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THE HINDU

Seminar on agriculture microbiology organised

The Department of Microbiology at the St Pious X Degree & Post Graduate College for Women, has organised a two-day national seminar on 'Current Developments in Food and Agricultural Microbiology' to bring forth the latest developments in food and agricultural microbiology through invited lectures, poster and oral presentations by faculty and students. Science and technology emerging from microbiology research can help meet the challenges in food and agriculture.

U.N. Climate Change panel calls for phasing out fossil fuels

Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) R. K. Pachauri on Sunday launching the Panel's Synthesis Report in Copenhagen, said, "There is no room for complacency." He suggested that India's National action plan on climate change needs to be revisited in the light of this report. If the rise in global temperatures has to be kept under 2 degrees Celsius, fossil fuels would have to be phased out by the end of this century, he added.

"The Report tells us that we need to tackle climate change with a combination of adaptation and mitigation," he said.

Navroz K Dubash, one of the lead authors of the Synthesis Report, said, "The IPCC Synthesis Report suggests a way of thinking about climate change that is deeply relevant to India. There is a complex two-way relationship between sustainable development and climate change: climate policies should support, not undermine sustainable development; but limiting the effects of climate change is necessary to achieve sustainable development. This suggests India has to increasingly internalize climate considerations into development planning."

Dr Purnamita Dasgupta, coordinating lead author of the IPCC's working group report two, said that there are observed impacts of climate change, for example in India there is decline in agricultural productivity. There is scientific consensus that warming is unprecedented and it will have irreversible impacts on lives across the globe.

Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, which co-sponsors the IPCC along with the UN Environment Programme said in a statement: “Urgent action is needed to cut global greenhouse gas emissions. The longer we wait, the more expensive and difficult it will be to adapt – to the point where some impacts will be irreversible and impossible to cope with.”

The organic option

An organic retail store with everything from vegetables to cosmetics



Pure and natural Organically grown fruits and vegetables at the store are sourced from Kerala and other States Photo:Thulasi Kakkat

Leading an organic way of life is not impossible considering that everything from organic common salt to organic detergent is now available. In the past few years, the organic way of life has caught on and stores selling organic produce have sprung up. The newest in the city is Vasudha, on Subhashchandra Bose Road, Kadavanthra.

The Thrissur-based organic retail store has everything a regular supermarket would have, but organic—vegetables, general provisions and cosmetics. Vasudha sources rice and vegetables from organic farmers across the State. Fruits are obtained from certified organic farms in other parts of the country. The types of rice available here are natural Kerala varieties such as navara , kuruva and thavalakannan just to name a few. Those with varying levels of husk are available—100 per cent husk, 70 and 40 per cent. “Awareness on organic food has certainly grown, but unfortunately, even today, farmers producing organic vegetables do not have a market. They are forced to sell their produce to ordinary shops. We

are creating a market for organic farmers,” says M.K. Madhusudanan, one of the directors of Vasudha.

The brand supports small groups of organic farms in the State. It plans to open stores in Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram, too.

The prices are slightly on the higher side. “This is because an organic farmer does not always get a good yield, because no pesticides are used. So such food has long-standing health benefits.”

The manure that is used in organic farming is cow dung, urine, compost and organic waste.

The store at Thrissur has ‘organic’ milk too. “It is the milk from cows that are fed just grass, hay and oil cakes. Not cattlefeed. We will introduce it here too, a few milk farmers have been identified,” Madhusudanan says.

Vasudha was started by ten like-minded individuals who wanted to promote an organic way of life.

Fruit juices and cosmetics, too are available at the store in addition to cookies and bread.

‘Sustainable agriculture’ scheme to be implemented in Tirupur

To promote ‘sustainable agriculture’ practices through location specific integrated/composite farming systems, the Department of Agriculture is all set to establish 310 pilot plots across the district for dissemination of improved agronomic techniques.

The plots, each one hectare in size, will be coming up on farmers’ holdings with assistances extended to farmers to raise select crops and set up 10 vermin compost units besides teaching the agrarian community the water and soil health management techniques for increasing productivity and profitability.

“Our present aim is to promote sustainable agriculture under the broad classifications of cereals based cropping system (maize identified in this

category), oil seed based cropping system (ground nut selected in this section) and pulses based cropping system (black gram and green gram identified in this segment),” Joint Director of Agriculture P. Santhanakrishnan told *The Hindu* .

Of the 310 pilot plots planned, 200 plots are to be used for raising maize, 100 for cultivating groundnut and the remaining plots for black gram and green gram.

Critical inputs such as high quality seeds, bio-fertilizers, bio pesticides, Di-Ammonium Phosphate and foliar sprays will be given to the beneficiary farmers for optimising the yield. Of the 10 vermin compost units planned under the scheme, two will be permanent structures and the remaining eight will be hi-density vermin compost beds. Costs of setting up vermin compost units will be subsidised by 50 per cent. “High yields and profit margins obtained sustainably from these plots will encourage the other farmers in the respective areas to adopt similar agriculture practices in their farms too. This approach will trigger an exponential increase in crop productivity , ensure food security,” Mr. Santhanakrishnan said.

‘Convene a meeting on setting up thermal plant in Kudgi’



Sagar Dhara, a former scientist, addressing presspersons in Vijayapura on Sunday.

In order to find out the feasibility of the NTPC thermal plant being established at Kudgi, K.S. Puttannaiah, State president of Karnataka Rajya Raita Sangha (KRRS), has urged the government to convene a meeting of

the scientists of NTPC and the scientist who are opposing its establishment.

Addressing presspersons here on Sunday, he said that the government, which had been defending the establishment of the plant, should hold public meeting involving those scientists who are against the plant for various reasons.

Answers

“Only the outcome of the meeting would find an answer to this critical question, whether such plant is actually in the interest of the people or not,” he said. Mr. Puttannaiah also urged the government to convene a meeting of the farmers, to discuss several issues pertaining to the plant

Taking exception to the statement of Energy Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who had said those farmers opposing the NTPC plant were outsiders and none of them was a local resident of Kudgi , Mr. Puttannaiah said that were protesting because they too belong to farmers’ fraternity.

Opposition

He said the association would continue to oppose the plant by exploring legal options, as the government was not ready shift the plant.

Sagar Dhara, a former scientist, claimed most of the thermal plants they surveyed was a major contributor to air and water pollution. They are also harmful to ecology, he said.

Referring to his survey conducted in Ballari and Andhra Pradesh, he said large tracts of agriculture crops had been damaged, rivers were polluted and cow milk had become contaminated, owing to the fly ash from the chimneys of the thermal power plants.

Asked how the government would then meet the ever increasing demand for electricity if power plants were not set up, Mr. Dhara said he was only talking about the ill-effects of power plants and was not discussing on their need.

Over 200 bags of foodgrains seized

The Food and Civil Supply Department officials on Sunday seized 203 bags of rice and wheat meant for the distribution under Anna Bhagya Scheme, stored illegally in an agricultural field near Chandraki village, about 10 km away from Gurmitkal town, in Yadgir district on Sunday.

Acting on a tip off, the officials raided the agriculture field and seized the foodgrains. The seized foodgrains included 64 quintals of rice, 32 quintals of wheat and one quintal of sugar. The officials also seized three empty trucks parked near the spot and handed them over to the police for further investigation. While one of the vehicles had a Karnataka registration, the others were from Andhra Pradesh.

The officials suspected the foodgrains were set to be smuggled to into neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

No arrests were made as nobody was present at the spot, when officials raided. However, a case has been registered in the Gurmitkal Police Station.

'Need for India suitable pro-agriculture education'

Agriculture system in India is different from that in western countries and their concept of agriculture education would not be suitable for India, said senior theatre activist K.V. Akshara Heggodu.

He was inaugurating a two-day seminar on 'Agriculture Education' held at Kanmane at Kalave village in Sirsi taluk recently under the auspices of Succo Bank Agriculture Award Committee, Ballari.

"Our universities are providing agriculture education from western countries but it is not possible to take up that education when the population is more and the land holdings less. We need pro-agriculture education suitable for India," he said.

Rubber enters its 50th year



Rubber, the Malayalam monthly from Rubber Board, is into its 50th year of publication and an abundance of nostalgic recollections has put the landmark in the limelight.

Rubber could claim a piece of the glory that natural rubber cultivation had achieved in the country over the last 50 years, said a senior Rubber Board official, who pointed out that the first edition of the monthly came out in August 1965 just as the financial assistance schemes for rubber farmers were taking off.

When the first issue of the monthly reached the farmers, rubber cultivation in the country was spread just over 1.75 lakh hectares. Since then, acreage under natural rubber has grown to a little less than eight lakh hectares in the country, about 90 per cent of it in Kerala.

Though the circulation of the magazine fluctuated with the fortunes of the rubber farmers, it had been an effective instrument of extension work, said another Rubber Board official.

He said the monthly played a big role in quickly spreading scientific methods of rubber cultivation at a time when the Board had only a limited number of extension officers. The idea of a monthly cropped up in these specific circumstances.

The circulation of the monthly reached 27,000 copies in recent memory and it has been a constant companion to the more than a million rubber

farmers in Kerala, most of them owners of small holdings.

The late Mr. P.K. Narayanan, who was its first editor, played a crucial role in shaping the tenor of the magazine, recalls R. Hali, a former Director of Agriculture and first editor of *Kerala Karshakan*, the 60-year-old farm magazine from the Department of Agriculture, in his article in the October issue of *Rubber*.

K.A. Aravindakshan, former editor of the monthly, recalls in its Golden Jubilee edition the reception that farmers gave to the monthly. It was so well received that print order for the monthly went up from 5,000 copies in its first six months to 10,500 copies over the next six months.

KCR against import of foodgrains

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has suggested stopping import of foodgrains to ensure remunerative price to the farm produce in the country.

There was a necessity to give serious thought to it by the State and Central governments, Mr. Rao said during his interaction with farmers upon going to Chhattisgarh on Sunday. He was talked to a group that achieved high crop yields by adopting modern techniques in agriculture at Kohadia village of Bemetara district there.

Expressing concern over the farmers not getting remunerative price to their produce, the Telangana Chief Minister attributed it to the import of agriculture produce from countries where the cultivation costs were less. The solution lied only in stopping the imports as there was shortage of some food crops in the country on one hand and the farmers were denied remunerative price to their produce on the other.

He went round the research station at Gomchi and told the scientists there about his plans to develop Telangana as seed bowl of the country.

Stating that his government was resolved to make agriculture profitable, Mr. Rao said he would explain his experience to farmers back home in Telangana. He complimented the farmers for who achieved 80 tonne

capsicum yield per acre and 42 tonne chill production in the similar extent of land. He also explained the successful farming practices of Ankapur farmers in Nizamabad district. Stressing joint cultivation by farmers, the Telangana Chief Minister said it would bring unity among farmers.

He visited greenhouses, poly-houses cultivating vegetables and flowers at Malpuri village in Durg district.

Farmers to interact with Hawaiian fruit grower

Ken Love

Ken Love, an expert on fruit farming and value addition of fruits from Hawaii, will be at Puttur on November 8 to interact with farmers. He will interact with farmers at a programme organised by Samruddi Gida Geletana Sangha, Puttur at Rotary G.L. Hall, Radhakrishna Mandir Road, at 10 a.m., a release said. Mr. Love, a former journalist-turned-fruit farmer, has toured about 50 countries. He would throw light on the varieties of fruits, their harvest, post-harvest etc.

Shree Padre, Executive Editor, Adike Pathrike, a farm monthly told *The Hindu* that Mr. Love has already arrived in the country. Mr. Pathrike, who will also speak at the programme, said that according to Mr. Love, kokum is grown only in India. There is vast potential for marketing it abroad as a fresh fruit. He believed that farmers must communicate with each other and share knowledge.

Mr. Love, who was formerly president, Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers, is visiting the country for the second time. As a journalist, he has travelled with five presidents of the United States. He was part of the “12 trees project” of the College of Tropical Agriculture and HR, University of Hawaii. It was a three-year agricultural demonstration program funded by Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (Western SARE). The goals of the project were to increase profitable agricultural diversification and contribute to developing a consistently high-quality, year-round supply of fruits.

The secretary of the sangha Shivasubrahmanya Pelathadkka said as paddy under cultivation was decreasing due to various reasons, fruit cultivation for food security could be promoted. The interaction with Mr. Love will help farmers here get a global perspective of fruits and how local fruits grown here could be marketed as fresh fruit, through value addition. He said farmers coming for the programme could bring vegetable seeds, fruits and vegetables in their collection for mutual exchange. They could also bring saplings for exchange.

Flower show

Pushpotsavam 2015, a flower show organised jointly by Tourism, Agriculture departments, City Corporation, Kerala Rose Society and Kerala Agri-Horticultural Society, will be held from January 9 to 18 at Kanakakunnu. For details, call 2316384. — Staff Reporter

Farm ponds come in handy for farmers

With a considerable amount of rainwater in store in farm ponds, which enhance water harvesting, farmers are hopeful of raising agricultural productivity. After the onset of northeast monsoon, Tuticorin district received a considerable amount of rainfall so far this year and the district administration is strongly advocating rainwater harvesting system.

A farm pond established under the Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) at Keela Poovani of Karungulam block is serving as a multi-purpose facility for farmers.

T. Palavesam, president of Poovani Watershed Committee, said maize crop and green gram could be raised on 40 acres with a sufficient storage of water in the farm pond, which also serves to be an alternative source of well irrigation.

Apart from enhancing agricultural productivity, the pond also offered a source of fish rearing tank. The watershed committee farmers also let mrigal fish seedlings that were bought from fish seed farm, Manimuthar dam, into the pond here.

Moreover, a vermi-compost unit beside the pond tended to generate

organic manure to enhance agriculture. He said that with the assistance of 15 committees, the farmers had been accessing benefits from 10 watersheds located at places in Karungulam block.

Joint Director of Agriculture N.K. Dhakshinamoorthy said that with this facility, the farmers were assured of getting their rainfed crops cultivated.

Collector M. Ravikumar, when contacted, said a total of 137 watershed committees were functioning with 13 batches of farmers. Assistant Executive Engineer of IWMP, R. Balaji, said this programme had been implemented in the following six blocks — Karungulam, Pudur, Vilathikulam, Ottapidaram, Kovilpatti and Kayathar.

Licences of two fertilizer dealers cancelled

District Fertilizer Inspection Cell conducted surprise inspections at various places and cancelled the licences of two private dealers and issued show-cause notices to 12 others for violating the provisions of the Fertiliser Control Order, 1985.

After Collector K. Nanthakumar advised officials to ensure availability of fertilizers to the farmers, the cell, headed by Joint Director of Agriculture N.V. Krishnamurthy and comprising PA to Collector (Agriculture) S. Kanagaraj and Assistant Director of Agriculture (Quality Control) S.S. Shaiek Abdullah, conducted inspections in RS Mangalam and Tiruvadanaai areas, where people were complaining about malpractices.

The officials found that the dealers either did not display stock position, price list or maintain proper register, Mr. Abdullah said. Some of the dealers did not issue receipts to the farmers, he added.

During the current season till the end of October, the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation (Tanfed) had made available 1,460 tonnes of Urea, 395 tonnes of DAP, 31 tonnes of Potash and 467 tonnes of NKP complex to Primary Agriculture Cooperative Credit Societies (PACCS) in the district, Mr. Abdullah said.

As on date, the PACCS had a stock 1,079 tonnes of Urea, 998 tonnes of

DAP, 153 tonnes of Potash and 942 tonnes of NPK complex, he said, adding farmers could get the fertilizers from the PACCS in their areas.

Thanks to the initiative taken by the Collector, the Indian Farmers Fertilizers Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) had cleared 2,600 tonnes of Urea for the district and the consignment was expected to arrive from Madurai in couple of days.

Tea industry in dire straits: UPASI

Vijayan Rajes, President, United Planters Association of Southern India (UPASI), has expressed serious concern over the state in which the tea industry is now in.

Pointing out that the industry is in dire straits due to falling tea prices, increase in labour wages, high cost of fertilizers and erratic climatic patterns, he said in a statement issued at Coonoor on Saturday that the current crisis is taking the industry back to the worst ever period the tea growers had at the beginning of this century. The price of tea nose-diving is having its effect on raw leaf prices.

There are around 70,000 small and marginal tea growers with a total land holding of approximately 49,000 hectares in South India depending wholly on tea and they account for almost half of South India's tea production.

Apart from the small growers, one of the most affected by this situation is the Kanan Devan Hill Plantations Company Private Limited., a member of UPASI, which has a unique ownership with around 12,000 employees owning 69 per cent of the shares of the company.

In addition to the basic problems, the unhealthy recent trend of foreign-funded NGOs spreading canards about pesticide residues in tea is adding to the woes. They are trying to malign Indian tea. India's economic growth, self-sufficiency in power generation, its flourishing IT Industry and now its emergence as a top agricultural producer are perceived as a threat and an irritant to various vested interests, who work in India with ulterior motives through foreign-funded NGOs. UPASI has strongly countered the false claims of these NGOs with objective data.

The UPASI has also requested the Union and State Governments and the mainstream media to help them in their efforts to thwart these unsubstantiated claims and put the domestic and foreign consumers' mind at rest.

The tea industry is well organised and professionally managed, adhering to the world standards. It supports over a million workers directly as it is highly labour-intensive. Tea prices in south India are at unviable levels with average price during the year 2014 up to September dropping to Rs. 85 per kg from Rs. 105 during the corresponding period last year; a drop of 17 per cent.

At the same time wages have gone up between 9 to 19 per cent in the three tea producing southern States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Mr Rajes added that the huge increase in wages which has no linkage to productivity coupled with spiralling costs of other inputs like fertilizers have crippled the tea plantations and it is on the verge of collapse. Co-relation of wage and price level is an easily assessable health indicator of the tea industry. When the daily wage in Tamil Nadu was Rs. 8.20 in 1980, the average price was Rs. 12.66 a kg. The equation gradually changed and in 1995 both were almost on par, daily wage at Rs. 39.88 and average price at Rs. 41.25 a kg. If one indexes it on a scale of 100 with 1995 as the base, wage in 2014 has gone up to 528 in Tamil Nadu, 485 in Kerala and 681 in Karnataka whereas the average price is at 207. In addition to the basic wage, the organised sector spends additional 75 per cent for discharging its obligations as social costs. Central and State Governments are yet to wake up and provide support for the sustenance of tea plantations.

Plantation sector is additionally burdened with social costs providing housing, medical, educational and other infrastructural facilities to the huge population it supports which in the normal course is provided by the local administration and the Government.

Though basic civic amenities to the estate population are provided by the estate managements, no concessions are given by way of tax or other levies.

The recommendations and assurances given by many expert committees for reimbursing part of the expenses incurred for social costs still remain only on paper.

At the current price levels, plantations will have no option but to cut production costs by stopping all developmental works like replanting and cutting down on inputs which will, in turn, reduce employment. Further, if this situation continues, most of the companies will find it difficult to even pay the wages / salaries on time.

He added that the UPASI urges both the Central and State Governments to put in place immediate relief measures to safeguard the tea plantations, which support a large number of workers and their families and preserve ecologically sensitive hilly terrains from environmental degradation.

Coconut farming gets a push

The Department of Agriculture is procuring seedlings of dwarf coconut varieties from farmers, under plans to popularise their cultivation across the State. The seedlings will be procured at the rate of Rs.40, an official note issued here said. Farmers are directed to contact the nearest Krishi Bhavan for details. — Special Correspondent

Study effects of antibiotics in poultry feed on humans'

Though there were studies revealing the presence of antibiotics in poultry feeds there were no studies on the impact of these residues on human beings, said experts speaking at a seminar here on organic dairy and poultry production.

The seminar was part of the ongoing Food and Agri-Aquatic Fest organised at Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies.

Director of Directorate of Entrepreneurship at Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) Deepa Ananth said antibiotics were not directly injected into birds as widely believed. However, antibiotics

were present in feeds though no studies had been done to assess their impact on human health, she said.

Similarly, hormones are not injected into birds because it is not economically sustainable. But they are used to achieve optimum feed conservation ratio, she said.

Most of the discussions at the Food and Agri-Aquatic Expo on Sunday focussed on organic poultry and dairy development with discussions ranging between organic milk production and processing of organically produced dairy produces.

The venue of the programme has also several stalls selling organic produces ranging from honey, tea; ready-to-eat seafood to farm products.

Organic practices in integrated agriculture; organic aquaculture and recycling of fish waste; value addition of organic produces; organic products from coconut cultivation etc have been part of the discussions during the expo. The five-day expo at the University is focussed on organic agriculture and dairying as Kufos plans to introduce courses in organic farming in the near future.

The organic option

Leading an organic way of life is not impossible considering that everything from organic common salt to organic detergent is now available. In the past few years, the organic way of life has caught on and stores selling organic produce have sprung up. The newest in the city is Vasudha, on Subhashchandra Bose Road, Kadavanthra.

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The store is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Farmers in a paradox as land turns dearer

Buses and cars plying on the lone and narrow dusty road in this mandal is not an unusual sight at this time of year when most families spend weekends picnicking. But, what is unusual is the sight of sheer number of flashy SUVs zooming up to the village. All through the day, a steady stream of visitors throng the mandal, enquire about the availability of lands, and a day or two later, procure a plot of land, in what is the new capital region of Andhra Pradesh.

The prices of farm land in most villages abutting this mandal are now quoted anywhere between Rs. 75 lakh to Rs. 1 crore per acre.

But, that is not holding back prospective buyers, who are lining up to buy land within the area identified for 'land pooling,' with an eye on future development.

The value of land has shot up by 4-5 times since the government announced the villages where land pooling will be done in the first phase.

"In the beginning, we were puzzled at the sudden spurt in realty. But, it makes sense for buyers with deep pockets. Even if the value of developed land goes up to Rs. 20,000 per square yard, the land value is likely to touch Rs. 2 crore. That is the reason buyers are willing to buy land at Rs. 75 lakh per acre," says Venkaiah, a local resident.

A fair deal for farmers, one is tempted to think. On the other side, a sense of despair and uncertainty is creeping in farmers.

Most of them hold small land holdings and depend on the farm produce to sustain their livelihoods and provide for their families.

There are seven villages having the best of fertile farm land on the riverfront where farmers cultivate four crops in a year and it is from these villages, a silent resistance is building up against the State government.

At Mandhadam, irate farmers reiterate before a group of YSRC leaders that they would not part with their farm land, come what may.

"I own 40 acres of land in which I cultivate six varieties of vegetables. I value my farm more than my home. Where will I live if the Government takes away my land," rues Bezawada Subbaiah.

Farmers of these villages are now rallying together to build pressure on the government to drop the moves to pool large tracts of fertile farm land.

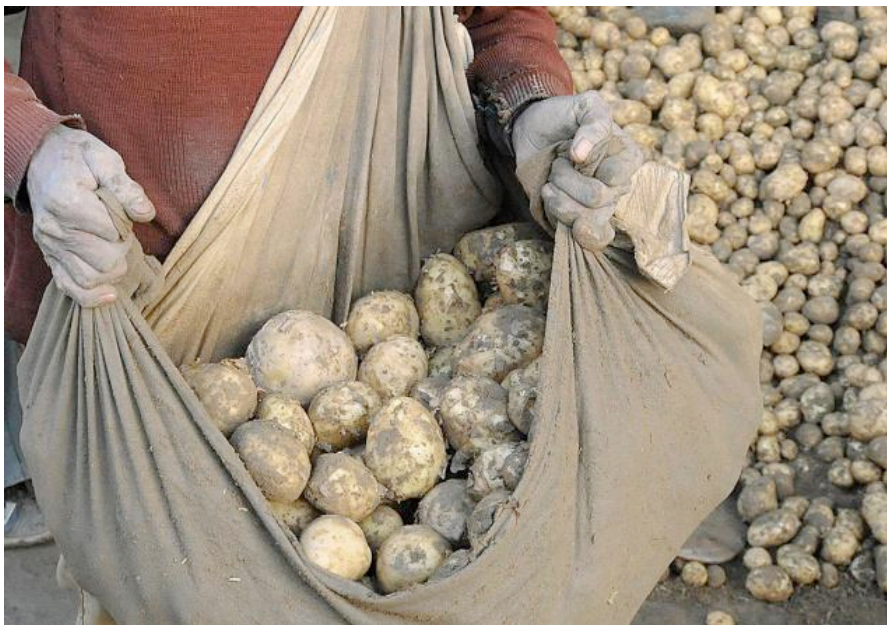
Farmers forum's plea to OPS

The Federation of Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Associations on Sunday urged Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission not to go ahead with the plan to increase power tariffs in the State.

Federation secretary S. Nallasamy said in a letter that tariff revision should be considered only after the State had surplus power and took steps to arrest transmission losses.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Potato farming: India makes a hash of it



The price of potatoes is once again moving up, largely due to the demand-supply gap in the market-place. The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (Nafed) that was asked by the Ministry of Civil Supplies to explore the possibility of importing potatoes from Russia, China and Egypt, procured 3,500 tonnes of potatoes for Orissa in July. It is now in the process of importing more potatoes, especially for the eastern States, after West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee started restricting potato trucks bound for Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Assam.

How did India, which has been a net exporter of potatoes to neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, turn into an importer with a

shortage of potatoes?

Faulty figures

Government estimates of supplies especially during the last two seasons are faulty, according to those in the trade. As agricultural commodities grow into modern supply-chain driven mass consumption products, the lack of authentic supply data can be crippling, leading to price volatility that hurts large bulk consumers as well as households. The problem could worsen with more food processing centres, proposed by the Government, because the capacity to process agricultural produce would improve without supplies being reliable.

National Horticulture Board (NHB) data says India produced 45 million tonnes of potatoes in 2012-13 — nearly 10 per cent more than what it produced last year. According to Prakash Lohia, a chemical engineer from IIT-Delhi who manages Vegit Foods, one of India's largest farm-to-retail potato businesses, the key culprit could be the lack of authentic data.

“There is no scientific method of proving the authenticity of this data,” says Lohia who has invested in tissue culture of the crop, warehousing, food processing and retail. The current method of collecting data is through the horticulture department officers right down to the block level who estimate the crop yield in a very rudimentary and unscientific way and collate it manually. The data is obtained from different States; there is no common, certified, standardised procedure of data gathering.

Traders say production of potatoes has dropped in Uttar Pradesh by 10 per cent and in West Bengal by 20 per cent, which contradicts government data.

NHB data shows that Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have historically produced nearly two-thirds of India's potato crop, and Bihar around 15 per cent. NHB reported increased potato crop in Uttar Pradesh over the past two years and a sharp drop in West Bengal during 2011-12, although that was partially reversed in 2012-13.

Surprisingly its data shows potato arrivals at Kolkata *mandi* from January to December 2013 at only 37,626 mt — just a tenth of the arrivals at Delhi and Mumbai and less than a fifth of the arrivals at Bangalore and Pune. How did the populous cities in the Gangetic belt manage during the later months? The absence of proper data, and hence the lack of preparedness, could lead to a major potato shortfall this year, affecting prices to the retail

consumer and the B2B segment.

Insufficient information

Apart from data there is a huge lack of know-how, technology and resource inputs in the area of potato culture which accounts for nearly 28 per cent of India's vegetable crop. All over the world, potato is grown in multiple varieties in at least three categories: one for the consumer, one for industrial use and one for commercial use by snack producers. Only in India is the same variety used for all three purposes. And, it is not only the USDA that accurately measures its potato crop annually; developing countries such as Peru and Brazil which are major producers of the Canchan variety of the tuber, popular for French fries, have also perfected their data outputs for use-based production.

Apart from data management there are other areas where India must improve its solutions to ensure low prices for retail consumers and food processing.

India lacks the right appliances for mass farming (though India's manufacturing sector is adequately advanced) probably because farm sizes are small. Tractor manufacturers are not investing enough in bringing to India the latest agricultural tools commonly used for automation in farming.

Our current agronomic practices are also pretty primitive and yield is low. Large-scale investment is needed in drip irrigation systems for farming, especially in tubular crops like potato which need less water to grow. Without these improvements the country will have to depend on sporadic imports that often have fungal issues like black dot, brown rot and other defects that are not visible. So the cost to consumer and the nation's import bill keeps rising.

Global black tea output up a tad

Global black tea production which has been trailing behind last calendar due to shortfall in India and Uganda has now marginally increased, thanks to Sri Lanka and African output posting gains.

"Sri Lanka's September output has risen by 3.66 million kg (mkg) to reach 28.85 mkg. This has helped the cumulative production in the nine months

to rise by 6.11 mkg to 254.59 mkg,” Rajesh Gupta, compiler of the annual Global Tea Digest, told *BusinessLine*.

Sri Lanka has posted the highest increase so far this calendar over the corresponding period of last year. Till September, Malawi has produced 4.31 mkg more to reach 40.70 mkg and Bangladesh 1.40 mkg to touch 45.47 mkg. Kenya’s production has increased by 4.54 mkg to reach 282.73 mkg.

On the other hand, India posted the highest shortfall of 7.22 mkg so far this calendar to dip to 702.14 mkg followed by Uganda with a decline of 7.05 mkg to plunge to 32.09 mkg.

The increase in output by all other countries helped to take the global black tea production to 1,402.27 mkg from 1,399.32 mkg, a marginal rise of 2.95 mkg.

Crisis-hit tea industry seeks Govt help

The South Indian tea industry has sought immediate relief measures from the Government to safeguard plantations.

“The industry is in dire straits due to falling tea prices, steep increase in labour costs and rising fertiliser cost. If the Central and State Governments do not come to the aid of this ailing sector, tea plantations will have no option but cut down on all developmental works like replanting and cutting down on inputs, which in turn would have social repercussions,” says Vijayan Rajes, President of the United Planters’ Association of Southern India.

Stating that the current crisis is taking the industry back to the worst ever period the tea growers had since the beginning of this century, Rajes said, “Tea prices have nosedived by 17 per cent to ₹85 a kg during the year up to September 2014 from ₹105 a kg during the corresponding period last year.

Wages, on the other hand, have shot up between 9 and 19 per cent in the three tea producing States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The huge increase in wage cost has had no linkage to productivity as the plantation sector is additionally burdened with social costs such as providing housing, water, power and other infrastructural facilities for its workers, which works out to nearly 70 per cent of our total cost.”

“The recommendations and assurances given by many expert committees for reimbursing part of the expenses incurred for social cost still remain on paper,” he added.

Challenges

In addition to these fundamental issues, the industry now faces a sinister campaign by certain foreign-funded NGOs of pesticide residues in tea. This has further added to the woes of this sector, Rajes said and pointed out that the sector needs some respite to sustain and grow.

“No concession is being given to taxes and other levies. All that we seek in this hour of crisis is some support from the Government,” he added.

Kerala: Call for value addition to boost farm sector

Minister for Water Resources PJ Joseph has called for emphasis on value addition to bolster the agriculture sector.

This will help protect farmers who are facing crisis due to decline in prices of several commodities, he said at the India International Food and Agri-Expo after launching value-added coconut products of the Neera producer groups in the State.

Products such as Neera, coconut palm sugar and virgin coconut oil have high demand in the market. It is a good sign that new entrepreneurs are being attracted to this sector with increased scale of such products, Joseph said.

According to him, organic farming is a better alternative to toxic food

products and people should be made aware of this by extending organic farming practices to all over the State. Kerala has yet to exploit the inland fishery resources to improve the fisheries sector, he added.

T K Jose, Chairman of Coconut Development Board, said that toxic food products could fully be replaced by organic food items if efforts are made to coordinate various organic farmers' clubs in the State and to boost trade networks.

Presiding over the function, Vice-Chancellor B Madhusoodana Kurup of Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS), said value-added products such as Neera and its honey would be beneficial the coconut farmers in Kerala.

The expo is being jointly organised by KUFOS and Foundation for Organic Agriculture and Rural Development.

ThoughtFocus solution for efficient dairy management

American technology firm ThoughtFocus has developed a cloud-based IT dairy solution 'Beyond Measurements' (BM) to bring transparency in transactions between farmers and dairy owners.

Using the cloud platform, BM institutes an intelligent system at collection centres to check the quality of milk, transparency of payments, monitoring data collection and envisages cold chain management solutions.

It was first installed at a Bangalore private dairy in 2012 and has since monitored the collection of more the 250 million litres (ml) across 50-plus centres in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, including some belonging to dairy major Hatsun Agro.

"Farmers get the milk to a collection centre where milk samples are analysed for fat and SNF content. Based on quality and quantity, the farmer is paid and gets an alert on his phone about the transfer of money

into his bank account,” said Avinash Dongre, Practice Head, ThoughtFocus.

With regard to the cold chain solutions aspect, weighing happens at each collection centre and samples are again checked for consistency before being sent to chilling centres. The data is backed up on a private cloud where it’s analysed by authorised personnel.

“As a result, farmers get the true value for what they produce and have their payment done in less than five minutes. As the cloud data is shared with dairy owners, it helps them in operational management and planning,” said Dongre, adding that identification of the quality and quantity of milk being provided by individual farmers have enabled owners to fairly remunerate and guide them on yield.

Most dairies had no solutions platforms and BM has helped dismantle data manipulation and build trust between producer and processor, Dongre said.

“It helps the entire ecosystem. Say a producer is known to be supplying 250 litres and on a particular day he supplies 220 litres. An immediate intervention is possible with our solution. The companies can analyse real time on shift to shift variations for centres and farmers,” he explained.

Being used mainly by private and cooperative dairies in the South for now in 5,000 villages and engaging with over 10 lakh producers, the company plans to expand its footprint in other parts of the country soon. In terms of cost, the only expenditure involved is for the Data Protection Unit at the centers.

Business Standard

India's sesame seed output to rise by 126%: SHEFEXIL



Country's [sesame seed production](#) for 2014-15 is expected to gain by 130 per cent on high acreage and increase in yield, suggests estimates put forward by Shellac And Forest Products Export Promotion Council (SHEFEXIL), a Union Commerce and Industry Ministry agency. According to survey estimates, sesame seed production in 2014-15 would be around 0.43 million tonnes as against last fiscal's 0.19 million tonnes, higher by about 126 per cent. Sesame seed acreage, which was sown on 1.62 million hectares, was high by 38 per cent than last year's. Favourable weather also increased the yield by about 66 per cent to 268 kg per hectare. SHEFEXIL stated improved weather condition was favourable for cultivation of sesame seed crop, resulting in improved production and quality of seeds. Gujarat, the report says, with nearly 122,000 tonnes, will register the highest production while the production in Uttar Pradesh is estimated to be around 111,000 tonnes. Sesame seed production in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra would be 104,000 tonnes, 79,000 tonnes and 20,000 tonnes respectively, the report estimates. Suresh Chandarana, managing director, Dhaval Agri Export said, "Quality of sesame seed would be good this year because of high production and favourable weather during growing period." Societe Generale de Surveillance (SGS) had undertaken a survey for SHEFEXIL from October 4 to October 18 in country's five sesame seed growing states and met 732 farmers across the country as part of this exercise. According to data provided by SHEFEXIL, India exported 299,482 tonnes sesame seed in 2013-14 as against 389,153 tonnes in 2012-13. In the current financial year, 76,731 tonnes of sesame seed has been exported from April to June 2014.



STATE FINMIN CALLS ON FARMERS TO HIKE POTATO PRODUCTION

Potato is one of the vegetables whose prices also remain high along with that of onion. That is why the farmers particularly those who are associated with potato farming need to work for increasing production of this one of the most common vegetables, the State Finance Minister further said while addressing farmers and traders associated with the Haldwani Sabzi Mandi at a programme here on Sunday.

At the same time the MLA from Haldwani also assured the farmers to extend all kind of assistance from the Government saying, the Government is committed to address the problems of the farmers on priority basis.

The Government will take necessary steps after studying the farming and horticulture policies of other states also that better results could be achieved in farming sector in the state too, she added.

More so, the State Finance Minister also assured the farmers and traders to organise a meeting in the chairmanship of the State Agriculture Minister in the region in December. Apart from farmers and traders, experts and scientists will also take part in this meeting and a new strategy will be prepared to address the grievances of the farmers and boost the farming sector, she added.

Speaking on this occasion, Sumit Hridayesh, chairman of the Haldwani mandi samiti, said that about 20,000 quintal potato seed will be soon procured from Himachal Pradesh so that farmers engaged in potato farming in the state could use better quality seed.

Besides, efforts are also being made to arrange Rs 15 lakh to provide good quality seeds and plans and other related farming related things for farmers, he added.

More so, steps are also being taken to setup small groups of women so

that the women could be integrated with vegetable and fruit productions, further said the chairman of the Haldwani mandi samiti.

He also said that soon the new mandi will also be ready with modern and air-conditioned storage facility for keeping fruits and vegetables.

TELANGANA FARMERS TO VISIT CHHATTISGARH'

During his visit, Rao told farmers that that Telangana is a new State and needs power for irrigation. 'Your Chief Minister Raman Singh has decided to provide 1,000 MW power to Telangana, he said.

'FINANCIAL CONDITION OF FARMERS STRENGTHENED IN CHHATTISGARH'

As a testimony, the State has twice won 'Rastriya Krishi Karman' award due to hard work of farmers, he said while addressing a farmers' convention here jointly organised by Agriculture Department and MB Foundation.

On the occasion, the Minister distributed cheques of Rs21.39 lakhs among 112 farmers for purchasing Agriculture equipment. Cheques of Rs4.54 lakh were also handed over to 21 farmers for digging borewells.

The 'Indira Kisan Mitan', a bulletin published by Indira Gandhi Agriculture University (IGAU) was also released by the Minister on the occasion.



In the greater scheme of things



Recent announcements on possible changes to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and restrictions on its coverage are baffling and worrisome. The passing of the MGNREGA and the Right to Information Act heralded a new vision of citizenship and state responsibility. The former created a safety net for the rural poor. The latter gave taxpayers and voters an opportunity to bridge the gap between state promise and process.

An energetic government can profitably use and improve the MGNREGA. The proposal to restrict access based on whether a household lives in a “backward” block is retrograde. A vulnerable family would then only get benefits if it lives among the poor. This undermines one of the main objectives of the act, namely to provide relief in the face of unexpected disasters. When coastal Andhra Pradesh and Odisha are hit by cyclones, or ethnic or religious conflict erupts in Assam, Bengal or Gujarat, do we really want to ask whether families are living in an MGNREGA block?

Some might argue that the MGNREGA has not achieved its objectives. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) last year revealed unspent allocations, unfinished projects and financial irregularities in materials-contracts. It would be hard to find a government programme without these. In contrast, there are reported results from survey of a sample of almost 40,000 listed beneficiaries: three-quarters knew the minimum wage and their entitlement to 100 days of work, two-thirds received wages within 15 days of completing work, 70 per cent reported

useful assets in the village as a result of the scheme and the average wait between a job request and employment was only nine days. Although minimum wages have been in force since Independence, rural households in my own surveys prior to the scheme rarely knew of them, since they were never paid.

One of the main advantages of the MGNREGA is that it is self-targeted. As long as transfers are not made to fictitious workers, those with better work options will simply not enrol. Households will opt for unskilled labour at minimum wage only when they cannot do better. This is evident in the CAG sample of beneficiaries: average annual household income is Rs 20,000, 43 per cent are illiterate and a majority live in impermanent structures. Access restrictions are unnecessary in well-designed and self-targeted programmes.

When public education expands and economic growth leads to increases in the demand for skilled labour, spending will decline without executive intervention. This, again, is in contrast to many other government programmes for which the National Sample Survey Organisation data show little correlation between household expenditure and the probability of being classified as “poor”.

The design of the act is innovative because it uses temporary transfers to needy households to bring about long-term improvements in their wellbeing through the better management of village resources and increases in local wage rates. Benefits are therefore much larger than direct transfers under the scheme. Figures published by the ministry of agriculture show that after rising in the 1990s, real farm wages declined between 1999 and 2005, and then rose rapidly after the passing of the act. In 2011-12, farm wages in over half of the 16 major states were higher than minimum wages under the MGNREGA. Although careful research is needed to causally link agricultural productivity to projects under the scheme, the growth in wages and the availability of employment on demand in most states do “provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country” — the stated purpose of the act.

There are also several stories of beneficiaries who found help at critical stages in their lives on the MGNREGA website. I’ll conclude with one of my own. Three years ago, we were trekking in the Annapurna range in Nepal. On our way up, we stopped and bought a couple of bananas from a man

laden with two baskets suspended from a bamboo stick across his shoulders. We saw him again while descending a couple of days later, and the surprise of a second encounter got us talking and walking together. He was from Gorakhpur and regularly bought bananas from Pokhara, walked up the trail with them, down with empty baskets and then started again the next day. Were there many like him? There used to be before the MGNREGA. Now there are only a few. He still comes because his wife's village is close to the border.

Hopefully, the current government will have the wisdom and grace to enhance the MGNREGA rather than curtail it.



Country's second Central agriculture varsity at Pusa soon:

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PATNA: A central agriculture university will come up soon at Pusa in Samastipur, Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh said on Sunday. It will be the second central agriculture university in the country after the one opened at Imphal in Manipur in 1993, he said.

Singh said the Planning Commission had already approved Rs1,000 crore in 2009 for a central agriculture university at Pusa, but the state government did not take up the matter with the agriculture ministry. Now, the Centre will increase the proposed investment for it. Space is no problem at Pusa, he said.

"The Centre plans to open a college of fisheries at Madhubani, a college of horticulture and forestry at Motihari and a college of agriculture at Chhapra or Siwan. There are 70 agriculture universities in the country, but only one central agriculture university at Manipur," Singh said.

The minister, who addressed a meeting of agriculture scientists organized by Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), said Bihar played a significant role in the success of the second green revolution and helped achieve the target of food production for Food Security Act's implementation.

Bihar will produce 151 lakh tonnes of foodgrains in 52 lakh hectares of agriculture land in the state. Bihar stands second to West Bengal in terms of kharif and rabi production, he said.

All the 38 districts of Bihar have been brought under the National Food Security Mission to increase production of oilseeds and pulses, Singh said. Under its 'Look East policy', the Centre is developing high yielding seeds. The eastern region of India produces 50% of the rice, 45% of vegetables and 35% fish in the country.

Under the integrated fish production programme, the yield has increased to 3 tonnes per hectare against one tonne earlier, Singh said and added even in dairy production, eastern India produced 15% more milk last year. Through improvement in seeds, production of oil and pulses can be increased by 10% every year, Singh hoped.

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PDKV had submitted the proposal under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY). The state government gave administrative approval to the project on August 5, 2010, but did not release any funds. Shirking its responsibility, the government forwarded the proposal for reassessing the project's feasibility to ICAR about a year-and-a-half ago. The ICAR too kept the proposal on hold for long.

Things started moving only after president and secretary of Katol-based NGO Nagpuri Santra Utpadak Sangh, Ramesh Phiske and Manoj Jawanjil, handed over a memorandum to Gadkari during his visit to NRCC along with the ICAR director general S Ayyappan in August this year.

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Potato has been the main cash crop of Lahaul valley since decades. A major portion of agriculture land in the valley is situated at an altitude of over 9,000 feet and the valley experiences mostly cold climate throughout the year. Being highly resistant to diseases and having good production rate, seed potatoes grown in Lahaul remain high in demand in all potato growing states of the country.

Sources said that over 1,800 hectare land was under potato cultivation in Lahaul a few years back, which has now come down to less than 800 hectares. Farmers are now more interested in cultivation of cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli and other vegetables. Gujarat, West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana, [Uttarakhand](#), UP and Maharashtra are the main buyers of Kufri Jyoti and Kufri Chandermukhi varieties. Earlier, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal also used to buy this potato seed.

Meet flays govt over changes to agri tenancy act

Mapusa: An amendment to the Goa Agricultural Tenancy Act 2014 by the government came under severe criticism at a meeting at Arambol on Sunday with speakers calling it 'a killer of democracy' and saying that it was 'digging the grave of tenants and mundakars' who form 80-90% of the population of the state.

At the public meeting convened by the Goencha Kulmundkarancho Awaz and organised by social worker Morgan Travasso, speakers opined that zamindari system will once again flourish in Goa which will kill the rights of the people.

It was also felt that the government should appoint more mamlatdars by giving them special training and giving them time limit to dispose of cases, which will be in the interest of tenants and mundkars in the state.

In a bid to reduce the pendency of tenancy cases, the government has passed the amendment to the Goa, Daman and Diu Agricultural Tenancy Act 1964 giving the decision making power, presently held by the mamlatdars under the act, to civil judges. The appellate authority would be the district judges including additional district judges.

"The clause of 'contract farming system' in the amendment says that the landlord can give his land on lease to anyone while the old law says just the opposite, the tenant is a deemed purchaser and landlord cannot lease or sell the land," said advocate Guru Shirodkar.

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"Suggestions from the panchayats were not sought. By directly abolishing the tenancy act introduced by Bhausahab Bandokar, the government has dug the grave of the majority population in the state," convenor of Goencha Kulmundkarancho Ramkrishna Jalmi said.

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SURAT: The first online retail portal of Agriculture Market Produce Committee (APMC) in the Diamond City has been a success with a large number of residents preferring to purchase their vegetables and fruits online since it was launched on August 2 this year. Surat APMC is the first one in the state to set up an online retail portal for the home delivery of vegetables and fruits.

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