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# THE HINDU

## **Start-ups focus on e-mandis**

*The organic farming sector is probably the only agricultural sector to be bitten by the e-commerce bug*

Organic vegetables or foodgrains are just a click away in the city. But while the city has seen a proliferation of organic food stores, e-mandis offering organic food are the new rage. The organic farming sector is probably the only agricultural sector that has been bitten by the e-commerce start-up bug.

A new start-up Jiva Bhumi offers delivery of organic foodgrains and pulses. Anil Nadig, one of the founders of Jiva Bhumi, said that they had identified six pick-up points in Kengeri, ISRO Layout, Vidyaranyapura, RR Nagar, Malleswaram and RMV Extension. Buyers can pick up their orders from these points.

Jiva Bhumi is a community based agriculture eco-system bridging the farmer and consumer communities with no requirement of certification. Though still a pilot project, more than 100 families have signed up for their monthly supply of rations.

Gautam P. B. and his friend Anurag quit their cushy corporate jobs a year ago and founded Healthy Buddha, an organic food start-up concentrating on east Bengaluru. Working out of Munekolalu with a brick-and-mortar store, the bulk of their business comes from their e-commerce wing. Gautam's family owns an organic farm on the outskirts of Chennai, which fuels the supply apart from procurement from the community. Healthy Buddha organises farmer markets in apartment complexes every alternate Sunday in Whitefield, Marathahalli, Sarjapur and Indiranagar.

Jayashree and Ganesh Eashwar have started an organic farm on the outskirts of Bengaluru. Called 'dubdengreen', it even has a distribution arm in New Delhi.

Most organic food stores in the city offer home delivery on orders placed on their websites.

## **Punjab to check quality of Bt cotton seeds**

With whitefly attacks causing widespread damage to cotton crop this year, the Punjab government has decided to check quality of Bt cotton seeds prior to their distribution among farmers from next season.

The government will also issue licenses for supplying fertilizers and agro-chemicals to qualified people to ensure supply of quality inputs among growers.

“Seed Control order has been amended by the Centre on our request. With this, now the States have been empowered to check Bt Cotton seeds. We were not empowered till last year,” Punjab Additional Chief Secretary Suresh Kumar said here on Wednesday.

“Seeds coming from outside will now be checked by the State agriculture department officials or PAU experts at their lab. We will be more conscious about seed supply this time,” he said.

A deadly attack of whitefly on cotton in Punjab has hit large tracts of fields, causing estimated 40 per cent yield loss in Kharif season this year.

He further said that the government would also now issue licenses for fertilizers to graduates in agriculture sciences.

“The State Department of Agriculture has decided to review all previous licenses to weed out undeserving licensees,” said Mr. Kumar.

Punjab has issued 12,000 licenses for retail, 370 for wholesale and 38 for manufacturing units.

During the last nine months of 2015-16, the Directorate of Agriculture has taken 2,204 samples of fertilizers, of which 116 samples failed quality tests.

Likewise, 3562 samples of agro-chemicals were also taken, of which 143 samples were found to be unsatisfactory. Further, legal action with regard to failed samples has been initiated with launching of prosecution and penalties on the dealers.

As many 98 licences have been cancelled and FIRs have been registered against 33 dealers, officials said.

The Punjab government has also decided to form a law on regulating informal debt and a Bill in this regard will be presented in Budget session of the Assembly.

“The State government is considering to enact a legislation to regulate non-institutional financing to the farmers,” said Kumar.

Commission agents known as ‘Arthiyas’ have been criticized for charging high rates of interest from growers for lending money, as a result of which farmers, especially small and marginal ones, fall into debt trap.

The State government has also formed district level committees for the promotion of institutional financing so as to ensure farmers switch over from commission agents to banks.

The Punjab government has already written to the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister for one-time debt relief to the farmers. - PTI

### **Progressive farmers get a big pat on the back**

The Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) director of D. Damodar Reddy on Wednesday felicitated progressive farmers and farm women who have contributed to wide adoption of the modern technologies and the latest technical know-how developed by the institute and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs).

### **Jai Kisan Jai Vigyan**

Speaking on this occasion, Mr. Reddy said that the farmers were feted in recognition to their contribution to agriculture and allied sectors as part of the Union government’s initiative “Jai Kisan Jai Vigyan” week which is being observed by ICAR-CTRI at Rajahmundry from December 23 to 29 for promoting the use of science for ryots’ welfare. The week was inaugurated by Chiranjeevi Choudhary, IFS, Commissioner of Horticulture, A.P., on December 23. During his inaugural address, Mr. Choudhary highlighted the importance of farm and allied sectors in Indian economy.

Mr. Damodar Reddy called upon students to join the agricultural education in building the National Agricultural Research System (NARS).

A quiz programme was also organised for Agricultural College students on Tuesday and winners were given prizes.

Farmers of CTRI and KVK, college students from twin Godavari districts and scientists and the staff members of CTRI also took part in the week-long programme.

## **Bankers made a beeline for the State**

*Deposit mobilisation registered an increase, but on the flip side, NPAs shot up*

: The year 2015 witnessed hectic activity in the banking sector in the State with a majority of banks looking for a share in the cake. Chairmen and Managing Directors of different banks descended on the State, more particularly Vijayawada, to announce new branches and business plans.

The banks, more particularly public sector banks (PSBs), expanded their business operations and launched new zonal and regional offices in the State. The rural branches rose to 2,603 (as on September 30) compared to 2,354 in corresponding period last year. As many as 139 new branches were added to the banking network in the State. Of this, 52 were in urban and 10 in metro areas. Remaining new branches were in rural areas. The banks fared well with regards to deposit mobilisation compared to previous year, the non-performing Assets (NPAs) have also increased.

The banks have opened as many as 71,31,425 accounts under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) with deposits of more than Rs. 626 crore. Of these, 40,97,123 accounts were opened in rural areas providing ‘universal access to banking facilities’ starting with the basic savings bank account.

The Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and Atal Pension Yojana (APY) were another three schemes that accelerated banking activity in the State. The banks registered 60,84,632 enrolments under PNSBY, 14,00,862 under PMJJBY, and 42,353 under APY.

The deposits and advances were Rs. 2,05,815 crore and Rs. 2,15,797 crore respectively. The credit deposit ratio stood at 07.04 per cent, which was over and above Reserve Bank of India (RBI) norm of 60 per cent.

The banks could also achieve 7237 per cent of priority sector advances. Of this, 42.36 per cent was agricultural advances. Again, it is above the RBI norm of 18 per cent for agriculture sector.

The banks registered Rs. 14,808 crore Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), while the outstanding loans are Rs. 2,56,285 crore.

The NPAs relating to agriculture sector stood at Rs. 5454 crore, while MSME sector was Rs. 2477 crore. Other priority sector NPAs were Rs. 1001 crore. Similarly, the NPAs of non-priority sector was Rs. 4294 crore.

The outstanding amount of farm credit given to 1.04 crore accounts is Rs.88,277 crore in the State. Of this, 30.22 lakh accounts were overdue and the total balance over due in these accounts is Rs. 23,480 crore.

As many as 7,98,590 accounts turned into NPAs, which amounts to Rs. 5307 crore. The total outstanding agricultural advances, including agriculture infrastructure, ancillary activities, is Rs. 91,415 crore. And, the total NPAs of agricultural advances are Rs. 5454 crore.

Likewise, the outstanding amount in MSME sector is Rs. 38,034 crore while the NPAs are 2477 crore.

The outstanding loans given to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is Rs. 14,695 crore, the NPAs are Rs.828 crore. The banks gave loans to 8,01,429 SHG accounts, and of this, 62,773 are found to be NPA accounts. The NPAs of SHGs was Rs.880 crore in corresponding period last year.

The NPAs relating to education loans was Rs. 203 crore last year, and it touched Rs. 204 crore.

The outstanding housing loans were Rs. 17,986 crore. Of this, Rs. 550 crore turned into NPAs. The outstanding housing loans were Rs. 15,572 crore last year and the NPAs were Rs. 468 crore.

***Deposit mobilisation registered an increase, but on the flip side, NPAs shot up***

### **Seed drill sowing introduced**

*The modern sowing method will improve yield by 20-25 p.c.*



The Department of Agriculture has introduced seed drill sowing on about 6,000 hectares for the first time this season in the district. Since seed drill sowing improved the ratio of crop yield, the department has introduced the modern implement for sowing seeds, involving about 6,200 farmers.

As 90 per cent of the 40,000 hectares under paddy cultivation in the district were rain-fed, the department had decided to divert the maximum number of farmers to seed drill sowing to enhance the yield by at least 20 per cent, R. Gurumoorthy, Joint Director of Agriculture, told reporters during a press tour on Tuesday. As instructed by Collector S. Malarvizhi, the department introduced the method on 5,820 hectares with a subsidy of Rs. 5,000 per hectare and a total subsidy of Rs. 2.91 crore, he said.

To distribute quality and certified seeds, the department had developed paddy farm seeds on 330 hectares, and pulses and oil seeds on 26 hectares each.

### Fish cultivation

Through the District Integrated Watershed Development Agency, the department had also encouraged the farmers to grow fish in farm ponds. It had dug 1,667 farm ponds for the farmers with 90 per cent subsidy and distributed fingerlings free of cost to help them earn additional income.

The beneficiaries had let 2,000 fingerlings of 'Viral', 'Rahu' and 'Katla' seven months ago and they would be ready for harvest in January. Saroja, one of the beneficiaries, was confident of making a profit of Rs. 80,000.

In a first of its kind, a women farm group had set up a unit for producing bio-control agents such as trichoderma viride, pseudomonas and reduviid bug with financial assistance from State Balanced Growth Fund. They marketed the products after they were certified by Tamil Nadu Agriculture University.

### **'Govt. should decide MSP'**

Suggestions ranging from setting up a State-level agricultural commission for disbursement of monthly pensions to farmers arrived from various quarters, at the interactive meeting conducted by the Telangana State Agriculture and Cooperation Department at the Secretariat here on Wednesday.

The meeting was conducted as per the directions by the High Court, to seek advice from farmers' organisations and experts about averting farm crisis and farmers' suicides. A PIL filed by TJAC leader M. Kodandram resulted in the directions. One suggestion was for the State government to own responsibility in deciding the Minimum Support Price, based on cost of cultivation. One more mooted the State Organic Farming policy, while another suggested education and health facilities to farmers. Streamlining of crop insurance with government bearing 75 per cent of the premium cost, strengthening of agricultural extension system, separate budget for agriculture, more focus on small,

marginal and tenant farmers, streamlining of Revenue system were some other suggestions offered by the invitees.

### **Youth urged to take up farming**



Central Plantation Crops Research Institute director P. Chowdappa holds talks with Badiadukka grama panchayat president K.N. Krishna Bhat (right) at a scientist-farmer interface programme in Kasaragod on Wednesday.

There is an urgent need to reverse the trend of youngsters moving away from agricultural vocation, Badiadka grama panchayat president K.N. Krishna Bhat has said.

Mr. Bhat was inaugurating a scientist-farmer interface programme hosted by the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) as part of the Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav and Jai Kisan Jai Vigyan initiatives here on Wednesday. It is also imperative to ensure that technologies developed by various agricultural institutions are effectively utilised for enhancing profitability in farming, Mr. Bhat, who is also a traditional farmer, said.

Presiding over the function, CPCRI director P. Chowdappa presented the details of farmer-oriented technology transfer activities of the CPCRI. He urged the farmers to make use of innovative farm technologies to turn farming remunerative.

C. Thamban, principal scientist and nodal officer of the programme, delivered the introductory speech. Panchayat ward members D. Shankara and Shabana, Badiadka Krishibhavan officer Santhosh, farmer representatives Shivaprasad and Radhakrishna Khandige offered felicitations.

Narasimha Adiga was honoured at the inaugural function for his achievements in rice farming.



An exhibition of CPCRI technologies and field demonstration of integrated disease management practices against bud-rot disease of coconut were also conducted as part of the programme.

### **Cochin Flower Show from Saturday**



The 34th Cochin Flower show, organised by the Ernakulam District Agri-Horticultural Society, will get under way here on January 2. The flower show will be on till January 10, said a press release here.

The highlight of the flower show will be a florally decorated area of 5,000 sq.ft. Famous floral decorators will participate in the show. The aim of the pavilion is to make people aware of the possibilities and opportunities in flower cultivation, the press release said. There will be 20,000 flowering plants in show. Of them, 2,000 will be from 100 different variety of roses. A total of 2,000 pots of anthurium, 15,000 pots of marigold, petunia, dahlia, etc. will be on show.

Bonsais and medicinal plants will be part of the Cochin Flower Show. Around 2,000 imported flowering plants will be another highlight of the show. The plants have been imported with financial assistance from the Kerala State Horticultural Mission, the press release said.

The State Department of Agriculture, Farm Information Bureau, Coir Board, State Horticultural Mission, Coconut Development Board and Spices Board are among the participating government agencies.



## Competition

A 'Flower King' and 'Flower Queen' competition for children aged between one and 11 years will be held on January 9. Around a hundred children are expected to participate in the competition.

There is also a section in which institutions and individuals can participate in the competitions.

Flowering plants from 25 nurseries in the State will be available for purchase during the flower show.

An agri clinic will function on the flower show premises between January 2 and 9. The clinic, being opened by the Department of Agriculture, will function between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., the press release added.

Kochi Mayor Soumini Jain will inaugurate the flower show at 5.30 p.m. The flower show will be open to the public from the morning hours on the inaugural day.

## Dilution of wetlands Act to hit Palakkad the most

*It will help real estate mafia convert at least 2,000 acres of paddy fields in the district as house plots*



An apartment complex eating into the vast expanse of paddy fields at Manappullikavu, just outside Palakkad town.— Photo: K.K. Mustafah

Attempts by the State government to incorporate a clause of the Finance Bill 2015 in the Kerala Paddy Land and Wetlands Conservation Act, recommending regularisation of paddy fields reclaimed before 2008 would turn disadvantageous to Palakkad district, which has the largest acreage under paddy cultivation in Kerala.

If implemented, real estate mafia can convert at least 2,000 acres of paddy fields in the district as house plots. They have been keeping a vast extent of land barren for several years, without any agricultural activity, waiting an opportunity to reap profits. Efforts are also on to fabricate documents portraying several hectares of paddy fields as barren lands to initiate real estate business.

According to sources in the district administration, about 40 real estate companies are reclaiming paddy fields across the district, manipulating documents and bribing officials. During the local body elections, local people had foiled attempts to convert a vast tract of paddy field in Elappully by a prominent real estate group.

“Palakkad will suffer the most if the Act is diluted. With encroachments getting legalised, there will be fresh attempts by the real estate mafia, which will put food security at risk,” said P.S. Panicker, environmental activist. It is believed that the dilution of the Act will trigger a flurry of attempts to convert paddy fields and wetlands in the district, impacting the agricultural sector, affecting the water table and upsetting the environmental equilibrium. Though paddy production has remained comparatively steady in the last five years, at 4.5 lakh tonnes a year, in Palakkad, large-scale conversion of paddy fields had raised concern.

### **Benefits of canals**

As per official records, the district had paddy cultivation in 1,82,621 hectares in 1970-71. It expanded to 1,83,634 hectares in 1980-81, largely due to the increased network of irrigation canals. However, the acreage under paddy declined to 1,45,687 hectares in 1990-91. In 2000-01, the acreage shrunk to 1,18,701 hectares.

“We have lost about 47 per cent of our rice fields over the last decade. About 30,000 hectares have been converted between 2000 and 2014 alone,” says Prabhal Mohandas of Daksh Farm at Chittur.

*With encroachments getting legalised, there will be fresh attempts by the real estate mafia.*

### **Global centre for below sea-level farming soon**

*Centre to come up in Alappuzha in February*

An international centre for research and training in a ‘below sea-level farming system’ will be launched in Alappuzha district in February, 2016.

It will be the first of its kind in the country. The guidelines for setting up of the centre were discussed at a government-level meeting a week ago, top officials told *The Hindu* .

The centre is expected to collaborate with SAARC countries and disseminate information across the world as envisaged by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

### **FAO recognised**

The Kuttanad below sea-level farming system had been recognised by the FAO as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) after a project proposal was submitted by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the State government.

The GIAHS status accorded to the unique farming practices of Kuttanad could open up new vistas for international research in agriculture.

The initiative is also expected to attract more international attention to the ecology of Kuttanad, thus ushering in a vibrant tourism related to agriculture, involving visits to farms. The Kuttanad farming system has some similarities to the 'polder' mode of farming in the Netherlands, which requires further studies, scientists say.

Research would help utilise traditional knowledge in developing appropriate technologies which might of immense help to farmers, S. Leenakumari, head of Moncompu Rice Research Station, told *The Hindu*. The new centre would have close collaboration with the Moncompu station.

“New methods of farming suited to the region, so as to optimise yield, could be evolved at the centre. Appropriate training to farmers could go a long way in ameliorating their hardships. It is not merely financial benefit that can make a difference in the lives of farmers,” she said. But Kuttanad Vikasana Samithi, an organisation with deep roots among the farmers of Kuttanad, is not enthusiastic about the arrival of one more research centre. “There are several research institutions in agriculture, but the farmers continue to be in deep distress. Opening up of yet another centre may not make a significant change in their fortunes,” Samithi Executive Director Father Thomas Peelianikkal said, echoing the sentiments of a cross section of farmers.

There should be regular interaction between the scientific community and the farmers. Researchers and other official representatives should get in touch with the farmer at the farm every other day to study the problems at the grassroots. He mooted visits by the concerned on a daily basis to see for themselves the developments at the sites.

***Centre to collaborate with SAARC countries***

***Kuttanad system similar to Dutch polder farming***

## **Rise of Pengal Otrumai, fall in cash crop prices**

In 2015, the district was in the news mainly for Pengal Otrumai, the collective of women workers in the Kanan Deven Hills Plantations Ltd. in Munnar, that came to the forefront for agitating against the alleged exploitation of tea plantation workers by the trade unions in connivance with the estate managements. The agitation was led by women sans the support of any trade unions or political parties and it succeeded in bringing their cause to the collective conscience of the public. National and international media came in support of the agitating women and finally the political establishment bowed before the poor workers.

The agitation proved that even without the support of powerful trade unions, workers could force the government to revise the wages. Moreover, the agitation brought to light the grievances hitherto suppressed by the trade unions and the powerful estate managements.

It was the public support that gave the collective the confidence to contest the local body polls and win a seat in the block panchayat and seats in Munnar and Devikulam grama panchayats. Later the movement started showing signs of degeneration with the two factions joining in separate platforms and fighting each other. The agitation launched by the collective remained a glorious chapter in the strike for protecting the rights of plantation workers.

## **Price fall**

The agriculture sector in the district went to a crisis with the prices of cash crops like cardamom, pepper, rubber and coffee nose-diving, badly hitting the economy of the district. The farmers who were in a crisis due to high labour and production cost found it difficult to continue in farming. The average prices of cardamom fell to Rs.550 a kg. Pepper is traded at Rs.610 a kg, a sudden fall from Rs.700 a kg after the beginning of the harvest season.

The rubber prices are yet to reach over Rs.100 a kg in the local shops, while the prices of coffee per kg remained at Rs.100. Except cardamom, there was a drop in production of all cash crops in the district.

## **Ghats reports**

The Kasturirangan report on Western Ghats continued to create ripples in the district with the issue being a main poll plank in the last local body election. Land prices in the district continued to fall, which the real estate sources termed as the result of the reports on the Western Ghats.

The tourism sector took a new height with some of the projects coming into reality in 2015. Though there was an increase in domestic tourist arrivals to lesser known places like Ramakkalmedu and Wagamon, the arrival of foreigners declined in the initial months of this tourist session, especially in Munnar and Thekkady.

### **Dam issue**

The Mullaperiyar issue continued to haunt the people living downstream of the dam. Though, this was the second year the water level reached the maximum level of 142 ft. The dam was opened five times to release water through the Periyar after unexpected rainfall upstream. It was the main issue that continued to confront the two States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

*From Munnar stir to Mullaperiyar issue, Idukki was in the news all through 2015*

### **Farm equipment distributed**

Subsidised mechanised farm equipment worth Rs. 23.42 lakh were distributed to farmers through Agriculture and Horticulture departments at the Collectorate here on Wednesday. Mini tractor, ploughing machines and rotary ploughing machines were distributed to small and marginal farmers at 50 per cent subsidised cost under mechanisation of farming activities under National Agriculture Development Programme.

### **Tenant farmers in dire straits**

*Government urged to arrange small loans at a low rate of interest*



No end to woes of peasants, particularly tenant farmers, in Prakasam district.—photo: Kommuri Srinivas

Peasants, particularly tenant farmers, who have been cultivating 70 per cent of land in the State, are in dire straits due to lack of access to institutional credit in the wake of partial implementation of loan waiver scheme.

Now they fall back on gold loan from banks as also credit from landlords and pesticide and fertiliser shops at a higher rate of 24 per cent interest to continue in the profession. In spite of the best efforts by bankers to organise about 20 lakh tenant farmers in the State into joint liability groups (JLGs), a majority of the share croppers are still outside the ambit of the institutional credit, according to CPI (M)-led Andhra Pradesh Kavulu Rythu Sangam State president N. Ranga Rao.

About 2.50 lakh tenant farmers in the State got crop loans from banks to the tune of Rs. 500 crore and half of them got waiver of their outstanding loan amount to the tune of Rs. 250 crore after meeting the stringent conditions put by the State government, points out Mr. Ranga Rao gearing up for a State-wide protest against the State government, coinciding with the third phase of the 'Janmabhoomi Maa Ooru' programme beginning on January 2.

"About 2.50 lakh debt-ridden tenant farmers are in a quandary with no scope of getting fresh credit from banks," he said.

"It is high time the State government arranged for small loans to the tenant farmers at a low rate of interest to sustain themselves and meet food security needs of the people," he said adding more tenant farmers were prone to commit suicide in the present situation.

### **Stir planned**

"We planned to organise a series of agitations in the State," says Mr. Ranga Rao. "We will not rest till all tenant farmers are issued LECs and crop loan by banks," he added.

Only 2,800 tenant farmers have been organised into JLGs in Prakasam district and provided Rs. 12.80 crore as crop loan, Lead Bank District Manager(LDM) M. Narasimha Rao from Syndicate Bank has told *The Hindu*.

As many as 1.36 lakh farmers in the district had got gold loan of Rs. 1,011 crore and about 20 per cent of them are tenant farmers, he says adding that due to delayed rain, the crop loan disbursal is only Rs. 1,200.12 crore in the district till last week as against the target of Rs. 2008.13 crore. Hence, the deadline for meeting the target has been revised to January-end from December 15.

"This is for the first time in the history, farmers skipped paddy cultivation in Prakasam district, both in NSP command area and Krishna wester delta(KWD)," says KRS district secretary P. Hanumantha Rao. The government, which has declared the district drought-hit should waive payment of rent by those holding lease agreement for cultivating temple lands, says another farmer leader G. Narasimha Rao.



## Make proper assessment of crop damage: farmers



Farmers discussing a point at a grievance meeting in Thanjavur.

A section of farmers staged a protest over the “callous” assessment of crop damage following the recent of rain in Thanjavur district and sought adequate compensation at the grievances day meet here on Wednesday. They demanded immediate and proper assessment of the damage and hike in compensation to meet the expenditures incurred.

Tamil Nadu Vivasyigal Sangam leader Samy Natarajan said the yield had dropped alarmingly and claimed that on Tuesday, in a field near Orathanad, less than half the regular productivity could be salvaged instead of grains due to devastation by rain. The authorities must go to the fields and do proper investigations to assess the damage and then report, he said.

Tamil Nadu Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam vice-president V. Jeevakumar observed that the average yield was 8,400 kilograms last year and even going by what the officials revealed on the average productivity so far that was quoted at 5,537 kg an acre, the current productivity would have fallen well below that, he said.

Collector N. Subbaiyan intervened to say that officials need to have a calibrated approach to assessment of damage based on approved guidelines and reports. It was only the beginning of the harvest season and harvest has been completed in just 111 hectares and the productivity pertained to that area only. We need to wait and watch, he said.

Another farmer M. Shanmugasundaram of Sethubavachatram wanted proper desilting of irrigation channels in the area as the region’s fields depended on rainwater and frugal water sources. The Collector promised to look into the possibilities.

Thozhagiripatti Govindarajan said the government had not come out with its pricing for the current sugarcane season though the crushing has commenced in many sugar mills. He wanted the Arignar Anna Sugar Mills to pay in one instalment the payment due to cane suppliers to the mill.

The Tamilaga Vivasayi Sanga district secretary Kakkarai Sukumaran and his men staged a protest with empty vessels highlighting the “neglect of the administration” in assessing fully and extending compensation to the damaged crops besides demanding Rs. 25,000 per acre for paddy crops. After squatting in front of the officials, they walked out of the meeting hall and staged a protest outside.

### **Go for conventional crops: Collector**



Farmers should take efforts to tap district’s potential for raising minor millets and conventional crops, said S. Ganesh, Collector. Addressing farmers at Bharathipuram near here on Wednesday, he said since the district had been registering scanty rainfall every year, farmers should go in for minor millets and conventional crops which needed less irrigation facility.

Earlier, he inspected the millets and conventional crops raised by G. S. Dhanapathy, a bio-farmer, at his fields in Bharathipuram.

The farmer explained the steps he has been taking to protect the crop. With less investment, farmers could earn prospective returns, he added.

### **12,000 cusecs released from Mettur dam**

The release of water from Mettur dam for Samba cultivation in Cauvery delta districts was further stepped up to 12,000 cusecs on Tuesday night.

Following demand from farmers of delta region, PWD authorities enhanced water release to 7,000 cusecs from 500 cusecs to save the standing crop on December 23.

Later the officials increased the release to 9,000 cusecs. — Special correspondent

### **Environmental activists create awareness on rooftop garden**

*Nammalvar remembered on his death anniversary*

Environmental activists observed the death anniversary of organic farming scientist and crusader G. Nammalvar in the city on Wednesday by distributing organic seeds and creating awareness among the people on roof gardens. The day was observed as ‘Seed Day’.

The volunteers of Green City Association and Esan Environment Committee paid floral tributes to the portrait of Nammalvar at the TMS bus stop in the city. Later they distributed about 200 packets of organic seeds of tomato, ladies finger, snake gourd, and bitter gourd to the public, with a request to raise a kitchen garden in their homes.

The volunteers said that Nammalvar, throughout his life, championed the cause of natural farming and always remained a crusader against genetically modified crops.

### **Vegetable garden**

They also motivated the people to raise rooftop vegetable gardens and gave important tips on how to set up the same.

Esan E. Ezhilvizhian, president of the Esan Environment Committee, said that the people were also urged to avoid fast food items such as fried rice, pizza, burger, noodles at least on Nammalwar’s death anniversary. They urged the people to consume food made using samai, varagu, thinai, or kuthiraivali rice on the day.

Mr. Ezhilvizhian said that the campaign evoked overwhelming response.

C. Senthilkumar, president of the Green City Association, S. Senthilkumar of Green Home Organic Shop, and a large number of environmental activists participated in the campaign.

### **Valiyakandam turns an empty rice bowl**

*Farmers have abandoned paddy farming, citing lack of support*

It was once the rice bowl of the High Ranges, spreading over a thousand acres from Vellayamkudy to Kattappana town. However, in 2013, the last Padasekhara Samithy abandoned paddy cultivation in the fields, citing shortage of labour, losses suffered in continuous years and lack of support from the government.

Tapioca, plantain and other crops, including pepper and cardamom, are cultivated in Valiyakandam paddy fields now. A large number of residential houses have also come up on land sold by farmers.

Pappachan Karottukunnel, president of the last Padasekhara Samithy, said earlier two crops were taken up annually. Later, one crop was avoided due to shortage of water and dearth of labourers. He said even that was abandoned as labourers from Tamil Nadu who came in groups to sow the seeds, clear the weeds and harvest the crops slowly drifted away.

Finally, as a last-ditch effort, the Padasekhara Samithy members jointly purchased a tiller. “Once when it needed repairs, it had to be taken to Perumbavoor as no mechanic in any nearby areas could do it. But it was not repaired in time, jeopardising harvest,” he said.

### **Irrigation**

The samithy went from pillar to post seeking support to get the paddy field irrigated from a nearby perennial stream. That too fell on deaf years, he said. The only help from the government was the allocation of some fertilizers, he added. Had there been timely help, the samithy would not have abandoned paddy cultivation, said Mr. Pappachan, who has taken up plantain cultivation in one-and-a-half acres of Valiyakandam paddy field, leaving his remaining land fallow.

### **Losses**

Siby, a member of the samithy, said that now Valiyakandam had no more paddy fields left. The farmers who shifted to plantain cultivation too suffered heavy losses. They had to sell banana at Rs.17 a kg when the prices was around Rs.40 a kg. Now the paddy field was not only a death knell for paddy cultivation but also for crops congenial to paddy cultivation in future, he said.

### **The fresh vegetable cart**



Several apartments host weekly 'raitha sante' where farmers sell their produce.  
Photos: K. Bhagya Pradesh and Special Arrangement



Several apartments host weekly 'raitha sante' where farmers sell their produce.  
-PHOTOS: BHAGYA PRAKASH K. AND BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



*A perk of living in the suburbs is procuring greens and vegetables directly from farmers.*

They may be far away from the facilities in the core city, but residents who have opted to live in the suburbs have something to brag about: easy access to farm fresh vegetables at their door step.

Located close to vegetable farms in nearby villages, residents of Sahakar Nagar, Kanakapura Road, Whitefield, Chandapura and Bellandur enjoy the luxury of buying veggies straight from farmers while the rest rely either on supermarkets or the traditional markets. In many cases, the farmers bring their produce to the doorstep.

But things were not this rosy a few years ago. R. Balasubramanyam, a resident of a gated community in Whitefield, faced a problem procuring fresh vegetables. People like him were dependent on retail chains and online grocers due to the lack of traditional markets and Hopcoms outlets.

But their stranglehold is weakening, thanks to farmers from neighbouring villages and organic food start-ups. Mr. Balasubramanyam now buys veggies from an organic farmer who sells his produce at his doorstep.

Chandapura, which has turned into a bustling suburb with several multi-storey apartments, hosts weekly 'raita sante' where farmers from Anekal sell their produce.

You may mistake G. Muniswamy Gowda, driving his MUV, to be a business executive. But once he parks his MUV and opens the trunk, you see pomegranate and assorted vegetables. His MUV doubles up as a mobile store. He owns eight acres in Chennarayapatna. He comes all the way to Yelahanka every day to sell his produce.



“Most farmers don’t want to take the risk of marketing their produce. But my earnings have almost doubled in the last six months,” he said.

In other suburbs, residents are turning to start-ups who procure organic greens from nearby farms and offer home delivery.

Rupesh Kumar, an MBA, is today an entrepreneur. His firm sells organic vegetables procured from farms in Magadi, Kanakapura and Kolar to residents of apartment complexes in south Bengaluru. “We presently sell veggies in seven apartments on a regular basis apart from a store in Girinagar,” he said, adding that each sortie would fetch him a business of about Rs. 10,000.

Divya Mouli, who recently shifted to a suburb on Kanakapura Road from Mahalakshmi Layout, said that the best incentive is an organic farmer nearby letting her pluck fresh vegetables from her farm. “I have developed a newfound passion for cooking,” she exclaims.

### **Progressive farmers get a big pat on the back**

The Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) director of D. Damodar Reddy on Wednesday felicitated progressive farmers and farm women who have contributed to wide adoption of the modern technologies and the latest technical know-how developed by the institute and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs).

### **Jai Kisan Jai Vigyan**

Speaking on this occasion, Mr. Reddy said that the farmers were feted in recognition to their contribution to agriculture and allied sectors as part of the Union government’s initiative “Jai Kisan Jai Vigyan” week which is being observed by ICAR-CTRI at Rajahmundry from December 23 to 29 for promoting the use of science for ryots’ welfare. The week was inaugurated by Chiranjeevi Choudhary, IFS, Commissioner of Horticulture, A.P., on December 23. During his inaugural address, Mr. Choudhary highlighted the importance of farm and allied sectors in Indian economy.

Mr. Damodar Reddy called upon students to join the agricultural education in building the National Agricultural Research System (NARS).

A quiz programme was also organised for Agricultural College students on Tuesday and winners were given prizes.

Farmers of CTRI and KVK, college students from twin Godavari districts and scientists and the staff members of CTRI also took part in the week-long programme.



## **Milk producers extend conditional support to parties**

The Tamil Nadu Milk Producers Welfare Association will consider extending support to the political party or alliance which will include milk in the menu of nutritious noon meal centres and Anganwadis in the State, said K. A. Sengottuvel, its president. He was speaking to press persons at the end of the executive committee meeting of the association in the city on Wednesday.

Ever since the State government increased the milk procurement price, farmers have been evincing keen interest in augmenting milk production. For the past six months, Aavin has been refusing to procure the entire quality of milk supplied by the farmers, Mr. Segottuvel alleged. The association has been demanding the government to provide milk to 60 lakh or 70 lakh children of noon-meal centres and Anganwadis. This will enable Aavin to procure the entire quality of milk. But the government has not responded to the suggestion so far, causing much anxiety to the farmers. The representatives of the association have planned to meet the authorities to press for their demand again within a week. If no response is received, the general body of the association will meet soon and decide on serious agitations.

Mr. Sengottuvel alleged that the Salem District Milk Producers Union had issued direction to all cooperative societies in the district a few days ago to procure 10 % less milk. This has badly hit the farmers of the district. He alleged that such a direction has been given only in Salem and not in any other district.

## **Training programme**

A training programme on use of bio-gas was organised under the auspices of Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Vamban near here on Wednesday. R. Manimekalai, coordinator, and Pasupathy, Head of National Pulses Research Station, spoke on the importance of bio-gas in not only ensuring clean energy but also in conserving forest wealth particularly trees. Pughazhendhi, resource-person from Kendra, imparted training on erecting and using bio-gas plants.

## **SEMINAR ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

A seminar on 'entrepreneurship' will be held for guiding ex-servicemen towards self-employment programmes and improving their skills here on January 5 from 10 a.m. at the Conference Hall at the Collector's Office. In a press note issued here on Wednesday, Collector S. Ganesh said officials from various departments and banks will participate in the seminar and offer necessary guidance to the needy.

## Botanic garden gets mobile app



Giant water lily (*Victoria cruziana*) in the Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden in Howrah. Photo: Special Arrangement



Baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) in the Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden in Howrah. Photo: Special Arrangement



The cup-shaped leaf of *Ficus krishnae* in the Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden in Howrah. Photo: Special Arrangement

*Visitors looking for a particular tree in the park in Howrah can click on a virtual library that documents 1,400 species of flora and their characteristics.*

The country's oldest and biggest botanic garden has a surprise new-year gift for its visitors.

A mobile application providing details of over 14,000 trees spread over the 273-acre grounds of the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden (AJCBIBG) in Howrah near here will soon be available.

“There are about of 1,400 species of trees and plants in the garden. Despite there being separate markings for some of these plants and trees, it is still difficult for visitors and nature lovers to distinguish one from the other,” Arabinda Pramanik, head of office of the AJCBIBG told *The Hindu*.

### **GIS-based mapping**

Two scientists C.M. Sabapathy and Basant Kumar Singh who are working on the GIS-based phytogeographical mapping of the garden for the past two years, said that the application will work on the basis of unique numbers assigned to every tree.

“The mobile application will have layered information depending on how much the visitor or user wants to access. From providing common names to the trees the application will open doors about phenology (flowering pattern and other life cycle related events), its distribution and even the history of the plant's introduction in the garden,” Mr. Singh said.

Set up in 1787, by Colonel Robert Kyd, the garden was the place where the British for the first time introduced a number of economically important plants like tea, coffee, cinchona, rubber and mahogany, he added.

“There are many visitors who come looking for a particular tree or plant such as the baobab or Kalpataru tree (*Adansonia digitata*) very rare in India and is believed to have powers of granting wishes. The application will locate the tree for the visitor,” Mr. Singh added.

Similarly, other unique species such Krishavat (*Ficus krishnae*) and Giant Water lily (*Victoria cruziana*) can be found easily.

### **Surprise checks on milk vendors**

After complaints from consumer organisations, officials from the Department of Labour conducted surprise checks on milk vendors here.

According to the officials, consumer organisations and activists held a meeting with the Labour Department officials on December 14. They said that the measures used by many milk vendors were not calibrated as mandated.

It was alleged that while procuring milk from producers, the vendors used some measures and while supplying to consumers, they used another set of measures, thus siphoning off huge quantities of milk.

Hence, the officials led by Inspector of Labour M. Sarojini Devi, formed three teams comprising deputy and assistant inspectors. They intercepted the milk vendors from 5.30 a.m. on Tuesday simultaneously at Kalavasal, Sammatipuram, Guru Theatre, South Gate, Villapuram, Othakadai, Valar Nagar, Narasingam and other locations.

During the checks, they found that the measures used to sell milk in different quantities such as one litre, 500 ml, 200 ml and 100 ml were not calibrated or was sub-standard.

### **136 measures seized**

During the checks, the officials seized 132 measures from as many as 96 milk vendors. Meanwhile, consumer activist Anand Raj welcomed the checks conducted by the officials and wanted the officials to carry out similar raids at regular intervals until the vendors adhered to the laws.

THE HINDU  
**BusinessLine**

### **Further imports will hurt arecanut growers: Campco chief**



SR SATHISHCHANDRA, President, Campco

The Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Co-operative (Campco) Ltd, which has been serving arecanut and cocoa growers since the last four decades, has got a new president. A native of Punacha village in Bantwal taluk of Dakshina Kannada district, SR Satishchandra assumed charge as President of the multi-state co-operative Campco in August. Prior to assuming charge in Campco, he was active in other co-operative institutions in various capacities. In an interview to *BusinessLine*, he spoke about his vision for the cooperative, and other issues related to farmers, market, etc.

Excerpts:

**What are your plans for the co-operative?**

Stability to arecanut market and better relationship with grower-members are on my agenda now.

My intention is to stabilise the price of arecanut.

In this regard, steps will also be taken to strengthen the cooperative system in arecanut market.

By ensuring better relationship with grower-members of Campco, I want to get their commitment to the organisation.

**Though arecanut contributes a major share of revenue to your co-operative, the prices keep fluctuating. How will you tackle this volatility?**

We want to educate grower-members on the need for periodic release of their stock to the market.

If there is a continuous flow of the commodity in the market, there will be less volatility in the market.

When there is hoarding, there is a huge amount of variation in the market.

If that is the case, it is a problem for everybody – co-operative, grower and buyer.

For that we need to impart proper knowledge to them. For example: If you are getting around 12 quintals of arecanut a year from your plantation, release one quintal each every month.

Then you will get average price for your commodity. We have been telling this to the farmers.

**What will you say about those farmers who sell the commodity to private traders when the prices are good?**

They can do that once or twice, and not all growers are like that. I have confidence in my members.

There are growers with vision, and some do planning also.

Above all, many growers have commitment to the co-operative sector.

**Import of arecanut is a cause of concern for both growers and co-operatives? What is being done to tackle this?**

Recently, we (the representatives from arecanut cooperatives and MPs from Karnataka) met the Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman to apprise her of the situation.

We are self-sufficient in the production of arecanut, and there is no need to import it. On an average, around 70,000 tonnes is being imported annually.

It is almost 10 per cent of India's total production.

Some traders take advantage of SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) to import arecanut into the country.

Since we are self-sufficient in production, any more imports into the country will affect growers.

Import by means such as SAPTA will also cause revenue loss to the country. All these points have been brought to the notice of the minister.

We have requested her to include arecanut in negative list of commodities while renewing the SAARC agreement. I hope that will happen.

**There was a plan to export arecanut to China. What happened to that?**

One company from China, which is into preparing mouth fresheners from arecanut peel, had approached us for supplying peel to them.

Our team will visit China to study the market for the commodity and take a decision on that.

**Do you have any plan to encourage cocoa cultivation in arecanut plantations?**

Yes, we have. We want to distribute around 2 lakh cocoa saplings at subsidised rates to our grower-members.

These saplings will be ready for plantation by June.



Cocoa production in the country needs to be improved. The total cocoa requirement of the country is around 32,000 tonnes. The country, as a whole, produces around 12,000 tonnes, and imports around 20,000 tonnes. Over and above, the chocolate market is growing by 20 per cent every year.

We will also impart training on cocoa cultivation to the interested farmers.

**Are you planning any new tie-ups for manufacturing chocolate at your Puttur factory?**

We have been producing chocolates for a global brand in Puttur since two decades. Recently, another company has come to us and production of three varieties of this company has started in our factory.

**About your own brands...**

We have 23 chocolate products now. We will come out with premium assorted gift pack in a fortnight.

This gift pack with ₹ 100 MRP includes premium products of Campco.

**Can you explain your plans for pepper, as the recent annual general meeting of Campco has given approval to trade in this commodity?**

We will enter into the pepper market in the coming days. We want to purchase pepper from our members, process it and market it in our brand.

(This article was published on December 30, 2015)

**Slack demand pounds pulses**



**INDORE, DECEMBER 30:**

Downtrend continued in pulses and pulse seeds on sluggish demand in pulses and pulse seeds from the millers and stockists. Tur (Maharashtra) declined to ₹ 8,400-8,500 (down

₹ 100), while tur (Madhya Pradesh) also declined by ₹ 100 to ₹ 7,200-7,400. Tur dal (sawa no.) was at ₹ 10,600-11,000, tur dal (full) ₹ 11,300-800, while tur marka declined to ₹ 12,800-13,600. Urad (bold) dipped to ₹ 10,200, while urad (medium) ruled at ₹ 9,200-9,300. Moong and its dal also traded lower on sluggish demand with moong (bold) at ₹ 7,500 (down ₹ 300), while moong (medium) ruled at ₹ 7,000.

(This article was published on December 30, 2015)

### **Spot rubber stays flat**



### **KOTTAYAM, DECEMBER 30:**

Spot rubber closed unchanged on Wednesday. RSS 4 quoted steady at ₹ 103 a kg, by traders. The grade was flat at ₹ 102.50 and ₹ 99.50 respectively, according to the Rubber Board and the dealers. January futures weakened to ₹ 103.96 (₹ 104.17), February to ₹ 105.65 (₹ 106.27) and March to ₹ 108 (₹ 108.46) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) slid to ₹ 79.94 (₹ 80.35) at Bangkok. January futures closed at ¥146.1 (₹ 80.52) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (₹ /kg): RSS-4: 103(103); RSS-5: 100.50 (100.50); Ungraded: 93 (93); ISNR 20: 86(86) and Latex (60% drc): 73.50 (73.50).

(This article was published on December 30, 2015)

## Turmeric gleams on demand



### **ERODE, DECEMBER 30:**

Spot turmeric prices edged up at Erode markets. On Wednesday, 5,000 bags arrived for sale and 65 per cent stocks were sold. The price of the finger turmeric increased by ₹ 400 a quintal and the root variety by ₹ 250. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric went for ₹ 6,855-10,108 a quintal and the root variety at ₹ 6,385-9,500. Of the arrival of 1,755 bags, 920 were traded.

(This article was published on December 30, 2015)

## Pepper in bear grip



### **KOCHI, DECEMBER 30:**

Spot pepper prices on Wednesday fell further on selling pressure. Domestic demand is good and some of the inter-state dealers who have bought exchange released pepper were offering it at ₹ 625 a kg. On the terminal market, 35 tonnes were traded at prices ranging between ₹ 620 and ₹ 630 a kg. Meanwhile, 11 tonnes of new pepper from Pulpally and Battery in Wayanad were traded at ₹ 615-620 depending upon quality. Spot prices fell by ₹ 400 a quintal to ₹ 62,700 (ungarbled) and ₹ 65,700 (garbled). All the active contracts on the IPSTA remained unchanged. Export prices were at \$10,100 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$10,350 for the US.

(This article was published on December 30, 2015)

## Castor oil dips marginally



### RAJKOT, DECEMBER 30:

Castor oil traded down marginally as demand for export reduced. Castorseed price declined on slow buying at spot. Traders said that due to year end, export demand for castor oil reduced dragging the prices. About 9,000-10,000 bags arrived in Gujarat and price moved down by ₹ 15 to ₹ 710-720 per 20 kg. In Saurashtra, around 650-700 bags arrived and price quoted down by ₹ 5 to ₹ 665-670 per 20 kg. Castor oil decreased ₹ 5 to ₹ 735 per 10 kg. On the Rajkot Commodity Exchange castor March contract gained ₹ 46 to ₹ 3,587 a quintal. RCX spot castor decreased ₹ 4 to ₹ 3,596.

(This article was published on December 30, 2015)

## Business Standard

### Decision on drought relief fund to Telangana next week: AgriMin

#### The Telangana govt has declared drought in seven out of 10 districts

Agriculture Minister [Radha Mohan Singh](#) today said a central team has submitted a report after assessing drought situation in [Telangana](#) and a final call on release of the relief fund would be taken next week.

The issue of delay in release of drought relief funds to the state came up for discussion in a meeting with Labour Minister Bandaru Dattatreya who requested for expediting the process in the interest of farmers.

"A central team has assessed the drought condition in Telangana and submitted the report to us. We will sent the report to Home Ministry in a day or two. I am sure the high- level committee meeting will take a decision on relief funds in the first week of January," Singh said after the meeting.

The NDA government is giving more relief funds to drought-hit states as compared to the previous governments.

"We have sanctioned Rs 1,540 crore to Karnataka this time...the state had never got this much amount. Similarly, we have given more funds to Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh," he told reporters here.

With regard to Andhra Pradesh, Singh said a central team has visited the state and assessed the drought situation. It is yet to submit the report. "Once the report is ready, we will place it before the High-level Committee," he said.

The Telangana government has declared drought in seven out of 10 districts. It initially submitted a memorandum demanding a relief of Rs 2,514 crore and later sent a supplementary demand of Rs 3,000 crore.

Whereas Andhra Pradesh has declared drought in 10 out of 13 districts and demanded a central assistance of Rs 2,000 crore. The two states submitted their memorandum during November-end.

Dattatreya, who is from Telangana, said the Agriculture Minister has assured more funds to the state. "The report to Home Ministry will be sent in a day or two. I also spoke to the Home Minister over phone requesting him to expedite release of a relief package."

Dismissing reports that the Centre was not helping drought-hit Telangana, he said, "Some are saying that the central government is releasing relief funds to other states and not to Telangana. This is wrong. There is a process involved for sanctioning of funds."

Besides Telangana and AP, eight more states have declared drought in 287 districts due to 14% deficit rains this year, affecting farmers and the farming activity.

Already, the Centre has sanctioned a drought relief package of Rs 7,898 crore to four states -- Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and the decision on proposals of other six states will be taken soon.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Farmers seek better support price for jute**

Around 10,000 farmers are directly involved with jute cultivation in this district. But since there is no incentive, farmers are losing interest. "Our livelihood depends on income from this crop. Cultivation is being hampered because production cost is increasing by the day and farmers are not getting fair price from mills. Neither do they get easy farm credit," said Madhaba Chandra Das, 65, a jute farmer of Gandakhia village in Kendrapada district. He added that in the past, over 50,000 farmers would be engaged in the cultivation on over 8,000 hectares.

Another reason why jute is losing its position is because of the booming polythene and plastic industry. Dr Sarika Jena, a senior agricultural scientist from the Jute Research Centre at Jajang, on the outskirts of Kendrapada, said, "Many industries and plants these days use polythene, plastic and synthetic fibre to prepare bags which is bringing down the demand for jute."

This year, farmers of Kendrapada district raised jute crops over only 1,315 hectares of land. The only jute mill at Dhanmandal in neighbouring Jajpur district has been shut down. The two jute procurement centres of the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) at Danapur and Marsaghai have not been functioning for long and farmers are being forced to sell jute to middlemen who sell the crop to Kolkata. Though the government fixed Rs 2,515 as supportive price for a quintal of jute, farmers are forced to sell to middlemen at a lower price, said Prafulla Chandra Mishra, deputy director of the agriculture department in Kendrapada.

"The Jute Corporation of India (JCI) is responsible for the the pathetic plight of the industry and jute growers. We are not getting the minimum fair price for the crop as the JCI has not opened any procurement centre in the district," said Maheswar Baral, a jute farmer of Pattamundai.



## **Mango farmers adopt 'high density' technology for better yield**

SURAT: Mango farmers of south Gujarat have started adopting new agricultural technology to cultivate high density mango orchards in the region. This technology will give higher yield, with less labour and also help in early fructification. More than two lakh mango trees have been planted under this new method in south Gujarat region.

High density farming has been adopted in countries like Israel, Australia and others. However, Indian farmers have been reluctant to use it. But now many in south Gujarat have also started adopting the new technique. Under this technique trees are planted in series and are not allowed to grow beyond certain height and width.

Ankit Patel, a farmer from Umra-Gothan village of Surat's Olpad taluka has about five acres of land. Under normal conditions he would have been able to plant 250 trees on his land. However, by adopting the new technique he was able to plant nearly 300 mango trees per acre. His mango orchard now has about 1,500 trees.

"Under the new technique, I have planted 15ftx15ft trees in a series. I see to it that the trees don't grow above 15 feet. Pruning is done at the beginning of the season and then regular care yields me best quality fruits," said Ankit. He was able to cultivate 6,000 kg mangoes last year despite rains and heavy winds.

If a tree grows above 40-50 feet it becomes very difficult to maintain it, he said, adding that when a tree is of a manageable size it is easy to take care of it.

"Nutrition and pesticides reaches all parts of the tree evenly if the new technique is used. This results in better yield," said Nirmal Yadav, technology transfer expert who has been propagating the use of this technology in south Gujarat.

According to sources, nearly two lakh trees are being cultivated under the high density method and figures are likely to double by next year.

"Fruit production increases four times due to increase in number of plants. It is advisable for farmers to go for this method for better results," said Dinesh Padaliya, horticulture officer Surat.

## **Stray cattle destroy crops, pit farmers against each other**

BATHINDA: Stray cattle menace in Barnala and Bathinda districts is causing friction among farmers. Transporting stray cattle to other areas to save crops from being damaged has triggered violence among residents of different villages.

At least two violent incidents occurred in the last two days in Rampura town of Bathinda and Tapa in Barnala where farmers of different villages confronted each other over

transporting cattle. Four farmers even sustained minor injuries near Tapa on December 27 night.

The farmers Gill Kalan village confronted residents of Mehraj on Monday as they tried to leave dozens of stray cattle in Rampura town. Police averted the clash between both groups and sent the cattle in three gaushalas (cattlesheds) at Rampura.

Worried over damage to their crops, farmers dump stray cattle, mainly bulls, in other areas. Earlier in February, farmers had blocked traffic on the Barnala-Bathinda highway in protest against the administration for not tackling the problem of stray cattle.

Mehraj residents Harinder Singh and Gurchet Singh said, "Stray cattle barge into our fields and damage crops. We wanted the animals to be left at Rampura so that those could be kept at gaushalas, but the residents of Gill Kalan and Phul stopped us and tried to use force. We want a permanent solution to this vexed problem."

Gill Kalan villagers Jasbir Singh and Balkaur Singh said, "The animals left at Gill Kalan and Rampura Phul enter our fields and damage crop, so we don't want stray cattle to be left in our area."

Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan), Bathinda unit chief, Shingara Singh said, "We urge the administration to find some solution to the problem otherwise we will be forced to come out in protest."

Rampura Phul deputy superintendent of police Gurjit Singh Romana said the issue had been settled and farmers of different villages had been asked to keep calm.

Bathinda deputy commissioner Basant Garg said, "The administration is looking into the issue and the matter will be solved soon by having more gaushalas to keep stray cattle."

#### **42 villages finally get rights to forest timber**

DEHRADUN: For 24 years, people of 42 villages near the Govind Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Uttarkashi have been demanding access to timber in the forest. These are rights they have had traditionally, and the timber has been used for building houses. In 1991, however, the state forest department decided that each year only a total of 169 cubic metres of wood would be allowed to villagers.

Ever since, the villagers have been on peaceful protest, demanding that their traditional right to the forest be restored. Now, the state government has decided to accede to these demands. Timber from the reserve forest will now be available to villagers. To ease pressure on the forest, wood even from divisions outside Govind WLS will be accessible to villagers.

The case of the villages around Govind WLS is unique - these villagers use a lot of wood and some stones to build houses in the traditional manner to keep themselves warm in

this cold region. The victory of these villagers is historic, as the struggle has lasted a quarter of a century.

Chief conservator of forests Dhananjay Mohan said the area was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1968. However, it could be properly notified only in 2013, as the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) came into being in 1972 and several changes occurred after that. An amendment in the WLPA in 1990 prohibited removal of trees from wildlife sanctuaries, unless the government clearly mentions this in the final notification.

In the final notification of Govind WLS of 2013, the state government did mention that the rights and concessions accorded to locals would continue, as recorded - the "recorded" period dates back to the time of the British raj, when people were allowed to collect timber and other forest produce freely. There was, however, another catch in the situation - a cap on free distribution of forest wood to locals by the Supreme Court.

"Besides the strictness on removal of trees in WLS as mentioned in WLPA, SC in the TN Godavarman v/s Union India case put an interim cap on total free grant of forest wood to villagers and permitted 32,000 cubic metres for free distribution to locals from the total forests of the state. Based on the settlement record, the state forest department then distributed 32,000 cubic meters among all the forest divisions a few years ago. But since the final notification of Govind WLS was not decided, it got left out. This was another reason that the decision on the concession on timber for locals could not be taken so far," Mohan explained.

Principal chief conservator of forests Veena Sekhri said timber would be given from various kind of forests outside Govind WLS. "Since there are few reserve forests, so we will take timber from other nearby forest divisions as well," she said, adding that no tree would be cut for the distribution of timber. Only dead and dry wood would be collected for distribution.