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Exposure visit for farmers

Fifty selected cashew farmers from different parts of the State embarked upon an exposure visit to Goa and Maharashtra under the guidance of Kerala Agricultural University's Cashew Research Station (CRS).

The farmers who left Thrissur on April 6 will visit cashew plantations in Goa and Maharashtra.

P.B. Pushpalatha, professor and head, CRS, Madakkathara said that the one-week long exposure visit, funded by Cocoa-Cashew Development Directorate under the Union government, will help farmers get familiarised with Asia's largest cashew nursery, modern farming techniques and feni production technology. – Staff Reporter

Naxal-hit village to get new facilities

The Amasebail Charitable Trust, which aims at turning the naxal-affected Amasebail into a model village, would be launching various development works on April 10.

The trust, Amasebail Gram Panchayat, Karnataka Bank and Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project (SKDRDP) have together contributed for the development works at Amasebail in Kundapur taluk.

Addressing presspersons here on Tuesday, A.G. Kodgi, former MLA and president of the Trust, said the works that would be inaugurated in the village include a Backward Classes girls' hostel, a bus stand, an agricultural market, a bio-gas plant, drinking water facility, an autorickshaw stand and a taxi stand. These facilities would be inaugurated by Urban Development Minister Vinay Kumar Sorake, Fisheries Minister Abhayachandra Jain and former Lokayukta N. Santosh Hegde. Besides these, foundation stone would be laid for construction of a fish market on the occasion.

Model village

The trust, established in 2006, began implementing development projects in 2008. In the last seven years, the Trust alone had spent Rs. 91.64 lakh on the work. Besides this, funds were also made available by the government, SKDRDP and Karnataka Bank.

Since he hailed from the village, Mr. Kodgi wanted to make it a model village by providing all basic facilities there. “There is a lot of migration of people from the villages to towns and cities.

This can be stopped only when better facilities are provided in the villages. When better facilities are provided, it automatically improves the standard of living of the people in the villages,” he said.

While the Trust had provided many facilities for the benefit of people in the village in the last seven years, there had been some failures also. It had not been possible to get a list of persons without sites.

The efforts to get drinking water through Multi Village Scheme had drawn a blank. The attempts to install solar street lamps throughout the village had not succeeded.

There were 1,600 houses in the village, but 50 houses were yet to have a toilet. The efforts to maintain cleanliness in the village had not yielded the desired results due to lack of cooperation of the people. “Yet we will continue with our efforts,” Mr. Kodgi said.

Dugge Gowda, director of district unit of SKDRDP, said the SKDRDP had constructed 180 toilets and installed 80 bio-gas plants in the village.

Hygiene, safety, themes of World Health Day celebrations



Puducherry observed World Health Day with several programmes on the World Health Organization-observed theme of ‘Food Safety’ on Tuesday.

The Department Of Public Health Dentistry and the NSS unit of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Dental Science in association with the Puducherry Municipality, organised a health camp at Gandhi Thidal.

Around 100 sanitation workers of the Puducherry Municipality were vaccinated against Hepatitis B, according to a press release from the organisers. Oral health screening was done for around 500 people, it said. Pamphlets were distributed on food safety standards among food vendors around Beach Road. The programme was attended by Local Administration Department Director P.T. Rudra Goud and Puducherry Municipality Commissioner R. Chandirasekaran.

Various aspects of food safety were discussed at the panel discussion organised by the Institution of Public Health Engineers India – Chennai Puducherry Regional Centre, with the Vinayaka Missions Sikkim University, in association with the Public Works Department.

“The food chain parameters from the agricultural field to the dining table like avoiding pesticides, artificial ripening using carbides, prevention of contamination require continuous advocacy and a sustainable Information Education Communication strategy,” said Local Administration Minister N.G. Pannirselvam at the programme, according to a press release.

Decoding plant's gravity sensor



Research aboard the space station may illuminate the mystery of a plant's "sixth sense", literally turning plant gravity-sensing research on its head.

Plants do have a unique sense of gravity, which is being tested in space.

Researchers with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency will conduct a second run of the Plant Gravity Sensing study after new supplies are delivered by the sixth SpaceX commercial re-supply mission to the International Space Station.

"Plants cultivated in space are not experienced with gravity or the direction of gravity and may not be able to form gravity sensors that respond to the specific direction of gravity changes," said Hitoshi Tatsumi, principal investigator of the Plant Gravity Sensing investigation.

The research team seeks to determine how plants sense their growth direction without gravity.

The study results may have implications for higher crop yield in farming and for cultivating plants for long-duration space missions.

The investigation examines the cellular process of formation in thale cress, a small flowering plant related to cabbage.

Scientists **hypothesise** that the process in which amyloplast - particles within the plant cell that store and synthesise starch for energy - distributes and assembles occurs in the direction of gravitational pull.

If the study hypothesis is proven true, it may be possible to modify plant gravity-sensing mechanisms on Earth or to cultivate healthy plants for consumption on future deep space missions or conceivably on other planets.IANS

Kisan Rally

The Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) is pulling out all the stops in its endeavour to motivate its cadres and leaders to go to New Delhi and participate in the 'Kisan Rally' at the Ramlila Maidan on April 19. A special train is also being arranged for the purpose.

The rally is to protest against the ordinance proposing amendments to the Land Acquisition Act of 2013. Chairing a preparatory meeting at Gandhi Bhavan, the Congress headquarters here on Tuesday, TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy and working president Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka explained how the ordinance proposed amendments that were completely 'anti-farmer' and how it would empower the government to have the ultimate say while acquiring lands.

KAU launches herbal face pack

It's good news for beauty conscious people. Coinciding with World Health Day, the Kerala Agricultural University's (KAU) medicinal plant research unit here has come out with an organic face pack.

Christened 'Mukhasree,' the cosmetic is made from indigenous herbs cultivated at the unit.

This is the fifth commercially viable product from the unit.

Dr. Koshy Abraham, Associate Dean, College of Horticulture (CoH), officially launched the product by handing it over to Pournami, Students Union joint secretary.

Germplasm collection

The All India Coordinated Research Product (AICRP) on medicinal plants at the CoH is well known for germplasm collection and conservation of all herbs and medicinal plants.

Apart from supplying planting materials of medicinal plants, the unit has already launched unique products like popular cool drink concentrate Narunandi syrup , skin cure oil Danthapala Velichenna , hair nourishing oil, herbal shampoo and herbal remedy for cough.

M.T. Kanakamony, Head of AICRP on medicinal plants, said the unit was getting ready to enhance the production of these herbal products in tune with the increasing demand.



Residents pay more to enjoy king of fruits

Residents wanting to buy Konkan alphonso mangoes have to pay anywhere from Rs500 to Rs 1,500 per dozen (as per size and quality). The increase in price, compared to Rs 300-600 per dozen last year, is due to decrease in supply of mangoes from Devgad and Ratnagiri. The unseasonal rain and hailstorm damaged the crops resulting in lesser supply.

Considering the supply crunch, traders are getting consignments from Karnataka, but the quality is not as good.

Traders and farmers are expecting an increase in the supply after mid-April, which may reduce the price. However, many believe that it is not possible to match the supply with demand, as over 50% of the crop was destroyed by the sudden rains.

According to sources, last year, around one lakh boxes of mangoes were sold daily from mid-April till end of May. Now traders are expecting around 60,000 boxes from April 15, which may reduce the price a bit.

"Supply has been less compared to demand. Only 30% of the produce is of good quality and it is sold at prime rates, the remaining 70% is found to be faulty," said Sanjay Pansare, former director of APMC.

Traders say shortage will be felt more in May due to loss of fresh crops and opening of exports in European market. Omkar Sapre, board member, Devgad Taluka Amba Utpadak Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit, said "It's

extremely difficult to predict the quantity of damage. The erratic weather has affected the harvest badly."

Forest dept's 'e-relief' project to cut short farmers' wait time

Soon, farmers may not have to face undue delay in receiving compensation for crops damaged by wild animals, thanks to a mobile application enabled pilot project to be implemented in Coimbatore that would cut the wait time by ten days.

At present, it takes a minimum of two months for farmers to receive their compensation, which in the worst case scenario, prolongs to one year. The forest department has planned to introduce 'e-compensation' for crop damage on pilot basis in Perianaickenpalayam forest range this week.

As per the project, the department would provide two mobile phones with advanced applications to foresters. The forest staff can take photographs of crop damage using their mobile phones, upload the pictures along with their observations online, facilitating easy computation and disbursement of compensation.

With crop damage by wild animals increasing with each passing year, the delay in disbursing compensation is also increasing. District forest officer M Senthilkumar said that this app would speed up the compensation process.

"Farmers who suffer crop damage can give a missed call to the two mobile phones. Besides taking photographs, the extent of damage can be accurately measured with the help of GPS. The date and time of the forester's visit would also be recorded through the application," he said. The DFO would receive an alert once a missed call is made. A similar mobile with the DFO would keep blinking until the forest staff visit the spot and enter the damage data. "This would enable the forest staff to act in a timely manner," he said.

Crop damage by elephant herds and wild boars has become a menace in villages abutting forests. Hundreds of acres of crops like plantain, coconut and maize in Karamadai, Mettupalayam, Sirumugai, Perianaickenpalayam and Boluvampatti get damaged every year. In 2014 - 15 alone 1 crore was disbursed as crop damage compensation in Coimbatore forest sub division compared to 40 lakh the previous year.

The forest department provides 25,000 as compensation for an acre of paddy crop damaged and 600 for each coconut tree damaged. Vivasayigal Sangam general secretary P Kandasamy said some farmers from Pannimadai and Varapalayam have not received compensation for more than a year.

When farmers suffer crop damage, they must inform foresters and the agriculture department. Field officers from the agriculture department would assess the damage and issue a certificate. The farmers need to obtain a certificate from the village administrative officer before they apply for compensation from the conservator of forests.

"We plan to hold talks with revenue and agriculture department officers to expedite the process of issuing certificates," said a forest officer. Once the farmers receive the certificate from the agriculture and revenue departments, they must submit them to the range officers and the applications would be processed immediately, said Senthilkumar.

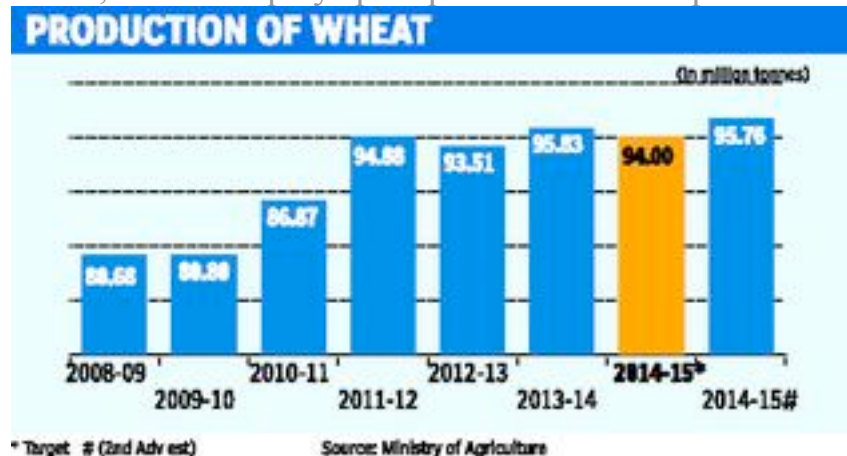
Foresters can take photos of the destroyed field, upload it with their observation and the compensation would be made accordingly

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THE HINDU BusinessLine

Wheat output likely to decline by 5%, says Agriculture Minister

Unseasonal rain, hailstorm play spoilsport with Rabi crop



Domestic wheat production is likely to slide by almost 5 per cent after significant tracts across key wheat-growing States, such as Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, were damaged by unseasonal rainfall and hailstorms through much of last month.

Agriculture Ministry officials estimated that 421 districts across 69 per cent of the country received excess rainfall between March 1 and April 1.

Rabi crops on nearly 113 lakh hectares (lh) of a total cultivable 600 lh have been damaged, they said.

“According to initial reports received from the States after the rains, estimates show that wheat output could be 4-5 per cent lower this year,” Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said during an address at a conference on Kharif crops here on Tuesday. He said the estimate was preliminary and officials would visit the affected regions to make a final assessment.

In its second advance estimates, the Ministry has pegged wheat output at 95.76 million tonnes (mt) in 2014-15 (July-June), marginally lower than the record 95.85 mt registered in 2013-14.

Australian imports

According to reports, India, the world’s second-largest wheat producer, recently bought 80,000 tonnes of the grain from Australia. Mustard and seasonal vegetables and fruits were damaged by heavy showers, the latter category more likely to fuel food inflation that has averaged 5.3 per cent this year.

Procurement norms

Singh added that States have adequate funds under the State Disaster Response Fund to provide financial assistance to affected farmers.

Outlook turns bullish for mustard



Lower output, both domestic and global, due to crop damage may lead to increase in prices of the oilseed

The mustard crop has suffered substantial damage in several States in the northern and central parts of the country due to unseasonal rain and hailstorm last month.

According to the Agriculture Ministry, 17.77 lakh hectares (lh) of the crop have been damaged in Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. This is about 25 per cent of the area planted during the rabi sowing season.

In Rajasthan, the country's biggest producer of mustard, crop on 15.05 lh has been destroyed.

The impact of damage has been felt over the last couple of weeks as prices have moved up in mandis across the country.

However, there has been an uptrend in mustard prices in the derivatives market since the second half of last year in anticipation of lower sowing due to poor monsoon.

Moreover, prices also surged during November and December on festival demand for mustard oil and expectation of an increase in customs duty on crude and refined edible oils.

But, the start of the New Year pegged the prices down on weak sentiments from other oilseed crops and anticipation of good yield on the favourable climatic conditions in the growing States. However, in the last six weeks,

mustard prices have stabilised and are hovering around Rs. 3,350-3,400 a quintal on hopes of arrival of the new crop.

Area-production falls

Mustard output is set to fall this season on lower area and crop damage. According to the latest government data, mustard cultivation fell 8.6 per cent to 65.17 lh compared with 71.32 lh a year ago.

In Rajasthan, mustard acreage has slid by 13 per cent due to moisture stress while in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, late harvesting of kharif crop such as cotton and soyabean impacted the planting.

Meanwhile, domestic mustard production is projected at 57.4 lakh tonnes (lt), down 12 per cent compared with last year, according to the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA).

However, with unseasonal rain and hailstorms reported in the growing areas, a damage of 10-15 per cent could further bring down the output.

Oil imports-meal export

Mustard is an important source of edible oil and feed meal. India imports mustard oil while exporting meal.

According to the Solvent Extractors Association (SEA), the country imported 43,759 tonnes of mustard oil in January – a seven-fold increase compared with the volume shipped in January 2014.

However, during November-January period of the current oil season to September, import of mustard oil is 122 per cent higher compared with the same period a year ago.

Meanwhile, the export of oilmeal has also increased 22 per cent to 10 lakh tonnes for April- February period of the 2014-15 fiscal compared with the previous fiscal.

Record import of mustard oil and good export demand for oil meal indicate demand for oil and meal in the domestic and global markets, respectively.

Global output dips

Global output is projected to fall for the first time in five years, led by a drop in European Union, according to the latest estimates by International Grain Council.

The council, in its first forecast for world mustard output in 2015-16, pegged the crop at 68.9 million tones (mt), down 3.8 per cent year-on-year.

Earlier, the EU's withdrawal of neonicotinoid pesticide harmed the crop prospects.

Initial outlook pegs mustard production at 21.1 mt – down 12 per cent from a record 24.1 mt last year.

In Canada, production of canola, the mustard variant, is forecast at 16 mt, up 2.9 per cent but sowing is forecast to fall next season due to crop rotation.

Meanwhile, China, world's largest importer, is set to produce mustard that will be 300,000 tonnes lower this year at 14.1 mt. Its imports are forecast to rise 400,000 tonnes to 4.5 mt in 2015-16.

Outlook

Seasonal supply pressure generally keeps mustard prices on leash during the peak harvest season. However, in the current season, prices have seen a notable gain during extended price stability.

Lower production and planting projections worldwide along with good export and consumption demand point to mustard prices gaining over the next two months.

The writer is Associate Director-Commodities & Currencies, Angel Commodities Broking. Views are personal.