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THE HINDU

H.P. favours lending for protective farming

Himachal Pradesh Chief Secretary P. Mitra on Friday asked the banks to encourage lending for protective farming by promoting setting up of polyhouses — naturally ventilated climate-controlled hothouses — and rejuvenating old apple orchards.

He said the State was laying emphasis on diversification of agriculture and providing irrigation facilities to farmers and encouraging latest farm practices.

Presiding over the state-level bankers committee meeting here, Mr Mitra said 60,000 soil health cards were provided to the farmers against the current fiscal target of 100,000.

He said the government was keen to provide crop insurance and weather-based insurance cover to the farmers and asked the bankers to create awareness among the farmers.

He said the banks have enrolled more than 10 lakh people under social security insurance schemes, which is a good progress.

He praised the banks for providing affordable bank finance under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojna.

He said the banks have disbursed loans of more than Rs.427 crore to 25,210 micro entrepreneurs since the launch of scheme in April this year.

UCO Bank managing director R.K. Takkar said the bank's total business in the state has crossed Rs.1.11 lakh crore in the period ended September 2015 and the total business has grown about 15 percent.

He said banking outreach of per branch population average of 3,511 persons is quite good in the state as compared to national average of 100,000 people. He said the various banks have a network of 1,955 branches and banking outreach is further expanded by engaging 1,347 business correspondents in remote areas.

State-level horticulture fair from today

23 progressive farmers to be felicitated; event will also mark 50th anniversary of the Green Revolution



New varieties of fruits and vegetables will also be on display at the exhibition.— File Photo

The three-day State-level horticulture fair will commence from Saturday at University of Horticulture Sciences-Bagalkot and it will be inaugurated by a progressive farmer, Mallanna Nagral.

The university has selected a title ‘healthy soil for healthy life’ to mark International Soil Day which was celebrated recently and also to mark the 50th anniversary of the Green Revolution.

During the three-day programme, special events would be held to inform the farmers about various researches being made in the field of soil for taking best benefits.

Exhibition of new varieties of fruits and vegetables would be held for the farmers.

More emphasis would be given for the mechanisation of horticulture sector for getting higher output with limited resources.

Exhibition of honey and wine would be held for promoting this vital industry directly associated with agriculture sector.

On the occasion, some 23 progressive farmers would be feted, said D.L. Maheshwar, the Vice-Chancellor of the university.

On the first day after inauguration, an interactive session with the farmers would be held where the experts would guide the farmers on the importance of soil testing.

He said that since election code of conduct in place for MLC elections, thus the university has not invited any elected representative. Dr. Maheshwar informed that for the event, about 160 stalls for agriculture products and 200 stalls for general purpose had been put. Some 80 stalls had been allotted to display various cattle breeds and 25 for agriculture equipment and machineries.

The three-day event will be inaugurated by progressive farmer Mallanna Nagral

After toor, rice prices too shoot up



Paddy growers, who suffered heavy losses in the last two years, have a reason to smile this year

It was the price of toor dal that was making every meal pricey till recently. Now it is the turn of rice. Over the last 15 days, the price of raw Sona Masuri rice has gone up from Rs. 42 a kg to Rs. 50 and there is a similar escalation in the prices of all varieties. Worse, there is every sign of it going further up.

While consumers are a worried lot, paddy growers of Karnataka — who had suffered heavy losses in the last two years owing to crop destruction caused by floods and other climatic fluctuations — have a reason to smile this year.

The prices of all varieties of paddy are up. The price of Sona Masuri variety paddy has increased from around Rs. 1,500 a quintal in the last two years to around Rs. 2,300 a quintal this year. Last year and the year before, farmers took their harvested crop to nearby agricultural produce marketing committee (APMC) markets and desperately waited for days to get a better price, but in vain. This year, even while harvesting of monsoon paddy is on, traders are rushing to farmers' fields to purchase the crop offering better price.

Hoarding of produce

However, the harvested crop is not changing hands in a big way as both farmers and traders are making efforts to stock it, expecting even better price, considering possible decline in production in the second paddy crop because of drought. Owing to various reasons, the production of kharif paddy has declined by around 20 per cent in the Tungabhadra command area that commands paddy production in the State with over 10 lakh acres in Ballari, Koppal and Raichur districts. The total area under paddy cultivation in the kharif season in the State is 25 lakh acres.

“There is not enough water in reservoirs due to drought. The Irrigation Department has declared that it would not release available water from dams for the second time for paddy cultivation this year. Knowing this, farmers are stocking the harvested crop expecting better price,” Shashidhar Haravi, a farmer from Manvi taluk told *The Hindu*.

Small farmers

He added that the rise in paddy prices would not benefit small farmers as they cannot stock their crop for a longer period. “Only rich farmers who have godown of their own can stock harvested paddy for a longer period. The small farmers who don't have access to such facilities or those who are in need of money for meeting urgent commitments, including repaying loans, would sell the crop to traders who would, in turn, stock it and reap the rich profits by selling it for a better price,” he said.

Dinesh Gundu Rao, Minister of State for Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs:

We cannot control the rice price as it all depends upon demand and supply. On Friday, we got clearance from the Election Commission for opening paddy procurement centres. We will open them within a day or two and start procuring paddy at Rs. 1,510 a quintal. Since the rates in the open market are high, we may not get enough paddy from these centres. However, we will purchase paddy from Punjab, Odisha, U.P. and other States to manage PDS system in Karnataka.

TN, AP floods have an impact

Recent floods in the districts along the east coast, particularly in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, have also had an adverse impact on the paddy market. Since standing paddy crop on vast tracts of land in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh has been destroyed, traders from those States are looking at Karnataka paddy purchase, causing greater demand for the crop and resultant rise in the price.

“Around 60 per cent of the paddy crop in coastal Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh has been destroyed. In other parts such as Telangana and Karnataka, drought hit the paddy production. The widening gap between demand and supply is causing the price rice,” Maram Tippanna, a rice miller from Raichur, told *The Hindu*.

Prices at your store

The rise in paddy prices has already resulted in the rice prices going up. The price of raw Sona Masuri rice has gone up from Rs. 42 a kg to Rs. 50 now, steam rice price has gone up from Rs. 32 a kg to Rs. 40, and idli rice price has gone up from Rs. 24 a kg to Rs. 32, within the last 15 days.

Fine quality rice was sold at Rs. 6,000 a quintal in Shivamogga market on Thursday. Considering the decline in paddy production and destroyed standing crop due to natural calamities, the rice prices are expected to rise further.

However, N.R. Vishwaradhya, executive president, Karnataka State Rice Millers' Association, said there would be "no crisis situation". He said the prices may go out of control because the State imports rice from Punjab, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar and other paddy-growing areas.

Total area of paddy cultivation

Irrigated: 6.96 lakh hectares

Rain-fed: 3.61 lakh hectares

Total: 10.57 lakh hectares

Escalation in paddy prices from last year to this (per quintal)

Sona Masuri: Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,300

Sanna Bhatta: Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 1,820

Paddy 1001: Rs. 1,400 to Rs. 1,800

IR 64: Rs. 1,200 to Rs. 1,520

Rice price (per kg)

Fine rice: Rs. 60

Medium rice: Rs. 60

Sona Masuri: Rs. 50

Steam rice: Rs. 40

Farmers' grievance redress meet

The farmers' grievances redressal meet for the current month will be held here at 10 a.m. at the Collectorate on December 24. Speakers and participants are requested to raise issues pertaining to agriculture and allied activities only, according to a release here by the District Collector N. Subbaiyan.

Farmers asked to guard against rice blast

The Agriculture Department has advised farmers to guard against incidence of rice blast, a fungal disease, in the standing paddy crop.

An advisory from the department said the prevailing weather condition after the monsoon rain could make the crop susceptible to the disease. Application of excessive doses of nitrogenous fertilizers, intermittent drizzles, cloudy weather, high relative, long dew periods, and low night temperature could make the crop susceptible to the disease. An official said there was no incidence of the disease so far in the district.

It could occur in fine grain type varieties such as BPT-5204 (Samba mahsuri) and improved white ponni. The disease is caused by *Pyricularia oryzae* fungus which attacks the rice crop at all stages right from the seedlings in nursery. The symptoms can be seen on leaves, nodes, neck of panicle, and on grains.

Lesions start as small water soaked bluish green flecks on the leaves, soon enlarge and form characteristic spindle shaped or eye shaped spots with grey centre and dark brown margins. The elongated spots join together as the disease progresses and large areas of the leaves dry up and wither. Similar spots form on the sheath. Blast infected grains become poorly filled and chaffy. Dark spots may be formed on the grains and reduces the grain quality.

If symptoms of the disease are found, farmers have been advised to remove and destroy weed hosts. Farmers have been advised to spray *Pseudomonas fluorescens* (mixed with water) at 5 gm a litre from the 45th day of the crop. This could be done thrice at 10 day intervals. Farmers could be spraying Tricyclazole (120 grams an acre) or combination (400 grams an acre) of Tricyclazole (18 per cent) and Mancozeb (62 per cent) or combination (100 grams an acre) of Tebuconazole (50 per cent) and Trifloxystrobin (25 per cent), the advisory said.

6816 tonnes of fertilizer ready for distribution

A total of 6,816 tonnes of fertilizer is ready for distribution to farmers for the second crop (Kungumapoo cultivation), said Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan here on Friday

Addressing the monthly grievance day programme for farmers, Mr. Chavan said that 1,240 tonnes of fertilizer was with TANFED, 2,957 tonnes with Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies and 1,169 tonnes with private dealers.

He also said that as on December 15, 204.320 tonnes of paddy seeds and 2.45 tonnes of urid dhal seeds had been distributed to farmers through agriculture extension centres. Besides this, 54,273 numbers of coconut saplings of various varieties were also distributed.

Mr. Chavan said that the collapsed pillars of the fence in Mambazhathani Thalam were being corrected and the damaged play materials in the children's park would be repaired during 2015-16.

The wild growth around Thengampudur Channel, Parakkai tank and Pal Kulam would be removed and the tanks desilted soon.

Black topped after rains

The road from Mayiladi Irattai Kinaru to Thoivalai would be repaired at an estimated cost of Rs. 30 lakh under a NABARD scheme. Immediately after the monsoon, the damaged roads would be black topped.

Joint Director of Agriculture Elango, Executive Engineer, PWD, S.K. Subramanian, and Personal Assistant to Collector (Agriculture) M. Nazeer Babu participated.

75 procurement centres to be opened: Collector

As the farmers were expected to harvest a bumper paddy crop this year, thanks to good rainfall during the north east monsoon so far, the district administration has decided to open 75 procurement centres this season and begin procurement from January 12.

Chairing the farmers grievance redressal meeting here on Friday, Collector K Nanthakumar said as farmers faced some problems in bringing the paddy to the procurement centres last year and complained about delay in procurement, the district administration has decided to open 25 more centres this year.

The administration would open more centres depending upon the need, he said adding 45 procurement centres would be opened in Paramakudi division and 30 centres in Ramanathapuram division. As farmers in a few areas were set to harvest the paddy crops later this month and early next month, the centres would start procuring paddy from January 12, the Collector said.

The Collector, however, ruled out opening mobile procurement centres. Making it clear that the government had no proposal to introduce mobile procurement centres, he said the farmers were free to sell the paddy crop to traders who visited their fields for procurement.

Giving details of rainfall during the monsoon period so far, N. V. Krishnamoorthy, Joint Director of Agriculture said the district received 1,000 mm of rainfall for the third time during the last 10 years this year. However, the rainfall was good in the coastal belts and many of the interior parts received only normal rainfall.

Responding to pleas by the farmers, the Collector said the district administration would seek additional quantum of water from Vaigai dam.

Water was released from Vaigai on November 28 and the district has almost received its full credit of 2,400 mcft.

Joint Registrar of Cooperative Societies T. Arokiya Sugumar said a total of 14,292 farmers have so far been distributed farm loans of Rs. 56.32 crore against the target of Rs. 70.40 crore for the year 2015-16.

He said the Primary Agriculture Credit Cooperative Societies (PACCS) had a total stock of 3,321 metric tonnes of fertilizers, enough to meet the requirements of the farmers.

“The centres will start procuring paddy from January 12”

Banana, sesame growers launch company

“District administration to provide necessary support to the company”

One more farmers’ producer company has been launched in Karur district.

As many as 240 members representing 12 Farmers Interest Groups have joined as members of the company based at Kulithalai. It has been christened as Kulithalai Banana and Sesame Farmers Producer Company.

Farmers of Kulithalai, Krishnarayapuram, and Thogamalai blocks have joined as shareholders.

This is the third farmers' producer company (FPC) in Karur district. Similar companies had been launched at Nachalur and Nadayanur and both of them are doing well. The new FPC had been promoted by NABARD under the scheme of "Producer Organisation Promoting Institution". Collector S. Jayandhi, who inaugurated the new company on Wednesday, said that chances were bright for its success as Kulithalai was a centre of agricultural activities with cultivation of banana on hundreds of acres of land. The district administration would provide necessary support to the company.

Rajeswari, director of the company, said besides supplying inputs for cultivation of banana and sesame at reasonable rate, it would take steps to get good price for the produce of members. It would explore the possibility of producing valued-added products to raise profitability.

J. Draviam, Senior Scientist and Head, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Karur, said the directors, founding members and new members had been taken to Nachalur and Nadayanur to provide on the spot inputs on functioning of farmer producer companies.

After kharif, farmers lose rabi crop too

Farmers allow crops to be devoured to avoid further investment



A farmer shows red gram with stunted growth near Sannur village in Chittapur taluk of Kalaburagi district.— Photo: Arun Kulkarni

“All hopes for retrieving anything have been dashed. This has been a total washout this year. I could not get even a grain from the kharif and rabi crops and this is the unkindest cut of all,” said Shashant Rojaker, a farmer who suffered heavy loss by taking up kharif and rabi crops this year at Sannur village in Chittapur taluk of Kalaburagi district.

“I had taken up the cultivation of the green gram at the beginning of the kharif season. After it failed due to the failure of rain, I took up the cultivation of red gram and now I have no money even to clean up my agriculture field. My last hope was jowar but even that crop has failed this year due to the absence of the moisture in the soil...I am ruined,” he said.

Surprisingly, after the rain played truant at the crucial stage of the growth of crops, resulting in stunted growth of red gram and bengal gram, jowar also failed in the absence of any mist during the winter season.

Usually, jowar survives on the moisture provided by the morning mist.

Yeshwant Patil, another small farmer at Sannur village, has stopped going to his field and left the red gram to be devoured by pests and cattle.

“Where should I go for getting the money to harvest or cleaning my field, all the money which I had has been invested in the sowing operations and there is nobody to give me further loan,” he said. According to the Agriculture Department, this was an unprecedented situation where the farmers had lost their crops both in the kharif and rabi season.

The farmers who had depended heavily on red gram and bengal gram are the worst affected.

Red gram on 2.41 lakh hectares, out of the total 3.56 lakh hectares, was completely lost and the yield in the remaining 1.15 lakh hectares will be less than 2 quintals per hectares, which is less than normal.

The yield of bengal gram on 1.96 lakh hectares is expected to be one of the lowest in the recent years due to stunted growth.

In some fields, the farmers have stopped spraying pesticides in the fields to avoid further investment in the crop and allowed the pests to devour on the crop.

Due to the failure of the morning mist this year, the growth of jowar in 2 lakh hectares was also stunted and the yield is expected to be one of the lowest in the recent years.

Kalaburagi, known for its extreme weather conditions, experiences severe cold spells with the mercury shooting down to 6 degrees Celsius during the peak of winter.

However, this year, the district was deprived of the chilly winter.

AP mulling debt swap scheme to bail out farmers

After debt redemption scheme, the State government is contemplating a debt swap scheme to bail out farmers from the clutch of moneylenders.

The idea is to transfer the liability of the farmer to banks which are expected to fulfil the payment through the scheme. The government is toying with the idea as it is observed that majority of farmers' suicides are related to indebtedness.

Banking sources say that the subject came for discussion at State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC) meeting on Wednesday. The officials made a strong case for the debt swap scheme.

It was found that the moneylenders charge exorbitant interest rates annually to the farmers. And, the officials argued, giving bank loans to such borrowers is a win-win situation for both, sources say.

As per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines, officials say, the bankers can swap the debt up to Rs. 1 lakh.

But, it is necessary to raise the ceiling of loan to Rs. 2.5 lakh as against the existing norm.

The bankers, however, say that existing norm is Rs. 50,000 and the RBI would have to clarify in this regard.

The government found that the small and marginal farmers still depend on private/non-institutional credit.

The farmers were borrowing loans from micro-finance firms and private money lenders at a rate of 36 per cent per annum, breaking the neck of farmers.

AP Rythu Sangham State joint secretary J. Prabhakar, however, argues that the micro-finance firms were charging up to 5 per cent per month. The bank loans, on other hand, were available at 4 per cent per annum, if the loan amount was up to Rs. 3 lakh.

And, at it is zero per cent interest, if the loan was less than Rs. 1 lakh. Majority of farmers approach private money lenders as bank loans were not easily available, he opines.

Sources say that the government is working out the modalities for the debt-swap scheme.

The loan raised under the scheme is likely to be in the shape of term loan. Sub-Committees in the SLBCs were formed to study the proposal and the matter is posted for January 10.

The bankers also point out that it was necessary on part of the farmer, who was interested in debt swapping, to prove that the money borrowed from informal sector was for agricultural purposes.

Govt. move to transfer farmers' liability

to banks which are expected to fulfil the payment through the scheme

Banks can swap debt up to Rs. 1 lakh, but it is necessary to raise the loan ceiling to Rs. 2.5 lakh

Greens to tighten screws on govt. to protect wetlands

The environmental organisations in the State are planning to strengthen their protest against the widespread reclaiming of paddy fields and wetlands in the State. A State meeting of the organisations here on Wednesday condemned the large-scale reclamation and the possible misuse of the new law to regularise all reclamations before 2008.

The convener of the Coordination of Environmental Organisations, V.S. Vijayan, alleged that the officials in-charge were being forced to become mute witnesses to the violations because of political pressure. Secretary of

Prakrithi Samrakshana Samithi T.V. Rajan said as per the draft of Kerala Conservation of Paddy land and Wetland Act 2008, the violators had to pay 25 per cent of the market value as fine. But when it became a law, the fine amount was changed to 25 per cent of the fair value of the land, which was considerably low compared to the market value. “This is an attempt to help the land mafia and the violators”, he said and added that large-scale violations took place at the time of the local body polls when the officials were otherwise occupied.

Draft data bank

The draft data bank prepared by Agriculture Officers and Village Officers after proper inspections had not yet been published. Many land owners had got their land off the data bank by exerting pressure on the officials. The government should try to protect at least those lands that are listed on the data bank, Mr. Rajan pointed out.

The Coordination of Environmental Organisations will hold Statewide massive protests on the issue during the last week of December to create more awareness among local people regarding the laws and possible violations and misuses, so that they could stay alert, Mr. Rajan said.

Greens fear misuse of the new law to regularise all reclamations before 2008

Farm, industry exhibition begins today

Expo based on organic farming for sustainable food production

Agrex 2015, a 10-day exhibition of agriculture, floriculture and industry, will be held at the SDV School grounds from Saturday.

The exhibition is being organised by the Alappuzha Zilla Agri-Horticultural Society, SD College, NABARD, and the State Department of Agriculture.

The exhibition of items will be held in an area of about 50,000 square feet. It will be inaugurated at 3 p.m. by K.C. Venugopal, MP. Actor and agriculture enthusiast Srinivasan will be the chief guest. T.M. Thomas Isaac, MLA, will preside over the meeting.

A.M. Arif and P. Thilothaman, MLAs; district panchayat president G. Venugopal; municipal chairman Thomas Joseph; and others will address the gathering.

The exhibition, being held on the theme of organic farming for sustainable food production, will coincide with the culmination of the year-long silver jubilee celebrations of the Agri-Horticultural Society. The exhibition will provide an opportunity for graduates in agriculture to gain insight into a variety of aspects. The show focuses on rural-urban linkages for sustainable agro-ecological farming and is sought to help rural farmers form groups for better price realisation.

Seminar on agriculture, climate change, dairying, safe food, livestock, hi-tech farming and other topics will be held on various days in connection with the exhibition. Entertainment programmes will also be held on all the days.

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- *Valedictory of silver jubilee fete of Agri-Horticultural Society*
 - *Focus on rural-urban linkages for agro-ecological farming*
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Promoting fish culture in farm ponds

Will help farmers earn additional income



possible varieties: The department of Fisheries displayed fish that can be reared in ponds by farmers.- Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

With farm ponds receiving water following heavy rainfall, the district administration is taking steps to promote fish culture in the ponds to help farmers earn additional income.

To take this forward to farmers, officials made a presentation on fish culture in farms during the farmers' grievance redressal meeting on Friday. G. Ramakrishnan, PA to Collector (Agriculture), said farm ponds measuring 15 m x 15 m were required to start fish culture.

To conserve rain water

These farm ponds were primarily being established to conserve rainwater. Under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, workers were establishing farm ponds in an area of 15 m x 15 m. This was being done for free for small, marginal, SC/ST farmers, Mr. Ramakrishnan added.

“Now, the district has received good rainfall. So far, ponds have been dry, or will have water following spells of rains for 15 days to one month. Heavy rainfall has brought in water to these farm ponds. It can be utilised for fish culture to generate additional income for farmers,” he said.

He said that there should be four to five feet of water in the pond to rear fish. The water should be tested for pH level. Officials provided information on various measures to be adopted to take up fish culture in farm ponds, including food for fish.

Types of fish

Fish such as “katla”, “rohu” and “mrigal” can be reared in the farm ponds. A. Mercy Amala, Inspector of Fisheries, said already, farmers had taken up fish culture in farm ponds, and this was to enable more persons to come forward.

Officials also pointed out that fish varieties were being bred by the Fisheries Department at Mordhana Dam. The department displayed varieties of fish that can be reared in these ponds at the meeting.

Green house cultivation becoming popular



Agriculture is the dominant sector of Indian economy which determines the growth and sustainability. About 65 per cent of the population still relies on agriculture for employment and livelihood. The increasing population coupled with growing income has increased the demand for food grains, and non-food grain crops.

Therefore, agriculture has to achieve a higher growth rate targeted at 4 per cent per annum on a sustainable basis.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Salem, organised a seminar on 'Opportunities in Green House Cultivation for cut flowers, capsicum, and cucumber,' in the city on Thursday.

The event was designed to focus on the requirements of the farmers, entrepreneurs, agripreneurs.

Robert de Bos, an expert from The Netherlands, and at present attached to Bangalore Plants First Private Limited, spoke in detail on green house cultivation, global perspectives, and export opportunities.

He said that virtually all commercial flowers can be grown somewhere, year around across the country.

Many new types of flowers can be cultivated too.

There is a market, a buyer, for everything. Getting to these groups and these market segments was the challenge. A professional approach was required.

Farmer clears farm, takes up millet cultivation

As many farmers looked up to the government to clear the ‘Seema karuvelam’ (*Prosopis juliflora*) in their private land holdings or grew them for commercial value, a farmer cleared 12 acres of his land from the deadly trees and cultivated ‘Kudiraivali’ (Barnyard millet), setting an example to fellow farmers.

Murugesan, the middle aged farmer from Keezhaseethai village in Uthirakosamangai block, was accorded the honour of addressing farmers and sharing his success story at the ‘farmers’ grievance day’ in the presence of Collector K Nanthakumar here on Friday. Without expecting any assistance from the government, the farmer had removed the trees in 12 acres of his land, spending about Rs. 4.5 lakh and brought the lands under cultivation, much to the envy of others in the village. He advised fellow farmers to clear the trees on their own and bring their lands under cultivation to reap long term benefits.

It costs about Rs. 50,000 to remove the trees from one acre and after selling the trees for Rs. 15,000, the net expenditure would work out to Rs. 35,000. Farmers could make the one-time investment to reap immense benefits in the future, he said. “Once in four years, the trees could be removed to make charcoal out of the wood but a one-time investment will help farmers in the long run,” he said.

To begin with, farmers could cultivate the drought resistant and short-term minor millet crops such as Samai (Little millet), Varagu (Kodo millet) and Kudiraivali, which commanded good demand in the market and fetched better price.

Farmers, who were cultivating the minor millets in the district about three decades ago, had switched over to paddy to enhance their income. But now, they could revert back to minor millets, which has the patronage of health conscious people and those affected by diabetes, officials said.

Crop loss compensation sanctioned

The government had sanctioned compensation for crop loss over 95.98 hectares in Tirumangalam and Kallikudi areas of Madurai district, said Collector L. Subramanian on Friday.

Addressing farmers at the monthly grievance redress meeting here, the Collector said that Rs.13,500 sanctioned per hectare of crop loss would soon be disbursed to farmers. Farmers from Kottampatti and surrounding areas demanded that water be provided to the extension areas of the Periyar canal system.

However, the Public Works Department officials said that 11 tmc water was needed for covering the extension areas but only 8 tmc of water was presently available of which around two tmc would be used for drinking water purpose.

Boost to horticulture crop cultivation

Raising of horticulture crops under controlled cultivation is being given a push even as the district has been allotted Rs.2.62 crore for being extended as subsidy to horticulture farmers during the current financial year under the National Mission on Integrated Development of Horticulture.

Under the scheme, subsidy is extended for various components including area expansion, promotion of cultivation controlled conditions using shade net and poly green houses, mulching, pollination support, mechanisation, micro irrigation and training on best practices for farmers, according officials of the Horticulture Department.

The department has planned to promote green houses in about 7,000 square metres and shade net in 14,000 square metres. According to officials, shade net is ideal for raising quality greens, flowers and tomato, cucumber and brinjal during summer. A variety of crops and vegetables could be raised under poly green houses. Officials said farmers could get a return of as much as Rs.9 lakhs an acre by raising vegetables or flowers under controlled conditions.

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Farmers plan fast

The All Farmers Organisations' Coordination Committee is organising a protest fast here on Saturday demanding declaring the delta districts as flood affected, granting Rs. 25,000 an acre as compensation for all cultivated lands and waiver of all loans of farmers with cooperative and commercial lending institutions. Farmers from 12 districts throughout the State representing various organisations are expected to participate in the protest, according to committee coordinator P.R. Pandian.

Poultry farmers asked to increase vitamin D3 level in feeds

Poultry farmers were asked to ensure low moisture and high energy diet along with additional vitamin D3 for poultries to prevent breakage in shells.

A press release from Agromet Field Unit of Veterinary College and Research Institute and Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, said that due to subdued northeast monsoon, temperature will decline and the feed intake in poultry will be high. Increase in egg weight will lead to poor egg shell quality.

Major feed ingredients like maize should be kept below 11 per cent moisture and feed should be prepared quickly. Farmers should ensure additional vitamin D3 to prevent breakage in shells, the release added.

Small onion

An agro advisory from Krishi Vigyan Kendra said that small onion crop may be affected with tip drying of leaf sheath due to foggy weather. It can be controlled by sprinkling of water using hand sprayer or by moving a jute rope just at the height of the onion leaf sheath in the morning hours.

Farmers seek compensation for crop loss due to pest attack

At loss: Farmers from Viswanathapuram seek compensation for crop damage at the farmers' grievance day meeting in Tirunelveli Collectorate on Friday.

Though all waterbodies in the district, including eleven reservoirs, have reached their maximum capacity and almost all irrigation tanks are brimming with water, the prevailing climatic condition is so conducive for pest attack in the standing crop, mostly paddy.

As the farmers' grievance day meet commenced at the Collectorate on Friday with Collector M. Karunakaran in the chair, a group of farmers from Viswanathaperi and Muthukulam near Sivagiri, carrying damaged paddy in their hands, appealed to him to give them compensation for the crop loss suffered after the recent downpour and subsequent flooding of fields. The farmers appealed to the Collector to involve agriculture department officials also in the survey being conducted for estimating crop damage along with revenue officials and for determining loss.



“More than 90 per cent of the standing paddy crop had suffered pest attack and is rotting in the inundating rainwater, the Collector should send a team of officials to Viswanathaperi to inspect the loss we've suffered,” a farmer, Murugesan, said.

The Collector assured them that the officials had been instructed to compile taluk-level reports on crop damage and hence no farmer would be left out from getting compensation for the loss suffered due to recent rains. He also informed that 45 farmers had been given a compensation of Rs. 1.88 lakh towards compensation for the loss of horticultural crops.

Dr. Karunakaran informed the farmers that chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which were being made available in the right price, would be stocked adequately in the district to cater to their needs.

“Even as all dams have reached the maximum storage level, 1,221 systemised tanks and 1,797 rain-fed tanks across the district are brimming

with water. Hence, fertilizers and pesticides had been stocked in adequate quantity,” the Collector said.

A group of farmers from Kalakkad submitted a petition to the Collector seeking compensation for the crop damage caused by invading wild animals such as wild boar and elephants from the Western Ghats.

‘Balance energy content in feeds’

With night temperature expected to be at 23 degree Celsius, poultry farmers have been asked to keep the energy content of the layer chicken diet at 2,550 to 2,600 kilocalories per one kg feed.

An advisory from Agromet Field Unit of Veterinary College and Research Institute and Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, said that due to active northeast monsoon over the southeast costal of Tamil Nadu, cloudy sky is expected over the region.

Though the temperature drop due to winter is not observed so far in the region, the night temperature will remain close to 23 degree Celsius. Hence, it is necessary to balance the energy content for the birds. Also, poultry farmers were asked to ensure sufficient heat to the young brooding chicks to prevent huddling and mortality.

An advisory from Krishi Vigyan Kendra here said that changes in the climatic conditions favour mealy bug and spiraling white fly attack in tapioca. These pests suck the sap from young leaf and stems causing damage to the crops. Hence, farmers are asked to take steps to control mealy bug.

Efforts on to remove invasive plant species

Forest Department in The Nilgiris is engaged in removing exotic and invasive plant and tree species to prevent their invasion of local species and reduce man-animal conflict.

According to sources, the department decided to remove the trees, planted continuously since 1840, because they affected the ecological balance in the district that was a part of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The department is engaged in removing *karpooram*, *seegai* and a few other species. According to the revised Forest Policy of 1988, it was decided to protect and conserve *sholas* and grass lands.



The sources said that the task proved to be difficult because the department had to continuously remove the trees for three years as any lapse could lead to their growth.

The department had estimated that the alien and invasive species had occupied over 15,000 hectare. Officials from the Mukurthi National Park, and Nilgiris North and South Forest Divisions' staff have been pressed into service. Since the start of the project, the officials had removed the species on 150 hectares or 1 per cent of the targeted land. The officials have covered 40 per cent of the 78.4 sqkm Mukurthi Park.

Officials engaged in the task said that they would carry on the work for the next three years.

The removal of these species would increase the grass cover and that would lead to adequate food and water for the wild animals.

Kappatagudda forest declared conservation reserve

The government move comes as Kappatagudda forest is facing serious threat from illegal mining lobby and frequent incidents of 'accidental' fire.

With Kappatagudda forest in Gadag district facing serious threat from illegal mining lobby and frequent incidents of “accidental” fire, the State government has declared the forest covering 17,872 hectares as a conservation reserve.



Move to declare over 8,000 acres as reserve forest challenged

The 152-year-old Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, part of the Wadia Group, has moved the Madras High Court Bench here against State government’s move to declare as reserve forest about 8,373.57 acres in the Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve in Tirunelveli district which was leased to the company for 99 years by erstwhile Singampatti Zamindar in 1929.

Justice T. Mathivanan on Friday directed the State government to file its counter affidavit by January 22 and ordered it not to take any coercive action till then on the basis of an order passed by a Forest Settlement Officer on January 6, 2010 rejecting the company’s claim for right of occupancy as a lessee and exempting the vast tract of land in its possession from being declared as a reserve forest.

Though the Forest Settlement Officer’s order was initially challenged by way of a civil appeal, the First Additional District and Sessions Court in Tirunelveli dismissed the appeal on September 1 this year after rejecting all grounds raised by the company, to substantiate its claim for right of occupancy, and hence it had moved the High Court now through a civil revision petition.

Additional District Judge P. Dhanabal rejected the company's main contention that the land in its possession was a Ryoti (cultivable) land and therefore the government lacked the authority to declare it as a reserve forest. Pointing out that the lease deed itself had referred to it as a minor forest land, he said subsequent cultivation by the company would not change its character.

The judge also rejected the company's other argument that the land was actually not at the disposal of the government. He pointed out that the government had taken over the Singampatti estate way back in 1952 under the Madras Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act, 1948 and subsequently passed an order in 1958 permitting the company to remain in possession of the leased area.

The company too had accepted the order and got the principal lease deed amended by the State government in 1966 and 1973 in order to sell the produce from the leased lands. "Therefore, the petitioner admitted the title of the government and that the government is the owner of the property... The petitioner is not entitled to a right over the property," the District Judge had said.

However, assailing his decision before the High Court on several grounds, the company claimed that the District Judge should not have ignored the fact that the Forest Settlement Officer had abdicated his duty by seeking an opinion from a Government Pleader before rejecting the claim for right of occupancy.

District judge had rejected the company's claim that it is cultivable land



Want to avoid gaining weight? Chew your food slowly

Moms, don't rush your child to finish that breakfast. Slow chewing gives children enough time to realise when they're full — helping to avoid overeating and effectively enabling them to prevent weight gain.



Waiting 30 seconds in between bites of food allows children to realise when they are full and avoid overeating. (Source: Pixabay)

Training your kids to chew food slowly can be an inexpensive and easy way to help them stay in shape, suggests new research.

Waiting 30 seconds in between bites of food allows children to realise when they are full and avoid overeating —hence preventing excessive weight gain — the study said.

“To lose weight, you need to stop eating. But it is not that simple for most people,” said study co-author Marcos Intaglietta from the University of California, San Diego in the US.

“So we decided to investigate how effective eating slowly would be,” Intaglietta noted.

The study monitored the eating habits of 54 children aged between 6-17 years in the city of Durango, Mexico for a year. The students were compared to a control group with similar demographics.

The students were divided into two groups: those who ate slowly as instructed by researchers — called the compliant group — and those who did not — called the non-compliant group. These two groups were compared to a control group.

The results were striking. The weight of the students in the compliant group decreased anywhere from 2-5.7 per cent after six months and 3.4-4.8 per cent after one year. By contrast, the weight of the students in the non-

compliant group increased by 4.4-5.8 per cent after six months and 8.3-12.6 per cent after a year. The weight of the control group increased by 6.5-8.2 per cent after one year.

The slow eating approach has the advantage of being sustainable over the long term — unlike most diets — because it doesn't require you to change what you eat on a daily basis, study co-author Geert Schmid-Schonbein from the University of California, San Diego said.

The findings appeared in the journal *Pediatric Obesity*.

hindustantimes

6% retail inflation likely, pulses set to pinch pockets



India's shortage of lentils, along with a decline in food production, poses risks to inflation, which could rise to 6% in the current fiscal, the government's Mid-Year Economic Analysis has said. At that level, prices would be slightly above what is acceptable for the government.

The review has flagged concerns about how pulses output has barely risen, roiling household budgets and inflation targets.

“While cereals production has picked up over the years with assured procurement of wheat and paddy, pulses continue to be a major problem in

India with frequent bouts of inflationary spikes owing to demand-supply mismatches and limited international supply response notwithstanding the rise in minimum support prices,” the review states.

For instance, pulses output has remained almost stagnant within the range of 13 to 19 million tonnes in the last 10 years. In fact, the availability of pulses — the only source of protein for vast majority of vegetarian diets of ordinary Indians — has come down steadily. According to the review, “the per capita net availability of pulses has declined from 69 grams/day in 1961 to 35 grams/day by 2010.” This means India had a much better output of pulses in the immediate aftermath and the beginning of the Green Revolution, a period when farm output shot up due to several policy measures and better crop varieties.

In fact, in 2015, agriculture has hit a very rough patch, affecting food production and hurting rural incomes. “During the kharif season, the output of cereals and pulses again contracted by 1.8% and 1.1% respectively, while oilseeds grew by 8.5%.”

India’s shortfall of pulses needs to be corrected if retail prices are to remain within acceptable bounds, for which the economic review suggested a three-pronged strategy focussing on yield, insurance and price, abbreviated as “YIP”.

“Better seed varieties are needed”, the report said, “which will need a scientific breakthrough. Generating awareness about insurance among farmers has to be of highest priority. Timely announcement of MSP (minimum support price) is essential to give greater incentives and encourage farmers to grow pulses, while also preventing price shocks in the retail markets.”



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Signs of heart attack women should know

Studies show heart attacks and heart disease are under-diagnosed in women, as their symptoms do not match that of men. To prevent a heart attack from sneaking up on you, watch for these seven little-known signs of heart attack:

Fatigue

More than 70 per cent of women reported extreme fatigue in the months prior to their heart attacks. This was an overwhelming fatigue that sidelined them from their usual schedules for a few days at a time.

Insomnia

Despite their fatigue, women who've had heart attacks remember experiencing unexplained inability to fall asleep during the month before their heart attacks.

Anxiety and stress

Stress has long been known to up the risk of heart attack. But what women report is the emotional experience; before their heart attacks they felt anxious and stressed, more than usual.

Indigestion or nausea

Stomach pain, intestinal cramps, nausea, and digestive disruptions are other signs reported by women heart attack patients.



Shortness of breath

Women couldn't catch their breath while walking up the stairs or doing other daily tasks.

Flu-like symptoms

Clammy, sweaty skin, along with feeling light-headed and weak, can lead women to wonder if they have flu when, in fact, they're having a heart attack.

Jaw, ear, neck, or shoulder pain

Many women say they felt pain and a sensation of tightness running along their jaw and down the neck, and sometimes up to the ear, as well. The pain may extend down to the shoulder and arm--particularly on the left side--or it may feel like a backache or pulled muscle in the neck and back.

Tech ideas for next-gen farmers

Pune: Entrepreneurs from the city are providing information technology-based solutions to make farmers' lives easier. These technocrats have brought in IT solutions to agriculture, leading to better farming practices. In fact, some of the solutions have been displayed at the ongoing Kisan Agri Expo.

AgroStar, a city-based m-commerce venture that raised \$4 million from IDG Ventures and Aavishkar in August this year, allows farmers to procure products they need simply by giving a missed call on a particular phone number. The system works in such a manner that the farmer receives a call from an expert offering advice, consultation and tips. Shardul Sheth, chief executive officer and co-founder of Agrostar, explains, "Farmers can call on the 1-800 number provided to them and someone will return their call and talk to them to understand their need in detail. The farmer can just place his order of the things he needs and we will get it delivered. We have a wide range of products, from national as well as international brands, on offer."

AgroStar has tied up with IndiaPost for last mile delivery and the venture is in the process of setting up a delivery system by roping in local entrepreneurs in both Gujarat and Maharashtra where it operates. "We have returned 10 lakh calls in the last two and half years and have served over three lakh farmers," said Sheth.

Another IT entrepreneur, Umeed Kothavala, strives to minimise losses in sugarcane farming through the app 'Dhrishticane', which has been developed

by his firm Extensia. The platform can be installed on an Android tablet and can aid farm supervisors in maintaining and transmitting data, soft copies of agreements, map the farm area, calculate the final production of sugarcane as well as estimate sugar prices. The platform helps supervisors minimise losses and farmers reduce water usage. Supervisors can track sugarcane growth across the various farms that they have tied up with. The system is being used by Renuka Sugars as of now.

"Currently, most data collection, agreements, and data transmission is done manually. The data also gets lost over time and discrepancies arise due to language differences between farmlands in Karnataka and Maharashtra. The app would also help farmers take better and timely decisions related to cutting their crop and marketing it," said Kothavala.

Sanjay Borkar and Bhanudas Shedge from Shivrai Technologies have developed Farm ERP. "There are a lot of challenges on today's farmlands. This solution addresses operational efficiency and is used for labour and input optimization. From the date related to sowing and harvesting, all processes can be monitored through this app which saves time and money. It also has a GIS capability, which enables us to see the map of a particular farm. Even a 5-acre farm can use this technology. In fact, a grape farm is using Farm ERP currently," said Borkar. One of the biggest corporate farms that is using the app is a 40,000 acre area where rubber, sugarcane and paddy is grown, he added.

"For smaller farms and small farmers, it can keep track of their expenses and budget. It also keeps a database of pests and diseases," added Borkar. Farm ERP is offered through a mobile app in offline mode, which gets synchronized with the cloud server and through an ownership model.

The Kisan Agri expo is currently going on at Moshi near Pune and will be on till December 20.

ScienceNews

Roosters run afoul of genetic rules



Researchers caught a rooster doing a hen's job: passing on mitochondrial DNA to his chicks. Mitochondria, the energy-generating organelles inside cells, carry a circular chromosome containing genes needed to make the mitochondria and keep them running. The long-held rule was that these powerhouses of the cell are inherited only from the mother. But some birds in a 50-generation family of White Plymouth Rock chickens at Virginia Tech broke that rule.

For the study, reported in the October *Biology Letters*, researchers determined the genetic makeup of mitochondrial genomes from 12 of the chickens. A mutation in the *ND4L* gene originated in a rooster, the researchers discovered. He passed the mutation to his chicks.

Scientists don't know how often mitochondria are inherited from fathers in the wild — they've seen it in some plants (*SN: 5/16/15, p. 8*), sheep and even in one person. Such evidence suggests that fathers bequeath mitochondria to their progeny more often than previously suspected. That finding could muddy the results of the many studies that use mitochondrial DNA to trace maternal lineages and determine evolutionary relationships.

Coonoor Tea Trade Association turnover edges down



The cumulative turnover at Coonoor Tea Trade Association (CTTA) auctions till last month continued to be less than the corresponding level of last year.

Till April, players at CTTA auction had earned less compared to 2014, but in May and June, they earned more.

However, the earnings dropped again in July, August, September and October.

This falling trend continued in November although the decline was only marginal.

Although the volume sold till November had risen over last year by 13 lakh kg, that was possible only by sacrificing prices by ₹2/kg.

Till end-November, 48 auctions had been held.

Since about 25 per cent of volume had remained unsold in most auctions, producers reduced their asking price resulting in average price falling to ₹71.65 per kg from ₹73.39.

The lower price helped higher absorption with the volume sold rising to 5.53 crore kg from 5.40 crore kg.

Nevertheless, the overall turnover dropped to ₹396.22 crore from ₹396.31 crore.

There has been an improvement in the absorption level in December.

Last week, 94 per cent of the offer was absorbed at an average price of ₹82.55 per kg – ₹2 more than the previous week.

The price is significantly higher than ₹66.33 received this time last year.

(This article was published on December 18, 2015)

Remove anomalies, amend TN Prohibition Act: Coconut Development Board



The Coconut Development Board (CDB) is advocating the need for removing the anomalies and issuing an amendment in Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act 1937 to exclude Neera from the definition of Toddy.

Asserting that Neera is a non-alcoholic beverage extracted from the inflorescence of coconut palm, the CDB, while stating that it is “illogical and irrational” to include Neera under Section 19 of the Act, explained that Neera or Padani as stated in Section 11-B means juice drawn from a coconut, Palmyra, date or any other kind of palm tree into receptacles treated so as to prevent any fermentation. It therefore should not be categorised as Toddy under Section 19, as it contains “no alcohol”.

The Madras Neera or Padani Rules 1939 states that licenses may be issued (under these Rules) for drawing of Neera in pots or other receptacles “freshly coated internally with lime” for manufacture of jaggery from such toddy for sale or use of such toddy as a beverage without fermentation.

And as per the 1939 Rules, there are at present eight Palmgur federations registered with the Tamil Nadu Palm Development Board. These federations are authorised to issue Neera License to the tappers who are the members of the Societies under these Federations.

The license incidentally is issued only for traditional and old methods of Neera extraction (using lime) and this permission for tapping, transportation and marketing of Neera and Neera-based jaggery is expected to expire in a fortnight's time, a board official told this correspondent.

When asked what changes are required in the State's Prohibition Act, the official stressed the need for taking Neera out of the definition of Toddy. “It is a health drink. This simple amendment would help create around 2.40 lakh “Green Collar jobs” and increase the State's revenue by Rs. 47500 cr.”

The Act of 1937 was implemented when modern food processing technology was not developed for preservation of food products. The CDB has at least six modern technologies for preservation of Neera up to one year without fermentation. Hence there is no rationale in keeping the unfermented juice under Toddy/ liquor.

Highlighting the opportunity for Neera in Tamil Nadu, the Deputy Director of CDB T Balasudhahari said it can give a facelift to coconut sugar industry. “Though India is a leading producer of coconut globally, our production of coconut sugar is “nil”. We import around 20000 tonnes of coconut palm sugar annually.”

“The State can consider giving Neera tapping license through Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs) and allay fear of misuse of Neera as Toddy. The Board has evolved a three-tier structure – Coconut farmers group themselves and moot a society. In the next stage, about 15 to 25 societies come together to form a Coconut Producer Federation (CPF) and finally 10 – 15 such federations join hands to form a Coconut-Producer Company (CPC).

“There are at present 471 Coconut Producer Societies, 61 CPFs and 11 CPCs in the State,” the CDB DD said.

(This article was published on December 18, 2015)

New generation entrepreneurs urged to enter coconut processing sector

T K Jose, Chairman, Coconut Development Board, has called upon new generation entrepreneurs to venture into coconut processing sector.

India, he said, is ahead in scientific and technological advancements compared to other major coconut growing countries. However, majority of the entrepreneurs are unaware about the vast scope and potential of the sector. Though the country is far ahead in coconut production, it lags behind in processing and value-addition.

The Chairman urged the prospective entrepreneurs to make use of this opportunity and to play a major role in making India the largest coconut processing hub in the world.

He was speaking at a ‘Face to Face interaction’ organised by the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

It is high time that the entrepreneurs should realise the enormous scope available in the domestic and export market for value-added coconut products. Imported canned coconut milk and coconut water from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam are now freely available in Indian markets, he added.

The participants also had an interactive session with the CDB Chairman.

K B Rajan, the Chamber President presided over the function.

(This article was published on December 18, 2015)

Rabi acreage inches up, but still lower than last year



Though wheat acreage has picked up in the largest producing State of Uttar Pradesh, the total area covered under the main rabi cereal crop across the country so far, is still lower than corresponding last year's levels.

Wheat acreage as on December 18 stood at 239.45 lakh hectares (lh) against last year's 268.26 lh.

With farmers having taken up brisk sowing in the recent days, the shortfall in acreage in UP has now been reduced to around 12.46 lh from the previous week's 20 lh.

So far, wheat has been planted on 74.59 lh in UP, while the State has set a target of 99 lh.

As farmers clear up their sugarcane fields with the progress of the crushing season, more area is expected to come under the cereal crop over next couple of weeks. Wheat planting in other major producers such as Punjab and Haryana is complete with acreages on par with last year's levels of 34.3 lh and 24.66 lh respectively.

Madhya Pradesh is the other major State where the acreage is lower by 5.56 lh.

Higher temperatures, poor soil moisture and storage levels due to a weak South-West monsoon have impacted rabi plantings this year.

Storage levels dip

Meanwhile, the water storage in the 91 major reservoirs of the country dropped further and stood at 49 per cent of the total capacity.

As on December 17, the water storage stood at 76.926 billion cubic metres (BCM) against a total storage capacity of 157.799 BCM.

The current storage is 75 per cent of the 10-year average for the period.

States such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have reported lower storages, while Himachal, Andhra and Tripura have reported an increase.

Gram area up

Among pulses, farmers have planted more of gram or chana on 79.17 lh (75.82 lh).

States such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have reported higher acreage under pulses, while MP, UP and Rajasthan have seen a decline.

In oilseeds, rapeseed-mustard has been planted on 59.36 lh against 63.67 lh in corresponding last year.

Lower area has been reported in Rajasthan, MP, Andhra and Maharashtra.

However, the area under coarse cereals has witnessed an increase over last year, mainly driven by higher acreages under jowar at 35.59 lh (29.57 lh).

Rabi maize has been planted on 9.96 lh and rice on 11.79 lh.