

26-08-2015

# THE HINDU

## U.S. to support fellowship in agriculture studies and allied disciplines in India



U.S. Ambassador Richard R. Verma addresses students of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in Coimbatore.- Photo:S. Siva Saravanan

United States of America's Ambassador to India, Richard R. Verma, on Monday presented some good news to the students of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

He said his country would support fellowship in India in agriculture and allied disciplines.

### Explore

Interacting with the students at the University, he said that the fellowship was to explore animal health, post-harvest treatment, biological control, biotechnology and agricultural marketing.

This was necessary because the U.S. and India, as two of the world's largest agriculture producers, should collaborate not only on the research front but to also ensure global food security and prosperity to the rest of the world.

As for research in agriculture, the countries needed to acknowledge the importance of agriculture biotechnology; in particular, the importance of genetically modified crops in boosting production. "While some still question the value of genetically modified crops, we believe it is one of the tools necessary to overcome the global challenge of feeding, clothing, and sheltering people as our land and resource base is increasingly constrained," said Mr. Verma.

Such a collaboration and research was necessary because by 2050 the world population would touch 9.1 billion, to feed which the production should go up by 70 per cent from the present level. This would require significant investment in agriculture research.

### **Find answers**

To the students he said that they were studying agriculture at a very crucial time because they should find answers to questions like how they could support rural jobs and income growth in rural areas, how to overcome resistance to innovative technology in food production, etc.

Mr. Verma then took questions from students.

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Vice Chancellor K. Ramasamy was present at the event.

### **22 model vegetable villages**

Agriculture Minister R. Vaithilingam on Tuesday announced a Rs. five-crore scheme for creation of model vegetable villages, Rs. 2.30 crore for micronutrients mixture scheme to increase millet production, Rs. 1.65 crore for promoting apiculture.

Replying to demands for grants for his department in the Assembly, he said model vegetable villages would be set up in 22 districts. “The technical guidance will be provided by Tamil Nadu Agriculture University and Horticulture Department,” Mr. Vaithilingam said. The government was taking measures to improve the production of millets to meet the nutritional requirement of the people.

### **Price of onions has come down: government**

Delhi government on Tuesday claimed that the price of onions has come down in the wholesale markets in the national Capital.

A senior official said that the change in onion rates comes after the government’s intervention, which will further bring down the price of the kitchen staple in the city.

The onion rates were Rs. 43.50 per kg and maximum Rs. 50 per kg whereas on Monday the price was Rs. 45.50 and maximum was Rs. 55 a kg, the official said.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Asim Ahmed Khan has also written a letter to the Maharashtra government to curb hoarding and black marketing of onions so that its availability in the open market could be increased.

In his letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Khan said, “Undesirable elements should not be allowed to take undue advantage of the situation arising out of

shortage of onions.” On Monday, a meeting was called by the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) with the members of Potato and Onion Merchants Association (POMA) to discuss the situation.

The government is maintaining a close watch on the onion price situation in the open market. AAP government has also decided to continue selling onions at Rs 30 a kg at the Fair Price Shops and through mobile vans, till the price situation normalises.

### **Dealers apprised of the rules on use of pesticides**

Pesticide dealers were oriented to the judicious use of pesticides, alternative pest management techniques, and impact of pesticides on agro eco-system and the environment at a training programme organised by the Central Integrated Pest Management Centre in association with the Department of Agriculture here.

The pesticide dealers were briefed on the Insecticide Act 1968 and Insecticide Rules -1971 besides issues such as pesticide resistance, pesticide residue, pest resurgence, bio magnification and impact on human health during the two-day training, which concluded here on Tuesday.

Exercises on assessment of knowledge on pest, disease, natural enemies, components of integrated pest management, and use of sprayers and nozzles were conducted by officials of Central Integrated Pest Management Centre, Tiruchi.

Fifty-three pesticide dealers from Tiruchi district participated.

R. Chandrasekar, Joint Director of Agriculture, and S. Umamehaswari, Plant Protection Officer (PP) of Central IPM Centre, spoke.

### **Horticulture crops hit by moisture stress**

If the lack of rainfall had created havoc for agricultural crops this year, it had equal or more impact on horticulture crops also with an estimated horticulture crops in more than 3,388 hectares damaged due to the lack of rainfall and moisture stress in Kalaburagi district this year.

Deputy Director of the Horticulture G. Manjunath told *The Hindu* that the affected crops including fruit bearing trees planted in the previous years and the one which were planted this year. The coverage of horticulture crops this year was less than 50 per cent of the targeted area and the yield from the planted crops would be drastically reduced due to the moisture stress and stunted growth.

He said as against the target of 5,304.40 hectare fixed for the current year for horticulture crops, the actual coverage of the listed crops by the department was 2,033.20 hectares.

Apart from this non-listed horticulture crops have been sown in another 5,000 hectares in the district.

Mr. Manjunath said that as per the preliminary estimate, the horticulture crop in 3,388 hectare has suffered damages due to lack of rainfall and moisture stress.

The department has taken up a detailed survey of the crop condition and extent of the exact loss would be known by this month end.

The condition of the lime, sweet orange, pomegranate and mango in the sown area was average and the banana and papaya plantations had witnessed stunted growth due to moisture stress leading to low yield and delayed fruit setting.

The worst affected was the vegetables and all the notified vegetable crops including tomato, chilli, onion, brinjal.

### **Falling potato prices worries Idukki farmers**



Officials of Agriculture Department and farmers of Vallavayalkudy at Kanthallur in Idukki district harvest the potato for Onam season

As the harvesting of potato begins, the main crop in Vattavada and Kanthallur, farmers are faced with a sudden fall in its price.

Hundreds of acres, where grandis were grown earlier, had been brought under potato cultivation and the prices suddenly fell as the harvesting started.

An official of the Marayur Krishibhavan told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that last year, the prices ranged between Rs 1,100 to 1,300 for a 45 kg sack. However, this time it has fallen to Rs

600. At Kanthallur, it has been certified by the Kerala Agriculture University that no harmful pesticides were found in the vegetables. The main items are potato, carrot, beetroot, beans and garlic.

The Agriculture Department under the Integrated Tribal Development Scheme had selected two tribal villages of Mangaparakudy and Vallavayalkudy for vegetable cultivation. Eighty-five hectares of land were brought under vegetable cultivation with nearly 50 hectares being potato. The harvesting of the potato started on Monday in these settlements. As it was aimed at initiating the tribal people into vegetable cultivation, the fall in the prices could make them retract from vegetable farming, the official said adding that in the coming days there are chances of further decline in the prices when the major portion starts arriving in the market. In Vattavada alone, of the 2,927 hectares total vegetable cultivation around 990 hectares is for potato.

This time the production is average and newly cultivated areas could make a better harvest, said P.T. Mohandas, president Kanthallur Cool Season Vegetable Marketing Farmers Society. The agency procures 75 per cent of the total production and supplies directly to HortiCorp.

He said that the falling prices of potato and other vegetables in the prime season is a matter of concern.

### **Kuruvai harvest in full swing**

*Harvest completed on about 30 per cent of 87,392 acres*



Kuruvai crop being harvested with the use of a harvester at a village in Thanjavur district.—  
File Photo

Harvest of 'kuruvai' crop has been in full swing in parts of the district, thanks to the special package scheme implemented by the State government in coordination with the Agriculture, Agricultural Engineering, Cooperation departments.

Harvest has been completed in about 30 per cent of the 87,392 acres in the district and there has been scramble for mechanical harvesters.

### **Rain affected work**

In fact, there was a lull in harvest on Sunday following moderate showers in parts of Kutthalam and Mayiladuthurai and Vedaranyam experienced.

According to official sources, the district's achievement last year was 71,575 acres but an additional 15,817 acres was covered this year, taking the total area to 87,392 acres.

A majority of farmers has raised 'ADT 45' paddy, a short-duration variety, which was best suitable for the 'kuruvai' season.

The harvest of 'kuruvai' has been in full swing and the paddy was being marketed at the direct procurement centres opened by the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation.

Apart from ADT 45, a cluster of paddy farmers in Mayiladuthurai, Sembanarkovil and Kutthalam have raised 'TKM 9' paddy variety.

As a special case, the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation procured the paddy, the official told *The Hindu* on Monday.

Harvest has been brisk in Mayiladuthurai and Kutthalam blocks in the district. Farmers of Perenzhundur, Atthikadu, Vanathirajapuram, Melaiyur, Kadakkam, Agaram Adhanur and Perunchedi have been registering a good yield.

The average yield was about 6.5 tonnes a hectare.

Farmers have resorted to 'thaladi' crop in a few villages in the district where the 'kuruvai' cultivation has been completed.

***Paddy is being marketed at the direct procurement centres opened by Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation***

### **Subsidy for green manure**

Farmers raising green manure on their fields can avail back-ended subsidy of Rs. 2,000 a hectare under the National Agriculture Development Programme. The subsidy would be given for 1,920 hectares of land in the district this year, according to an official release. Accordingly, farmers raising daincha or Sunn hemp can avail the subsidy, to the extent of 50 per cent of the cost of the 50 kg of the seeds of the plants subject to a maximum of Rs. 2,000 a hectare. A farmer can avail the subsidy for a maximum of two hectares. Applications can be submitted to the respective Assistant Directors of Agriculture, an official release said.

## LAST DATE FOR

### M.PHIL APPLICATION

The last date for submission of applications for M. Phil programmes of the Bharathidasan University and its affiliated colleges has been extended up to August 31, according to an official release from the varsity.

### JOBS IN OMAN

Preliminary interviews for the recruitment of machine operators for a company in Oman and labourers for cable laying works for a telecommunication project in Kuwait would be held at the District Employment Office here on August 30, according to a release from Overseas Manpower Corporation Limited. Machine operators in the age group of 22 to 32 and labourers, experienced in digging trenches for laying cables, in the age group of 22 to 35 are to be recruited. Those interested can appear for the interviews at the Employment Office at 9 a.m. on August 30 along with their certificates. For details, call 044-22502267 or 22505886, the release added.

### **Onion prices fall below Rs 50/kg on export curbs**



At Lasalgaon, Maharashtra, which sets the price trend across the country, the wholesale onion price declined to Rs 48.5 per kg on Tuesday from Rs 57 per kg last week. Photo: Shashi Ashiwal

*However, retail onion prices across the country continue to rule as high as Rs 80 per kg.*

Wholesale prices of onion today fell below the Rs 50 per kg mark at the Lasalgaon in Maharashtra, Asia's biggest onion market, due to curbs on exports and fear of action against hoarding.

Even at Azadpur mandi in Delhi, wholesale onion price declined by Rs 3-5 per kg to Rs 53 today on increase in arrival of new crop from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

However, retail onion prices across the country continue to rule as high as Rs 80 per kg.

At Lasalgaon, which sets the price trend across the country, the wholesale onion price declined to Rs 48.5 per kg today from Rs 57 per kg last week, according to the data maintained by Nashik-based National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF).

“Prices declined due to increase in arrival in the mandis,” NHRDF Director R P Gupta said.

Arrival of onion increased as farmers/traders brought more stock for sale after the government imposed restriction on overseas sale by raising export price sharply to USD 700 per tonne from USD 425, Nashik-based traders said.

Also, fear of action against hoarding along with MMTC importing 10,000 tonnes of onion helped, they added.

On Monday, the Centre had asked the Maharashtra government to crack down on hoarders and take adequate measures.

Onion prices both in the retail and wholesale markets have been rising unabated in the wake of shortage of five lakh tonnes of onion in the country. There is apprehension that this year's kharif output may get affected because of deficit rains in the growing states.

Thanks to increased arrival of new crop from in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the wholesale prices in Delhi markets have declined by 3-5 per kg to Rs 53 today, Azadpur Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) member Rajendra Sharma said.

The arrival of early kharif crop of onion in the two southern States has picked up momentum, which would help improve supply across the country till harvesting of new crop begins in Maharashtra, the country's largest onion growing state, from October onwards.



## **Water level increases in Krishnagiri reservoir**

Water level in Krishnagiri reservoir has reached 49.35 feet with the full reservoir level being 52 feet.

The inflow into the Krishnagiri reservoir from Kelavarapalli dam is 350 cusecs while the outflow from the reservoir is 150 cusecs.

## **Flood alert**

Collector T.P.Rajesh said that a flood alert would be issued if and when the water level crossed 50 feet in the reservoir.

The water level was being monitored round the clock and the situation would be taken stock of.

The Krishnagiri reservoir, primarily fed by Kelavarapalli dam, has seen an increase in the water level with an increase in inflow into Kelavarapalli dam due to rain in Karnataka.



## **Whitefly menace in Punjab: Agri dept to survey crop damage from today**

“The week-long survey will determine the exact area damaged and the reasons for the whitefly attack,” said Dr Sukhdev Singh Sidhu, deputy director for cotton, department of agriculture.

At least 80,000 hectares of cotton is facing an attack from whitefly — a pest that sucks sap from the plant’s leaves, thus affecting its growth. A team from the agriculture department will start surveying areas affected by the pest from Wednesday.



“The week-long survey will determine the exact area damaged and the reasons for the whitefly attack,” said Dr Sukhdev Singh Sidhu, deputy director for cotton, department of agriculture.

A central team that had earlier visited the affected areas, termed the attack to be at the economic threshold level (ETL) — a term used to describe a severe attack that requires urgent action to prevent large scale losses. The team had recommended farmers spray insecticides to repel the attack. Farmers however claim that the sprays subsidised by the government were of no use and have started to demand compensation.

“As per rough reports, nearly 300 hectares are under severe attack. Water logging is a major contributing reason especially in Fazilka district,” Dr Sidhu said.

Meanwhile CLP leader Sunil Jakhar said, “Cotton farmers have suffered huge losses and they must be compensated for the same. I will be sitting on a dharna along with farmers from entire Malwa region to demand special girdwaris so as to assess the damage and then seek compensation for the crop loss.”

He added, “At the same time, there should be an inquiry into why the insecticides for spray on which the government provided 50% subsidy were completely ineffective in controlling the pest.”

## **Govt orders raids across state to check for onion hoarding**

The state government's decision to crack whip against hoarding coupled with ban on export of onions saw the prices coming down in domestic market marginally. The ministry of agriculture revealed that prices at Lasalgaon, which is the main market of onions, came down to Rs 50 per kg. State Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse said, "The government has taken several measures to bring down the price of onions.

The import of onions from Egypt was essentially to bridge the gap between supply and demand. It worked as prices came down by Rs 10 per kg in domestic market." However, he indicated, "The cost of importing onions from Egypt proved expensive. The government centre -state has incurred almost double the cost for importing Egypt onions." Another decision was to dissuade the large scale hoarding of onions to create an artificial short supply that lead to spiralling of prices. As Khadse said, "The raids have been ordered and would continue till the prices stabilise.

If any body is found hoarding onions action would be taken." While maintaining that people should not hesitate to pay a little extra for onions as it would help farmers, he said, "What we need to check is if there is deliberate attempt to create a short supply." The consumption of onions in "Shravan and Chaturmas" (August and September) is always lower as a section of people fast and give up non-vegetarian food, he revealed. While acknowledging that there are not many takers for Egypt onion as it doesnot match the flavour of local market, government has also tried to tap neighbouring states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The short supply of onions in Maharashtra is also being attributed to poor rains to some extent



## **Maha govt clears 22 sugar mills for Centre's soft loan scheme**

As many as 22 sugar mills in Maharashtra have been cleared by the state Cabinet for the soft loan scheme announced by the Centre.

These 22 factories would be receiving interest-free loans under the Centre's scheme, making them eligible to crush in the new season. The state government would pay Rs 56.33 crore towards the interest for the next five years.

Of the Centre's R6,000 crore interest-free loan, Maharashtra's share is around Rs 1,850 crore.

Meanwhile, primary estimates by the State Agriculture Department reveal that around 68,000 hectares have been reduced from the usual acreage of 10.34 lakh hectares in the state. Around 800 lakh tonne of cane is expected to be crushed next season with production estimated at 90 lakh tonne. This season Maharashtra produced a record 104.5 lakh tonne.

The state Cabinet has also decided to extend the scheme to those sugar factories which had paid more than 50% of the fair and remunerative price (FRP) to sugarcane growers in the last season. The money coming from the scheme would be going towards making FRP payments to farmers.

Millers in Maharashtra have been reluctant to availing of the soft loan scheme. Top officials of the Maharashtra State Cooperative Sugar Factories Federation (MSCSFF) pointed out that the general view among millers is that this is a loan that has to be paid.

Moreover, there are stringent conditions of personal guarantees attached which seem to have led to some unease among the millers, said Sanjeev Babar, MD, MSCSFF. Purchasing raw material through loans does not make business sense either, he said.

Although prices have improved to about R2,200 per quintal, around 60% of the sugar has already been sold.

Around 147 mills in the state have made more than 50% cane payments to farmers and are therefore considered eligible for the loan. The mills are expected to submit details of last year's production figures and the proof of payments of at least 50% dues of the FRP payments to farmers for this season in order to be eligible for the bank loan.

A total of 178 factories had crushed 929.5 lakh metric tonne of cane and the sugar production had touched 104.79 lakh metric tonne.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Egyptian onions hit market, retail prices to dip in a week**

As the first container of around 30 tonnes of imported Egyptian onions arrived at the Navi Mumbai Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) market on Wednesday, wholesale

rates of the bulb dropped by Rs 2 to Rs 58 per kg. This sent cheer among the trading community, as more of the fresh imported stock will arrive in the coming days.

"This is good news, as wholesale rates of onions will continue to drop in the days ahead. Onion wholesale rates in the Pune and Nashik markets also dipped on Wednesday. After mid-September, as the fresh domestic crop starts arriving, prices will further go down to the standardized figures," said Ashok Walunj of the onion-potato section of the market.

However, retail rates in Mumbai region continued to hover at Rs 65-80 per kg, as the dropdown effect is still to reach local markets.

"The Egyptian onions sold for Rs 50 per kg at the APMC. Hence, overall wholesale rates dipped a little. But it will take two days more of fresh stock to influence retailers to lower rates," an APMC trader said.

Onion wholesale rates at Lasalgaon, near Nashik, which sets price trends for the bulb, had dropped below Rs 50, to stand at Rs 48.50 per kg on Tuesday.

Some malls have adopted a marketing strategy to lure customers by offering onions equivalent to Wednesday's wholesale rates which ranged at Rs 50-60 per kg. It has not amused consumers as no one usually purchases onions from malls unless some other items are listed with it.

"The malls have orchestrated the scheme to attract customers who will certainly have something else to buy. For online purchases too, your bill should be more than Rs 1,000 to enable you to be privileged for delivery and concessional onions, which are now sold at Rs 50-60, equivalent to the wholesale rate," said Shantaran Avate, a trader.

Market sources said bulk of imports will hit the market in seven to eight days to bring down onion prices. "Prices will now not move upward. They will come down in a week, with imports arriving and hoarders releasing stocks," said Atmaram Gavde, a wholesaler.

"With this alarming trend, we prefer to purchase minimum quantity while managing the kitchen budget," said Aarti Sharma, a homemaker.

## **CM urged to curb prices**

Members of the consumer welfare organization, the Mumbai Grahak Panchayat (MGP), met chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday, urging state intervention to curb irrationally high prices of onions and tur dal.

Onions are selling for around Rs 70 per kg while tur (arhar) dal has touched an all-time high of Rs 150 per kg.

"Such a steep price rise is not due to genuine shortages resulting from erratic rain or weather conditions. It is engineered market manipulation by traders and middlemen for profiteering motive," said MGP chairman Shirish Deshpande.

The activists said that government was not helpless in such a situation. "We pointed out that Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act empowers the Central and state governments to fix selling and buying prices and ensure equitable distribution of produce. On the basis of this provision we have demanded that onions be purchased from farmers at Rs 10 per kg and sold to consumers for Rs 25," said MGP's Varsha Raut.

MGP reminded Fadnavis that during the past one year, diesel prices have declined from Rs 67 to Rs 50 per litre but traders and middlemen have not relayed the benefits of lowered costs to consumers.

## **'Forests the size of India to be axed by 2050'**

Tropical forests covering an area nearly the size of India are set to be destroyed in the next 35 years, a faster rate of deforestation than previously thought, a study warned on Monday.

The Washington-based Center for Global Development, using satellite imagery and data from 100 countries, predicted 289 million hectares (714 million acres) of tropical forests would be felled by 2050. The results will have dangerous implications for accelerating climate change, the center's study said.

Deforestation contributes to climate change as forests store carbon while acting as a filter taking the heat-trapping carbon dioxide gas out of the atmosphere. If current trends continue, tropical deforestation will add 169 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by 2050, the equivalent of running 44,000 coal-fired power plants for a year, the study's lead author said.

"Reducing tropical deforestation is a cheap way to fight climate change," environmental economist Jonah Busch told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. He recommended taxing carbon emissions to push countries to protect their forests.

UN climate change experts estimate that the world can only burn one trillion tons of carbon in order to keep global temperature rises below 2 degrees, the maximum possible increase to avert catastrophic climate change.

If trends continue, the amount of carbon burned as a result of clearing tropical forests equals roughly one sixth of the entire global carbon dioxide allotment, Busch said.

"The biggest driver of tropical deforestation by far is industrial agriculture to produce globally-traded commodities, including soy and palm oil," he said.

The study predicted the rate of deforestation will climb through 2020 and 2030 and accelerate around the year 2040 if changes aren't made.

There have been some success stories where countries reduced tropical deforestation without compromising economic growth or food production, the study said.

Brazil decreased deforestation in the Amazon rainforest by 80 per cent over a decade through the use of satellite monitoring and increased law enforcement, even as cattle and soy production rose, the study said.

### **91% of sowing completed in Gujarat**

Despite no rainfall in the second half of August in the state, sowing activity has been completed in 91% of the total sowing area of 85.53 lakh hectares.

However, sowing has been less compared to 2014.

According to the data released by the state agriculture department, crops have been sown on 78.8 lakh hectares of land, down by 2 per cent from that of last year's sowing undertaken on 80.40 lakh hectares. Officials said that despite no rains in the second half of August, sowing activity, which had almost come to a halt in July, has continued.

Cotton crop, sesame seeds, tuwar, soyabean and millet have been sown across the state. Sowing of jowar, which was done over 39,200 hectares of area last year, was carried out over 71,000 hectares of area this year.

Officials further said that cotton sowing, which began at a slow pace, has been undertaken on 27.26 lakh hectares while groundnut has been sown on 94 per cent of the total area of 13.98 lakh hectares.

Sowing has been completed in Saurashtra and Kutch, the officials confirmed.

In Kutch, sowing was completed on 5.38 lakh hectares area against the average area of 4.76 lakh hectares. In Saurashtra, against the average sowing area of 37.22 lakh hectares, the activity was undertaken on 37.85 lakh hectares.

Officials, however, said that sowing is yet to pick up in north Gujarat. Against the sowing area of 17.95 lakh hectares, crops were sown on 12.42 lakh hectares, mere 69 per cent.

In central Gujarat, sowing was completed on 15.71 lakh hectares, 87 per cent of the total sowing area of 18.13 lakh hectares.

### **Bt cotton: Govt admits Monsanto never had patent in India**

Thirteen years after US multinational Monsanto launched Bt cotton seeds in the country, the government has woken up to the fact that the first version of the genetically modified crop was not patented in India. Monsanto ended up earning huge royalties on the Bt seeds even without a patent, changing the economics of cotton farming in India.

In 2002, Monsanto came up with the Bollgard version of the seeds, which have an inherent resistance against bollworm, a common pest for cotton crop. The Mon-531 or cry1Ac gene, which was used in the seed, was not patented by Monsanto in India. In 2006, Monsanto launched the Bollgard II variety, which has a patent.

Since Monsanto does not have a patent for the Bollgard version, Indian scientists were free to use the same cry1Ac gene to develop indigenous varieties and supply them to farmers through government channels. However, the misinformation that Monsanto held the patent for the gene ended all such efforts.

In 2008, an indigenous seed developed by researchers at the University of Agriculture Sciences (UAS), Dharwad, Karnataka, too was found to contain the cry1Ac gene. However, under the assumption that Monsanto had a patent on this gene, Dharwad Bt was not used commercially on the directions of the ministry of environment and forests, which controls genetically modified plants.



TOI had reported the matter based on RTI findings by farm activist Vijay Jawandhia on June 7, 2015. After Jawandhia also took up the matter with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, union agriculture secretary Siraj Hussain had last month written to the director general of Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR). The letter requested the agency to examine the possibility of using cry1Ac gene in developing Bt cotton varieties after obtaining requisite permissions from the genetic engineering appraisal committee (GEAC) under the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF).

Dr S Ayyapan, DG ICAR, told TOI that a team is working on the proposal but further details can be divulged only at a later stage. Jawandhia says the ball is now in GEAC's court and it should grant permission at the earliest.

Once indigenous Bt varieties are developed, the seeds now available at 800 for a 450 gram pack could be sold at 100 a kg, say experts. Also, after buying seeds the first time, farmers could save seeds from each crop for reuse next year, thus saving a major amount.

City-based Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR) has developed 21 varieties using cry1Ac but its commercial launch is held up for want of clearance from GEAC.

The agriculture secretary's letter says it was accepted in a high-level meeting held last month that Monsanto's patent for the gene in the US had expired in 2012. In India, it did not have any patent at all. "It seems we were not able to take prompt action in making Bt cotton seeds with this particular gene or other genes available to our farmers," says the letter.

On August 19, additional commissioner (seeds) responded to a follow up letter by PMO, saying that the department of agriculture has suggested that ICAR examine the possibility of developing Bt cotton seeds after getting clearance from GEAC.

The second letter says it has been gathered that Monsanto does not have any patent for cry1Ac in India or Pakistan. The latter has, in fact, already approved 31 starlight line varieties for farmers to reuse in their fields.

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## **Turmeric improves by ₹500/quintal**

Spot turmeric prices increased by ₹500 a quintal at Erode on Wednesday.

“Traders have received some fresh upcountry demand for the quality turmeric. Knowing this, the farmers has brought medium and fine variety turmeric for sale. The Salem medium variety was sold at ₹8,300-8,500 a quintal and the Salem Best variety fetched ₹8,600-8,700,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

Of the arrival of 6,200 bags, 70 per cent stocks were sold. The price was up ₹200-500 a quintal for the finger variety and ₹300 for the root variety.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric fetched ₹5,399-7,869 a quintal; the root variety ₹5,309-7,188. Of the arrival of 1,736 bags, 1,205 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹6,704-7,895; the root variety ₹6,369-7,193. 933 bags were sold against the arrival of 955 bags.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric ruled at ₹6,799-7,749 and the root variety ₹6,589-7,193. Of the arrival of 1,346 bags, 1,314 were sold.

## **Edible oils in bear grip**

Edible oils witnessed a dull trading day as stockists stayed away tracking bearish overseas futures. On the Bombay Commodity Exchange, palmolein declined by ₹1. Soyabean, sunflower and rapeseed oil rose by ₹5, ₹5 and ₹10 for 10 kg each. Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹432 ex JNPT, super palmolein ₹480 and soyabean refined oil ₹570. In Saurashtra-Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* ruled steady at ₹1,680 and loose (10 kg) at ₹1,075. BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,040 (1,040), soya ref. oil 570 (565), sunflower ref. 705 (705), rapeseed exp. ref. 855 (845), cottonseed ref. oil 608 (608) and palmolein 430 (431).

## Sugar firms up on demand

Sugar prices ruled firm at mill level on higher demand. At the Vashi market, prices remained range-bound with fine variety up by ₹5-10 a quintal and fair variety sold at ₹5-7 lower. Arrivals were at par with demand. *Naka* rates were unchanged. Mill tender rates increased by ₹10-20. Arrivals were at 61-62 truck loads while local dispatches were 60-61 loads. On Tuesday evening, hardly 14-15 mills offer tenders and sold 38,000-40,000 bags at ₹2,290-2,390 (2,290-2,370) for S-grade and ₹2,400-2,490 (2,400-2,480) for M-grade.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade ₹2,410-82 (2,380-2,482) and M-grade ₹2,466-2,575 (2,466-2,582). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹2,370-2,470 (2,370-2,470) and M-grade ₹2,490-2,590 (2,490-2,590).

## Russia says cheese, softens position on dairy imports from India



Displaying more flexibility in its policy on dairy imports from India, Russia says it is ready to let in products from plants with small cattle farms or no cattle, including cooperatives such as Amul.

Softening its initial position that only dairy plants with over 1,000 cattle may export hard cheese to the country, Russia has now said it is ready to reconsider the condition if India gives a comprehensive report on how its safety concerns would be addressed.

“We are happy that Russia has responded positively to our request. We have already sent the required report to our embassy in Moscow and it will be shared with the Russian authorities,” a government official told *BusinessLine* here.

The Export Inspection Council of India (EIC), a government body for quality control and inspection of items for export, has prepared the report.

It specifies the measures that will be taken to ensure that dairy products exported to Russia are free of contaminants and disease-causing germs.

### **Only 2 qualified producers**

Only two Indian producers of hard cheese — Parag Milk Foods and Shreiber Dynamix Dairies — had qualified to export to Russia when it allowed entry of dairy products from India in April under stringent conditions.

The Commerce Ministry had refused to formalise the draft agreement on dairy exports, insisting that a provision be added that there would be a review of the condition on minimum cattle ownership six months later. Moscow did not respond to that plea for a while, resulting in no sales even from the qualified exporters.

### **Big opportunity**

“Since the Russians finally responded positively to our request when our delegation went to Moscow for talks on a free trade pact this month, we are hopeful that exports can start soon,” the official said.

Russia’s annual imports of food items from Western countries are worth about \$40 billion. Due to the Ukrainian crisis it has banned imports of most food products from that region, and New Delhi has been making efforts to grab a part of the business.

Earlier, Russia had insisted that dairies supplying cheese should have captive cattle farms. This would help them get certificates from authorised veterinarians specifying that the cattle have been properly vaccinated and are free of foot-and-mouth disease, tuberculosis, brucellosis and leukaemia.

India suggested that instead of insisting on a captive farm, clusters of villages from where dairy plants source their milk can be identified. Veterinarians can then be assigned for specific clusters, and give the requisite certificates.

## Know your onions



### **Why do onions get costlier at this time of the year?**

The onion shortage occurs annually during June-September as there is no fresh supply, resulting in a price rise. Onion harvested from the rabi crop (which accounts for 60 per cent of the total output) during March-May, is normally stored for consumption during the lean season of June-September.

Onion grown during kharif accounts for about 20 per cent of the total production and is harvested during October-December. The late kharif varieties also account for about 20 per cent of the total output and are harvested during January-March. Except for the period between June and September, there is a steady supply of fresh bulbs, whereas consumption during these months is from the stored produce.

This year the unseasonal rains impacted the rabi harvest in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, affecting the quality of the produce. This resulted in a shortage. Also, the quality of the stored bulbs was rather poor, thereby triggering demand for good quality produce.

### **Are we producing enough?**

India is the second largest producer of onions after China, accounting for about a fifth of the global output. Though India's annual production varies between 18 and 19 million tonnes, the yields are among the lowest at 16 tonnes per hectare. Going by the production and export data, consumption of the vegetable could be marginally lower than the domestic production. However, there are no fresh estimates on the consumption.

This year 40 lakh tonnes or 40 per cent of the rabi produce was stored. Of this, around 50 per cent stored stock has been exhausted. Of the remaining, 10-15 per cent is lost in storage.

### **Are hoarders the culprits?**

Besides a shortfall in supplies during the lean period, the traders and hoarders are also to be blamed for the crisis, as they tend to take advantage of the situation by holding back the stocks. Onion prices started increasing from mid-July due to lower arrival, thanks to slow release of stored stock amidst expectation of higher prices, and touched a high recently.

### **What can governments do?**

While keeping a check on hoarders by enforcing stock limits, the governments should focus on creating low-cost and efficient storage solutions for onions that would encourage the growers to store the produce. Considering the low price of the vegetable, cold storage is not a common practice in India due to prohibitive costs. Also, as shortages occur during June-September annually, the government should intervene quickly on the slightest indication that prices are set to rise.

It can take measures such as enhancing the floor price for exports and contracting imports to ensure adequate supplies so that prices do not hit the roof.

Any delay in contracting imports not only affects the consumer, but also hits the farmers' realisations for the next crop, as the window for bringing in the produce is very short.