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THE HINDU

‘Chemical pesticides a threat to soil health’

Excessive use of chemical pesticide by farmers is not only increasing the input cost for them, but also taking a toll on the soil health, which determines the crop yield and quality of produce, S.N. Sushil, Plant Protection Adviser to the Department of Plant Protection, Quarantine and Storage of the Ministry of Agriculture, has said.

Mr. Sushil spoke to *The Hindu* on the sideline of an interactive session with farmers held recently at Tatiparthi village where a pilot project on ‘Responsive Use of Pesticides and Container Management’ was launched by the Crop Life India, in association with the Ministry of Agriculture. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, the project is being implemented in another three States.

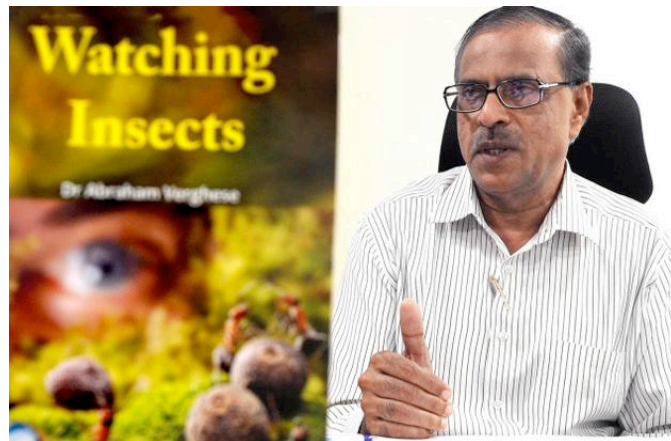
Farmers continue to use chemical pesticide in excess owing to lack of awareness, Mr. Sushil said, adding that it is high time ryots be educated on the use of pesticides and use of bio-pesticide should be promoted. “The use of bio-pesticide has increased from 123 metric tonnes to 6,000 metric tonnes per annum in the country in the last 20 years. But, at the same time, farmers are using 60,000 metric tonnes of chemical pesticide in a year too,” Mr. Sushil points out.

However, he mentioned that promotion of bio-pesticide is a big challenge as most of the farmers are uneducated and adapting a new innovation is difficult for them. “Even as detailed instructions of bio-pesticides are given by the manufacturers, uneducated farmers can’t make use of it,” he said.

Drawing a comparison between chemical and biological pesticide, Mr. Sushil said the biggest advantage with the latter is it is eco-friendly. “Bio-pesticide does not harm the farm-friendly insects which is the case with chemical pesticide. Speaking on the container management Mr. Sushil advised farmers that pesticide containers should not be burnt, but be buried after proper rinsing.

“Before burying empty containers, farmers have to crush them to prevent their reuse,” he says.

A peek into ‘urban wildlife’



Abraham Verghese, the author of ‘Watching Insects’, interacting with The Hindu in Bengaluru on Thursday.— Photo: Sudhakara Jain

THE CREEPY AND THE CRAWLY
COMMONLY FOUND INSECTS
● Grasshoppers
● Praying Mantis
● Shield Bugs
● Cicads
● Spit Bug – Poophilus
INTERESTING FACTS
About 70 per cent of all animals are insects
Only about one per cent of all insects are harmful
Ants don't sleep
House flies find sugar with their feet, which are 10 million times more sensitive than human tongues
There are more kinds of beetles than all plants
There are as many ant species as there are birds
The weights of all termites on earth put together is 10 times more than the weight of all humans

Book to raise awareness about the insect world brought out

Have you ever noticed blobs of spit in the grass at a park or in the lawns in your backyard? You will be surprised to know that those little blobs are actually insects. Poophilus or spit bug is just one of the varied species of insects that are part of the “urban wildlife”.

Just by sitting quietly in the park or in one's own backyard, one can observe the urban wildlife that includes many forms of bugs, ants and butterflies.

“There are over 60,000 species of insects that have been identified in India alone and over one lakh that are yet to be identified,” pointed out Abraham Verghese, director of the National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources (NBAIR).

“It is only a few years ago that a butterfly park was established here. However, a butterfly park was established in Singapore around 25 years ago. India is yet to pick up insect watching as a hobby,” he said.

He said that barring exceptions like mosquitoes, flies, cockroaches, bed bugs, head lice and fleas, a vast majority of insects are either useful or interesting. “The best way of appreciating the natural history is to watch the most abundant creatures in the environment – insects. Insects form almost two-thirds of all moving animals,” he said. To encourage people, especially students, to go out and observe the insect world, a book – *Watching Insects* - has been brought out. “This is an attempt to popularise insect watching.” While the paperback version is available at Rs. 899 on Amazon and Flipkart, the e-book (colour) is priced lower at Rs. 300, while the black and white version is Rs. 100.

Do you need help identifying some insect? Just click a photo and email it to the National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources (NBAIR). The bureau will identify the insect for you and send you information. Even a mobile phone photo will suffice. Citizens can send photos to todirectornbair@gmail.com or browse the database at (<http://www.nbair.res.in>).

Mechanical sowing of groundnut seeds gains popularity

The Agriculture Department has taken initiative for popularising mechanical planting of seeds in groundnut cultivation in the district.

A target of 1,000 hectares had been fixed during the current ‘Aadi pattam’ of which 400 hectares had already been covered under the subsidy-based scheme, according to B. Manoharan, Joint Director of Agriculture. About 50 hectares had been covered in Ariyalur block, 100 in Jayamkondam and 250 in Andimadam block.

“We have been motivating farmers to take to mechanical planting of groundnut seeds to minimise labour and also for ensuring higher rate of germination,” he said explaining the special campaign being organised in the district to sensitise the farmers to this scheme. The department had identified as many as 18 entrepreneurs from whom the machinery would be hired for planting the seeds.

The department has been experimenting with a new variety of groundnut for enhancing yield. “Against the conventional seeds of VRI 2 and TMV 7, the department has introduced ‘GPPD 4’ in select villages with higher irrigation facility in the district,” said R. Mohan, Agriculture Officer, Ariyalur.

Many farmers have come forward to use the new seed, that too using mechanical sowing of seeds. “Thus, we achieve our twin objectives of introducing new variety and popularising the mechanical planting of seeds,” Mr. Mohan said.

The duration of the crop is 130 days and per hectare yield would be one tonne in rain-fed areas and 1.5 tonnes in irrigated fields.

“Machines are available at all blocks in the district and the needy farmers can contact the nearest Agriculture office,” they said.

Aavin plans dairy at Padalur

It is expected to benefit about 30,000 farmers

A new milk dairy of the Aavin being established at Padalur in Perambalur district is expected to come as boon to milk producers in Perambalur and Ariyalur districts.

The two districts are currently under Tiruchi District Cooperative Milk Producers Union (Aavin) and the establishment of the dairy would help process over one lakh litres of milk procured everyday from producers in the two districts.

The State government has sanctioned Rs.36.28 crore for establishing the dairy and had laid the foundation stone for the project on July 15.

The dairy would come up in an area of 23 acres at Padalur and civil works are under way in full swing for establishing the necessary infrastructure.

The dairy would have a capacity to handle about one lakh litres a day and about 30,000 farmers would benefit from the dairy, according to Collector Darez Ahamed.

The dairy would have modern processing equipment including a chilling plant, officials said.

Aavin officials here said that the Tiruchi union had about 702 milk producers' cooperative societies under its jurisdiction and nearly half of the four lakh litres procured by the union every day came from Perambalur and Ariyalur districts.

The two districts had about 320 milk producers' cooperative societies. Perambalur was a district with high potential for milk production and hence it would be of much help to milk producers there, officials added.

The establishment of the dairy at Padalur would allow the Tiruchi union to process more milk at its Tiruchi dairy and benefit producers here too, said N. Ganesan, Joint Secretary, Tamil Nadu Milk Producers' Welfare Association.

Chilling plant

“The new chilling plant would help faster packaging and delivery of milk procured locally. A milk power making unit should be set up at the dairy,” he said.

· *23 acres of land has been identified at Padalur*

· *It will have a capacity to handle one lakh litres*

Farmers get advice to improve yield, enhance income at Kharif preseason camp

Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan released a guide on Kharif at a preseason camp held at the Agriculture Research Centre at Thirupatisagaram near Nagercoil on Wednesday.

The camp was organised jointly by the Regional Directorate of Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR).

Presiding over the Kharif pre-season camp, Mr. Sajjansingh R. Chavan said that the district administration would back all efforts of farmers to have a bountiful samba and thalady paddy crop in the district.

Timely water release as ordered by the State Government would also help the farmers in achieving their targets, he added.

Scientists exhorted the farmers to go in for value addition to the farm products by treating agriculture as an industry to maximise income from the field and make the venture more profitable. By doing so, the farmers could reap benefits in a better and easy fashion.

Pointing out that adopting recent scientific technologies and practices would pave the way for more profitability, farmers were called upon to go in for farm mechanisation in a big way to ease their burden.

Such pre-season awareness camps would help to showcase technologies and advancements. Integrated farming practices would augment revenue generation and be of great help to the farmers.

J. Sujatha, Professor and Head, Agriculture Research Centre said that farmers were given farm advice on cultivating paddy, coconut, flowers and were also given required training.

Farmers were asked to participate in various training programmes conducted by the centre.

P. Ilango, Joint Director of Agriculture, Kannan, Assistant Director of Horticulture, P. Anandaraja, Executive Engineer, Agriculture Engineering Department among others spoke.

Over 200 farmers participated in the Kharif pre-season camp.

New dam: farmers happy

Farmers expressed their happiness over Centre's rejection of a proposal of the Kerala government on construction of new dam at Mullai Periyar before Periyar dam here on Thursday and were in praise for the just and impartial stand taken by the Central Government in this connection.

The Periyar Dam Retrieval and Safety Committee president Ranjith said that Central government's decision was a victory and recognition to the genuine struggle of the people in the State.

Now, Kerala should realise its mistake and explain the reality behind the dam issue to the people in Idukki district and allay their fears over dam safety.

Even as the people in Idukki district knew well about strength of the dam, politicians spread fear among the people. Such activities should be stopped, he added.

Uthamapalayam farmers' association president A. Dharvesh Mohideen said that the Centre's decision was a reflection of truth and reality. It has taken the right decision. Kerala should change its attitude and help Tamil Nadu in strengthening the baby dam to raise its storage level to 152 feet.

The Centre has rejected Kerala government's proposal for a new dam at Mullai Periyar stating that giving approval for the new dam would amount to condemnation of the court as the case was still under the consideration of the apex court.

Farmers' helpline

A helpline has been established for farmers coming under Bengaluru Rural District to file their complaints relating to harassment from financial institutions/moneylenders. Farmers can lodge their complaints to the Police Department by sending an SMS to 9480802400 or by calling 22256767; Agriculture Department on 26711594; or the Department of Cooperation on 23446272, 27622077. A four-member team comprising representatives from various departments has been formed at the taluk and district level to attend to the complaints, said a release from the Deputy Commissioner of the Bengaluru Rural District.

e-Kisan Foundation reaches out to farmers

Moved by the increasing number of farmers' suicide in the State, the e-Kisan Foundation, a non-governmental organisation, has decided to extend a helping hand to farmers.

The foundation had for the first time in the country, distributed Tablets that have applications related to agriculture.

Under the 'Namma Raita' project, it had distributed about 1500 Tablets to farmers of Vijayapura and Bagalkot districts for free.

The Tablet has some 24 different applications. "We want to extend our services to farmers to prevent the suicides by providing them required help and education," said Alok Sulakhe, project manager of e-Kisan.

The foundation proposes to reach out to 10,000 farmers' families by the year-end through the Tablets distributed.

"We will form a Model Club, through which we will try to contact the farmers to hear their grievances and give solutions through a toll-free number or via SMS," he said.

Food safety certificates for TN vendors

Fruit and vegetable vendors from Tamil Nadu who take their produce to Kerala are now being given food safety certificates by the Health Department in the wake of complaints of high pesticide residue from that State.

Thirty vendors have been issued the certificate from the Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration and 250 others have applied for it, department sources said.

The department will carry out physical verification of shops and quality of produce before issuing certificates to ensure there were no more complaints from end users, they said. The Kerala government had expressed concern over reported high levels of pesticide coming into the State and stated that vehicles carrying vegetables from other States would be monitored at check-posts. Chief

Minister Oommen Chandy had written to his counterparts in TN, Karnataka, and Andhra regarding the issue

Karshakajyothi to launch pesticide-free vegetable market

Move aimed at spreading awareness among public



A project management implementation committee meeting of Karshakajyothi, a farmer club sponsored jointly by the NABARD and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, has decided to open a pesticide-free fruit and vegetable market here from August 19 to August 20.

Wayanad district was self-sufficient in vegetable production till a few decades ago, but now the district is depending for vegetable and fruits from neighbouring districts in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Many a time the pesticide-residue in agriculture produce is higher than the recommended dosage. The consumption of such produce may lead to many health issues among the public and attaining self-sufficiency in pesticide-free produce is the sole remedy to address the issue, says P. Ramakrishnan, training coordinator of the Karshakajyothi farmer club.

“The market is envisaging to promote pesticide-free vegetables and fruits being produced by the members of the club and supply it to the public at a nominal price by avoiding the intervention of middlemen. It is also aimed at sensitising the public on the significance of consuming pesticide-free agricultural produces,” Mr. Ramakrishnan says.

The club was able to train as many as 6,000 farmers in the district in precision organic farming, zero budget farming and precision farming since its inception

in 2011, he adds. Many trained farmers were following organic cultivation practices and have been able to set a successful model in pesticide-free cultivation for the farming community in the district to emulate, he says.

- *Vegetable, fruit market to function on August 19, 20*
- *Farmer club has trained 6,000 farmers since 2011*

Hortcorp licensees on the warpath

Hortcorp authorities accused of bid to weaken vegetable distribution network

The Hortcorp licensees in the district have threatened indefinite strike against the authorities who were allegedly colluding with private vegetable trader lobbies to undermine the Hortcorp vegetable distribution network in the district.

The State Horticultural Products Development Corporation (Hortcorp) outlets are part of a scheme launched by the government to ensure safe-to-eat quality vegetables for a fair price to the people across the State.

Negligence alleged

However, the mechanism is in “complete jeopardy” due to the negligence of the authorities in the district here, said office-bearers of a collective of Hortcorp licensees.

The licensees have alleged that the Hortcorp authorities were fixing the vegetable price higher than the market price making the Hortcorp outlets unattractive to customers. “Two years ago the prices were quite attractive to the people, but not any more,” said M. Madhu, convener of the licensees collective.

‘No action yet’

Though the issue was brought to the notice of the authorities, including the Agriculture Minister, no action was taken yet, he said.

The collective had earlier staged a token strike in front of the HortiCorp regional office here to highlight the issue. Instead of taking any corrective action, the authorities had resorted to taking revengeful actions against the licensees by cancelling the licenses of around 35 people in the district, Mr. Madhu said. “This cannot be justified by any means,” he said adding that the collective would launch an indefinite strike soon.


Training programme on horticulture

The Horticulture Department is conducting a training programme on ‘Protected cultivation: high value flowers and vegetables’ on August 9 at the Exhibition Society Hall, Autonagar.

Horticulture scientist Raavi Chandrasekhar from Hyderabad will conduct the training programme. He will be discussing training modules on poly-house and net house techniques. Officials will also speak on subsidies being offered to farmers. Those interested in participating should have land and borewell facility, a press release stated. For details one may contact: 0866-2492665 / 8187890470

Rice procurement may be below 50 per cent this year

Poor rainfall badly crippled farm operations

SHORTAGE OF CROP		
		<p>The socio-economic survey of Telangana for 2015 showed that the productivity of rice during kharif of 2014-15 had already decreased to 3,054 kgs per hectare as against 3,227 kgs per hectare during the same period of 2013-14.</p>
<p>The productivity of rice crop was almost stable during the period 2009-10 to 2014-15 (prior to kharif)</p>	<p>Normal paddy production in Telangana during regular monsoons was 42 lakh metric tonnes.</p>	<p>Farmers retain 10 lakh MTs of rice for personal consumption and seed requirements</p>
<p>State government has taken up procurement of rice through Indira Kranti Patham centres</p>		

The Telangana government is bracing up to the prospect of less than 50 per cent procurement of rice from farmers this year in the backdrop of poor rainfall which has badly crippled agricultural operations across the State.

Officials of civil supplies estimate that the procurement of rice at minimum support price might not cross 14 lakh metric tonnes (MTs) against a production of 20 to 25 lakh MTs in kharif. It could be even less in rabi when the cropped area will shrink because the sowing will be largely confined to ayacut serviced by reservoirs and other water sources while a larger area is cultivated in rain-fed kharif.

Sources said normal paddy production in Telangana during regular monsoons was about 42 lakh MTs, but the procurement of rice at MSP after milling was about 30 lakh MTs. The farmers retained 10 lakh MTs of rice for personal consumption and seed requirements.

The government took up procurement of rice through Indira Kranti Patham centres manned by women of self-help groups, primary agricultural cooperative societies and district cooperative marketing societies. A five-member committee of officers headed by Principal Secretary Vinod Kumar Agarwal has decided to continue the same method of procurement this year, pending a final decision on how to proceed in view of zero levy of rice to come into force at the national level from October 1. The committee is also exploring other options like handing over the process to private players on the basis of bidding after dividing the State into 25 clusters and giving procurement rights directly to millers. In any case, the government has decided to improve agreements with millers with the assistance of Centre for Good Governance which has been asked to draft a model contract, a senior official said. Meanwhile, the government will go ahead with rationalising services at fair price shops before October 1 with the mandate that these outlets handle 1,000 to 2,000 ration cards in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits, 800 to 1,000 cards in district headquarters and other major towns, 600 to 800 cards in urban centres and up to 600 cards in villages. The commission for fair price shop owners will go up from 20 paise to 70 paise per kg of any item sold.

Move to increase area of onion cultivation



Farmers purchasing onion seed from a shop in Khammam on Thursday. -- Photo: G.N. Rao

In a move aimed at expanding the area under onion cultivation in the district, the Horticulture Department has initiated a special drive to augment production of onions and income of farmers for addressing scarcity of the precious commodity in the local market.

The move is intended to double the area under onion cultivation from the present little over 100 acres spread in a few mandals mostly in Khammam division to over 200 acres across the district by the next agricultural season.

Onion cultivation is presently confined to a few pockets in Bonakal, Mudigonda, Kusumanchi and some other mandals in Khammam division.

The Horticulture Department has come up with a string of initiatives, including supply of high-yielding hybrid variety of onion seeds at a subsidy of 75 per cent and provision of buy-back arrangement.

Increase in subsidy

The State government has reportedly increased the subsidy on onion seeds from 50 per cent to 75 per cent as part of the new initiative to enhance onion production for minimising dependence on neighbouring States for onion supplies.

The Horticulture Department has devised an action plan to encourage farmers take up onion cultivation to meet the huge demand for onions in the domestic market and deal with the recurring problem of spurt in prices of the essential commodity.

Onions of various hybrid varieties can be grown in the district, which is endowed with fertile soil and climatic conditions, said J Marianna, Assistant Director-I, Horticulture Department, Khammam.

An action plan has been prepared to motivate farmers take up onion cultivation by availing the increased subsidy of 75 per cent, he said, adding that the onion seeds were kept ready in the respective offices of the horticulture officers concerned in the district.



58% rainfall in district so far; crop condition good

The Kolhapur district has received 58% of its average annual rainfall till the first week of August this season. Despite deficit rainfall, the condition of crops remains good owing to intermittent showers in July, said the officials of the agriculture department.

The district received average rainfall of 1,700 mm annually. The talukas situated in the Western Ghats such as Radhanagari, Gaganbavda, Shahuwadi and Chandgad receive more than 3,000 mm rainfall every year. By July-end, almost all areas in the district witness more than 70% of their annual average rainfall. However, even Gaganbavda has not received 50% of its average rainfall.

"The rainfall has been consistent in most of the areas in the last four days, which has helped the crops. Barring soyabean and groundnut, which were a hit this year, 91% sowing of other crops will be completed this week," said Mohan Atole, district agriculture officer.

Atole said sowing of paddy in the western and southern areas have been completed up to 95%, while that of other crops is about 91-93% finished. "The intermittent rainfall may bring pests. Hence, we have asked the farmers to keep using deterrents. We will conduct a review again next week," he added.

Meanwhile, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday held a video conference with all the divisional heads, who presented him an overall picture of the state. In the Pune division, Sangli and Solapur have received minimum rainfall, while Pune and Satara have reached to their annual average target.

The officials said the catchment areas of Radhanagari and Warna dams have been receiving good rainfall. The dams are filled up to more than 80% till Thursday night. Kalamawadi, another major dam in the district, has around 62% water storage, said Vijay Patil, executive engineer of the Kolhapur irrigation division.

Now, postmasters to help farmers sell their produce online

If you are a farmer looking to sell paddy, cotton, or any other farm produce, take it to the post office. India's postal department is set to launch a pilot programme that seeks to help farmers sell their produce over the internet, that too without spending a paisa on transport. The plan is to deploy postmasters in villages to collate details from farmers on their produce and upload the data online for traders to peruse and make decisions.

India Post, which is taking up the role of a mediator here, will launch the pilot project in two locations in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana over the next couple of weeks, said BV Sudhakar, the chief postmaster general of the circle covering the two Telugu-speaking states.

The initiative is part of India Post's efforts to put its vast network of post offices and employees into use at a time when the advent of emails and proliferation of mobile phones, instant chat apps and express courier services made its core

service of delivering letters mostly irrelevant. The department's new areas of interest include financial services and insurance. It is also exploring new-age business opportunities to generate revenue.

Under the new project, postmasters will use smartphones to take photos of the farm commodities and upload the details on a website that will act as a trading platform.

"While it is free for farmers, India Post will collect a nominal fee from the buyers, apart from stipulating a condition that buyers should use the services of India Post for transporting the farm commodity to the required destination," Sudhakar told ET. Terming it a first of its kind initiative and a win-win for both farmers and traders, Sudhakar said that, based on the results of pilot project, the postal department will decide on extending the service across the country.

An Andhra-based firm, NGIT Systems, has built the trading platform for India Post. The company has experience in developing online platforms for farmers to sell, buy and lease farms, crops, manures, cattle and farming equipment.

The idea of launching an agri-commodity trading platform was arrived at as part of India Post's asset maximization strategy wherein it plans on improving revenue from its existing human and physical assets, including logistics network, said Sudhakar.

India Post is looking at strengthening its logistics infrastructure connecting various commodity markets in AP and Telangana and between Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru using some 500 trucks, said Sudhakar.

Aimed at encouraging the postmasters in villages to participate in the new initiative and help improve revenue, the department is devising a special incentives package and increasing the fleet size based on demand. The department expects to cover at least a third of these states and is targeting a

minimum Rs 10 crore in revenue from agri-commodity trading in the first year.

Sudhakar, who took up several innovative schemes in the circle that were later replicated across the country, said he was confident of the circle posting a marginal profit this fiscal year. Effectively using the services of 40,000-plus employees working across 16,155 post offices, the circle improved the average per employee revenue to Rs 3.15 lakh last fiscal year from Rs 2.43 lakh the previous year.

Telangana may face severe shortage of rice

A severe rice crisis looms large over Telangana this Kharif. Thanks to the prolonged dry spell, farmers have been able to sow paddy in only about 2.5 lakh acres as against the normal acreage of 25 lakh during the season. Normally, Telangana produces about 33 lakh tonnes of rice, but under this year's conditions this could come down to below 5 lakh tonnes! And such a severe shortfall would force the government import huge quantities of rice from other states to meet the demand.

According to agriculture officials, the Kharif sowings had technically come to an end on July 31, though farmers usually continue the operation till August 10. Only if the monsoon turns active and brings in good rainfall in the next five days can the Kharif season be sustained this year.

"This is the crucial period for Kharif. If we do not get good rainfall before August 10, we will have to lose all our hope. Since paddy is a water intensive crop, the yield will be affected. We will know the exact output of paddy only at the end of the season. But this Kharif will surely turn out to be a bad season," a senior official in the Telangana agriculture department told TOI.

The official said that if the monsoon revives after the second week of August, it will be beneficial for the next season. "Farmers can go for an early Rabi season and prepare for groundnut, Bengal gram, horse gram and other crops. It all

depends on the groundwater level during the Rabi. The Rabi season will also be affected if the water table does not recharge sufficiently," he cautioned.

Meanwhile, CPM-affiliated Rythu Sangham's general secretary, S Malla Reddy, said the state is facing one of the worst droughts in recent years. "The early rains this monsoon could not benefit the farmers much though it helped the dry crops to some extent. Paddy cultivation has been affected beyond the point of recovery. Even if the state gets good rainfall during August, it will not sustain the standing crop," he said, adding that only 10 per cent of the total paddy area has been sown so far.

The prolonged drought and the near-failure of the Kharif has triggered massive migration of the agricultural workforce from the state. "We have gathered data from all the districts in Telangana. About 13.5 lakh people have migrated to other states in search of livelihood. But unfortunately, the state government has not come out with a scientific plan to safeguard the interests of farmers and farm hands," Malla Reddy said.

The state disaster management department, in the meantime, said Telangana received a deficit rainfall of minus 21 per cent so far this monsoon. As against the normal rainfall of 396.2 mm, the state received only 313 mm till August 5. Farmers took up cultivation of various crops in 29.64 lakh hectares as against the normal sown area of 41.43 lakh hectares. Only 72 per cent of the crop area was sown and even half of that has dried up due to the prolonged drought conditions.

Adding to the woes of the farmers, all dams across the rivers Krishna and Godavari are nearly empty as there have been no rains in the catchment areas. Only the Pulichintala dam has a little storage.

No PDS rice too

Rice prices may go up in the coming months as the central government is reportedly planning to do away with the supply of 15 lakh tonnes of rice to the state under the Public Distribution Scheme. Instead, it plans to extend the direct cash transfer benefit to ration card holders.

'Grow crops in line with rain pattern'

It is the government that must guide farmers to ensure that crops grown are suited to the semi-arid rainfed farming pattern in the state, 'waterman of India' Rajender Singh advised on Wednesday.

Rajender Singh, who won the Stockholm Water Prize this year and is credited with bringing water management in semi-arid areas to the forefront of national consciousness, said, "The government must bear in mind the relationship between rain and crop pattern. It must follow the agro-ecological conditions of the area. The Telangana government must take a little more care of its farmers." He was speaking with reporters after meeting irrigation minister T Harish Rao.

On the use of groundwater, on which bulk of agriculture in the state depends, Rajender Singh said the government must not allow commercial exploitation of the resource. "Existing companies that utilise groundwater must be strictly monitored and no new permissions must be given," he said.

Any bulk extraction of groundwater does not bode well for the farming community, the water conservationist said. Sounding a word of caution, he said the government must never believe a company that promises to recharge the aquifer. "No company has done that in the country so far. Instead, they add to pollution of water bodies," he said.

Rajender Singh said that Telangana, being a new state, is not shackled by powerful political lobbies that favour water-intensive crops. This is the case in

Maharashtra which is also water stressed but the government is unable to overcome the strong political sugarcane lobby, he said.

On Mission Kakatiya, Rajender Singh was all praise and called the programme the best water conservation model in the country at present. "When the government and society are involved in a programme, the people will keep a watch to ensure transparency," he said. When minister Harish Rao explained that the government was planning a new law on the lines of the Forest Act which provides for automatic punishment for violations, a visibly excited Rajender Singh welcomed the move. "This is the way to protect water bodies from encroachment," he said.

Yogendra Yadav launches kisan andolan in west UP

Taking up the cause of farmers on a war footing, former Aam Aadmi Party leader Yogendra Yadav launched a 'Kisan andolan' in western UP on Thursday and said social activist Anna Hazare had also pledged support for his movement.

The founder of the newly-formed social movement 'Swaraj Abhiyan' is mobilizing farmers across India to organize a march towards Parliament on August 10. The major demands of his movement include changes in the proposed land acquisition bill and formulation of a new land use policy.

Addressing farmers in Baghpat and Sardhana, Yadav said, "I'm visiting regions that are perceived to be prosperous. However, the truth is that no agriculture-dependent household in India is prosperous. Only people who have quit farming are doing well. I will visit villages across India and meet farmers."

Slamming the Central government for its 'anti-farmer government' in recent times, Yadav added, "Farmers are not distressed only due to natural disasters. The government plays a crucial role in deciding the prices of food grains and cost of inputs. There is an ongoing urea crisis in the country. The government

not only went back on its promise of raising the minimum support price (MSP) but also cancelled the bonus on it. Farmers are not asking for loan waivers. They simply want to be treated like Vijay Mallya when it comes to restructuring of the law."

Anna Hazare, Yadav's mentor from his days with the India Against Corruption (IAC), had also recently voiced his dissent against the land acquisition bill.

"Anna has professed his support for our movement. As many as 41 farmer outfits from across the country have lent their support and have agreed to march with us to Parliament on August 10," said the founder of Swaraj Abhiyan.

On Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal recently hinting that he would not mind expelled members Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan returning to the party, the former AAP leader said, "I would rather comment on the issue after August 10. I don't want anything to distract attention from farmers' issues. I'm only focusing on Swaraj Abhiyan at present."

Stating that he wanted a minimum income guarantee for farmers, Yadav added, "The government should fix the rates of food grain and cost of input at such a rate that a farmer can earn a certain amount as his income. This is on the same lines as a minimum wage law."

Earlier, Yadav had launched a kisan andolan in Punjab on Sunday.

‘Underutilised plant species are a hidden treasure trove’

Out of at least 1 lakh plant species that humans can consume as food, hardly 30 are used as food and just three- wheat, rice and maize- predominantly get cultivated as food grains. In the unexplored plant species lies India's wealth, said vice-chancellor of University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Dr D P Biradar here.

Biradar on Wednesday inaugurated the third 'International Symposium on Underutilised Plant Species - Exploration and Conservation for Future Generation' at the Agricultural College and Research Institute (AC & RI) under the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU). The first two symposiums were held in Arusha, Tanzania (2008) and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2011). As part of the golden jubilee celebrations of AC & RI, Madurai, the third international symposium is being held by Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the institute in collaboration with the International Society for Horticultural Sciences (ISHS), Belgium.

During the four-day event, researchers will explore the potential of underutilised plants as there is increasing endorsement at national and international levels on the important role that can be played by less-used crops and species in sustainable farming systems and human well-being.

Addressing the audience, Biradar said that according to the West, Indians are not aware of the immense value of these plant species found in their backyard. Plant species found in biodiversity-rich Western Ghats are worth a million dollars, he commented. In addition to being ignorant about their worth, Indians also tend to study these plants in isolation.

For example, a common weed like 'coat button' or 'tridax daisy' (*tridax procumbens*) can cure wounds. In the same way, wild vegetables that are yet to be domesticated have a lot of potential, like the wild bitter gourd which is getting more prominence in the food industry.

"There is a need for a multidisciplinary research approach on these underutilised plant species, which is going to be a boon to the Indian economy," Biradar said.

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University VC Dr K Ramasamy said underutilised plants should be explored in a sustainable manner. He pointed out that though the Western Ghats were safeguarded, the Eastern Ghats from Kanyakumari to

Kolkata was getting lost and its impact on environment was becoming visible in the present days.

Dr Bhimu Patil, director, vegetable & fruit improvement centre, A & M University, Texas, Dr Sandhya Gupta, vice chair, commission on plant genetic resources, ISHS, also spoke at the inaugural event.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, TNAU VC said they have identified 156 plant species in the state, of which 56 were medical plants.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Kenya's loss of tea output could mean India's gain



A whopping 50 million kg (mkg) loss in production in Kenya due to drought in the first half of current calendar has thrown open a fresh opportunity for exports of Indian tea.

“Kenya has had a bad year with production trailing behind 2014 each month until May. June was relatively a better month with production increasing marginally to 32.20 mkg from 31.94 mkg. However, the overall output in the first half fell to 175.13 mkg from 225.18 mkg,” Rajesh Gupta, compiler of Global Tea Digest, told *BusinessLine*.

This drop of 50.05 mkg marked a decline of as much as 22.23 per cent.

This is significant because Kenya is the world's largest exporter of black tea accounting for over a quarter of the global tea exports.

As Kenya produces mostly CTC variety which is similar to the Indian output, there is scope to convert Kenya's loss into India's advantage.

“The supply situation in India is favourable with production so far rising by as much as 29.86 mkg over the corresponding period of 2014 to reach 274.93 mkg,” Rajesh Gupta noted.

Mombasa auctions

As of now, Pakistan exerts strong demand in Mombasa auction for all available Kenyan tea. Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Yemen are other strong bidders there. The UK is selective for some grades. Russia, Egypt, Sudan, Iran and Somalia which have been buying Kenyan teas are now facing the heat of high prices and limiting their offtake.

Kenya has reportedly exported some 40 per cent less tea to its major markets, compared to last calendar, because of lower supplies and concomitant high price.

Bright outlook for India

“The reduced supplies from Kenya so far and the less possibility of the short supplies being made good in the near future brighten the prospects for Indian tea exports. We are aiming at increased shipments to Iran, the UK and rest of European continent where short supply of Kenyan tea is felt”, said D Hegde, former UPASI President and Director of The United Nilgiri Tea Estates Co Ltd, substantial portion of whose production is exported (as Chamraj tea).

“Producer-exporters are expecting a rise in shipments by this month-end or September beginning and a concomitant increase in Indian tea prices by at least 10 per cent”, he disclosed.

Merchant exporters also see bright scope. “Indian exporters are aiming at Egypt and Pakistan where Kenyan teas are in short supply now. We are increasing our procurement and this should play a major role in halting the falling trend in prices of South Indian teas witnessed recently. This will help producers and small growers as well,” Hemant Shah, a leading exporter, opined.

“Indications of increased demand from exporters are seen. Substantial portion of the teas auctioned by us belong to CTC grade manufactured by bought-leaf factories which are suitable in markets consuming Kenyan teas. We are waiting for a major revival in price now,” Ramesh Bhojarajan, Chairman, Coonoor Tea Trade Association, said.

Exports dip 13%

India’s tea exports so far this calendar has been trailing behind the corresponding period of last year.

According to Tea Board, till May, the latest period for which official data is available, India exported 76.09 mkg of tea worth ₹1301.72 crore against 85.07 mkg worth ₹1592.98 crore in January-May 2014.

This marked a decline of 12.41 per cent in volume and 1.15 per cent in value.

Oilmeal exports dip 86% on low soyameal shipments



Oilmeal exports dipped 86 per cent to 18,410 tonnes in July compared to 1.32 lakh tonnes (lt) in the same period last year as soyameal shipments plunged to a record low due to sharp drop in crushing of oilseeds by the domestic mills.

Exports in the four months of financial year was down 35 per cent at 4.92 lt (7.58 lt), according to data released by the Solvent Extractors' Association of India on Thursday.

The high soyabean prices in the domestic markets resulted in lower crushing and fall in availability of both oil and meal. The export of soyabean meal hit a new low of 928 tonnes in July compared to 2,098 tonnes in June.

In May, the country exported 14,046 tonnes against 18,017 tonnes in April, reflecting the steady downfall in export of soyameal.

Capacity utilisation has been hovering at the lowest level with many plants inching closer to a shut down due to high crushing cost and low realisations, said BV Mehta, Executive Director, SEA.

SFPL sets up ₹100-cr chicken processing unit in Telangana

SFPL, a diversified company into poultry, edible oil and FMCG products is setting up a ₹100 crore chicken processing plant in Jadcherla, Mahboobnagar district of Telangana.

The German-technology based Muriel Starc unit will have a capacity to process 6,000 birds per hour and would be among the biggest in India, said the company's Managing Director and Founder D Ram Reddy.

The funding is a mix of a ₹70-crore loan from South India Bank and internal accruals.

“We plan to get the unit operational during October. The target is to reach a capacity of one lakh birds per day in the near future,” he told *BusinessLine*.

The plant is among the first lot of 21 industrial units that the Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao issued licences in a short time under the new industrial policy unveiled in June this year.

The employee-intensive facility is spread over a lakh sq ft at present and will be expanded as demand grows, he said.

SFPL, which has rebranded its chicken retailing as Sneha Fresh Chicken is certified by HACCP and is available in 1 kg and 500 gm packs.

The company also has 17 specially designed reefer vans to distribute the processed chicken.

SFPL is aiming to cross ₹3,000 crore by fiscal 2016-17 through diversification and expansion strategy.

Sugar up on Govt's exports move

Sugar prices shot up on reports that the government is considering options to make compulsory exports to take out surplus sugar from the domestic market. Prices at mill level jumped by ₹50-90 a quintal which lifted *naka* rates by ₹60-110.

Stockists also placed fresh orders as festivals are approaching. Freight rates were up ₹4-5.

Arrivals at Vashi market were 60-61 truck loads and local dispatches were 59-60 loads. Vashi market carries about 105-110 loads. On Wednesday, 17-18 mills offered tenders and sold about 85,000-90,000 bags at ₹2,100-2,200 (2,030-2,150) for S-grade and ₹2,220-2,350 (2,160-2,260) for M-grade.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade ₹2,202-2,320 (2,176-2,252) and M-grade ₹2,302-2,462 (2,252-2,392). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹2,240-2,300 (₹2,160-2,190) and M-grade ₹2,320-2,450 (2,250-2,390).

Centre looking to ship 4 million tonnes sugar next season: Paswan

The Centre is looking at ways to help the beleaguered sugar industry clear dues to sugarcane farmers that stood at ₹17,300 crore as of mid-July. Among the proposals forwarded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a meeting held on August 1 was the export of 4 million tonnes of the sweetener through barter.

“We are looking to allow export of 4 mt of sugar to countries under the barter system whereby we import other agri-commodities,” said Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Food Minister, on the sidelines of an Assocham event here on Thursday.

While countertrade with countries from whom India imports pulses and edible oils in particular has been suggested as an export model, Government sources cited direct sales by Indian millers to foreign traders as the more likely possibility.



The Commerce Ministry and External Affairs Ministry are also believed to be onboard to formulate the policy. Potential losses incurred by millers given that sugar prices are at a six-year low will be covered by a subsidy paid directly to cane farmers, they informed. “The world is moving away from large state trading institutions which facilitate inter-Government countertrade. This model is not likely to happen. Allowing millers to directly sell sugar abroad where there is a demand is a more feasible solution,” said a senior official.

Average ex-mill sugar prices are currently around ₹ 20/kg, while cost of production is around ₹ 31-32, which has affected mills’ paying capacity.

“Sugar is available at ₹19/kg on the world market, while domestic cost is around ₹20. If we export more quantity, global prices will further fall,” said Paswan, adding that the import duty of 40 per cent has not helped the industry. A final call on the proposal and likely export mechanisms will be taken after another meeting and with the assent of the PM.

Pepper slides on weak demand

Pepper prices continued their downward trend on lack of buying interest and reports of easier trend in other origins/markets.

Prices in Indonesia and Vietnam, major competitors of Malabar in the world market, at present, were reportedly dropping rapidly. As a result, buyers stayed away, market sources told *BusinessLine*.



Only five tonnes of pepper were traded today at Rs. 635 a kg.

Spot prices fell by Rs. 300 a quintal to Rs. 62,300 (ungarbled) and Rs. 65,300 (garbled). August and September contracts on the IPSTA were down Rs. 1,000 each to Rs. 66,500 and Rs. 67,000.

Export prices were at \$10,700 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$10,950 for the US.

Weak buying support drags mustard oil



Notwithstanding July and August being the peak season for the pickle manufacturers, demand in mustard oil in mandis across Madhya Pradesh continues to be weak on decline in buying support at higher rate.

Mustard oil in Indore mandis on Thursday remained flat at Rs. 788, while it was quoted at Rs. 780 in Neemuch and Rs. 795 in Morena respectively.

Mustard oil ruled stable at Rs. 820 in Jaipur (up Rs. 5 from last week). In Gujarat also it was steady at Rs. 775.

Mustard seeds and raida also ruled stable at Rs. 3,700 a quintal and Rs. 3,800 respectively. Plant deliveries for Jaipur line on Thursday was at Rs. 4,520-25 (Rs. 4,570-75 last week).

Arrival of mustard seeds across the country today was recorded at 65,000 bags (55,000 bags last week).