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# THE HINDU

## **Farmers in dismay over agri insurance**

The farming community in East and West Godavari districts are a worried lot following the government's decision to reduce sanction of loans and trim insurance coverage for their land.

Farmers in East Godavari have completed sowing operations in 40 per cent of their wet land and 20 per cent of upland areas during the current Kharif season. When farmers approach banks for short-term loans, bankers do not give them the full amount of loan as they gave during the last season. "The government has fixed the scale of finance less this season," a farmer said.

"It is a regular process that we give agriculture loans on the basis of the amount spent by the farmer per acre," said Satyanarayana, an agriculture field officer with Andhra Bank in Seethanagaram mandal.

This year, the district committee had recommended increasing scale of finance to paddy and banana from Rs. 26, 500 to Rs. 29,000, but the State committee has reduced the scale of finance considerably.

## **Now, farmers turn to green energy to irrigate fields**

As part of the government's target to set up 6,000 solar agricultural pump sets across the State in the current financial year to reduce the grid power consumption by farmers, officials of the New and Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP) and AP Power Distribution Company are making all-out efforts to motivate farmers to rely on the eco-friendly mode to irrigate their fields.

"In Krishna district, 600 farmers have registered their names. We have identified 540 'feasible' sites for installation of the pump sets after visiting the farmers' fields and of them, 350 pump sets have been installed," said NREDCAP Krishna District Manager K. Srinivasa Rao.

"The cost of a 5HP pump set is Rs 4.9 lakhs, out of which a farmer has to pay Rs. 55,000 and the remaining cost would be borne jointly by the Union government and the Discoms. Likewise, the cost of a 3HP pump set is Rs. 3.2 lakhs for which farmers have to pay Rs. 40,000 towards

their contribution,” said AP Transco Superintending Engineer Mohana Krishna.

Farmers opting for solar-powered mode get a pump set, panels, starter and 100 ft pipe besides maintenance and insurance for a five-year-long period.

“Most of the installations have been carried out in Nuzvid division where farmers seem to be realising the benefits of the solar pump sets. Besides uninterrupted power supply, they can work in their fields in daytime,” said Mr. Srinivasa Rao.

The solar pump sets have a life span of 20 years and the investment can be easily recovered by the farmer as he does not have to pay any power bills, said Mr. Mohana Krishna.

The Solar Photovoltaic (SPV) water pumping systems for irrigation were granted by the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy about six months ago to a few select States including Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar among others.

Subsequently, the pump sets, 3,500 in number, were distributed between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the ratio of 58:42, on the basis of population.

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· *Farmers pay only Rs. 55,000 for installation of*

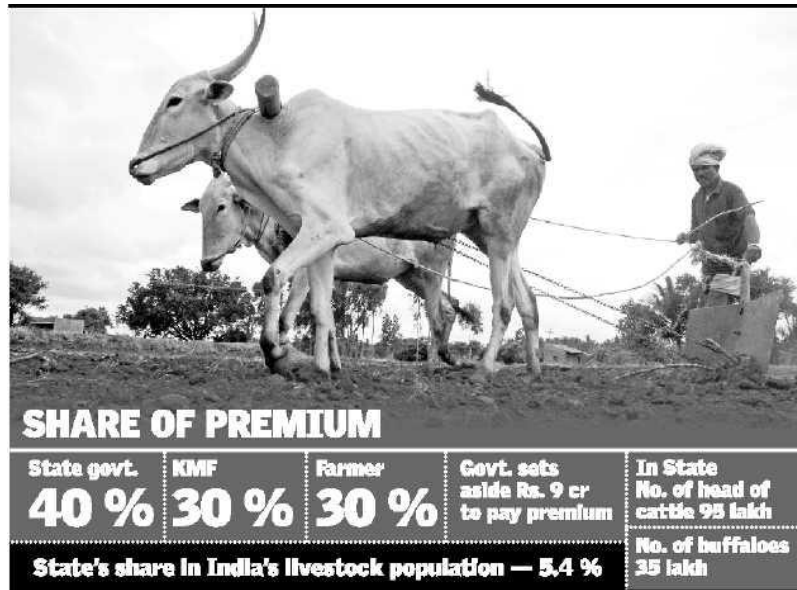
*5 HP solar pump set that costs Rs 4.9 lakhs*

· *The pump, with a life span of 20 years, reduces dependence on power and expenditure on bills*

### **Nod for livestock insurance scheme**

*Milch cattle and buffaloes to be covered*

With foot-and-mouth disease and road accidents claiming thousands of head of cattle in the past, the State government has decided to implement the livestock insurance scheme this financial year to encourage farmers to insure their milch cattle and buffaloes.



Under the scheme, a maximum of five head of cattle/buffaloes will be covered by a farmers' family. The maximum insurance cover for an animal is Rs. 50,000.

So far, milch cows and buffaloes purchased under bank loans were covered under the scheme. Now, all milch animals in the State will be provided insurance cover.

While the government will bear 40 per cent, Karnataka Milk Federation and other milk producers' societies will bear 30 per cent of the premium for the insurance cover to milch cows. The beneficiary farmer will have to bear the rest.

The government has set aside Rs. 9 crore to pay its share of premium, according to Animal Husbandry Minister T.B. Jayachandra, who made efforts to get Cabinet nod for the proposal last week. If a cow is insured for Rs. 50,000, the yearly premium will be two per cent of the cost, which is about Rs. 1,000. The farmer will have to pay Rs. 300 a year, while the remaining will be borne by the government.

According to the 2012 Livestock Census, the State has 95 lakh head of cattle and 35 lakh buffaloes.

Mr. Jayachandra said the scheme would benefit dairy farmers immensely as certain breeds of cattle are very expensive. Generally, farmers have not been covering milch animals under the insurance scheme owing to ignorance and financial difficulties, he said.

Dairy farmers have already been facing financial difficulties owing to cut in milk prices by unions owing to excess production (74 lakh litres a day) in the State.

In Karnataka, the share of animal husbandry in Gross State Domestic Product of agriculture and allied activities was around 20 per cent. The share of Karnataka in India's livestock population was 5.4 per cent. The State Cabinet also cleared a proposal for implementation of 'Pashu Bhagya' — a scheme aimed at providing interest subsidy to farmers setting up cattle, sheep, poultry, and piggery units.

Under the scheme, small and marginal farmers, having up to two hectares of land, are entitled to bank loans of up to Rs. 1.2 lakh on each unit. The government will reimburse 33 per cent of interest amount on the total in case of SC, ST families and 25 per cent for other famers, he said.

### **Farmers seek cohesive plan for samba paddy cultivation**

*“Turn system in releasing water will be a welcome step”*

Farmers in the delta districts have urged the government to chalk out a plan synergising various departments and agencies to see through the coming samba paddy season.

While the government is expecting frugal water utilisation, as seen in Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's statement while directing water release from Mettur Dam from August 9, farmers are expecting four pivotal government agencies to coordinate better and ensure that all areas get adequate water for irrigation till required.

It is imperative that the Agriculture Department, Public Works Department's groundwater, Cauvery and Vennar Divisions, Tangedco and the Department of Cooperatives work hand-in-hand and deliver the goods to the farmers this samba season, observes general secretary of Tamil Nadu Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association Mannargudi S. Ranganathan.

Mr. Ranganathan has requested the government to take the field requirement into consideration in water release. “Implementation of turn system even for raising nurseries will be a welcome step. Cauvery and Vennar Divisions could get wettings on a regular interval of, say four days each, and that will guarantee even the tail-end areas get water,” he says.

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- *Centre urged to review new insurance scheme*
- *Impress upon Karnataka to release sanctioned quantum of water to TN*

### **Farmers' groups to launch joint action plan**



President of the Karnataka Red Gram Growers' Association Basavaraj Ingin addressing a press conference in Kalaburagi on Sunday.— PHOTO: ARUN KULKARNI

Five different farmers' organisations, including the Krishik Samaj, have joined hands to launch a joint action plan to force the State and Union governments to respond positively to the genuine demands of the farmers in Hyderabad Karnataka.

President of the Karnataka Red Gram Growers Association Basavaraj Ingin told presspersons here on Sunday that the Sugarcane Growers Association, the Hyderabad Karnataka Raita Sangha and the Kalaburagi District Raita Horata Samiti will launch a sustained struggle against the indifferent attitude of the government to farmers' problems and its failure to end the continuing saga of farmers' suicides.

Farmers of all the four organisations will take out a procession in Kalaburagi under the leadership of the former Ministers S.K. Kanta and C. Gurunath, Aland MLA B.R. Patil, the former legislators M.Y. Patil and Vishwanath Patil on Wednesday and submit a memorandum addressed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to the district authorities.

Despite the fact that Kalaburagi is facing one of the worst-ever droughts and farmers suffering heavy losses, the State government has failed to declare Kalaburagi as drought-hit or decide on the payment of compensation to farmers.

Mr. Ingin said that the migration of agricultural labourers was rampant in the district due to the failure of officials to take up drought-relief works and provide employment in rural areas.

He said that the government should provide a monthly compensation of Rs. 20,000 to farmer's families in all the villages, as they had no source of income due to the failure of rain.

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· *'State government has failed to declare Kalaburagi as drought-hit'*

· *'Migration of agricultural labourers is rampant in the district'*

### **Karimnagar Dairy milk reaches Hyderabad**



Finance Minister Etala Rajender having sweets as part of the launch in Hyderabad on Sunday.- Photo: G. Ramakrishna

Karimnagar Milk Producers Company launched its pasteurised toned milk in the city on Sunday. The company is expected to sell 5,000 to 8,000 litres in the city in the initial phase.

The product will be available in the market from August 6.

The company currently sells 1.30 lakh litres in Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Adilabad and Warangal. The new product has entered a market that already has big players such as Heritage and Jersey, among others.

At the launch of the event, stressing the need for self reliance, Finance Minister Etala Rajender said while there are companies which have come to the city from far off places, cooperatives in Telangana should explore the possibility of doing good business in Hyderabad. “The financial improvement of Telangana’s cooperative societies will aid agricultural workers and cattle farmers,” the minister said. The society currently produces 10 varieties of milk products. The city has a need for 25 lakh litres of milk, members of the cooperative society said. “We will make a mark in the industry soon,” said Ch Rajashekhar, chairman of the company.

### **Mango products, flavour of the month**



Value-added products from Kuttyattoor mango in Kannur range of value-added products serve to add flavour to the repute of a popular native mango variety in the region.

Kuttyattoor mango still lures the palates of the people in this region in spite of the entry of exotic hybrid varieties. The initiative of a group of local people to produce value-added products from the popular native variety is expected to increase its popularity. An array of products ranging from pickles to jam made from the Kuttyattoor mangoes is being rolled out from a food processing unit established in the village with the financial assistance under the National Agricultural Development Programme. According to an official press release, the processing unit working under the Krishi Vigyan Kendra-Kannur (KVK) makes the value-added products made of the mango variety.

The unit employs 12 women. The products are made from mango pulp collected during the mango season and from dried mangoes. Preparations are under way to open a stall at the Onam Fair venue here to popularise the products, the release said adding that pickles, squash and jam are now in good demand. It is estimated that only 50 per cent of mangoes from Kuttyattoor reach the market during the mango season as the rest perish due to difficulty in plucking them from tall mango trees.

KVK is exploring ways to ensure that the entire mango production at Kuttyattoor is utilised.

According to local people, there is hardly a household in the Kuttyattoor village without at least one Kuttyattoor variety mango tree. Recently the Kuttyattoor panchayat has initiated proceedings to secure geographical indication registration (GI Tag) for the mango. A survey is under way to ascertain the number of mango trees in the panchayat.

### **Spices Board launches subsidy scheme to boost production**



The Spices Board has launched a raft of measures to support farmers by offering various subsidies and sensitise them on the need to enhance the quality of spices through post-harvest improvement techniques, as a part of boosting spices production in the country.

The Board has also decided to provide financial assistance to farmers for irrigation, land development, mechanisation, replanting, soil conservation and organic farming of various spices, especially small cardamom. It will also give financial aid to them for purchasing state-of-the-art irrigation and farming equipment and tools.



“The initiatives are part of the Board’s 12th Plan to improve export-oriented production of small cardamom and post-harvest improvement of other spices across spice-growing regions in the country, said Spices Board Chairman A. Jayathilak.

“The eligibility criteria for availing the benefits are based on land held by the grower and is different for each programme,” he added.

Under the new schemes, cultivators of small cardamom in Kerala and Tamil Nadu would be provided with a sum of Rs.70,000 a hectare for replanting, while farmers in Karnataka would get up to Rs.50,000 a hectare. The cultivators would also be given aid for planting material production.

To help small scale cardamom farmers in the three southern states in irrigation and land development, the Board will provide financial assistance up to 25 per cent of actual cost for acquiring irrigation pump sets, sprinkler sets, equipment for gravity-fed irrigation system, and up to 50 per cent for water storage structure. The farmers would also get funding up to 25 per cent for soil conservation.

Besides, they would be given a subsidy of Rs.1 lakh for purchasing improved cardamom curing devices and 50 per cent subsidy for GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) kits and bee-keeping boxes.

Under the Board’s farm mechanisation programme, small cardamom growers in these states would be given 50 per cent subsidy for purchasing equipment for plant protection and washing, grading and polishing cardamom.

The Board also provides assistance for post-harvest improvement process of the spices in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and North-eastern states. The assistance includes funding up to 50 per cent for seed spice thresher, pepper thresher, turmeric boilers and polishers, Integrated Pest Management kits for chilly growers and mint distillation units.

As part of the farm mechanisation programme, spices growers would receive 50 per cent subsidy for purchasing equipment for the post-harvest improvement process, including cleaners, graders, spice slicing machines, de-huller, driers, storage units and extractors/dehydration units.

The Board also provides financial assistance to organic farmers for attaining organic certification, maintenance of internal control system and purchasing organic inputs and bio-agent production units. Apart from this, it would provide a maximum of Rs.5 lakh as subsidy to Spices Producer's Societies in major spice-growing regions in the country.

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### **Tracking climate change**

Five different areas of research pertaining to climate change that are offered by the Central Ministry of Earth Sciences were covered in the column on July 20. We shall now see a few more of them under the Ministry, as well as the facilities available in other institutions in India and abroad.

### **Long-term monitoring of the Konfsfjorden system**

Kongsfjorden is an icy archipelago 40 km long and five to 10 km wide in the Arctic. This is at a site where warmer waters of the Atlantic meet the colder waters of the Arctic. India has been focusing research in this area with external collaboration. The studies cover the effect of interaction between the warm Atlantic water and the cold glacial-melt fresh water on the biological productivity and also the trigger mechanism of spring bloom and its temporal variability and biomass production. The National Centre for Antarctic & Ocean Research, Goa plays a major role in these studies.

### **Modelling of changing water cycle and climate**

Our country faces the problem of reduction in the availability of water. Serious research has to be organised in respect of land, ocean and atmosphere interaction / precipitation characterisation / detection and attribution of water cycle changes / and consequences of changing water cycle. The institutions engaged in this research are mainly the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecast, Noida, India Meteorological Department, New Delhi, / and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune.

## **Reconstruction of Palaeoclimatic conditions**

Studies on climate of prehistoric ages give a picture of what happened in the past. This is significant in assessing climate trends. Identification of millennial scale (in the scale of 1,000-year units) changes in the southwest monsoon with emphasis on rainfall variability is important for us. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune and the National Centre for Antarctic & Ocean Research, Goa are major players in this area of research.

## **Short term climate prediction and variability**

Planning for enhanced agricultural production and effective water management needs reliable short term predictions. Continuing research in respect of boundary conditions like sea surface temperature, soil moisture, and snow cover tells us about atmospheric developments on seasonal time-scales. A coupled ocean-atmosphere climate model will be required for predicting the monsoon with fair reliability. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune carries out research in this area.

## **Some of the other centres of research**

We gave indications about the facilities for climate change research offered by the central Ministry of Earth Sciences. Let us see the facilities available at some of the other centres for research in this area, in India and abroad.

**Indian Climate Research Network:** A collaboration of Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, and Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. The main goal is to enhance capacity for climate research and action in India.

**Centre for Climate Change and Adaptation Research, Anna University, Chennai**

**The Earth Science and Climate Change Division, TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute), IHC Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi**

**Centre for Environment and Climate Change, Jindal Global Law School, Sonapat, Haryana**

**Centre for Policy Research, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi (Its Climate Initiative seeks to generate research and analysis on the global**

**climate negotiations, and on the links between the global climate regime and domestic laws, policies, and institutions in India.)**

**Environmental Change Institute, Oxford University Centre for the Environment, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3QY, U.K.**

**Cambridge Centre for Climate Change Mitigation Research, 19 Silver Street, Cambridge CB39EP, U.K.**

**Oregon Climate Change Research Institute , Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, U.S.**

**Purdue Climate Change Research Center , Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, U.S.**

**New Zealand Climate Change Research Institute , Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.**

### **Spices Board to incentivise farmers**

The Spices Board will incentivise spices farmers with a set of programmes of financial assistance covering areas such as land development, irrigation, mechanisation, replanting, soil conservation, organic farming and quality improvement through better techniques.

Spices Board Chairman A. Jayathilak was cited in a press release issued here as saying that the initiatives were part of the Board's 12th Plan programmes to enhance export-oriented production of small cardamom and to improve post-harvest techniques in other spices across spice-growing regions in the country.

Small cardamom farmers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu will get up to Rs. 70,000 a hectare for replanting; farmers in Karnataka will get Rs. 50,000. The farmers will also get assistance for production of planting materials.

Small cardamom farmers in the three southern States will also get assistance in the form of 25 per cent reimbursement on purchase of irrigation equipment such as pumps and sprinklers.

Those building water storage structures will get 50 per cent subsidy and soil conservation efforts will get 25 per cent subsidy, the press release said.

The Board will bear 33.33 per cent of the actual cost (upper ceiling being Rs. 12,000) of construction of 200 cubic metre-capacity tanks for

rainwater harvesting. They will also get a maximum subsidy of Rs.1 lakh for purchasing improved cardamom curing devices and 50 per cent subsidy for Good Agricultural Practices kits and bee-keeping boxes.

The Board will provide financial aid to organic farmers for getting their produce certified, for purchase of organic farming inputs, bio-agent production systems and for maintenance of Internal Control System [ICS]. The Board will extend a maximum of Rs.5 lakh as subsidy to Spices Producer Societies in major spice-growing regions.

### **Jackfruit yields a kingly platter**



Ever thought of making dosa, idli, upma from jackfruit? Well, you can, says Jissy George, a specialist in the topic, at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Alappuzha.

“Dosa, idli, or upma, all can be made from jackfruit at the right level of maturity. It is a good alternative as cereal starch,” she said, while training 52 people from across the State on how to make 25 marketable products from jackfruits.

The free training programme is being organised by the Santhigram, in association with the Jackfruit Promotion Council, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Community Development through Polytechnic scheme that functions at Government Polytechnic College, Neyyattinkara. It is being held at Santhigram, Chappath, near Vizhinjam.

### **Cutlets too**

On Sunday, Day 2 of the programme, the participants were taught how to make cutlets from jackfruit.

A jackfruit with maturity between 45 days and 3 months is ideal for making cutlets.

The ones with three to four months' maturity can be powdered and used for vada or bajji. Ms. George said.

### **Delectable spread**

That's not all. Wafers, candies, preserves, halwa, jam, squash, cakes, cookies, barfi, chutney powder — the list of products that can be made from jackfruit is endless. The fruit also lends itself well to ready-to-cook food. The *koozha* variety is very good for making wines that is organic and eco-friendly, Ms. George said.

The fleshy part of the fruit and the strands can be used for making jelly. One can even store the pulp of jackfruits for use during the off-season.

No part of this fruit goes waste, Ms. George said.

### **Fruit as fuel**

The green outer cover is an excellent source of fuel in a biogas unit, and the slurry can be used as organic manure.

The session on Monday will focus on uses of jackfruit pulp. A session on industrial aspects of value-addition will also be held.

One of the participants, Suja, who is also secretary of the Kanjiramkulam Jaiva Karshaka Samithi, said: "A lot of jackfruit goes waste as people wait for it to ripen.

The programme will enable us to use jackfruit in all stages of maturity to make various value-added products. It will also give a fillip to self-employment ventures."

Santhigram has been actively engaged in jackfruit promotion activities for long, said its director L. Pankajakshan.

"People are not aware of the benefits of jackfruit or its by-products. The programme is one such activity," he added.

## **Conference on cows in October**

A conference on cows (Go Sammelan) would be held here from October 4 to 7.

A press release issued here on Saturday said that the sammelan would be organised by the Paryaya Kaniyur Mutt, Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project and other organisations.

A preparatory meeting for the sammelan was held here under the leadership of Vidyavallabha Tirtha Swami of Paryaya Kaniyur Mutt.

Speaking on the occasion, the seer said that the population of cows was decreasing in the country.

Due to changing lifestyle, people were no longer interested in rearing cows.

Since there was lot of emphasis on getting more milk from the cows, farmers had taken to rearing a foreign breed of cows. The increase in cow slaughter was a cause for concern.

Experts would be speaking on various topics related to cows including cow-based agriculture and commerce at the conference, he said.

## **Kharif crop area**

The Ministry of Agriculture has said that the total sown area under kharif crop as on July 31, as per reports received from States, stood at 764.28 lakh hectare compared to 703.43 lakh hectare, at this time last year. It is reported that rice has been sown/transplanted in 227.81 lakh hectares, pulses in 82.44 lakh hectares, coarse cereals in 148.49 lakh hectares, oilseeds in 148.52 lakh hectares and cotton in 101.91 lakh hectares.

## **WASP ushers in 'green farming'**

A wind of change is blowing across Kerala now. New entrepreneurs — from educated youngsters to technocrats — are now entering the farm sector. And, modern methods of cultivation and non-traditional varieties are the new trend. Organic (pesticide-free) food products such as vegetables and fruits are the new mantra. Indeed, these are praiseworthy changes, deserving social support. Yet, in the rush of the revolutionary zeal for 'green farming', the State, as perhaps in other parts of the country, has come to neglect the basics of green revolution: to provide healthy staple food to the masses at affordable price, which alone is

ethically progressive farming. The focus must shift to the cultivation of paddy, more extensively and intensively.



*Modern methods of cultivation and non-traditional varieties are the new trend*

A small group of farmers in Wayanad, Kerala, has set a model in this direction. The Wayanad Agriculture and Spices Company (WASP) has been formed with the support of NABARD to achieve this aim. It intends to produce and market pesticide-free rice. At the same time, it is keen to ensure better income to farmers and healthy food to consumers at an affordable price. Formed in 2013 with 10 farmers, it is planning to attract more farmer-members in the venture.

The group started paddy cultivation in 2013, taking on lease 20 acres of land, which had been kept fallow for more than seven years in Punchavayal, Panamaram grama panchayat. The expense involved was Rs.25,000 an acre as production cost, which also included the lease amount. They cultivated the ethnic rice varieties such as Gandhakasala, Kaima, Adukkam, Marathondy and Chomala, as well as Uma, a popular high-breed variety. They got a yield of 20 tonnes of rice. They also procured 11 tonnes of paddy from other farmers, produced pesticide-free under instructions of WASP. The company uses modern technology for planting as well as harvesting, apart from utilising the services of tribal workers, especially in the cultivation of traditional rice varieties. To ensure their credibility, the company had sent rice samples to the pesticide residue-testing laboratory of Kerala Agricultural University, Vellayanai and had obtained their certification. After three years of success, WASP is now at the threshold of expansion. It has tied up with 14 farm collectives (Padasekhara samiti) in Thirunelly and Noolpuzha



grama panchayats to cultivate pesticide-free rice on 300 acres (120 hectares approximately) this season. The procurement of rice from farmers will be at a premium price, and the product will be marketed under company's brand name Kabani, says, K. Narayanan, Managing Director of WASP.

WASP has tied up with many supermarkets in the State to sell the Kabani rice, as the pesticide-free rice has a good demand among consumers.

WASP now has 82 members, and its target for the season is to procure 300 tonnes of pesticide-free paddy against 150 tonnes last year. Inspired by the success of WASP, four more farmer groups have already been set up in the district to achieve the similar aims in coffee, tea, vegetable and dairy product sectors, says N.S. Sajikumar, District Development Manager, NABARD.

[wymnj@thehindu.co.in](mailto:wymnj@thehindu.co.in)

### **Milch cattle, buffaloes to be covered under livestock insurance**



Under the insurance scheme, a maximum of five cattle/buffaloes would be covered by a farmers' family. The maximum insurance cover for an animal is Rs 50,000. File Photo: M. Srinath.

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amount in the case of SC/ST families and 25 per cent of interest on the amount in the case of other famers, he said.

### **Training on flower arrangement, bouquet making**



Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre is organising a one-day training programme on ‘Flower Arrangement and Bouquet making’ on August 5, between 9.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. at No.U-30, 10th Street, (near Jayagopal Garodia School), Anna Nagar.

Training certificates and lunch will be given to all participants. Call 2626 3484 to confirm participation.

***Venue: No.U-30, 10th Street, (near Jayagopal Garodia School), Anna Nagar.***

### **Smart villages to boost rural economy**



The Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) has advocated transformation and development of “smart villages” across the country to improve standard of living in the rural areas and boost the rural economy. Development of rural India holds the key to the nation’s sustainable economic growth, it said.

SCOPE Director-General U.D. Choubey told *The Hindu* over the weekend that the smart villages, to be developed on the lines of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s initiative for smart cities, would have adequate infrastructure and proper environment for development of rural population. The facilities should include health and sanitation, housing, power, skill development centres and micro-industries.

SCOPE is the apex body of Central Government-owned public enterprises and has all the Central PSUs, a few State Government enterprises and some nationalised banks as its members.

Dr. Choubey pointed out that urban-rural divide was creating desperation among villagers and a large percentage of school dropouts in villages were “disgruntled jobless youths”, who had an inclination towards criminal activities. Over 44 per cent of the rural youths discontinue education due to financial constraints and lack of facilities.

Employment in villages is largely in agriculture sector, while industrial employment is less than four per cent. Dr. Choubey said all these factors called for more attention to rural development, and developing smart villages would be a better option for their economic growth.

“The task is enormous and requires tremendous planning as well as a huge amount of resources. State Governments, corporate sector and charitable institutions have to contribute generously,” said Dr. Choubey, adding that the provision of fund for development of villages by Members of Parliament may also serve the purpose.

***The smart villages will have facilities***

***like health and sanitation, housing, power, and skill development centres***

### **Plea to implement Swaminathan panel report**

The CPI-led Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sangam (APRS) has urged the Union government to immediately implement the recommendations of the

National Commission on Farmers headed by agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan in keeping with the BJP's poll promise.

"The APRS will hold protest demonstrations in front of all MRO offices on August 17 and September 1 to highlight issues facing farmers," APRS Prakasam district secretary V. Hanumantha Reddy said here on Saturday.

"Farmers are struggling to meet both ends meet, with no remunerative prices for their produce, be it paddy or cotton or any other crop.

Only when the Centre announces a Minimum Support Price (MSP) by adding 50 per cent to the production cost, as recommended by Dr. Swaminathan, they can continue in the avocation and provide food security to the nation," he added while briefing reporters on the resolutions adopted at its two-day conference at Kandukur.

The APRS wanted the Centre to direct the trade wing of the Tobacco Board to intervene in the market and provide succour to growers struggling to get remunerative prices.

"The Tobacco Board is flush with funds, thanks to the hefty penalty collected from farmers for excess crop over the years, and the Centre just needed to give administrative clearance in this regard," APRS district president D. Srinivas said.

The ryots' body also urged the State government to allot Rs. 1,000 crore for the completion of the first phase of the Pula Subbaiah Veligonda project in 2016, besides asking it to ensure the release of 1.5 tmc water from the Nagarjunasagar reservoir to meet the drinking water needs in the drought-prone district.

*Farmers are struggling to meet both ends meet with no remunerative prices for their produce.*

*V. Hanumantha Reddy,*

*APRS Prakasam district secretary*

*APRS to organise protests on August 17 and September 1*

### **Masula scientists develop saline tolerant paddy seed**

Plant breeding scientists of the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University's Research Station, Machilipatnam, have developed two new paddy seed varieties, exclusively meant for saline soil .

The seed varieties developed by Principal Scientist T. Anuradha and Scientist K. Nagendra Rao are MCM 103, a kharif variety, and Rabi variety MCM110. The duration of crop period of the varieties is 140 and 120 days respectively.

“The Directorate of Rice Research (DRR), Hyderabad, has tagged the MCM 103 as the best paddy seed variety among the 40 entries from across the country in 2013. The DRR has also tested the variety in the six States, where it gave expected results including yield and quality grain,” Ms Anuradha told *The Hindu* .

“The MCM-103 seed variety gives nearly six tonnes of yield while the MCM-110 gives the yield of up to 5.5 tonnes per hectare,” she added. The scientists have claimed that the yield of the two varieties would arguably be much higher in the normal soil. Another scientist K. Nagendra Rao added that the MCM 103 is being tested in the saline fields in the coastal Andhra districts from the ongoing kharif season and the other variety would also be tested from the next rabi season in the State. The District Agricultural Advisory & Transfer of Technology Centres have selected the fields to test the seed varieties from the kharif-2015. “The medium duration paddy varieties will primarily encourage the farmers to turn the saline soil fields into cultivable fields. The varieties will also ensure better yield,” said Ms. Anuradha.

### **Farmers indebted**

#### **to scientists**

The farmers having saline soil are indebted to the scientists, Ms. Anuradha and Mr. Nagendra Rao, who have developed two paddy seed varieties — MCM 100 and 101— in 2011. It has been proposed for approval of the Andhra Pradesh State’s Seed Varietal Release Committee for release of the two varieties into the market.

#### ***The seed varieties developed by Principal Scientist***

***T. Anuradha and Scientist K. Nagendra Rao are MCM 103, a kharif variety, and Rabi variety MCM110.***

## Season begins in Himachal Pradesh

The average production of apple is around 5 lakh tonnes or 2.5 crore boxes every year.



The most awaited apple season in the hill State of Himachal Pradesh has begun with the first lot of around 10 lakh cartons reaching various markets in the country.

The State, despite undergoing an encroachment removal drive ordered by the High Court, is expecting to pack around 4 crore boxes of 20 kg of apples each. Though a majority of business is carried out in the private sector, the government has also opened procurement centres. “We will open around 300 centres in apple producing areas under the market intervention scheme and as per the demand of farmers,” said an official spokesman on Sunday. More than 10 per cent of such centres have already started functioning and the farmers are bringing their produce there, he says. With an expected production of around 8 lakh tonnes, about a million boxes or about 2,000 trucks of some early varieties of fruit like Red June and Tydeman’s have already been transported out of the State. The fruit from Himachal has already reached the markets of Delhi, Punjab, Gujarat, Rajasthan and even down South in Bengaluru and Chennai.

Last year’s production remained less than 3 crore boxes or 6 lakh tonnes.

## **Important crop**

Apple is the most important fruit crop or cash crop of the hill State and constitutes about 49 per cent of the total area under fruit crops — about 85 per cent of the total fruit production, says the latest Economic Survey of the State. The apple fruit, having an economy of around Rs. 3,500 crore, is grown mainly in the districts of Shimla, Kinnaur, Kullu, Mandi, Chamba and some parts of Sirmaur and Lahaul-Spiti. The average production of apple is around 5 lakh tonnes or 2.5 crore boxes every year but the maximum production was recorded in the year 2010-11 when it crossed 9 lakh tonnes or almost touched 5 crore boxes.

Due to inclement weather, this year the initial supply from the orchards is slow and only around 20,000 boxes are being transported every day. The fruit has not attained the full size and lacks colour, said majority wholesalers.

The season matures around second week of August and is at its peak by the end of this month when the fruit starts coming from the middle and upper reaches of the State, from beyond the hills of 5,000 feet and above. The real juicy varieties like Royal Delicious, Red Gold, Red Chief and Oregon Spur and later Golden Delicious would start coming now, giving a tough challenge to the Chinese Gala and Washington apples from the U.S.

### **Per-hectare production**

But the per-hectare production in Himachal Pradesh is much less than China and other countries.

The State gets around 8 to 10 tonnes of apples per hectare against 35 to 40 tonnes of fruit in the advanced countries. The transportation and marketing aspects are the main problems faced by the apple growers in Himachal.

### **More area comes under tapioca cultivation**

Tapioca cultivation is in full swing in Perambalur.— Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

There has been a sharp increase in the area under tapioca cultivation in the district in view of drip irrigation technique being popularised by the Horticulture Department.





Against the usual 1,500 hectares, about 1,750 hectares had been covered under the crop indicating growing awareness among farmers of the advantages of the drip irrigation.

Most farmers have cultivated ‘mulluvadi’ variety, with duration of 12 months. The major villages covered are Poolampadi and Malayalapatti in Veppanthattai block; Arumbavur, Thondamanthurai and Noothappur in Veppur block and a few villages in Perambalur block.

Official sources told ‘The Hindu’ that it was a tough task for introducing a shift in the cropping pattern among farmers.

But, a sustained campaign on economic use of irrigation water and attractive returns from tapioca crop had yielded the desired results.

One of the farmers of Annamangalam, S. Madhulamuthu, said that he was confident of harvesting 200 bags of tapioca, each of 74 kg.

He has been irrigating the fields using his pump set, once a week.

A number of farmers in Arasalur, Eechankadu, Viswakudi, Poompuhar, Mohamadpattinam had resorted to raising the crop this season.

### **Manapparai traders utilise demand for neem seeds**



Neem seeds may appear not so important for many, but they have been providing an assured revenue to a group of wholesale dealers in Manapparai, who have been procuring the seeds from retail vendors and market them within and outside Tamil Nadu.

According to a group of traders, a number of small traders bring dried seeds to the wholesale market in Manapparai.

K. Muthusamy, one of the wholesale dealers, points out that they purchase the seeds from retail dealers for Rs.12 a kg and market them for a profit.

It is widely marketed to oil cake units, where the seeds are converted into neem cake. Further, they are used for extracting oil.

The demand for neem cake has been on the rise, particularly in Kerala where spices are grown. “Spices are prone to some pest attack. Neem cake has been acting as a bio-pesticide,” he says.

On an average, five tonnes of neem seed is despatched from Manapparai to different markets in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is only during May and June that the wholesale dealers register maximum sale. “The seeds are dried extremely during peak of summer,” says Rajenedran, another dealer.



**Promising start for AMC-backed market for organic farm produce  
As many as 18 stalls were setup on the opening day and the turnout showed promise for opening more stalls.**



A two-day market every week for direct sale of organic vegetables and other farm items that informally started here on Saturday evoked considerable interest among local populace in these products. There was no formal inauguration for the market — sponsored by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) — on its plot opposite Vastrapur lake, but more than 2,000 buyers turned up on the first day.

As many as 18 stalls were setup on the opening day and the turnout showed promise for opening more stalls, said director of parks and gardens Jignesh Patel. The market will function on Saturdays and Sundays through the day, said Patel, justifying the venue which is a municipal corporation-owned plot.

Parag Sheth, a resident of Ambawadi who came for the first time in such a market, said: “I don’t mind buying a little costlier farm products and vegetables instead of going for vegetables grown with use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers.” Sheth said he would buy vegetables for the whole week and then come again the next week.

Ramanbhai Mahipatbhai Patel, coordinator of Madhya Gujarat Sajeer Kheti Khedut Samaj from Kheda district, brought organic farmers from the district with their produce. Patel (75) said the objective was to popularise organic farm produce and bring people from junk food to organic vegetables and other products. “There have been food festivals at other places but this is first such platform to encourage consumption of organic vegetables and other farm products like syrups and grain,” he said.

“One advantage from such markets is that framers and buyers have a direct deal with each other, which eliminate middlemen, thus letting farmers have a fair dea,” said the AMC official. Interestingly, one of the buyers early in the day was Anar Patel, daughter of Chief Minister Anandiben Patel. Deputy municipal commissioners R B Barad, I K Patel, and Devang Desai had also visited the place.

**In fact: Let’s not cry over onions**

**Growers of the humble bulb have become victims of political expediency and the official commitment to ‘inflation targeting’.**



Onion is yet again in the news. Not surprising, when it is retailing around Rs 45 per kg in the national capital. The fact that prices at Lasalgaon (Maharashtra), India’s largest wholesale market for the bulb, have soared from under Rs 15 to Rs 31-32/kg in just over a month makes it all the more newsworthy. The increase cannot possibly be blamed on the Centre.

The present government especially, unlike its predecessor, has been quite hawkish vis-à-vis onions — which may well have to do with memories of the BJP’s 1998 Delhi Assembly election loss attributed to pyaaz then touching Rs 60 a kg. One of this government’s first moves, on June 17 last year, was to impose a minimum export price (MEP) of \$ 300 per tonne on onions with a view to restricting shipments. It was further raised to \$ 500 per tonne on July 2, the same day when onions — for the first time since 2004 — were also brought under the Essential Commodities Act to empower states to undertake de-hoarding operations and fix stockholding limits.

Subsequently, the MEP was reduced to \$ 300 on August 21, and \$ 250 per tonne on April 17, only to be increased again to \$ 425 with effect from June 26. The NDA regime, in other words, cannot be accused of not being proactive. When it has come to onions, all the rules of free trade have been given the go-by. While states have been repeatedly reminded about reforming their agricultural produce market committee acts to allow barrier-free movement of crops from farm to fork, the Centre hasn’t seen its own actions on onion — virtually banning exports or telling traders how much they can buy and stock up — contradict this sage advice. Why such double standards and obsession with a commodity that hardly qualifies as “essential” from a nutritional standpoint (think rice, milk, pulses or eggs)? Although classified as a vegetable, onions assume that form only in the odd pyaaz-tamaatar ki sabzi or chicken do pyaaza. More often, they only serve as a condiment or flavour enhancer to impart

pungency to dishes. Given that, should we really be crying over onion prices? Besides, to know why prices go up — that too, in certain months — a few facts about onion production merit consideration. \*\*\*\*\* First, out of India's 185-190 lakh tonne (lt) annual output, roughly 60 per cent is the Rabi crop harvested during April-May. Another 20-25 per cent comes in late-Kharif (January-March) and the balance 15-20 per cent from Kharif (September-November). Thus, the period from late-June to August is when prices are most vulnerable to increases.

Second, about 30 per cent of the country's onion production is accounted for by Maharashtra. This share is even more, at 40 per cent, for the Rabi crop. The stored onions from the Rabi harvest is what feeds the market during June-August, before the Kharif crop, mainly from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, starts arriving in September. Third, a major development of the last 10 years, if not less, has been the creation of significant on-farm storage capacity in onions. Many farmers in Maharashtra's onion belt of Nashik, Ahmednagar and Pune have built these structures, typically of 25-50 tonnes capacity, and costing a couple of lakhs or so. Onions basically require a dry, heat-protected and well-ventilated environment to ensure no sprouting or rotting.

The on-farm storage structures are constructed on raised platforms to prevent moisture ingress from direct contact of the bulbs with the soil. Roofs built with asbestos or heat-resistant Mangalore tiles, and side walls made of bamboo battens supported by iron angles to enable proper aeration, complete the structure. No great technology here. Maharashtra growers were smart to exploit the opportunity of storing Rabi onions that, given their higher total soluble solids and dry matter content compared to the late-Kharif/Kharif crops, are amenable to it. Rather than sell their entire crop in April-May, these farmers saw how there was money to be made by simply storing the onions for 4-5 months and making staggered sales through the off-season. In 2013, an extended monsoon followed by Cyclone Phailin, delaying the harvesting of the kharif crop, led to prices in Lasalgaon averaging Rs 42-46 per kg in September-October (see chart).

Not only traders, but even farmers made money from that. Now, isn't this — farmers learning to play the market — something to be celebrated? The creation of some 40 lt of on-farm onion storage capacity nationwide — 15 lt in Maharashtra alone — was a revolution of sorts, partially aided by capital subsidies from both the central and state governments. Unfortunately, the powers that be today in Udyog Bhawan and Krishi Bhawan are engaged in sabotage. And they have a convenient excuse —

the Centre's and the Reserve Bank of India's commitment towards "inflation targeting" — for it. What else explains the move to hike MEPS (allowing Pakistani and Chinese onions to capture the international market) or imposing stockholding restrictions denying farmers the chance to benefit from higher prices during the off season? For Maharashtra's farmers, already combating drought and a price crash in sugar, cotton and milk, this is tragedy compounded. Onion is one crop that gave decent returns — but not any more. Yes, elections in Bihar are important. But so are the interests of onion growers in Lasalgaon and Pimpalgaon or even Shajapur, Ujjain and Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh, Sikar and Alwar in Rajasthan, and Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri and Davangere in Karnataka. Political expediency and inflation targeting should not come at farmers' expense.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Agri wastewater enters food cycle**

What goes around comes around. For years, environmentalists have warned against releasing sewage in rivers. In the Pune region, contaminated river water has eventually entered the food cycle due to extensive use of municipal wastewater for farming.

Crops, fruits and vegetables grown on wastewater are exposing you to toxicants (especially metals) taken up by crops. Besides, eating fish with toxic residue or contaminated milk also have the potential to cause extensive damage to human body.

The PMC and other local governing bodies in the Pune region have been releasing untreated sewage in the Mutha river, which is a tributary of the Bhima. Besides, Mutha carries industrial waste from Pune city and adjoining areas to Bhima which flows into Ujani dam in Solapur district. The river, which resembles a nullah, continues its journey towards Solapur and on the way hundreds of farmers pump the wastewater for their crop. Hundreds of acres of land in the region is irrigated using the same water. Though there is no comprehensive estimate of the total agricultural land under wastewater irrigation, a journey of Mutha from Pune to Solapur tells the story.

As the river moves out of Pune city carrying city's sewage, the pollution multiplies. Excreta, urine and associated sludge and effluents from hundreds of small and big commercial establishments flow into the Mutha, which has become the lifeline for some farmers, especially in areas where water is scarce. Ironically, the vegetables and other produce grown here come directly to areas like the Market Yard and Pimpri market.

"Solapur faces a perennial water problem. So, wastewater is the best alternative because it is easily available. We do not know how it affects the quality of crop. But the yield is definitely good," said Arvind Shinde, a farmer from Solapur. Many other farmers agree with Arvind because using the untreated water is less costly and, as they claim, it has a high nutritional content. The municipal corporation and the district administration of Solapur have repeatedly blamed Pune for polluting their water and crops. However, the local administrations have no mechanism to check use of wastewater for irrigation.

Experts warn against the use of water for irrigation. "The use of untreated wastewater for irrigation poses a high risk to human health in all age groups. However, the degree of risk may vary among age groups. Untreated wastewater irrigation leads to relatively higher prevalence of hookworm and Ascariasis infection among children. Heavy metals pose a health risk if ingested in sufficient concentrations," states a report by the International Water Management Institute.

"Rapid urbanization and industrialization have had a huge impact on natural resources, especially water. Livelihoods in peri-urban areas have responded in myriad ways to the qualitative and geographic expansion of cities.

The rapid change that cities and peri-urban areas undergo also calls for a closer look at current institutions and forms of governance," said

Bengaluru-based researcher Priyanka Jamwal, who is working on the wastewater research project at Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE).

Jamwal told TOI that the use of contaminated water for irrigation definitely has an impact on human health. "Big cities like Pune and Bengaluru will have to deal with this matter seriously and urgently," said Jamwal. Like Pune, Bengaluru too releases huge amount on untreated water into river. ATREE researchers are studying how it is affecting crops and human health. "We examined the impact that urbanization has had on livelihoods in select villages adjoining Bengaluru, in the Vrishabhavathy and Suvarnamukhi catchments. We found that in the command area of Byramangala reservoir, urban wastewater has caused a shift to crops such as babycorn and fodder from paddy and ragi (finger millet). We have made a preliminary assessment on the presence of heavy metals in water, milk and vegetables (specifically babycorn) and further analysis is underway," said Jamwal. But there are no such efforts in Pune region yet to understand the impact of wastewater use for irrigation.

Former deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar admits that Pune city should have taken steps to complete sewage treatment plant works quite early. "Now that the PMC has decided to treat maximum sewage, farmers in rural Pune fetching water from canals will get treated water for irrigation. This water might not be potable, but it will be definitely safe for irrigation," said Pawar.

The Centre has announced an assistance of Rs 841 crore to overhaul Pune's sewage treatment plant.

Experts, however, say that there is no way to revive Mula-Mutha rivers unless there are adequate number of STPs to treat all the waste released into rivers and tributaries in Bhima upper sub-basin in the district. This basin has Mutha, Pavana, Indrayani and Bhima rivers which are most polluted in the state, according to a government report which states that



water flowing in 18 more rivers in Pune, Solapur and Satara too has been labeled 'bad'. As per the Union government data of the 302 polluted river sections identified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in the country in its recent report, 49 — the highest — are in Maharashtra. A government survey reveals that the sewage from cities, villages and towns is polluting the state's rivers in a much bigger way than industrial waste. According to the government data, 70% pollution in the catchment areas of 20 major rivers is caused by untreated sewage flowing in from towns and villages as against 30% of river pollution being caused by industrial waste.

"Despite widespread use of wastewater, municipalities and water boards underestimate its value and for policymakers it's a non-issue. The lack of information and awareness among producers and consumers about the inherent risks of wastewater use further compounds the problem. Wastewater is not a priority issue for policy-makers and there is no coordination among different institutions - municipalities, water boards, departments of agriculture, and departments of land use planning, quality control agencies - that have a stake in wastewater use," say Stephanie Buechler, Gayathri Devi Mekala and Ben Keraita in their research paper 'Wastewater Use for Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture'.

### **Supply crunch raises onion prices over Rs 60**

Onion prices have once again skyrocketed in wholesale as well as retail markets across the city. The wholesale price which remained around Rs 25 for a kilo last week shot up to Rs 35 on Saturday, an increase of 40 per cent, while retail price hovered around Rs 65. This is the steepest increase this season. Agriculture produce market committees (APMCs) attributed the price rise to short supply of the vegetable from Rajasthan and other neighbouring states. The average supply to the city has been 130-150 tonnes less than the requirement.

APMC market sources said they are expecting a further increase in the

prices in September. "Onion may even disappear from the market in September as the cold storage stock is likely to exhaust by then," said Ghyanshyam Patel of Mahuva APMC, adding that the shortage is due to heavy rains in neighbouring states.

According to Deepak Patel, secretary, Ahmedabad APMC, the supply to the city is currently limited to 30 trucks, each carrying 10 tonnes of onion. When the market is stable, the supply remains around 42-45 trucks and prices range from Rs 20 to Rs 35 per kilo.

Ahmedabad APMC chairman Ketan Patel said, "We are keeping a watch on the situation. There is no extra charge in APMC, but we do not have any control on the retail market."

In areas like Satellite, Vastrapur and Jodhpur, onion is being sold at Rs 60-65.

"The increasing prices have left me worried as onion is one vegetable which is used extensively. I fear that prices may again touch Rs 100 this season. I have already cut down on my usage and further increase will force me to completely stop using this vegetable," said Shital Barot, a resident of Satellite.

### **With water to be released from Mettur, farmers upbeat over samba cultivation**

With the chief minister announcing that water from Mettur will be released on August 9, the farmers in delta districts are gearing up to begin the samba cultivation, which is expected to cover thousands of hectares of land.

The announcement has come as a huge relief to farmers, who have already suffered losses in the kuruvai (short-term crop) cultivation due to shortage of water. In fact, the state government was supposed to have released the water from Mettur dam on June 1 to facilitate the kuruvai

cultivation in delta districts, including Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagappattinam and parts of Trichy. However, the water could not be released due to low storage level in the dam.

Expecting the release in one week, the agriculture department has begun preparations to help the farmers access necessary materials like seeds, fertilizers etc. If everything goes as planned, the samba cultivation will begin once the water reaches till the tail-end areas.

Of the four major districts in the delta region, Thiruvarur district tops the list with the proposed cultivation of paddy on around 1.48 lakh hectares of land. A major producer of paddy, the district is already awaiting harvest from around 27,700 hectares as part of kuruvai cultivation, which was carried out in June with the help of water from wells.

Thanjavur follows closely, with samba cultivation expected to be carried out on 1.36 lakh hectares of land. Once described as a rice bowl of Tamil Nadu, Thanjavur district has already witnessed kuruvai paddy cultivation on 32,000 hectares this year.

Nagappattinam district and Trichy district agriculture department have predicted that their districts would carry out samba cultivation on 1 lakh hectares and 60,000 hectares respectively. The farmers in these two districts were also engaged in kuruvai cultivation on 35,000 hectares and 3,488 hectares respectively.

The release of 6,000 cusecs of water this week for the Aadi Perukku festival on Monday has already filled the dry Cauvery with some water, enabling the next course of water to roll on and reach the tail-end areas.

In order to keep enough stock of fertilisers, Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO) Ltd has sent 1,320 tonnes of urea imported from Oman through the Tuticorin Port. The fertilisers unloaded in Good Shed in Trichy were distributed to Ariyalur, Perambalur, Karur and Trichy.

KRIBHCO officials said they would continue the supply. The next consignment of 2,600 tonnes of urea will be sent to Thanjavur and Tiruvarur in a couple of days. The farmers can get the fertilisers at cooperative societies at Rs 270.50 per pack.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### **Amul supports Centre's stance on Indo-Russian dairy protocol**



Only Parag Milk Foods and Schreiber Dynamix Dairies have received the nod from Russia's federal inspection agency, for export of hard cheese

The Commerce Ministry's attempt to get Russia to water down its requirement that stipulates sourcing of milk products only from dairy players who own ranches with thousand-plus milch cattle, has found a supporter in Amul.

This is indicative of a split in opinion within the domestic dairy industry. Amul estimates that only one or two farms in India met the condition, with most procuring milk from farmers who had 2-5 milch animals.

"The farm costing and land availability issue will practically make it impossible to establish new farms with more than 1,000 cows in India, as having higher number of cows is economically not viable," said Rs.Sodhi, Managing Director of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which owns Amul.

### **Discriminative ?**

“Even globally, there are few farms with more than 1,000 cows. For example, USA has 1,730, New Zealand has 600, and UK has only 17 such farms,” Sodhi said, adding that Russia had not imposed the condition on any other country.

The Ministry had not signed the dairy protocol with Russia as it felt only a few dairies would meet the ‘captive farms’ stipulation. “Once you have signed a protocol, you can’t revise it unilaterally. If we sign the protocol in the current form and later ask for a change, they may not oblige,” a senior ministry official had said.

So far, only two private dairies – Parag Milk Foods and Schreiber Dynamix Dairies – have received the nod of Rosselkhoznadzor, Russia’s federal inspection agency, for export of hard cheese.

The companies have urged the Centre to continue negotiations with Russia but allow them to begin exports, since tie-ups had already been established with importers. This view was repeated at a July 23 meeting between industry players and the Commerce Ministry. The window to establish a presence in the market is also limited, with the ban on dairy imports from the European Union lasting only a year.

### **‘Against WTO norms’**

Sodhi said the demand was against World Trade Organisation (WTO) guidelines and the condition amounted to “a non-tariff barrier to restrict trade in favour of only a couple of parties”.

“For paltry exports of dairy products, India should not surrender to a special condition being implemented by Russia which is being enforced exclusively on India. We have suggested that the Ministry should...reinvite the Russian team to visit India so that they can again inspect the facilities/EIA system in a newer perspective,” he added.

Reports from Russia indicate that it may soften the stand, which stemmed from hygiene and sanitation concerns to minimise the risk of foot-and-mouth disease, tuberculosis, brucellosis, etc.

The Russian cheese market is estimated at more than 2,00,000 tonnes. As of June, international prices ranged between \$3,000-\$3,600 per tonne, depending on type and quality.

The average price of cheddar, among the varieties likely to be sold by Indian manufacturers, was \$2,613 a tonne as of July 15, having slid about 14 per cent from \$3,060 per tonne at the beginning of the month.

### **FCI gets ₹13,000 cr as food subsidy**

To ensure smooth procurement and distribution of grains, the government has released ₹13,000 crore as food subsidy to state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI).

The corporation is facing a subsidy arrear of above ₹55,000 crore as of March 31, 2015.

For 2015-16, the government has allocated ₹97,000 crore as food subsidy to FCI against an estimated bill of ₹1,18,000 crore. The bulk of the food subsidy is paid to FCI for running the public distribution system.

### **PM convenes high-level meeting for ailing sugar sector**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi convened a high-level meeting here on Saturday to review issues related to the sugar industry, particularly on the question of repayment of arrears owed to sugarcane farmers, which stood at a whopping Rs. 18,000 crore at the beginning of July.

“Taking note of the current supply-demand issues with regard to sugar, the Prime Minister called for assiduous efforts to increase ethanol

blending of fuel. He also called for exploring all possibilities for export of sugar,” said an official statement.

Excess supply has created a glut in the domestic market and resulted in massive losses for the industry. The arrears situation could worsen with the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) estimating production at 28 million tonnes (mt) for the 2015-16 season (October-September) in addition to 10.4 mt of carryover stock, far higher than the requirement of around 4.3-4.5 mt.

Domestic production is pegged at 28.3 mt for 2014-15 and domestic consumption is expected to be around 25.2 mt next season. The industry cites a drop in ex-mill sugar prices – at around Rs. 22/kg in Uttar Pradesh and Rs. 19-20/kg in Maharashtra – as being the reason for losses. Cost of production in UP is estimated at Rs. 33/kg and Rs. 29-31/kg in Maharashtra.

The Centre has pitched in to help the beleaguered industry by raising import duty on raw and refined sugar and providing a subsidy of Rs. 4,000/tonne for exports of 1.4 mt of raw sugar. The excise duty on ethanol was also waived to spur higher production of ethanol by mills for the blending programme.

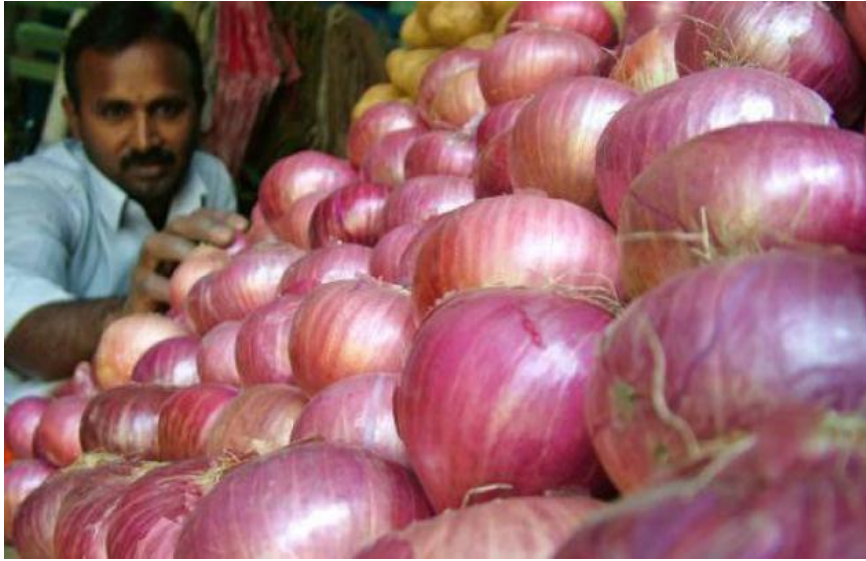
An interest-free loan of Rs. 6,000 crore was also granted in June to help mills clear arrears owed to sugarcane farmers. But reports of suicides by cane farmers in Karnataka trickling in likely prompted the Government to take another look at the sector's problems through this meeting.

“The Prime Minister reviewed the progress with regard to the Rs. 6,000 crore incentive package approved by the Union Government in June 2015... (he) emphasized that the farmers' interest be kept foremost at all times, and issues related to sugar sector be monitored regularly. Long-term measures with regard to the sector were also discussed,” the statement added.

The meeting was attended by Cabinet Ministers Arun Jaitley, Radha Mohan Singh, Ram Vilas Paswan, Nirmala Sitharaman, Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, besides senior officers from the various Ministries including Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs, Finance and Commerce.

Officials from the NITI Aayog and Prime Minister's Office also attended the meeting, the statement added.

## AP considers import of onions to keep prices in check



The Andhra Pradesh Government is considering import of onions to boost the availability of the commodity and to prevent a hike in its prices, according to IYR Krishna Rao, State Chief Secretary.

During a meeting held today, the Chief Secretary discussed the onion supply issue with officials of the Civil Supplies and Agriculture Marketing Departments and remedial measures to ensure adequate supply and also measures to check the price rise.

According to a statement, retail prices of onion have already gone up to Rs 30-Rs 40 per kg. To keep a check on the price, 930 tonnes of subsidised onions have been supplied through Rythu Bazaars, the Chief Secretary said.

The Chief Secretary directed the officers to prepare an action plan to look at the possibility of importing onions from outside the state in case of crop failure due to bad weather.