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THE HINDU

ICRISAT launches 'Green PHABLET'



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Dilip Kumar explaining Green Phablet to Women Farmers in Medak. Photo: By Arrangement

Powered by the Green SIM, it is priced at \$299. Real time information sharing between farmers and researchers enables farmers to improve crop productivity and researchers to collect accurate data in real time.

A customised low-cost combination phone and tablet computer called 'GreenPHABLET powered by the GreenSIM' was launched by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

"ICRISAT has been at the forefront of using the latest technology to benefit smallholder farmers. The GreenPHABLET will allow information to be precisely targeted to individual smallholder farmers. This will help farmers purchase inputs at lower price, get a better price for their produce, and link them to markets, thus putting them on the path to prosperity," said William Dar,

ICRISAT's Director-General, while launching the GreenPHABLET, on Monday, according to a release here on Tuesday.

Internet connectivity

The GreenPHABLET powered by the GreenSIM is priced at US\$ 299 and has been developed by the ICRISAT Centre of Excellence in ICT Innovations for Agriculture in collaboration with NUNC Systems, a company based in Hyderabad..

“The device acts like a mobile village knowledge centre/common service centre, enabling farmers to benefit from contemporary information and communication technologies and expanding Internet connectivity in remote rural regions,” says Dr. Dileepkumar Guntuku, Global Leader and Director, ICRISAT Centre of Excellence in ICT Innovations for Agriculture.

Real time info sharing

“Real time information sharing between farmers and researchers enables farmers to improve crop productivity and researchers to collect accurate data in real time. This lays the road for future innovations in the field of agriculture,” says Sandeep Dega, Senior Director, NUNC Systems.

The GreenSIM is a special SIM card that can be used with any mobile phone.

Apart from regular phone services developing world smallholder farmers receive free messages about the weather and pest problems while sharing the most competitive agricultural input and crop prices.

This has proven successful in pilot tests.

“In 171 villages across three States of India (Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), farm incomes have gone up since farmers can now compare prices of agricultural crops and inputs offered by both the traditional local agent and, now, via the GreenSIM,” says Dr Guntuku.

The GreenSIM was created under partnership between ICRISAT, mobile phone service provider Airtel, and the IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative) Kisan Sanchar Limited (IKSL).

Modi for merging job and irrigation schemes

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asked officials to focus on fast-tracking the Rs. 1,000-crore Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), for creation of irrigation assets for farmers, announced by the government earlier this year.

Chairing a meeting in which Water Resources Minister Uma Bharati and Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh were present, Mr Modi spoke of integrating MGNREGA, the rural jobs employment scheme, with creating irrigation assets under PMKSY.

He asked the Ministry of Water Resources to identify river-interlinking projects which could be immediately taken up. Prime Minister Modi suggested that there be a comprehensive mapping and identification of water bodies across the country and that potential irrigation sources be identified using satellite imagery.

PMKSY was introduced earlier by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley with focus on assured irrigation to mitigate risk to farmers, as most of the farm lands are rainfed. Under the programme, the government aims to provide Soil Health Card to farmers to know the status and production capability of farm soil and understand its suitability to various types of crops.

India needs to take the lead

PROGRESS: “There are serious plans to reduce the carbon intensity of Indian production, construction as well as energy consumption through more energy-efficient vehicles.” In this file photo, smoke billows from the chimneys of the Indraprastha Thermal Power Station in New Delhi.

Without Indian leadership, there will be no climate change agreement. The country should improve its own energy efficiency

The latest marathon negotiations on climate change recently finished in Lima, Peru. Many outside observers feel that the centrepiece of Lima, the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), neither to be reviewed nor externally monitored, are too weak to have any real impact on climate change.

Despite this, the Indian delegation expressed satisfaction over the result. So has the U.S, which is understandable since little is really being asked of it in terms of commitments. But what is India seeking?

Let's look at the situation. India is a warm and primarily subtropical country where agriculture and drinking water depend on the monsoons. Northern India depends on river systems which are sustained by melting Himalayan glaciers. The country has a long coastline. It is also regularly exposed to extreme weather events — floods, droughts and hurricanes — and suffers from the presence of mosquitoes and other vectors that can carry infectious diseases.

Global warming leads to changes in weather patterns that could make the monsoons more erratic and extreme weather events more likely. With glaciers melting more rapidly, there will be more floods followed by water scarcity. Rising sea levels due to warming will threaten our coastal cities and low-lying villages. Higher temperatures could reduce yields of some major crops while bringing in tropical diseases that have not been endemic in the country so far. Rising emissions, especially in urban areas, have worsened pollution and made the air in many Indian cities unhealthy.

More vulnerable

India is far more vulnerable to global warming than developed countries which are located in cooler temperate zones. So, it needs strong collective international action to limit climate change and global warming more than these countries do. Making the economy more energy-efficient, which will reduce carbon emissions, is in the country's own interest. Even the energy-guzzling U.S. produces four times more GDP per unit carbon dioxide emissions than India does — many energy-efficient EU countries produce six times more. If 'Make in India' products require four times as much carbon-based energy, can they be internationally competitive? Moreover, unless India reduces carbon intensity, its rapidly growing imported oil and coal requirements will weigh heavily on external payments, and pollution in cities will worsen. But if it improves carbon efficiency to current U.S. levels, the GDP could grow four times without an increase in CO emissions.

There is now growing recognition of this and there are serious plans to reduce the carbon intensity of Indian production, construction as well as energy consumption through more energy-efficient vehicles. Progress is being made. But wouldn't it be logical to leverage domestic actions we need to take in our

own interests to promote commitments by major emitting countries, accountable within an international agreement?

Against this background, what issues have we emphasised on in the climate change negotiations? The key ones have been equity and historical responsibility of the developed countries; hence Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), financial aid and green technologies to developing countries for mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Recently India called for adaptation to be given the same priority as mitigation. On equity it has argued that developed countries, which are responsible for most of the additional CO₂ in the atmosphere following the industrial revolution, should provide the solution. But developed countries like the U.S. stress that the developing countries of today — China, India, Brazil and others — are responsible for more than 50 per cent of global CO₂ emissions. Unless a collective effort is made, CO₂ emissions cannot be reduced sufficiently to limit global warming to 2 degree Celsius — the temperature that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the global body that tracks the science of climate change, has said is the threshold which could trigger dangerous effects.

Regarding financial aid and concessional technology transfer, does giving high priority to them really make much sense in terms of India's interests? Following a decision of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, India rejected development aid from most donor countries for over a decade. Do we seek aid from them now?

On technology, most green technology is owned by private corporations. Budgets in developed countries are under pressure and there is not going to be much additional money for climate aid. Whatever is available to lease or purchase green technology, or for mitigation and adaptation, will go to African and other Least Developed Countries and Small Island States. India should welcome receiving aid but at the same time cannot expect to get much climate aid. Sub-Saharan African countries, smaller Latin American and Caribbean countries, and Small Island States are more concerned about their future in a world of erratic weather and rising seas than they are about historical responsibility. Moreover they know that their emissions are small, and little will be asked of them, and that their limited financial requirements are likely to be substantially covered by a combination of additional climate finance and multilateral aid. So India's approach that only developed countries should have

binding international commitments does not get much resonance; developing countries are often fragmented in these negotiations.

Improving energy efficiency

The only significant climate-related financing India has received is through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Under the CDM, Indian entities receive payments from developed country enterprises for CO reductions that the latter can use to meet their carbon reduction obligations. But this will only work in future if there is a strong new climate agreement. Otherwise the carbon market will collapse and our CDM financing, which is significant, will dry up. Without Indian leadership, there will be no climate change agreement. India needs to improve its own energy efficiency. It should leverage this necessity to lead the way to a meaningful international agreement in Paris. Its policy goal should be to reduce the dangers of global warming for its people and get financial and other benefits from climate change agreements through, for example, an enhanced CDM. Unfortunately India's current approach is achieving neither. Perhaps it is time for some fresh thinking.

(Uday Abhyankar is a former Indian diplomat and UN official.)

Fencing the farmer out

In the name of economic reforms and development, the government has taken a significant step backward in India's march to land justice. The pushing through of the Land Act ordinance violates all democratic norms

On Monday, the Bharatiya Janata Party government cleared the proposed ordinance to amend the [Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013](#). This amendment, insofar as has been made known to the public, creates a separate category of projects which shall be "fast tracked." The items covered under this category include industrial corridors, defence and defence production, rural infrastructure including electrification, housing for the poor including affordable housing, and infrastructure projects including projects taken up under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

The immediate and likely impact of this amendment is that land can now be acquired for these projects without having to exhaust the pre-acquisition processes that had been put in place, namely the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and the determination of prior informed consent from affected families. A

cursory analysis of this amendment shows why the same is not just problematic but is also a serious step backward.

Reason behind pre-acquisition steps

First, there is a reason why the consent and SIA process had been hardcoded into the DNA of the law. Acquisition had become a tool for the use of brutal force by the state. Acquisition was almost always forceful, leading invariably to riots and protests (often violent in nature). By requiring the state to seek the consent of 70 to 80 per cent of the affected families, the law empowered those who were to be directly impacted against the arbitrary exercise of the power by the state. For the first time in the history of independent India was the citizenry given a say in how the state would deal with their land. Now with this one step, the BJP has returned us to the days of the British enacted law where our citizens enjoyed no say in their development.

Second, the unamended law was enacted after unprecedented nationwide consultations which took place over two years. Two all-party meetings were convened. The Bill was subject to 12 hour debates in both Houses in which over 60 members took part. Two key amendments suggested by Ms. Sushma Swaraj and Mr. Arun Jaitley were also accepted (These related to providing for lease as an option and the share of an original owner in case his land was subsequently acquired). The BJP unambiguously supported the law in Parliament and even expressed support for these very provisions it now seeks to exclude. In this context, this sharp 'U-turn' becomes all the more surprising.

Infrastructure projects

Third, under the unamended Act, the only exemptions to the consent and the SIA clause were the 13 laws given in the Fourth Schedule to the Act itself. Mindful of the fact that some projects were of greater national importance than others, the framers had already created this separate class of projects which included acquisition for the purposes of railways, national highways, atomic energy, electricity, etc. Acquisition for defence and national security had also been protected under the urgency clause. And even these 13 laws had to be amended within one year, i.e. by December 31, 2014 to ensure that compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement clauses were brought on a par with the new law (*vide* section 105 of the unamended law). With regard to this particular amendment, the government is attempting to make a virtue out of a necessity prescribed by their predecessors.

Fourth, crafting a set of categories which includes vague items such as infrastructure projects (including PPP projects) solely for the purpose of exempting them from consent requires enormous application of mind. The exemptions given in the unamended law were the result of sustained public consultation. In the case of the ordinance, exemptions have been created without any explanation as to why these activities or sectors are being placed in a class of their own. Such lawmaking practices veer dangerously close to arbitrariness in administrative decision-making.

Importance of a safeguard

Supporters of the amendment will undoubtedly argue that the law does not dilute the provisions of compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement but instead only makes the process for acquiring the land easier.

What they fail to realise is the gap between the bargaining power of the state and the lowest common denominator is a very wide chasm.

The SIA process gave these people (often farmers) the right to negotiate fairer rates of compensation while determining if the project was truly in the public interest. It had also removed the scope for the subjective use of discretion by the Collector and other representatives of the government.

Now, with the SIA process being waived, the Collector can once again determine what constitutes a public purpose and how soon can land be acquired. It was this unchecked authority that was at the heart of the multiple abuses of the law chronicled over the last 70 years. Discretion had been replaced by verifiable systems and processes to check capricious decision-making. Now, this safeguard stands eroded.

The SIA was designed to ensure that no acquisition in excess of the bare minimum requirement took place. This was an important objective as most acquisitions were characterised by excess zeal on the part of the state. More land was always acquired than was needed for the project in question. Without SIA, the possibility of arbitrary diversions once again becomes a reality.

No restrictions

Also, the new law didn't introduce the concepts of rehabilitation and resettlement. It merely put in place a process that ensured compliance and enforcement. The Supreme Court of India had already mandated rehabilitation

and resettlement even before the new law was enacted. There was even a national policy that existed on the subject but violations remained rampant. The SIA was created to provide a framework that would ensure its implementation.

Another fear is that this new ordinance will effectively undo the implicit limits that had been placed on the acquisition of agricultural or multi-crop land by the unamended Act (done to ensure continued food security for our citizens). However, the amendments seem to allow such acquisitions without restrictions. This gives rise to worrying questions as to who is the natural constituency of the party in power.

The government should have instead used this opportunity to strengthen the legal regime governing land titles in States where it is now in power (since land is primarily a state subject). Knowledge asymmetry and an active land mafia lead to the purchase of land being a risky proposition (and hence making acquisition more attractive). It is a pity that the government did not take this opportunity given that it is in power in both the Centre and in key States where acquisition is a burning issue (Maharashtra, Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh). The amendments will only disempower gram sabhas.

In the name of economic reforms and development, the government has taken a significant step backward in India's march to land justice. An ordinance pushed through in this manner violates all democratic norms and is the shape of things to come in the Modi sarkar. Given this cloak-and-dagger approach becoming the norm for lawmaking in our country, we can only hope that in this era of acronym-anchored governance, 'Modi' does not come to stand for 'Murder of Democratic India'.

Western Ghats'

Diverse freshwater ecosystems of the Western Ghats and a large variety of species they contain face the "highest level of threat" due to pollution and mining in the world's most heavily populated biodiversity hotspot, according to a study.

The report, published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), says that in most instances the development planning process does not consider the requirements of freshwater ecosystems, mainly due to a lack of adequate information on the distribution of species.

“Although many protected areas are located within or near areas of the richest freshwater diversity, the southern Western Ghats region experiences the highest level of threat to freshwater species,” says the study, titled ‘Status and Distribution of Freshwater Biodiversity’

Additional threats include hunting in many parts that have extirpated local populations of several species and groups of terrestrial and freshwater fauna.

It says the highest number of threatened species (40 and 48 species within each sub-catchment) occur in the southern Western Ghats hotspot in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and southern Karnataka.

“Close to 16 per cent of the 1,146 freshwater species assessed are threatened with extinction, with a further 1.9 per cent assessed as near threatened. No species were assessed as extinct or extinct in the wild,” the study says.

According to the report, the main threats impacting freshwater biodiversity in the Western Ghats include “pollution, with approximately 50 per cent of fish, 20 per cent of molluscs, and 21 per cent of odonates threatened, and with urban and domestic pollution ranking as the worst threats followed by agricultural and industrial sources of pollution.”

It says biological resource use with 38 per cent of fishes, 17 per cent of molluscs, and 7 per cent of odonates threatened by commercial fisheries and the aquarium trade.

Residential and commercial development, dams and other natural system modifications, energy production and mining are the main threats impacting freshwater species of the hills. PTI

50 per cent of fish, 20 per cent of molluscs, and 21 per cent of odonates are affected by pollution. 38 per cent of fishes, 17 per cent of molluscs, and 7 per cent of odonates are threatened by commercial fisheries

All land records will be put online by 2016: KEK

Deputy Chief Minister and Revenue Minister K. E. Krishna Murthy on Tuesday said entire land records of revenue, agriculture, endowments, paramboku (waste) and ‘grama kantam’ lands would be made public by 2016.

Speaking to the media here, he said, “The government is firm on making revenue records a public document and put the details online in the next 12 months.”

Replying to a question, he made it clear that there was no ban on registrations in any district in the State except for land earmarked for capital.

He said a joint meeting of revenue, panchayat raj departments would be convened on January 3 in Hyderabad to take a final decision on ‘grama kantam’ lands. The meeting would brief officials on ‘grama kantam’ lands, acquisition or conversion and latest judgments of Supreme Court on the issue. He said ‘grama kantam’ lands were being enjoyed by the present owners hereditarily without any registration.

He said the government wanted to regularise such lands or endowment lands with the consent of the present owners voluntarily and not by pressure.

The Deputy CM, who was here to attend the felicitation function of elected representatives from the toddy tapping community, said toddy tapping societies had lost their identity as most of the youth from the community were shifting their profession and seeking employment elsewhere. A public meeting of the toddy tapping community and its sub-castes would be organised shortly in Vijayawada, he said.

Keeping the seed bank full



Gurusamy, seed collector and farmer, displaying native seed variety. Photo: M.J. Prabu

Farmer Gurusamy of Karnataka continues the struggle to save indigenous seeds

Henry Kissinger famously said: “Control oil and you control nations; control food and you control the people.” Seeds thus hold the key to a country’s future.

Gurusamy is well known in his area for the great work he has been doing – preserving native seeds.

Sad truth

Long before seed companies set shop and went commercial, the traditional farmer saved his own seeds, swapped them with neighbours or exchanged them with others.

Just compare this to the pickle ritual. When your grandmother makes pickles at home, your mother shares them with your friends and others in your neighbourhood. But today, we see several brands of bottled pickles available in the market. You can choose from a wide array of varieties. But do they have the homemade flavour?

Similarly, after the green revolution, importance is given to growing hybrid crops, rather than the traditional ones. Sadly the indigenous knowledge of such farmers has gone for a toss. His traditional wisdom is devalued by our system of promoting technologies. Thus we end up with seeds that are not suitable for our land and community.

The seed bank

Gurusamy has painstakingly collected and documented several hundred varieties of native seeds and distributed them to farmers.

If you visit his home in Odayarpalayam village in Karnataka’s Chamrajnagar district, you can see that the seeds have been stored inside old earthen pots and worn-out plastic jars, lined up on ramshackle wooden shelves in a dingy and dark room. Presently, there might be more than 3,000 farmers in Karnataka who grow and maintain such seed varieties.

“We have a good network of suppliers who see to it that our seed bank balance doesn’t go down,” says Gurusamy.

Seeds are an integral part of many ceremonies and festivals in India. Seed-saving has been a cornerstone of Indian farming that made agriculture a way of life for many.

All this changed to an extent with the Green Revolution. High-yielding seed varieties and the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides destroyed several indigenous seed varieties.

As farmers stopped saving and exchanging seeds, and instead started buying them from the market, their own native expertise slowly became irrelevant and crop diversity suffered. In a land that once had several thousand varieties of crops such as rice, most of them are no more to be found.

Probably this is the reason farmers such as Gurusamy continues the struggle to save indigenous seeds in the face of the onslaught by multinational companies.

“Native seeds are like our children they are for our prosperity. They never let us down nor destroy our lives,” he says with hope glimmering in his eyes.

Book on GM crops released

The Forum of Former Vice-Chancellors of Karnataka State Universities (FVCK) and the Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises – Agricultural Group (ABLE-AG), on Monday, released a book, *GM Crops: Perception vs. Reality* by two scientists T.M. Manjunath and K.S. Mohan.

Programme to test soil quality in 15 villages

The Agriculture Department has launched a special programme to ascertain the cause for poor soil quality in a cluster of villages in and around Kulathur in the district. The villages numbering about 15 are located in Kulathur, Thaniapatti and Odukkoor revenue villages – all in Kundrandarkovil block.

The villagers have been traditionally cultivating only paddy. Lack of crop rotation and awareness on soil testing techniques has necessitated the special programme for soil testing camp in these 15 villages, say officials.

On Tuesday, as many as 40 samples were collected from paddy fields in Odukkoor village. “Failure of monsoon and poor irrigation facility in the area has forced the farmers to skip paddy cultivation in a majority of these areas,” said V.Ravindran, founder, Green Care Foundation, which coordinates the camp for collection of soil samples. The camp would conclude in a few days and the results would be conveyed to the farmers, said D.Subathira, Assistant Agriculture Officer. She said the farmers would be advised of the shortage or excess of nutrients in the soil, which may affect the yield.

Seeds distributed to public to encourage organic farming

Nammalvar remembered on his first death anniversary



Vegetable seeds were distributed free of cost to public in Salem on Tuesday, to mark the first death anniversary of organic farming scientist G. Nammalvar. - PHOTO:P. GOUTHAM

To encourage people undertake organic farming and to produce vegetables on their own, three types of vegetable seeds and two types of spinach seeds were distributed free of cost to the public here on Tuesday.

As part of observing the first death anniversary of organic farming scientist G. Nammalvar, 'Seed Day' was celebrated here. Members of Green City Association and Easan Environmental Group paid floral tributes to his picture and recalled his contribution to the agricultural sector.

Nammalvar stressed on organic practices and sustainable agriculture among the public.

During the occasion, seeds were distributed to the public and students. The association members said that people should cultivate crops in their house and should not depend on others for seeds. Naturally grown vegetables and small millets should be used in daily food, they said. "It is the way to pay homage to Nammalvar." Pamphlets were also distributed to the public along with the seeds.

P.S. Senthil Kumar from Green City Association, Elango and D. Ezhilvizhan from Easan Environmental Group participated.

Portable farming structure developed

The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has come up with a portable family farming structure to promote family farming.

The Fa Fa kit, a simple structure designed by the agricultural engineering department of the College of Horticulture, Vellanikkara, is ideal for urban and peri-urban residents interested in growing vegetables in their own yards or on terraces.

The 2.3-m tall structures with rectangular or circular base made of steel are provided with seating for pots and trays to grow plants. Lateral provisions to facilitate drip irrigation and fertigation are also incorporated, helping optimum use of water and manure. The UV sheet rain cover makes it ideal for all seasons and all kinds of plants including climbers can be grown in this set-up.

The Fa Fa kit may be placed in the backyard or terrace depending on the availability of space in a house or apartment. Each family could grow the vegetables of their choice.

The kit is a helping hand to bring back homestead food security concepts so popular in Kerala homes in yesteryears, according to KAU sources. The average price of the structures comes to Rs. 4,500 (for rectangular models) and Rs. 3,500 (for circular models).

Those who want to buy the kits may contact the Professor and Head, Department of Agricultural Engineering, College of Horticulture, KAU. For details, contact 0487 2438331/ 8332 or mail to visalakshi.kp@kau.in.

The Fa Fa kit is

ideal for urban and

peri-urban residents interested in growing vegetables in their own yards or on terraces.

NABARD identifies schemes for development of Mysuru rural

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has identified area-based schemes for the comprehensive development of rural hinterland in the district.

It released a Potential Linked Credit Plan (PLP) for the district which will be the basis for the District Credit Plan to be prepared by the Lead Bank for the fiscal 2015-16.

The document, released here on Tuesday at the district-level review committee meeting of various banks, estimates the potential and identifies key activities or thrust areas for development envisaging coordination among stakeholders leading to asset creation.

N. Aravamudhan, AGM, NABARD, said apart from agriculture, thrust areas include watershed development programme and tribal development programmes in H.D. Kote and Mysuru taluks, development of organic cotton and supporting farmers and producers organisation in H.D. Kote, sericulture development in Nanjangud and H.D. Kote, among others.

The document notes that the initiatives would help augment flow of investment in credit. Important economic activities of Mysuru district other than agriculture and allied activities are wood inlay, carving, coir, agro-processing, and small-scale industries among others for which an amount of Rs. 1,571.44 crore has been estimated.

Mega dairy

Dairy farming, sheep and goat rearing have been identified as potential sectors under the area-based schemes.

Accordingly, the critical infrastructure having a bearing on the livelihood of the people is the mega dairy at Alanahally on the outskirts of Mysuru with a capacity to procure milk of 6 lakh to 10 lakh litres per day.

Besides, a fodder plant of 3,200 metric tonnes capacity is required and the total financial outlay of the projects is Rs. 164 crore, according to the document.

At present, the district produces nearly 3 lakh litres of milk per day and MYMUL, which is the biggest cooperative producer organisation in the region, has nearly a lakh small milk producers as members.

Of the seven taluks in the district, the maximum contribution comes from H.D. Kote (56,000 litres) and Nanjangud (43,000 litres) per day and hence can be considered the hub for dairy activities, the PLP document states.

It is reckoned that the fodder requirements for the two taluks could be met locally with supplement from T. Narsipur.

The meeting also reviewed the progress of various government schemes in which banks have a role to play of which there was special reference to Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojana.

K.N. Shivalingaiah, Chief Manager, Lead Bank, State Bank of Mysore, said 2,67,000 accounts were opened under the project ever since it was launched on August 28. Mysuru district had attained 100 per cent financial inclusion, he said.

However, he reiterated that opening new accounts will be an ongoing process to include new entrants or beneficiaries to the government schemes.

'The schemes will help augment flow of investment in credit'

Officials keep fertilizers prices in check

Licences of four outlets suspended following detection of violations



The government has fixed the cost of one bag of urea fertilizer at Rs. 270.50.—
File photo

The Agriculture Department, Vellore, has been taking measures to regulate the sale of fertilizers for farmers. After its crackdown on outlets that sold fertilizers

for higher price last week, violations have been curbed to a large extent, officials said.

In Vellore district, fertilizers are being supplied through a total of 483 outlets — 182 primary agricultural cooperative credit societies and 301 private outlets.

Steps were taken to supply fertilizers without any shortage for farmers by keeping adequate stock at these outlets, a press release said.

Following complaints that fertilizers, particularly urea, were being sold for higher prices at certain outlets, officials of the Agriculture Department led by its Joint Director R. Jayasundar conducted surprise inspections last week. They inspected outlets at Kaveripakkam, Ocheri and Panapakkam.

They checked if the outlets violated the rules under Fertilizer (Control) Order 1985 during the inspection. The licences of four outlets were suspended following detection of violations such as for not putting up a board with prices of fertilizers and available stock, not maintaining stock registry and bill book, buying and selling fertilizers without the seals of firms and selling at higher cost.

Officials were also directed to submit a report after conducting enquiries on the cost of fertilizers sold to farmers. The Joint Director warned outlets that their licences will be cancelled and legal action will be taken if found that they had sold the fertilizers at higher rates.

“The adequate stock of fertilizers is available for farmers in the district. The government had fixed the cost of one bag of urea fertilizer at Rs. 270.50 but we found that these outlets were selling them for higher cost as they wished. Following the inspection, the outlets are following the government fixed prices,” Mr. Jayasundar said.

He said their efforts will continue to regulate fertilizer sales. He warned sellers of stringent action if they sold fertilizers for higher cost, hoarded fertilizers or sold to other districts as per provisions of the Fertilizer (Control) Order, 1985.

Farmers can lodge complaints on malpractices in the sale of fertilizers to Assistant Director (Quality Control), Agriculture Department at phone number 94431 04780, the release said.

Top priority to agriculture, says Pocharam

'TRS government will fulfil all poll promises'

Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy has said that the State government was according priority to agriculture and its allied sectors for the benefit of farming community.

Speaking after laying foundation stone for the construction of agriculture polytechnic college in Sardapur village of Sircilla mandal on Tuesday, the Minister said that the government was taking all measures for the fulfilment of promises made during the elections. He said that the government had named the Horticulture University in Gajwel Assembly segment as the Konda Laxman Bapuji horticulture university. Similarly, it had also named veterinary university as PV Narasimha Rao veterinary university.

He said that they would take all measures to start the college from the next academic year at the Agriculture polytechnic college in Sardapur village. Initially, they would allocate 30 seats for the first year. He said that the college building would be constructed at a cost of Rs 1.7 crore and the girls and boys hostel buildings at a cost of Rs 2.2 crore each. Minister for IT K Taraka Rama Rao, Zilla Parishad chairperson Tula Uma, Karimnagar Mp B Vinod Kumar and others were also present. Later, the Minister for Agriculture inaugurated the Seed testing laboratory on the outskirts of Karimnagar town. In the evening, the Minister convened a special Zilla Parishad general body meeting to discuss about the agriculture scenario in the district.

Aloo Methi recipe: The healthy and delicious winter treat



Aloo Methi Recipe (Source: nishamadhulika.com)

Tasty, healthy and flavourful – Aloo Methi ki sabzi is a must-have in winters. Here's the recipe.

Ingredients

- 250 grams Fresh fenugreek leaves
- 250 grams potatoes (3-4 medium size)
- 2 tbsp Mustard oil
- 1-2 pinch Asafoetida
- ¼ tsp Turmeric powder
- ½ tsp Coriander powder
- 2 Green chilly (finely chopped)
- less than ¼ tsp Red chilly powder
- 1/2 tsp Salt (as per taste)

Method

- * Remove stalk of the fenugreek (methi) leaves.

- * Wash the leaves twice and place them in a sieve or in plate and slide the plate diagonally so that excess water drains out.
- * Peel potatoes and then cut them.
- * Keep potatoes in water while you chop leaves.
- * Chop the leaves and make 8-10 pieces from one potato.
- * Heat some oil. Add asafoetida and cumin seeds. Also add turmeric powder, coriander powder and green chilies.



Add potatoes and mix ingredients (Source: nishamadhulika.com)

- * Add potatoes as well and mix all ingredients.
- * Now add ½ tsp salt and sauté until potatoes get nicely coated with the masala. Add 2 tbsp water, cover and cook for 5 minutes on low flame.
- * Open and stir the sabzi, mix methi leaves, salt and red chilly powder as well. Also add 1-2 tbsp water, cover and cook for 5 minutes on low flame. Keep a constant check on Sabzi. If the potatoes are still hard cook for 3-4 more minutes.



Open and stir the sabzi, mix methi leaves, salt and red chilly powder as well.

Luscious and mouth watering aloo methi Sabzi is ready. Take it out in a bowl and serve with piping hot chapatti or parantha.



From green dots to dhansak: Food trends that nominated 2014



Mutton berry pulao at SodaBottle- OpenerWala; Lotus root with homemade spice, soy cream at Tian; Pork ribs at Farzi Cafe in Gurgaon

Parsi Plates

Their diminishing numbers aside, Parsis have never been larger on the map. After being cherished in Mumbai for decades, the Irani bakery (and indeed the entire Parsi kitchen) finally made it to Delhi through AD Singh's SodaBottleOpenerWala where it met with great gastronomic genuflection. Now, with dishes such as mutton berry pulao and dhansak finding honourable mentions on restaurant menus across the country, look out for some Parsi on your plate.

Now, with dishes such as mutton berry pulao and dhansak finding honourable mentions on restaurant menus across the country, look out for some Parsi on your plate.

The Millennial Indian

India's dining landscape has been undergoing an overhaul. From fusing regional favourites with flavours from other countries to making delicacies with foams and sears and other methods of molecular gastronomy (thanks largely to Farzi), Make in India has never been more delicious or exciting. Of course, there will always be space for ghar ka khana.

Pork ribs at Farzi cafe in Gurgaon

Asian Games

Indian Chinese, that desi standby, is facing competition. Apart from a slew of international “authentic” Asian restaurants popping up across the country, restaurants such as Tian in Delhi, Bao Haus in Mumbai and Fatty Bao in Bangalore are changing the very fabric of Asian dining by gleefully demolishing borders and mixing and matching the continent’s food into a mouthwatering mosaic.

Lotus root with homemade spice, soy cream at Tian.

Advantage Vegetarian

There has always been a paucity of options in fine-dining restaurants and bistros. With restaurants such as the Olive group and The Hungry Monkey coming out with a cornucopia of cuisine with a green dot, and shelves full of vegetarian cookbooks being published, green has never been more red hot.

weather

INDIAN CITIES

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Wednesday, Dec 31

Max Min

29° | 23°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 06:30

Humidity: 84

Sunset: 05:52

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1010

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Thursday, Jan 1

Max Min

28° | 24°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday

Jan 2



28° | 24°

Cloudy

Saturday

Jan 3



28° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

Sunday

Jan 4



27° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

Monday

Jan 5



27° | 24°

Partly Cloudy

Tuesday

Jan 6



27° | 24°

Sunny

Homemade orange chicken recipe

Ingredients:

½ cup buttermilk, 3 lbs, Skinless chicken breasts, ½ cup flour, ½ tsp pepper, 1 cup water, 12 inch skillet, 2 ½ tsp orange juice, 1 cup brown sugar, 1/3 cup rice vinegar, 2 tbsp soy sauce, 1/3 cup lemon juice, ½ tsp minced garlic, ½ tsp minced ginger root, ¼ tsp red pepper flakes, 3 tbsp cornstarch

Method:

Pour the ½ cup of buttermilk into a large bowl. Cut the chicken breasts into bite-sized pieces and add them to the bowl. Stir until all the chicken pieces are coated with buttermilk. Combine the flour, salt and pepper into a separate bowl. One by one, dip each piece of chicken into the flour mixture until completely coated with flour. Shake off any excess. Heat oil in a deep fryer to 375 degree F. Add a few pieces of chicken to the oil at a time and fry for 3 -4 minutes until golden crispy. Place the fried chicken on tissue paper to soak up the excess oil. Mix together the water, orange juice, brown sugar, soy sauce, lemon juice, minced garlic, minced ginger root and red pepper flakes in a bowl. Place the mixture into a saucepan and heat on high until it starts to boil. Combine the cornstarch and about 4 tbsp of water into a small bowl and stir until the cornstarch dissolves. Add this mixture to the boiling saucepan and stir for about 5 more minutes. Reduce the heat to low and before adding the fried chicken pieces to the sauce. Allow the chicken to simmer in the sauce for 5 minutes before serving.

5 Must-have spices in your kitchen

Outlined below are some of the most commonly used Ayurvedic spices, which when used in cooking, not only enhance the taste of the meal, but also make it nutritious and balancing:

Coriander (Dhania): The coriander seed is truly a cook's best friend as it aids in the assimilation of other herbs and spices used during cooking. Known to be gracious to all the doshas, this spice is famous in Ayurveda for its use in

balancing the body and mind. Coriander is also beneficial in digestive, respiratory and urinary disorders, as well as treating skin ailments caused by Pitta aggravation.

Ginger (Adrak): An irreplaceable spice in any kitchen, Ginger brings flavor and pungency to food and is used widely as a digestive. Known as 'the universal medicine' for its healing properties, Ginger provides an excellent remedy for respiratory conditions caused by aggravation of Kapha and Vata. Apart from vegetables and lentils, this invigorating spice is also used in herbal tea to treat common cold and cough.

Cumin (Jeera): Widely used as a flavoring agent and condiment in curries and lentils, Cumin is known for its aromatic qualities. This spice is used as a stimulant for digestive disorders and even as an antiseptic. It also enhances the functioning of the liver and pancreas, enabling the body to cleanse accumulated toxins and absorb nutrients better.

Fenugreek (Methi): Fenugreek is highly valuable for its healing properties. It is helpful in treating digestive, respiratory, nervous, and menstrual disorders, as well as purifying the skin and facilitating weight loss. Drinking water with Fenugreek seeds soaked overnight helps in reducing blood sugar levels in the body. Bitter-sweet in flavor, this spice is popularly used in Indian cooking for vegetables and dals.

Turmeric (Haldi): Referred to as the Indian Saffron, Turmeric is bitter, astringent and pungent in taste. It has been known for centuries for its many therapeutic qualities, including anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-septic properties. Widely regarded as an indispensable part of Indian cuisine, Turmeric enhances metabolism and helps the body to reduce undesirable fatty deposits when used in cooking.

Recipe: Egg-less banana cake

This traditional yet conventional recipe is catching up with a lot of households. It's easy to bake and delicious at the same time.

So this time make this scrumptious banana cake for that house warming party or kitty party or even your kids birthday.

Ingredients:

½ cup curd
50g butter, melted
2 cups flour
1tsp baking powder
½ tsp baking soda
1 tsp Vanilla essence
2 ripe bananas, mashed
200g condensed milk

Method:

- Pre heat the oven to 180 C and grease and dust the baking dish.
- Beat the condensed milk, curd and butter together till smooth.
- Sieve the flour, baking powder, baking soda and fold into the wet mixture.
- Once it's completely mixed add the mashed bananas and the vanilla essence and mix well.
- Pour this mixture into the dusted baking dish and bake in the pre heated oven for about ½ hour. Check if baked fully by poking in a tooth pick.
- Let it cool then slice it and serve with tea.

Healthy soups for winter

With winter whetting your appetite, food usually becomes the centre of attention.

When the ambient temperature drops, the body generates heat by increasing its basal metabolic rate in order to keep up the body temperature. There are two ways in which this metabolic feat is achieved - by increasing the breakdown of the body's stored fat, and by providing the body more fuel to burn in the form of food. Thus, in cold weather, the feeding centre is stimulated, increasing the food intake.

Another important reason for a noted increase in hunger is a marked drop in water intake during colder days. When the temperature is low, you don't really feel the need to drink more often, as you don't feel thirsty again and again. As the fluid intake reduces, you tend to confuse thirst with hunger, which leads to

increased consumption of food and thus, a bigger appetite. So, focus on keeping the fluid intake constant throughout the year, not just in summer. Less hydration has many disadvantages. It is the underlying reason for cold sores, dry and flaky skin, itching, cracked lips and lacklustre hair.

If gulping down glasses of water doesn't appeal to you, try increasing the intake of other fluids like milk, juices and caffeine-free tea, like jasmine, chamomile and other natural flower extracts. Do remember that caffeinated beverages are never counted as liquid in take; instead, they sap your system of water. Soups are a healthy and delicious way to stay hydrated and warm during winter. Soups need not be loaded with cream and grease; opt for recipes that contain chicken or vegetable broth and a variety of vegetables, beans, and lean meat - the kind of ingredients that make you feel light and healthy.

Soups are a great way to incorporate nutritionally-rich foods in your diet. Plus, they work as a wonderful option for picky eaters. You can cook your soup longer or shorter to vary the crunchiness of the vegetables. You can also puree the ingredients to add a creaminess.

CHICKEN TOFU LEMON CORIANDER SOUP

Ingredients: Olive oil: 1 tsp, Garlic cloves: 2, Green chilli (small, crushed): 1, Oil: ½ tsp, Vegetable or chicken stock: 500 ml, Coriander leaves (finely chopped): 2 tbsp, Cornflour: 2 tsp, Fish sauce: ½ tsp, Boneless chicken or tofu (small pieces): 50 gm, Carrots and beans (finely chopped): 50 gm, Egg: 1, Salt and lemon juice to taste

Method: Take one tsp olive oil and saute garlic and green chillies in it for 1 min. Add tofu chicken pieces and saute further for 2 mins. Add stock and boil for 10 mins. Add salt. Turn off the gas and add coriander leaves. Just before serving, bring to a boil and add fish sauce. To thicken the soup, take two tsp cornflour in a bowl and dilute it in little water. Add this diluted cornflour to the soup and stir it well. Add the beaten egg as well. Add lemon juice as per taste. (Vegetarians need to do away with fish sauce and egg; the soup tastes delicious without them too). It is a healthy, nourishing soup that tickles the tastebuds with chillies and garlic and hydrates the body.

POTATO AND MUSHROOM SOUP

Ingredients: Boiled potatoes (medium, grated): 2, Mushrooms (sliced): 50 gm , Garlic cloves (crushed): 1 to 2, Vegetable stock: 2 cups, Celery (finely chopped): 1 tsp, Dash of butter, Salt and pepper to taste

Method: Saute garlic in a dash of butter. Add grated potatoes, 1 cup water and boil it till it becomes smooth. Add the vegetable stock and sliced mushrooms. Boil for 5 to 7 mins. Add salt to taste and coarsely ground pepper. Garnish with finely chopped celery. This thick, smooth soup is very filling and warms you on cold winter nights.

Green tea vs black tea

Though green and black tea are obtained from the same plant, there are quite a few significant differences between them. Research demonstrates that there are similar health benefits in almost every tea. Experts tell us more...

GREEN TEA -Green tea leaves aren't fermented and hence, don't go through the oxidation process that black tea undergoes, making it extremely rich in the EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate), a popular antioxidant known for fighting cancer, cardiovascular conditions and more. -Green tea contains 1/4th of the caffeine that coffee has, making it healthier. -Since oxidation is arrested, it is believed that more polyphenols are preserved. -It supports weight loss programmes that include diet and exercise. -Green tea leaves is good for afternoon breaks and meditation in the evening. -It is less acidic and so, washes off acidic waste. -Pure organic green tea creates a detoxifying effect, giving you glowing skin, boosted metabolism and stronger immunity.

Make the perfect green tea Bring 220ml water to 80°C. Add two grams of green tea leaves. Let it sit for three minutes. Strain and serve. Do not add anything.

BLACK TEA -The EGCG in black tea is destroyed during the fermentation process. Hence, green tea is ahead of black tea in its antioxidant quality and quantity. -Black tea contains 1/3rd the amount of caffeine your coffee contains. -It hydrates the body and strengthens the immune system with bacteria-fighting antioxidants and promotes blood flow to the brain. -It improves focus and concentration. -It's a morning 'eye-opener'. -Black tea and coffee are more acidic. Mild black tea needs lemon to kill acidity.

Make the perfect black tea Bring 220ml of water to 100°C. Add two grams of black tea leaves. Let it sit for four minutes. Strain and pour. Optionally, you could add lemon, sugar, cream, milk etc

NOTE:

Do not mix teapots if you are preparing different types of teas. Do not overboil the water. Green tea is delicate and boiling water may burn the leaves, destroy its properties and drive the aroma away. Pour or make tea only in clean, dry and warm cups and teapots.

— *With inputs from tea sommelier Dr Rupali Ambegaonkar, lifestyle nutrition consultant Tripti Gupta and clinical nutritionist Priya Karkera*

5 super seeds with amazing benefits

Here are five super seeds that health experts around the world recommend people should include in their diet. Sprinkle these over your baked dishes and breakfast cereal for a health boost

Good things come in small packages. In the world of wellness, super seeds embody this truism like no other food. Packed with essential nutrients and with multiple health benefits, they are nature's precious gifts to humanity.

1. Chia seeds: Vegetarians miss out on Omega-3 fatty acids since they can't eat seafood. An easy solution to their dietary dilemma is chia seeds (and flaxseeds), which are a good source of this nutrient. They are also tightly packed with protein and fibre.

Benefits: Chia seeds reduce the risk of diabetes and metabolic syndrome. Studies have proven that their consistent use lowers blood pressure. They are recommended to dieters since they give the feeling of being full, so you are less likely to overeat.

How to use: They are tasteless so you can add them to smoothies, breakfast cereals or baked goods.

2. Flaxseed: Flaxseed is low in calories, high in protein, fibre and alpha

linolenic acid (ALA), a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid.
Benefits: Flaxseed combats free radicals and improves digestive and cardiovascular health.

How to use: The easiest way for the body to digest and absorb flaxseed is in the ground form. So, add ground flaxseed to your breakfast items like pancakes, spread it over yogurt, oatmeal and cereal or sprinkle over baked goods.

3. Pumpkin seeds: A good source of Vitamin E, zinc and manganese, pumpkin seeds also contain some types of hard-to-find antioxidants. A single tablespoon has 4.7 gm of healthy fats (monounsaturated fats that lower bad cholesterol and increase good cholesterol levels).

Benefits: They boost immunity, and regulate insulin levels.

How to use: Use as garnish over soups, salads and stir-fry veggies or noodles, or munch on them plain.

4. Sesame seeds: Desi foodies will like them for the nutty flavour and crunch. Sesame seeds are rich in calcium, magnesium and copper.

Benefits: They increase levels of Vitamin E in the body, improve heart health and boost the immune system. Studies show they may reduce risk of multiple sclerosis.

How to use: Sprinkle generously to add crunch and health to salads, chicken, fish, breakfast cereals and yogurt.

5. Sunflower seeds: High in 'good fats', namely monounsaturated and polyunsaturated, sunflower seeds are so good to taste you can snack on them plain when hunger strikes.

Benefits: They have a high concentration of Vitamin E, compared to other sources, making them great for your skin and hair. Sunflower seeds are good for the bones since they are high in magnesium.

How to use: Snack on them, add them to breads, salads and soups, or sprinkle over cold cuts.

4 junk foods masquerading as healthy foods

Protein bars: Protein bars are very close to being considered junk food if not eaten in the right manner. Dr Seema Tyrewala, celebrity nutritionist, says, "People have a huge misconception about protein bars. For those who don't work out, a lot of protein increases uric acid levels, and is heavy on the kidney."

She cites the example of a client who snacked on many protein bars in a day as he thought he was getting his dose of protein from them, plus they were tasty. "They also add to the cholesterol content of the body as they are heavy on sugar," she adds.

Breakfast cereal: The popularity of breakfast cereal can be attributed to heavy marketing, which began in the early 19th century in North America. While earlier, they were oats and corn 'grits', it was the cornflakes that took the market by storm. But what's available these days is quite different, "Breakfast cereals are loaded with sugar. The ones that are made of chocolate and other sweetened dried fruits are high on calories. People should buy non-branded corn flakes that are cheaper. For sweetness, fruits or honey can be added as that's a healthier option," says clinical nutritionist Shilpa Mittal. "While cereals do provide nutrition, one doesn't know in what quantity they are absorbed by the body and we often end up consuming large amounts of sugar instead," she adds.

Sports drinks: Marketed as 'beneficial to all', sports drinks are far from that tall claim. "Most sports drinks have sugar content that is three times more than what is needed," says Dr Tyrewala, who has often encountered patients who were actively working out but had sugar problems. "If you are consuming that much sugar, what is the use of working out?" she asks. People, she adds, need to read the labels carefully and see the amount and forms of sugar — including dextrose — that is included in the drink. Mittal recommends homemade nimbu-paani as a better alternative. "It has the electrolytes you need, and one can control the amount of sugar they want to consume," she explains.

Multi-grain products: Products like flour and bread are often sold as containing 'seven-grains', 'multigrain' and 'bran', but what the clever labelling hides is that the nutrients are added later, after the processing step. Says Mittal, "Most multi-grain products have very smart labelling. They cover up how there's very little multigrains present in the mix. At times, multigrain flour merely has 10% of wholegrain, which means it's not even one percent in one roti," she says, adding that people should instead make the flour at home.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Cardamom, pepper spread cheer to growers this year

Lower inventories may make them even more spicier next year



Kochi, December 30:

Growers of small cardamom and pepper had a lot to cheer this year as prices ruled at higher levels.

At the same time, growers of other plantations crops such as tea and rubber were in for a disappointment as prices ruled lower.

Black pepper

Black pepper prices rose to a record of around Rs.700 a kg this year due to shortfall in production and lower carry-forward stocks.

Total domestic output was estimated at 37,000 tonnes against domestic consumption of 46,800 tonnes. Total availability, according to the International Pepper Community(IPC) statistics, was pegged at 72,883 tonnes comprising brought-forward stock of 19,883 tonnes, production of 37,000 tonnes and imports of 16,000 tonnes.

Total outgo was estimated at 63,800 tonnes (domestic consumption of 46,800 tonnes and export of 17,000 tonnes) leaving a balance of 9,083 tonnes to be carried forward to next year.

Domestic consumption is rise annually at a rate of four to five per cent, a senior Spices Board official said.

The sharp fall in production this year is attributed to unfavourable weather conditions and erratic monsoon. The carryover stock from 2013 might include around 6,400 tonnes of pepper held in the warehouses for alleged contamination from June 2012. The stocks are yet to be released after cleaning/processing.

On the other hand, import covers 2,500 tonnes of pepper brought in from Sri Lanka duty free.

Commodity cartels took control of imports by obtaining three different licences of 833 tonnes each and thus, the duty free import was limited to a handful.

Lower availability

These factors coupled with low production reduced the availability, and in turn, created demand-supply mismatch, Kishor Shamji, a major exporter told *BusinessLine* .

As domestic prices were ruling above the international parity, substantial quantity of pepper was imported from Vietnam after paying duty but they were under-invoiced.

The year also witnessed alleged entry of Vietnam pepper into the Indian markets via Nepal. Shipments for Nepal, imported through Kolkata were diverted to domestic markets. Bihar, Jharkhand and some UP border-based dealers were involved in this.

Cardamom (small)

It was a year of cheer for the cardamom growers as its prices ruled at an average of around Rs. 750 a kg throughout the season from July. Last season, prices ruled at Rs. 550 to Rs. 600 a kg.

Reasons attributed to high prices are lower carry-over stocks and production, besides demand outstripping supply.

During the year, the production is estimated at around 20,000 tonnes. The per capita consumption of cardamom has gone up in recent years following increased use in food, pharma

ceutical and cosmetics, etc. Therefore, the annual demand is estimated at around 25,000 tonnes.

Added to this, is a targeted annual export of 3,000 tonnes valued at Rs. 225 crore. During April-September 2014, total shipments stood at 1,295 tonnes valued at Rs. 108.07 crore.

Severe cold wave conditions prevailing in North India have also raised the upcountry demand as the masala grinding sector is buying good volumes.

Good practices

Good remunerative prices, coupled with favourable weather conditions and efficient farm management practices are being followed by farmers.

This, in turn, might spread the harvesting till March next year, market sources pointed out.

However, growers of other plantations crops such as tea and rubber were stressed as prices ruled lower.

Business Standard

AgriMin for 10% tariff on gram, ending of ban on pulses' export

To protect farmers from sliding pulses' prices, the [agriculture](#) ministry has proposed a 10 per cent [import](#) duty on gram (chana).

It has also recommended lifting the ban on export of all varieties of [pulses](#) and bulk export of edible oils, a senior official said.

Chana is presently trading below the government's minimum support price of Rs 3,100 a quintal in some parts.

The proposed tariff on chana might face some opposition in the government, from those who feel any raising of duties on pulses and allowing its export would push up prices. At present, pulses are imported at zero duty across the board for any category. Similarly, export of pulses is prohibited, except for chickpea (kabuli chana) and organically grown ones.

The country annually imports three to four million tonnes of various varieties of pulses. In the 2013-14 crop year, production of chana, a rabi crop, was 9.88 million tonnes, up from 8.83 mt the previous year. In the ongoing rabi season, chana sowing is underway and so far the coverage is lower at 7.78 million hectares, as compared with 9.06 mn ha last year.

India imports chickpeas and dried peas from Australia and Tanzania. Domestic production of chana is mostly concentrated in the central and southern parts of India.

Production of rabi crops, especially of wheat, pulses and oilseeds, is expected to fall marginally in 2014-15 due to lower sowing, says Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh.

“There was a 13 per cent shortfall in monsoon rain. It is natural there would be some impact on rabi crops but it will not be significant,” he told reporters.

According to the latest data, rabi crops have been sown in 53 mn ha so far this season, as against 55.7 mn ha a year before.

Sugarcane growers demand hike in procurement price

Urge factory authorities to fix procurement rate of sugarcane at Rs 3,500 per tonne at field level

Ahead of the beginning of the processing of sugarcane at Aska Cooperative Sugar Industries (ACSIL), the [sugarcane growers](#) in Ganjam district in southern Odisha have urged the factory authorities to fix the procurement rate of sugarcane at Rs 3500 per tonne at field level.

The oldest sugar industry in cooperative sector in the state paid Rs 2270 per tonne to the sugarcane farmers in the last crushing season. It included Rs 50 per tonne as transport subsidy.

"Due to the increase in input cost of cultivation, the [procurement price](#) should also be raised", said general secretary of Ganjam district sugarcane growers' association, Samira Pradhan. The association has submitted a memorandum to the factory secretary, SK Singh after a meeting of the sugarcane growers at Aska, about 40-km from here.

Association president and former MP, DK Panda presided over the meeting. Lok Sabha member from Aska, Ladu Kishore Swain and MLA (Aska), Debaraj Mohanty were present in the meeting.

Sugarcane growers in the district had suffered heavy loss due the cyclone Phailin which hit the district on October 12 last year. Though the government had declared a special package of Rs 4.99-crore for the sugarcane growers in the district, the farmers are yet to get the relief, except the fertilizer component, alleged association vice president, Narayan Jena.

"The factory authorities need to increase the sugarcane price to compensate the last year's loss due to Phailin and to encourage them cultivate sugarcane in more areas", said Pradhan.

"The factory will run for more days and make profit when the acreage of the sugarcane increased", he said. The association also demanded coverage of farmers under crop insurance taking panchayat as a unit.

The sugarcane area in the district has reduced drastically over the last few years as farmers no more think it to be a profit-making crop, said Jena. Around a decade ago, the sugarcane cultivation area was around 12,000-acres. It reduced to around 8,400-acres last year, he alleged.

"The price fixation committee will consider the demand of the farmers considering all aspects", said an official of ACSIL. The committee, under the chairmanship of the district collector, would meet before operation of the factory begins, he said. The factory authorities plan to start sugarcane crushing operation in the first week of January.