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THE HINDU

Agri Fest from Aug. 16

Municipal chairperson Roshni Khalid on Monday inaugurated the *kaal naattu karmam* (placing the central pole) for the venue of the South India Agri Fest being held at the Police Maidan here from August 16 to 26.

The organisation of the agricultural fair coincides with the celebration of the State Agricultural Day.

The *karmam* was held in the presence of Agricultural Minister K.P. Mohanan.

District panchayat president K.A. Sarala and District Collector P. Bala Kiran and municipal vice chairman T.O. Mohanan were also present at the event.

The organisers said that over 300 stalls would be arranged at the venue of the fair in which agricultural universities, research centres and government and semi-government agencies and private institutions from southern States would participate.

- Special Correspondent

Mafia and multinationals milk Italy's green energy boom

Italian island of Sardinia has jumped at the chance to boost the economy by converting its long months of sunshine into green energy



The solar plant of Narbolia near Oristano in Italy's Sardinia. PHOTO:AFP

Thousands of solar panels glint in the sun, but the prized farmland beneath lies barren. While the Italian island of Sardinia revels in a renewable energy boom, the long arm of organised crime risks sullying its clean power ambitions.

Famed for its lush plains and emerald waters but racked by poverty and unemployment, Sardinia has jumped at the chance to boost the economy by converting its long months of sunshine into green energy. And it is not alone: cities and towns across Italy are embracing hydroelectric power, geothermal energy, wind farms, solar panels, steam generators and biomass plants, due largely to generous state subsidies.

In Sardinia's northwest, the crop from purple and golden fields of thistles and sunflowers is used to generate biomass energy, while on the rolling hills in the island's centre, towering white turbines spin gently in the breeze at Italy's second largest wind farm.

With youth joblessness in the region at over 50 percent, many hoped the state's green incentives would not only breathe life into struggling family communities, but attract companies from other parts of Italy and foreign multinationals which would create jobs.

The problem, according to countryside campaign groups, is that while the subsidies come out of taxpayer pockets, so far the region has seen little of the profits made by the energy firms -- many of which are accused of making fraudulent claims for funds.

'Money leaves the country'

Sardinian prosecutor Mauro Mura warned last year of mafia infiltration in the sector, flagging up instances of renewable energy plants which had profited hugely from subsidies open exclusively to farmers, while "not producing any agricultural goods at all". "The incentives were meant for real farmers, it was a helping hand from the state. They were supposed to be able to install a few panels on their land for their own consumption, and sell any leftover energy on," said 63-year-old campaigner Pietro Porcedda.

On the outskirts of Narbolia near the island's western coast, one such plant sprawls across the town's most fertile fields: over 107,000 solar panels sit atop

the roofs of some 1,600 greenhouses, in which the owners had promised to grow aloe plants. But with the sunlight shut out by the panels, nothing grows there but weeds. The Chinese company which runs the plant, meanwhile, is pocketing profits from 20 years of subsidies and the sale of its energy to Italian giant Enel, Porcedda said. "Instead the money leaves the country, it's not reinvested here. And the 60 jobs we were promised? Four people are employed here," he added, blaming not the multinational but the Italian authorities for turning a blind eye to the situation.

The potential for investment - and corruption - is great. The European Union's law enforcement agency Europol flagged up concerns in 2013 that "the Italian mafia is investing more and more in renewable energy." And the sector has grown since then. In solar in particular, Italy has become a world leader, generating more of its energy from the sun than any other state, with over 7.5 percent of national consumption coming from photovoltaic production.

Every single township in the country now boasts at least one source of renewable energy, according to Italy's main environmental group Legambiente, with 323 considered autonomous in terms of electricity thanks to wind farms.

'Threats won't stop us'

In spite of the success, the Italian government was forced to reduce subsidies last year in the hope of slashing electricity prices, after households found themselves paying 94 euros (\$100) a year on top of their bills to support green energies.

Some locals have taken it upon themselves to block controversial projects. Biologist Manuela Pintus was elected mayor of nearby Arborea this year on a platform to prevent the drilling of an exploratory well for natural gas next to a reserve for protected pelicans.

"Our supporters received threats from those who wanted the well, who said 'We'll destroy everything you have if you vote for Manuela,'" she said. "It didn't stop us. We have mothers and grandparents behind us, and will continue the fight to protect our land for future generations."AFP

With youth joblessness in the region at over 50 percent, many hope the state's green incentives would not only breathe life into struggling family communities, but attract companies from other parts of Italy and foreign multinationals which would create jobs.

Street food was invented by ancient Romans



Amphorae used to transport liquids displayed at the exhibition on food from Rome at Ara Pacis Museum.— Photo: AFP

Grabbing something hot and tasty on the move? You have the ancient Romans to thank. “Street food” was their invention, generally enjoyed with wine, gambling or even prostitutes.

Food on the go was an integral part of daily life in the empire, from nibbling on salted peas while watching gladiators battle in the Colosseum, to grabbing a sausage or fried fish snack after a dip in Rome’s famed baths.

Massive empire

Feeding an empire of some 50 million people was no mean feat, as an exhibition in the Italian capital sets out to show in conjunction with Milan’s 2015 Universal Exhibition on the themes of food and agriculture, running until the end of October.

Food scarcity could trigger uprisings or even topple leaders, a risk Emperor Augustus (63 BC to 14 AD) was unwilling to take. He made importing wheat, oil, wine and other foodstuffs a top priority, changing the face of Roman dining.

A typical day kicked off with the jentaculum, or breakfast - salted bread, dried fruit and eggs washed down with milk or wine.

That was followed by a quick prandium, or lunch, grabbed at the thermopolia - forerunners of fast food restaurants - or popinae, wine bars frequented by the lower classes where customers could grab a bite, dabble in a bit of gambling, or pop upstairs for some sex.

And after an afternoon's work or session at the thermal baths, the rich would throw sumptuous banquets, dining on anything from peacock tongues to baked dormice.

The rest of the population supped on fresh vegetables, stews and, occasionally, meat.

“The logistics deployed by the Romans to feed themselves is fascinating,” said Orietta Rossini, curator of the Ara Pacis exhibition, emphasising how hard it was to keep happy a capital of one million people - the biggest in history before the industrial revolution hit London.

Cheap transportation

The key lay in turning conquered Egypt into the empire's granary and ensuring wheat was transported cheaply to Rome all year round.

Private ship-owners would carry up to 500 tonnes of wheat between Alexandria and Rome under the strict supervision of the state in an early example of today's partnerships between the private and public sectors, Ms. Rossini said.

This made the emperor “the sole distributor of daily bread, the only one responsible for the supply of provisions”. Augustus boosted his popularity by distributing 35 kilos of wheat a month free to 20,000 citizens - free men over 17-years-old.

Egypt's role was later passed on to the empire's African provinces, with grain shipped from Carthage in Tunisia to Rome's Ostia port in just three days and nights. Wine, sold at rock-bottom prices, was also imported, along with oil and meat.

The wealthy may have gone out of the way to impress with exotic dishes, but the empire's leaders were fond above all of fruit and vegetables: Emperor "Tiberius loved cucumber, while Augustus loved asparagus", Ms. Rossini said. Food was such an important commodity that Emperor Diocletian, who ruled from 284 to 305, imposed price controls

Samples of carbonised foodstuffs discovered during excavations at the ancient town of Herculaneum — destroyed along with Pompeii by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 — are on display at the exhibition, including wizened Roman-era figs.

The much-lauded "Mediterranean diet" began here: broad beans, peas, lentils and onions went in stews, with pine nuts, dates and almonds thrown in. Cumin, coriander, sesame and mint seeds were used to spice up dishes.

The globalisation of foodstuffs seen in today's supermarkets was already in action, with wine imported from Gaul and Cyprus, oil from Andalusia, honey from Greece and prized garum — the fermented fish sauce which drove Romans crazy — from Portugal. — AFP

Feeding an empire of 50 million people was no mean feat, shows an exhibition in the Italian capital

Basking in the success of goat farming



Imamsab Nadaf has set an example to others by adopting alternative farming methods in Sindagi taluk of Vijayapura district.— photo: rajendra singh hajeri

While there seems to be no end to farm suicides in State, here is a farmer who is an inspiration to others.

Imamsab Nadaf (40), a native of Sindagi taluk, has successfully taken to goat farming at Antargangi village. A diploma-holder in computer science, he worked in the Gulf for some years, before returning to India in 2009. “At first, I was not sure what business to do. Then, a friend advised me to start farming as we had agricultural land,” he said.

Initially, he took to lemon and pomegranate cultivation. “After three years, I switched over to goat farming in 2012 by spending Rs. 2.1 lakh to purchase 62 lambs,” he said. Two years later, he earned a profit of Rs. 6.5 lakh from selling goats. Today, he has nearly 500 goats worth Rs. 7 lakh. Mr. Nadaf believes that goat farming is a good source of income.

“If a farmer raises at least 10 goats in his farm, this would give him additional revenue even at the time when his crop fails due to vagaries of nature. The earning not only comes from selling goats, but also from its droppings as it is considered as good organic manure,” he said.

With an objective of encouraging other farmers to take up farming, Mr. Nadaf has now set up a goat farming education centre where he offers guidance to interested farmers.

He can be contacted on 9880227247.

Imamsab Nadaf, who started with 62 lambs, now has 500 goats worth Rs. 7 lakh

TNAU prof. on international team studying barley

A Tamil Nadu Agricultural University professor is part of the team of scientists from across the world that has successfully studied the grain dispersal mechanism of barley. The team has published an article in the international journal, Cell.

According to the professor, N. Senthil, Head, Department of Biotechnology, he was part of the team that probed how the dispersal mechanism of barley evolved, and where the dispersal mechanism was lost during the process of domestication.

He says in wild varieties of barley and other cereals, the rachis shatters to facilitate dispersal, essential for the survival of the species. The team identified two genes 'Btr1' and 'Btr2' that enable the shattering and grain dispersal.

People who domesticated barley (taking it up for cultivation) identified those that did not shatter and cultivated it, which led to natural mutation where the shattering did not happen. The team studied barley because it is one of the earliest domesticated crop.

Mr. Senthil says that there was evidence to show that humans used wild varieties of barley at least 17,000 years ago and they started cultivation at least 10,000 years ago. This mostly happened in the present day Israel-Syria region.

In its pursuit to identify what causes the shattering and dispersal mechanism, the team studied at least 1,000 varieties and renewed the efforts that started 60 years ago.

Turmeric auctioned

Turmeric worth Rs. 2 crore was auctioned at the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Cooperative Marketing Society here on Saturday. While 'virali' variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,739 and Rs. 9,205 per quintal; 'kilangu' variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,399 and Rs. 7,503 and 'panankali' variety fetched between Rs. 6,000 and Rs. 18,179.

About 3,000 quintal turmeric was auctioned for Rs. 2 crore, a press release of the society said.

Jatha for boosting farmers' morale



Activists staging a street play outside the Deputy Commissioner's office in Raichur on Monday.—PHOTO: SANTOSH SAGAR

Baduku Besaya, a cultural campaign for instilling confidence among farmers in distress, was flagged off by Deputy Commissioner S. Sasikanth Senthil outside his office here on Monday.

A leaflet containing the excerpts of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's radio-speech addressing farmers was released. The jatha, organised by the departments of Information and Public Relations, Agriculture, Horticulture, and the zilla panchayat, is scheduled to visit 100 villages in five taluks till August 22. The campaign is designed to infuse confidence among farmers and boost their morale through staging street plays, singing folk songs, screening short films and distributing pamphlets. It would visit two gram panchayats a day. Shriti Samskriti, a cultural troupe, is involved in the campaign.

Joint Director of Agriculture Kiran Kumar, Senior Assistant Director of Horticulture, K.M. Ramesh, and Senior Assistant Director of Information and Public Relations T. Kanumappa were present.

It will cover 100 villages in Raichur

Jatha to instil confidence among farmers flagged off in Ballari

Ending lives is not a solution to your problems: Deputy Commissioner



Sameer Shukla, Deputy Commissioner of Ballari, flagging off a jatha to instil confidence among farmers in Ballari on Monday.

Sameer Shukla, Deputy Commissioner, flagged off a jatha being taken out all over the district by the Department of Information to instil confidence among farmers and prevent them from ending their lives.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Shukla made a fervent plea to farmers not to take the extreme step of committing suicide in the face of debt. .“Don’t lose confidence, the government and the district administration is with you,” he said.

Expressing concern over the number of suicides in the State, including six in Ballari district, Mr. Shukla said ending lives was not a solution as nothing could be achieved. In case of any crisis, farmers could approach him or bring it to the notice of officials.

The jatha, which was being taken out following instructions from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, would cover at least 100 villages in the district up to August 22. Sharnappa Mudugal, Joint Director of Agriculture, and Suresh Babu of Information Department were present.

Later talking to press persons, Mr. Shukla said that due to failure of rain, sowing had been severely affected and in the even of dry spell continuing, the district administration would gear up to take up relief work, including suggesting alternative crops by the Agriculture Department.

He said that there was no shortage of fodder and the existing stock would be sufficient for about 30 weeks. He said that a Rs. 1 crore plan was ready to take up permanent repair of the bund of Allipur reservoir to overcome the drinking water problem in the city.

Jatha at Delhi

Swaraj Abhiyan Organization will hold Jai Kisan Jatha in front of Parliament House in Delhi on August 10 in support of various demands of farmers. Abhiyan’s local leader Raghavendra Thane said in a press release in Sirsi on Monday that farmers from all over the country, including about 8,000 from Uttara Kannada district, would come with a small pot full of soil from their areas. It would urge the Union government to withdraw Land Acquisition Act, provide full compensation for crop loss and to implement a policy to provide

minimum Rs. 15,000 income guarantee per month to agriculturists and agriculture related families in India, according to the release.

Traders apply for licence to send veggies to State

Deadline to obtain the same is August 5

Food safety department officials have started taking efforts to monitor the pesticide content in vegetables sent to Kerala from Coimbatore. In one such move, they are educating the traders on the need to obtain the registration certificate or licence, based on the quantum of business they are doing.

This effort has been taken after the Government of Kerala made it mandatory for wholesale traders from other States to obtain the certificate or licence before August 5 to continue sending fruits and vegetables to Kerala.

According to Food Safety Wing Designated Officer (Coimbatore) R. Kathiravan less than 20 traders in Coimbatore have obtained the licence so far.

The officer told *The Hindu* that a special one-day camp was organised at six places on July 31 for the traders and commission agents.

“Two hundred traders obtained challan to pay for the licence or certificate at the camps held at MGR Market and TK Market in the city and at Mettupalayam, Pollachi, Kinathukadavu and Sultanpet Markets,” he said.

Arrangements have been made at 15 browsing centres located near the markets to help traders apply online for the licence or certificate. The applicants would then be issued the certificate on Tuesday — a day ahead of the deadline for obtaining the same.

It is learnt that MGR Market on Mettupalayam Road in the city sends 750 tonnes of various vegetables from Coimbatore, Mettupalayam and Ooty and onions from Nasik (Maharashtra) and Bellary (Karnataka) to Kerala. The licence would first be given to the traders there before it is issued to traders supplying locally.

According to a department official, providing the certificate is the first step to monitor the quality of vegetables sent to Kerala through Coimbatore.

Food safety officials would then collect vegetables samples from traders and send it for testing. There is no facility to test vegetables for pesticide residues in Coimbatore. Collected samples will be sent to the National Accreditation Board Laboratories (NABL) and to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) recognised laboratories in Bengaluru, Chennai and Kerala.

If vegetable from a particular place is found to be having high pesticide residues, the food safety department officials will ask agriculture and horticulture officials to advice farmers to reduce use of pesticides.

While the test carried out by food safety department officials is free of cost, traders have also been advised to test the quality of their vegetables by paying for the same.

Kerala government makes it mandatory for wholesale traders from other States to obtain a licence.

Now, farmers turn to green energy for irrigation

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 lakh, 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.

· *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*

Bioprocessed grains may be used as medicine



A woman winnows rice at a village in Sivasagar district of Assam.photo:pti

The rice and wheat you eat may soon also be used as a medicine if scientists are successful in changing the carbohydrate profile of foodgrains.

By partial bioprocessing of rice, wheat and coarse grains like jowar, bajra and ragi, a team of five researchers at IIT Kharagpur are busy developing nutraceuticals, which has the best of nutrition and pharmaceutical medicine.

Once ready in the next three years, the bioprocessed grains would then be consumed just like corn flakes or in the form of ready-to-eat products like biscuits, chocolates and even health drinks.

“Changing the dietary carbohydrate profile by bioprocess in grains will lead to the development of new range of low-cost prebiotic nutraceuticals. It will enable better nutrition by releasing more energy, promoting growth of beneficial gut microbe and inhibiting harmful gut bacteria and boosting immunity,” lead researcher of the project Dr Satyahari Dey said.

The foodgrains would also be fortified with beneficial microbe and micronutrients before it reaches the consumer.

Prebiotic and probiotic nutraceuticals are preventive for lifestyle diseases like hyperglycemia, inflammatory bowel disease, colon cancer, etc.

“They can even cure certain diseases if they are in their initial stages,” the biotechnologist, who is also the deputy secretary general of Asian Federation of Biotechnology, said.

Malnutrition in women and children is also in many respects related to dietary carbohydrate assimilation - a problem which can be solved with the new generation food.

One such type of biscuit made of bioprocessed grains is already under trial at the IIT campus.

“For further trials we will launch it in the local market from our IIT’s Science & Technology Entrepreneurs’ Park (STEP). The main raw materials are coarse grain crops that are low-cost food source for people and processed ingredients will therefore be affordable to all,” Dey said.

Their ultimate aim would be to commercialise the technology.

The project, funded by the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development, also aims at improving food security through reduced dietary intake.

The National Food Security Act proposes to give rice, wheat, coarse grains to the tune of 62 million tonnes annually for 67 per cent poor population but it may not ensure nutritional security of the poor, say experts.

“Bioprocessing will help reduce daily dietary intake and our total national foodgrain need because the delivery of our nutrition-improved processed food will ensure nutritional security for our people,” Dey said.

Researchers deny that there could be any possible side effects of consuming such partially bioprocessed products.

“The ingredients are from grain crops, edible and are in common use. So there can be no such side effects,” they say. PTI

· ***Once ready in the next three years, the bioprocessed grains would then be consumed just like corn flakes or in the form of ready-to-eat products like biscuits, chocolates and even health drinks.***

· ***The foodgrains would also be fortified with beneficial microbe and micronutrients before it reaches the consumer.***

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· ***Researchers deny that there could be any possible side effects of consuming such partially bioprocessed products.***

This farmer is making a profit!

Imamsab Nadaf has shown the way to other farmers by adopting goat rearing in Sindagi taluk of Vijayapura district.

Rearing goats comes in handy for Imamsab Nadaf of Sindagi.

In a situation when farmers are committing suicide almost everyday in the State owing to financial burden, here is a farmer who could be an inspiration to others for adopting alternative means of farming.



Imamsab Nadaf (40), native of Sindagi taluk of the district, has successfully adopted goat rearing in his farm at Antargangi village and making a profit out of it.

Having completed diploma in computer applications, he worked in Gulf countries for several years in different companies before returning to India. “Having spent years on foreign land, I returned to India in 2009. I wanted to stay back to involve in revenue generating activity. But, I was not sure what business I should do. At that time, one of my friends advised me to take up farming as we have agriculture land,” he said.

Attracted by the idea, Nadaf constructed sheds in the farm and cultivated plants of lemon and pomegranate. “After spending three years in cultivating land, I switched over to goat farming in 2012 by spending Rs 2.10 lakh to purchase 62 lambs,” he said.

In two years itself, he earned a profit of Rs. 6.5 lakh from selling goats. Today, he has nearly 500 goats worth Rs. 7 lakh.

With increasing profit, Mr. Nadaf believes that goat rearing is profitable if done efficiently and scientifically.

“If a farmer raises at least ten goats, this would give him additional revenue even if his crop fails due to vagaries of nature. The earning not only comes from selling of goats but also from its droppings as it is considered as a good organic manure,” he said. He said that he has earned Rs. 2 lakh only from selling the droppings of the goats.

With an objective of encouraging other farmers, Nadaf has now set up a goat farming education centre where he offers guidance to those interested.

He could be contacted on 98802 27247.

Soil connection



Australian students came visiting farmers in Suttur and Coorg. They felt the predicament of farmers in India and Australia are rather similar

Kathryn Dullard, an Australian student from La Trobe University, is a farmer's daughter and considers herself a farmer too. Currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Agriculture Science and International Development at the University, she talks about growing up on the farm, seeing her family get through many a drought and yet, asserting that she would not have it any other way. "Being a farmer instills a feeling of pride in your land, your culture and heritage. I know I wouldn't give it up for anything else," she says. This is why when she and 19 other classmates of hers, who are also from farmer families, visited Suttur (Mysore) and Coorg last month, as part of a university project, they could connect with the predicament of farmers in the region almost immediately.

Most of the students chosen for this visit had not only spent a large portion of their lives on a farm, but had also chosen to pursue an education in agriculture.

Their visit to Suttur and Coorg was organised with the aim of educating them about agricultural techniques employed here. "We learned about the farming sizes here, the techniques employed, fertilizers used, details about the yield and about the ongoing farming crisis in the State. We tended to compare the

techniques employed here with the ones back home only because a comparative study helped us weigh the pros and cons of the various systems of agriculture,” explained Kathryn.

“It was interesting to see, for instance, that the actual nutrient deficiencies in India are in no way similar to Australia,” continued Kathryn. “Back home, the land is very old and is deficient in potassium, phosphorous and nitrogen. Whereas here, there hasn’t been a huge need for a nitrogen fertiliser for instance, because the land is already quite fertile in it. So, the challenges here are quite different. They are more focussed on pest management, water retention and bringing about a high yield. In Australia it is all about how to import things back into the soil. We are using things like legumes that have nitrogen because we are burning out of nutrients in our ground.”

The students were taken around the region by a team from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) and were also acquainted with the grim facts of the ongoing agrarian crisis in the region.

Stephen Grylls, also a student of La Trobe University, talked about how a lot that is being done today in Suttur, especially, is to try and curb the farming crisis. “Seed technology was one aspect. KVK is trying to ensure that only certified, clean seeds are used. Then, we also saw a number of companies providing guidance to farmers about their crop,” he said.

“There were confessions about water resources and we were told that the farmers are starting to look at technology that will put water back into the ground and keep it there because of what is coming up in the future,” added Kathryn.

The challenges in Coorg are of a different kind, said the students.

“The conflict between man and animal is what is plaguing the plantations there. In Australia you don’t have to contend with tigers or elephants. Whereas here, it is a huge problem that the farmer has to deal with. What was heartening to see

is that they are also worried about the lives of elephants as much as they are concerned about their crop,” said Kathryn.

Finally, albeit the problems that the farmers have to face vary significantly, both Kathryn and Stephen believe that the predicament of farmers in Australia and Karnataka are quite similar. “We also have issues of a higher yield, water retention etc. Just that we experience them on a different scale. We may not live in poverty but we do have the risk of losing everything,” said Stephen.

Good response for solar bids

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has asked the energy officials to increase the quantity of solar power purchases in tune with the number of applications received for the bids, as the response for the bids was unexpectedly high.

While the utilities including TSSPDCL and TSNPDCL called for tenders for supply of 2000 MW of power, the actual tenders received were to the tune of 4,623 MW of total capacity, at the minimum price of Rs.5.17 per unit.

A total of 184 companies have vied for setting up their solar power plants in Telangana, a press release informed. However, only those matching the eligibility criteria have been taken into consideration during financial bids. At a meeting in the State Secretariat, Mr. Rao has asked the officials representing TSTransco and TSSPDCL to finalise details of power purchase agreements with the companies selected in the tendering process.

The 800 MW for which the State power utilities have entered into agreements with, are likely to be completed by next March. The plants being finalised in this phase will be ready within a year, catapulting the State as the top user of solar power, the press statement said. This could aid the planned nine-hour supply for farmers, Mr. Rao hoped.

Minister for Energy G. Jagadish Reddy and Principal Secretary of Energy Arvind Kumar too were present at the meeting.

Onion to be available at Rs.20 per kg from today

Minister for Irrigation T. Harish Rao said that onion would be made available for Rs.20 per kg from August 5 in the district.

In a video conference held from Hyderabad on Monday, Mr. Harish Rao directed the officials to open special counters at all division headquarters and sell onions. These centres can also be commenced at Rytu Bazaars and vegetable markets and the timings need to be informed to local people, he added.

The district officials were also asked to procure onion from farmers of Sadashivapet and Zaheerabad. He said that as many as 80 counters would be established across the State, including 40 in Hyderabad.

Jackfruits, a big draw here



The tribal shandy atop Kolli Hills in Namakkal district on Monday.- Photo: S.P. Saravanan

After negotiating 70 hairpin bends to reach Kolli Hills, the aroma of ripe jackfruits welcomes tourists to this hill destination.

The journey to Kolli Hills is not complete without a visit to the tribal market in Solakadu where the fruits are sold. The shandy was launched in 2012 to benefit members of the Scheduled Tribes community in the hilltop. It has 18 shops selling all fruits grown in the hills depending upon the season.

Jackfruit and pineapple, grown even in the backyards of houses, are available from June to August.

The sellers said they did brisk business on Monday. The cost varied from Rs. 50 to Rs. 250 per fruit depending on the size, Samidurai, a seller, said.

Though jackfruits are transported to the plains for sale, thanks to Aadi Perukku and Valvil Ori festival, the tourists trooped to the fruit market to buy them.

Many tourists said that as jackfruits were available in all sizes, they could pick and choose the fruits of their choice at the best price. Tourists were even surprised to see many houses selling jackfruits on their doorsteps.

“We have only two trees on our premises that yield about 15 to 20 fruits every season. Instead of selling them to traders at cheaper rates, we prefer to sell them directly to tourists at a reasonable price,” said Bakkiyam of Semmedu.

Tourists were even surprised to see many houses selling jackfruits on their doorsteps

Solid waste management plan for village panchayats

VILLAGE PANCHAYATS PROPOSED FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM		
District Name	No. of village panchayats	No. of village panchayats proposed
Tiruchirapalli	404	88
Karur	157	22
Ariyalur	201	25
Perambalur	121	20
Pudukkottai	497	74
Thanjavur	589	80
Nagapattinam	434	56
Tiruvarur	430	40

The State government plans to implement Solid Waste Management (SWM) in 2,000 village panchayats during the current year.

The activities include collection, removal and safe disposal of waste with the participation of every member of the village community. Village panchayats that have the potential of generating maximum waste and those with the population of more than 10,000, peri-urban panchayats, village panchayats

associated with tourist, pilgrim and industrial activities and village panchayats abutting national highways will be covered on a priority basis.

The SWM has been tasked with the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) that has selected the village panchayats. As per the plan, the scheme will be implemented in 88 village panchayats in Tiruchi district. As many as 80 panchayats have been chosen in Thanjavur district and 22 in Karur district. It will be implemented in 70 villages in Pudukottai and 25 villages in Ariyalur districts. Twenty villages have been selected in Perambalur district.

As per the plan, which has been sent to Collectors and Project Officers of DRDAs recently, disposal of solid waste should be done without contaminating groundwater, surface water and ambient air quality. Solid waste should be segregated into organic and inorganic, recyclable and hazardous waste before disposal. Segregation at source should be done so that processing of disposal of waste was easier.

Similarly, sites should be identified for dumping segregated waste without affecting the environment. Three pits should be dug, two for composting bio-degradable waste and one for dumping residual solid waste with suitable protective measures against pollution. A senior officer of the DRDA in Tiruchi told *The Hindu* that the government had permitted involving Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme workers in solid waste management activities. One worker would be involved for 150 households. They would be involved in various activities such as door-to-door collection of waste, segregation, transporting to dumping site and others. For 100 days, they would be paid under the MGNREGS. Beyond 100 days, wages would be paid from solid waste management funds.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

No respite from price rise; onions become 5% dearer

The average wholesale onion prices at the Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) increased by 5% to Rs 3,250 a quintal on Monday, against Rs 3,100 a quintal on Friday due to decline in arrival. The minimum and

maximum prices were recorded at Rs 2,001 and Rs 3,600 a quintal, respectively. Around 5,000 quintals of onions were auctioned on Monday at Lasalgaon.

The average wholesale prices at Lasalgaon APMC has increased by 130% in the past 35 days from Rs 1,450 a quintal on June 30 to Rs 3,250 a quintal on August 3. The retail prices of onions in the country have reached up to Rs 45 a kg from Rs 25 a kg a month ago.

An official from Lasalgaon APMC told TOI, "The decline in supply compared to the demand has led to the rise prices. The arrival of onions, which was around 14,000 quintals a day around a month ago, has declined to 5,000 quintals a day. Presently, the onions arriving in the market is of summer crop harvested in March and April. This year, the summer crop was badly damaged to a large extent due to unseasonal rains and hails in February and March. Now, the farmers are bringing onions from their storage, but in low quantities and it is difficult to say how much stock they have."

Meanwhile, the average wholesale prices at Pimpalgaon increased marginally by 3% to Rs 3,300 a quintal on Monday, against Rs 3,200 a quintal on Friday. The minimum and maximum prices were at Rs 2,000 and Rs 3,551 a quintal, respectively. Around 8,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Pimpalgaon on Monday.

After poor rain, exorbitant power bills make farmers' lives miserable

It's a double whammy for the farmers in the district - On one hand they are facing the vagaries of the weather and on the other, they have been reeling under the burden of alleged exorbitant power bills being served to them by the state-run electricity distribution company limited.

The Maharashtra Energy Regulatory Commission (MERC) had long time back ordered the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited

(MSEDCL) to ensure that all its agriculture power connections are metered; and while the compliance was expected by 2009, it is still awaited. The farmers are, in the meantime, bearing the brunt of the delay as they have no choice but to clear the bills served to them, even though they may not have consumed that much electricity.

"I stay in the drought-prone Chandwad taluka. From February, we don't have water for farming. The wells run dry and with no alternative irrigation facility in place, agriculture pumps are used for pumping out water required for human and cattle consumption alone. And to top it all, our tri-monthly power bills issued in May have been charged at Rs 4,366, way above our consumption," said Ganpat Pansare, a resident of Chandwad taluka.

Even though Pansare has got a 'metered' connection for agriculture purpose, he is still being delivered the average bill against which he has made several complaints to the company. "I have approached them several times and even wrote to them to resolve the discrepancy, but in vain. I'm worried now about the agriculture pump bill that will be generated for the quarter ending June," he said.

Vijay Wade of Yeola is another farmer who has been receiving the average meter reading from MSEDCL. "Yeola is a dry belt and from March onwards, we stop getting water here. The power company, however, continues to issue us average bill during the dry spell. Although we use motors only when the water is available, the bills are generated year-round," Wade said.

Rajesh Sangamnere from Nashik taluka, yet another aggrieved customer talks about his experience. "There is a group of seven farmers, including me, who have been issued meters in the past five years. However, we continue to be issued power bill on average. This has been brought to the notice of the company. Besides, the company issues us bills for 5 Horse Power (HP) of motor even though we have only three HP motor. Had the meters been utilised, the bills would have been in tune with the consumption," he added.

Nashik Rural has a total of 2,74,873 connections - 1,61,250 metered and 1,13,533 unmetered.

The proportion of unmetered connections is 41.30% of the total connections, which is a huge number, and the MSEDCL does not have any concrete plans of converting them into metered connections.

Centre ready with stocks of pulses, onions to help cool prices in Delhi

Centre has asked Delhi government to estimate its requirement of pulses, particularly arhar and chana, which can be sold at cheaper prices to public through fair price shops.

Sources said that the issue of increasing prices of onions and pulses in the national capital was discussed at a meeting headed by consumer affairs secretary C Viswanath last week where Delhi government officials were also present. They added since there is enough stock of chana dal with the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation (NAFED), dal can be bought by Delhi government at a cheaper price so that it can be sold to consumers.

Nafed has stock of about 5,000 tonnes of chana dal, officials said.

"Since we are importing 5,000 tonnes of arhar dal and it will be available next month, we have asked the city government to make an assessment of their requirement. Their need would be met and people can also get pulses at cheaper prices. It's for them to take a call," said a consumer affairs ministry official. He added efforts to sale pulses at cheaper rate will help moderate the market prices.

The price of arhar has been hovering around Rs 115 for the past one month, while chana dal is selling at Rs 68 per kg.

Meanwhile, Delhi government is likely to take a decision on selling onion through fair price shops. Nafed has already procured about 2,500 tonnes for Delhi. "We are asking all states to enforce the anti-hoarding drive during these months when traders try to make maximum profit because of shortage in supply. We are also getting huge quantity of imported onion that will be used as market intervention to check prices of onion," consumer affairs minister Ram Vilas Paswan said.

In Maharashtra, 46% more farmers take crop loans this year

The number of farmers availing crop loans has gone up by 46% this year in Maharashtra. In terms of amount disbursed, it is an increase of 56%. Bankers say this could be the highest ever year on year growth in the recent past.

However, the trend has also left the banks worried. The lending has gone up considerably at a time when a dry spell is expected to hamper output, and could lead to more outstanding loans next year.

The state government has also restructured crop loans for 2013 and 2014, which are now payable in five years. The move has deferred payment of short-term loans, otherwise repaid soon after the harvest.

Data shared by state-level bankers committee (SLBC), 33.65 lakh farmers were granted crop loans worth Rs 21,002 crore from April 1 to July 15. In the same period last year, 22.93 lakh farmers got loans to the tune of Rs 13,377 crore. During the entire 2013, 32.17 lakh farmers availed loans worth Rs 15,726 crore.

The crop loan period for kharif season continues till mid August. This is followed by rabi season, which starts in October. However, in Maharashtra, almost all the loans are dispensed during kharif season itself.

The number of farmers having gone for loans in 2014 is expected to be low, as defaults on account of excessive rains the year before may have kept them out of the loan net, say experts.

This year, the state government conducted a strict drive to ensure that the targets are met. With this, each farmer who approached the banks was promptly granted a loan if he met the criteria. Banker also do not rule out foul play by farmers. "There are chances that the same person may have gone for multiple loans as there is no system to cross check among banks," said a source engaged in agriculture credit.

However, it is sure that this year a larger number of farmers were brought into the loan net. Reasons for denying loans, like older defaults by their father or grandfather, were ignored. The state government's drive also helped, said Kishore Tiwari, newly appointed director general of Shetkari Swawalamban Mission.

Each year, the scale of finance is increased by around 10%. Taking advantage of the norm, some banks are providing fresh loans to farmers on the condition that they clear the previous debt. The farmer, however, is left with a very small amount in the entire deal. However, such loans pad up the list, said Vijay Jawandhia, a veteran farm activist.

For example, a farmer with an earlier loan of Rs 90,000 may be eligible for a loan of Rs 1 lakh under the fresh scale of finance. The bank provides him Rs 1 lakh but the old dues are deducted and the farmer is left with just Rs 10,000 for expenses, explained Jawandhia.

World Bank to adopt reservoir at Gogababa Tekdi

The World Bank and 2030 Water Resources Group has decided to adopt a water conservation project initiated by the Aurangabad Development Forum at

Gogababa Tekdi on the campus of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University (Bamu) for further development.

As part of its activities in India, especially Maharashtra, 2030 Water Resources Group (2030 WRG) is facilitating establishment of a work stream for water security for agricultural, urban and industrial sectors in Aurangabad district. The project includes expanding the capacity of a reservoir constructed by the forum, a citizens' group, to 125 crore litres as well as develop it as a tourist spot having a yoga centre at a cost of around Rs 12 crore.

2030 WRG is a public private civil society partnership that works with governments for sustainable water resources management. As part of its initiative, 2030 WRG had organized a brainstorming workshop in January in the city to generate projects and define tangible actions to improve water security. The representatives of government, private sector and civil society attended the workshop.

"During the workshop, 2030 WRG expressed its desire to undertake the water project launched by the forum on the Bamu campus. Meanwhile, several beverage companies also extended their support to the project and discussed the steps for implementing it," said Sandeep Nagori of the forum, who is the brains behind the project at Gogababa Tekdi on the university campus.

"The beverage companies underscored the usefulness of coming together for discussing Aurangabad's water security. During the workshop, the potential of public private partnership (PPP) co-financing was discussed. It was concluded that the government would provide financing," said Rochi Khemka, programme co-ordinator (Karnataka and Aurangabad), 2030 WRG.

Dr Sudhir Kumar Goel, additional chief secretary of the state department of agriculture, and Bastiaan Mohrmann, co-lead of 2030 WRG (Asia and Middle East, co-Chair), visited the project site around two-three months ago and

appreciated the efforts of the forum. The outlined further action saying that the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), WWF and the forum would contribute towards the development of a repository of data on Aurangabad's hydrogeology. Besides, 2030 WRG would also engage with corporate houses to boost the initiative.

2030 WRG was initiated in 2008 by a few multinational companies, donors and development banks. After an incubation phase within the World Economic Forum, it became part of the World Bank Group in March 2012.

It works at the national level as well as through partnerships in states to drive water security. It is engaged in activities in Maharashtra and Karnataka at present and plans to enter Uttar Pradesh in the near future.

When the region faced one of the worst droughts in 2012, the forum took up the responsibility to mitigate the hardships. The forum, along with other social organizations, had initiated the process of constructing an additional water source in the catchment area of about 200 hectares near Gogababa Tekdi on the Bamu campus. Experts said this source would be able to conserve around 200 crore litres of water.

"The project aims at providing water to around two lakh people and improving groundwater table by increasing depth of the existing check dams by 10ft. Moreover, these chain dams would be connected with each other so that the width also increases. The project would be carried out in two phases. The first phase has been completed and with the city receiving around 60mm rainfall in June, the dam has been able to conserve around 20 lakh litres of water and increase groundwater table," Nagori added.

About the project

* Providing water to at least two lakh people and improving ground water table

- * It would be completed in two years
- * There are plans to develop the site as a tourist spot
- * Plantation will be done on a large scale
- * First phase completed conserving 20 crore litres of water
- * Target to expand capacity of reservoir to 125 crore litres
- * Develop a tourist spot incorporating a yoga centre at a cost of around Rs 12 crore

Odisha launches e-chicken portal

One can now order for chicken and eggs online in Bhubaneswar. Odisha State Poultry Products Co-operative Marketing Federation (OPOLFED), a state level poultry co-operative marketing organisation of the state government, on Monday launched online shopping platform to provide its customers a flexible buying experience of its products such as chicken and egg.

Agriculture minister Pradeep Panigrahy launched the e-chicken portal www.chickenfresh.in.

"It is really appreciable that OPOLFED has offered to sell its product online. Although initially it will sell its products within the municipal corporation area of Bhubaneswar, it can extend the facility to other areas after looking at the response," the minister said.

"OPOLFED symbolises quality and hygiene. It is a trusted name in Odisha," Bishnupada Sethi, Secretary, fisheries and animal resources development.

The online shopping platform will provide the residents of Bhubaneswar who cannot visit the OPOLFED-CHICKEN FRESH to place order online and get delivery at home, he said. The OPOLFED would take flat delivery charges of Rs 50. One has to order minimum amount of Rs 500.

Millets no less nutritious than quinoa: MINI

The Millets Network of India (MINI), an umbrella organisation of activists and organisations promoting millets in the country, has said it would be much effective and cheaper to go for millets rather than encouraging the costly crop of quinoa.

Quinoa, a South American grain, is gaining currency in middle-class section in India and is selling here for Rs. 1,600 a kg.

“Millets, particularly Korra (foxtail millet), match Quinoa in many of the nutritional parameters. Millets require less water and require virtually no power. The government must give incentives for farmers who grow millets. But it is unfortunate that imported crops are getting more importance than the native ones,” PV Satheesh, National Convener of MINI, said.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, he said the State governments must take a cue from Karnataka that had announced a bonus of Rs. 5,000 an acre for millets farmers.

Export demand helps cardamom retain aroma

Cardamom prices ruled steady on strong export buying despite increased arrivals at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Supply continued to rise as the harvesting entered its second round. The arrival trend indicates of a good crop. It went up to 594 tonnes last week from 518 tonnes the previous week.

“Despite the upsurge in arrivals the prices remained by and large unchanged because of good export buying last week which was some where between 80 and 100 tonnes,” PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, told *BusinessLine*.

He said upcountry buyers were neither active nor aggressive and in fact, the export coverage has aided the market to remain steady.

They are waiting for the prices to fall when the arrivals pick up further in the coming weeks.

Growers in the main growing district, Idukki, told that any price below Rs. 750 a kg would not be remunerative for them. Ranganathan, a dealer in Bodi, said even though the arrivals are expected to rise in the coming days prices are unlikely to slip as the domestic buying would pick up.

The total arrivals today at CPA auction in Bodi stood at 40.2 tonnes and of this 38.7 tonnes were sold out against the arrival of 36.6 tonnes and sales of 35.5 tonnes the previous week.

The maximum price was at Rs. 840 a kg while the auction average slipped to Rs. 600.62 (613.11) a kg.

The individual auction average last week was vacillating between Rs. 595 and Rs. 640 a kg.

Total arrivals during the season up to August 1 stood at 23,397 tonnes against 22,060 tonnes during the same period last year.

The sales were at 22,770 tonnes and 21,311 tonnes respectively.

The auction average as on August 1 stood at Rs. 625/kg against Rs. 765.

Prices of graded varieties (Rs. /kg): 8mm bold good colour 850-950; 7-8 mm 720-750; 6-7 mm 600-630; below 6 mm: 560-600.

Tea imports from Lanka on the rise

Tea imports from Sri Lanka have been rising steadily in last few months despite India being the second largest producer in the world.

The strong domestic demand for quality tea and opportunity to re-export Lankan tea to other markets has pushed up imports in the first half of this year. Shipments from Sri Lanka increased multi-fold between January and June this year to 2,930 tonnes against 352 tonnes logged in the same period last year. In value terms it was up seven times at Rs. 418 crore (SL Rs. 2,005 million) against Rs. 50 crore (SL Rs. 244 million) recorded in the first six months of last year.

Sampath Perera, Director, Sri Lanka Tea Board, said some of the speciality teas such as Orthodox tea, Ceylon super pekoe black tea, Ceylon green tea and instant tea have gained huge traction in India with changing lifestyles and large-scale urbanisation.

“According to trade sources, we hear that India has started barter trade with Iran due to currency exchange restriction on the back of economic sanctions. Hence, Indian tea exporters have been re-exporting Ceylon orthodox tea to Iran for oil,” he said.

With Indian tea producers giving preference to exports, there is shortage of good quality premium tea forcing Indian branded tea companies to buy premium tea from Sri Lanka and Kenya.

According to Commerce Ministry data, India’s tea imports in value terms grew 33 per cent during 2014-15 to Rs. 381.58 crore over the previous year’s Rs. 284.96 crore.

However, the domestic tea industry is unperturbed by the surge in tea imports from Sri Lanka. As part of the free trade agreement with Sri Lanka, the island nation can export up to 15 million kg (mkg) or 15,000 tonnes at concessional duty to India.

Sri Lanka is the largest producer and exporter of the orthodox black tea in the world. Russia is the single largest buyer of Ceylon Tea and with other CIS countries the region accounts for 24 per cent or 75 mkg of the annual Sri Lanka tea export volume.

India is a leading producer of black tea in the world with an annual production of about 1,100-1,200 mkg and exported around 200 mkg last year.

Price crash pushes sericulture farmers towards suicide



Red, red silk A view of Chandrikes, the make-shift platforms made from bamboo and coconut leaves on which the silk worms are placed to form cocoons, in the interiors of Channapatna taluk in Ramanagara district, Karnataka. GRN SOMASHEKAR

Unable to deal with mounting debts amidst diminishing returns from his three-acre farm, Siddaramu, a sericulture farmer in his mid-fifties at Abburdoddi near Channapatna, committed suicide recently in his silkworm rearing house.

The trigger for this unfortunate incident was the crash in silk cocoon prices and the issuance of recovery notice by the bank, says Chandramma, his wife.

Other crops too failed

Siddaramu, like many other small and mid-sized farmers in the region, practiced multi-cropping, and to his bad luck the alternative crops such as maize and coconut have also suffered in recent years.

While mite infestation and declining water levels have hit the coconut plantations, maize prices have been bearish over past couple of years on excess supplies. “He had raised about Rs. 3 lakh as loan from the bank, part of which was used for sinking a borewell that failed. Also, a couple of lakhs were raised through hand loans,” said Chandramma.

Siddaramu’s suicide is not an isolated case of small farmers succumbing to the growing financial distress in the region.

In neighbouring Mandya, the sugar bowl of South Karnataka, over three dozen farmers, some of whom practiced sericulture have taken to committing suicide, which has reached epidemic proportions in the State.

“Ten of the 11 farmers who committed suicide in Ramanagara district in recent months practiced sericulture,” said C Puttaswamy, a farmer leader. “The situation is very grave. The Government should formulate both short and long term measures to protect the silk worm growers,” said Puttaswamy, an office bearer of Reshme Belagarara Hitarakshana Samiti.

Troubles for the sericulture farmers started intensifying over past three months ever since the Centre reduced the customs duty on raw silk imports to 10 per cent from the earlier 15 per cent, after which prices of both cocoons and the domestically produced raw silk have crashed.

Customs duty cut

Prices of the cross breed (CB) cocoons have dropped from an average of Rs. 267 per kg in April to around Rs. 148 in May only to recover later to Rs. 226 in

early August, while the bivoltine variety have slumped from an average of Rs. 311 to around Rs. 237 in the same period.

The minimum price for CB variety fell to as low as Rs. 120/kg. In 2014-15, the average price for CB stood at Rs. 274, while for bivoltine it was Rs. 285 a kg.

Growers say the prices are much below the production cost estimated between Rs. 265 and Rs. 350, depending on the variety.

State's support price

Following a spate of protests and highway blockages by the silkworm rearers across key producing regions, the Karnataka government intervened and announced a support of Rs. 30 a kg over and above the auction price for the cross breed cocoon, while for the superior bivoltine variety, the support price has been fixed at Rs. 50.

Also, the State has set up a technical expert committee to study the current crisis, fix the cost of production for cocoons and recommend measures for the revival and stability of the sector.

The committee is expected to submit its report soon. Karnataka accounts for about two thirds of the raw silk produced in the country.

“The Centre should immediately restore the customs duty to 15 per cent and set up a revolving fund of Rs. 500 crore to intervene as and when the price falls below a threshold,” said C Narayanaswami, Chairman of Silk Association of India, an outfit representing the entire chain of growers and reelers.

Farmers switch over

Dejected over the recent price crash, farmers are not keen in continuing with sericulture and are looking at alternatives such as vegetables.

There have been stray instances of farmers uprooting mulberry plantations across the key growing districts of Kolar, Ramanagaram and even Chikkaballapur .

Business Standard

Vegetable prices up on lower supply



[Vegetable](#) prices shot up sharply in the last one month due to supply disruptions in major producing centres following heavy rainfall that affected the plying of trucks.

While bitter gourd is costlier by 140 per cent in one month and was trading at Rs 2,400-3,200 a quintal on Monday, [cauliflower](#) and [brinjal](#) firmed by 117 per cent and 67 per cent, respectively, to Rs 1,300-1,600 a quintal and Rs 1,000-1,200 a quintal.

Vegetable sowing was initially disrupted in Maharashtra and Gujarat by two dry weeks in July and thereafter floods in Gujarat and heavy rainfall in Maharashtra damaged seedlings. Traders estimate lower vegetable output this year.

An official with the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC), Vashi, near Mumbai said there was no need to push the panic button.

“In the absence of customers, vegetables’ prices decline. They rise when customer turnout is higher. Arrivals have been normal,” he said on condition of anonymity.

Data compiled by the National Horticulture Board (NHB) showed arrivals of brinjal in Mumbai’s mandi had declined to 62 tonnes from 84 tonnes a month ago. Similarly, arrivals of cabbage slumped to 170 tonnes today from 195 tonnes on July 3.

The deluge in Gujarat has disrupted supply of vegetables from the state. Arrivals from other states have also declined significantly.

Sanjay Bhujbal, a trader in Vashi, attributed the sudden spurt in vegetable prices to high production cost. "Seed prices have gone up by 10-15%. Also, labour cost has doubled due to non availability of farm labour. So, farmers have no choice but to sell vegetables at high prices. This level of price will continue for two-four weeks until new season arrivals being in September," said Bhujbal.

VEGETABLES ON BOIL

Prices in ₹/quintal

Particulars	July 3	August 3	Change (%)
Bitter gourd	1,000-1,800	2,400-3,200	140
Cauliflower	600-1,200	1,300-1,600	117
Onion*	1,625	3,250	100
Potato#	1,300	2,200	69
Brinjal	600-1,000	1,000-1,200	67
Ladies finger	1,000-1,200	1,400-1,800	40
Pumpkin	1,000-1,600	1,300-1,800	30
Carrot	800-1,200	1,000-1,400	25
Cucumber	1,400-1,600	1,600-2,000	14

* Price for Lasalgaon mandi, # Price for Bhivandi (Maharashtra) wholesale market, % calculated on lower range

Source : APMC, Vashi, National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation

Nath Seeds' Managing Director Satish Kagliwal confirmed that seed prices had gone up in those areas where rainfall remained short.

Onion prices in the retail market here jumped to Rs 50 a kg on Monday, a rise of Rs 20 a kg, or 67 per cent, in the last one month. Total arrivals of

onion were reported at 64.5 tonnes here on Monday against 90 tonnes a month ago.

"The season between July and September is crucial for vegetable prices as supply declines normally due to fewer trucks to ferry commodities from warehouses in the hinterland. Truckers fear being stalled in mud," said Samir Inamdar, an okra stockist in the Vashi mandi.

NHB data showed okra supply to the mandi here declined to 11.2 tonnes on Monday from 14.2 tonnes a month ago.

Monsoon to remain weak in August-September: IMD

India's southwest monsoon in the remaining two months of the four-month season, that is in August and September, is expected to be below normal at 84 per cent of the long-period average (LPA) as El Niño weather conditions have

strengthened in the past few months, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday. The forecast is with a model error of plus and minus eight per cent.



“The latest forecast from ESSO-IMD and IITM coupled model indicates 72 per cent probability of El Niño conditions to become strong during the remaining part of the monsoon season,” the Met department said in its statement. There is 86 per cent chance of rainfall being below normal in the second half, IMD said.

For the full season (June to September) IMD has retained its June forecast of rains being 88 per cent of the LPA, which is deficient. For August, the Met department said that rainfall is expected to be 90 per cent of the LPA with a model error of plus and minus nine per cent, same as June’s forecast.

Private weather forecasting agency Skymet, too, lowered its full season forecast for the 2015 southwest monsoon season from 102 per cent of LPA to 98 per cent, with a model error of plus and minus four per cent.

“Taking cognisance of the July rains and the updated forecast for August and September, we are revising the monsoon forecast to 98 per cent of LPA from 102 per cent,” said Jatin Singh, chief executive officer, Skymet. For August, Skymet said that rains would be 92 per cent of LPA and for September it would be 112 per cent of LPA. These forecasts are with a model error of plus and minus nine per cent.

The southwest monsoon entered India after a delay of almost five days in June, but then picked up pace and covered the entire country ahead of schedule. In June, the country received 16 per cent surplus rains. This not only aided sowing

of kharif crops, but also belied fears of a widespread drought across the country.

“With this forecast, sowing of kharif crops could only get impacted in those areas where it had not rained adequately so far like Marathwada, Telangana etc. The final harvest of certain crops like coarse cereals and pulses might get impacted if rains are not sufficient in August and September. Though, I feel the situation is not alarming,” said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, CARE Rating. The momentum in rains continued though there were occasional breaks in between. Even though July ended with a shortfall of almost 15 per cent, because of spread and distribution of the showers, there was no let-up in sowing.

According to data from the department of agriculture till July 31, kharif crops have been planted in about 76.42 million hectares, which is 8.64 per cent more than the corresponding period last year.

TAKING A RAIN CHECK

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- For August, the Met department said that rainfall is expected to be 90 per cent of the LPA with a model error of plus and minus nine per cent, same as June’s forecast
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Centre peels layers off onion hoarding



The Centre has directed all state governments to take immediate action against hoarding and black-marketing of onions in view of the sudden increase in prices in some centres. It is also in process of importing 10,000 tonnes of the same to curb price rise.

"We have taken several measures to check prices of onion in the last few weeks. We have tendered for import of 10,000 tonnes of onions, which will help increase supplies in the market," Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan told reporters here. Nafed has floated a tender for onion imports and the bids will be finalised this week, he said.

Stating that hoarders get active during this lean period of July-September, Paswan said, "We have imposed stockholding limits on onion. So far, three states have imposed stock limits. We have asked states to strengthen enforcement efforts and crack down on hoarders and profiteers."

Last year too, timely action by state governments against hoarders had helped contain prices.

Officials said though the Centre has given power to the states to impose stock limits on onions as per their convenience, just three states have imposed stockholding limits. Besides, the government is also expected to issue a tender to import 10,000 tonnes of onions this week to tide over the shortfall. Officials said it has also directed the states to utilise the services of its agencies to sell onions in the open market.

Nafed and other agencies are expected to intervene in the markets to sell onions at reasonable rates.

Retail price of onions in most major markets of country have increased by an average of Rs 10 a kilo in the last one month mainly due to unprecedented rains in eastern India and Rajasthan, which damaged some of the standing crop and also made transportation of the commodity difficult.

Much of the rabi (winter) onion crop is stored to meet the demand in the lean period. But this year, most of the onion kept in storage is of poor quality as the rabi crop got damaged due to unseasonal rains in early March.

About 3 million tonnes of stored onions is left in the domestic market to cater to the demand till September. Total onion production is estimated to be 18.9 million tonnes in 2014-15 crop year (July-June), slightly lower than 19.4 million tonnes in the year-ago period.