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THE HINDU

TNAU imparts training in building biogas plants

Rural artisans imparted with know-how of constructing the units

In an attempt at ensuring sustainable rural development, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) is currently imparting a training programme on construction and maintenance of low cost biogas plants and the production of biogas to 10 local rural artisans at Thandalam village near Arakkonam.

The training programme has been sponsored by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Government of India.

Inaugurating the 10-day training programme organised jointly with Thandalam Yoga Shema Trust at Thandalam on Wednesday, S. Kamaraj, Professor and Head, Department of Bio-Energy, Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute, TNAU, Coimbatore, said that the artisans were being trained in the construction and maintenance of a cement concrete biogas plant which cost only Rs. 20,000 as against the conventional steel-domed biogas plant which cost Rs. 40,000.

The TNAU is giving importance not only to reduce the cost of construction of the plant, but is also introducing the multi-feed option of feeding the plant with kitchen waste and night soil in addition to the normal feed of cattle dung. The training programme also serves the purpose of demonstrating the construction of the cement concrete biogas plant. The trainees are paid a stipend of Rs. 400 per day per head.

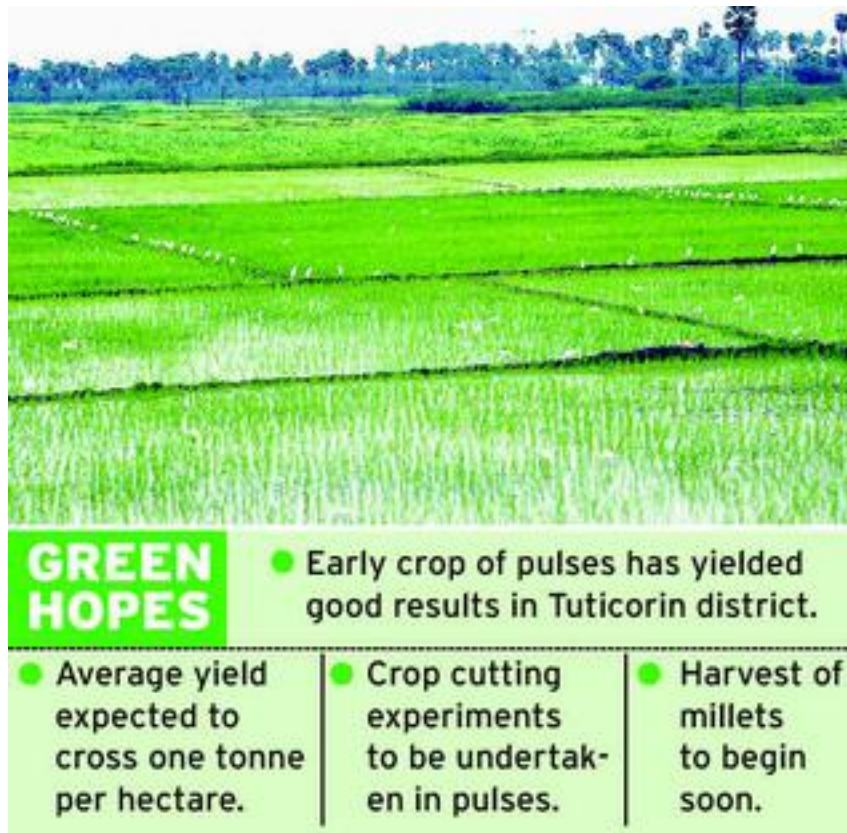
Dr. Kamaraj said that biogas plants help in controlling the emission of greenhouse gases and reducing the impact of global warming. The usage of chemical fertilizers is also controlled by encouraging the farmers to use the slurry obtained from the biogas plants after digestion as organic manure for their crop.

The MNRE also provided a subsidy of Rs. 9000 to encourage farmers to establish biogas plants, he said.

Senthamarai, Block Development Officer, Kaveripakkam panchayat union and Prabhakaran president of Thandalam village panchayat participated in the programme.

The training programme has been sponsored by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy

Harvest of pulses begins



Harvest of pulses, mostly black gram and green gram, has begun in some parts of the district. Early crops cultivated in parts of Kovilpatti block and Kayathar block have yielded the desired results for farmers.

Speaking about the prospects of pulses in rainfed blocks, officials of the Department of Agriculture told *The Hindu* here on Friday that average crop yield was expected to cross one tonne per hectare, thanks to good rainfall during the northeast monsoon this year. On the whole, pulses are expected to be covered in an area of 75,000 hectares. The harvest of millets, including maize, cholam and cumbu, is expected in another 20 days. Further, the officials said that crop cutting experiments on pulses had been taken up

initially in some parts of the district to estimate the yield. Ninety six crop cutting experiments would be executed by teams involving officials from departments of Agriculture, Revenue and Statistics. Such experiments were being carried out based on random numbers of fields allotted by the Department of Statistics, they said.

Paddy planting is also in full swing in the district since the storage in dams and system tanks is comfortable. As for horticulture crop, small onion has been harvested in 200 hectares in Vilathikulam. Overall, small onion has been cultivated in 1,098 hectares in the district. Vegetable crops, including bottlegourd, snakegourd and lady's finger, are being harvested in Ottapidaram and Pudukottai blocks.

Perdoor farmers have set their hopes on 'black pearl'

A black pepper vine growing on an arecanut tree in Perdoor, Udupi district. Perdoor village is all set to emerge as a centre for black pepper production in Udupi district, thanks to an initiative by the Department of Horticulture.

Some farmers in the village and its surrounding areas were already growing pepper. Black pepper is basically grown as an intercrop in arecanut, coconut and cashew plantations in the district.

According to the department, the land under black pepper cultivation had gone up from 267 hectares (ha) in 2008-09 to 383 ha in 2013-14 in the district. Total production of black pepper in the district is 148 metric tonnes, with a yield of 0.39 tonnes per hectare.

Pepper cluster

Since pepper is a climbing vine, farmers grow them under the arecanut, coconut and other trees. The Horticulture Department is developing a black pepper cluster in Perdoor under the Integrated Horticulture Development Programme.

Towards this end, the department has formed a Black Pepper Growers Association at Perdoor with 50 farmers. "The objective is to extend pepper cultivation to 32 acres in the village. We will rope in more farmers in the

association and give them training on scientific method of cultivation of pepper,” said K.A. Vijay Kumar, Deputy Director of Horticulture.

The farmers have responded positively to the department’s initiative. B.V. Poojary, president of the Black Pepper Growers Association, said he grew black pepper on 500 trees — 400 coconut and remaining arecanut — on his field.

“The price of pepper fluctuates like any other horticultural commodity. But if pepper is cultivated now, farmers can expect to get better price in the coming years. I will increase the area under pepper cultivation on my field,” he said.

Babu Amin, another farmer, said the formation of the association was a positive step. “I want to increase pepper cultivation on my field. I will join the association as I will be able to get more facilities and learn about latest techniques of pepper cultivation,” he said.

Shivaram Shetty, president of Perdoor Gram Panchayat, said there was a lot of scope for pepper cultivation in the area. There were 2,800 families in the gram panchayat, with “most of them” owning agricultural fields. “Taking up pepper cultivation will benefit them immensely,” he said.

“Encourage sale of shallots through regulated market”

Maize and cotton farmers in the district should be encouraged to sell their produce through regulated markets, said Darez Ahamed, District Collector, here on Friday. Reviewing the activities of the agriculture department with officials, Mr. Ahamed said that at present 60 tonnes of shallots were coming to the Chettikulam market.

Steps should be taken by the officials to bring in traders and farmers from other districts to improve it to 100 tonnes, he said.

For green growth

The State needs to tackle twin challenges of climate change and pressure on natural resources for economic growth. By M.A. Siraj

Karnataka is the eighth largest and fifth most industrialised State in the country. It contributed 5.46 per cent to the GDP of India (as in 2011-12).

During the 11th Five-Year Plan period (2007-2012), the State's Domestic Product grew by 7.2 per cent with services alone contributing 60 per cent to the State's economy followed by industry and agriculture.

Will the State be able to sustain its growth on the trajectory it has charted for itself in the years ahead? Increased pressure on natural resources and climate changes are forcing a rethink. Though the State with 61 million populace is not exactly on the verge of a precipice to warrant a doomsday scenario, it also cannot ignore the threats and postpone measures to tackle challenges faced on the environment front. How then to reconcile economic growth with environmental sustainability?

For the first time, an emerging think-tank has come out with a report titled *Green Growth Strategy for Karnataka*. The report is a collaborative project between Bangalore Climate Change Initiative-Karnataka (BCCI-K) and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), Seoul, South Korea. The report was produced by a host of researchers who worked under the guidance of former Minister B. K. Chandrashekhara. It was released by Chief Minister K. Siddaramaiah earlier this week.

The report identifies several key areas of growth that are exerting pressure on the environment in the State, namely agriculture, transport, water and energy. The State has to keep up with the demand for growth as well as the stress on resources in the wake of climate change which threatens to push up temperature by as much as 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius by 2030. It sets out a strategy for green growth in the face of the challenges.

Dreams may turn sour

Karnataka recorded an impressive 5.6 per cent growth in agriculture against a national average of 3.3 per cent during the 11th Five-Year Plan period. The performance was quite impressive. Yet not everything is hunky-dory on the front. Thirty seven per cent of irrigated land is supplied with underground water and most pumps in use are energy inefficient. Agriculture consumes about one-third of the total grid-supplied electricity in the State which has to be totally subsidised, leading to a Rs. 48 billion subsidy expenditure in the 2012-13 budget. The dream of poverty alleviation threatens to turn sour due to increased vulnerability to climate change. Droughts, floods and stagnant farm incomes may not enable the State to realize 4.5% growth in the agricultural sector as envisaged by the agriculture policy. Between 2006 and

2011, a total of 4.2 million hectares of crop was damaged due to natural calamities. In fact the most poverty-afflicted districts of the State are the ones that are most vulnerable to climate change.

Ninety of the 170 and odd taluks in the State are identified with depleting groundwater. Of these half are at critical level. The energy subsidy bill for agriculture is likely to increase with the projected decline in groundwater. The current budget has earmarked Rs. 6,100 crore toward subsidies on electricity for agricultural uses.

Karnataka is among the top producers of iron, steel and cement in the country. Industries consumed nine million tonnes of oil equivalent of energy (Toe) in 2010 or 57 per cent of the total. Energy costs can account for up to 40 per cent of manufacturing costs in large industries.

Power needs

The State's 61 million people live in over 10 million houses consuming 19 per cent of total electricity supplied with the demand growing at 10 per cent annually. People have low access to modern cooking fuels i.e., one out of three urban households and nine out of ten rural households do not have access to LPG as a primary cooking fuel. Overall, the commercial sector has 11 per cent share in the State's electricity demand, growing at 17 per cent annually. Bengaluru has about 100 million sq. ft of commercial floor space and electricity consumption is much above the approved threshold. At its peak the State suffers from 13 per cent deficiency of power.

Transport

People in urban areas of Karnataka log in 100 billion passenger-km of commuting annually, of which 50 per cent is met by buses and 30 per cent by two-wheelers. Bengaluru itself has over 40 per cent of the total number of vehicles in the State. The city is primarily designed for motorised travel, offering least walkability. Private vehicles in the city are increasing by 25,000 a month despite the city having the largest fleet of buses i.e., 6,000.

Forestry

Karnataka ranks fourth in India with regard to area under tree cover with 11 per cent area covered with forests and close to 70 per cent of forest cover classified as dense. It has the highest per capita forest cover (i.e., 0.059

hectare) among the six South Indian States. Decadal analysis shows a decline in the area under dense forests while the area under open forests is increasing, suggesting degradation of forests and fragmentation of animal habitat.

Environment

Almost 10,000 tonnes of solid waste is generated and 80 per cent of it is collected and sent to landfills on an average day in the State. Methane emission is of the order of 60 kilo ton. Besides, 1,300 million litres of domestic and commercial wastewater is generated per day. Out of this only 30-40 per cent gets treated. Untreated wastewater flows to the water bodies, polluting the lifelines of the State. Particulate matter concentration in Bengaluru is already above the National Ambient Air Quality standards. Sulphur-related gases and particulate matter from thermal power plants are likely to cause significant health problems for the people in the State in future. Per capita emission of Green House Gases (GHGs) is calculated at 1.3 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Challenges

The report 'Green Growth Strategy for Karnataka' suggests a roadmap for the years ahead when global warming is expected to cause several changes. The suggestions include:

1. The State's high wind resource potential urges setting up of wind parks and improved evacuation potential. The State can add 9000 MW of wind power by 2030.
2. The State should shift from fuel-based public transport to electric buses under the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP 2020). Going for electrification of 25,000 buses owned by the State road transport corporation will bring down particulate matter by 25 per cent.
3. In farming, adoption of solar-powered micro irrigation offers a significant green growth opportunity. The technology can result in fuel saving to the tune of 3.54 billion litres, provided that all the diesel pumps are replaced by solar pumps.

‘Grow intercroops for better profits’

Vinay Kumar Sorake, Urban Development Minister, said on Friday that farmers should cultivate intercroops such as pepper and cocoa to maximise their profits.

He was speaking after inaugurating the Black Pepper Growers Association to develop a black pepper cluster under the Integrated Horticulture Development Programme by Department of Horticulture, here.

Mr. Sorake said that when chief crops such as paddy yielded poor returns, intercroops such as pepper acted as a buffer and saved the farmers. Some time ago, rubber growers were affected by fluctuation in the prices of rubber. In Kerala, however, the government came to the rescue of rubber farmers by holding talks with tyre companies to purchase good quality rubber from the farmers. In addition, rubber was also used in the construction of roads.

When the price of coconut crashed a few years ago, farmers and people in the coastal districts of Kerala switched to tender coconut water from aerated beverages. This helped coconut growers. “Such progressive thinking, which helps the farmers, is also required in our State,” Mr. Sorake said.

There are 73 lakh farmers in the State. Sugarcane growers formed about five lakh among them, but their problems got highlighted all the time to the detriment of growers of other crops, the Minister said. This was because the sugarcane growers were well organised.

“It is essential for other farmers to become organised and put forth their demands to the government,” Mr. Sorake said.

The children of the cherry tree farm

We stare at the man nonplussed. Farmer Jenks leans on the stile in a weathered brown coat and knee-high wellingtons crusty with clay. He’s framed against cows munching on the green, green grass of home, a blue summer sky with billowing white clouds and the happy sounds of children tucking into lunch spread on a red-checked cloth under a cherry tree laden with fruit. “The next bus will be a while coming, dearies,” he says, in his broad Hampshire accent. “Come in for a spot of tea.”

My friend and I are stranded on a winding country road a few miles south of Winchester in southern England, and starving. We had hopped off the bus

from Southampton to Winchester, the Anglo-Saxon capital under King Alfred the Great and home to the magnificent cathedral where Hitler hoped to be crowned king, a few stops too early and now stand outside Cherry Tree Farm. The children, their cheeks berry-stained, wave us in. At the end of a pebbled drive is a charming farmhouse — red-brick walls, lace-curtained windows and a gabled roof with roses climbing all over. It's quintessential Enid Blyton.

Mrs. Jenks bustles around the warm kitchen and lights the kettle over the fire. The aroma of Earl Grey rises to settle on the Cornish pasties lined up on a tray. Tea cakes crowd the tiered stand and a pitcher of cold milk — fresh from the cows in the field, no doubt— threatens to spill over. Warm bread from the oven, slathered with butter appears in several rounds. And when it's time to leave, she presses two brown paper bags into our hands. Inside are apples, crumpets, a bottle of hand-pressed lemonade, and a whole lot of childhood memories.

Nationwide hydrology data soon

The World Bank-aided project is estimated to cost Rs. 3,000 crore

With flood damage in the country pegged in the range of Rs. 6,000 crore a year, according to official estimates, India is poised to adopt a World Bank-funded hydrology project. Such a project has already made a difference in 13 States which opted for it in the earlier two phases.

Under the proposed expansion of the project, States will be able to generate and digitise their own data without waiting for central help. The project for the whole country is estimated to cost Rs. 3,000 crore.

The project, the first phase of which began some 20 years back, has digitised real time data in 13 States, according to Anju Gaur, senior water specialist, World Bank. Some of the main reasons for floods are poor reservoir management systems as was witnessed some years ago in Western Maharashtra. Farmers sometimes face problems as they plant crops without knowing if there is assured water from reservoirs.

There is no reliable hydrological data and some of the figures are as old as 1993. The project, in partnership with the Union Water Resources Ministry and other agencies, was aimed at developing monitoring systems in the States. The use of such data on water storage and availability is unlimited,

Ms. Gaur pointed out and can be used in decision support system (DSS). The project has completed two phases and established the basis for a Hydrological Information System (HIS) for reliable records.

Data collection was near primitive till as recent as 2009 when in Karnataka, gauge readers from drought-affected areas would send in figures on post cards. Karnataka first asked for mobile phones so that data could be sent speedily and later moved to setting up systems for real-time data since gauge readers often did not venture into the field.

The major handicap was the unwillingness to share data across States citing confidentiality issues. There is a culture of not sharing data and the project resulted in a major breakthrough by the government which introduced a data policy, she said.

The Bhakra Beas Management Board and the Krishna Bhima Basin in Maharashtra are two examples where real time water data has helped to take many decisions and to prevent floods. Maharashtra is one of the best managed States in terms of water, Ms. Gaur said and one of the earliest to go in for the hydro meteorological system.

The project gives data which can help release of water from reservoirs and prevent untimely floods. The operating costs have gone down by half due to advance knowledge of water availability, rainfall and even water quality, Ms. Gaur said.

Though the initial investment is high, over the years the States have found that it is worthwhile. "The project made information travel faster than flood waters," remarked Ms. Gaur. The data also uses satellite to help figure the amount of snow melt, and make projections on the flows into the reservoir. This is particularly useful in the case of the Bhakra basin.

Apart from flood prevention, the data and real time monitoring of water flows also helps in analysing and testing proposed projects. She said a tunnel project to divert water in Pune was dropped as a result.

As part of the project, water quality stations have been set up in the Ganga river at 10 locations from Hrishikesh to Kolkata. The Rs. 550-crore project in two phases which is complete, is a loan to the government of India and aimed at a complete standardised centralised water data system.

Rain likely in Odisha; farmers warned to protect crop

With the low pressure area (LOPAR) formed over Bay of Bengal likely to be intensified into a depression which may cause widespread rain in Odisha, the State government on Friday alerted farmers to keep their harvested crop in safe places.

Besides, the collectors were advised to disseminate the information so that farmers could take necessary steps to protect their crops which were yet to be harvested.

“As per information received from India Meteorological Department, a LOPAR has been formed over South Bay of Bengal near South Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka coast, which is likely to intensify into a depression and move towards North Andhra Pradesh and South Odisha coast on December 29 (Monday),” State’s Special Relief Commissioner said here on Friday.

“Under its influence, light to moderate rainfall may occur on Monday in South Odisha and moderate to isolated heavy rainfall in Odisha especially in coastal and South Odisha from December 30 (Tuesday) to January 1 (Thursday). Rainfall may increase in North Odisha and coastal Odisha from December 31 (Wednesday),” the SRC elaborated.

“Paddy and other crops already cut or harvested but lying open or stacked in the field may be immediately shifted to the threshing ground or to any high land which is unlikely to be inundated in the event of rain,” said the warning issued by SRC.

Pachauri for public debate on Western Ghat reports

An informed, transparent debate involving the public should be imperative in the implementation of either the Madhav Gadgil committee report or the Kasturirangan committee report on the Western Ghats, said R.K. Pachauri, Nobel laureate and Chairperson of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, here on Friday.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of the 7th International Congress of Environmental Research, at R.V. College of Engineering here, Mr. Pachauri said it was left entirely to the public and those affected to decide on the implementation of the report.

There has been opposition from those staying along the Western Ghats for both the Gadgil report and the Kasturirangan report that had suggested identification of ‘eco-sensitive areas’ along the forests where there would be restrictions on certain development and industrial activities.

“We cannot lose the biodiversity present, because if we lose it, we will not get it back. We are a democracy, and it is up to the people to decide its implementation. We have to look at the entirety of the issue,” he said.

However, Prashant Bhushan, senior Supreme Court advocate, was equivocal in his support for the Gadgil report (which suggests 64 per cent area in the Western Ghats to be protected under stringent terms) instead of the Kasturirangan report (which recommends keeping 37 per cent of the Western Ghats area out of bounds for polluting industries only).

“Just as the opposition to environmental regulations, the protests against the Gadgil report have been instigated politically ... the judiciary should step in,” he said.

He believed the dilution of Western Ghats protection and the proposed amendments to the environmental laws undo the work of environmentalists and people’s movements.

More than 500 participants from 25 countries are expected to attend the three-day conference that would discuss the implications of climate change.

‘Anti-conversion law unconstitutional’

An anti-conversion law is unconstitutional as it goes against the fundamental right of the citizen to choose or change his/her religion, said senior Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan here on Friday.

Mr. Bhushan told reporters on the sidelines of a conference that the BJP and its affiliates were attempting to bring about the law by “forcibly” converting citizens. “It is illegal to convert under force or pressure. And what the VHP and the Bajrang Dal are doing across the country is just that,” he said.

The great forgetting



The sector has bounced back, with an average growth rate of 4 per cent over the last decade.

The Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) of agricultural households, released last week by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), is the second one ever to be done. The SAS of 2003 was necessitated by the agrarian crisis of the time. Farmer suicides had reached a peak, and the reference year for the survey, 2002-2003, had seen severe drought. The agricultural sector was in crisis, with growth rates slowing to 1 per cent, the terms of trade going against it, incomes dropping drastically and wages almost stagnating.

This time, the situation is different. The reference period, 2012-13, was a year with record foodgrain production and a normal monsoon. The sector has bounced back, with an average growth rate of 4 per cent over the last decade. The terms of trade have moved in its favour, credit flow to the sector has increased four-fold, and public investment in agriculture, which had been declining since the 1980s, has risen dramatically. Even agricultural

workers are doing better, with wages rising by 6 per cent per annum in real terms, the highest in the last decade.

Yet a comparison of findings from the two surveys does not give the impression of a substantial change in the lives of farmers. While the percentage of farmer households has come down marginally in rural areas, the proportion of small and marginal farmers (defined as those with less than two hectares of land) has gone up marginally, from 84 per cent in 2002-03 to 87 per cent in 2012-13. The percentage of farmers who are indebted has increased from 48.6 per cent to 51.9 per cent. Despite the flow of credit to rural areas, the proportion of farmers who depend on non-institutional sources has only gone down from 42.3 per cent to 40.2 per cent. The share of local moneylenders in outstanding loans has remained unchanged at 26 per cent.

Meanwhile, the percentage of area irrigated has increased from 48 per cent in 2002-03 to only 50 per cent in 2012-13. This despite the fact that most public investment in agriculture went into irrigation infrastructure. The percentage of farmers who were aware of minimum support prices (MSPs) went down from 70 per cent to 68 per cent, even though MSP operations have nearly doubled in the last decade. Almost 60 per cent of farmers in 2002-03 had no access to modern technology through government extension services. A decade later, that figure remains the same. Only 4 per cent of farmers insured their crops in 2002-03; this has increased to a mere 4.8 per cent in 2012-13.

So, a cursory reading of the report would suggest a period of stagnation in the situation of Indian farmers. How does that square with the fact that this decade has also been the golden period of Indian agriculture? One explanation could be that the growth of the agricultural sector was not so much the result of government intervention as of the entrepreneurial ability of farmers. That is a strong indictment of successive governments that have continued to neglect the sector. But the fact that most government interventions have failed to reach farmers, despite increased financial outflow, is evidence of the government's failure to understand the nature of farming in this country, or the situation of farmers. The revival of agricultural growth rates after 2004-05 also indicates the resilience of the farming community to various shocks, both natural and manmade. But this is not surprising, given that, for the majority of small and marginal farmers, agriculture is the only livelihood. Even though the report suggests a growing diversification of their income portfolio, agriculture still accounts for roughly half of their total income. The vulnerability of farmer households becomes apparent in the fact that, in most cases, the income from agriculture

is barely enough to keep the household above the poverty line. For most small and marginal farmers, even those with other sources of income, consumption expenditure exceeds income from all activities. The growth of agricultural productivity in the last decade appears to be driven by the private initiative of small and marginal farmers rather than the efforts of the government. This is partly evident in the fact that the share of public investment in Indian agriculture has come down sharply in the last decade. Much of the resilience also comes from the farmers' ability to adapt to new technology such as Bt cotton. But what does this mean for the growth of the agricultural sector or the lives of farmers in future? While it is too early to say that this situation may not be sustainable, some signs of stress are already visible. The issue of farmers suicides has reared its head again. International commodity prices are falling and some of this is transmitted to the domestic economy, with unsold agricultural produce leading to further stress. Input costs have continued to rise, which means an onslaught on the basic livelihood of farmers, who already have to deal with government apathy. Last, the degradation of natural resources, in the absence of government support and extension services, has also meant that climatic factors will continue to remain important determinants of agricultural productivity

Next: Ordinance to change land Act

The government is seriously considering an ordinance to effect the changes.

Under Opposition fire for promulgating three ordinances less than 24 hours after both houses of Parliament were prorogued, the Centre is planning to take the ordinance route once more to effect crucial changes to the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.

Sources in the Prime Minister's Office told The Indian Express that with Assembly elections in Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir over, the government is seriously considering an ordinance to effect the changes.

Failing to get most of its investor-friendly and reform-related legislation passed in both houses of Parliament due to repeated disruptions — these were mostly over the controversial statements of senior RSS and BJP functionaries, including a minister — the government has turned to ordinances to signal that it means business.

A senior government functionary said “necessary directions” have been issued to the Rural Development Ministry to get the draft ordinance vetted by the Law Ministry so that Cabinet approval can be taken early next week.

“I think the draft ordinance will be taken to the next Cabinet meeting for clearance,” the source said. Asked if the government would be able to get the amendments cleared in Parliament, the government functionary said, if required, a joint session of both houses will be convened to push it through.

The reason for bringing in an ordinance is Section 105 of the Act which provides for excluding 13 central legislation, including Land Acquisition (Mines) Act 1885, Atomic Energy Act, 1962, Railway Act 1989, National Highways Act 1956 and Metro Railways (Construction of Works) Act, 1978 from its purview.

“The Act came into force on January 1, 2014 but unless an ordinance is issued before January 1, 2015, these 13 legislation will also come under the purview of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, something that the government can ill-afford. That is why we are trying to hurry up,” the official said.

It is learnt that the proposed ordinance could also take large infrastructure and PPP projects out of the purview of the clause in the Act pertaining to social impact assessment (SIA), which is mandatory and has to be completed within six months.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and some other senior ministers of the view that this clause causes huge delays in land acquisition.

However, according to sources, there is still no unanimity on amendments pertaining to doing away with the consent clause completely or keeping it to minimal. Currently, prior consent is required from 70 per cent of the affected families if land is being acquired for PPP projects and from 80 per cent in case of private companies.

Earlier too, the government toyed with the idea of promulgating an ordinance to amend the Act but the move was never carried to its logical conclusion because there was concern that it could have a negative impact on BJP fortunes in the then poll-bound states of Maharashtra and Haryana.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Power salads for a healthy diet

Foods with really healthy properties are often relegated to being mere side dishes and find themselves out of the mainstream. Here are a few of them which you can make a part of your diet and get back all those useful nutrients and antioxidants that help you avoid illnesses and help keep you fit.

Tomatoes: The veggie packs a lot of antioxidants that help in decreasing the risk of arterial aging, heart disease, stroke, memory loss, impotence and wrinkling of the skin

Broccoli: High in vitamin C and dietary fiber, it also contains multiple nutrients with potent anti-cancer properties, such as diindolylmethane and small amounts of selenium.

Fish: Packed with protein, vitamins, and nutrients that can lower blood pressure and help reduce the risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Black beans: Low in fat and high in protein and fiber, they have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which combat cardiovascular disease.

Leafy greens: Spinach, cabbage and arugula are rich sources of vitamin B and are packed with nutrition. One serving of leafy greens is loaded with fiber, calcium, and virtually your entire day's recommended dosage of beta carotene, a nutrient vital for immunessystem health.

6 Steps to a healthier breakfast

How many of us start the day with an inadequate breakfast to beat the day's calorie counts or simply because we're late for work? A common scene in many Indian households, skimping on breakfast only makes us irritable, tired and weak.

Your concentration level is also affected due to improper fueling of the brain, and culminates into lack of energy or enthusiasm. The only way to counteract such affects is by following a healthy breakfast routine. Follow these simple guidelines to make your breakfast healthier and more nutritious...

Maintain a routine time for breakfast: This is vital to prevent the onset of the "starvation mode". This implies that if you skip your morning breakfast, your body metabolism slows down eventually making you feel weak and starved. Apart from this, due to the 8-9 hours of overnight gap, there is an instant need of nutrition and healthy foods to fuel your body. Thus, try to put something inside your belly within one hour of getting up in the morning. If you can't eat a full meal as soon as you get up, try indulging in a handful of nuts or some pieces of fruits.

Avoid sugary cereals: It is not sufficient to eat a filling breakfast. Your morning meal should be healthy as well, loaded with all the essential nutrients. Most of us feel that incorporating lots of cereals is the best way to achieve this. Truly, cereals do provide all required minerals and vitamins but some of them are really high in calories. In fact, you will be surprised to find the calorie level of some of the most widely marketed cereal brands currently available. If you do want to start your day with cereals, choose healthier varieties like whole bran instead of the sugary ones.

Include daily intake of calcium: It is imperative to include daily recommended amounts of calcium for children and adults in breakfast. Milk and milk products are the best ways to achieve this. Regular intake of calcium in breakfasts will help in proper development of bones and prevent conditions like osteoporosis.

Don't skip your Omega 3s: This can be achieved through adequate intake of eggs, salmon or flax seeds. The benefits of omega-3 fatty acids for maintaining health and for proper physical development are many. From controlling diabetes to preventing heart ailments and colon cancer; this compound is a must-have for people of all age groups and sexes.

Skip the caffeine beverages: According to recent researches, caffeinated products along with low-sugar cereal cause the elevation of blood sugar levels for hours. Apart from this, excessive coffee intake can cause addiction and lead to health hazards like insomnia, headaches, dehydration and heartburn. Thus, it is advisable to steer clear of these agents as much as possible; particularly during the mornings.

Include a healthy serving of fruits and vegetables: Regarded as the "powerhouse" of antioxidants and other essential nutrients, a generous serving of fruits and vegetables is a must during breakfasts. This can be used either in their pure forms as salads or along with other items like spinach with eggs or carrot juice.

Recipe: Yummy Banana Muffins

Muffins are loved by children and adults alike. Eat them for breakfast with coffee or have them as an evening snack. What's more, you can never go wrong with baking something as easy as muffins!

Today we bring to you a simple Banana Muffins recipe that combines the goodness of a fluffy cup cake and the sweet flavours of banana. High on taste and light on tummy, they make for perfect home nibbles as well as great treats when you have guests over.

Ingredients

250 grams all purpose flour
75 grams butter
2 ripe bananas (mashed)
2 eggs
1 cup milk
1 tsp vanilla essence
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp cinnamon powder
1 tbsp honey
1 cup castor sugar
A pinch of salt

Method

1. Preheat oven at 190 degrees for 5 minutes and melt butter in a pan.
2. In a bowl, sift the flour, baking powder, cinnamon powder and salt, all together.
3. In another bowl, beat the eggs until fluffy. Add to it the vanilla essence, milk, honey, the melted butter and the mashed bananas.
4. Add this mixture slowly to the bowl that has flour, stirring constantly to get a thick and lumpy batter.
5. Grease the muffin moulds with butter/oil and fill them with the batter.
6. Bake them at 190 degrees for at least 25 minutes and allow a stand-by

time of 10 minutes later.

7. Serve while they're warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream by the side.

French Fries recipes: Baked Cajun, Truffle scented

Have you ever wondered how a cheese burger would look on a plate without the mandatory French fries bundled up right adjacent to it?

The burger may have been priority on the menu but the case of the missing fries surely leaves us feeling a little incomplete after the meal. Side dish it may be called but only after dipping the crisp slender fried potatoes in sauce and crunching it in our mouths do we proceed with the main dish on the plate. Isn't it?

French fries have evolved over the years in many forms and have become an inseparable a dish for diners at restaurants.

Executive Chef Girish T.V, Courtyard Marriott says, "French fries provide a sense of completeness and determines the level of satisfaction of the entire meal. It is a given fact that people enjoy and savour a burger more if the fries are perfect as an accompaniment. Otherwise, the taste of the main dish becomes too dry and the meal satisfaction below average", adds Girish.

You too can try slicing and frying the potatoes in different ways and experiment with your own cooking skills.

We share some simple and easy-to-make French fries recipes:

Recipe: Baked Cajun French Fries

Ingredients

Potatoes 3 Nos

Olive oil 80 ml

Paprika 20 gm

Ground cumin 5 gm

Dried oregano 3 gm

Dried thyme 3 gm

Sea salt to taste

Method

-Wash and cut the potatoes length wise in to ¼ inch batons

-Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

-In a mixing bowl toss the potatoes with olive oil to coat.

-Mix the spices and salt together and toss with the potatoes to coat

-Arrange the potatoes in a single layer on an oiled baking sheet

-Bake for 20 minutes. Flip the potatoes, bake for another 12-15 minutes.

-The fries should be golden brown, Serve immediately.

Recipe: Truffle scented home fries with parmesan cheese

Ingredients

Potatoes 500 gm

Truffle oil 5 ml

Parmesan cheese 100 gram

Sea salt to taste

Cracked black pepper to taste

Oil to fry

Method

-Wash the whole potatoes thoroughly and cut it in to wedges with the skin on

-Boil the potatoes until half done and refresh.

-Deep fry the potatoes wedges in medium hot oil until crisp and golden brown.

-Remove from the oil and toss it with sea salt, grated parmesan and truffle oil.

-Serve hot

(Contributed by Executive Chef Girish T.V., Courtyard Marriott, Chennai)

Recipe: Cheese Fries

Ingredients:

Regular frozen fries

White sauce

Cheddar cheese

Salt/Pepper

Method:

-Place the fries on a cookie sheet. Bake the fries in an oven

-Bring the white sauce on a medium flame and sprinkle the cheese and stir till it forms a creamy sauce.

-Once the fries are done, season them and pour the sauce over the fries while serving.

-Serve quick and hot

Recipe: Prawn and chicken dumplings

You may know them better as momos, but the original dimsum is a clever little package of fineness, flavour and technique

They may have different names in different parts of the world — momos in Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal and dimsums from the Cantonese regions of China, but the two are essentially the same — spiced meat mince encased in a thin flour wrapping, steamed, boiled or fried for a juicy, hot, fragrant dumpling.

These dumplings are molded and wrapped with delicate folds in different shapes to distinguish their stuffings. As intricate as they look, they are easier to make and even healthier to eat. Executive chef Liang Xiaq Qing and Noodle and dimsum chef Wang Peng from the Pan Asian restaurant at ITC Maratha give you step by step directions on making the perfect, succulent dimsum.

Vegetable dumplings

The same filling can be used to make steamed, deep fried, boiled and pan fried dumplings

Chinese cabbage or cabbage- 250gm

Pak Choi- 150gm

Fresh Mushrooms 50gm

Carrot- 50gm

Black mushrooms (boiled)- 50gm

Chopped ginger- 25gm

Chopped onion- 50gm

Chopped spring onion- 30gm

White pepper- 1tsp

Oyster sauce- 1tbsp

Sesame oil- 1tbsp

Salt- 1/2tsp

Cooking wine- 1tsp

Vegetable oil- 1cup

Method

-Wash the vegetables and boil for about two minutes and drain the water.

-Chop the vegetables into small pieces and squeeze them dry.

-Pour some oil in the wok and fry the chopped onions and spring onions till they turn translucent.

-Then mix the fried spring onion, onion and chopped ginger with the chopped vegetables and add the seasoning. Keep the mixture in the fridge for 10 mins.

Cooking tips

-Vegetables should be cut into very fine pieces and dried thoroughly

-For every half a kilo of meat, add 50 grams of water while making mince.

Chicken dumplings

Boiled, chicken with mushroom dumplings

Minced chicken- 250gm

Minced carrot- 25gm

Chopped spring onion- 25gm

Chopped ginger- 25gm

Soya sauce- 1tsp

Oyster sauce- 1tsp

White pepper- 1tsp

Salt- 1/2tsp

Egg- 50gm

Sesame oil- 1tsp

Cooking oil- 1cup

Cooking wine- 1tbsp

Black vinegar- 1/2cup

Method

-Mix chicken meat with ingredients in a bowl and stir well. Let it rest for 10 mins

Prawn dumplings

Same filling can be used to make Prawn Shao Mai, steamed dumplings and deep fried prawn wantons

Fresh prawns (deshelled)- 350gm

Chopped mushrooms (boiled)- 50gm

Chopped ginger- 25 gm

Chopped spring onion- 25gm

Sugar- 1 tsp

Sesame oil- 1 tsp

Corn starch- 1 tbsp

Soda- 1 tsp

Egg- 50gm

White pepper- 1 tsp

Salt- 1 tsp

Cooking wine- 1 tsp

Cooking oil- 1 tbsp

Method

-Marinate the prawns in soda, half a tsp salt and a cup of cold water for 30 mins.

-Wash the prawns thoroughly and dry them before chopping them into small pieces.

-Add the seasoning and ingredients to the prawns and mix well.

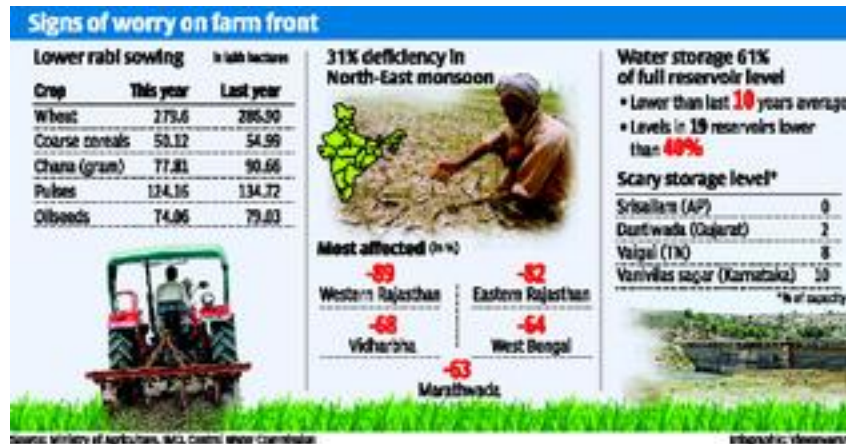
-Let it rest in the fridge for 20 mins.

Cooking tips

While marinating the prawns with soda makes them crisp, you have to wash them with cold water a few times to drain out the soda. Cooling the prawn filling for 20 mins will make it easy to put the filling in to the dumpling sheet.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Rabi sowing trails, may hit rural economy



Chennai, December 26:

Rural economy is in for some trouble. Prices for crops such as cotton, maize and oilseeds are hovering near minimum support levels. Chances for rise in prices of agricultural commodities are bleak in view of supply glut globally. To top it all, farmers are likely to harvest less this season to June with rabi sowing being reported lower as on Friday.

The rural economy depends heavily on agricultural income. Lower farm income will affect sales of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), gold jewellery and vehicles. In turn, industrial production is likely to come under pressure. Sales of FMCG goods have already taken a hit in the October quarter. It affected industrial production, which was 4.2 per cent lower in October compared with the year-ago period.

Sowing operations in almost all the crops barring rice are drawing to a close and there is also a possibility of agricultural production being lower this season. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, coverage of all crops under rabi this season is about five per cent lower at 530.22 lakh hectares (lh). Notably, the pace of sowing has begun to slow with the overall coverage dropping to around 19 lh in the past week from 40 lh the previous week. Deficient rains, dense fog, particularly in the North, and poor soil moisture have led to a drop in sowing operations. With fog conditions expected to continue in the coming week, coverage of crops could be further affected. Rain and snowfall are expected to add to growers' woes. While the

South-West monsoon that lashes the country during June-September was 12 per cent deficient this year, the North-East monsoon, which brings rain during October-December, is so far 31 per cent deficient. Last week, the deficiency level touched 70 per cent across the country.

Some of the key states for rabi crops such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana and West Bengal have received 50 per cent lower than normal rainfall. The end result could be that crops such as wheat, rapeseed and rice, to some extent, could be affected.

Deficient rainfall this year has resulted in storage level in the 85 major reservoirs of the country dropping to lower than the last 10 years' average.

According to the Central Water Commission, the storage was 61 per cent of the full reservoir level or 95.081 billion cubic metres. The level is likely to have dropped further in view of poor rains last week. Storage level in Andhra Pradesh is 64 per cent below normal, while it is 48 per cent below normal in West Bengal.

Among rabi crops, wheat acreage is down by three per cent, chana (gram) sowing is down by nearly 15 per cent, pulses coverage by eight per cent and oilseeds planting by six per cent.

In the kharif season, foodgrain production is estimated to have dropped by about 10 million tonnes (mt) at 120.27 mt. Rice output has been projected lower by three mt at 88.02 mt and that of maize has been pegged at 16.03 mt (17.68 mt). Farmers growing pulses could be an exception, getting better returns. But they, too, could be constrained by lower production and yield. Going by the data on the Consumer Affairs Department website, prices of tur (Rs. 83 a kg this year versus Rs. 76 a year ago), urad (Rs.83 vs Rs. 65), moong (Rs. 98 vs Rs. 78) and masur (Rs. 84 vs Rs. 65) are all up over the last 12 months.

According to the office of the Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the pulses index increased five per cent between January and November in the Wholesale Price Index.

Consumers may have to pay more for pulses, but a global glut in other crops such as wheat, maize and oilseeds could prevent any alarming rise in prices of agricultural commodities.

Small tea growers seek subsidies for pruning

Coonoor, December 26:

Small tea growers have urged Commerce Ministry and Tea Board to launch a massive pruning subsidy scheme to augment the productivity of the bushes.

“We have stressed that at least 25 per cent of small growers’ area must be pruned annually to inject the necessary yielding skills in the bushes. This would involve significant labour and plant caring cost and the concomitant loss of income until the pruned bushes come to yielding stages. Hence, we have appealed for a subsidy to the growers to support their timely pruning activities,” former member of Tea Board and President of Small Tea Growers’ Association of Southern India S Ramu told *BusinessLine*.

“We have requested Tea Board to dovetail this into the new Tea Development and Promotion Scheme for small-scale sector entailing an outlay of Rs. 200 crore. We have also sought massive replantation of old tea bushes, supply of subsidised fertilisers, setting up of micro and mini tea processing units, irrigation facilities, assistance for transporting green leaf and establishing leaf sheds,” he said.

“This scheme is valid till March 31, 2017. So, we have urged Tea Board to hasten the formation of the nearly 4,000 societies required to cover the two lakh small growers in the country,” Samir Roy, long-time member of Tea Board and President, National Federation of Small Tea Growers of India, said.

Food Ministry invites NGOs to run consumer helplines

New Delhi, December 26:

The Department of Consumer Affairs under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has invited applications from registered and eligible voluntary consumer organisations for setting up and running Consumer Care Centres or Grahak Suvidha Kendras.

Among the cities identified for these centres are Lucknow and Chandigarh in the North; Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad in the South; Jaipur,

Ahmedabad and Pune in the West; Bhubaneswar, Patna and Kolkata in the East; Guwahati and Shillong in the North East; Aipur and Bhopal in central India, as well as New Delhi.

The centres aim at empowering consumers and will be set up across the country and will function as one-stop centres providing a spectrum of services to consumers, such as counselling, grievance redressal, among others, an official release said. "The Centres will also be authorised to take up complaints with private companies/manufacturers/service providers on behalf of the Government," it added.

Govt will get Rs. 3,500 cr more from hike in cooking oils import duty

Raking in the moolah The additional revenue generated by way of hike in import duty may be used for overall development of oilseeds production and support farmers

Mumbai, December 26:

The Government is likely to fetch Rs. 5,000 crore annually as revenue from the five percentage points hike on import duty for edible oils from the current Rs. 1,500 crore.

On Wednesday, the Centre raised the duty on crude vegetable oils to 7.5 per cent and that of refined oils to 10 per cent.

The Solvent Extractors' Association of India, in a statement, asked the Government to use the additional revenue generated by way of hike in import duty for overall development of oilseeds production and support farmers when prices drop below the minimum support level, it said.

This will encourage farmers to grow more oilseeds and stop imports, said the association.

Terming the recent hike in import duty to support farmers as meagre, it urged the Government to create a duty difference of 15 per cent between crude and refined oil so that the value-addition and capacity utilisation of oil mills improves.

"Under the current scenario, revision of import duty just by five per cent is very meagre to support the farmers for realising better price for his produce and need to be re-looked for higher revision," said the solvent extractors body.

Business Standard

Groundnut oil price in Gujarat at two year's high

Less availability of crop for crushing results in reduced oil production and high price

At a time when seasonal demand for [groundnut oil](#) is at its peak, price of the oil across [Gujarat](#) has touched a two year's high on account of scarcity of groundnuts for crushing.

According to groundnut oil millers, the output is estimated to be very low this year, as a consequence of which, mills face a shortage of the raw material.

"It is the peak seasonal demand period and mills are not getting enough groundnuts for crushing to match the demand. As a result, price of the oil is rising," said Samir Shah, president, [Saurashtra Oil Mills Association](#) (SOMA).

The present price of groundnut oil in the retail market ranges from Rs 1,605-1,610 per 15 kg new tin. It was two years back when the cost of 15 kg oil tin exceeded Rs 1,600. During December, the price has gone up by Rs 160 per tin.

Millers expect the price to touch Rs 1,800 per tin in the next two months.

In the wholesale market, loose groundnut oil is priced from Rs 925-930 per 10 kg.

The rise in cost of groundnut oil comes at a time when the crop's annual national production was estimated to be down 24 per cent on account of delayed monsoon in Gujarat, the major groundnut producing state in the country, and farmers shifting to other crops this season.

The estimates released by Central Organization for Oil Industry and Trade (COOIT) a fortnight back pegs India's groundnut output for 2014-15 at 3.57 million tonnes, down from last year's 4.71 million tonnes. Production of the

crop in Gujarat is estimated to be 1.44 million tonnes this year as against 2.50 million tonnes recorded last year.

Ravaji Mandanaka, president, Gondal Oil Mills Association, a local body, said, "Farmers don't have requisite stock of groundnut as the crop size is almost half of last year. Current stock is utilised for peanut export or for direct uses."

Daily groundnut arrival in different markets of Gujarat stands at about 25,000-30,000 bags (one bag is 35 kg), nearly 40 per cent down from that of last year.

Country's groundnut oil availability for 2014-15 has been estimated at 240,000 tonnes by The Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA). It is down by 170,000 tonnes or 41.50 per cent from last year's 410,000 tonnes.

Mandanaka said, "Due to shortage of raw material, most of the groundnut oil mills are running for only two or three days in a week."

Increased import duty breathes life into dull soy trade

[Soybean](#) and [soy product](#) traders and industry players feel that the increase in [import duty](#) on [vegetable oils](#) has breathed some life in the dull soy trade this year.

On Thursday, the government raised the import duty on crude vegetable oils and refined oils by 5 percentage points bringing the total duty on crude oils to 7.5 per cent and refined oils to 15 per cent.

Indian vegetable oil imports showed substantial increase in the last few years due to low duty regime which hit the profits of Indian farmers, said market players. India is one of the leading vegetable oil consumers and importers and mainly imports from Malaysian and Indonesia.

Both soybean and soy oil prices have started showing improvement after the announcement, said traders.

"Soy oil prices showed around ' 30-40 per 10 kg improvement after the announcement and we feel the gains will continue," said a soy oil broker in Indore.

Currently, soy oil prices in Indore for refined category are ' 640-645 per 10 kg and solvent prices are in ' 620-625 per 10 kg range.

Soybean, the basic raw material for soy oil, has also shown improvement of around ' 100 per 100 kg in the physical markets after the duty announcement, said traders. Currently, soybean auction prices in Indore markets were ' 3100-3300 per 100 kg and higher prices being ' 3500 per 100 kg.

"Prices have been range bound since the beginning of the season and now we feel there will be further improvement as the supplies are also down," said B L Saini, a soybean trader in Indore market.

Industry bodies like Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) and Indore-based Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA) have also welcomed the decision of the government.

SOPA expressed its satisfaction that the government has at least partially increased the customs duty to check the increasing imports of edible oils.

"Although, the duty requested by us was 17.5 per cent on crude and 25 per cent on refined edible oils but we hope that even this small increase will help the local soybean processors and exporters and the government will revisit the import duty in the near future," said Davish Jain, chairman, SOPA via mail.

SOPA has also requested the government to create an Oilseed Development Fund for increasing oilseed productivity and for augmenting availability of oilseeds and edible oils.

UP sugar mills hit by falling sugar prices

The wholesale sugar prices have fallen from Rs 3,000/quintal (ex-factory) last month to Rs 2,750/quintal

[Uttar Pradesh sugar mills](#) are bracing for another challenge of steep fall in sugar prices in the state.

The Wholesale sugar prices have fallen from Rs 3,000 a quintal (ex-factory) last month to Rs 2,750 a quintal now.

When Uttar Pradesh had announced its state advised price (SAP) for cane on November 12, sugar was around Rs 3,000 a quintal, which was already low, compared with about Rs 3,188 a quintal in July.

In this backdrop, Uttar Pradesh Sugar Mills Association (UPSMA) has now written to the state government on the “fallout on the sugar industry, making it a crisis situation in which sugar mills of the state are the worst-sufferers”.

The association said despite low prices, the state mills have been unable to sell stocks in the market due to an “extremely weak sentiment” and the presence of heavy floating stock.

The major complaint of the industry is that sugar from Karnataka and Maharashtra was about Rs 200 a quintal cheaper than that of sugar from Uttar Pradesh mills, owing to the lower cost of production.

Earlier this month, [UPSMA](#) had even urged the Centre to intervene in the crisis. In a letter to the Union food and public distribution ministry, the association had said the crisis, giving rise to arrears and payment delays, will not be resolve unless the Centre intervenes.

Meanwhile, UPSMA said mills in Maharashtra, while enjoying the benefit of a lower cane price coupled with higher recovery and higher yield, were still unable to pay even the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of cane and also expressed its inability to their state government.

FRP, set by the Centre, is the floor price paid by mills to farmers. To further remunerate farmers, some states announce SAP, which is higher than FRP.

According to UPSMA, sugar exports were held up due to pending announcement of subsidy by the Centre and cheaper imported sugar in the country.

The letter said these factors had a direct bearing on “Our cane price payment capacity. It is an extremely difficult situation.”

For the current season, the state had announced SAP of Rs 280 a quintal, which was 27 per cent higher than FRP of Rs 220 a quintal.