. It can advise rescheduling only when the crop yield in a given area is less than 50 per cent of the normal.

In fact, it did approve rescheduling wherever these norms were fulfilled; in 100 out of 475 mandals of Telangana and 120 of 653 of Andhra Pradesh.

Two, the governments have made or are making all-out efforts to reduce the burden by eliminating the 'ineligible' farmers to the extent possible, using all sorts of loopholes in the rules.

Three, the burden is being sought to be postponed through several 'inventive' methods such as issuing bonds to the borrowers. The queerest proposal is asking the farmers themselves to first repay the loans with the assurance to reimburse them later. If the farmers could have paid, they would have paid, without waiting for government help.

No benefit to farmers

All this is not to say that the farm loans should never be waived nor that it is beyond the capacity of the governments to do so. It is only to assert that the schemes are not well thought out and bring little benefit to the farming community.

There is no effective plan, together with the present waiver, for the development of agriculture in these States, bringing down the need for such waivers in future.

Also, the benefit is limited only to institutional borrowers. The Rangarajan Committee on financial inclusion has pointed out that only 27 per cent of

farm households are able to avail of institutional credit; therefore, 73 per cent of the farmers who do not get bank loans will be outside the scheme.

Similarly, the majority of small and marginal farmers who account for 84.93 per cent of all farm holdings (2010-11 official data) do not get bank credit, and therefore are outside the scheme. A World Bank report said that 87 per cent of marginal and 70 per cent of small farmers do not get bank loans.

The waiver promise has done more harm than good to the farmers as they could not avail fresh loans this kharif season.

Having learnt these lessons, the Centre should now have a fresh perspective on the rural credit scenario in India and should work out a comprehensive plan to give relief to farmers in distress in an effective manner.

If there's a will

In a recent study by this writer for the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, the American model of 'non-recourse' loans, suitably modified, was found suitable for India. Under this model, the farmers need not pay back the government in case of crop failure, because security for loan is limited to the crop alone.

Also, the farmer is not forced to repay the full amount when yield was low or market prices were not optimal. In a sense the loan is settled either through waiver or payment depending on the farmer's capability. The US government bears the insurance premium burden to a substantial extent.

The Indian government cannot afford to ignore agriculture. There is no way of getting food for 1.27 billion people other than producing it locally; and 48.9 per cent of employment accrues from agriculture. In other words, the government should be responsible to the farmer in the interest of protecting overall food and employment security. Piecemeal measures and populist gimmickry cannot work as substitutes for long-term policy.

China okays Argentine GMO corn

December 25:

China has approved imports of one of Argentina's genetically modified (GMO) varieties of corn, Syngenta's Agrisure Viptera, Argentina's agriculture ministry said. The Argentine government had been negotiating access to the Chinese market for the corn strain for several years. The South American country is the world's fourth-biggest exporter of corn. In its statement, the ministry also said China had cleared the import of Bayer CropScience's A5547-127 strain of soyabean, which has local regulatory approval for production in Argentina. Argentina is a leading global exporter of soyabeans and the top supplier of soyameal. Reuters

Kolhapur jaggery turns bitter on shortage of labour, sugarcane



Mumbai, December 25:

Navi Mumbai-based 65-year-old homemaker Swati Bhatt has been unhappy with the way she has been cooking *puran poli* (sweet flat bread) over the last one year. The reason: Kolhapuri jaggery, an essential ingredient in the dish, is in short-supply in the market.

Jaggery from other States, or for that matter palm jaggery, does not lend the original taste to the Maharashtrian delicacy.

This variety of jaggery is made in Kolhapur district of western Maharashtra, which is the sugar capital of the State. It is preferred by customers across the country because of the unique taste and aroma.

Just like Darjeeling tea, the jaggery has been conferred with Geographical Indication tag by the Geographical Indications Registry, which is covered under Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement.

But today the Rs. 300-crore jaggery-making market in Kolhapur is in trouble. Of the 1,250 jaggery making units only about 400 are operational. The units are facing problems due to chronic labour shortage and shortage of sugarcane. Since most of the units fall in the small and medium enterprises sector they lack the muscle to sustain their losses and continue operations.

A Kolhapur-based farmer and entrepreneur Pratap Chiplunkar who was running a jaggery making unit for the last two decades, closed his unit in 2011.

Chiplunkar told *BusinessLine* that in the current market conditions, sugar mills in the State are paying about Rs. 2,500 a tonne, while jaggery making units pay about Rs. 2,700-2,800. On the other hand, the farmers also have to bear the cost of sugarcane transportation, which works out to Rs. 400-500 a tonne. In effect, the farmer makes lesser money by selling his sugarcane to the units, he said.

Due to various employment guarantee schemes, labourers too are in short-supply. Even a small jaggery making unit requires at least 25 workers, who have to be employed on contract during the jaggery making season, which usually runs from October to February. “Many workers enter into multiple contracts, take advance money and simply disappear,” Chiplunkar said.

Jaggery making is a tedious business as it requires crushed sugarcane juice to be boiled to 1,000 degrees Celsius in large open pans. At times, chemicals are also added to give distinct colour. Workers need to continuously stir the juice, so that it congeals into a syrup and ultimately solidifies into jaggery.

As alternative and less labour-intensive jobs are available in the market, workers do not want to stand near the heat, fumes and grime in the units.

Bakshi Ram, Director of Coimbatore-based Sugarcane Breeding Institute, said that farmers are also reluctant to sell their produce to units which delay payments. Many units use old technologies for jaggery making which are not efficient. Along with automation if jaggery is made without using chemicals, then it could get a new life as a health food, he said.