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Worrisome Trends in Agriculture



[The Hindu](#)The latest Economic Appraisal of the government has shown that Tamil Nadu needs out-of-the-box policies to tackle agriculture production and its impact on food inflation.
File Photo

Low output and land fragmentation are critical issues, says survey

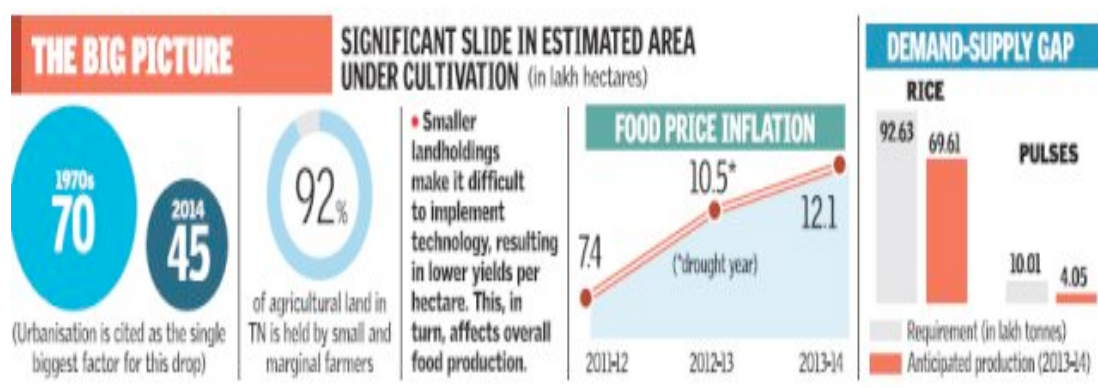
The writing on the wall for Tamil Nadu in agriculture is pretty clear, though the State's grain production during 2013-14 was good. The latest Economic Appraisal of the government has shown that Tamil Nadu needs out-of-the-box policies to tackle agriculture production and its impact on food inflation.

The State did well in 2013-14 to bounce back from a nightmare drought in the preceding year. Data show that between 2011 and 2013, the total production dropped by 45 per cent, from 101.52 lakh tonnes to 56.05 lakh tonnes. Paddy, the principal crop, declined by 46 per cent.

In 2013-14, estimates put the total production at 110.65 lakh tonnes, a figure similar to the pre-drought year. However, it is the data underlying the fundamentals of agriculture that require a closer reading.

According to the appraisal, while both area under cultivation and yield per hectare increased during the 10th Five Year Plan period (2002-2007), the figures dropped by 5.76 per cent and 2.65 per cent in the 11th Plan period (2007-2012), with food crops production, consisting primarily of paddy, millets and pulses, declining by 3.08 per cent.

Officials of the Agriculture Department say that since the 1970s, the area under cultivation had gone down from 70 lakh hectares to 45 lakh hectares, what with rapid urbanisation.



Significantly, going along with the drop in cultivated land is the yield gap. For example, the appraisal says in terms of paddy, the potential yield fixed after on-farm trials was 6 tonnes a hectare in the current scenario.

In 2011-2012, which was a favourable year in terms of rain and irrigation, the average yield was only 3.9 tonnes a hectare. In other words, the gap between potential yield and actual yield was about 2.08 tonnes a hectare.

While production alone was not the deciding factor for food inflation, it is nevertheless a contributing factor. Between 2011 and 2014, the food price inflation in the State increased from 7.4 per cent to 12.1 per cent. It is during this period that the State faced a severe drought.

Experts feel that in a situation where there is little scope for expansion of area under cultivation, usage of technology becomes vital for production maximisation.

"The only answer is increasing (per hectare) productivity. This is why increasing fragmentation in agricultural landholding is a problem," says C. Rangarajan, former Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Rangarajan's comment is significant, given the nature of agriculture land holdings in the State. Officials estimate that 92 per cent of all farmers (nine in ten) in Tamil Nadu are small and marginal farmers. In other words, lack of scale is hindering the implementation of technology, showing in the poor yield results.

A senior official points out that the State is indeed aware of these issues and has begun experimenting with cooperative farming. There is also focus on expanding System of Rice Intensification, which has given significant results in improving the yield.

But experts feel a lot needs to be done to tackle a potential saturation given the present indicators. "Our productivity is very low by global standards.

There is a lot of scope to increase yield. But the required government structures to accomplish this are either non-existent or not functional," says K. Sivasubramaniyan of the Madras Institute of Development Studies

Scientific inputs vital: Chandy



THE HINDU Chief Minister Oommen Chandy inaugurates the Scientists' Interface meet organised by the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment in the capital on Wednesday. PHOTO: S. MAHINSHA

Mr. Chandy said the State government was ready to hand over the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) to the Centre

Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has called upon researchers to provide scientific inputs for the development of key sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, forest conservation, and water management in the State.

Delivering the inaugural address at the Scientists' Interface meet organised by the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE) here on Wednesday, Mr. Chandy said research inputs in priority sectors were critical for the social and economic development of the State.

He exhorted scientists to make use of the available facilities and resources to come up with innovations that would contribute to nation-building. He assured that the government would try to create an environment for young scientists to realise their full potential.

Mr. Chandy said the State government was ready to hand over the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) to the Centre. Citing the examples of the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology (RGCB) and the National Centre for Earth Science Studies, he said both the institutions had been carefully nurtured by the State before being transferred to the Centre for further development. “The decision to hand over JNTBGRI is guided by the view that the growth of the institution is more important than its administration,” he said.

Mr. Chandy released a handbook on research scientists in various disciplines in the State. He also released the latest issue of Sastra, a tri-monthly published by the KSCSTE. KSCSTE executive vice-president V.N. Rajasekharan Pillai presided over the function.

For a tree on every field boundary



Special Arrangement GOING GREEN: Agroforestry provides an alternative to increasing forest green cover. Picture shows an agroforestry farm in Coimbatore.

Agroforestry promotes productive cropping environments, prevents deforestation, protects watersheds and enables agricultural land to withstand extreme weather events

Growing trees on farms is a triple-win strategy for combating simultaneously the challenges of increasing food production, mitigating greenhouse gases and adapting to climate change. It is an instrument of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), catapulted to centre-stage by President Obama's launch of the Global Alliance for CSA at the World Climate Summit on September 23 at New York.

It was fitting, therefore, that "Trees for Life" was the theme of the World Agroforestry Congress held earlier this year in New Delhi. On this occasion the previous United Progressive Alliance government, supported by the National Advisory Council, unveiled the National Agroforestry Policy coinciding aptly with the International Year of Family Farming.

Benefits of tree-based farming

While planting trees on farms is as old as settled cultivation, "agroforestry" is a recently coined term derived from agriculture and forestry. It describes practices developed and employed by farmers over many centuries to cultivate trees on farmland together with crop and animal husbandry. While agroforestry comprises agriculture and forestry in seemingly separate land uses, its essence is of an integrated tree-based farming system. The science and technology, the institutions, and policy sphere of agroforestry is uniquely its own and characterised by a landscape approach.

When strategically applied on a large scale, with appropriate mix of tree species, agroforestry promotes productive and resilient cropping environments, prevents deforestation, protects watersheds and enables agricultural land to withstand extreme weather events, and climate change.

“*Tree-based farming systems have significant potential to provide employment to rural and urban populations through production and industrial application*”

Tree-based systems contribute robustly to livelihoods by providing both tree products and tree services. The bounties they offer include tree products such as fruit, fodder, fuel, fibre, fertilizer and timber which add to food and nutritional security, and income generation and insurance against crop failure. These products are tangible, have money value and are tradable in the markets. Trees also generate wealth through the services they provide in the form of soil and water conservation, nutrient recycling, carbon storage and biodiversity preservation. These services are intangible, not easy to quantify, and do not lend themselves to monetary valuation. At present there is no payment for eco-services provided by tree-based farming systems.

Agroforestry has significant potential to provide employment to rural and urban populations through production, industrial application and value addition ventures. Current estimates show that about 64 per cent of the country's timber requirement is met from the trees grown on farms. Agroforestry has the potential for augmenting energy capacity through biomass, biodiesel, biochar and biogas production. It is also recognised that agroforestry is perhaps the only alternative to meeting the target of increasing forest green cover.

Despite all this, agroforestry has not become the movement it should have. For a long time the subject fell between the cracks of “agriculture” and “forestry” with no ownership by either sector. The value and position of agroforestry in the national system remains ambiguous and undervalued. It has been disadvantaged by adverse policies and legal bottlenecks. Its adoption by tenant-farmers is constrained due to insecurity of tenure. The subject lies fragmented in several Ministries with hardly any mechanism for

convergence and coordination. Inadequate investment in the sector is also a cause for neglect. Unlike the credit and insurance products available for the crop sector, the provisions for growing trees-on-farms are minimal. Weak marketing infrastructure, absence of price discovery mechanisms and lack of post-harvest processing technologies further compound the situation.

Wood Based Industries (WBI) have played an important role in the promotion of agroforestry and economy in Punjab, Haryana, western U.P and in Uttarakhand. However, over the years, the regulations governing the WBI have become stringent. The procedure for setting up new units is cumbersome.

The way forward

The National Agroforestry Policy has pointed the way forward to foster innovation in tree-based farming systems, among various stakeholders.

For lawmakers this would mean amending unfavourable legislation and simplifying regulations related to forestry and agriculture. Policymakers are to incorporate agroforestry in all policies relating to land use and natural resource management, and encourage government investments in agroforestry-related infrastructure, research and education and in the establishment of sustainable enterprises. Development administrators are to develop an institutional framework to ensure coordination between various elements of agroforestry scattered in existing missions and programmes. Farmers are to demand improved agroforestry science and technology from the public research and extension systems, loan and insurance products from financial institutions, and adopt suitable varieties and agronomic practices. Scientists and researchers are to develop location-specific tree-based technologies that complement the crop and livestock systems for sustainable livelihoods, factor in gender concerns, and incorporate the feedback from local communities.

Extension agents, NGOs and farmer organisations are to demonstrate new technologies, build capacities of farmers and help in linking producers to markets and value chains. The private sector is to invest in agroforestry both as a commercial enterprise as well as through the route of Corporate Social Responsibility. Finally, the media is to communicate the benefits of agroforestry to user communities.

Farmers have encapsulated the essence of agroforestry in a pithy slogan “har medh par pedh”(trees on every field boundary). It is time for others to turn over a new leaf. The challenge now lies in the detail of crafting a road map for the implementation of the National Agroforestry Policy by the new government.

(Rita Sharma is a former Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development and the National Advisory Council and Board Trustee of the World Agroforestry Centre.)

KCR for new land acquisition

Proposes paying twice the registration value for land acquired in urban and scheduled areas as compensation

A meeting convened by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao to discuss land acquisition issues, considered paying twice the registration value for land acquired in urban and scheduled areas as compensation and one-and-a-half times of it in other places.

Mr. Rao asked officials to prepare a legislation suiting the requirements of Telangana and one that was favourable to land oustees. The legislation should ensure that the agricultural land to be acquired is not more than 15 per cent so that there is no threat to food security. The maximum land for industries should not exceed 2,000 acres.

At the meeting, which also discussed rehabilitation of land oustees, Mr. Rao felt the government should adopt a humane approach towards land-owners when their holdings were acquired

for irrigation projects and other developmental programmes. The rehabilitation packages should be extended as early as possible.

The meeting studied the land acquisition and rehabilitation legislation of the Centre and the rules framed by different State governments for the purpose.

Recalling the pain that his own family had undergone when their prime land was acquired for the construction of Lower Manair Dam project in Karimnagar, Mr. Rao said the compensation payable to oustees should be liberal. The amount should be more than the registration value because there was a huge difference between market and registration values.

The Chief Minister wanted highest priority for land oustees in irrigation projects as their numerical strength would be more in view of higher demand for land. As far as possible, compensation should be paid to land losers in consultation with them. State and district level committees should be constituted for the purpose. The amount should be deposited in banks in advance so that losers do not have to go to government offices frequently.

The economic consequences of Nehru

While the failure to initiate a programme of building the capabilities of a majority of Indians is a moral failure, we would be missing the larger perspective if we do not recognise the economic significance of the short Nehru era in the long haul of India's history

A call to burn history books has upped the ante as the 125th birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru approaches. The trouble with history though is that it would be prudent for us to first learn its lessons lest we end up repeating our mistakes. As Nehru was India's longest serving Prime Minister, and both triumph as well as tragedy had accompanied his tenure, this is a fit occasion for a public debate on what had been attempted in the Nehru era and

the extent of its success. I must per force confine myself to the economics. This, though would serve as a corrective to the tendency of political historians to most often concentrate on the other aspects of his leadership. For instance, Sarvepalli Gopal's noted three-volume biography bestows a single chapter on Nehru's economic policy.

However, reading through the speeches of Nehru, we find that the economy had remained his continuing preoccupation even amidst the debates on social policy in the Lok Sabha and on decolonisation in the United Nations. Reading them is in any case advisable, as strongly held positions on the economy in the Nehru era have often been crowded in by ideological predilection when they have not been clouded over by ignorance.

Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy

The objective of the economic policy in the 1950s was to raise per capita income in the country via industrialisation. The vehicle for this was the Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy, the decision on this having been taken as early as 1938 by the National Planning Committee of the Congress constituted by Subhas Chandra Bose during his all-too-brief and ill-fated presidentship of the party. The committee was chaired by Nehru.

The cornerstone of the strategy was to build machines as fast as possible as capital goods were seen as a basic input in all lines of production. While a mathematical model devised by Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis had lent a formal status to the strategy, it was the so-called "plan frame" that had guided the allocation of spending. In retrospect, the allocation of investment across lines of production in the Second Five-Year Plan was quite balanced with attention given also to infrastructure, the building of which — given the state of the economy then — the public sector alone would have initiated.

The Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy had criticised even at the outset. I shall discuss two of the criticisms at this stage and turn to a third at a later stage. Thus, Vakil and Brahmananda argued that the Mahalanobis model neglected wage goods, being those consumed by workers who were the majority of the country.

While important per se, in practical terms, this criticism turned out to be somewhat academic as the plan frame — as opposed to the model — had given due importance to agriculture. In fact, the Green Revolution which is dated from the late 1960s cannot entirely be divorced from the attention paid to agriculture in the Nehru era.

The ‘Grow More Food’ campaign and the trials in the country’s extended agricultural research network both contributed to it. Next, B.R. Shenoy had famously dissented from his fellow economists by querying the use of controls as part of the planning process. Shenoy’s is a well-known position in economic theory that the allocative efficiency of the competitive market-mechanism cannot be improved upon. While this is a useful corrective to ham-handed government intervention, it was known even by the 1950s that a free market need not necessarily take the economy to the next level.

The Pax Britannica had been a time of free markets, though coated with political repression, and this had not helped India much during the two centuries since Plassey. Moreover, many of the extant controls were wartime controls that had not been rescinded. Investment licensing though was a central element in planning in India and Shenoy was right in identifying it as such.

An economy quickened

As the maxim “the proof of the pudding lies in the eating” must apply most closely to matters economic, the Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy can be considered only as good as its outcome. It had aimed to raise the rate of growth of the economy.

With the distance that half a century affords us and the aid of superior statistical methods, we are now in the position to see that its early success was nothing short of spectacular. Depending upon your source, per capita income in India had either declined or stagnated during the period 1900-47. Over 1950-65, its growth was approximately 1.7 per cent.

India's economy, which was no more than a colonial enclave for more than two centuries, had been quickened. It is made out that this quickening achieved in the 1950s was no great shakes as the initial level of income was low and a given increase in it would register a higher rate of growth than at a later stage in the progression.

This confounds statistical description with economic assessment. It is a widely recognised feature of economic growth that every increase in wealth makes the next step that much easier to take due to increasing returns to scale. The principle works both ways, rendering the revival of an economy trapped at a low level of income that much more difficult.

It is worth stating in the context that the acceleration of growth achieved in the 1950s has not been exceeded since. Also, that India grew faster than China in the Nehru era.

“ *The acceleration of growth achieved in the 1950s has not been exceeded since. Also, India grew faster than China in the Nehru era* **”**

So if the Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy had led to such a good start, why were the early gains not sustained? The loss of an early vitality in the economy had to do partly with political economy and partly with a flaw in the strategy itself. The death of Nehru created a crisis of leadership in the Congress Party which was communicated to the polity. It took almost a decade-and-a-half for stability to be restored. The instability impacted the governance of the public sector, and public investment which had been the

engine of growth since the early 1950s slowed. Additionally, the private corporate sector, which contrary to conventional wisdom had flourished under Nehru, was initially repressed by Indira Gandhi. Private investment collapsed. This held back the acceleration of economic growth.

Neglect of primary education

Even though we now have reason to believe that the mechanism of long-term growth that remains to this day, which is that of cumulative causation, had been ignited by the Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy, the strategy itself was incomplete.

This is best understood by reference to the Asian Development Model as it had played out in the economies of east Asia. These economies had pursued more or less the same strategy as India in that the state fostered industrialisation. But a glaring difference marks the Indian experience. This was the absence of a serious effort to build human capabilities via education and training.

In the east this had taken the form of a spreading of schooling, vocational training and engineering education. In India, on the other hand, public spending on education had turned towards technical education at the tertiary level too early on.

The slow spread of schooling ensured that the growth of productivity in the farm and the factory remained far too slow. Now the pace of poverty reduction also remained slow, and, via positive feedback, slowed the expansion of demand needed for faster growth of the economy.

It is intriguing that the issue of schooling did not figure majorly among India's planners, especially as it was a part of Gandhi's Constructive Programme.

This had not gone unnoticed even at that time. B.V. Krishnamurthi, then at Bombay University, had pointed out that the priorities of the Second Five-Year Plan undergirded by the Mahalanobis model were skewed.

He castigated it for a bias toward “river-valley projects,” reflected in the paltry sums allocated to education. But it was the argument advanced by him for why spending on schooling matters that was prescient. He argued that education would enable Indians to attend to their livelihood themselves without relying on the government, thus lightening the economic burden of the latter, presumably leaving it to build more capital goods in the long run as envisaged in the Mahalanobis model. But this was not to be, with enormous consequences for not only the economy but also the effectiveness of democracy in India.

While the failure to initiate a programme of building the capabilities of the overwhelming majority of our people is a moral failure of colossal proportions, we would be missing the wood for the trees if we do not recognise the economic significance of the short Nehru era in the long haul of India’s history. It was path-breaking in that a moribund economy had been quickened.

This would have been the precondition for most changes in a country with unacceptably low levels of per capita income. It is yet to be demonstrated how this could have been achieved in the absence of the economic strategy navigated through a democratic polity by Jawaharlal Nehru.

Selling cheap to be the norm

VEGITABLE SUPPLY FROM DISTRICTS		
District	No. Lorries	MTs
Krishna	8	58
Guntur	6	50
Prakasham	3	36
W Godavari	2	30
E Godavari	—	20
Nellore	1	15
Total	20	209

Potatoes and onions for Rs. 5 a kg and other vegetables for Rs. 3 a kg for cyclone affected. Since close to eight lakh people were directly affected by the cyclone in Visakhapatnam district, 70 per cent of vegetables will be supplied to the district, while the rest will be sent to Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts.

The government is taking all measures for sale of potato and onion at Rs. 5 a kg and other vegetables at Rs. 3 a kg through Rythu Bazaars in the cyclone-hit districts of Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam.

“The Marketing Department and the respective district administrations have been told to ensure that vegetables are sold at rates prescribed by the government. The practice will continue till normalcy is restored in the cyclone-hit areas,” said Ranjeev R. Acharya, Principal Secretary, Horticulture and Agriculture.

In all, 209 metric tonnes of vegetables were sent to the cyclone-hit areas on October 13 and 14 from Guntur, Prakasham, West and East Godavari, Nellore and Krishna districts. In addition, 170 metric tonnes of potato were sent to Visakhapatnam, she said.

Moreover, Rythu Bazaar Estate Officers from respective districts will ensure timely supply of vegetables.

Since close to eight lakh people were directly affected by the cyclone in Visakhapatnam district, 70 per cent of vegetables will be supplied to the district, while the rest will be sent to Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts. Among the districts that supplied vegetables to the cyclone-affected areas, Krishna district topped by supplying 58 metric tonnes. Ms. Acharya appreciated the efforts of the district administration for its efforts

Harvesting the veggies of labour



Farming enthusiasts in the city are having a field day by growing the vegetables for their table and for their neighbours too. Today is World Food Day

Kitchen gardening, terrace farming, community farming, paddy cultivation and vegetable gardening in schools and other educational institutions... a lot of ground-breaking work is being done in the city and its outskirts, thanks to the key role played by Krishi Bhavans, State Horticulture Mission and Farm Information Bureau and non-governmental organisations such as Agrifriends and Biotips.

The farmers come from all walks of life, right from pensioners to teachers, techies and homemakers. For instance, Chempaka Kindergarten Annexe I at Pallimukku grows vegetables on the school's terrace. "Our founder Daphne Gomez inspired us to start this. We have a 'Vegetable day' and the children get enthused and involved when they see how vegetables are actually grown. Our teachers buy the produce and the money collected is invested for farming activities," says Monica Augustin, headmistress of the school.

Many of these farmers are now thinking of the next step to encourage more residents to romance the good earth. "I am advocating the concept of 'one hour point', wherein various households under a residents' association cultivate different vegetables and on a particular day they all come together to sell the produce. In fact, I used to sell the produce in front of my home," says V. Unnikrishnan, a former banker who walked out of his cabin to work in his home garden.

Home Greens, his one-stop venture for anything related to agriculture, will become functional soon and he is also an active member of Kitchen Gardeners' Forum, which has 20 members, who meet on the second Saturday of every month and exchange information on agriculture-related subjects. His plot is a veritable green house of vegetables and plants with medicinal value. Nearly three cents of land around his house and every available space on the terrace have been turned into green spaces.

Among the crops are tomato, lady's finger (especially the long Anakkomban variety), brinjal, cowpea, beetroot, ivy gourd, plantain, tapioca, yams, palak, mango ginger, Surinam cherry, amaranthus... Earlier, he had successfully harvested soya bean, bok choy, and salad cucumber too.

“I am not marketing the produce, but it is a possibility worth exploring. There is no stress or strain and from dawn to dusk, I tend to my plants. Later, I am on Facebook interacting with members of various farming communities,” says Unnikrishnan.

Shafeek A. Shihab, a technical analyst with an MNC in Technopark, is one of the ‘friends’ Unnikrishnan interacts with. Shafeek’s polyhouse on the rooftop of his house at Pettah helped him harvest 800 kg salad cucumber. Recently, the 25-year-old had a bumper harvest of cowpea and bitter gourd.

“The satisfaction you get from farming is beyond words,” says Shafeek, adding: “Right now nearly 25 polyhouses are there in the district and by the end of this financial year, it would cross 40.” Now that the government has proposed to set up hi-tech polyhouses with the help of Krishi Bhavans, the number might go up.

For Syamkumar K., an employee of the Kerala State Electricity Board, farming is a family affair, with his son and daughter pitching in. Since he couldn’t cultivate on his three-cent plot, he turned to his 700 sq ft terrace. His labour of love won him the Agricultural Department’s Yuvakarshaka award in 2013. “I also keep hens and the droppings are used as manure. After the award, I took 40 cents of land at Vattiyoorkavu on lease where I cultivated cauliflower, cabbage, cowpea, tomato, cucumber, carrot, brinjal and chillies,” says Syamkumar who is also an actor and dubbing artiste.

Meanwhile, some of the farming enthusiasts are giving shape to new ideas to promote farming. Joji Mathew, a web developer, has introduced the concept of ‘weekend farming’. “It is for those who love to take up farming but are tied up with many other things.

We take land on lease and these people can come there on weekends and tend to the plants. We have already done it at Santhigiri Ashram, Pothencode, and I am looking for vacant plots in the city,” he says.

Meanwhile, according to Farm Information Bureau, a large number of youngsters are coming forward to do community farming, where they are ready to invest in a plot and do farming as a group. It seems, self-sufficiency in food might not be an impossible dream to realise. Food for thought!

Many farmers are now thinking of the next step to encourage more residents to romance the good earth

Bangalore India Bio in February

Bangalore India Bio, an annual biotechnology event, will be held from February 9-11 in 2015. It will focus on agri-biotech, renewable energy and environment sustainability and regenerative medicine, among other things.

Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, France and Australia are among the over 20 countries expected to participate in the 15th edition.

The event is being promoted by the State Department of IT, BT and Science and Technology and Vision Group on Biotechnology. S.R. Patil, Minister for IT, BT and S&T, Planning and Statistics, said: "Karnataka offers huge potential for the biotech sector.

The government's focus is to leverage biotechnology to solve various issues of the people. The focus of this year's event is agri-biotech."

The Minister said that the State government has provided grants to the University of Agriculture, Dharwad and the University of Horticulture Science, Bagalkot, for research in the agri-biotech sector.

Community forest stabilises water table

The community forest developed in a cluster of 11 villages in Kundrandarkovil has helped in stabilising water table in the area as well as in the periphery, said villagers in the area.

An interactive session was held in which representatives of Building Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Societies (BERAS) International, Sweden, and office-bearers of 'Kudumbam,' a service organisation which developed the community forest at the village recently for ascertaining the advantages of the forest, took part.

At Ammankorai, the villagers specifically referred to the impact of the community forest on groundwater table in their village. They said that the water table, which had depleted seriously, had got stabilised by about 10 to 15 feet.

Oswald Quintal, Director of Kudumbam, said that community forest was developed on 400 acres of temple lands in these villages. Jostein, Chief Executive Officer of BERAS International, spoke on the importance of ecological recycling agriculture practices to be followed by farmers and consumers. He called upon farmers to set up sustainable food societies.

Farmers unhappy with paddy procurement rate

With promising signs of water availability for paddy crop in Erode region, productivity may not be an issue, but the procurement cost is far below expectations of the agricultural community.

According to farmers here, the cost of cultivation has gone up drastically over the years due to escalating expenditure on inputs and labour. On an average, the cost of cultivation ranges from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 30,000 per acre.

The returns are also in the same range, since the procurement is in the range of Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,200 per bag.

According to K.V. Ponnaiyan, the State Government ought to consider the plight of farmers and effect a rise in the procurement price.

Paddy cultivators say procurement at Rs. 1,500 per bag will be reasonably remunerative for the agricultural community. The State Government says Ramasamy, a paddy cultivator, must factor in the reality of several thousands of farmers in rain-fed areas who incur higher expenditure on costs of water management.

Farmers in rain-fed areas spend much more due to the need for maintaining the water canals all through the year. The unanimous view of the farming community is that the policy of calculating the cost from the time of sowing to harvest is flawed.

And, though the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation procures the produce through its Direct Procurement Centres, farmers also find themselves constrained to sell their paddy to private procurers at the time of harvest. Farmers also suffer a lot due to pilferage as most of the Direct Procurement Centres do not have electronic weighing machines, lamented another farmer.

According to Mr. Ponnaiyan, it was time the State Government adopted the recommendation of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan Committee for determining the cost of agricultural produce at 50 per cent higher than the production cost.

Agriculture Minister takes on Centre

I wonder if the Centre is neglecting Karnataka, says Krishna Byre Gowda

Karnataka is upset that the Centre was yet to respond to its request for providing flood relief assistance even a month after submitting a memorandum.

“Let alone flood relief, the Centre is yet to send its team to study the situation in the State,” Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda told reporters, on the sidelines of a programme organised to mark the foundation day of University of Agricultural Sciences-Bangalore here on Wednesday.

“I wonder if the Centre is neglecting Karnataka?,” the Minister remarked, while expressing anguish over the delay in releasing the aid.

Pointing out that the State had sought Rs. 266 crore, he said all guidelines prescribed by the Centre had been taken into consideration while arriving at this figure.

“Even though the Centre has not responded to the flood relief request, we have decided to finalise the memorandum seeking Central assistance for taking up drought-relief works in about a week,” the Minister said.

The memorandum would be submitted to the Centre after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah clears it. He said the districts of Kolar, Chickballapur, Bangalore Rural and parts of Tumkur and Ramanagaram were seriously affected by drought for the fourth consecutive year.

As there was a possibility of these districts facing fodder shortage, the State government had instructed the Deputy Commissioners concerned to procure adequate quantum of fodder besides encouraging farmers themselves to grow fodder crops.

The watershed works would be taken up in these districts under the Krishi Bhagya scheme, which would be implemented from the next month in the State, he said.

Krishi Mela from October 18

The University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shimoga, has organised the three-day Krishi Mela on its campus here from October 18, its Vice-Chancellor C. Vasudevappa said.

The Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Sericulture, Animal Husbandry and Water Resource would also participate in it to highlight various schemes launched by them for the welfare of farmers, Mr. Vasudevappa said at a press conference here on Monday.

The emphasis would be on popularising mechanisation of agricultural operations in this edition of Krishi Mela. The UAHS, Shimoga, had received Rs. 1 crore as a special grant from the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) to develop low-cost farm equipment.

With this grant, the zonal agriculture and horticultural research stations of UAHS, Shimoga at Hiriya and Brahmavar had developed many devices that could be used for the routine chores like sowing, weed removal and spraying of pesticides.

These equipment would be displayed at the exhibition. A separate pavilion would be set up for stalls related to agricultural equipment, he said. Farmers from Shimoga, Chikmagalur, Hassan, Davangere, Kodagu, Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts that come under the jurisdiction of UAHS, Shimoga, would attend the event.

The arecanut, millets, native varieties of paddy and tobacco were cultivate on the UAHS, Shimoga premises by adopting innovative farming practices. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the mela on October 19.

Emphasis will be on popularising mechanisation of agricultural operations

Tobacco Board's charter in conflict with country's health goals: Harsh Vardhan

'Devise scheme that encourages farmers to stop cultivating tobacco'

Contending that the charter of the Tobacco Board was in conflict with the country's public health goals, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has sought a joint meeting of officials of the Union Ministries of Agriculture, and Commerce and Health to devise a scheme that encourages farmers to stop cultivating tobacco.

The Tobacco Board, through its programmes, seeks to bring about overall development of tobacco growers and the Indian tobacco industry.

In a letter, dated October 1, addressed to the Union Minister of State (Independent charge) Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman, Dr. Vardhan said that the officials could meet on October 29 for a brainstorming-cum-consultation session with experts on the issue of encouraging tobacco farmers to take up alternative crops.

Dr. Vardhan also pointed out that the Government of India, which had ratified the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), was committed to implement strategies for effective tobacco control. "However, the charter of Tobacco Board, which is directly under the control of your Ministry, comes in conflict with some of the provisions of FCTC," Dr. Vardhan said in the letter to Ms. Sitharaman. Also, various expert groups have recommended economically viable alternative crops as options for different regions.

The letter comes even as the Tobacco Board chairperson K. Gopal, in a recent statement, said India had exported tobacco and tobacco products worth Rs. 6,092.86 crore during 2013-14, surpassing the earlier record.

One million deaths

However, Dr. Vardhan, in his letter, pointed out that tobacco consumption was responsible for at least one million deaths every year in India. “If effective steps are not taken, tobacco-related annual death toll may rise to 8 million by 2030,” he warned. Citing the findings of the global Adult Tobacco Survey 2010, Dr. Vardhan said that 35 per cent of adults in India were consuming tobacco. And as per the 2008–09 figures, more than 85 per cent of tobacco cultivation in India was in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka. Meanwhile, Voice of Tobacco Victims (VoTV), an initiative aimed at sensitising policymakers about the dangers of excessive tobacco usage, said the mission of the Tobacco Board was in conflict with the goals of public health. The mission needed to be changed to reducing tobacco production and redeploying tobacco farmers, Vishal Rao, an oncologist associated with VoTV, said.

Briefly

ALL-INDIA FARMERS’ WORKSHOP

The All-India Farmers’ Empowering Workshop will be held at the IFFTC auditorium in CSIR-CFTRI here on October 17 at 4 p.m. Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda will inaugurate the workshop. Chamarajnagar MP R. Dhruvanarayan will release souvenir and Mysore MP Pratap Simha will release the workshop logo. CFTRI Director Ram Rajashekarani will preside. — Special Correspondent.

Several new schemes for fisheries sector

National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) is implementing various production oriented schemes for enhancement of fish production and productivity.

To increase fish production and productivity in reservoirs, a massive fish seed stocking programme was taken up in 21.15 lakh hectares of water spread area in 21 States.

Considering the need for promotion of hygienic markets, the board is focusing on developing hygienic markets across the country. For promotion of fish marketing and consumption, modernisation and construction of 252 fish markets were taken up.

Addressing weak links

NFDB is addressing the serious weak links in the supply chain by providing fishermen with 1214 mobile fish vending vehicles with ice-boxes so that they can earn more by reaching markets faster and the fish are also delivered in better condition.

To meet the quality standards stipulated by the European Union and other importing countries, assistance was extended for modernisation of 21 fishing harbours and 31 fish landing centres.

Considering the scope for development of ornamental fisheries in India by involving rural beneficiaries, especially women self-help groups, NFDB has launched initiatives by implementing different schemes.

Several families and women self-help groups are earning a livelihood through ornamental fish culture. NFDB has launched schemes for setting up of ornamental units such as backyard hatcheries, medium scale ornamental fish breeding units, integrated ornamental fish breeding units and aquarium fabrication units with 50 per cent subsidy.

Four models

The board has established four model fish dressing centres, 30 solar fish drying units and platforms and has provided solar operated deep freezers to fisherwomen to ensure hygienic and better quality fish is made available to consumers.

Training to fishermen on hygienic handling of fish, solar fish drying and value addition is being imparted. These pro-active measures aim bring a significant improvement in handling, preservation and marketing of fish in addition to increase in production.

Dr.M.V.Rao, IAS, is Chief Executive, National Fisheries Development Board, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-500 052, phone :040 2401553, Mobile:97034 40004, email: mvraoforindia@gmail.com, website: nfdb.gov.in

Uniform evaluation pattern for KAU courses

The Academic Council of the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has decided to have a uniform evaluation pattern for final examinations of postgraduate and Ph.D. courses in different colleges under the faculties of Agriculture and Forestry.

The 123rd meeting of the council here on Wednesday, chaired by Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran, unanimously cleared a proposal for this.

The Vice-Chancellor said that research conducted as part of postgraduate and Ph.D. programmes should aim at technology generation. The council authorised the Directors of Research and Extension to identify centres for offering diploma courses in agricultural sciences.

The courses will be run on a cost-sharing basis. The council also decided to create a database of abstracts of research projects undertaken in the university. The database would help new research scholars, observed the council.

The council turned down a request of a private educational trust seeking No Objection Certificate for starting undergraduate courses in agriculture, agricultural engineering and food engineering in the self-financing mode.

The council, after prolonged discussion, concluded that the KAU Act and Statutes did not permit such affiliated colleges. The council cleared a proposal to recognise postgraduate degrees awarded by the Central University of Kerala.

In regard to KAU recognising degrees awarded by the Annamalai University, the council constituted a committee to study the issue. The committee included the Dean (Agriculture), Director of Research, Director of Extension, Registrar, Director (Academics), Jacob John, Thomas George and E.K. Kurien.

E.V. Nybe, Director (Academics) said the council also decided to adopt a Free and Open Source Software for academic activities. A proposal to incorporate a hologram in the KAU degree certificate was also approved.

The meeting was attended by elected representatives of teachers; nominated members; P.V. Balachandran, Registrar; Swarup John, Dean (Agriculture); and Siva Swamy, Dean (Agricultural Engineering).

Perambalur emerging as a hub of poultry farming



Broiler chicken farm at Ogalur in Perambalur district.— PHOTO: R.M. RAJARATHINAM

Perambalur district is making rapid strides in poultry farming and is emerging as a close second to Namakkal.

Under the scheme for development of poultry clusters in the non-poultry backward regions of the State announced in the budget for 2012-13, there are 128 poultry units in the district and many more are in the making. The Government announced 163 units for 2012-13 in Perambalur district, 100 for 2013-14 and 100 for 2014-15.

Of the 163 units for 2012-13, 118 are functioning and others are in the process of development. For 2013-14, 100 units is the target, out of which ten have been established.

A. Muthaiah, a small farmer of Kazhanivasal village in Veppur block in Perambalur district and a beneficiary of the scheme, has reared seven batches of chicks with nearly 4,000 chicks in one batch. Chicks delivered to him grow into broiler chicken of 2 kg weight in 38 to 42 days. "I sold chicken for Rs. 52,165 in one batch and got a profit of Rs. 15,000 a batch. Now I am rearing the eighth batch of chicks which are now 19 days old," he said showing the chicks in his poultry farm on Wednesday. Anbuselvan of Ogalur is yet another farmer who has benefitted out of the poultry cluster scheme announced by the government.

He is rearing the sixth batch of chicks given to him. He has sold chicken for Rs. 53,171 per batch. Like these two farmers there are many who benefitted out of the scheme. A sum of Rs. 8,25,000 is spent for establishing a poultry unit.

Out of this amount, Rs. 4,12,500 is the subsidy from State and union governments and the beneficiary has to pay a margin of 10 per cent of the project cost. Indian Overseas Bank and other banks have given loans to farmers for the rest of the amount. Besides these, beneficiaries get back end subsidy from Poultry Venture Capital Fund of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

Darez Ahamed, District Collector, whose motivation brought many farmers to poultry farming, said that many farmers had shown interest in establishing poultry farms.

M. Chandrasekaran, Joint Director, Animal Husbandry, and K. Thangarajan, Deputy Director, said broiler chicken rearing was undertaken in the district through integration wherein, integrators supply day old chicks and feed required for birds.

Shanthi Feeds Ltd, Swami Feeds Ltd, and Suguna Feeds Ltd., are the integrators for Perambalur district. The integrators ensure that the birds are marketed through their own channels. Beneficiaries are selected by integrators, bankers, and government officials.

Broiler chicken rearing is undertaken through integration

Nutty way to health – and wealth!



Valuable commodityWalnuts get a wash in a farm in Laishui town in China. (Below) A vernier caliper being used to measure walnuts. Nowadays, consumers in search of hand massages value them more highly than gold.PHOTO: AFP



With the humble walnut becoming a key player in health food market in China, prices shoot up, bringing cheer among farmers

Grinning with pride, a Chinese farmer held out two precious walnuts — globes so precisely symmetrical that consumers in search of hand massages value them more highly than gold.

“Prices have skyrocketed,” said Li Zhanhua, standing in the shade of the leafy green walnut trees which have made him a small fortune. “Years ago, we could never have imagined this.”

Rolling a pair of walnuts between palm and fingers — believed to improve circulation — has been a Chinese pastime for hundreds of years.

“Mainly the walnuts are good for the body, that’s why people play with them,” Li said.

Going nuts

Walnuts were used as toys in China’s imperial courts as early as 220 AD, but were championed by officials during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and have been a status symbol exchanged among the country’s elite ever since.

Demand has grown alongside China's economic boom, and vendors say they are especially popular among the newly wealthy and gangsters profiting from Beijing's grey economy.

Years of rising prices have transformed the lives of farmers in Laishui county, a few hours from the capital.

Just a decade ago, Li and his neighbours ploughed a hard-scrabble existence growing wheat and corn, but now take regular holidays from their mountainside village and own imported cars as well as apartments in a nearby city.

Images of the humble walnut are everywhere in Laishui, shining down from shop fronts, huge banners lining the streets, and naturally, printed on business cards. Collectors are not interested in the edible kernel, but instead value its ridged brown shell, which grows concealed beneath a green husk.

Skin deep

With prices appreciating long term, investors facing low interest rates on bank deposits have turned to walnuts as a store of value, according to Chinese reports, and speculating on unpeeled walnut fruit has become a form of gambling, which is generally banned in mainland China.

In a practice called "betting on skin" buyers pay a fixed price for the nuts before their green outer covering has been removed, hoping that what is inside will be worth more than they shelled out. Walnuts have been sold for generations in Beijing's Shilihe market, where stalls also offer specialised walnut oil and brushes.

Dozens of mostly middle-aged men crouched smoking and commenting on lines of fruit set out on black cloth.

After prodding and measuring a series of specimens, and a prolonged debate, Beijinger Miao Yaoge rolled out 2,000 yuan in crisp red notes, before watching as the vendor cut open his chosen pair with a kitchen knife.

“Look, the husk is thin,” the seller exclaimed, suggesting a larger nut and prompting a flicker of a smile from Miao, 45.

As they were given a final buffing, Miao — who reckoned they were worth around 2,500 yuan, giving him a profit on the deal — said: “This is Chinese culture. I’m happy with my walnuts.”AFP

‘There is no suitable alternative crop’

Tobacco farmers in Karnataka have not taken kindly to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan’s initiative to encourage tobacco farmers to cultivate alternative crops.

President of Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) Tobacco Growers’ Federation of Karnataka Javare Gowda said there was no alternative crop that was suitable to be grown in the soil and climatic conditions in the tobacco-cultivating belt in Mysore region.

The Central Tobacco Research Institute’s (CTRI) Research Station in Hunsur had carried out a study in the regard and submitted a report to the Tobacco Board that there was no alternative crop suitable to be grown in the rain-fed areas, where tobacco is grown, he said.

Sugarcane and Janaki Ammal

The Indian National Science Academy (INSA) arranged a seminar last week on the history of science in India, with particular focus on the last 100 years. Among the various topics, work in the area of genetics during the early years of the 20th century was presented by Dr. Durgadas Kasbekar of the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics, Hyderabad.

In a gripping and highly informative half an hour, he presented three advances made in India, namely the success story of sugarcane breeding, the discovery of the Bombay Blood Type (the “O” subgroup) and the mathematical analysis of the mapping of genes distributed across the length of the chromosome. Of these, the story of sugarcane breeding and generating new varieties was particularly gripping not only for its glorious success but also because it highlighted the dedicated work of a lady scientist named Edavaleth Kakkat Janaki Ammal. And this story is worth retelling.

Dr. K.T. Achaya has written in his authoritative book, “Indian Food: A Historical Companion” (OUP 1994) that while sugarcane was well known and grown in India since the Rigvedic times (c. 1500 BC), as *Ikshu*, and Kautilya (c. 300 BC) mentions a whole range of products from sugarcane, our canes were not as sweet as those from the Far East. They had however robust stalks. Achaya in his other book: “A historical dictionary of Indian food” (OUP 1998) states that the Tamil book *Agananuru* mentions that when carts got stuck in the mud, stalks of sugarcane were heaped beneath the wheel to provide a grip! Such has been the robustness of our sugarcane.

The sweetest sugarcane comes from Papua New Guinea, and termed *Saccharum officinarum*. Also called ‘noble’ cane, it migrated northwest to Asia. During the early 1900s, India actually imported this sweet sugar from Java and the Far East. The freedom fighter and scholar Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had suggested in the 1910s that we in India should do botanical work to sweeten our own varieties (called *S. spontaneum*). This led to the start of the Sugarcane Breeding Station at Coimbatore, Madras Presidency, led by C. A. Barber, which took on the task of improving the Indian sugarcane plants. He and his assistant T.S. Venkataraman began crossing the ‘noble’ *S. Officinarum* females with *S. Spontaneum* males.

As Kasbekar explains, when the pollen of *spontaneum* fertilized eggs of *officianarum*, the products retained the full chromosome complement of *officianarum*, generating a hybrid sugarcane plant as sweet as *officianarum* and with robust stalks as in *spontaneum*. Back-crossing of the hybrid male with *officianarum* was even more successful. Success was thus achieved in producing sweeter varieties of Indian sugarcane.

These Coimbatore breeds (Co-canes) were so successful that in the first year itself they increased sugarcane production in Punjab by 50 per cent, and were even exported to places like Cuba. Between 1930 and 1935, this work of Venkataraman led to a doubling of sugarcane production in the country.

It was during this time that the young girl from Tellichery, Kerala, Janaki Ammal (b. Nov 4, 1897) moved to do her BSc and BSc Honours from Queen Mary's and Presidency Colleges, Madras. With a scholarship, she moved to the University of Michigan, U.S. to get her MS in 1925. She came back, got her DSc in 1931 and joined the Sugarcane Breeding Station at Coimbatore to work with Venkataraman on sugarcane biology.

She was an expert in cytogenetics (the genetic content and expression of genes in the cell). She had known that plants display polyploidy (collection of not just two pairs of chromosomes in each cell, as our body cells do, but many multiples of 2, e.g., $2n = 48, 56, 64, 72$ and even 112). Her research in this area led to our understanding of the nature of polyploidy in sugarcane, forming a firm scientific basis for crossing and hybrids, but also helped in choosing plant varieties for cross-breeding.

*It also helped analyse the geographical distribution of sugarcane across India, and to establish that *S. Spontaneum* is sugarcane that originated in India.*

She left Coimbatore to join the John Innes Institute at London and then the Royal Horticulture Society at Wisley, during the years

1945-51. A summary of the life and times of Janaki Ammal has been written by the famous scholar in plant pathology and evolution, Professor Chiryathumadom Venkatachaliar Subramanian of Chennai (www.ias.ac.in/womenin-science/Janaki.pdf). He writes that Nehru invited Janaki Ammal to return and reorganize the Botanical Survey of India. She came back and ran the Botanical Survey of India.

Even earlier than Nehru, Professor C.V. Raman saw the spark in her and made her a Foundation Fellow of the Academy. Years later, in 1957, she was elected to INSA — the first woman scientist elected to any of the science academies in India. She was also awarded the Padma Shri in 1957. Having led a full life, she breathed her last on February 4, 1984. Think about it; every time you bite a sugarcane, or a lump of gud or vellam, you are enjoying the fruits of toil of Barber, Venkataraman and Janaki.

Genetic history of tomatoes revealed



K. Pichumani

The sequencing of 360 tomato varieties has yielded a 'genetic history' of tomato. An important finding is that specific regions of the genome were unintentionally depleted in genetic variation.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 tonnes of adulterated pepper seized in Chennai



The food safety department on Wednesday seized 18 tonnes of adulterated pepper coated with cancer-causing mineral oils.

CHENNAI: The food safety department on Wednesday seized 18 tonnes of adulterated pepper coated with cancer-causing mineral oils such as liquid paraffin and burnt diesel oil in Broadway.

A team of officials raided the godown of a wholesaler on Varadha Muthaiappan Street and seized adulterated pepper worth 1.50 crore and 400 litres of mineral oil. "We sealed the godown of Venkateswara Traders and took samples for checks. The adulterated pepper will be destroyed with the consent of Spices Board of India," said an official.

The department received a tip about the illegal trade from a retailer in Old Washermenpet. "We seized adulterated pepper from him and traced the origin of the illegal trade after enquires," the official said adding that more raids would be initiated in the next few days.

"The mineral oil was used as a fungicide and polishing agent. We had seized it for the first time even though the practice had been in place for long. The use of any mineral oil in pepper is prohibited according to the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act," the official said.

Sources say mineral oils are used to give more weight and dark black colour to pepper. "It is one of the methods to preserve the spice. But black pepper coated with mineral oil gives out a kerosene like smell," said a trader.

Experts say pepper coated with mineral oil is considered carcinogenic.

Santhana Rajan of the Consumer Association of India said few customers checked spices. "Adulterated pepper will have a shiny look due to addition of mineral oils but it can easily be identified by the colour."

He said traders engaged in the malpractices were not aware of the health risks. "No awareness campaigns are conducted to sensitise them."

Monsoon round the corner as wind changes direction

CHENNAI: The northeast monsoon is somewhere round the corner, but the weatherman can't yet tell when it would be here.

As the first sign of the monsoon, the wind direction has changed. Till Tuesday, wind was blowing from west to east. From Wednesday morning, it has been blowing from east — from the Andaman Islands to Tamil Nadu. "This is a sign of the monsoon coming in. But for it to set in, other factors like moisture content and convergence of air have to fall in place," said S Thampi, deputy director general of India Meteorological Department. "With Hudhud moving away, conditions have become more conducive for rain," he added.

The northeast monsoon usually sets in around October 15, but it has been delayed because of cyclone Hudhud. "Hudhud has to completely nullify before the monsoon sets in. Since the winds have changed direction, it will do so in the next few days," said Thampi. Several parts of Chennai received rain on Wednesday. While central parts like Nungambakkam received drizzles, western suburbs like Avadi and Ambattur received heavy showers early in the morning.

Wednesday's rain will be accounted for the final statistics of the monsoon season. "The Met department does not call this monsoon rain, but it takes into account all rain from October 1 on its database. This period is ambiguous," said Pradeep John, a weather blogger.

The easterlies are now blowing at a speed of around 20kmph (10 knots). When the monsoon sets in, it would be around 40kmph. "The winds are almost in a straight line from the Andamans. And

they are blowing up to 2km from the surface. This is typical of days before the monsoon sets in," said John.

The northeast monsoon is Chennai's largest source of rain water. Of the 140cm of rain the city receives annually, 87cm is through the northeast monsoon. Of this 87cm, November receives 40cm over just 12 days.

WEATHER

Chennai, India

Today's temperature

27°C

H33°L25°

°F

Today's weather forecast

- 3 AM
28°C
 - 6 AM
25°C
 - 9 AM
30°C
 - 12 PM
33°C
 - 3 PM
33°C
 - 6 PM
31°C
 - 9 PM
28°C
 - 12 AM
27°C
- Max 33°C
- Min 25°C

Cloudy

- Min Temp: 25° C
 - Wind speed 20 KMPH
 - Wind direction NE
 - Wind direction 59
 - Rainfall quantity 0mm
 - Rainfall probabilities 0%
 - Max RH: 88
 - Min RH: 61
-

Business Standard

Better days ahead for coffee growers

As Brazil is headed for a lower crop, bean prices are likely to move up further in 2015



Good days are ahead for [coffee](#) growers and traders as bean prices are likely to increase on the back of lower production in Brazil, a major producing country.

“Going by the indications of International Coffee Organization (ICO), which has projected a lower crop in 2014-15, we expect [Arabica](#) prices to go up 15-20 per cent by February or March next year,” said Ramesh Rajah, president, Coffee Exporters’ Association.

The Association expects Arabica prices to touch 250 cents per lb (pound), an increase of 19 per cent from the current levels of 210 cents per lb. Robusta prices are likely to touch \$2,300 a tonne, about 15 per cent higher over the current levels, by the first quarter of 2015, Rajah added.

Robusta prices might not increase much, compared to Arabica. However, it is too early to make a guess as the condition in Brazil, the leading producer, keeps changing. Recent rains in that country has given hope for a better than estimated crop next year, he noted.

Prices were volatile again in September, mostly reacting to weather news from Brazil. Daily prices fell initially but rose towards the end of the month as reports of dryness in Brazil exacerbated concerns over next year’s crop, ICO said.

A new survey from Conab, the Brazilian crop forecasting agency, gave a revised production estimate of 45.14 million bags for crop year 2014-15 (April to March), around 570,000 bags (each bag is 60 kg) higher than the previous estimate. This new estimate leaves production in Brazil in 2014-15 at its lowest level since 2011-12, with mounting concerns over the 2015-16 crop.

Crop year 2013-14 has ended in all exporting countries, with total production estimated at 145.2 million bags, unchanged on the previous year. World consumption was also around 145 million bags in calendar year 2013, leaving the market reasonably balanced, but lower production expected in 2014-15 will likely result in a global deficit next year, ICO said.

COFFEE PRODUCTION*

(In '000 bags)

	2010	2011	2012	2013E
Arabica	84,190	81,741	88,685	85,276
Robusta	48,876	50,270	56,319	59,926
Total	1,33,066	1,32,011	1,45,004	1,45,202

*Production in exporting countries, E=Estimated

Source: ICO

The ICO composite indicator price averaged 161.79 US cents per lb in September, 0.8 per cent less than that in August. The daily price fell from a high of 176.44 to a low of 153.64 in the middle of the month, before climbing back to finish on 164.37 cents, as increased reports of dryness in Brazil renewed speculation over production in the next year. "We expect ICO composite indicator to move in the range of 180-190 cents per lb by first quarter of 2015," said Rajah.

A slight recovery is expected in parts of [Central America](#) during crop year 2014-15, as the damage from coffee leaf rust is starting to subside. Nevertheless, the social and economic damage to the region is ongoing and should not be underestimated.

The lower volume of exports recorded from Indonesia suggest that production in crop year 2014-15 (April to March) could be significantly reduced, the ICO said.

Rubber output slides as prices slump, even as imports surge



A fall in monthly [rubber](#) output since June is causing concern to observers. Production in September fell 25 per cent to 60,000 tonnes, compared to 80,000 tonnes in the same month last year. Total stock at September-end was 200,000 tonnes, against 223,000 tonnes earlier.

Experts say the negative output trend indicates a shift in attitude from growers, owing to a continuously sliding price. The local price is Rs 120 a kg, a level at which a majority of small and medium farmers have stopped tapping rubber trees, as this isn't viable enough to nurse the plantations.

“This is a serious situation,” says N Radhakrishnan, former president, Cochin Rubber Merchants Association. Since industries have to use rubber, it would mean a further rise in imports. “The price should be at least Rs 170/kg. Only then can we continue with tapping,” says Binu John, a Kottayam-based grower.

He said the high cost of labour is a serious issue. And, with the fall in prices, aging trees are not being replaced with fresh plants in recent years.

The [Rubber Board](#) says consumption in September was 85,500 tonnes, compared to 80,550 tonnes in the same month of last week. With production dipping and consumption rising, the gap is being met through imports -- prices are even lower in global markets than here.

RUBBER STATISTICS (In tonnes)				
Period	Production	Consumption	Import	Export
Sep '13	80,000	80,550	47,899	1,098
Sep '14	60,000	85,500	41,848	8
Apr-Sep '13	345,000	491,580	181,700	3,495
Apr-Sep '14	337,000	509,085	225,652	163

Source: Rubber Board

During April–September, the first six months of the current financial year, 225,652 tonnes were brought in as against 181,700 tonnes in the same period of 2013-14, a rise of 24 per cent. More import is likely. The SMR grade is available at Rs 88/kg abroad, against Rs 120/kg in India. So, even after paying a 20 per cent import duty, it is still much cheaper than buying at home, a further loss of markets for home growers.

With 98% cashew apple going waste, traders look for alternative use

Mangalore, October 15: The Karnataka Cashew Manufacturers' Association (KCMA) has said that it is ready accept the challenge posed by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the better utilisation of cashew apple.

It has requested the Prime Minister to constitute a task force with members from industry and research bodies to find viable alternatives on utilisation of cashew apples.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Bola Rahul Kamath, President of KCMA, said that the association would like to take up the challenge posed by the Prime Minister on the proper utilisation of cashew apple on public-private partnership model during his recent visit to Tumkur.

“We are buying raw cashewnuts from farmers, and are ready to buy even cashew apples from them and put them to proper use,” he said.

Out of the 40 lakh tonnes of cashew apples produced in the country, 98 per cent is wasted. Stating that Goa allows distillation to make cashew fenny, he said the laws in other States do not allow such distillation.

The production of juice from cashew apples opens up a lot of logistical challenges, he said, and expressed doubts about the viability of projects such as production of bio-diesel from cashew apple.

Kamath suggested that a task force be appointed with representatives from industry and research institutes to identify the viable alternatives on utilisation of cashew apples. Proper utilisation of cashew apples will have many benefits, as it will increase income of farmers and make cashew cultivation more viable.

The increase in raw cashew production will help cashew industry to expand and generate more jobs in rural India, he said. KCMA is ready to take the tasks assigned to it in this respect, he added.

To get over copra import ban, solvent extractors ship in coconut oil cake

Kochi, October 15: Solvent extraction units have found a way out to overcome the ban imposed by the Centre on copra imports. They are now importing coconut oil cake from the Philippines and Indonesia and extracting oil from it.

This solvent extracted coconut oil has begun to eat into coconut oil demand in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Deodorised coconut oil is produced by the extraction units and it is available in the market along with coconut oil extracted from copra. This has begun affecting sales of coconut oil extracted from copra, said Thalath Mahmood, Director, Cochin Oil Merchants Association said.

This new trend coupled with low copra arrivals and absence of a strong local as well as upcountry demand has all contributed for a fall in prices this week. Coconut oil is now ruling at Rs. 15,000/quintal in Kerala, while it quoted at Rs. 14,500 in Tamil Nadu.

Copra prices also were down at Rs. 10,400 in Kerala, while they ruled at Rs. 9,800 in Tamil Nadu.

Our Erode correspondent reports: Coconut oil prices plummeted as there was total lack of buyers in Erode. “Coconut oil prices had increased to a record; but now they have dropped to Rs. 2,130-2,150 for a 15-kg pack in loose form. This is about Rs. 80-100 lower than last week,” said RM Palanisamy, an oil trader.

He said buyers in North India and other places, expecting a further drop by the week-end, did not place any orders.

Even millers in Kerala who buy coconut oil from Tamil Nadu aren't placing any orders. But oil crushers are still hopeful of an increase in price post Diwali.

Copra prices have also dropped sharply. On Wednesday, it sold at Rs. 10,200-10,300 a quintal and arrival of copra increased. But sales were very poor.

Meanwhile, the sale of other oils has increased. Sunflower oil was sold at Rs. 6,400 while the palm oil was sold at Rs. 5,700-5,900 a quintal.

WTO rules against India's curbs on US chicken imports

Poultry sector wants Centre to challenge the ruling before the appellate body

New Delhi/Bangalore, October 15: India's import restrictions on chicken legs and some other farm products from the US on fears that “low-intensity” bird flu can affect public health are not in line with multilateral trade rules, a World Trade Organisation panel has ruled.

This means New Delhi will now not be able impose restrictions on imports of farm products, including poultry products, from countries reporting low-intensity bird flu on health grounds which would in turn open the Indian market to low-priced chicken legs from the US.

The US had dragged India to the WTO on the issue in 2012 claiming that the restrictions were based on “unscientific” reasons, which the dispute settlement panel has upheld.

India will now examine if it would challenge the verdict in the Appellate Body, the highest decision making body of the WTO. “We can definitely appeal before the Appellate Body. But in this case it is the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries that will have to take a call as it was their notification that was under challenge. We will consult them,” a Commerce Ministry official told *Business Line* .

The US had argued that the ban imposed by India on import of poultry products from countries’ reporting outbreaks of low pathogenic notifiable avian influenza has no basis in science and was also not supported by World Organisation for Animal Health.

Although India keeps lifting its ban on import of poultry products from the US when the country reports that it is free of avian influenza, it immediately re-imposes it if there is report of outbreak in any part of the country. Because of the uncertainty, US poultry exporters have not been able to export much to India.

The ruling has left the domestic poultry sector worried. It wants the Centre to go to the WTO Appellate Body in appeal against the ruling as it is jittery over the prospects of cheaper US chicken legs getting dumped in the Indian market.

“We want the Government to appeal against this order,” said G Ranjit Reddy, President of the Hyderabad-based Poultry Breeders Association. Poultry breeders across the country are planning to approach the Government seeking its intervention in this regard.

“The WTO ruling will hamper growth of the domestic industry which is still recovering from bird flu and high feed costs,” said MCR Shetty, President, Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders Association.

Shetty said chicken legs are considered a scrap in the US, which it wants to dump in the Indian market at a throw away price.

Such dumped chicken legs could potentially occupy about 40 per cent of the Indian market, Shetty said adding that the Government should block the cheaper imports to protect the domestic growers.

About four lakh farmers are engaged in poultry farming and the domestic market size is estimated at around Rs. 50,000 crore.

Reddy said the poultry industry in the US is highly subsidised. He said the Indian poultry industry is ready to compete with the US provided they export the whole bird to India and not just the chicken legs.

The Government should consider some measures to protect the domestic growers, he added.

North-East monsoon in Andaman Sea, says Thai Met Dept

Thiruvananthapuram, October 15:

The North-East Monsoon has arrived in the Andaman Sea, according to an update from the Thailand Meteorological Department

The easterly wind regime has established well over upstream Gulf of Thailand and the Thai mainland, the update further said.

Easterly winds

Over the Bay of Bengal, the winds are slowly but surely tuning to being easterly. They would straighten out to the east fully after the southwest monsoon exits mainland India.

This turning of winds is expected to happen as an elongated trough off southeast Sri Lanka extends influence over southwest Bay of Bengal and eases up the flows into peninsular India.

The Thai Met Department said strong north-easterly winds prevailed over Gulf of Thailand with scattered to fairly widespread rain and isolated heavy rain with high winds.

Forecast into Thursday said that both sides of Gulf would remain cloudy with fairly widespread thundershowers and isolated heavy rain with high winds.

'Good build-up'

North-easterly winds are expected to range between 20 and 35 km/hr in speed. The Andaman Sea too is expected to remain cloudy and windy with scattered thundershowers. Easterly winds are expected to clock between 15 and 35 km/hr in speed.

This is a 'good enough' build-up to northeast monsoon over peninsular India downstream, according to seasoned monsoon watchers.

Back home, India Met Department said that the southwest monsoon is preparing to leave more parts of east and central India during the next three to four days.

Conditions have become conducive for the exit after a remnant of cyclone Hudhud weakened and faded out over east India.

Rains forecast

The heavy to very heavy rainfall that the cyclone remnant caused overnight at many places of east Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had halted the South-West Monsoon withdrawal process from the east. But the delay would only make easterly flows over the Bay of Bengal to consolidate and precipitate in due course the onset of North-East Monsoon along the eastern seaboard and peninsular India.

Meanwhile, weak easterlies have already fanned out over Tamil Nadu and adjoining Kerala on Wednesday.

This goes to indicate that it would not take too long for the South-West Monsoon to exit the landmass.

The Met has forecast rain or thundershowers to break out over most parts of south India from the weekend.

Coonoor tea sale volume rises

Coonoor, October 15: For the fourth consecutive week, the volume coming for the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association has increased over the previous week. A volume of 18.16 lakh kg has been catalogued for Sale No: 42 to be held on Thursday and Friday. This is some 48,000 kg more than the offer of last week. Last week, Kodanad clonal Broken Orange Pekoe Dust, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped the entire market when Kushal Tea Co bought it for Rs. 245 a kg. In the Leaf auction last week, Hindustan Unilever Ltd bought brighter liquoring good medium varieties. Tata Global Beverages Ltd., was fairly active on good medium sorts. Godfrey Philips India Ltd was selective on medium brokens. In the Dust auction, HUL, was fairly active on good medium smaller grades. Exporters chose mostly plainer grades.

Minister calls for better focus on agriculture and biotech

Bangalore India Bio meet to be held on February 9-11

Bangalore October 15: State IT & BT Minister SR Patil has called for better focus on agriculture and biotech sector.

Addressing delegates and mediapersons at the unveiling of Bangalore India Bio conference to be held on February 9-11 next year, Patil said that as 65-70 per cent of the people in the country are dependent on agriculture, there is an urgent need for the government to devise policies that promote growth of this sector. "Right policies can empower farmers and thereby help the economy," he added.

Biotech earnings

Karnataka has contributed more than a quarter of the biotech sector earnings, which stood at \$4 billion in 2014-15. Half of it comes from exports. There are 226 biotech companies in the State. "There is a need to position India as a quality yet affordable healthcare destination," said Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, CMD of Biocon, who is also the chairperson for Karnataka's Vision Group on biotechnology.

The potential growth of this sector can be seen from the fact that according to a recent KPMG study, biotech/ healthcare IT are amongst the top trends that can disrupt industries in the next 3 years. In 2012, the Karnataka Government had sent a proposal for setting up an Information Technology Investment Region (ITIR), which got the Union Cabinet approval nod in 2013. This proposal included setting up of parks where IT and biotechnology companies, including startups could set up operations.

For the development of ITIR, the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) had announced that it will acquire 2,072 acres for the first phase of this project, which the state is still in the process of acquiring.