

THE HINDU

As India consumes more and more maize, search on for better varieties

KUMAR BURADIKATTI

The Global Maize Programme, an initiative of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, is intensively pursuing the development of heat-stress resilient, high-yielding and nutritionally enriched maize varieties in order to face the challenges of global warming and meet the global demand for maize, the agency's director Prasanna B.M. has said. "With the financial assistance of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the CIMMYT has undertaken 'Heat Stress Resilient Maize' for South Asia, a five-year project, for developing heat tolerant and high-yielding maize varieties specifically suitable for South Asian climatic conditions. The project has commenced in 2012 and will end in 2017," Mr. Prasanna said at a press conference at the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) here on Monday. Various public institutions from South Asia, he said, had collaborated in the project. The UAS, Purdue University in the U.S., the Bihar Agriculture University in Sabour, Bhagalpur, the Maize and Millets Research Institute of Pakistan, the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, and National Maize Research Institute of Nepal were involved in the project. Four Indian private seed companies too collaborated. Terming maize a crop for the future, Mr. Prasanna said the area under maize cultivation was expanding globally. "A two degree Celsius increase in temperature reduces the maize yields by 13 per cent. Changes in global climatic conditions have led to increased temperatures and increased frequency of droughts. These objective conditions have prompted us to take up development of new heat stress tolerant varieties of maize through advanced genomic approaches." The increasing gap between increase in yield and consumption, he added, was widening the demand-supply gap. "While the growth of maize yield is just 28 per cent, the growth of its consumption is 70 per cent. The gap is triggering a great demand for maize globally. In China, with 32 million hectares of maize cultivation, the maize production and consumption has crossed that of rice," Mr. Prasanna said. In India, 80 per cent of the crop is used for feed and 20 per cent is for consumption, but in Africa it is other way around. "The production of maize needs to be doubled by 2050 to meet growing global demand," he added.

Members want measures to help drought-hit farmers



A withered paddy field at Vengur in Tiruchi.— A File photo

Members of various political parties in the Assembly urged the State government to take steps for the benefit of farmers who, they said, were affected by successive spells of drought. Participating in a debate on a call attention motion, Communist Party of India (Marxist) member A. Laser wanted the government to declare most of the districts drought-hit and said only such a measure would help to increase the number of days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) from 100 to 150.

‘Relax norms’

S. Gunasekaran of the CPI urged the government to relax norms for drought relief to farmers. E.V. Velu of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam suggested that crop loans be waived. At the end of the debate, Revenue Minister R. B. Udhayakumar said the government was closely monitoring the rainfall position and the storage of reservoirs. It would take required steps.

Vegetables go dearer as drought hits yield

Oddanchatram market gets less vegetables



DROP:A view of wholesale vegetable market at Oddanchatram. **PHOTO:** G. KARTHIKEYAN

The prices of vegetables have skyrocketed at the wholesale vegetable market near here in Oddanchatram. According to wholesale vegetable traders, the market receives thousands tonnes of vegetables daily, brought in largely from Coimbatore and Theni districts. However, in the past two weeks, the market has been receiving only 500 tonnes of vegetables every day. They attribute to drought as the reason for the drop in the quantity of vegetables coming to the market. “Normally there are no functions during the Tamil month of Aadi. Therefore, there will not be much demand for vegetables and prices of the vegetables will remain cheaper. But, this year, the circumstances are different,” says T. Thangavel, president of the wholesale traders association in the market. “We do not even have adequate drinking water. Due to drought, the yield of vegetables has gone down,” he explains. Sources in the market indicate that the prices of the vegetables are likely to go up in the coming days as well. The vegetables in the wholesale market are priced around Rs. 15 less than the retail market. On Tuesday, the price of drumstick remained unaffected at Rs. 18 per kg. Whereas the price (per kg) of onion was Rs. 45, beans Rs. 65, chilli Rs. 58, tomato Rs. 45 and beetroot was Rs. 30, sources in the market said.

The vegetables from the market are sent mainly to Kerala, followed by Chennai for sale.

Farmers take to the streets over 'drought-hit' tag

Demand Rs.10,000 per acre compensation each month during distress period

Farmers affiliated to the Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam courted arrest for staging blockade across the district on Tuesday. Protesters of the CPM-affiliated farmers' association demanded declaration of delta districts, particularly tail-end areas, as drought-hit and demanded adequate compensation. Speaking to *The Hindu*, V. Marimuthu, ex-MLA, who led the protest organised in front of the Nagapattinam block development office, said the government should compensate farmers and farm-wage labourers for the loss incurred due to water scarcity and crop failure. According to Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, farmers should be given Rs.10,000 per acre and farm wage labourers Rs.3,000 per month compensation during the distress period. The protesters also demanded that wage days under MNREGS be increased from 100 to 150 days. Alleging that some panchayats have not disbursed wages under the job scheme, farmers demanded that wage be given to workers on a weekly basis. The demonstrators also demanded immediate dredging of water bodies. Old age pension too had not reached several eligible beneficiaries, Mr. Marimuthu said. Due to lack of work, farm labourers have to travel to far off places in search of jobs. Hence, additional buses must be operated during mornings and evenings to help these labourers find jobs, Mr. Marimuthu said. Drinking water scarcity was another problem which haunts villages and authorities must take steps to address the issue immediately, he said. According to Giridharan, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, though the government declared Nagapattinam as drought-hit during 2012-13, no relief had been received yet. The protests in Keezhvelur were led by district secretary of CPI (M) A.V. Murugayyan, in Keezhayur by MLA Nagai Maali, and in Vedaranyam by Kovai Subramaniam. Protest blockades were held in all the 10 blocks except Kollidam. Arrests were made in Nagapattinam, where of the 300 protesters, 200 were women. Similarly, over 300 people were arrested in Sirkazhi, Mayiladuthurai, and Kuthalam. In other places, protesters dispersed after a demonstration.

Modern irrigation tools to be supplied to farmers

The Department of Agricultural Engineering has decided to supply 18 oil engines, 12 sprinklers and six rain guns to its units in Vellore district for supply to farmers. According to a release from Vellore Collector R. Nanthagopal farmers could obtain the equipment to pump water from their farm ponds or wells. They should select the equipment and register their names with the Department of Agricultural Engineering in Vellore, Walajapet or Tirupattur.

TNAU programme

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University will conduct a two-day training programme on ready-to-use products on July 30 and 31. A release says that faculty at the Post Harvest Technology Centre will train the participants in preparation of health mix, dosa mix, dhokla mix, bisibelabath mix, kheer mix, halwa mix, gulab jamun mix, ice cream mix, tomato rice mix and soup mix. For details dial 0422-6611340.

Farmers' grievances day meeting

The monthly farmers' grievance meeting will be held here at the Collectorate on July 25. According to an administration release, farmers are invited to attend the meeting to be presided over by Collector T.Munusamy scheduled for 11 a.m.

Farmers' meet

The district administration will conduct the farmers' grievances day meeting at the collectorate here at 10 a.m. on July 24. An official press release called upon the farmers to take part in the meeting and get their grievances solved.

Training on post-harvest technology

The Central Warehousing Corporation will conduct a two day training programme on post-harvest technology for the benefit of the farmers at the Veterinary University Training and Research Centre, Pillaiyarpatti here. The training programme consists of a field trip to Central Warehouse to have awareness on scientific storage of food grain, pulses, so on and adopting various preservative and curative measures to save the grains from pest, according to a release of N. Muthusami, Warehouse Manager.

Farmer's way to manage drought, labour shortage

K. RAJU



NOVEL CULTIVATION: Onion and banana are being planted in multi-crop system at a farm at Chinnamanur in Theni district.PHOTO: G. KARTHIKEYAN

Acute drought and shortage of labour and water for irrigation have forced progressive farmers to devise new strategies to raise crops. A farmer in Chinnamanur has successfully adopted a multi-cropping system blending one short-term and one long-term crop to improve yield. R. Singaram of Seepalakottai has raised banana and small onion in the same field using limited water for irrigation. "I look at multi-cropping as a feasible strategy to overcome difficulties in farming. It helps me produce more in a limited area and avert risk of crop failure." He has formed a five-and-a-half-foot-wide pit around the banana tree to sow onion. "I need not irrigate separately for banana and small onions. Irrigation cost has come down by half now," he adds. Onion plants prevent development of stem borer and root borer in banana. Mr. Singaram has raised onion and banana on six acres and plans to expand it by four acres next month. "Before planting banana and onion, I had raised maize as single crop. After harvesting, I ploughed the land with maize plants and applied 100 loads of manure and goat droppings. It improved the health of plants and made them disease-resistant. Attack by pests like green worms and beetle is also reduced." "In 90 days, onion crop will be ready for harvesting. Banana will give long-term benefits and onion will meet the short-term expenses," he says. Since water yield in his well was not enough to irrigate the entire area, he had raised crops only in half of the land and left the other half barren. He cultivated only dry crops that did not fetch much income. Now, multi-cropping has enabled him to utilise the entire land to raise twin crops at a low cost and with less water. It helps to protect the soil from extreme erosion, improves soil structure, enhances fertility, conserves moisture and suppresses pests and pathogens. It also contributes towards improving overall health of ecosystem. Use of external inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides is reduced substantially, he points out. He has maximised the use of natural resources and minimised external inputs to scale down expenses.

Tomato prices will make you see red

CHITRA V. RAMANI



That tomato soup or the steaming tomato rasam has just become a little beyond reach. With the price of a kilogram of tomato hovering around Rs. 80 kg, tomato dishes

may well be off the menu in many households in the city. The wholesale price of tomato is around Rs. 55 to Rs. 60 a kg while the retail price ranges from Rs. 70 to Rs. 80 a kg. The price of tomato in HOPCOMS outlets is Rs. 70 a kg. The prices have skyrocketed owing to shortage in supply, sources said and pointed out that in June, the price was around Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 per kilo. Sources said that with rains arriving late in many tomato growing areas, the crops had failed. The city usually gets around 500 tonnes every day. With crops failing and reduction in yield, the city is now getting just 200 tonnes a day. Sources added that the city received very little stock from the Nagamangala and Mandya regions. Much of the stock that arrives in Bangalore is from Hoskote, Malur and Kolar areas. "The tomato crop has failed in many other states as well due to insufficient rainfall. Buyers from Maharashtra, West Bengal and even neighbouring Bangladesh have been purchasing tomatoes directly from farmers in the Kolar market. With huge demand, the wholesale prices in the Kolar market shot up to Rs. 70 a kg on Monday," the source said. The price will continue to be in the range of Rs. 70 to Rs. 80 a kg for at least another fortnight. "It is unlikely that the price will increase further, as it has reached the maximum," the source added.

Soya bean, green gram hit by pests

Stem fly attack on soya bean and green gram crop in Bidar district that could reduce yield significantly, is causing anxious moments among farmers. In a release, Krishi Vigyan Kendra has said that farmers should look for marks that look like a trail left by a snake on the stem of the crop, indicating that the crop has suffered a pest-attack. The pest lays eggs on the surface of the stem. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae bore small holes on the stem and start eating the plant. The stem either dries down or the plant is stunted. Clear signs of the disease are seen only after one month to 45 days of the pest attack. Farmers should spray a mixture of Thiomethaxam 25 wg 0.3 gram or Imidachloprid 0.2 ml in one litre of water to check the disease.

FM radio to be closer to farmers

FIROZ ROZINDAR

UAS to set up four community radio stations in north Karnataka



The Bijapur Krishi Vigyan Kendra to have one of the four FM radio station dedicated to farmers. With an objective of taking radio technology closer to the farmers, the University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, has decided to set up four community-based FM radio stations in four Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVS) of North Karnataka region. The university set up the first-of-its-kind radio station dedicated to farmers in the country, and now wants to expand it to other districts. Devendrappa, Programme Officer of community radio station of the university, told *The Hind* that the university was preparing a proposal to be submitted to the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to establish FM radio stations. “We are preparing project for Bijapur, Bagalkot, Sirsi (North Canara) and Hanumanakatti (Haveri). The FM radio station can reach within 15 km radius,” Dr. Devendrappa said. He said the station would function on the concept of programmes that were ‘by the farmers and for the farmers’. He said the station would broadcast programmes of the achievements of farmers, including women farmers, who could become a role model for other farmers. The farmers would be told about researches taking place on new species to help increase the yield. Weather forecast and market rate of commodities would be broadcast, expert guidance would be given in controlling pests, live phone-in programmes would be held where farmers could call up experts on farming issues and get answers. Events such as Krishna Mela would be telecast live. “Besides this, agriculture related folk songs would be aired,” Dr. Devendrappa said.

Support promised for fallow land farming

Rural Development Minister K.C. Joseph has said that labour for land preparation work will be provided through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) if the Kudumbasree Mission comes up with plans to cultivate in fallow land. Inaugurating an agricultural seminar held at Sreekantapuram here on Tuesday in connection with the Kudumbasree anniversary programmes, the Minister said the State government would extend all support to Kudumbasree groups if they were prepared to cultivate in fallow land taken on lease. Mr. Joseph said the State would emerge self-sufficient in the production of vegetables, milk, eggs, and poultry by 2016. The government was implementing programmes to achieve this. Polluted food items and lifestyle changes were causing health concerns in the State, he added. The Minister presented a Kudumbasree memento to A. Surendran, who has been adjudged the best agricultural officer in the district.

Alone in the orchard, with his tree friends



Sivan Pillai at his sample orchard near Mukathala in Kollam.— Photo: C. Suresh Kumar

A 52-year-old man walking alone around an orchard full of exotic and endemic fruits trees, talking all the while. A soliloquy it may seem, or even an eccentricity, but it isn't both. Sivan Pillai actually is chatting seriously with the fruit trees he has planted in his orchard at Mukathala, near Kollam city — 120 different varieties. In fact, with loving words and caresses, he is asking them to give him some fruit each day as a meal. Mr. Pillai's orchard is full fruit trees from across the world. Find even a young blueberry tree that one can usually see only in the American continent. The trees stand testimony to his undying interest in growing tropical trees and his unique method of nurturing them. A grocer, Mr. Pillai's interest in growing the trees started after he planted some lemon and orange saplings. Citrus trees are still his favourites. So much that any guest to his house is welcomed with a ripe lime or lemon and a glass of lime juice.

Conducive climate

Kerala climate is quite conducive to the growth of fruit trees, he says, though some of the trees do complain to him about the weather during his tête-à-tête with them. He claims the pear and the apple trees of the orchard are now asking him to send them back to their natural habitats. "They tell me that they are unable to tolerate the Kollam climate. They feel uneasy, and want to go back where they belong to. But I am so attached to them that I don't want to be separated from them," he says. So when it comes to tending to the trees, Mr. Pillai's methods are way off the beaten path. Apart from the routine care, the plants are treated to a sweet and lingering bond of love, he says. "That happens when you talk to your plants." And so touched are the trees by his affection, Mr. Pillai claims, that they take turns in bearing fruits for him all the year round. When he gets his daily quota from the trees, Mr. Pillai thanks the trees and relishes the fruits with his family members. Some of them are also offered to guests. "They are simply fresh, organic, yummy, juicy, and bursting with flavour," he says. The fruit trees in his orchard from different countries are in different hues, from pale yellow to vivid green to a spectrum of red and mixed colours. During this part of the year, a visitor can enjoy the sight of rambutan hanging like red, sparkling jewels from more than 10 trees, all of them different varieties of the fruit. The avocado harvest from the lone tree in his orchard was over in May and there were plenty of them this year, he says. The other trees in the orchard are apricot, peach, plum, butter fruit, durian, philosan, velvet apple, rollinia, kola nut, pista, strawberry guava, ackee, olive, Agasthi badam, bell fruit, mahakoovalam, custard apple, Burmese grapes, five varieties of oranges, 10 varieties of lime and lemon, pomelo, dragon fruit, jabuticaba, Himalayan mulberry, miracle fruit, bilberry, aronia berry, lychee, wax berry, hook plums, salak and the famous Tamil Nadu berry, elanthapazham. The list goes on.

Star attraction

But the growing star attraction of Mr. Pillai's orchard is the Amazonian acai berry, which has earned the reputation of having the highest antioxidant content any food can have. It is a palm and is yet to start bearing berries. Mr. Pillai says that he cannot wait to harvest

the acai berry. The tropical fruits may surely be an attraction, but the endemic ones too are prominent in the orchard. There are about nine varieties of jackfruits and 10 varieties of local mangoes. He has two varieties of kokum, many herbal medicine plants, and timber trees too. There is also a 25-cent mahogany plantation.

Sounding the death knell for paddy crop?



As per a study conducted by the Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM) in 1998, the total annual utilisable yield of the 10 rivers draining into the Vembanad wetland system was 12,582 mcm against the 22,268 mcm water demand in these river basins for domestic use, irrigation, industrial purposes, says Pampa Parirakshana Samithi general secretary N.K. Sukumaran Nair. The CWRDM study also states that the Pampa and the Achencoil will have a deficit of 337 mcm and 459 mcm, respectively, by 2051. Moreover, it requires not less than 4,745 mcm of water for flushing out pollutants from the Vembanad wetlands into the sea every year, the report says.

Twin Kallar project

Mullaperiyar Special Cell chairman Parameswaran Nair says Kerala committed a big mistake by not pursuing the Twin Kallar multi-purpose project planned by the Kerala State Electricity Board in 1975. The implementation of the project would have provided the State with additional power and water for irrigation and salinity extrusion. "It would have ensured enough water for paddy cultivation in Kuttanad. But we became very concerned about the environmental impact of submergence of about 900 ha of forestland in the Ranni forest division," he says. Implementation of the PAVLP will lead to submergence of nearly 2,004 ha of forestland, including 297 ha with human settlements. Mr. Parameswaran Nair says the National Water Policy advocates interlinking of rivers and inter-basin diversion in national interest. The policy document also makes it clear that any such diversion and interlinking should be made only after ensuring the full satisfaction of the water needs of the respective river basin area, he says.

The PPS general secretary says salinity intrusion into the Pampa has reached up to Aranmula, and any diversion of water from these two rivers would adversely affect paddy cultivation in Kuttanad owing to salinity intrusion and deficiency of water. Mr. Parameswaran Nair fears the Vembanad-Kol wetlands spread over 1,51,250 ha will cease to exist if the PAVLP becomes a reality.

Fisheries varsity gets Rs.20 crore

The government has sanctioned an assistance of Rs.20 crore for the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies. An official pressnote quoting Fisheries Minister K. Babu said the amount would be utilised for infrastructure development, education, research and extension activities. — Special Correspondent

Cops to grow vegetables on station premises

K.M. DAYASHANKAR

Gone are the days when police personnel prowled the station premises to prevent attacks from suspected Maoists. They are now to be seen with mud stains as the authorities have decided to let them take up food farming on the Station premises. Superintendent of Police V. Shiva Kumar formally launched the programme by planting a sapling on Monday night. Talking to *The Hindu* on Tuesday, the SP said that the stations, which also have quarters for policemen, have ample space, but was not put to any use so far. In order to utilise the large open space, the cops were asked to take up vegetable cultivation, he said. They can grow vegetables without using fertilizers and consume the same. This way, they can save on the money spent on buying vegetables. Mr. Shiva Kumar also said that they were planning to introduce the programme in all the police station quarters in the district.

4,000 tonnes of red sanders to be disposed

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest B. Muralikrishna has announced that 4,000 tonnes of red sanders would be disposed of in the first phase and the process of readying the stock would be completed in 10 days. The mounds of logs in forest godowns would be liquidated in a phased manner, given the huge demand in China and other countries, he told the media persons during his visit to verify stock in godowns in Chittoor and Kadapa districts.

Paddy: short duration varieties only option

G. VENKATARAMANA RAO

With monsoon remaining elusive, farmers in the district appear to be left with no other alternative than sowing of short duration varieties of paddy like MTU -1010 and MTU 1001 that can be harvested in 115 to 120 days. Officials of the Agriculture Department are already into preparation of contingency plans as the monsoon has been delayed by over a month. They are favouring crops, especially paddy with short duration yield as it

could also lower the risks accompanying the crop. Deputy Joint Director Balu Nayaik told The Hindu said that in the 2.53 lakh hectares planned this Kharif, farmers were able to transplant paddy in less than 10,000 hectares. There was no possibility to go for an alternate crop like pulses at least in Krishna district which predominately has water-retaining black cotton soil. Coupled with this is the absence of an effective drainage system. Mr Nayaik said that it was possible for farmers to opt for longer duration, higher yielding varieties till August 15. "After August 15 it is advisable for paddy farmers to go for short duration varieties," he stressed. The crop planned in 90 per cent of the area in Krishna district was paddy. While cotton has been planned in 56,500 hectares it had been sown in 30,000 hectares and Sugarcane originally planned in only 14,000 hectares was sown in 16,000 hectares till now.

Phailin-hit mushroom farmers unlikely to get compensation

There is no record of number of cultivators affected

Mushroom growers of Ganjam district fear that they may not get any compensation for their losses during cyclone Phailin in October 2013. Their fear is based on information they got from the office of the deputy director of horticulture in Berhampur through an application filed under Right to Information (RTI) Act. A mushroom grower of the district, B. Narasinga Rao had filed this RTI application to know the number of mushroom cultivators, who had been affected by Phailin. In its submission of information under RTI Act, the office of the deputy director of horticulture mentioned that number mushroom cultivators affected during the cyclone was not available in their office. Mr. Rao said it was ironical that the very department which should have kept track of mushroom cultivation and the farmers involved in it has not kept track of their losses during the cyclone. According to him, during disbursement of compensation for agricultural losses during Phailin, mushroom growers may not get any succour. Members of Ganjam district unit of Odisha Mushroom Growers' Federation (OMGF) had met Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik at Chatrapur during his visit to the district in December 2013 and handed over a memorandum. Through the memorandum they had alleged that although they were involved in agricultural production they were unable to avail agricultural loans at low interests. They had added that although mushroom growers had suffered immense loss due to Phailin, they had not received any support from the government for restoration of their cultivation. The mushroom growers say Ganjam district is in second place in mushroom production in the State. Before Phailin there were hundreds of mushroom cultivation units as well as 30 mushroom seed production centres in the district. They claim that around 4,000 youths of the district were involved in mushroom cultivation. Phailin had completely devastated the infrastructure of mushroom cultivation in the district. The mushroom growers alleged that after the cyclone they faced a financial crunch to restart cultivation. They were unable to avail any government assistance or loans at low interest from authorised financial institutions and were compelled to opt for personal investment or loans at high interest from private sources.

They continue to demand that they should also be eligible for agricultural loans and other benefits provided to peasants by the government. They had demanded State government to declare some special package for Phailin cyclone hit mushroom growers.

EU may restrict genome editing of crops: scientists

FIONA HARVEY

A fledgling technology to manipulate the genes of crops in order to make them less susceptible to disease and more productive is at risk of falling foul of the European Union's genetic modification rules, scientists warned on Monday. Genome editing is different to genetic modification, because it does not usually involve transplanting genes from one plant or species to another, but on pinpointing the genetic mutations that would occur naturally through selective breeding. This means that, in most cases, it mimics natural actions and does not require the wholesale transformation of genes with which GM is often associated. Genome editing typically involves finding the part of a plant genome that could be changed to render it less vulnerable to disease, or resistant to certain herbicides, or increase yields or other desirable traits. Researchers use "molecular scissors" to break apart the genome and repair it, which is a process that occurs naturally when plants are under attack from diseases and can throw up new mutations that enable the plant to survive future attacks. This evolutionary process can effectively be speeded up now that it is possible to examine plant genomes in detail in laboratories, and create mechanisms through which the relevant genes can be altered very precisely, without the need to import DNA from other organisms, one of the key criticisms of GM foods. "Using these methods to introduce new variations, our ability to create new genes is nearly limitless," said Sophien Kamoun, of the Sainsbury Laboratory at the John Innes Research Centre in Norwich, east England. "We can be much more precise [than with conventional plant breeding]." As the processes mimic those of nature, but speeded up, the end result is the same as if the sort of selection routinely practised by farmers for centuries had been used, scientists said. Huw Jones, of Rothamsted Research, south-east England, said: "These plants are indistinguishable from those that would occur through selective breeding." Ottoline Leyser, director of the Sainsbury Laboratory at the University of Cambridge, said gene editing could offer an alternative to GM that could be much more palatable to consumers. But green campaigners are far from convinced. The European Parliament's Green party said: "While the biotech sector has sought to trumpet the benefits and precision of gene editing, compared to existing GM technology, there are many uncertainties as regards the impact of gene-edited organisms on the environment and health." The technology is very new, as the first commercial application of it in a plant for human consumption was approved this spring, when the U.S.-based Cibus announced an edited version of canola. Scientists believe there is huge potential for the technology because it avoids the slower, scattergun approach of selective breeding. It has only become possible to edit plant genes in the past few years following decades of work on mapping genomes and inventing ways in which they can be precisely altered.

Under EU laws, however, it is unclear whether gene editing should be treated in the same way as genetic modification. GM crops are effectively banned in Europe, and licences to experiment in GM are rare and very expensive. In some other parts of the world, most importantly the U.S., the regulations are much lighter and GM food faces few barriers to animal and human consumption. The European Commission is expected to offer guidance on the technology soon, perhaps next year, but it is not clear whether that could involve a ruling on whether and how the current regulations should apply, or a commitment to further study with the possibility of new regulations.

Level at Mettur marginally improves

Water flow to Stanley Reservoir in Mettur recedes as the inflow dropped from 23,276 cubic feet per second (cusecs) on Monday to 15,545 cusecs on Tuesday morning. Public Works Department officials said that the water level increased from 55.89 feet to 55.67 feet against its Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of 120 feet. Also, the storage improved from 21.722 million cubic feet (tmc ft) to 22.982 tmc ft against its capacity of 93.470 tmc ft. The outflow was 800 cusecs. The water flow at Biligundlu, the entry point in Krishnagiri district where River Cauvery enters Tamil Nadu was also reduced.



Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Wednesday, Jul 23

Max Min
36° | 29°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 56

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:51

Sunset: 06:38

Barometer: 1006

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Thursday, Jul 24

Max Min
37° | 28°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday Jul 25	Saturday Jul 26	Sunday Jul 27	Monday Jul 28	Tuesday Jul 29
36° 28° Partly Cloudy	37° 27° Cloudy	37° 28° Cloudy	37° 27° Partly Cloudy	36° 27° Cloudy

Airport Weather

Chennai

Chennai

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:51

Humidity: 79

Sunset: 06:38

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1005



THE  NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Spurt in Vegetable Prices Leaves the Common Man High and Dry

With the prices of vegetables skyrocketing, the common man is struggling hard to prevent the family budget from going haywire. When the vegetables cross the Walayar checkpost, the prices of tomato and carrot were `60 and `70 per kg compared to `15 and `28 respectively in the last week of May. By the time the commodities reach Kochi, the prices increase steeply. The price of potato ruled at `38 in the retail market here while it was just `28 around one and a half months ago. Beans now cost `60-70, as against `32 in May. Onion was priced around `38-40, beetroot at `46 and chilli at `65 per kg, all of which cost 30-40 percent lesser two months ago. Only the price of drumstick has declined. It has come down to `38 from `50 per kilogram. Said P Ganeshan, one of the largest wholesalers in the Malabar region: "The production was limited in Tamil Nadu due to the weak monsoon. The produce from Tamil Nadu was also being transported to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and north Indian states such as Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Chittoor and Tirupati were the largest suppliers of chilli. After a severe drought affected production in these areas, the chilli market in the state depends on supplies from Chickmangalur and Dharmasthala in Karnataka. And the transportation charges have increased by 10 percent." "Even the native varieties of vegetables such as bitter gourd and cow pea were being sold for `42 and `52 per kg while it was `24 and `30 in May. S Sivaprasad, chairman of the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, Keralam (VFPC), said: "We are both happy and saddened by the spurt in prices. While the farmer is getting a remunerative price, the consumer is at the receiving end." "Except in Palakkad district, there is no production at all. This leaves consumers at the mercy of the traders from the neighbouring states. The farmers of Palakkad were getting a wholesale rate of `44 per kg for tomato, `31 for bitter gourd, `45 for cow pea from the VFPC. These vegetables are transported up to Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur which increases the prices by 80 to 100 percent as per the demand," said T V Arun Kumar, Palakkad district manager of the VFPC. HortiCorp MD V V Pushpangadhan said: "Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has called a meeting of officials of Supplyco, HortiCorp and other agencies on Wednesday to discuss inflation and remedial measures. We are offering a 30 percent discount on

vegetables at our outlets till July 29".Pushpangadhan said that except in Kasaragod, Wayanad and Malappuram districts, HortiCorp had outlets across the state.

These keerai farmers use cars, Facebook to sell their produce



CHENNAI: When farmers are quite reluctant to encourage their kids to pursue agriculture, who head to cities for new jobs, a group of men have turned farmers, leaving their corporate jobs behind. Yes, you read that right! How many of us would give up high-paying jobs to be the change we want to see? Nallakeerai, a farming initiative, which was started by R Jagannathan, formerly a business manager with a city-based firm, and his friend, in 2011, aims to influence people to switch to organic farming. Inspired by organic farmers in the State, including popular organic farming scientist who passed away last year G Nammalvar, this experimental cultivational venture has made many farmers in the Melappedu village take up organic farming, besides attracting more takers with their door delivery services of the organic produce. Currently, Nallakeerai cultivates 30 varieties of spinach and sells 10 lakh bundles within the city per month. "Organic greens have a huge market. Even in half an acre of land, we can cultivate greens. I was able to produce 45 varieties of greens in one cycle," says Jagannathan. "The biggest challenge was to create a customer base. That's where agriculture marketing consultants come in. We use Facebook to promote Nallakeerai and have volunteers who pick them up from certain localities and sell them. About 15 people have invested on their land for their yearly produce," he says. What started as a team of two in 2011, has now grown into a group of 30 metropolitan farmers ranging from an IIT graduate, management consultant, software architect, and so on. And they their keerai in a koodai just as easily as they do off the backseat of a car! So it didn't surprise us when we discovered that the Nallakeerai Facebook page — <https://www.facebook.com/NallaKeerai> — has a massive 10,000 followers. Ask Jagannathan why his choice of crop is spinach and he responds, "It requires a very short growth period and gives quicker returns, which eases the transition to organic farming." He goes on, people who produce food for the country, go to bed hungry and that's the plight of today's farmers. The idea struck me when I conducted a survey in my native, near Thirunindravur. I decided to do something about it and started to study the economy of farmers in my village. I found that the 240 farmer households in the village spent about `40 lakh investing in fertilisers and pesticides.

If this money was properly channelised within the farm, they would lead more comfortable lives. So what does Nallakeerai do differently? “We help organic farmers by eliminating middle men, and connecting them to a direct consumer base in the city,” explains this farmer-preneur. This is apart from supplying to some of the biggest organic retail stores in the city and also renting out store space within the premises of large companies to sell the veggie. In order to get youngsters interested, Jagannathan conducts weekend workshops on organic farming and eco-friendly lifestyles, assisting a community of Irula farmers to market their produce. “Organic spinach farms are profitable through weekly door-delivery of organic greens to residences and apartment complexes in the city. We want people to emulate our model,” says Jagannathan, explaining how he spread cow-dung on his planting beds once and harvested three bundles of spinach from tiny one sq ft area. “Today, if I am doing this with spinach, somebody will come up with organic milk and organic potatoes tomorrow. If the pricing of organic food is feasible, organic farming can make it big,” he assures us. Priced at `25 to 30, Nallakeerai’s organic greens are available in T Nagar, Virugambakkam, Vadapalani, Anna Nagar, Adyar, Thiruvanmiyur, Ambattur, Velachery, and Kodambakkam, and can be reached on 99626 11767/9840614128.

Poultry Units Distraught over Feed Price Hike

HYDERABAD: Due to an unprecedented increase in the cost of poultry feed like maize and soya meal, the poultry industry in the state is heading for a major slump with several farmers incurring huge losses. The National Egg Co-ordination Committee (NECC) appealed to the government to grant a moratorium on payment of interest and loans availed by poultry farmers for a period of one year. The price of soya was increased from Rs 2,800 per quintal in April 2012 to Rs 3,980 in April 2013. It has further increased to Rs 4,225 this April to Rs 4,670 in May, according to a press release. The increase in MSP of soya bean for the current year and the apprehension that soya bean production during the current year might be substantially lower compared to last year due to the predicted deficient rainfall, point to a much higher price in the coming months. Due to the steep increase in input cost, the average cost of production of eggs has gone up from Rs 2.60 per egg last year to Rs 3.50 presently. However, the average farm-gate price is only Rs 2.75 per egg, thus resulting in a net loss of Rs 0.75 per egg for the farmers. Similarly the average cost of production of boilers has increased from Rs 52 per kg live weight last year to around Rs 68 presently, whereas the average farm gate price is Rs 57-58, thus resulting in net loss of Rs 10 per kg. Thousands of small and marginal farmers, representing 20-30 per cent of the industry, have already closed down or suspended their farming operations, as they are unable to feed their birds and meet the overhead costs of sustaining the operations. If the present crisis is not addressed more than 50 per cent of the farms might be forced to close down, which will result in shortage of eggs and chicken. “If that happens, one should not be surprised if the price of eggs increase by more than 100 per cent,” the release said.

Exports slip on higher cashew prices

GK NAIR

Cashew kernel prices continued to rise in June at all origins and markets. As a result, shipments of the commodity declined compared with the same month a year ago. During June, shipments stood at 9,590 tonnes valued at Rs. 422.82 crore at an unit value of Rs. 440.88 a kg against 10,380 tonnes valued at Rs. 422.75 crore at an unit value of Rs. 407.27 a year ago, according to Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI) sources. Exports during April-June this year totalled 25,305 tonnes valued at Rs. 1,106.21 crore with the unit value being Rs. 437.12 a kg, while they were 29,802 tonnes valued at Rs. 1,177.09 crore (unit value of Rs. 394.94 a kg) in the year-ago period.

Competition

Sasi Varma, Executive Director and Secretary of CEPCI, attributed the decline to the rise in prices and competition from other tree nuts. Exports of roasted and salted cashew also slipped by around 5 per cent during the first quarter to 216 tonnes valued at Rs. 8.97 crore against 439 tonnes valued at Rs. 15.10 crore in the same period a year ago. In this case also, the rise in prices is mainly attributed to the decline. Similarly, shipments of cashew nut shell liquid fell to 1,478 tonnes valued at Rs. 7.02 crore from 1,717 tonnes valued at Rs. 6.56 crore, he said.

Rising imports

Imports of raw cashew during the first quarter of the current fiscal are up substantially at 2,78,365 tonnes valued at Rs. 1,825.53 crore (unit value of Rs. 65.58) against 2,17,898 tonnes valued at Rs. 1,194.31 crore (unit value of Rs. 54.81) in the year-ago period. Industry sources at Kollam said the rise in raw cashew prices has pushed the kernel prices up and the trade is not able to get the parity price from exports. Imports have to be made to keep the factories running and meet the commitments, they said. According to Pankaj, a Mumbai-based dealer, as the prices paid for RCN in the current season are substantially higher than 2013, processors may not be able to continue selling kernels at the lower end of the range. "At the same time, the need for small processors to keep selling regularly will prevent prices from going up too much," he said.

Sugar output to touch 25 million tonnes next season

A Vellayan, Chairman of Murugappa Group, is optimistic that sugar production would touch 25 million tonnes this year, notwithstanding a weak monsoon, in the next season starting October. "UP is big question mark (in regard to sugar production), but in Maharashtra there has to be excess cane production. Karnataka will also see some excess production. Overall, I think there will be 25 million tonnes of sugar production (during the harvesting season that starts from October)," Vellayan told media persons here. He said the Government's move to increase the import duty on sugar will boost the domestic industry. EID Parry, a Murugappa group company, is a leading sugar producer in the country. Vellayan said the rainfall deficit had come down to 15 per cent of the forecast in the last two weeks and it could improve further. "In the last two weeks, the deficit has come down to 15 per cent in the addressable market as far as we are concerned in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. I think we have to see next three weeks how it pans out. Current indications are looking positive," he explained. Fertiliser maker Coromandel International, another Murugappa Group company, has its major markets in these States. Earlier, Coromandel signed a MoU with IIM-Ahmedabad Alumni Association's Hyderabad chapter to support the latter's Udbhav school in the city. Under the MoU, a new common trust will be created by both the parties, in which Coromandel will contribute Rs. 3.5 crore and an equal amount by IIM-AAA, Hyderabad chapter. Meanwhile, the fertiliser maker will support with Rs. 35 lakh a year for three years.

To stop price fall, growers' body wants rubber imports suspended

The Indian Rubber Growers Association has asked the Centre to suspend rubber imports, considering the fall in prices. When the prices fell in 1999, the Government had stopped imports under advance licence scheme through a notification. A similar situation has arisen now and the Government should act accordingly till the prices improve, Sibi J Monippally, President of the Association, said. In a memorandum submitted to the Commerce Ministry, he urged the Government to increase the import duty of rubber to 40 per cent beyond the domestic requirement and restrict the imports to end users only. He pointed out that in 2013-14, imports were to the tune of 3 lakh tonnes against 2.14 lakh tonnes the previous year. Production and consumption of rubber is almost balanced with output at 9.3 lakh tonnes and consumption at 10 lakh tonnes. The requirement by 2020 will be 15 lakh tonnes. To attain this goal, he suggested sustainable development of production with the support of farmers.

Spot rubber rules steady

Spot rubber continued to rule steady on Tuesday. According to observers, practically there were no trading activities in the local markets and the commodity lost its direction amidst extremely low volumes. Sheet rubber was quoted unchanged at Rs. 140 a kg by traders and the Rubber Board. The grade closed flat at Rs. 137 according, to dealers. August futures weakened to Rs. 139.40 (Rs. 139.88), September to Rs. 136.96 (Rs. 137.85), October to Rs. 136.09 (Rs. 137.22) and November to Rs. 137 (Rs. 138) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) declined to Rs. 120.70 (Rs. 122.26) at Bangkok. July futures closed at ¥191.0 (Rs. 113.32) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg) were: RSS-4: 140 (140); RSS-5: 134 (134); Ungraded: 128 (128) ISNR 20: 121.50 (121.50) and Latex 60%: 105 (105).

Business Standard

Sugar mills owe Rs 10,541 cr to cane farmers as on July 15



Sugar industry owes Rs 10,541 crore as arrears to sugarcane farmers as on July 15 mainly due to the low realisation from sale of the sweetener, Parliament was informed today. “As on July 15, 2014, the outstanding amount of sugarcane farmers of the country on sugar mills is Rs 10,541 crore, which is about 18.5 per cent of total amount payable during the current sugar season 2013-14,” Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in the Lok Sabha. The dues in the present marketing year (October-September) have arisen mainly on account of low realisation from sale of sugar, he added. According to the data, the total cane price payable as on July 15 of the ongoing 2013-14 marketing year stood at Rs 56,968.38 crore and out of that Rs 46,426.51 crore have been paid and Rs 10,541.87 crore is still outstanding. Uttar Pradesh-based sugar mills owe the maximum at Rs 6,737 crore followed by Karnataka mills at Rs 1,836.59 crore, Tamil Nadu at Rs 638.33 crore and Bihar Rs 425.62 crore. Paswan said the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 stipulates payment of cane price within 14 days of supply, failing which interest at the rate of 15 per cent per annum on amount due for the delayed period is payable. “State governments of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Haryana, Maharashtra,

Telangana, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab have informed that they have taken action against the defaulting sugar mills as per law," Paswan added. India's sugar production is estimated to rise by 4 per cent to 25.3 million tonnes during the next marketing year starting October, despite a drop in cane area by 2 per cent, according to industry body ISMA. Sugar production of India, the world's second largest producer, is estimated at 24.3 million tonnes in the 2013-14 marketing year (October-September).

Technology to preserve onions to be discussed



To deal with high prices of vegetables, especially in lean seasons, the government has called an inter-ministerial meeting on Wednesday to discuss the possibility of using irradiation technology to increase the shelf life of perishable commodities such as onions and potatoes. When the idea was first mooted, the plan was to use the technology to increase the durability of onion. However, Rural Development Minister Nitin Gadkari, who will head Wednesday's meeting, is of the opinion that the technology be deployed in other agriculture produce as well, officials said. "Radioactive technology will not only enable in enhancing shelf life but also provide value proposition to farmers and consumer alike," said a key official. The idea was first broached when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister, under whose regime the first irradiation centre - the Krushi Utpadan Sanrakshan Kendra - was set up in Nashik, the hub of India's onion trade. Since 2002 - when the Centre was inaugurated by Vajpayee - about 10,000 farmers have benefited by increasing the shelf life of onions. However, the Centre, set up at a cost of Rs 8-10 crore, is currently used to irradiate mostly mango meant for export to the US, officials said. Maharashtra is India's biggest onion producer, contributing 75 per cent of annual output.

Tata Coffee posts 24.9% fall in June quarter profit

Bangalore-based Tata Coffee on Tuesday announced a 24.9 per cent fall in consolidated net profit to Rs 30.31 crore for the quarter ended June 30, compared with Rs 40.38 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income from operations is lower by 11 per cent at Rs 374.52 crore during the first quarter of 2014-15, against Rs 418.46 crore in the corresponding

period last year. Earnings per share stood at Rs 16.23. Lower profits in the June 2014 quarter reflect the lesser quantity of crop available for sale in the plantation business on account of lower production of coffee, tea and pepper during the previous season, which had witnessed distinctly unfavourable weather conditions. However, the instant coffee business saw good volume growth, aligned to the company's strategy of driving significant growth of value-added products, Tata Coffee said in a statement. Income and profitability of the plantation segment were impacted during the quarter under review on account of lower plantation output available for sale. This was caused by adverse weather as well as by the fact that the previous financial year was an 'off-year' in the biennial production cycle of coffee and pepper. The instant coffee segment reported good top line growth with revenues standing at Rs 86 crore for the quarter, compared with Rs 76 crore in the year-ago period. This was largely driven by higher sales of instant coffee to new geographies. During the first quarter of FY15, the instant coffee business commissioned its new aroma agglomeration plant, which will cater to the premium agglomerated coffee customers. Commenting on the performance, Hameed Huq, managing director of Tata Coffee, said: "The focus on value-addition and superior offerings is producing good results, as demonstrated by the growth in sales of instant coffee. Our premium value propositions have allowed us to gradually move away from commodity price volatilities. The global instant coffee market is showing steady recovery after a slowdown in some markets. The new capacities we have put in place will help us strongly leverage such growth."

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

Sugar mills owe farmers Rs 10,541 cr

Sugar mills owed farmers as much as Rs 10,541 crore as of July 15 for cane purchases, as realisation from sugar sales remained low, food minister Ram Vilas Paswan said on Tuesday. The outstanding amount is about 18.5% of the total amount payable to cane farmers in the current sugar season, Paswan told the Lok Sabha. However, mills and co-operatives paid as much as R46,426.51 crore until July 15, he added. Not surprisingly, mills in UP led the pack with arrears worth R6,737 crore, or 64%, followed by Karnataka (R1,836.59 crore), Tamil Nadu (R638.33 crore) and Bihar (R425.62 crore), according to food ministry data. The total cane arrears were as high as R11,000 crore until end-May.

While UP has stipulated that mills should make payment within 14 days of purchasing cane, the mills are yet to pay farmers even more than two months after the crushing season was over. "The governments of UP, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka,

Haryana, Maharashtra, Telangana, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab have informed that they have taken action against the defaulting sugar mills as per law," the minister said.

Govt launches scheme to cut down waste of veggies, fruits

The government has launched a scheme for technology upgradation and establishment and modernisation of food processing industries to minimise wastage of fruits and vegetables. Food processing industries minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal said the National Mission of Food Processing will be implemented during the 12th Plan period to set up processing centres, collection centres besides upgrading technology, establishment and modernisation of such industries. "The schemes are implemented by the states and they have full power to receive sanction and release funds to applicants," she told the Lok Sabha.



Delta farmers to try their hands in horticulture crops

Tapioca, brinjal, bitter gourd, cucumber and okra (ladies finger) will soon replace paddy in Tamil Nadu's rice bowl. With paddy cultivation proving a costly affair due to water scarcity in the delta region, some farmers in Trichy district are switching to horticulture, which needs far less water. They will grow vegetables, fruits and flowers instead of paddy and use drip irrigation for better water utility management. In an effort to rope in more farmers, the department of horticulture arranged a meeting with successful farmers and also assured subsidy for cultivation and drip irrigation. Water scarcity, rising costs of fertilizers, higher labour wages and low procurement price are driving frustrated delta farmers to give up the traditional cropping system. They now have the option to use their fertile land to cultivate horticulture crops to ensure a steady income throughout the year. Those who have tried it out say horticulture can compensate losses in paddy cultivation. "The trend of paddy farmers switching to horticulture is increasing. They realise they can make up losses incurred in paddy cultivation," said T Chandrasekaran, deputy director of horticulture, Trichy. Farmers in the non-delta areas such as Thuraiyur, Uppiliyapuram, Thottiyam, Musiri and T Pettai have been cultivating banana, sapodilla (Chickoo), onion, jasmine and rose besides other vegetables. The horticulture department is promoting the cultivation of mango, lemon, chillies besides other horticulture crops through drip irrigation method. As part of the promotion, officials on Tuesday took some farmers on a tour of successful horticulture farms in Thottiyam, Musiri and Thuraiyur. "We met some farmers who earned profit by cultivating tapioca in vast areas. They use water judiciously through drip irrigation," said Puliur Nagarajan, state vice president, Kisan-Khet Mazdoor Congress. "While much of the delta region in our district is dry, areas that have taken to horticulture are more fertile," he said. Paddy farmers now have no other option

but to switch to horticulture for a livelihood. "We have lost hope that paddy cultivation will get back on track," he said. N Veerasekaran of Ayyan Vaaikkal Paasanatharar Sangam, who was also part of the farmers' team that toured the horticulture fields, said farmers have proved they can be successful in horticulture. Farmers can avail subsidies by contacting assistant director of horticulture in all 14 blocks in the district.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Government plans to import onions to prevent further spike in prices



The government plans to import onions from Pakistan, China, Iran and Egypt as it seeks to prevent another spike in the price of the politically sensitive commodity. The National Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Federation of India LtdBSE -0.23 % (Nafed) has floated tenders for importing 40,000 tonnes of onions after August 15, which would be timely as shipments can arrive before the possible jump in onion prices by October, unlike last year when imports were contracted too late to make a dent in retail prices. Though trade analysts say that this move can help keep domestic prices under control, which have already remained stable in July, importers say that their response could be lukewarm due to some conditions in the tenders. After the wholesale onion prices appreciated by 80% in June, they have remained stable between Rs18/kg to Rs20/kg at the major onion hub of Lasalgaon in July, with a slight decline of Rs1/kg to Rs2/kg in last two days. Traders attribute this to a fall in exports and lesser speculation."Export demand was less due to Ramadan. There is ample onion in Rajasthan, which will take care of the requirements of north India for at least next 15 days," said a trade source. Demand from Sri Lanka is less as the local crop arrival has started there. Sri Lanka will impose import duty on onions from August 1. "Right now Indian onion is not competitive to export," said a Mumbaibased exporter. Sources say

speculation had reduced. "Speculation was also responsible for the price rise in June, which reduced in July as traders cannot do hoarding for more than four to five days after the onset of rains," said a source requesting anonymity. No government agency has authentic data available about the progress in sowing after the revival of rains in the country. But despite any progress in onion sowing, the delay in sowing by more than a month is still expected to put pressure on demand and supply situation in September and October. This makes traders believe that imports can be profitable this year. However, importers claim that some conditions in Nafed tenders may put off the importers. "Nafed wants to make payment 15 days after the delivery. Looking at the financial conditions of Nafed, no one will like to take that risk," said an onion exporter/importer. He said that Nafed has informed that it will soon remove the phytosanitary requirements from the tender, which closes on August 2. Delayed decision to import onions last year, when retail prices had touched Rs100/kg, had proved futile to control domestic prices.

Farmers to have 'Kisan Mandi' in Delhi by September



Farmers will be able to directly sell fruits and vegetables to consumers and wholesalers in Delhi as the city will have a 'kisan mandi' by September after the government changes the law that gives traders and middlemen a monopoly. Farmers and farmer producer organisations (FPOs) will be able meet part of Delhi's demand of 15,000 tonnes of vegetables a day after the Delhi Agriculture Produce Market (APMC) Act is amended, said Pravesh Sharma, MD of the Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC), a society under the department of agriculture. SFAC is already preparing to launch the mandi in the capital. "We will provide a platform — over 25,000 sq feet to sell produce directly to consumers, both wholesale and retail," he said. Retail chains said the move would help them procure good quality vegetables but traders were confident the initiative would not work as it would be difficult to match the established mandis, which provide loans to farmers and allow retailers to make payments after a few weeks. For the new

market, the government is looking at possible locations such as a Nafed godown and cold storage at Lawrence Road and sites of the Delhi Milk Scheme (DMS) at Shadipur and Alipur. In the first phase, the mandi is targeting participation of 25-30 FPOs and growers associations. Initially onions, potato, lemons, banana, apples will be sold followed by fresh green vegetables. The mandi is expected to give both dry and cold storage space to each allottee, apart from logistics handling facilities. "In the first six months we should be able to sell 1,000 tonnes of fruits and vegetables which will represent 6% of the current market," said Sharma. The government has promoted over 300 FPOs with over five lakh farmers across the country whose members are farmers and grassroots institutions, which provide collective bargaining power to small and marginal farmers. "We are also exploring to sell fruits and vegetables through the network of 500 DMS booths. Further, the Delhi government has allowed us to sell onion and potato through 1,000 fair price shops in Delhi-NCR," said Sharma, who felt the organised retail network could help keep prices stable. Retailers like Reliance, Big Bazaar feel a farmers' mandi could address their biggest issue of quality produce. "This mandi is being set up to address not only farmer's issue but also of retailers and consumers. The people working with farmers have to play a major role in back-end services from reducing the time between harvest and mandis, thereby ensuring quality and freshness to produce. The produce should be sorted and graded too," said Vineet Malaviya, national head sourcing-fruits and vegetables, Reliance Retail.