

22.08.2015

THE HINDU

Land acquisition notice triggers farmer protest in Vijayawada



Farmers from Undavalli, Penumaka and other villages in A.P. Capital region Amaravathi protesting against the Government proposal to acquire land for Capital in Vijayawada on Friday. Photo: V. Raju



Farmers from Undavalli, Penumaka and other villages in A.P. Capital region Amaravathi protesting against the Government proposal to acquire land for Capital in Vijayawada on Friday.

Farmers from villages in the capital region - Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamarru, vowed to fight until the Government withdraws its plans to acquire their lands.

The Andhra Pradesh Government's move to invoke the land acquisition law in the Amaravati capital region triggered protests by farmers in front of the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) office here on Friday.

Farmers from villages in the capital region - Undavalli, Penumaka and Nidamarru, vowed to fight until the Government withdraws its plans to acquire their lands under provisions of the land acquisition ordinance.

Alleging that the Government was violating standing court orders, the farmers questioned the legal sanctity of the land acquisition notification issued on Friday. "The court has given orders in our favour. It allowed us to cultivate our lands. How can the Government go ahead with land acquisition?" said Bose Reddy, a farmer from Undavalli.

Jayamma, a farmer from Nidamarru broke down in tears, as she spoke about their woes. "The Government is playing with our lives. We are dependent on this soil. We have no other means of income. We don't see a better deal in what the Government is offering us," she said.

The protesters raised slogans against Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and distributed vegetables to onlookers. Congress Capital Region Committee convenor Malladi Vishnu, Congress leaders Kolanukonda Shivaji, CPI(M) Capital Region Committee convenor Ch. Babu Rao, farmer leaders Vangala Subba Rao and others spoke at the protest.

Teams formed to check hoarding of onions



It is being said that the retail prices of onion may shoot up.— File Photo

Even as onion prices reached their highest in two years, the Delhi government, on Thursday, said it had formed teams to monitor onion stocks in the wholesale markets in the Capital to check hoarding. Six such teams were despatched to various wholesale *mandis* in Delhi.

But, the wholesale market predictions say that the retail prices of onion may shoot up in Delhi after the arrival of fresh stock from other States as the wholesale price there has itself gone up. According to the government, teams of Food and Civil Supplies Department was continuously monitoring the supply and prices of onions in Delhi.

Each team consisted of a food and civil supplies officer and an Inspector besides an officer from the Delhi Agriculture and Marketing Board.

“The teams have been asked to check the availability of onions in the wholesale markets and also report about any hoarding or black—marketing activity by unscrupulous elements,” a senior office said.

Officers have been directed to keep a strict watch on the Fair Price Shops (FPS) and mobile vans, engaged in retail sale of onions, to ensure that they sell the bulb at Rs. 30 per kg.

“We have also asked the FPS and mobile van units to sell only one kilogram of onion, priced at Rs. 30 per kg, to one person. There is a heavy demand of cheap onion. We sell close to 3,000 metric tonnes of onion a day. We will continue selling cheaper onion throughout October till prices comes under control,” a government spokesperson said.

Minister of Food and Civil Supplies, Asim Ahmed Khan informed that monitoring of supply as well as price movement of onion will continue till their prices stabilise in the open market.

A-farming, we will go

The #Be a Farmdost initiative from TAFE aims to raise awareness about farming as a profession and inculcate respect for farmers



My daughter came back from school and eagerly filled me in on a wonderful interactive programme at school called Be a #Farmdost. The students were given a short, but effective, lecture on the importance of the agricultural sector and a kit to start their own little farms. The kit consisted of a packet of seeds and instructions on how to grow them. My daughter got spinach and lady's finger while others had spinach and cluster beans. The instructions were very detailed and precise. The students were also encouraged to think about the different kinds of containers in which they could grow their plants. "Don't go and buy pots," they were told. "Look around your house; you can use an old broken bucket, tin can, mud pot ... Just make holes at the bottom for drainage." And the school's recycling lesson was reiterated.

The 'Be a #Farmdost' kit not only consists of seeds and compost mixture but also a very important message to both the parent and the student. The #Farmdost representatives also want the kids to share this activity with relatives and friends. It could be a wonderful way for families to bond and together they could spread the message that we should be proud of our farmers. They are every bit as important as any other professional in the service industry, if not more so.

The first phase has been launched in Tiruchi, Madurai, Coimbatore and Chennai. The #Farmdost Facebook page has over 1,00,000 fans. Each stage of growth from shoot to mature plant has to also be clearly documented through photographs. There are rules and regulations for how these pictures should be presented. This will be judged as an ongoing competition. A healthy and friendly competition among schools adds to the excitement of growing their own plants.

The school that uploads the maximum number of pictures and has the most number of enthusiastic little farm hands will find a special mention. There are different categories of awards (see box).

The #thank you farmers award is what I like best. This involves students visiting a farmer in their area and acknowledging them in an innovative manner.

Giving thanks could be a home-cooked meal for the farmer, spending an hour with them in their environment or maybe even writing a verse in appreciation of their hard work.

The most innovative gesture will be highlighted. This is the great way to teach them to appreciate the farmers' contribution to their lives.

The good news is that the #Farmdost is not just for students. Anyone who is willing to contribute can be a Farmdost. You can order your own free Farmdost kit and get started on your own farm. At every stage, you can upload pictures and videos of your progress and share it on social media by hashtagging Farmdost.

The idea is to bring about “a paradigm shift in the way the urban society looks at farmers and engages with them”.

It will include outreach programmes that will tackle different needs of the agricultural sector and how the general population can work towards meeting them. The #Farmdost initiative is committed to putting the ‘pride’ back into farming.

Green Marathon tomorrow

Students pursuing B.Tech Energy and Environmental Engineering at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University have organised a ‘Green Marathon’ with the theme ‘Energy Conservation and Environmental Awareness’ on August 23. The marathon is a forerunner of ECOFEST 15, a national level symposium. It will start from the main building of the university at 6.30 a.m. and end at the university stadium.

It is organised in three categories - 9 km for men aged above 18 years, 7 km for women aged above 18 years and schoolboys aged below 18 and 5 km for schoolgirls aged below 18 years. Registrations are done at Sapna Book House, North Coimbatore, and Nehru Stadium. On-the-spot registration can be done at the stadium from 5.30 a.m. on Sunday with entry fee of Rs.100 for college students and the public. Participation is free for school students. Cash prizes and

medals will be given to the winners. For details, call P.A. Vinothkumar at 87601 17714 or P.N. Sasi Sudhan at 80985 90660.

More than half of kharif crop lost in Chikkodi taluk

Most of it is in Nagarmunoli hobli which does not have water sources in its vicinity



Small farmer Yamanappa Maruti Shirgavi of Karoshi village under Nagarmunoli hobli of Chikkodi taluk clearing his dry field on Friday as the standing maize crop has withered.— PHOTO: MALLIKARJUN DANANNAVAR

Small and marginal farmers, particularly those dependent on rain in the dry belts of Chikkodi taluk, are facing a grim situation due to deficient rainfall and prevailing drought conditions. Fearing an imminent financial crisis owing to crop loss, they are looking forward to government support.

According to officials in the Agriculture Department here on Friday, 51.6 per cent of kharif crops, except tobacco, have been lost in the taluk, which has been declared as drought-hit by the government.

Most of it is in Nagarmunoli hobli which does not have water sources in its vicinity, and the adjoining areas in Chikkodi hobli. The taluk received only 274 mm of rain till August 20 against the normal of 414 mm from January to August.

Sowing has been completed on 84,137 hectares (ha) in the taluk against the targeted 87,985 ha this year. But, due to deficient rainfall, moisture stress and continued dry spell, standing crops such as groundnut, soya bean, jowar, maize and cotton have either been lost or withered. Some farmers have already started clearing their fields.

The extent of crop loss is as follows — 13,608 ha of the sown area of 15,563 ha for cereals; 1,390 ha of the sown area of 2,109 ha for pulses, 17,860 ha of the sown area of 22,189 ha for oilseeds, 780 ha of the sown area of 989 ha for

cotton and 9,780 ha of the sown area of 34,537 ha for sugarcane. The farmers have taken up tobacco sowing on 6,000 ha and could suffer losses if there is no sufficient rainfall soon, the officials added.

Paddy crop hit by ‘benki roga’

Paddy crop on about 250 hectares in Badangod gram panchayat in Sirsi taluk were hit by ‘benki roga’ due to deficient rain in July and August.

Panchayat president Basavraj said in a press release on Friday that the farmers were worried about the loss of paddy crop as well as the availability of cattle fodder.

Most of the farmers have sown seeds and used fertilizer taking loans from societies and banks.

The farmers have urged the government to waive loans and save the farmers, he said.

Smelling success with ‘Kozhi kondai poo’

“The flower can be harvested continuously for six months”

A number of farmers in and around Azhagiya Manavalam near Tiruchi are busy cultivating “kozhi kondai poo” (Hen’s horn flower) which brings an assured return to them. Mostly, it is women who are more involved in raising the flower. There has been a growing demand for the flower as it is widely used in garlands by virtue of its serene colour.

The plant is cultivated on small land-holdings at various parts of the village and in neighbouring Tiruppainjili village. The plant registers full growth after three months when it is ready for harvest. “The flower can be harvested continuously for six months,” says Chithra, one of the villagers who has been harvesting the flower for the past two decades.

She said the flower needed proper care and should be carefully guarded against pests and insects.

“We have to apply pesticide and insecticide periodically once the field is ready for harvest for registering an assured harvest,” she said.

The daily per acre yield is 30 kg and it is readily marketed. “The flower merchants from Srirangam in make a beeline to the village daily to purchase the flowers,” says Perumayi Ammal, another farmer of the village.

The farmers said the flower was sold for Rs. 25 a kg on Friday. The demand for the flowers registers a peak during the marriage seasons when the price shoots up to Rs. 50.

Official sources said that villages in and around Azhagiya Manavalam was ideally suited for the flowers. It is raised in Uppliyapuram, Thuraiyur, and Thathaiengarpet blocks.

About 300 acres had been brought under the flower all through the district.

Raising this crop enriched soil fertility.

Most farmers resorted to raising any other horticultural crop or paddy, once the Hen's horn flower is harvested completely.

'Take up paddy cultivation if banana is not remunerative'

Tenders for ponds after clearance from court: official

Farmers were told to switch over to paddy cultivation if banana was not remunerative during the monthly grievances meeting held here on Friday.

When a farmer expressed his concern over high production costs involved in banana cultivation, Joint Director of Agriculture P. Elango suggested him to switch over to paddy cultivation. His announcement was opposed by the farmers in one voice.

A few farmers urged the authorities to extend crop insurance for the banana crop like in neighbouring Kerala.

Replying to the queries on awarding fishing rights in ponds to traditional inland farmers, S.K. Subramanian, Executive Engineer, WRO of PWD said that tenders for 15 ponds in Vilavancode taluk would be awarded soon after obtaining clearance from the court.

A farmer said that the leaders of local bodies were reluctant to release water from the ponds for irrigation and alleged that corruption was rooted everywhere in the local bodies.

Arumugam Pillai of Paraseri alleged that a library building at Villukkuri village was illegally occupied by an individual and the building was used as a slaughter house during weekends.

Encroachments

Sukumaran of Poovancode in Thovalai taluk demanded eviction of encroachments in irrigation channels in Veeramarthandanpudur and sought action to prevent letting out drainage water into the channel.

Periya Nadar of Pulluvilai village said that his request for harvesting machine was not met.

Sri Krishna Perumal of Puthalam village urged the district administration to establish a milk procurement centre at the Manikatti Pottal Milk Cooperative Society.

The meeting was presided over by Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan. Personal Assistant to Collector (Agriculture) M. Nizamudeen and Executive Engineer, WRO of PWD S.K. Subramanian were present.

Agriculture panel chief favours tomato,mango processing industries



T.N. Prakash Kammaradi addressing press persons in Kolar on Friday. ZP CEO N.M. Panali is seen. PHOTO: VISHWA KUNDAPURA

Crops will get value addition and help growers come out of distress

T.N. Prakash Kammaradi, chairman, Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission, has laid stress on setting up of tomato and mango processing units so that the crops get value addition and help growers out of distress.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) yard here on Friday, Mr. Kammaradi said a thorough study was necessary to ascertain the steep fall in prices of tomato. “Whether it is the glut of crop in the market or improper distribution of it should be known”, he said.

Options of direct export of mango and tomato or processing units should be explored, he said and added that the value addition process will be more helpful as these are perishable crops.

Perspective report

Mr. Kammaradi said the Commission will submit a perspective report on 17 crops to the State government by September so that the government can take a call on prices of those crops. The crops include paddy, ragi, jowar, potato, tomato, groundnut, toor, areca and coconut.

Additional Deputy Commissioner R.S. Peddappaiah and Chief Executive

Officer of Zilla Panchayat N.M. Panali were present.

Media report prompts visit

The KPAC Chairman said the media reports about steep fall in prices of tomato and the sufferings of farmers prompted his visit to Kolar and study the situation. *The Hindu* published a report 'No cheer for tomato farmers' on August 11 detailing the effect of the price crash.

Small-sized apples in Himachal this year

Experts blame the weather and a bumper crop for not enabling the apple to be fully mature



Apple trees laden with red ripe fruits in Manali, Himachal Pradesh. PHOTO:PTI

The apple of your eye has turned smaller in Himachal Pradesh!

Horticulture experts blame the weather and a bumper crop for not enabling the apple to be fully mature. But it has attained true colour.

Markets across the country are flooded with smaller - sized apples. Top quality apples, whose optimum size ranges from 80mm to 85mm are available from 55mm to 65mm, S.P. Bhardwaj, a former joint director at the Y.S. Parmar University of Horticulture said. He said even 70 mm apples are rare in the market.

The hill state is one of India's major apple-producing regions, with more than 90 percent of the produce going to the domestic market. The horticulture department estimates the state is heading for a bumper production of 37.5 million boxes of 20 kg each, or 750,000 tonnes, against the normal yield of 25 million boxes. Last year's production was around 29 million boxes. Trade representatives say initial crop arrival trends indicate the size of apples will remain smaller throughout the season. Currently, the crop is mainly coming from the lower altitudes (less than 6,000 ft) of Shimla, Kullu and Mandi districts. In the middle reaches, fruit plucking has just started.

“As per the present trend, up to 80 percent of the crop will be smaller in size. However, juice content and colour of the fruit are perfect,” agro—commodities trading house Adani Agrifresh deputy general manager Sanjay Mahajan told IANS.

He said bigger—sized apples would definitely fetch higher prices.

The company every year procures apples directly from the farmers in the state and this year plans to procure 30,000 tonnes. The process will start from August 20. The Upper Shimla areas, which account for 80 percent of the total apple production, are now seeing congenial weather. Apple grower Phool Chand at Kotkhai in Shimla district said fluctuating climatic conditions, ageing orchards and rising costs of inputs are taking a toll on the overall fruit productivity and its quality.

Bhardwaj said the farmers should delay the harvesting at least by a fortnight to allow the fruit to attain maturity.

“In the middle hills, the temperature is ideal now due to less rain activity and partially sunny conditions. This will help the crop enhance in size. The farmers should either delay harvesting or opt selective plucking. This will help the crop attain optimum size,” he said.IANS

Coffee growers have something to cheer about

While farmers growing pulses, cereals and oilseeds are in distress in most part of Karnataka, coffee growers have something to cheer about. Timely pre-monsoon showers and normal distribution of rains during monsoon in coffee growing districts is expected to bring them a good yield.

Normal rainfall has augured well for coffee crop in all three major crop growing districts of Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Hassan.

On the other hand, rating agency CRISIL in a report titled *Angsty Farms* released on Wednesday, said five crops - jowar, soyabean, tur, maize and cotton - are most likely to be hurt by below-normal rains this year. The analysis is based on CRISIL's own Deficient Rainfall Impact Parameter (DRIP). Karnataka has already declared 116 taluks drought-hit.

Better prospects for coffee

Aided by timely and normal rains, the country's crop size for 2015-16 is placed at 3.55 lakh tonnes - a growth of 8.5 per cent over previous year - according to the Coffee Board's post-blossom forecast.

Bose Mandanna, a progressive and large coffee-grower at Suntikoppa in Kodagu, told *The Hindu* that overall, the crops prospects this year are quite encouraging with a promise of highest record crop, thanks mainly to the timely and adequate blossom and backing showers.

Mr Mandanna said the Arabica crop production would be 30 per cent higher this season compared to last year (74,755 tonnes) while robusta variety would be the same of that last year (1.58 lakh tonnes).

"The last year was off for coffee. This year we are seeing good crop since plants have grown strongly with better pruning and plantation practices," Mr Mandanna said.

CCRI director Raghuramulu Y. said in general, good crop condition and continued stable prices have helped to invigorate production in Karnataka.

Coffee board officials also said that impact of stem borer pest, which has affected Arabica plantations spread over 3,000 hectares in 2014, has reduced impact this year. Growers removed of pest affected plants and adopted better management practices.

Normal rainfall has augured well for coffee crop in all three major crop growing districts

Toor dal prices go through the roof

Here's some news that is hard to digest. The prices of toor dal have gone up again, with a kilo trading between Rs. 175 and Rs. 180 in the retail market from the earlier Rs. 150.

Foodgrain merchants predict that the prices may breach the Rs. 200-mark by this year end, before the new crop is harvested.

The prices have reached a historic high of Rs. 150 a kg in the wholesale market, an increase by 25 per cent within a fortnight. It was around Rs. 120 a kg in the wholesale market during the first week of August.

The jump in prices due to crop failure started around April. In May, the wholesale price had crossed Rs. 100 a kg for the first time.

The rising prices of toor dal — the principle source of protein in a vegetarian diet — has had a drastic effect on its consumption, thus raising concerns, said Ramesh Chandra Lahoti, president of Bangalore Wholesale Foodgrains and Pulses Merchants' Association.

He said that the retail market consumption of the dal had come down drastically in the last two months.

S. Raju, a retailer in Rajajinagar, said most households that usually bought 3 kg of toor dal a month have reduced it by half. "Earlier, we never stocked half-kg packets in our store. But now, most of the customers buy only this," he said.

The worry here is that the next crop is expected only by December 15. Crops in various pockets of south India — Karnataka and Marathwada region of Maharashtra — are expected to be low owing to insufficient rain.

"This time, western and northern India should save south India. Private and government imports are expected to hit the market by October, which we hope would lead to some minor course correction," Mr. Lahoti said.

The rising prices of toor dal has had a drastic effect on its consumption, thus raising concerns

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Bring coconut under Horticulture Department



Coconut cultivators say some policy corrections are required to promote value-addition.

Coconut growers in the Western region say bringing the crop under Horticulture Department will reflect in better economic development of rural parts.

Coconut is the only crop that has not failed the farmers so far. There was no reason why coconut considered a Horticulture crop in other States must not be deemed the same in Tamil Nadu as well, said T.A. Krishnasamy, president of the United Coconut Growers Association of South India.

There would have been better economic potential of coconut crop in Tamil Nadu had it been brought under Horticulture Department that is now unable to use the Centre's funding to implement schemes for value addition of coconuts, Mr. Krishnasamy said.

In fact, even the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University refers to coconut as a plantation crop under horticulture.

The Western region accounts for the bulk of coconut production in the State and it was only proper that the Coconut Development Board accelerated its activities, farmers said.

In the absence of support systems, farmers are unable to scale up income-generation through value addition.

There are very few units involved in value addition of coconut, official sources acknowledged. A unit producing desiccated coconut powder at Kanjikoovil had to close down recently, sources said.

The powder obtained by drying ground or shredded coconut kernel after removal of brown testa is used in confectionaries, puddings and many other food preparations as a substitute to raw grated coconut.

Likewise, there was huge demand for coconut sugar in the export market. But, the right pricing for which economy of scale is essential would be possible only through formation of farmers' cooperatives, federations and companies.

In neighbouring Kerala, the coconut sector is quite organised, and there are thousands of farmers' cooperatives, hundreds of federations, and several companies involved in manufacture of coconut-based products including neera. It was time Tamil Nadu followed suit.

The desired developments will take place once coconut is made a horticulture crop, Mr. Krishnasamy said.

Agri Expo tomorrow at VIT

Display of modern agricultural equipment, fertilizers and pesticides, tractors, horticultural crops and vegetable seeds, and workshops on water management, soil-less agriculture, poultry farming, bee-keeping, drip irrigation, solar technology and food processing would form the highlights of a two-day Agri Expo to be organised at the VIT University campus here on August 22 and 23.

Briefing newsmen about the Agri Expo, G. Viswanathan, VIT Chancellor, said that while about 55% of the India's population is dependent on agriculture, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP (gross domestic product) of the country has gone down from 25% to 16%.

Agriculture has declined owing to various problems such as failure of monsoon and labour shortage. Under these circumstances, the two-day event is aimed at educating the farmers of Vellore and Tiruvannamalai districts about the modern technology that is available for undertaking various operations like sowing and harvesting, which would go a long way in addressing the problem of labour shortage.

The workshop would explain to them the water management technology which would help them tide over water scarcity.

The Agri Expo is being organised by the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development and Research Education (CSRDE & RE) of the VIT University in association with the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.

M. Pandiyan, Professor and Head, TNAU Research Station, Virinjipuram, Vellore, said the VIT has arranged for buses to bring the farmers from all the block headquarters in Vellore and Tiruvannamalai districts.

Tamil Maran, Project Director, CSRD & RE said that Manmohan Singh, a Punjab farmer, who has converted 800 acres of fallow land into cultivable land in Ramanathapuram district through modern technology would be making a presentation on Saturday morning.

The Agri Expo would be inaugurated by Rajesh Lakhani, Agriculture Secretary, Tamil Nadu Government. The expo would be held from 10.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. on Saturday, and from 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. on Sunday.

Workshops on various aspects of agriculture, with special focus on water conservation will be held

CPI(M) boost to organic farming

Ernakulam Maharaja's College played perfect host to a meet of agriculture farmers, practitioners, advocates and supporters of organic farming here on Friday.

The green initiative was part of the Jaiva Jeevitham programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The party plans to generate 1,600 tonnes of organic agricultural products from 400 acres aimed at sustained cultivation of safe-to-eat vegetables and fruits as part of the project.

Actor Mammooty inaugurated the meet. Farmers shared their experience in organic and safe farming methods at the venue. People who created wonders through their unique organic farming initiatives were felicitated on the occasion.

P. Rajeev, district secretary of the CPI(M), who presided over the meeting, pointed out that the party planned to bring about 800 tonnes of vegetables to be sold through 164 stalls this Onam. The party-led primary cooperative societies and local units of the party had undertaken vegetable cultivation for the festival. Around 2.5 lakh saplings and one lakh growbags have been distributed in the district.

Aqua exhibition for shrimp farmers

Modern aquaculture practices were showcased at the aqua exhibition organised by Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (Kufos) for shrimp farmers in the State here on Friday.

Pond guard, a gadget which monitor real time contents of dissolved oxygen, salinity and water temperature, was the main attraction of the exhibition. The device helps farmers know the real conditions of the water by using their mobile, and it will send an alert voice to the mobile when there occurs any variation from the standardised degree of dissolved oxygen (DO), temperature and salinity of the water in which farming is being undertaken.

G. Ram Babu, General Manager of Eruvaka Technologies which developed the device, said that it has a sharp sensor at its bottom level and can be fixed in the water body making its upper part floating on water. Mobile sim cards can be inserted in a chipset inside the gadget, and the instrument will send real-time messages of the details of the water quality parameters to a maximum of four mobile numbers, he said.

was part of popularising the farming of vannamei shrimp variety.

Training in mushroom cultivation

The Mushroom Growers Association, a forum of cultivators promoting mushrooms, will hold a session on various aspects of mushroom farming at Sikshak Sadan in the city on August 25. According to John Marangoli, general secretary of the forum, there is a growing demand for mushrooms among consumers and the Agriculture Department should come forward to help the farmers considering the demand.

Mr. John, a veteran mushroom cultivation trainer, said farming could be taken up by anyone with a little training. He said he trained more than 50,000 people in different parts of the State during the last 25 years. Though only a few hundred of his trainees had taken to commercial cultivation so far, thousands of them were doing it domestically, he says.

The farmers would also be given advice to obtain financial assistance from the government. Interested persons may contact the organisers to register their names. Ph: 9809279473, 9349491001.

Vegetables produced in Kerala found pesticide-free

Vegetables at the Ernakulam market.- Photo : Thulasi Kakkat

ringing relief for customers in Kerala during the Onam festival season, tests carried out by the Pesticide Residue Analysis and Research Laboratory under Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) have revealed that most of the vegetables produced in the State are safe to eat.



Samples of vegetables produced in Thiruvananthapuram and Kasaragod districts were found to be free of pesticide residue, according to Thomas Biju Mathew. As many as 73 samples of vegetables such as amaranthus, beans, cucumber, cowpea, brinjal, chilli, bittergourd, and okra were subjected to tests.

Samples of cut vegetables marketed by the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council Kerala (VFPC), Thiruvananthapuram, were also found to contain no hazardous chemicals. Dr. Mathew said the vegetables were cut and packed after cleaning as per protocols prescribed by KAU. Vegetables procured by HortiCorp for Onam sales from Hosur in Karnataka were also found to be safe to eat.

The tests revealed that samples of vegetables produced in Madhur, Muliya, Cherkkala, Kumpala, Mogaral, and Puthur in Kasargod, which has been proclaimed as organic district, were of safe-to-eat quality.

KAU Vice Chancellor P. Rajendran said the latest test results showed an optimistic trend and reflected the increased public awareness about the hazards of pesticide residue. “We are testing samples from farmers’ fields free of cost. KAU is establishing more pesticide residue labs, at Kumarakom, Thrissur and Padannakkad, to ensure wider collection of samples and more rigorous testing across the State. These labs will start functioning soon.” Dr. Rajendran said the pesticide residue lab at Vellayani, the lone NABL accredited facility in Kerala, would be upgraded as State referral lab.

He said the university was also thinking of setting up mobile testing facilities to conduct on-the-spot qualitative analysis of pesticide residues in vegetables brought from other states.

“Simultaneously, we are considering a proposal to test samples of cooked food for the presence of hazardous chemicals, since some chemicals may decompose or combine with others during the process of cooking,” he added.

Latest test results show an the increased public awareness on the hazards of pesticide.

Yet to open butterfly park has guests

10 spacious enclosures to house exotic varieties of insects



fully equipped: The butterfly park will have landscaped habitat, nectar gardens, rock garden, breeding centre a walkway and pathways.— photo: G. Krishnaswamy

The butterfly park set up at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Vandalur, has already started receiving butterflies even before its formal launch.

Zoo authorities said that the caterpillar-shaped park was being built on 2.7 hectares of land near Otteri Lake at a cost of Rs.4 crore. The park will host hundreds of colourful winged insects. The butterfly conservatory in the gardens is expected to help boost the butterfly population in the city.

According to zoo officials, the park will have a host of plants, a landscaped habitat, nectar gardens, a walkway and pathways, breeding and rearing centres and rock gardens. There will also be larval and adult host plants to aid the various stages of butterfly growth. Zookeepers have built 10 spacious enclosures to house exotic varieties of insects.

Arignar Anna Zoological Park director K.S. S. V. P. Reddy said the new enclosures had a partly open space and a solid concrete-covered structure. Mr. Reddy said zookeepers designed them to provide the specimens adequate space and they were equipped with nesting boxes stuffed with waste wood for when the birds got broody. “The nesting boxes will help them hatch their eggs without any risk and the wood waste will help maintain the warmth needed,” Mr. Reddy said.

Minister reviews work

Minister for Forests M.S.M. Anandan and Animal Husbandry Minister T.K.M. Chinnaiyya visited the zoo and officials apprised them of the work progress.

The Ministers, accompanied by District Collector V.K. Shanmugham, Environment and Forests Principal Secretary Hans Raj Varma and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (in-charge) (PCCF) V. Melkani visited the Nanmangalam Reserve Forests to oversee the construction of an office for Chief Project Director, Tamil Nadu Biodiversity and Greening Project, (TBGP) and an interpretation centre.

The park is being built in 2.7 hectares of land near Otteri Lake at a cost of

Rs.4 crore

Plan to enhance green cover

Over 1.8 lakh seedlings to be planted in Coimbatore District



Seedlings are getting ready at various nurseries of the Forest Department for the massive planting drive in Coimbatore district.—file Photo: M. Periasamy

The district administration and the Forest Department will embark on the task of planting 1.8 lakh seedlings in Coimbatore Division by November end this year.

This was decided at a meeting of officials from various government departments that was chaired by District Collector Archana Patnaik here on Thursday.

Target

District Forest Officer (DFO) M. Senthil Kumar said that the Coimbatore Division was given a target of planting 2.1 lakh seedlings as part of the state-

wide drive to plant 67 lakh saplings that was launched to commemorate the 67th birthday of Chief Minister Jayalithaa in February this year.

“About 30,000 seedlings were planted during the launch.

“The remaining 1.8 lakh seedlings will be planted during North East Monsoon that will go on till the end of November,” the DFO said.

The Collector asked heads of various departments to give a detailed report on the available space on government building premises including schools and primary health centres and the number of saplings needed. The report should be submitted before next Wednesday.

Green Marathon tomorrow

Students pursuing B.Tech Energy and Environmental Engineering at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University have organised a ‘Green Marathon’ with the theme ‘Energy Conservation and Environmental Awareness’ on August 23. The marathon is a forerunner of ECOFEST 15, a national level symposium. It will start from the main building of the university at 6.30 a.m. and end at the university stadium.

It is organised in three categories - 9 km for men aged above 18 years, 7 km for women aged above 18 years and schoolboys aged below 18 and 5 km for schoolgirls aged below 18 years. Registrations are done at Sapna Book House, North Coimbatore, and Nehru Stadium. On-the-spot registration can be done at the stadium from 5.30 a.m. on Sunday with entry fee of Rs.100 for college students and the public. Participation is free for school students. Cash prizes and medals will be given to the winners. For details, call P.A. Vinothkumar at 87601 17714 or P.N. Sasi Sudhan at 80985 90660.

Bellary onion price shoots up

Price rise is attributed to sharp fall in arrivals from Maharashtra



A woman sorting out onions at Gandhi Market in Tiruchi.— A file photo

Price of Bellary onions has shot up in the city in tune with the nationwide trend. Although the price of the onions had not risen as early as in some other parts of the country, it has touched Rs.60 a kg in the wholesale market here.

Wholesale traders at the Gandhi Market in the city, which caters to retail traders in several neighbouring districts, attributed the hike to the sharp fall in arrivals from Maharashtra.

On Saturday, Bellary onion was selling at Rs.60 a kg at the wholesale market here. The retail price is higher by at least Rs.5 a kg. Just about a couple of weeks back, the onions were selling at Rs.35-40 a kg. in the wholesale market.

Wholesale traders here said that the wholesale market here was just getting about five to six loads of Bellary onions from Maharashtra, accounting for about 100 tonnes a day.

Normally, the market receives about 300 tonnes a day, said A. Thangaraj, General Secretary, Tiruchi Onion Commission Mandi Traders' Association.

Mr.Thangaraj said that the arrivals had been coming down gradually over the past 10 days resulting in the steep rise in the prices.

“Arrivals from Karnataka are just starting and we expect to get more supplies in another 15 days,” he said.

Meanwhile, the price of small onions was ruling steady at the market at Rs.25 a kg. “Though we are getting only 200 tonnes of small onions a day, against the requirement of 300 tonnes, the off take from traders in Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam and Pudukottai has come down. These traders now prefer to purchase as small onions from Dindigul where the prices are lower by at least Re.1 a kg,” he said.

With the price of Bellary onions shooting up across the country, small onions are now being sent to even Andhra Pradesh from the wholesale market here, he said.

KUFOS to promote vannamei shrimp farming

Minister for Fisheries K. Babu has said that the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS) will popularise vannamei shrimp farming across the State. In his inaugural address at the two-day training and aqua-expo on the prospects of Litopenaeus Vannamei, an exotic white shrimp, here on Thursday, Mr. Babu urged the shrimp farmers to speed up the process of ushering in a

vannamei revolution in the State. Compared to the other States in the country, we are very late to earn profits out of vannamei culture, the Minister said.

He said that KUFOS would organise training programme in each districts to spread vannamei shrimp farming.

Organic farmers' meet

A meeting of the organic farmers, organised by Jaiva Jeeitham programme, will be held at Ernakulam Maharaja's College on Friday. Actor Mammooty will inaugurate the programme at 4 p.m. District Collector M.G. Rajamanickam will inaugurate the sale and exhibition of organic farm produces, P. Rajeev, district secretary of the CPI (M) told the media. N.S. Madhavan and K.N. Unnikrishnan were also present.



As prices soar, Delhi government limits sale of onions at its outlets

The government had earlier claimed that it had bought a sufficient quantity of onions to meet the demands of the citizens of the capital in the forthcoming days.



The Delhi government has also urged citizens not to indulge in “panic buying” of onions since sufficient stock was available.

As onion prices continued to skyrocket in Delhi, crossing Rs 80 per kg, consumers made a beeline for the fair price shops and mobile vans set up by the

AAP government to sell the vegetable. However, many of these outlets ran out of stock by Friday evening, leaving dozens of people waiting in the serpentine queues, empty-handed.

The government had earlier claimed that it had bought a sufficient quantity of onions to meet the demands of the citizens of the capital in the forthcoming days.

Now the government has set a limit of one kg per consumer to ensure everyone gets their share of onions. However, some consumers were seen queuing up multiple times at the shops and vans to get around the new rule.

The government has also announced its decision to launch 10 more outlets in the capital. According to Food and Supplies Minister Asim Ahmad Khan, the government is trying to increase the stock of onions in safal stores, fair price shops and mobile vans, in an effort to bring down prices to Rs 25 per kg by next week.

The government also held a review meeting with Delhi police officials and the traffic police to make the entry of trucks carrying onions easier. The meeting was attended by senior ministry officials, Delhi Traffic Police, Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) and the food commissioner.

“In the run-up to Independence Day, many trucks carrying onions were halted and hence there was a delay in the vegetable reaching the mandis. But now, we have requested the police not to halt those trucks. The police will be given the number of trucks carrying our quota of onions once they start from Nasik,” said the minister.

The Delhi government has also urged citizens not to indulge in “panic buying” of onions since sufficient stock was available. It has claimed that nearly 1,000 tonne of onions is available in open market, the same quantity available at this time last year.

Rural development minister Gopal Rai has directed officials to convene a meeting of wholesalers at the earliest to ensure there is no hoarding of onions in Delhi. "If the stock availability is same as last year in the open market, then there are gaps which need to be filled to ensure that prices do not keep going up in the open market," he said.

Meanwhile, teams from food and civil supplies department have been directed to conduct surprise checks at fair price shops to make sure that common people are getting the benefit of the price and nobody is being allowed to buy above the specified quantity.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Onions at 22-month high of Rs 5,500 a quintal

NASHIK: Average wholesale onion prices at Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) rose to Rs 5,500 a quintal on Friday, a 22-month high and just short of an all-time high of Rs 5,600 a quintal recorded on October 18, 2013. Before that, the all-time high of Rs 3,200 a quintal was recorded in 1998, when onions became one of the factors for the BJP's debacle in the assembly polls in three states.

Average wholesale onion prices at Lasalgaon have shot up by almost four times in just 52 days from Rs 1,450 a quintal on June 30 to Rs 5,500 a quintal on Friday (August 21) due to the decline in supply of onions as compared to demand. Sources say it is only a matter of days before the all-time high price is surpassed.

An official from Lasalgaon APMC said, "At present, the onions arriving in the market are the summer crop which is harvested in March and April and has a shelf life of six to seven months. The farmers store the summer crop with an aim to get better prices and bring it to the market as per requirement. There is no fresh crop during the five-month period from May to October until the arrival of the fresh kharif crop.

The summer crop caters to market demand until arrival of fresh kharif crop by October-end. A scarcity of onions is created if this cycle is affected."

He said the summer crop had been badly affected by the unseasonal rains in February and March this year. "Moreover, the farmers sold most of their stock in April and May, as the shelf life of the summer crop had decreased because of the bad weather. Now the farmers have very limited stock and it is difficult to estimate the quantity they have. This has resulted in a sharp decline in the arrivals of onions at the Lasalgaon market. The daily arrivals of onions, which were in the range of 15,000 to 22,000 quintals per day in June, have declined to the range of 2,500 to 4,000 a quintal per day. This has led to a sharp rise in average wholesale onion prices," the official said.

Speaking to TOI, R P Gupta, director of the National Horticulture Research & Development Foundation (NHRDF), said, "I don't understand why average wholesale onion prices have shot up so high. On Thursday, the average wholesale onion prices were Rs 4,900 a quintal and today (Friday) it has increased by Rs 500 a quintal to Rs 5,500 a quintal. If the average wholesale onion price is Rs 5,500 a quintal then it should be around Rs 6,500 a quintal in other mandis in the state. But the average wholesale onion prices are in the range of Rs 4,000 to Rs 4,500 a quintal there. Hence, I don't understand how the traders are buying and where they are selling the commodity."

Gupta further said, "The arrival of fresh kharif crop has already started in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The arrival is expected to increase there in the next few days. This will help cater to the demand of the market. Traders have also started importing onions from Afghanistan and Egypt. Moreover, the government has also asked MMTC to import 10,000 tonnes of onions immediately. This will help stabilise the onion prices in the country."

Meanwhile, the minimum and maximum prices were Rs 3,100 and Rs 6,151 a quintal, respectively at Lasalgaon APMC. Around 4,585 quintals of onions were auctioned on Friday.

The average wholesale onion price at another major market at Pimpalgaon was Rs 4,900 a quintal on Friday. The minimum and maximum prices were Rs 2,800 and 5,752 a quintal respectively. Around 3,400 quintals of onions were auctioned at Pimpalgaon on Friday.

Onion commands Rs 70/kg in city

PUNE: At Rs 70 per kg on Friday, onion is selling at the same price as average quality rice in the city. Some traders said prices would peak to Rs 100 per kg, this season.

The last time onion prices touched such a peak in the city was in 2011-12, when the wholesale prices were Rs 80 per kg and retailers were selling it for Rs 95 per kg.

The good quality, dry variety costs even more in the city's wholesale market. Inadequate rainfall in the onion-growing belt has hampered production, affecting supply to the city. Traders expect the trend to continue for a couple of more weeks.

According to officials in the city's Agriculture Produce Market Committee, only 25% of the average expected supply at this time of the year is reaching the market. It has pushed up wholesale prices from Rs 40 per kg on August 13 to Rs 58 per kg on Friday.

N D Gule, in charge of the market committee's fruits and vegetables subdivision, said, "The entire onion growing belt has had poor rainfall. The new crop is not of expected quality and is commanding not more than Rs 30 per kg in the wholesale market. Farmers are hoarding good stock. While we usually receive more than 50,000 bags every day. But in the last few days, a mere 10,000 bags have been arriving at the wholesale market which has pushed up the prices."

They won't fall quickly in the days to come, said Gorakh Kamble, a vegetable retailer in Pashan who was selling onions at Rs 60 per kg. "Only a limited supply of good quality onion is available in the wholesale market. While onion rates are already sky-high in the city, it is selling for even more in the outskirts. We are expecting the retail prices to go up to Rs 100 per kg in the next few weeks," he said.

Ritesh Poman, a wholesale trader in Market Yard, said the Union government may import the kitchen staple from Pakistan and Iran.

"This year, there has not been enough rain for the fresh crop to grow. As a result, farmers are holding on to whatever stock they have, with the hope that they will be able to fetch a higher price for their good quality crop. So while 80-100 truckloads of onion usually reach the Pune market daily in this season, this year, we are not getting more than 40 trucks per day. Demand for onion continues to remain high, especially from the southern states. While there are reports of onion being imported from other countries, it could take more than a couple of weeks for that supply to actually reach the Pune market," he said.

Nagpur orange set to turn sweeter for farmers

NAGPUR: Nagpur orange has climbed another step up on the ladder of commercial success. After getting GI tag in April last year, the Nagpur orange will now be making it to the international market too. Sant Gajanan Maharaj Santra Utpadak Sangh (SUS), comprising a group of 20 farmers from Warud taluka in Amravati district, has obtained the Global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certificate (GGAPC), a mandatory requirement for exporting agriculture products, especially to European countries. It is the first licence given to any orange grower in Maharashtra.

The GGAPC certificate obtained from the Food Cert India Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad, has come to the SUS under state run Krishi Samrudhi Prakalap (KSP) with financial support from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT). The project is being implemented by the Tata Consultancy Services.

Delighted by the achievement, Ramesh Jichkar, a progressive orange grower from Warud taluka, who is technical adviser in the KSP programme told TOI it took them an entire year to obtain the certificate. "This has opened new doors for the Vidarbha orange cultivators and will go a long way in motivating local farmers. It is really a matter of pride for Vidarbhaites. Till now, only fruits grown in western Maharashtra like pomegranate, grapes and mango had GAP certificate. It is first step towards a big lead that awaits the orange growers," he said. The other two technical advisers for the KSP programme in Warud are Rahul Gudadhe and Rajesh Kale.

Vidarbha has 1.36 lakh hectare area under orange with 70,000 orange farmers. Of this, only 90,000ha is viable with an average productivity of about 10 tonnes per ha making for a Rs1100 crore market. Unfortunately, the farmers get just about Rs15/kg which is not profitable. "This is one crop that takes nine months for production from flowering to fruits. Hence it requires much higher wholesale price," says Jichkar. He is grateful to Arun Pande and Sonali Kulkarni, the two TCS officials who guided the farmers throughout the process of obtaining the certificate.

Ravindra Thakre, project director of KSP is all praise for the farmers from the five villages (Sourali, Chandas, Wathoda, Sawangi and Musalkheda) who he said really worked hard. "The Food Cert team conducts 5-6 audits throughout the year for ensuring the produce meets all the requirements as per international norms. IFAD doesn't fund any programme easily. It paid Rs4 lakh for the certificate on behalf of farmers. This group really deserves all the plaudits," he said. He admitted that besides targeting European market, other markets like SAARC countries could also bring good income for the farmers.

Manoj Jawanjal, secretary, Orange Producers Association from Katol, also sees this development as an extremely positive step. "It will bring a new confidence to the orange growers of entire Vidarbha," he said. This is the second orange export attempt supported by government. In 2001, the state had exported oranges to Dubai and Netherlands through Maharashtra State Marketing Board (MSMB).

What goes into getting GAP certification

- * A technical team ensured that all the 20 farmers from five villages having 23 hectare far area with 7500 orange trees follow all the Good Agricultural Practices as per international norms especially to ensure zero chemical residue in the fruit
- * The Central Citrus Research Institute (CCRI) scientists led by M S Ladaniya trained the farmers in adopting cultivation, grading, processing, waxing and packaging technology to meet international standards that included soil and leaf analysis, irrigation methodology, spraying schedule based on integrated pest management programme
- * The project was undertaken under the KSP initiative of state government for five suicide prone districts of region-Akola, Amravati, Buldhana, Washim, Wardha and Yavatmal

Future plans

- * To export about 250 tonnes orange annually
- * Maintain the standards to get renewal as certificate is valid for only one year
- * Seek help of chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and union surface transport minister Nitin Gadkari in getting Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) and MSMB to fund other steps in the project like transporting and packaging

Demands

- * Government should negotiate with Bangladesh to withdraw 40% import duty on oranges from India
- * Corporate sector or government should come forward to take up processing of Grade IV and V orange and supporting farmers as end to end process

Web drive to help farmers with weather forecast

A large part of India's agricultural produce comes from monsoon-fed crops. MEERUT: Skymet, the nation's sole private weather forecaster, has started a social media campaign called #HelpTheFarmer, asking social media users to

spread monsoon forecast to farmers who may not have access to the internet.

As part of the campaign, Skymet has also prepared a gut-wrenching video about farmer suicides that has received over a million views. So far, over 10,000 people have tweeted using the hashtag #HelpTheFarmer in two days. On Thursday, the hashtag was the top Indian trend for six hours, above other trends such as #FTII and #MulayamSinghYadav.

"A large part of India's agricultural produce comes from monsoon-fed crops. Each year, monsoon impacts crop production, price-control and industrial output as nearly 40% of raw materials also come from farming. But unusual weather patterns and aberrations lead to a myriad of problems for the country," an official statement from Skymet said.

Manav Singh Gehlaut, Skymet's chief of digital media, said, "Unlike the 1990s, it is much easier to share information about weather forecasts with the masses. Internet has changed the way information is disseminated. We want to capitalize on that. Those who do not have access to the internet need a digital revolution. We need to acquaint them with the platform. Those who have access can also play their part. The aim behind #HelpTheFarmer is to let urban citizens know that they can spread the word by informing people around them about the forecast. If someone with access to the internet tells their gardener or driver, the information can reach someone in a far-off village. This can help them prepare for monsoon or lack thereof."

Gehlaut said short-term forecasts can help farmers and at least bring down the number of farmers' suicides. "A farmer in Madhya Pradesh was in constant touch with us about the weather and he kept asking us when he should sow his seeds. He followed the weather patterns online and made huge profits," he said.

Skymet also prepared a four-minute short film which follows the story of a young girl who was in constant fear that her father, a farmer, might commit suicide. "The video has over 1 million views on Facebook and another 50,000 on YouTube. Just planning ahead can help farmers exponentially. In a country where we are still working to improve our internet penetration, those with access can play a large role."

Soyabean acreage edges up, but yield a worry

The area under soyabean, a key Kharif oilseed, may have risen in comparison to last year, but whether it translates to a higher yield is questionable.

As of August 21, Agriculture Ministry data shows that soyabean has been planted on about 11.3 million hectare (mh) – higher than the 10.9 mh under the crop at the same time in 2014-15.

Weather woes

An erratic monsoon over parts of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (MP), which account for 50-60 per cent of soyabean output, could hurt crop productivity and prompt a rise in soya oil imports.

“Major growing areas like Marathwada, North Karnataka and Telangana have had deficit rainfall. The crop needs rain for flowering through August and September without which yield will be lower,” said BV Mehta, Executive Director, Solvent Extractors’ Association of India.

A vigorous El Nino has impacted the South-West monsoon and rainfall between June 1 and August 19 was deficient by 9 per cent, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Regions such as Marathwada, have received less than 46 per cent of normal rainfall while Central MP has a 36 per cent deficit. Telangana and North interior Karnataka have recorded deficient rainfall by 23 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively.

“Inclement weather will impact productivity. Certain parts of MP began with dry weather after which excess rain inundated fields and damaged the sown crop. The pod count may not be up to its potential,” said Davish Jain, Chairman, Soyabean Processors’ Association of India.

Acreage comparison

Mehta pointed out that the current sowing data should be compared with 2013-14 figures, a normal agricultural year. “Compared to then, acreage for this year is lower so the numbers can be misleading,” he warned.

Acreage at this time in 2013-14 stood at 12.1 mh, nearly 1 mh higher than the August 21 figures which estimated area under soyabean in MP at 5.8 mh, marginally higher than 5.69 mh last year but lower than 6.4 mh in 2013-14.

In Maharashtra, acreage is pegged at 3.51 mh, lower than both last year (3.56 mh) and the year before (3.9 mh). Rajasthan recorded an increase in area by 0.3 mh over last year, while Karnataka has also reported a marginal rise.

Farm groups to promote vannamei



Kochi, August 21 Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies have plans to launch large scale vannamei farming across the state with the formation of various farmer groups. According to Vice-Chancellor B Madhusoodana Kurup, KUFOS would help farmers to export the produce directly avoiding intermediaries. Steps have been taken to obtain the recognition of Aquaculture Stewardship Council, a global eco-labelling agency in the Netherlands. He was speaking at the two-day training and aqua-expo organised by Kufos on the *Litopenaeus Vannamei*, an exotic white shrimp. The programme was organised with the support of Choice Trading Corporation Limited. Central Institute of Brackish Water Aquaculture, Coastal Aquaculture Authority and Mpeda. Our Bureau

Weak rains drag Kharif acreage; area under oilseeds, cotton down

Slack sowing		(Coverage as on 21/08/2015)		
Crop	Area sown		Change	% change
	2015-16	2014-15		
Rice	333.65	332.09	1.56	0.47
Pulses (total)	101.96	92.57	9.39	10.14
Arhar (tur)	33.29	33.11	0.18	0.54
Urad	25.96	22.75	3.21	14.11
Moong	23.16	19.64	3.52	17.92
Oilseeds (total)	168.25	168.45	-0.20	-0.12
Soyabean	112.75	109.36	3.39	3.09
Groundnut	33.55	35.12	-1.57	-4.47
Sesamum	15.48	14.48	1.00	6.91
Castor	5.01	7.31	-2.30	-31.46
Coarse Cereals (total)	167.69	162.27	5.42	3.34
Jowar	18.00	17.25	0.75	4.35
Bajra	65.93	61.47	4.46	7.26
Kharif Maize	72.74	71.58	1.16	1.62
Sugarcane	48.84	47.17	1.67	3.54
Cotton	110.23	118.81	-8.58	-7.22
Jute & Mesta	7.80	8.13	-0.33	-4.06
Total	938.41	929.48	8.93	8.96

*Source: Ministry of Agriculture ** Area in lakh hectares; Normal Kharif area: 1052.89 lakh hectares

The weakening of monsoon rainfall in recent weeks across several parts of the country has slowed down the pace of kharif plantings.

After the cotton area slid over the last month from last year's sowing figures, oilseeds coverage has also declined vis-à-vis the corresponding 2014-15 acreage for the first time this week, according to the latest data released by the Agriculture Ministry on Friday.

Overall acreage under Kharif crops, such as rice, soyabean, cotton and a variety of pulses, stands at 938.4 lakh hectares (lh), around 1 per cent higher than at the same time last year when 929.48 lh had been covered.

Around 89 per cent of planting for the season has been completed, serviced by the South-West monsoon which, as on Friday, was estimated to have provided 9 per cent deficit rainfall, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Reservoir levels

Each major region is estimated to have received sub-normal rainfall, says IMD's daily monsoon report.

The situation is most acute in the South Peninsula (20 per cent deficiency) and the Central region (11 per cent).

Out of 36 sub-divisions, 13 have recorded deficient rainfall. Marathwada, North interior Karnataka, Central Maharashtra, East and West Uttar Pradesh and Kerala are the most stressed in terms of poor precipitation.

Water levels in 91 important reservoirs in the country, as of August 20, stood at 91.04 billion cubic metres (bcm), about 58 per cent of the total capacity of 157.79 bcm, according to the Central Water Commission.

The figure is 88 per cent of the storage during the corresponding period last year and 92 per cent of the 10-year average.

Crop-wise data

Oilseeds acreage has slipped mainly on lower coverage by groundnut in Karnataka and castor in Gujarat, which has slipped by nearly 5 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively.

Sesamum acreage is up nearly 7 per cent, led by higher sowing in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Area under soyabean, the most widely cultivated Kharif oilseed, stands at 112.75 lh, around 3 per cent higher than during the same period last year.

The marginally higher acreage is largely on account of increased sowing of pulses in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and UP.

Pulses area

While area under arhar (tur) is up only marginally by 0.54 per cent, sowing of urad and moong has continued to surpass 2014-15 figures by 14 per cent and nearly 18 per cent. Higher urad sowing has been recorded in Madhya Pradesh and UP, where acreages stand at 9.19 lh and 6.52 lh, respectively, about 7.5 per cent and 27 per cent higher than at the same time last year.

Increased area under moong has been reported in Rajasthan (10.5 lh) and Maharashtra (3.51 lh). The figures are higher by 20 per cent and 38.2 per cent in the respective States.

Coarse cereals up

Sowing of coarse cereals, such as jowar and bajra, are up 3.3 per cent over last year, led by more area brought under these crops in Rajasthan, Haryana and Maharashtra.

Cotton area slipped for the fifth straight week and stands at 110.23 lh, more than 7 per cent lower than at the same time in 2014-15 with Gujarat and Maharashtra – the two largest growing States – reporting decreased sowing.

Area under rice, the main Kharif foodgrain, has touched 333.65 lh, marginally higher than the corresponding figure from last year, while cane acreage is also up 3.5 per cent.

Jute and mesta coverage continued to stagnate at 7.8 lh, around 4 per cent lower than last year.

Kerala varsity plans to give big push to vannamei farming



Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies have plans to launch large scale vannamei farming across the state with the formation of various farmer groups.

According to Vice Chancellor B Madhusoodana Kurup, KUFOS would help farmers to export the produce directly avoiding intermediaries. Steps have been taken to obtain the recognition of Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ACC), a global eco labelling agency headquartered in Netherlands, for getting easy access in foreign market.

He was speaking at the two-day training and aqua-expo organised by KUFOS on the *Litopenaeus Vannamei*, an exotic white shrimp.

Earlier, the State Fisheries Minister, K Babu, has urged shrimp farmers to accept the change and to speed up the process of ushering in a vannamei revolution in the State.

“Kerala shrimp farmers should be ready to accept the changes in the field of shrimp farming around the world. Compared to the other states, we are very late to earn profits out of vannamei culture”, he said.

By successfully developing a farming model of vannamei shrimp suitable to the particular brackish water ecosystem of the State, KUFOS dismissed concerns of shrimp farmers in undertaking the vannamei culture, he added.

Showcasing hi-tech model of aquaculture practices, the expo exhibition and the State-wide training programme on vannamei farming have received encouraging response from the fish farming community.

The programme was organised with the support of Choice Trading Corporation Limited. Central Institute of Brackish Water Aquaculture (CIBA), Coastal Aquaculture Authority (CAA) and MPEDA also are cooperating with KUFOS.

MMTC floats tender for import of 10,000 tonnes onion



State-run MMTC has invited bids from global suppliers for import of 10,000 tonnes onion from countries like Pakistan, Egypt, China and Afghanistan to boost domestic supply and check price rise.

The wholesale price of onion at Lasalgaon in Maharashtra — the country’s largest market for the crop — shot up to Rs. 54 per kg today.

Consequently in the price-sensitive Delhi retail markets, price of the kitchen staple has dramatically risen up to Rs. 80 per kg.

According to the tender, MMTC has invited bids for import of 10,000 tonnes of onion for arrival latest by September 15 via Wagah border, Kandla, JNPT and Chennai ports.

Onion should be sourced from Pakistan, Egypt, China, Afghanistan or any other country. Bids should be submitted by August 27 and will remain valid up to September 2.

Bids should be made for a minimum quantity of 1,000 tonnes. The exact supply order will be regulated in units of 500 tonnes depending upon the requirement.

“Quantity can be increased or decreased. It is the sole and absolute discretion of the buyer depending on the prices received in the tender,” the tender added.

Onion prices are hardening due to the fall in production and sluggish supply of stored onions, which are meant for meeting demand during the lean July—September.

Total onion production is estimated to be lower at 189 lakh tonnes in 2014—15 crop year (July—June), slightly lower than 194 lakh tonnes a year ago.

Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are the top three onion—producing states in the country.