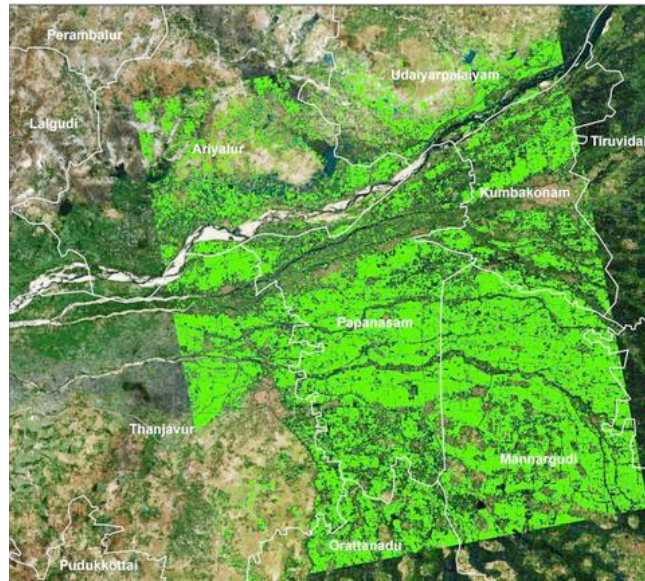


14.12.2015

THE HINDU

TNAU uses satellite images for crop management



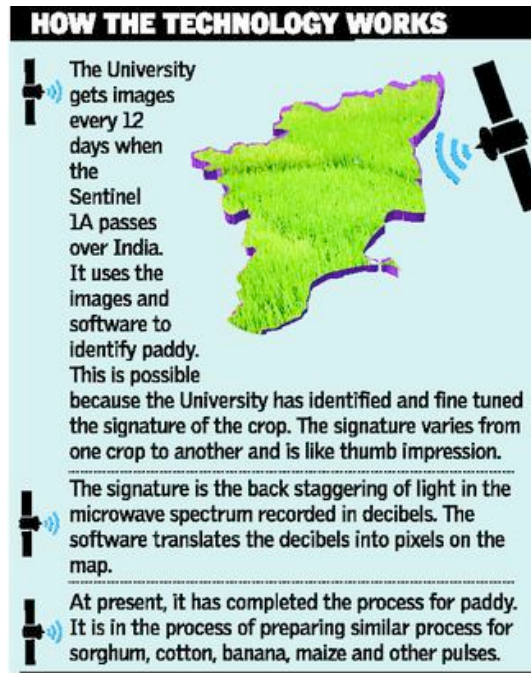
A map of paddy cultivated area in Thanjavur prepared using images from the Sentinel 1A satellite.

The images, and the data will help the State Government frame policies, says Vice-Chancellor

Soon after the recent rains hit hard the costal districts, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, calculated how much cultivated area was inundated. It also estimated the loss of paddy in Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram, Cuddalore and other districts.

The University's quick assessment and communication to the State Government is the result of the work it has been doing for four years now using images obtained from European Space Agency's Sentinel 1A satellite. The University's access to the satellite images follows a tie-up under the 'Remote Sensing Information for Insurance on Crops in Emerging Economies' project with the Swedish Developmental Council, International Rice Research Institute and Sarmap of Switzerland.

The engagement with the European Space Agency is for accessing the satellite images and with the other two agencies for technology (software) to process the images and develop yield model, says S. Pazhanivelan, professor, Department of Remote Sensing and GIS, TNAU.



The University uses the images to identify crops, estimate area of cultivation, prepare seasonability map (track the start, end and progress of agriculture seasons), phenology map (various stages of crop) and yield map (estimate the yield).

The images, and the data deciphered there from will help the State Government frame policies and farmers get precise inputs and also quick disbursement of crop insurance, says Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy.

By studying the progress in cultivation from the satellite images, the government will be in a better position to decide the area that needs fertilizers and inputs on a priority basis, Mr. Pazhanivelan explains.

Again, by estimating the yield, the government will be in a position to decide how many paddy procurement centres it should open.

As for farmers, the process of availing of crop insurance will be easy as the satellite images will serve as proof of crop damage. Until now, the farmers will get compensation only if there is crop loss in the entire *firka* , he points out.

The farmers will also get to learn about soil conditions and nutrients needed. The Vice-Chancellor adds: in the event of monsoon or drought, the satellite images will help the government with the extent of damages. This will ensure that the government take decision without delay.

A farmers' group producing bio-agents gaining attention



Biological agents production unit set up by a group of farmers at Kunnathur in Tirupur district.— Photo: R. VIMAL KUMAR

A group formed by 13 farmers at Kunnathur to promote value-addition to farm incomes is gaining attention as they are now successful commercial producers of bio-agents necessary for promotion of organic farming.

V. Sreenivasan (40) and 12 other progressive farmers, who were raising vegetables, turmeric, pulses and a few other crops on a total area of 150 acres in the area, came together to set up the unit for producing biological agents namely *Pseudomonas fluorescens* and *Trichoderma viride* with an initial capital of Rs. 5 lakh.

Of the expenditure, Rs. 1.25 lakh was obtained as subsidy extended by the Department of Agriculture from the corpus created under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.

They are now producing nearly 20 tonnes of *Pseudomonas fluorescens* and *Trichoderma viride* a year.

But what made the farmers venture into the production of biological agents, which, according to Agriculture Department officials, is a lesser explored terrain at the village/farm level.

“At one point of time, we felt it as a responsibility to protect the earth from getting contaminated by the excessive use of chemicals to control/prevent insects, diseases and pests.

“For that, we thought that the bio-agents can be the best alternative and hence, the unit to produce high quality products,” Mr. Sreenivasan said.

Fadnavis calls on farmers to adopt new agriculture technology

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has called on farmers to adopt new technologies in order to improve and increase their farm yield, which will ultimately result in their well being.

Inaugurating the 7th edition of agriculture festival ‘Agro Vision’ here last evening, Mr. Fadnavis said due to rapid changes in climate, embracing new methodology and technologies was the “need of the hour.”

Union Minister for Shipping and Road Transport, Nitin Gadkari, who is also the chief promoter of exhibition, Rajasthan Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Union Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers, Hansraj Ahir were also present at the inaugural function.

The Chief Minister said due to unfavourable climatic conditions, last year there was a drought-like situation in 20,000 villages of the state, which has

swelled to 24,000 this year and production has suffered drastically in the entire Marathwada and eastern part of Vidarbha.

About 50 per cent population in state is directly dependent on agriculture and makes use of traditional methods of farming, he said.

“We cannot depend on nature as the climate is playing hide and seek with farmers. In such situation, we have to adopt new technology and do experiments with new crop that can improve the financial condition of farmers. Farmers must take the help of scientists, experts and change their mindset,” Mr. Fadnavis said.

The Chief Minister on the occasion requested Mr. Gadkari to suggest the Central Government to allocate fund of Rs. 2,500-3,000 crore to every state for investing in agriculture infrastructure and emphasised that it was important to improve the condition of farmers in the country.

Mr. Gadkari, in his address, said irrigation facility for farmers in Maharashtra was 16.8 per cent, 18 per cent in Rajasthan, and 90 per cent in Punjab and Haryana. He said farm yield can increase many fold in Maharashtra if farmers are provided with electricity supply 24X7.

Mr. Scindia said her government would soon send farmers in small groups to Israel to study use of new technologies in farming.

Araku Valley Coffee now in retail form

Minister for Tribal Welfare Ravella Kishore Babu launching the retail packs of Araku Valley Coffee in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. GCC Vice-Chairman-cum-Managing Director Ravi Prakash and ITDA Project Officer Harinarayanan are seen. —Photos: K.R. Deepak

GCC POOLING RATE



Arabica Parchment
Rs. 180 per kg

Arabica Cherry
Rs. 92 per kg

- Acreeage in tribal tracts: **one lakh**
- Total produce: **7,000 tonnes**
- ITDA asked to identify land to bring additional one lakh acres under cultivation

Rise in yield apart, remunerative price and marketing mechanism are guaranteed

— RAVELLA KISHORE BABU, Tribal Welfare Minister

Tribal farmers displaying coffee seeds brought from Araku and Paderu for procurement by the Girijan Cooperative Corporation in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

GCC also launches raw coffee pooling under the Rs.526-crore Paderu Coffee Project

The Girijan Cooperative Corporation on Sunday launched the Araku Valley Coffee in retail form and raw coffee pooling under Paderu Coffee Project sanctioned by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu with an outlay of Rs.526.16 crore.

Taking part at a function organised in Visakhapatnam to launch the twin programmes, Social Welfare, Tribal Welfare, and Empowerment Minister Ravella Kishore Babu said the government had directed the GCC to initiate measures to weed out brokers (middlemen) by procuring and marketing organic coffee grown in the Agency areas.



The GCC announced a pooling rate at Rs.180 per kg for Arabica Parchment and Rs.92 per kg for Arabica Cherry coffee during the current year – almost double than what the middlemen used to pay earlier.

Mr. Kishore Babu said that the middlemen were estimated to have looted almost Rs.700 crore from the tribal coffee farmers during the past 10 years by paying them peanuts for their produce.

Remunerative

“Now, under Paderu Coffee Project, the yield will go up and remunerative price and marketing mechanism are guaranteed to sell the produce in the retail market in the two Telugu States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh,” he said. Some 7,000 tonne coffee is grown every year in the tribal tracts of Paderu in an area of one lakh acres by 96,337 tribal farmers.

An additional area of one lakh acres will be brought under coffee plantation, for which the Integrated Tribal Development Agency has been asked to identify suitable land.

“We are very happy that our livelihood will improve significantly with the government deciding to grow coffee in more areas and provide us remunerative price,” K. Ramana, a coffee grower from Sunkarametta near Araku Valley told *The Hindu* .

High demand in U.K, U.S.

Paderu and Araku coffee are high in demand in the U.K., the U.S., and several parts of Europe. Till date, there has been no effort by either private or government agencies to market organic coffee in the retail market. The aroma and flavour are recognised outside, but not known among coffee lovers of the two Telugu States, according to ITDA Project Officer M. Harinarayan.

Consumer packs

GCC Vice-Chairman-cum-Managing Director Ravi Prakash said that they launched the Araku Valley Coffee in 50 gram, 100 gram, 200 gram, and 500 gram consumer packs.

He said they would market the coffee in other States in the next phase.

The GCC will open an exclusive outlet for coffee at its head office in the city.

The GCC achieved a turnover of Rs.14 crore last year through sale of value-added products in the retail market.

This year, it has set a target to achieve a turnover of Rs.20 crore.

With the retail sales of Araku Coffee, it is expected to go up to Rs.25 crore.

The GCC has set a target to achieve an overall turnover of Rs.180 crore during current fiscal as against Rs.142 crore last year.

KFRI showcases diversity of forest soil



The Kerala Forest Research Institute's forest soil museum at Peechi is the first of its kind in the country.

Valuable information on soil genesis, transformation in humid tropics

Kerala's first forest soil museum, established by the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) at its campus in Peechi, highlights the diversity of forest soil and mineral resources in the State and provides critical inputs for forest management.

The main attraction of the museum is a collection of 15 soil monoliths featuring the soils in different types of forests including shola, evergreen, and semievergreen, grasslands, plantations, and degraded forests in Kerala.

A monolith is essentially a profile representing the soil typical of a region, with all the basic characteristics preserved intact. “The forest soil museum is the first of its kind in India and provides valuable information on soil genesis and transformation in the humid tropics,” says M.P. Sujatha, head, department of soil sciences, KFRI. “Forest ecosystems make strong imprints on the soil beneath them. They are signatures of the vegetation, climate, rainfall, topography, and rocks in a particular region.”

15 soil monoliths

The museum has a set of 15 soil monoliths, which preserve and display the vertical sections of the soil from the surface to the bedrock below displaying the various horizontal layers or genetic horizons. Each monolith was dug from the ground and processed for more than a month before being mounted for display.

Alongside each monolith is information about the soil, including the physical and chemical characteristics of the soil, the forest type and significant features. Other exhibits include a geologic map of Kerala, a map showing the agro ecological zones and units represented in the State and collections of rocks and minerals.

“Any degradation of a forest ecosystem is reflected in the soil profile,” says S. Sandeep, scientist, KFRI.

“By obviating the need to scan an entire forest to assess the extent of degradation, it can be a valuable tool in forest management and conservation.”

Suresh Das, executive vice president, Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment inaugurated the museum on Thursday at the opening session of a national seminar on soil health hosted by KFRI.

Three-day training on dairy farming

Veterinary College, Shivamogga, has organised a three-day training programme for unemployed youths and farmers on scientific dairy farming, from December 17 to 19 on its premises.

Experts would provide information to the participants on feeding the cattle, disease management, construction, and maintenance of cattlesheds and value addition for dairy products.

Those interested should register their names by December 15. For details, call 08182 651017 or 94483 45521.

Dairy farming: KVASU plans tie-up with the Netherlands

Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) is preparing to collaborate with natural livestock farming initiatives of the Netherlands and Trans Disciplinary University (TDU), Bengaluru, to build practical solutions in the area of health.

The proposed collaboration between KVASU, natural livestock farming initiatives of the Netherlands government, and TDU aims at providing practical solutions to address increasing use of antibiotics, antimicrobial and other chemicals and pesticides in dairying across the world, says Vice Chancellor B. Ashok.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) will be signed in this regard soon,' Dr. Ashok said adding that the focus would be on natural dairy farming.

The Netherlands Ministry of Health had already entered into a MoU with its India to help reduce antibiotic residue present in animal products such as milk and meat products and antimicrobial resistance among human beings and animals, T. P. Sethumadhavan, Director of Entrepreneurship, KVASU, said.

As antibiotic-resistant organisms affect human and animal health as well as environment, the issue would be studied under the Centre for One Health Education Advocacy, Research and Training (COHEART) of the varsity, Dr. Sethumadhavan said.

A global platform in the form of a consortium will be developed to pursue academic, research, knowledge transfer and exchange programmes for scientists, veterinarians, farmers, entrepreneurs, industry and women self-help groups.

In India, activities would be on community-based enterprise development for producing herbal medicines, organic/safe to consume dairy chain development with potential stakeholders and offer prospective courses for the stakeholders, he said.

Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Karnataka Veterinary and Fisheries University, TDU, National Dairy Development Board and State milk unions of South India including Milma from the State would work together for this consortium, he added.

Dr. Sethumadhavan presented a paper on the underlying principle of One health at KVASU at a meeting which concluded in Bengaluru on Saturday.

A land to grow organic vegetables

Savayava Krishika Grahaka Balaga offers you an opportunity to grow vegetables

People buying organic products at Savayava Swavalambi Sathé organised by Savayava Krishi Grahaka Balaga, Mangaluru, in Mangaluru on Sunday. — Photo: by special arrangement

You wish to grow vegetables organically, but do not have land to do it. This situation is quite common among urban residents. They will be forced to buy products, said to be organic, by paying a premium price.

To change this, some large-hearted farmers and a few organisations dedicated to the cause of organic farming are up for some experiment in

Mangaluru. They would give you a piece of land, manure, seeds, water and others required for vegetable cultivation. A few things you have to provide are your time and energy.



Savayava Krishika Grahaka Balaga, Mangaluru, which has been conducting Savayava Swavalambi Santhe in and around Mangaluru from last year, has come out with this novel idea to promote organic farming. During the monthly santhes, the balaga has been providing a platform for organic farmers and entrepreneurs running home-based industries to sell their products, which has been a big hit.

K. Rathnakar Kulai of the balaga told *The Hindu* that it was an attempt to encourage organic farming among urban residents. A progressive farmer, Jayananda Mogaru of Mogaru village, off Ganjimutt on Mangaluru-Moodabidri, had come forward to offer the land for the experiment.

Mr. Mogaru told *The Hindu* that about an acre of his land, which otherwise would be lying idle during the summer, would be offered to the enthusiasts. He would also attempt to provide other inputs, including water, seeds and manure.

The land would be prepared to sow vegetable seeds by the balaga and the farmer and the only expense an enthusiast has to incur could be towards expenses towards water and the waterman. Mr. Kulai said the manure would also be provided by them, while the physical work of sowing the seed and related activities would have to be done by the enthusiast.

Besides offering organically grown vegetables, the initiative could also prove to be an outing for urban residents, Mr. Kulai said.

Those interested may contact Mr. Kulai on 94488 35606. They could be go by bus at 8.20 a.m. to Mogaru on January 15. Breakfast and lunch are arranged on that day only. Kukkikatte is the nearest bus stop for Mogaru, to which buses are available from Kaikamba and Ganjimutt.

Mr. Kulai also said the last of the Savayava Swavalambi Santhe would be held on January 17 at Asaigoli, near Konaje. Instead, the balaga intends to encourage growing organic vegetables, he added.

Pinnamaneni award for pomegranate farmer

The trustees of the Dr Pinnamaneni and Smt Seethadevi Foundation have announced that the prestigious ‘Grama Pragathi Puraskaram’ (rural development award) will be given to Anantapur based pomegranate farmer Muttuluri Narasimhappa on December 16.

Managing trustee of the foundation Chadalawada Nageswara Rao said on Saturday that Narasimhappa who lived in Narsimpalli village in Tadimarri mandal of Anantapur district has been selected for the rural development award.

Dr Nageswara Rao said that Hindustani classical musician Hariprasad Chaurasia and writer Hindol Sengupta would be conferred the Dr Pinnamaneni Foundation award at the 25th annual awards function to be held on Wednesday. Detroit-based Nephrologist P R K Prasad will preside over the function.

The award presentation will be followed by a talk on “The Great Indian Dream” by Mr Sengupta and a Bansuri concert by Mr Chaurasia.

‘Graama Pragathi Puraskaram’ will be given to Anantapur- based pomegranate farmer Muttuluri Narasimhappa

Chief Secretary justifies water release from Chembarambakkam



The entire discharge from Chembarambakkam was through the regulators, says the official. A file picture of the reservoir.

"Reports in sections of the media of overflow from Chembarambakkam tank after it reached its full capacity of 24 feet are factually incorrect."

The flood in Chennai on December 1 was the rarest of rare natural calamity and was not caused by any failure in the management of water release from reservoirs, said K. Gnanadesikan, Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary, here on Sunday.

In a statement, he said the flooding was caused primarily due to the very heavy rainfall in November, the second highest recorded in more than 100 years, followed by high intensity of rainfall in Chennai, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur districts.

“Reports in sections of the media of overflow from Chembarambakkam tank after it reached its full capacity of 24 feet are factually incorrect. The entire discharge was through the regulators and there was no uncontrolled discharge through surplus weirs.”

The reservoir received about 2.13 tmcft of water in a span of 24 hours from December 1 noon which was about 60 per cent of its capacity. Hence, no significant difference would have been made from the flood control perspective by lowering the level below 22 feet, he said, pointing to reports

that the water level should have been kept at 75 per cent instead of 86 per cent as was done.

The tank accounted for only 44 per cent of the Adyar's catchment. Due to heavy rain of 47 cm at Mudichur, Tambaram and Tiruneermalai areas and the surplus from several tanks, the Adyar river carried a huge flow downstream of the confluence point of the Chembarambakkam tank surplus, he pointed out.

Prior intimation of the water release, including step up of release, was given by an Assistant Engineer, who is the controlling officer of the Chembarambakkam lake, to the Chennai and Kancheepuram Collectors, Chennai Police and Corporation Commissioners asking them to take all necessary precautionary measures.

Flood warnings were given. It was telecast in major television channels.

After the second warning, nearly 30,000 people had been evacuated from low-lying areas. The allegation that the government had not given sufficient alert to the people was not true, he said. As heavy rain was forecast, supervisory officers, including the Chief Engineer, Chennai Region of Water Resources Organisation, Public Works Department, were also present at the Chembarambakkam tank, personally monitoring the situation.

Closely watching the inflows and the rainfall upstream, the engineers regulated the discharge from the tank.

“No specific instructions or orders are required nor were they sought from the Principal Secretary, PWD or the Chief Secretary for release of surplus water from the Chembarambakkam tank in the period leading up to December 1,” he clarified..

Soil conservation work taken up

Tribal farmers are being trained on soil erosion techniques and water saving strategy.

Soil erosion has been a major problem for tribal farmers of Pachamalai. It gets aggravated partly due to lack of awareness of anti-erosion techniques and manual harvesting of the tapioca crop. To sensitise farmers to soil conservation techniques, a special programme is being conducted by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Pachamalai for farmers of Tiruchi and Salem districts.



A series of soil conservation works including setting up of stone bunds, tree platforms, field bunds, pipe outlets have been taken up.

The programme, Integrated Tribal Development Project, is being implemented at an estimate of Rs. 6.99 crore including a grant of Rs. 5.85 crore by the NABARD and a loan of Rs. 1.14 crore. “It is being implemented through a non-governmental organisation Hand in Hand, India,” S. Suresh Kumar, Assistant General Manager, NABARD, told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

The programme covers a wide spectrum of activities for the benefit of tribal farmers and soil conservation was one of the components. It has been planned to set up 600 field bunds, 10 pipe outlets, 400 tree platforms, two farm ponds and 63 tanks in the Tiruchi limits of the Pachamalai.

Mr. Suresh Kumar said exploitation of irrigation water was another factor resulting in poor yield. To check this, the programme has incorporated a special water conservation programme. Concrete tanks are being constructed

on the hills close to the fields. About 90 tanks in individual fields have been constructed so far.

Once the tank is filled either with rainwater or water got from nearby lakes, it will be stored and used for irrigating cashew, mango and silver oak.

The objective of imparting water conservation and soil conservation techniques is to enhance the skills of the tribal farmers in a phased manner. Mr. Suresh Kumar said it has been planned to form producers' company for providing an assured profit to tribal farmers.

At present, cashew and mango are being raised under the orchard development project. "In course of three years or so, the tribal farmers will be able to harvest cashew and the NABARD will explore the possibility of setting up a cashew processing unit on Pachamalai," he said.

Rotary revives pond near Coimbatore

Rotary Coimbatore Central has completed the de-silting, clearing and restoration of a pond at Molapalayam.

Proving how public participation is essential for moving forward, the Rotary Coimbatore Central has de-silted, cleared and restored a pond to collect rainwater at Molapalayam, a water-starved village.

Molapalayam is situated in Thondamuthur block, off Siruvani Main Road, 24 km away from Coimbatore.

Rotary Central is not new to the village and it has been serving Molapalayam with a Village Knowledge Centre for the past 6 years. Swamini Pramananda opened her 'Poorna Vidya Ashram' in Molapalayam recently. Molapalayam and its twin village Vadivelampalayam are water scarce areas and it had a combined population of about 4,000 people mostly marginal farmers and people rearing cattle.

Groundwater was getting depleted year after year, says Ashwin Kumar, secretary of the Rotary Coimbatore Central. This summer, the water level went down to between 800 ft and 1,000 ft. To tide over this, the existing check dam had to be desilted. Swamini Pramananda and the villagers approached Rotary Central for help and Rotary Coimbatore Central as part of its community service completed the work in four weeks at a cost of Rs. 3 Lakh. Siruthuli was the technical consultant for the drive.

This work was done as a priority project and completed in time for the monsoons. The 10-acre pond was deepened by about seven feet in core areas and the bund strengthened throughout. The feeder channels were de-silted and cleaned, says U.S. Prakash, president of Rotary Central. Apart from increasing groundwater level in the village, it also serves as the primary source of drinking water for large number of cattle and livestock , apart from helping agriculture.

A function to mark the completion of the restoration was held recently wherein Vanitha Mohan, managing trustee of Siruthuli, highlighted the immense benefits the project would bring about. Swamini Pramananda Saraswati of Purna Vidya Foundation said that their organisation would maintain the pond. “This work has been an inspiration and we are ready to take up restoration of nearby ponds,” said N.S.Karuppusamy president of the Agricultural Cooperative Bank.

Following this, the local village administration has come forward to take up sapling planting along the bunds of the tank. This is a great example of NGOs and local administration coming together to take up fruitful projects.

12 lakh MT of paddy yield expected in Krishna district

Farmers transporting paddy on a bullock cart on the outskirts of Machilipatnam-Photo: T. Appala Naidu

Nearly 12 lakh metric tonnes of paddy production is expected in Krishna district, despite above 50,000 hectares of land was left unsown due to lack of timely rains in the 2015 Kharif season. Of them total 2.55 lakh hectares of

normal acreage of paddy cultivation in Kharif season in the district, paddy was sown in 2.5 lakh hectares in the 2015 Kharif.



“Given the yield per acre, the paddy production would go nearly 12 lakh metric tonnes in the Kharif 2015. Maximum of yield of 40 to 43 bags per acre has been recorded in several mandals in Krishna district. Output of 43 bags per acre is said to be the decade’s highest yield”, Agriculture Department Joint Director Mr. Balu Naik told The Hindu.

The annual paddy production in Krishna district was 11 and 14 lakh metric tonnes in the 2013 and 2014 Kharif seasons respectively. Mr. Balu Naik has added that bumper yield has been reported in the paddy fields those survived the drought. On the other hand, the district authorities have targeted to procure 6.4 lakh metric tonnes of paddy through Paddy Purchasing Centres, ensuring Minimum Support Price to the farmer apart from promising marketing facility at the village level.

The harvesting operations of paddy are in full swing across the Krishna district and expected to complete by December end. However, women folk play a crucial role in the harvesting stage of the paddy cultivation.

Orange economy under threat

Farmers in Amarvati have dumped oranges on the Varud- Morshi road. Regardless of the glut, customers in Mumbai and Pune are forced to pay 40-50 per kg for the fruit, thanks to the traders' chain. Photo: Special Arrangement

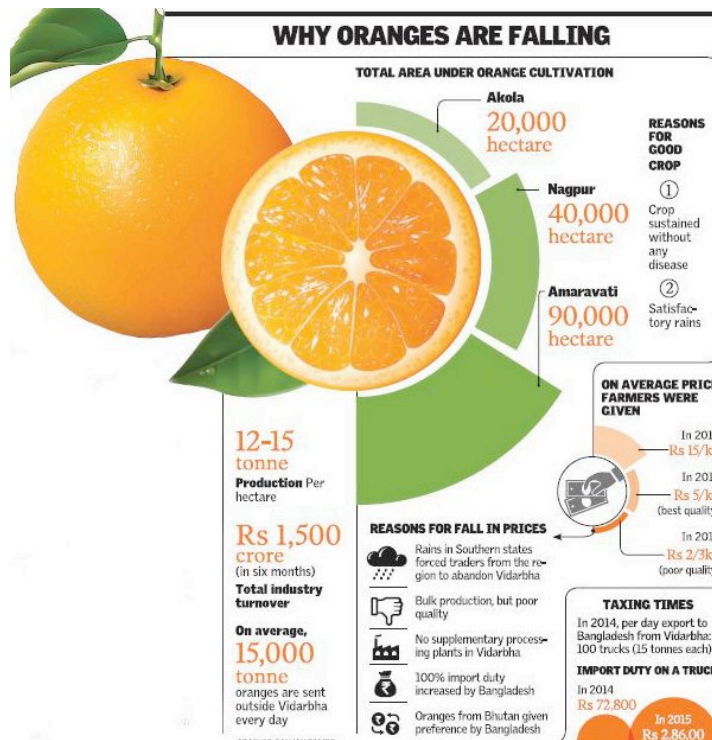
Despite high production in recent times, the orange farmers of Vidarbha are not only forced to sell at lowest of prices to traders but many of them are also dumping the fruit on the roadside. Regardless of the low prices which farmer are getting, customers in Mumbai and Pune are forced to pay around Rs 40 to Rs 60 per kg thanks to the traders' chain.



While incessant rains in the southern parts of India have hampered the annual orange business of Vidarbha's farmers, 100 % increase in import duty by Bangladesh has cut off one of the major destinations of this fruit. "Traders from the south haven't come to buy their stock of oranges. They usually buy the September crop, which has now gone waste. The price of this variety has dropped, so even if we find takers, we are not making any money," said a farmer.

Rains in southern India have forced the traders from all four states to turn their backs on Vidarbha this year. According to government officials, the Ambia variety of orange – which tastes sour and sweet and grows during September – is extremely popular in south India. "It has all gone waste this year," said an official from agriculture department.

Vidarbha's orange industry runs in to around Rs 1,500 crore per year. Major production of the fruit is concentrated at Amaravati, Nagpur and Akola district. Over 1.50 lakh hectare areas from these three regions come under this fruit crop.



“This year, the crop grew without any disease. Occasional rain, though not enough, helped in increasing production,” said Manoj Javanjal, an orange farmer from Katol in Nagpur, who also heads Mahaorange – a federation of orange farmers. He accepted that the quality of the fruit was compromised at many places due to insufficient rains.

The per hectare production of oranges in 2015 has increased to up to 12-15 tonnes from around 8-9 tonnes. Till last year, farmers were getting Rs 15 per kg for the top quality. In 2015, it has come down to Rs 5/4 per kilogram, while the rate given for low grade variety is barely Rs 2/3 per kilogram. “How is it even possible to sustain ourselves?” asked Mr. Javanjal.

Bangladesh, one of major destinations of Vidarbha oranges has increased its import duty by 100%, leaving farmers helpless. Despite several pleadings to the state government, no letter has been written to Bangladesh requesting to cut off the duty.

Despite being a Rs-1500 crore industry, the entire region does not have a single supplementary processing unit. A Rs-250 crore processing unit that

was to be set up in Amaravati was shifted to Nanded in Marathwada region during the tenure of Ashok Chavan, who hails from Nanded.

“The entire orange economy is under jeopardy this year. There is a need to take immediate correcting measures to help orange farmers. Failing to do so will result in complete destruction of this crop,” said Dr. Anil Bonde, BJP MLA from Vidarbha.

Kerala farmers stretched to the limit

Kerala has suggested establishing proper testing facilities in designated ports to ensure that import of cheap quality rubber does not kill the domestic industry.



Record fall in rubber prices is affecting 11 lakh cultivators in Kerala.

Kerala’s search for a formula that would prevent further crash in the prices of its prime cash crop is unlikely to end soon. Chief Minister Oommen Chandy’s recent visit to New Delhi to lobby for a fair deal for rubber farmers, who constitute the core of the voter base of the United Democratic Front, has received only a half-hearted response, according to government sources.

The Chief Minister’s petition to Union Minister for Commerce Nirmala Sitharaman has highlighted the record fall in rubber prices affecting an estimated 11 lakh cultivators, most of whom are small and marginal. Significantly, Mr. Chandy has made several out-of-the-box suggestions to tackle the rubber crisis.

Mr. Chandy wanted quantitative restrictions on the import of low-priced TSR (technically specified rubber) or block rubber, with a ceiling of 20 per cent on imports. A majority of Indian farmers produce RSS (ribbed smoked sheets) grade, while the imports are in the form of block rubber.

Mr. Chandy lobbied for a maximum price of Rs. 150 for the benchmark grade of RSS 4 produced domestically. He wanted a major contribution to protect the rubber cultivator from the price stabilisation fund, from its corpus fund of over Rs. 1,000 crore. He wanted an increase in the subsidy for replanting from Rs. 25,000 per hectare to Rs.1 lakh a hectare. There is also the need to announce soft loans to the cultivators.

The State has asked the Centre to revise the input-output norms in the tyre industry from the present level of 40 per cent, on the basis of a proper study to be carried out based on the present usage of natural rubber in tyres and wanted norms revised to prevent misuse of the advanced license scheme for imports.

Kerala has demanded stringent enforcement to prevent the misuse of the import for export scheme.

The State has also suggested establishing proper testing facilities in designated ports to ensure that cheap quality rubber imports do not kill the robust domestic industry.

Mr. Chandy took strong exception to the move to downsize the Rubber Board and the delay in appointing a full-fledged chairman, secretary, and production commissioner, all of which have been lying vacant for months.

Enough water in Ramanathapuram Big Tank

For the first time since 2009, the storage reaches about 400 mcft

The northeast monsoon has not been active in this arid district unlike in other parts of the State, but the Big Tank, which catered to the supplementary irrigation needs of the farmers here, has sufficient storage, thanks to the release of water from Vaigai dam.

For the first time since 2009, the storage in the tank reached about 400 mcft against the tank's full capacity of 618 mcft as the district received 2,589 cusecs of water from Vaigai dam till December 12 against its full credit of 2,800 cusecs, official sources said. Since the onset of northeast monsoon in the later part of October, the district has been receiving intermittent rains but they were not sufficient to fill the major irrigation tanks in the district such as the Big Tank, Sakkarakottai Tank and RS Mangalam Tank.

After the water level at Vaigai dam reached comfortable position, the State government ordered discharge of 1,400 cusecs of water to the district on November 28 for eight days till December 5 but continued the discharge till December 12, thanks to copious inflow into the dam.

“We have sufficient storage at the Big Tank and whatever rains we received so far would be more than enough to save the paddy crops cultivated on about 1.17 lakh hectares in the district,” N.V. Krisnamoorthy, Joint Director of Agriculture told *The Hindu*. Sources in the irrigation department of Public Works Department (PWD) said that the Big Tank could not receive sufficient water during the last three years. Now, water received from Vaigai dam was diverted to 241 system tanks to supplement the irrigation requirements of the farmers, the sources said.

Meanwhile, authorities on Sunday released 1,100 cusecs of water from Vaigai dam to meet the irrigation requirements of farmers in Sivaganga district. The released water is expected to reach Viraganur regulator on Monday afternoon, official sources said. The water being released for eight days would be diverted to 87 system tanks to supplement the irrigation needs of farmers, the sources said.

Turmeric auctioned Rs. 70 lakh

Turmeric was auctioned for Rs. 70 lakh at the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers' Cooperative Marketing Society here on Saturday.

While 'Virali' variety fetched a price between Rs. 8,869 and Rs. 11,189 per quintal; the 'kilangu' variety fetched a price between Rs. 8,519 and Rs.

10,509 and ‘Panankali’ variety fetched a price between Rs. 6,102 and Rs. 18,099. About 1,500 quintals of turmeric was auctioned for Rs. 70 lakh, a press release of the society issued here said.

Coconut kernels were auctioned for Rs. 1.15 lakh at the Mallasamudram branch of the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers’ Cooperative Marketing Society on Saturday.

While first quality kernnels fetched a price between Rs. 56 and Rs. 63.15 per bag; the second quality kernnels fetched a price between Rs. 38 and Rs. 46.95. A total of 55 bags of kernnels were auctioned for Rs. 1.15 lakh, the release said.

Cotton was auctioned for Rs. 50 lakh at the Konganapuram branch of the society on Saturday.

While PT variety fetched a price between Rs. 3,200 and Rs. 4,350 per bag; DCH variety fetched a price between Rs. 4,400 and Rs. 5,030.

A total of 3,100 bags of cotton was auctioned for Rs. 50 lakh.

‘Agripreneurs’ to get venture capital assistance

The Small Farmers’ Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC), an organisation under the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare, has decided to promote its venture capital assistance (VCA) scheme for “agripreneurs” in the State in a big way.

The scheme envisages single window approach that connects the agribusiness applicant with banks for financing projects in agriculture or allied sectors of horticulture, floriculture, medicinal and aromatic plants, minor forest produce, apiculture and fisheries. It offers venture capital to set up agribusiness projects and project development facility to assist producer, producer groups/organisations and units in agri-export zones and agriculture graduates in preparing viable detailed project reports.

The SFAC has excluded projects in the dairy and poultry sectors. The SFAC has conducted awareness camps about the scheme in the districts. The proposed projects should be able to provide assured markets to the farmer and producer groups as the case may be, that is catering to the needs of the suppliers.

Diversification

It should create potential for diversification of high value crop, resulting in higher incomes both at the level of supplier and producer, which, in this case, could be an agri-business unit. The project should be viable in nature and should be accepted by the bank for grant of term loan, Pravesh Sharma, managing director of SFAC, said here.

The scheme is intended to catalyse private investments in setting up agri-business projects that will increase rural income and employment.

Ayurveda hope for milk with lesser drug residue

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CHECKING ANTIBIOTIC CONTENT

Kolar Milk Union hopes to produce at least 25,000 litres of milk that has significantly lesser residue of antibiotics.



Pilot project in Kolar

- Installed capacity: 2 lakh litres per day
- To be sold at a premium
- The proposal is awaiting approval from the Netherlands government

- Exotic breeds such as Holstein Friesian and Jersey cows start developing illness at temperatures higher than **20 degree Celcius**
- Conventional antibiotics can cost more than **Rs. 400 per batch**
- Herbal medicines come in a combination of aloe vera and turmeric
- The cost is just **Rs.10 per batch**
- Permissible limit for antibiotic residue: **0.2 mg/ml**
- Milk in India is far above this limit



**Post your views
at [http://the.
ws/IFhmi6x](http://the.ws/IFhmi6x)**

Herbal mixture of aloe vera and turmeric can decrease antibiotic residue by over 49 per cent, says expert

Can Ayurveda formulations make milk safer? This is the experiment the Kolar Milk Union is dabbling in, and hopes to produce at least 25,000 litres of milk that has significantly lesser residue of antibiotics.

Currently, farmers are stuck in a catch-22 situation: exotic species such as Holstein Friesian (Hf) and Jersey cows give superior milk yield compared to native species; however, they are more susceptible to illness and need to be

pumped with high amounts of antibiotics. While the global standards for antibiotic residue content is 0.2 milligram per millilitre, all milk in India is higher than this, says M.N. Balakrishnan Nair, Emeritus Professor at the city-based Trans Disciplinary University (TDU).

In a recent study done by him in association with the Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS), milk samples from Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu were tested over three years. “While Karnataka contains the least quantity of antibiotic residue, the content is still higher than the prescribed limits. This has long-term effects as the residue is consumed by humans and eventually, leads to microbes being resistant to antibiotics,” he said.

The solution proposed is a herbal mixture of aloe vera and turmeric, which can decrease antibiotic residue by over 49 per cent, Mr. Nair said. Seeking funding from Netherlands-based organisation Solidaridad, Rakesh Singh, Managing Director, KMF, said the Kolar Milk Union will produce safe milk as part of the pilot project in a few months time. This is expected to yield between 25,000 and 30,000 litres, he said.

G.T. Gopal, Managing Director of Kolar Milk Union, said the proposal was awaiting approval from the Netherlands government. “Once it is done, we’ll train farmers on preventive measures using herbal medicines. Of course, we can’t stop antibiotics immediately. Serious illnesses cannot be cured using herbal medicine. But, we can reduce the extent of antibiotics in milk,” he said.

The market for such products can be created, and milk with lesser antibiotics can be sold at a premium, he said. “This is the first step in going towards mass-creating organic milk,” Mr. Gopal said.

Launched

The Vasishta Farmers’ Producers Company (FPC), launched by the Salem District Farmers Club Federation (SDFCF), was inaugurated at Yethapur, near here, on Saturday. R. Amalorpavanathan, Deputy Managing Director, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD),

inaugurated the FPC at a function brought up by the SDFCF and Pallavan Grama Bank, Salem.

Vasishta FPC is the second FPC promoted by the Salem District Farmers' Club Federation, Yethapur.

Mr. Amalorpavanathan in his presidential address said that as a company, farmers will now be able to aggregate their produce with primary processing of their produce. They will also be able to collectively market their products at a better price. They also enjoy the advantage of bulk procurement of inputs at lesser price, he said.

He also distributed loans to the tune of Rs. 2 crore sanctioned by the Pallavan Grama Bank. K. Venkateswara Rao, Chief General Manager, NABARD, Tamil Nadu Region, S. Sureshkumar, Chairman, Pallavan Grama Bank and S. Jayaraman, president, SDFCF, spoke.



How agri could soon break out of commodity downturn

The last two years have been terrible — that's an understatement — for commodities.

Since the start of 2014, the average landed cost of crude imported by Indian refiners has fallen from \$ 108.76 to \$ 36.65 a barrel. The same period has seen the London Metal Exchange Index that tracks prices of six primary non-ferrous metals — aluminium, copper, zinc, lead, nickel and tin — shed nearly a third of its value, even as benchmark US Midwest hot rolled coil steel rates have collapsed from around \$ 680 to \$ 365 per tonne.

But it's not just energy and industrial metals. The same holds true for precious metals and agricultural commodities. Gold on Friday traded in London at \$ 1,072.5 per ounce, compared to \$ 1,225 in early 2014, and the peak of \$ 1,895 reached on September 5, 2011. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's food price index, at 156.7 in November, is also

down from its December 2013 level of 206.2, and the all-time-high of 237.7 for February 2011.

There are broadly three reasons for this commodity meltdown, of which two are relatively easy to understand.

The first, of course, is China. The slowdown in the world's largest manufacturing economy has hit demand for everything from copper, nickel and aluminium to coal and iron ore. Given its share of global consumption, ranging between 50% and 75% in these industrial raw materials, the dragon sneezing has naturally led to Brazil, Australia, Indonesia, Chile and many others catching cold. Worse, the excess steelmaking and aluminium, zinc and copper smelting/refining capacities that came up during the boom have today become a source of dumping, as Chinese producers are increasingly pushing overseas sales to offset stalling local demand growth.

The second is a strengthening US economy, alongside its emergence as a surplus oil producer, courtesy the shale revolution. In October 2013, US crude oil output hit 7.7 million barrels per day (mbpd), surpassing imports of 7.5 mbpd. Since then, its production has gone up further to an average of 9.4 mbpd, while imports have hovered at 7.3-7.4 mbpd. This turnaround in fortunes for a country that consumes a fifth of the world's oil — in addition to the current hype over solar and wind energy, amidst growing pressure for phasing out fossil fuels — has been a significant contributor to the tumbling of crude prices. Simultaneously, the US economic recovery and the prospect of an imminent Federal Reserve interest rate hike have fostered a strong dollar, in turn, diminishing gold's safe-haven appeal.

The third factor is somewhat more complex, having to do with commodities being lumped together as a distinct 'asset class'. From the early 2000s, commodities became trading vehicles for not just chocolate manufacturers, jewellers or airline companies wanting to hedge against volatility in prices of cocoa beans, bullion or fuel, but even for exchange-traded funds and other 'pure' investors having no direct production or dealing interests in them. At the height of the so-called emerging markets boom, the notional value of net 'long' or bullish investments in commodity index products monitored by the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (USCFTC) totaled \$ 256 billion in end-April 2011.

That tide has turned in the past two years, though, as index, pension and hedge funds have sharply cut their commodity exposures — the last USCFCTC data for October 30 shows net long index positions at only \$ 138.3 billion. The mounting selling pressure from funds has aggravated the crisis in commodity markets and also for governments, whether in Russia and Brazil or Argentina and Venezuela (where recent elections have seen seemingly secure socialist regimes being dislodged). Even the apparent rural backlash being faced by the [Narendra Modi](#) dispensation can be traced quite a bit to the global commodity crash affecting realisations for sugarcane, cotton, rubber, rice, soyabean or milk producers in India as well.

While the meltdown has impacted commodities across the board, the idea that they can be lumped together as an asset class could, nevertheless, come under challenge in the months ahead. The one distinction that markets may well end up making is between commodities whose prices in the near- to medium-term are largely a function of demand, and those for whom there could be supply-side issues, too. In the former category would be energy, base metals or gold and silver whose production is not amenable to sudden increases or decreases. It's safe to assume that their prices would remain under pressure, so long as the Chinese slowdown continues and India does not provide the new fuel for global growth that Modi's election initially promised.

Agricultural commodities fall in the latter category. In their case — at least for food, even if not for cotton, guar-gum or bio-ethanol — demand is stable or unchanging at worst. At the same time, supply is more prone to fluctuations, in response to both weather conditions as well as prices: it may be easier for farmers to expand or contract wheat acreages from season to season than for BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto, Glencore and Vale to open and shut down mines.

It is for this reason that the effects of the current El Niño — already the strongest since 1997-98 and expected to last through the winter and early spring — on the supply of farm produce cannot be written off. In the last three months, global prices of palm oil and sugar have climbed by 12.5% and 25% respectively, while cocoa futures are ruling 17.5 per cent higher over last year at this time. Dry weather in Indonesia, Australia, West Africa and India is clearly causing supply concerns at least in these commodities.

The world may still be awash in corn, wheat and soyabean, but we still aren't sure about the extent of drop in rabi plantings and the likely moisture stress to the already-sown crop in India. By the time the picture becomes clearer towards January-end or so, the markets may start treating agricultural commodities a little differently from the other constituents of a generic, undifferentiated 'asset class'.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Chhattisgarh govt making all-out efforts for welfare of farmers

Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh on Saturday described the recent incidents of farmers suicide as a challenge saying that his government was making all efforts to provide relief to the farmers affected by this year's drought situation.

There may be many reasons such as debt, illness, crop failure and strained family relations for farmers taking extreme step. But, these suicides is a challenge. One can have two crops a year, but life is only once, he said at a press programme on the occasion of his completion of 12 years in office.

The chief minister said all district collectors concerned have already been directed to ensure timely distribution of relief and compensation to the farmers affected by the drought.

Referring to problem of Naxalism, Singh said Maoist menace has almost been eradicated in Sarguja region in the North. In Bastar region in South, Maoist problem is persisting in certain pockets while a vast area is free from Maoist activities, he said and expressed confidence that normalcy would return to Bastar region also.

Replying to a question about the demand for inclusion of Chhattisgarhi as a language under the 8th schedule of the Constitution, he said our members of

parliament have been making efforts in this direction.

Pointing out that Chhattisgarh has witnessed a giant leap in development ever since the state was carved out of Madhya Pradesh in November 2000, the chief minister said the state has been successful in mobilizing resources for development initiatives, including development of road network and electrification in the villages. He said a project is being implemented to strengthen transmission network to the remote areas of Sarguja and Bastar regions.

[Nashik farmers set up firms to sell produce](#)

Farmers in the district will market their produce through private companies they have floated to bypass the middlemen.

Six private companies of the farmers' groups have been set up in Nashik with initiatives from the Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) of the agriculture department.

These farmers will sell their produce through the private companies registered as per the company act. ATMA is planning to set up a total of 14 such private companies, of which, seven have already been set up while the remaining nine are in the process of being registered.

Speaking to TOI, S K Nagare, director, ATMA, Nashik district, said, "Our objective is to eliminate middlemen between farmers and consumers and pass on the benefits to both the farmers and customers. Around 400-500 farmers have taken part in the project."

Nagare further said, "The seven companies that have already been set up will market their own produce like onion and pomegranate. Initially, the government provides financial assistance or grant of Rs 14 lakh to each

company, while stake-holders have to contribute Rs 3.5 lakh, which means they may start their company with Rs 18 lakh as capital. We also impart training to farmers pertaining to sales management and other services," he added.

In Sinnar tehsil, a group of around 836 farmers have formed a private company named Green Vision and are getting benefits by marketing their own produce. They have also appointed a team of marketing officials to sell their produce.

Machhindra Kokate, a farmer from Sinnar tehsil, said, "Around 830 farmers came together and formed a company as per the government norms to market our own produce and get better prices. We are focusing on onion and pomegranate. I myself have benefited by setting up the company."

Kokate further said, "Instead of selling our produce in the local agriculture produce market committees, we directly send our produce to other cities like Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and other cities to get better prices."

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Convergence 'elusive' on safeguard measures at WTO

Attempts for a breakthrough on a special safeguard mechanism to protect poor farmers against an indiscriminate rise in imports spearheaded by India and other developing countries of the G-33 alliance have failed to yield results.

Agriculture negotiations Chairman Vangelis Vitalis of New Zealand reported no convergence on the issue of special safeguard mechanism (SSMs) as well as public stockholding — both important to India — at the last informal meeting in Geneva on December 11, an official involved in the negotiations told *BusinessLine*.

Further negotiations will now take place in Nairobi at the December 15-18 WTO Ministerial Conference, but the fight before developing countries seems to be tough with opposing members refusing to relent.

Strong opposition

“In order to reach a consensus, the G-33 had further refined its proposal on SSMs some time back suggesting that safeguards need not apply on all farm items but only on products designated with SSM symbols in the schedules of developing countries. This proposal is similar to the existing safeguard mechanism used by many developed countries and should have logically been accepted,” the official said

Unfortunately for the G-33, its logic does not seem to be working with those opposing the SSM proposal. The proposal was rejected outright by agriculture exporting countries Brazil and Argentina, while others such as the EU and Norway stated that there is very little time to discuss it.

In Nairobi, WTO members will attempt to take a decision on how to proceed with the ongoing Doha Development Round that has not delivered many tangible results over the past 14 years, while reaching an agreement on a small package of issues.

There is, however, no clarity yet on what that package would contain.

Protection for farmers

India and 44 other countries, that form the G-33, have demanded that they be extended a SSM that would allow them to raise tariffs on farm goods to protect small and vulnerable farmers against sharp rise in imports or steep fall in global prices.

Since many developed members such as Australia, the EU, Norway, Iceland and Japan already have access to such protection under the special safeguards rule, the developing countries argue that their poor farmers, too, need to be protected against abnormalities.

Another important issue

Finding a ‘permanent solution’ to the problem of ensuring subsidies given under public stockholding do not get penalised at the WTO — another important issue for India — may also be difficult at Nairobi, as Vitalis stated.

The Chair gave a slightly more positive assessment on export competition under which members are trying to put in place timelines for scrapping of export subsidies.

Statutory committee to be set up to fix cottonseed price



The Centre will set up a statutory committee to study and recommend a price for cottonseeds in the country, ending over a 10-year row over the issue.

The committee would hold discussions with all the stakeholders periodically to ascertain the cost of production, margins of producers, dealers and firms, before arriving at a Maximum Sale Price (MSP).

Invoking the Seed (Control) Order, 1983, the Centre said the (seed) Controller has the power to regulate the sale price of cotton seed and prescribing licensing guidelines and format for all the genetically modified technology licensing agreement.

The Centre has decided to intervene to solve the endless rows on the issue between the State governments, seed firms and Mahyco-Monsanto, which provides genetic technology to seed firms under exclusive licence agreements. The government has said no one would be allowed to sell the

seeds above the MSP. The price would be notified before March 31 every year, well ahead of the kharif season, letting the seed companies plan for the kharif season.

“This (move) should solve the problem once for all. We have been wasting a lot of time and energies, running pillar to the post in order to seek a uniform price across the country. It is desirable,” a seed industry representative told *BusinessLine*.

The government has indicated that the committee would be headed by the Joint Secretary (Seed) and Controller, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers’ Welfare. The panel would consider important components such as seed value, licence fee (including trait value or royalty fee), trade margins and applicable taxes.

After considering representations from farmers’ associations and the seed industry, the government has come out with an order, with a strong intent to put an end to the row. The associations argued that the issue of seed price had become a big menace with different State governments announcing different prices.

These price orders often end up in courts with the technology provider Mahyco-Monsanto challenging the rights of States to fix royalty prices and defending the licence agreements it sign with seed firms.

The industry too made a representation to the Centre to intervene to settle the issue of royalty permanently by taking up the responsibility to ensure uniform pricing across the country.

The proposed committee would have two representatives (Agriculture Production Commissioner or Secretary, Agriculture) from two major cotton growing States. It would also have representatives from Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), seed industry and a farmer.

Seminar proposes model fish villages

A seminar on Conservation of Fisheries Resources has proposed to form model fish villages to increase the aquaculture production.

In order to improve the fisheries sector, diversified fish farming practices should also be given importance instead of concentrating only on marine capture fisheries, the seminar observed.

The seminar was organised by Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies.

KUFOS Vice Chancellor B Madhusoodana Kurup said that each village in the State should have projects on fish farming effectively utilising the inland water resources.

“Our villages should be self-reliant in aquaculture. We are yet to exploit the highly prospective inland fishery resources of the State. At a time when marine fisheries are in a deteriorating condition due to many reasons, we have to focus more on inland aquaculture”, he said.

According to Kurup, the country should emulate the model adopted by China to increase its aquaculture production. There are 30,000 fish villages in China and these villages are playing a pivotal role in boosting the fish production there.

Gopakumar, former Deputy Director General of ICAR, said global warming was taking a toll on fishery resources. The pelagic fishes like sardine, mackerel and anchovies are very sensitive to sea water temperature. If global warming goes up unabated, these fish resources will be depleted in the Indian coasts.

Fadanvis urges farmers to adopt new agriculture technology



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has called on farmers to adopt new technologies in order to improve and increase their farm yield, which will ultimately result in their well being.

Inaugurating the 7th edition of agriculture festival 'Agro Vision' here last evening, Fadnavis said due to rapid changes in climate, embracing new methodology and technologies was the "need of the hour".

Union Minister for Shipping and Road Transport, Nitin Gadkari, who is also the chief promoter of exhibition, Rajasthan Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Union Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers, Hansraj Ahir were also present at the inaugural function.

The Chief Minister said due to unfavourable climatic conditions, last year there was a drought—like situation in 20,000 villages of the state, which has swelled to 24,000 this year and production has suffered drastically in the entire Marathwada and eastern part of Vidarbha.

About 50 per cent population in state is directly dependent on agriculture and makes use of traditional methods of farming, he said.

"We cannot depend on nature as the climate is playing hide and seek with farmers. In such situation, we have to adopt new technology and do experiments with new crop that can improve the financial condition of farmers. Farmers must take the help of scientists, experts and change their mindset," Fadnavis said.

The Chief Minister on the occasion requested Gadkari to suggest the Central Government to allocate fund of Rs. 2,500—3,000 crore to every state for investing in agriculture infrastructure and emphasised that it was important to improve the condition of farmers in the country.

Gadkari, in his address, said irrigation facility for farmers in Maharashtra was 16.8 per cent, 18 per cent in Rajasthan, and 90 per cent in Punjab and Haryana. He said farm yield can increase many fold in Maharashtra if farmers are provided with electricity supply 24X7.

Scindia said her government would soon send farmers in small groups to Israel to study use of new technologies in farming.

Business Standard

NITI Aayog to soon unveil policy on important sectors

Taking forward its project of creating a national agenda in consultation with the states, the NITI Aayog will soon come out with policy papers on critical sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, energy, manufacturing and social development.

These strategic documents incorporate suggestions from state government and seek to address their concerns. Each White Paper will not only highlight key challenges facing the sector, it will also lay down the government's objectives and goals to be achieved in the next few years. These reports could set the direction for key sectors and serve as reference guides for all departments concerned.

According to officials, the Aayog will appoint a team of four-five advisors or consultants to ensure constant communication and problem-solving with the states. These experts would also help in framing the discussion papers.

Earlier, an attempt was made to solicit states' support in rationalising and restructuring 66 centrally sponsored schemes (CSS). In February, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, chairperson of the Aayog, had announced constitution of three sub-groups of chief ministers on skill development, Swachh Bharat and centrally sponsored schemes.

The Aayog has also constituted a committee under its full-time member and agriculture expert Ramesh Chand to prepare a road map for the ambitious Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY). This scheme aims to provide irrigation water to every farmland. The government has directed all district collectors to prepare a district irrigation plan.

The PMKSY would rationalise all irrigation programmes - like the accelerated irrigation benefit programme of the ministry of water resources, integrated watershed management programme of ministry of rural development and land resources and farm water management component of National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture of agriculture department - and bring these under one roof.

Though the existing schemes would continue to run under the respective ministries, NITI Aayog will play the coordinator and problem solver.

A sum of Rs 50,000 crore has been allocated for PMKSY. This money would be spent over a period of five years. Officials said secretaries from the departments of agriculture, water resources and rural development have been included in the committee. Besides, experts such as the head of Dehradun-based Soil and Water Conservation Institute have been made part of the committee.