

Students turn farm hands



Students of Sri Ramanujar Engineering College, Kolapakkam, working at the paddy farm at a village near their college on Sunday. —Photo: M. SRINATH

CHENNAI, February 10, 2014 - Working at weekends is a definite no-no for many. But for a group of engineering and MBA students in the city, weekends are for farming in the fields of Unamanchery and Alapakkam villages near Vandalur.

The students earn anywhere between Rs. 100 and Rs. 150 a day, for the back-breaking work, and they promptly donate it to noble causes.

In the few months they have been working on the fields, the girls — B. Divyalaksmi, E. Jenifer Mercy, S. Preethi, G. Gowri and G. Suganya, from Sri Ramanujar Engineering College, Kolapakkam, Vandalur — have learnt to balance themselves in the slush, remove weeds and harvest paddy.

Suganya, who is doing her MBA, said her friends and she did not even know to tuck in their saris when they started off.

“Initially, we would hold hands to be able to stand firmly. After a few days, we learnt to balance. It is a great experience to work in the fields,” she said.

Farming has not only taught them another vocation but the whole experience has been a humbling one.

“Farmers work so hard to bring food to our tables. Since our work is for a good cause, we don’t mind the strain,” said Preethi.

Jenifer Mercy said even though they will take up other vocations after their courses, they could always fall back on farming. “Some of us have farmlands in our native villages and agriculture can remain our mainstay,” she said.

The boys — S. Velmurti, R. Vishal, K. Ashfaque Ahmed, K. Sathiyamoorthy and E. Naveen Kumar — also from the same college, help to till the fields, drive the tractors and farm animals, and pack paddy in gunny bags after harvesting. Farming is nothing new for them, however.

Sathiyamoorthy hails from a family of farmers in Neyveli, and said only the harvesting technique was alien to him.

“We are into cashew cultivation and are used to working from sunrise to sunset. After I complete my MBA, I want to take up agriculture,” he said.

The students are trained by farmers R. Babu and K. Kamaraj in whose fields they work.

“It is nice to see students taking an active interest in farming. Only if the next generation comes forward, agriculture can be sustained,” said Kamaraj.

For its part, the college ensures the students are safely escorted to and from the fields.

College administrative officer Leela Chezhan said food is kept aside for the students, in their hostels, when they return from the fields.

“We are accountable for the students while they are in college and hostel. We also help them identify the causes they can donate their earnings to,” she said.

Farm varsity national youth festival from Thursday

BANGALORE, February 10, 2014 - There is a bonanza for lovers of cultural entertainment as Bangalore is set to host a five-day national inter-agricultural universities youth festival from February 13 with a theme on farming.

The 14th All India Inter-Agricultural Universities Youth Festival, which is being organised by the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, in association with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, will present performances depicting the cultural heritage of almost every region in the country.

“This is the biggest ever agricultural universities youth festival as 51 of the 69 agricultural universities in the country are participating,” says UAS vice-chancellor K. Narayana Gowda. The festival will feature 18 cultural events involving the participation of the best talent from these universities, he notes. They will be held simultaneously at five different venues in the university.

Nearly 2,000 youth would present various performances during the festival, according to UAS Dean (Student Welfare) and organising secretary of the festival K.R. Sreeramulu. The cultural events, which would be held on the GKVK campus of the UAS, are open to the general public on all the days. They will be held from 9 a.m. to 10.30 p.m, he says.

The festival will be inaugurated on February 13 by Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda. Minister of State for Kannada and Culture Umashree will be present. The valedictory of the event, to be held on February 17, will be attended by Minister of State Sports and Youth Services K. Abhaychandra and actor-turned MLC Jaggesh.

51 of the 69 agricultural universities in the country are participating

Farmers oppose Kasturirangan report

HEBRI (UDUPI DISTRICT), February 10, 2014 - *Deputy Commissioner tries to convince them, but in vain*

Farmers opposed the recommendations of K. Kasturirangan Committee Report on Western Ghats at a meeting organised by Udupi Zilla Raitha Sangha and Huyyar Patel Charitable Trust here on Saturday.

A group of farmers walked out of the meeting in protest against the Kasturirangan Report. Presiding over the meeting, Vinaykumar Sorake, Urban Development Minister, said the Cabinet Sub-Committee was studying the recommendations of the report. He had urged the State government to take the views of all affected Gram Panchayats before deciding on the panel's report.

M.T. Reju, Deputy Commissioner, tried to convince farmers that the Kasturirangan panel report had nothing against farmers and protected agricultural activities. He said it had even suggested that subsidies be provided to farmers. It did not oppose land conversion. It recommended a ban on quarrying, mining, and sand mining activities.

It also banned the establishment of red-category industries and thermal power plants. It was against the construction of industrial townships. It did not oppose the use of chemical fertilizers by farmers. As many as 35 villages in the district had been categorised by the panel as 'eco-sensitive villages', Mr. Reju said.

H.K. Sridhar Shetty, a farmer, said farmers were already facing problems due to demarcation of deemed forests. The construction of roads and electricity supply to villages in the Western Ghats area had been affected due to objections raised either by the Forest Department or the Revenue Department. The area from Hebri to Chara and Mudrady should

be kept out of the sensitive zones. "We cannot accept this Report. It is against the farmers," he said.

Satish Kini, farmer, demanded to know the parameters the Panel had followed before classifying villages as "eco-sensitive". The Panel had not even visited those villages, he said.

☐ **'We already facing problems due to demarcation of deemed forests'**

☐ **Farmers want to know the parameters followed for classifying villages as 'eco-sensitive'**

CM promises subsidy hike for dairy farmers

Govt. to help farmers hit by outbreak of FMD



Chief Minister Oommen Chandy launches the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme for dairy farmers at Kuruppanthara.

KOTTAYAM, February 10, 2014 - Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has said the government will consider the demand for hiking the dairy farmers' subsidy for purchasing cattle feeds. He was inaugurating a public meeting held as part of the State-level dairy farmers'

meet at Kuruppanthara on Saturday evening.

Mr. Chandy said the present subsidy rate of Re.1 for every litre of milk produced was inadequate. "The government will do all it can to increase the subsidy at least by a small margin," he said.

He said the government would continue its efforts to bring the dairy sector within the ambit of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGS).

The Chief Minister also called for collective efforts to ensure that the State attained self-sufficiency in milk production within two years. Steps have been taken to ensure fair price for milk. Efforts were also being made to help farmers whose cattle were hit by the foot-and-mouth disease. Dairy Development Minister K.C. Joseph said the government was considering the proposal to hike the pension of dairy farmers.

Pawar gave "a new direction" to agriculture, says Pranab

Agriculture Minister predicts 263.3 million grain production this year

NAGPUR, February 10, 2014 - India is likely to produce a record 263.3 million tonnes of foodgrains this year, Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said on Sunday.

At the inaugural ceremony of 'Krishi Vasant,' an agriculture exposition, here, he said: "India has witnessed a record grain production this year and emerged as the largest producer of rice and the second largest producer of wheat in the world. This year's grain production is likely to increase by four million tonnes, breaking the two-year-old record of 259 million tonnes."

He said India emerged as the largest rice exporter and the second largest wheat exporter.

President Pranab Mukherjee, who inaugurated the exposition, lauded Mr. Pawar for “stirring the Agriculture Ministry” during his 10 years at the helm and achieving a record grain production. “There was a time when India depended on other countries for foodgrains, but tremendous progress of the last 10 years has made us self-sufficient.” Mr. Pawar had given “a new direction” to agriculture. Calling for collaboration between industry and agriculture to enhance farm growth, Mr. Mukherjee said that improving farmers’ access to markets was vital to cut farm wastage, curb inflation and boost income.

Focus on agri-insurance products: IRDA

HYDERABAD, February 10, 2014 - Chairman of the Insurance Regulatory and Development (IRDA) T. S. Vijayan, on Friday, said it was imperative for general insurance companies to focus on agriculture insurance products.

Brokers could focus on agriculture and allied sectors, as also disaster management insurance products that are helped by remote-sensing technologies, he said, in his inaugural address at the 10th Brokers’ Summit of the Insurance Brokers Association of India (IBAI) here.

Because agricultural insurance had largely remained Government-driven thus far, there was potential for expansion in the segment, he pointed out. On demands put forth by IBAI President Sohanlal Kadel, he said a panel was working on them, including permission to sub-broking. “Brokers should have a proper post-sales service as policy servicing is critical to their credibility,” he said, adding that they also needed to help customise products in the retail general insurance segment.

Mr. Kadel said the focus of the summit was on the vital role of the broker in shaping future course of development of the Indian insurance market. Increasing insurance penetration and higher growth levels in partnership with customers and insurers were the prime objectives, he said.

About 250 delegates including IBAI members, customers and stakeholders took part in the meeting. As on date there are 315 licensed brokers, including 276 Direct, 33 Composite and six Re-insurance Brokers, handling about 24 per cent of business in the non-life segment and just 0.5 per cent of life insurance. Their services range from risk analysis to placement of business at best price with optimum coverage, rendering service and assisting in the handling of claims.

Mill owners flay proposed levy on rice

CUDDALORE, February 10, 2014 - The Central government’s move to bring rice under service tax regime by excluding the commodity from definition of an “agricultural produce” has caused resentment among millers and dealers across the State.

The Federation of Tamil Nadu Rice Mill Owners and Paddy-Rice Dealers’ Associations has called upon Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram to summarily drop the idea of removing rice from the Negative List (items mentioned are exempted).

Federation secretary A.C.Mohan told *The Hindu* that his organisation had come to know of the new Central order only on January 6 and within a couple of days sent representations to Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, Food Minister and other officials to take steps to urge the Centre to withdraw the levy.

Mr Mohan further said that he, along with Federation president D.Thulasingam, met Mr. Chidambaram at Karaikudi on February 1 and requested him to retain rice in the Negative List and withdraw the proposed levy.

The secretary quoted Mr Chidambaram as saying that the order was passed by his predecessor Pranab Mukherjee which he had to go through thoroughly before making any commitment on this score.

Mr. Mohan noted that till the pre-Budget session of 2012, rice was considered agricultural produce. Later, the definition was changed. As per Section 65 (B) and sub-clause 5 of the Finance Act, rice is no more an agriculture produce and as such it has to suffer a levy of 12.36 per cent in the form of sales tax.

“Since paddy cannot be consumed directly, it has to be de-husked to give it in rice form to the consumer. In this process, neither essential characteristics of rice are changed nor additional properties incorporated. Therefore, rice deserves to be treated as an agricultural produce,” Mr. Mohan said.

Banana prices shoot up as arrival at market dips

Monsoon failure, shrinking area of cultivation cited as reasons



Not so affordable: The slump in the arrival of banana has pushed up the prices of the fruit varieties in Batlagundu wholesale market. — File photo

DINDIGUL, February 10, 2014 - Banana is no more a poor man's fruit, thanks to spiralling prices over the last few days. The prices are expected to go up further in the future.

The retail price of banana has touched an all-time high of Rs.10 a fruit. Poor arrival of banana to the wholesale fruit market at Batlagundu has shot up the prices of the fruit. Monsoon failure for the last two years and shrinking area under banana cultivation are some of the reasons cited for the poor arrival, opine traders.

A majority of farmers have abandoned the banana crop and shifted to perennial crops owing to shortage of water and depletion of storage in Marudhanadhi and Manjalar dams. Arrival of banana from Dindigul and Theni districts has come down sharply. At present, the wholesale market depends on banana grown in Kulithalai and Lalgudi in Tiruchi district. Normally, the market receives around 7,000 to 10,000 banana bunches every week. But the arrival to the market recently got slashed to 1,000 to 2,000 bunches only.

When contacted, banana commission trader Thomas says that prices of 'Rasthali' variety of banana hovers between Rs.600 and Rs.900 per bunch, from Rs.300, registering a three times hike within a short span of time. 'Sevvazhai' is being sold at Rs.900 and prices of 'Karpuravalli' oscillate between Rs.400 and Rs.500 per bunch. 'Poovan' variety is being sold at Rs.300 to Rs.400 per bunch. “Earlier, we had struggled to sell one bunch even at Rs.100. Prices of these fruits rose by 200 to 300 per cent from its usual price,” say traders.

Increase in the arrival of banana alone will bring down the price. Expanding the area under banana cultivation and improving the yield will help stabilise the prices. But the present scenario will not change in the near future, add traders.

At present, a single banana fruit is being sold at Rs.10 in the district, shocking all sections of the people.

Batlagundu is one of the major banana markets in the State. Traders here send bananas to Kerala, Karnataka, Hosur, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Chennai.

The market functions twice a week.

Tiruvarur rice to the rescue of Pudukottai



Supply route: Paddy and rice brought from Tiruvarur by train being offloaded in Pudukottai.

PUDUKOTTAI, February 10, 2014 - The Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) has made arrangements for prompt supply of rice through public distribution system by obtaining paddy and rice from Tiruvarur district where

procurement has been in full swing.

The TNCSC has come out with the plan keeping in mind the prevailing drought conditions in Pudukottai district. On Saturday, the first consignment of 2,000 tonnes of paddy and 1,300 tonnes of rice reached Pudukottai from Tiruvarur. "We have immediately despatched paddy for Cover And Plinth (CAP) storage and hulling and rice to the taluk godowns in Alangudi, Aranthangi, Avudaiyarkovil, Manamelkudi, Tirumayam, and Kulathur," said S.Sukumaran, regional manager of the corporation.

The plan to move paddy and rice from Tiruvarur by rail has been revived after 15 years as moving the contingent by road has been expensive and time consuming," sources said.

CAP storage ensures proper conservation of paddy, said Mannar Uma Shankar, manager of Quality Circle, Pudukottai.

The monthly off-take of rice for public distribution was about 5,000 tonnes in the district. The rice received on Saturday was immediately released for public distribution to avoid supply constraints, sources said.

Water level at Mettur dam

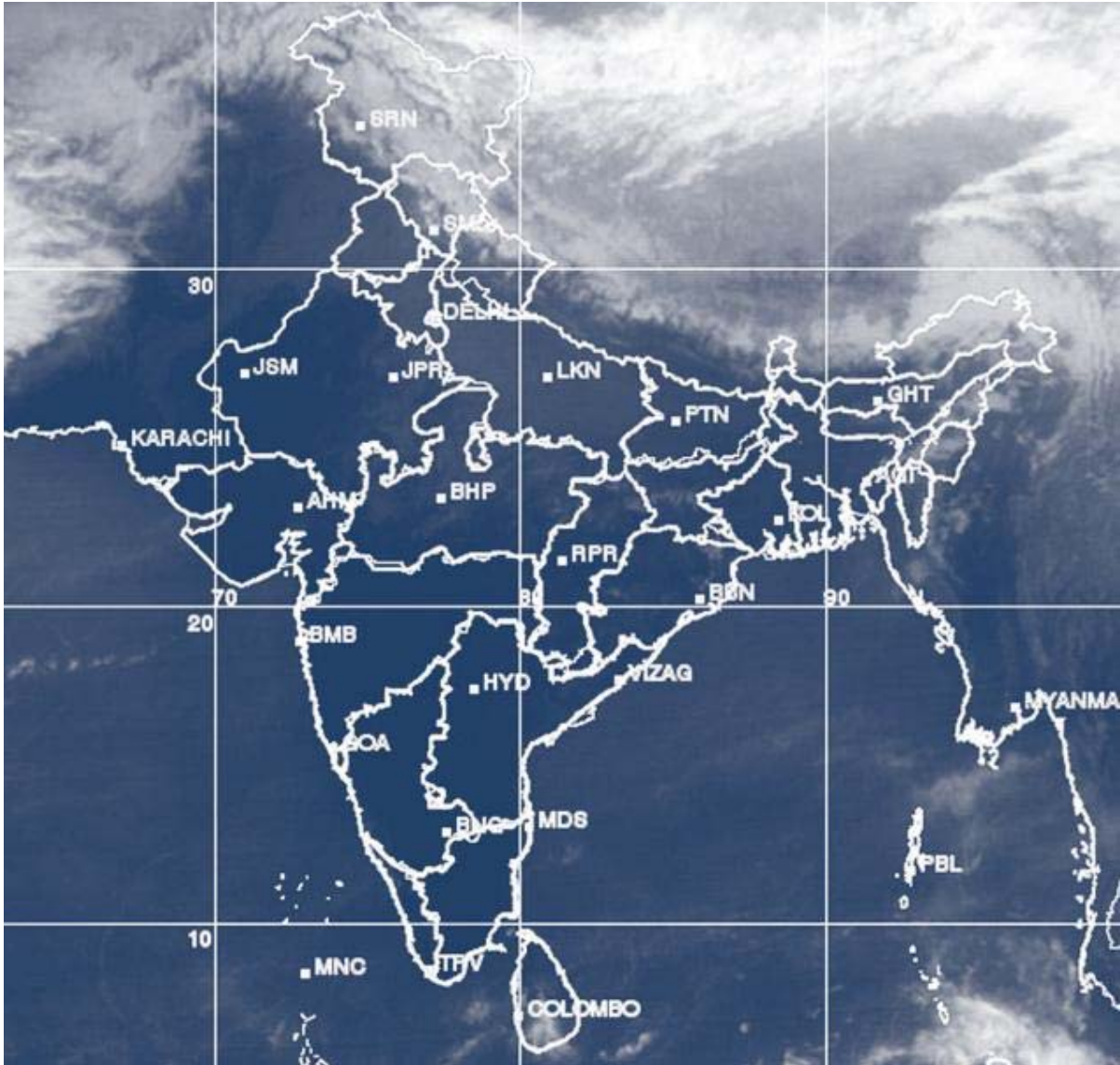
The water level at the **Mettur Dam** stood at 51.20 feet on Sunday against its full level of 120 feet.

The inflow was 285 cusecs and the discharge 1,000 cusecs.

Water level in the **Papanasam dam** on Sunday stood at 70.10 feet (maximum level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 322.57 cusecs and 1,154.75 cusecs was discharged from the dam. The water level in the **Manimuthar dam** stood at 81.53 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 17 cusecs and 90 cusecs was discharged.

Kanyakumari - The level in the **Pechipparai dam** stood at 16.50 feet, 47.30 feet in Perunchani, while it was 7.12 feet in Chittar 1, 7.21 feet in Chittar 11, 3.80 feet in Poigai and 54.12 feet in Mamabazathuraiyaru.

Weather



INSAT PICTURE AT 11-30 hrs. Observations recorded at 8-30 a.m. on February 09.



Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Sunny

Monday, Feb 10

Max 30° | Min 20°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 78

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:33

Sunset: 06:13

Barometer: 1011

Tomorrow's Forecast








Partly Cloudy

Tuesday, Feb 11

Max 31° | Min 19°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday Feb 12	Thursday Feb 13	Friday Feb 14	Saturday Feb 15	Sunday Feb 16
				
31° 19° Partly Cloudy	25° 21° Cloudy	25° 22° Overcast	25° 23° Overcast	26° 23° Cloudy

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Farmers tap into oil palm profits

BELGAUM: The Oil Palm Development Project, implemented by the horticulture department and private entrepreneur Godrej Agrovet Limited (GAL), has evoked a good response from farmers in Belgaum district. Crop area is growing steadily and turning out to be alternative to the main crop of the district--sugarcane.

Over 3,300 hectares is being used for this project. In 2004-05 when the project started, cultivation began with 194 hectares. Said Ravindra Hakati, deputy director of horticulture department, "we are receiving a good response from farmers for the crop. So far, 1,900 farmers are cultivating oil palm in the district and it is increasing. This year we plan to add 408 hectares."

[Oil palm farmer Purshottam Nadagouda](#) from Kundaragi village in Gokak taluk says the crop has turned 'Kamadhenu' for him. "The crop demands less labour and investment; and the revenue generated is good. There is no tension of getting a buyer as GAL purchases the produce and deposits the payment into my account. I started cultivation in 2006-07 when the price for per tonne oil palm was Rs 4,500. Now, the Central government has announced a support price of Rs 8,500," he added.

What has also boosted the project is the various subsidies the Central government has for oil palm growers like for fertilizers, pump set, drip irrigation system, compensation in case of loss during gestation period, support for intercropping etc, under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. GAL also gives technical support and training to growers and buys fresh fruit bunches of oil palm from them at the rate fixed by Price Fixation Committee on that date.

President Pranab praises farmers for freeing country of food shortage

NAGPUR: The humble Indian farmer living in penury and hardship, braving fickle weather got his due on Sunday when his contribution in bailing out the country from perennial food shortage came in for generous praise. President [Pranab Mukherjee](#) said this feat would not have been possible without the farmers' hard work. "From net importers of foodgrains five years ago, today we are major exporters of rice, wheat, fruits, cotton and sugar relieving the strain on economy."

Praising the UPA government's performance in the last 10 years, he said the annual growth of 7.9% was achieved because of huge contribution from agriculture sector during 2003 to 2013 period. He also praised Union agriculture minister [Sharad Pawar](#) for giving "new dimension and direction to agriculture in the last ten years."

Inaugurating the five-day biggest-ever agriculture exposition 'Krishi Vasant', here, on Sunday, Mukherjee said the country has emerged as the world's top exporter of rice and second largest exporter of wheat, sugar and cotton. "Till recent times, every finance minister had to worry about rising import bills of food, fertilizers and fuel. We had to beg for wheat from countries like US, Canada and Australia. Today, we export wheat."

The country has achieved food security because of special initiatives taken for increasing foodgrain production in the eastern part of the country, production of pulses and oilseeds and provision of credit to farmers. These measures have resulted in ushering in the second green revolution in the country. "All this was possible because of measures initiated in favour of farmers that included crop credit, loan waivers, providing support prices to agricultural produce and adapting modern techniques," Mukherjee said.

"When the government tried to bring the Food Security Bill, there were apprehensions about its implementation. There were many sceptics. But because of tireless efforts of farmers that dream has been realized. Country's grain production has touched a new record," he noted.

The five-day agro-exhibition is a joint collaboration of Union agriculture ministry, Maharashtra government and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Appreciating the role of CII, Mukherjee said agriculture and the industry should go hand in hand for achieving new growth trajectories. The President hoped that the banking sector would achieve its target of providing Rs7 lakh crore crop credit to farmers in the next season so as to give further boost to agriculture sector.

Chief minister [Prithviraj Chavan](#) noted that the industry participation in the expo showed the faith reposed in the farmer's capabilities to boost economy. He hoped the historic fair, a tribute to son of soil Vasatrao Naik, would be a harbinger of second green revolution in the country.

'263 mt foodgrain production this year'

Union agriculture minister Sharad Pawar said on Sunday that a new record of 263.2 million tonnes (MT) in foodgrain production is expected this year. "This would be about 4 million tonnes more than the earlier record of 259 million tonnes achieved two years ago," Pawar noted.

He said measures like higher support prices given to farmers in the last one decade has paid off. "India has now emerged as a prominent player in exporting rice, wheat, cotton, milk, fish and vegetables," he said. The efforts of scientists in developing high-yielding, input-efficient, disease-tolerant varieties along with new technologies adopted by farmers have resulted in increasing quality and quantity. "India's foodgrain production has touched an all-time high," he added.

Today at the expo:

Manipur, Kerala, Punjab, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Rajasthan, [Tamil Nadu](#), Mizoram to present various dance performances.

Marathi agri poetry.

Cane dues: Govt to issue RCs



As per reports, cane dues for current season is around Rs 1,200 crore.

SUMMARY

The government has kept February 20 as the deadline for mills to clear their dues, before issuing RCs against the defaulters.

After several attempts to get the cane dues for last year cleared, the state government is now planning to issue recovery certificates (RCs) against the mills, which are yet to clear their arrears for 2012-13. The government has kept February 20 as the deadline for mills to clear their dues, before issuing RCs against the defaulters.

As per the latest report from the Uttar Pradesh Cane Commissioner's office, Rs 541 crore is yet to be paid to the farmers for the last crushing season, while a total of Rs 19,997 crore have been paid to the farmers against their cane purchase for 2012-13. Around 78 of the 100 odd private mills in the state have already cleared their dues for the last year.

"We will wait till February 20 after which we will start issuing recovery certificates against the mills," Cane Commissioner Subhash Chand Sharma told The Indian Express. "The major defaulters now are Bajaj group, Mawana group and Modi group. Between Mawana and Modi group, the standing dues are nearly Rs 300 crore, where as Bajaj Group has dues worth around Rs 154 crore to settle," said Sharma.

In the crushing season 2012-13, Bajaj Group, which has 16 sugar mills running in UP, had crushed canes worth Rs 4071.48 crore, while Mawana group, with three sugar mills in Meerut and Muzaffarnagar, had crushed cane worth Rs 938.74 crore. Modi group, with two mills in Baghpat and Ghazipur, had crushed cane worth Rs 499.68 crore. Sharma said that recovery certificate had already been issued against Mawana Sugar Mill at Naglamal, Meerut, in August 2013. The mill had crushed cane worth Rs 199.5 crore in 2012-13, and had dues to the tune of 142 crore standing when the recovery certificate was issued against it.

As per reports, cane dues for current season is around Rs 1,200 crore. Of these, around 37 per cent of the dues have been cleared, said Sharma.

Meanwhile, the interest free loan promised by the Government of India under the interest subvention scheme for the sugar industry is yet to come through, said Sharma. The cane commissioner said that the state government has written to the Finance Ministry and other officials of Government of India for the bank loans to the sugar mills but nothing has come forth so far.

Mulayam faces protest at farmers' meet over cane dues



The cane farmers agitated before Mulayam Singh demanding payment of cane dues for the past and current cane crushing seasons.

SUMMARY

Meet turns political, state representatives lobby for SP chief as PM

In a major embarrassment for the Samajwadi Party, even as its national president Mulayam Singh Yadav is trying to woo farmers of UP for the parliamentary elections, the cane farmers agitated before him demanding payment of cane dues for the past and current cane crushing seasons.

Yadav was addressing an Indian Farmer's Representative Conference in Lucknow Saturday, claiming that his party alone works for the benefit of the farmers, when chairmen and farmers of various district cane committees approached him with grievances of non-payment of dues.

However, aggrieved at not getting an opportunity to voice their demands before the former CM, the farmers shouted their demands even as Yadav left the venue.

The demands of cane farmers include payment of dues for not only the previous year, but also the current crushing season; the non-payment of cane society commission, and the closure of sugar mills.

"Around Rs 125 crore of the current season and Rs 59 crore from the last crushing season is not paid to the cane farmers," said Rishipal Bhati, chairman of Khatauli Cane Development Committee, Muzaffarnagar.

Earlier, the conference turned into a political event, with farmer representatives from various states like Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar using the dais to advocate for Yadav to be the next prime minister of the country.

Targeting the BJP for communal politics and raising the Ram Temple issue, Yadav, in his address, said the BJP had accumulated a lot of donations and funds in the name of constructing the Ram Temple and the party should come forth and tell the public what happened to those funds. "If I would not have stood up before the (Babri) mosque (to protect it), the country would have faced a major problem and Muslims would have lost faith (in the system)," said Yadav, recounting his action against attempted Babri mosque demolition while he was the UP CM.

"I had offered the VHP a land next to the disputed site to construct a temple there but they did not accept it," said Yadav, adding it was never their intention to construct a temple.

Targeting its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, Yadav said Modi questioned the development in UP, but the kind of development UP has seen, no other state has witnessed in the country.

The proposal by the farmers included the demand for payment of cane dues to the farmers of UP; running the closed sugar mills of the state; giving fifty per cent subsidy on farmer equipment and diesel in order to promote best farming technology amongst the farmers; and bringing down the agriculture loan's interest from four per cent to three per cent, amongst others, said Dr Arvind Kumar Singh, General Secretary, Uttar Pradesh Cane Development Committee Chairman Association, which organised the conference.

10 Islands Declared 'Fishermen Villages'

In a major boon to Lakshadweep islanders, the Government of India has declared 10 islands in the Union Territory 'fishermen villages'.

The tag accorded to these islands comes at a time when Lakshadweep is losing most of the benefits offered by the Central Government for fishermen despite its inhabitants depending primarily on fishing as an occupation.

In a letter issued by Joint Secretary Raja Sekhar Vundru of the Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries on February 7, 10 islands have been considered fishermen villages as per the Marine Fisheries Census 2010 (Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands).

Agatti, Amini, Androth, Bitra, Chetlat, Kadmat, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kittan and Minicoy are now fishermen villages.

As per the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) for fishermen's villages, active fishermen will have access to group accident insurance, model fishermen villages will be developed and the fishermen will be given saving-cum-relief.

Houses worth `75,000 will be constructed for the fishermen, as per the 12th Five Year Plan.

Multipurpose community halls will also be constructed. An integrated drinking water scheme will be included under the list of benefits for the islanders. As per the saving-cum-relief scheme, if a fisherman deposits `100 in a bank, the government will pitch in `300.

According to NCP national secretary Jimmy George who briefed the media here on Saturday, Lakshadweep islanders had been not able to avail of many benefits under the national scheme of welfare of fishermen.

"Crores of money is set aside by the Central Government for the benefit of fisherfolk every year. However, since the Lakshadweep islands were yet to be declared 'fishermen villages', the islanders never received the benefits," he said.

As per the list under the Marine Fisheries Census 2010, 5,338 fishermen families live in Lakshadweep. Of this, 1,872 are BPL families. Nearly 12 per cent of the fishermen community live in 'kutcha' houses. P P Muhammed Faisal, NCP candidate for the Lok Sabha polls from Lakshadweep, said when Minister of State for Agriculture and Food Processing Tariq Anwar visited Lakshadweep on December 27, he had declared five islands to be fishermen villages. "After much persuasion, it was decided to give the 'fishermen village' tag to 10 islands based on the commonality of geographical and livelihood factors," Faisal said.

THE HINDU Business Line

Awards for coconut farming

Kochi, February 9: The Coconut Development Board has instituted national awards to recognise and promote excellence in coconut cultivation, innovative methods in coconut farming, product development, product improvement, quality improvement, product diversification and marketing. The National Awards 2012 will be distributed by Sharad Pawar, Union Minister for Agriculture, Food and Public Distribution on February 11 in New

Delhi. As many as 16 award winners under various categories will receive awards on the occasion. This is the fourth national award distribution function being organised by the Coconut Development Board. Our Bureau

Step up focus on agriculture insurance: IRDA chief

Hyderabad, February 9: Referring to some of the demands made earlier by IBAI President Sohanlal Kadel, the regulator said a panel was working on aspects, including permission to sub-broking. Brokers should put in place a proper post-sales service.

“Policy servicing was critical to the credibility of the brokers,” he added.

They should also help customisation of products in the retail general insurance segment, he added.

Earlier, Kadel had requested that the regulator increase the limit of business from a single client from the current 30 per cent to 50 per cent, reduce the annual brokerage fee and permit sub-broking.

Many of the issues brokers face with general insurers, such as delays in payment of brokerage, issue of Form 16A certificate, and documentation and settlement of claims, should also be addressed, he added.

In search of a second White Revolution

The gap between milk demand and supply can be addressed by adopting innovative dairy farming models

India has retained its leadership as the world’s largest milk producer for the last 15 years.

This has been made possible by Operation Flood — which ushered in the White Revolution in India. Production estimates stand at 132.43 million tonnes for 2012-13, accounting for approximately 17 per cent of global milk production. Unlike the other major milk producing countries, the growth story in India was driven largely by small scale farmers.

Eighty per cent of Indian cattle is owned by farmers with a herd size of up to four animals.

But a number of factors impact the sustenance of these traditional small farms, such as the subsidiary nature of dairying as an activity, stagnant yields, rising feed/fodder costs and a shift in rural areas towards other vocations.

Parallel to the supply side challenges, India is slated to witness a boom in dairy demand of over 6 per cent annually. However, the average annual growth in supply is only a little over 4 per cent per annum. The demand-supply interplay effect is evident in steadily rising milk prices in the recent past. We clearly need a Second White Revolution.

One of the most effective means to bridge the demand-supply gap is an innovative approach to commercial dairy farming models so that they are sustainable, inclusive and scalable. Some of these possibilities are explained below.

Large scale dairy farms

Large scale integrated dairy farms can house over 1,000 high yielding cross bred cows, with automated milking, feeding, milk processing, integrated feed production and in-house breed improvement. The ownership and responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the farm lies with an anchor processor, who may enter into contract farming model with the farmers for procurement of green fodder, a key input for enhancing milk yield of cattle.

The milk is either sold to other dairies or used for processing into value added milk products at one’s own plant(s). The significant benefit of this model is efficiency in scale of operations. This model is suitable for large cooperatives and corporates.

Hub and spoke model

The main farm (hub), owned by an anchor has all the integrated facilities for milking, feed production and milk processing with a cattle count of over 500 cows. The connected/ satellite farms (spokes), with 50 to 200 cattle each, have basic infrastructure for milking and cattle management and are owned by progressive dairy farmers in close proximity to the main farm. The anchor provides technical support (veterinary care, feed management, and training) to the satellite farms.

This model offers the benefits of product and process control, with low capital expenditure by the anchor. Critical to this model are the control systems that need to be put in place to ensure that farm management administration is of desired level and that milk output quality adheres to the set standards. Further, the land requirement is distributed over multiple locations. The model is socially inclusive and lends itself to quick scale-up.

Progressive dairy farmer

With some support from an anchor processor, a number of progressive farmers may scale up their herds to establish mid-sized dairy farms with 200-300 cattle. Farms in this case are semi automated for milking and feeding. This is an entrepreneurship model where the anchor without incurring substantial capital expenditure benefits from an assured supply of milk of traceable, consistent and good quality.

The anchor provides technical support (veterinary care, feed management, training) and financial support (directly or through financial institutions) to the farms. This model is constrained by way of limited capital investment capability of the progressive farmers and is also challenging in terms of the anchor's ability to monitor farm operations.

However, if replicated, this can be an excellent partnership model between farmers and processors and a win-win for all stakeholders.

This model is based on the concept of building "hostels" for cows. This helps farmers achieve economies of scale and results in superior dairy management systems.

This model envisages investment in farm infrastructure by an anchor. Cow stalls are leased out on nominal charges to farmers, who are responsible for housing of cows and managing them under guidance of the anchor. The automation level of the farms can depend on the farm size. The milk would be purchased under a buy-back arrangement by the anchor. This model enables the smallest dairy farmers to avail the benefits of technology, scale and systems.

Community Model

Community ownership and management of common infrastructure for housing, breeding, feeding and milking under a cooperative/ producer company model shall be applicable here. A number of such farms within a restricted geographical periphery can avail of technical support services on a pooling basis. Farmers are not restricted to sell their milk to a specific entity. Milking machines, equipment, bulk coolers and milk storage facilities are owned by the community.

The strategy going forward to address the supply demand challenge needs to be aimed at strengthening supply systems which are sustainable and scalable. Drivers of success for each model need to be tested on the ground. Due to the current diversity in nature of farming systems, socio-cultural realities and climatic patterns, no single model can emerge as the answer to the search for a second White Revolution.

AP farmers can get soil test reports on mobiles

Hyderabad, February 9: Earlier, this would take several days for the farmers, involving visits to laboratories and sifting through stacks of reports to find their papers.

The State Government on Saturday launched a new mobile technology platform to help farmers increase output and save costs. As part of this initiative, it unveiled a slew of IT-enabled services for the farmers, covering areas of farm mechanisation, soil test-based fertiliser recommendations and online licence management system.

The State Agriculture Minister Kanna Laxminarayana, who launched the services, said this has drawn appreciation at the national level and would be replicated by the Centre in other States.

Carefully developed

Initially, this covers 31 different services, including insurance enquiries. "The suite of services will be slowly expanded. It has taken several months for us to develop this platform, especially as we wanted the SMS messages to be sent in Telugu," K Madhusudhana Rao, Commissioner of Agriculture, said.

Explaining how the process worked, he said the farmer can first apply online for the services from the nearest mee seva centre or the neighbourhood Internet centres. "After the application is submitted by the farmer, it comes to the department for further processing. Once the applications are registered, farmers will be allotted unique identification numbers," he pointed out.

As part of the services, an application has been developed to send soil test-based fertiliser recommendations to farmers through SMS after the soil test results are made online. A pilot programme has been taken up in Rangareddy, Medak and Krishna districts and will later be extended to other districts.

The services include an online license management system for dealers, who can now apply for licenses online for marketing seeds and pesticides.

The State is likely to end the current fiscal with a food grain production of 207 lakh tonnes, groundnut 11 lakh tonnes and 52 lakh bales of cotton. These are slightly below the target because of the three cyclones and heavy rains that struck the State before the season.

Business Standard

India's corn exports likely to fall 31% in 2013-14



India's outbound shipments of corn are expected to slide 31 per cent to 3.2 million tonnes in the 2013-14 marketing year hit by weak export demand, according to a report by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

India is estimated to have shipped a record 4.67 million tonnes of corn (maize) in the 2012-13 marketing year (November-October).

"Corn export is estimated lower at 3.2 million tonnes on weak export demand," the USDA said in the report.

Provisional monthly trade estimates indicate a sharp decline in corn exports since August 2013 due to relatively weak global prices on improved supplies from other competing locations compared to last year, it said.

Besides, corn prices in India have been relatively steady due to strong domestic demand from poultry and starch industry, and the government's intervention of procuring corn at minimum support price of Rs 13,100/tonne in many states.

Domestic spot prices of corn in the major producing states currently range from Rs 11,640 to Rs 13,650 per tonne.

Some corn is being exported to Bangladesh and South Asian markets at prices ranging from USD 235-240 per tonne Freight on Board (FOB), which is not competitive in the traditional destinations compared to the corn available from other competing origins, the report observed.

The USDA said, "Corn exports are expected to improve in coming months assuming the current price parity of Indian corn vis-a-vis other origins remains unchanged."

There are expectations that domestic prices will ease further with the harvest of winter corn in Bihar and eastern India, where government procurement is not very effective.

Quoting market sources, the USDA report said the Indian government has procured about 4,00,000-4,50,000 tonnes of corn under the minimum support price operation in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The last corn procurement of this general magnitude was 3,28,858 tonnes in 2009-10.

Market sources also report a strong demand from the domestic poultry industry since October 2014 on improved consumer demand for poultry products and relatively lower feed prices. Off-take by the starch industry is also strong, the report added.
