

16-04-2015

THE HINDU

Smart technologies for water management in crops



Irrigation projects have always been part of the top agenda in any government policy. Each administration has always introduced something new for its part on the water issue.

“Irrigation projects are like bank ATMs. One knows how much water is being released from reservoirs but does not know how each drop is being distributed or utilised. It is similar to people remembering how much money they draw from an ATM, but don’t keep tag on how each rupee is spent. The interest shown in creating infrastructure is not shown in management of water resources. Without monitoring water use, its management is not possible,” says Dr. N. Sai Bhaskar Reddy, Coordinator, ClimaAdapt Project, Walamtari, Andhra Pradesh.

Two states

Walamtari is a government organisation in Hyderabad serving farmers of both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh States.

Presently they are working on low cost sensors for water use efficiency, soil moisture and environmental parameters, through a project called ClimaAdapt, supported by the Norwegian Government.

“Unlike in olden days, today several smart technologies like sensors are available to monitor water resources distribution and utilisation. The cost of monitoring water usage with the aid of these technologies is more reliable and convenient as compared to human resources engaged for monitoring,” says Mr. Bhaskar Reddy. All the farmer needs to do is to buy and install one or two sensors in his field and irrigation outlets in the fields for measuring water flow, soil moisture, temperature and relative humidity in the atmosphere. Once every two to three hours information on the above is sent to the farmer’s mobile as a message.

Project

As part of a project to popularise it and bring awareness among farmers Walamtari set up sensors for measuring water use in paddy crops in the field of a beneficiary farmer Mr. K. Prabhakar from Kondrapole village, Miryalaguda, Nalgonda District, Telangana.

Mr. Prabhakar, had been cultivating the paddy crop for the last 30 years in about two hectares. He was utilising water without any measurement.

“I used to worry when there was no water standing in the field. I was given training and also taken for an exposure visit on alternate wetting and drying (AWD) method in paddy by Walamtari. Through them I learnt that there was no need to keep the paddy field always flooded with water. The water level can be allowed to even recede 15 cm below the surface. This will not affect crop yield. There is a saving of 30 to 40 per cent water by this method.

“And also the crop production is high as the roots penetrate deeper with receding water and there are more tillers and increase in paddy yield. The crop also stands well. Although all sensors are installed in the field openly, none of the sensors was damaged or lost due to theft” he says.

Information timings

Today, after setting up the sensors in his field, Mr. Prabhakar is able to get information every three hours on his mobile about the water flow, air temperature, soil moisture etc on his mobile phone.

With these systems in place he is able to schedule his cropping pattern as per the requirement.

Mr. Prabhakar was asked to speak to other farmers in his region about his experience and hearing him, farmers growing chillies and cotton have come forward to try and use this technique.

Cost

Some farmers expressed that they were also willing to buy these sensors on their own for irrigation management. Sensors are priced at Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000.

“Being a Government organisation, it does not market sensors commercially. At present a farmer cannot buy directly from us, but we can guide them to the right place from where they can purchase,” says Mr. Sai.

Though this is a new concept in an area that already faces several problems, the need of the hour is for farmers across the country to become aware about this concept and try them personally.

For more information coninterested farmers contact Dr. N. Sai Bhaskar Reddy, Coordinator, ClimaAdapt Project, Walamtari, email: saibhaskarnaka@gmail.com, Mobile:09676799191.

NABARD to train tribal ryots



Tribal farmers of Srikakulam district will get advanced training in the use of agriculture technology and new methods of farming at Bapatla Agriculture University with the support of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural

Development (NABARD) and Bapuji Rural Enlightenment and Development Society (BREDS) of Pathapatnam.

They will also be trained in the cultivation the of Vriddhachalam variety of cashew, which gives higher yields.

Agriculture scientists in Bapatla College will clarify doubts of tribal farmers during the training programme.

Around 1,800 tribal farmers are engaged in 'Maa Thota' programme in six mandals, including Pathapatnam and Saravakota.

Among them, 40 active farmers have been identified for the training programme, which is expected to help in the cultivation of crops like cashew and mango.

Food grain production registers significant increase in Tirupur district

Food grain production witnessed a boom in Tirupur district during the just ended 2014-15 financial year when compared to previous fiscal.

According to the statistics jointly compiled by the Departments of Agriculture, Revenue and Statistics, the area coverage of all the prominent agriculture crops have gone up significantly during 2014-15 financial year.

Deputy Director of Agriculture A. Mahendran told The Hindu that the increase in the acreage was due to better rainfall when compared to the previous fiscal and to effective transfer of latest technologies to the farm.

Going crop-wise, paddy, one of the main food grain crops, was raised over an area of 11,007 hectares in 2014-15 fiscal which was 3,468 hectares more than the total acreage achieved in 2013-14 fiscal.

The Agriculture Department officials were of the opinion that acreage of paddy could have been at least 2,000 hectare more if the water was released from Amravathi Dam in December.

In the case of pulses, it was bountiful harvest in 2014-15 fiscal as the acreage touched 23,064 ha against the target of 22,150 ha set for the period.

When compared to the previous fiscal, the cultivation area increased by an additional 4,000 hectares.

Among the pulses, red gram, green gram, horse gram, black gram and Bengal gram were cultivated mostly in the district.

Similarly, area coverage of millets too increased remarkably during 2014-15 with 64,688 ha brought under the crop. During the previous fiscal, area coverage under the crop was 55,995 ha.

In the case of oilseeds, the acreage increased marginally to stand at 8,869 ha in 2014-15.

“We feel that the farmers could have raised oilseeds on more area if Avinashi region got early rains in July,” Mr. Mahendran pointed out.

Crop loss report in a day or two

Officials of Agriculture, Horticulture and Revenue departments, who are visiting agriculture fields to assess crop damage due to unseasonal rain in Yadgir district, are likely to submit a detailed report to the district administration in a day or two.

According to sources in the Agriculture Department, officials are holding discussions with farmers to assess the loss. Paddy, bajra, cereals, papaya, banana, mango and other crops were damaged due to hailstorm and heavy rain.

As per preliminary information, over 1,200 hectares of paddy fields suffered damage. However, the number might go up, Chetana Patil, Joint Director of Agriculture told *The Hindu* over phone.

Compensation

Manoj Jain, Deputy Commissioner, said that compensation to those whose houses were partially damaged and whose domestic animals died would be released after getting the reports by revenue officials.

33 p.c. damaged crop eligible for compensation



Some respite for farmers in Telangana hit hard by the unseasonal rains that lashed several districts as the Centre relaxes its norms to pay compensation to farmers. As per the new guidelines, compensation will be paid if the extent of damage to the standing crop is 33 per cent.

Union Ministers – M. Venkaiah Naidu and Bandaru Dattatreya – on Wednesday extensively toured Nalgonda, Karimnagar and Nizamabad districts to inspect the damaged crops.

Both the Ministers, speaking to farmers at different places, said as per the new guidelines released by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, standing crops damaged to the extent of even 33 per cent were eligible for compensation against the earlier rule of 50 per cent.

Mr. Naidu, who inspected damaged paddy fields in Pochampally, Bhongir, Bibinagar and Ramannapet mandals, said the State and the Centre would work in tandem to compensate the farmers.

He was accompanied by Union Minister of State for Agriculture Mohanbhai Kundariya, BJP State president G. Kishan Reddy, Bhongir MP Bura Narasaiah Goud, Nalgonda MP Gutha Sukendar Reddy, Principal Secretary, Agriculture, B.R. Meena, District Collector P. Satyanarayana Reddy, Joint Collector N. Satyanarayana, public representatives and officials.

After visiting the agriculture market yard at Ramannapet where the paddy brought by farmers was damaged, the Urban Development Minister admitted that there was dearth of proper markets and godowns. He further said that

paddy in over 16,000 hectares was damaged due to rains in Nalgonda, besides horticulture crops in thousands of acres.

In Karimnagar, Mr. Dattatreya inspected rain-affected villages in Jagtial revenue division along with BJP legislator C. Ramachandra Reddy. Earlier, he held a review meeting with Collector Neetu Kumari Prasad, Joint Collector Pausumi Basu and others.

Talking to newsmen, he said crops in over one lakh hectares were damaged due to rains in the State, including 20,000 hectares in Karimnagar district alone. Expressing concern over huge losses to farming community, he said that more than 300 farmers had committed suicide due to failure of crops caused by non-availability of MSP, power supply and irrigation sources in the State.

The Union Minister along with Ministers Etala Rajender and K. Taraka Rama Rao, TRS legislators K. Vidyasagar Rao, Gangula Kamalakar, Ch. Ramesh Babu and Putta Madhu visited affected villages of Medipalli, Jagtial and Korutla mandals on his way to Nizamabad district.

Govt. not pro-active

Mr. Dattatreya inspected damaged crops in Hasakothur village of Kammarpally mandal and Bachanpally in Bheemgal mandal in Nizamabad district. He observed that the State government had not acted immediately after the heavy rains. He told reporters at Bachanpally that the administration was apparently not pro-active in providing succour to farmers. It should have acted on war footing to assess the damage, he said.— Additional reporting By T. Karnakar Reddy (Nalgonda), K.M. Dayashankar (Karimnagar) & P. Ram Mohan (Nizamabad)

Mangoes may be costlier this summer



Mango lovers may have to shell out a little more this summer to enjoy their favourite fruit, thanks to poorer harvests and the recent rainfall. Data from the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), Gaddianaram, shows that mango arrival in April has been less this year in comparison to 2014.

“This year mangoes might be priced a little more [than the last] because the produce itself has been less. Also, this sudden rain is going to affect availability, which will increase the retail price outside,” a commissioning agent at AMC said. He added that that stock might have suffered a fall of 20 per cent over last year.

Mohd. Jabbar, a trader at AMC, concurred while pointing out that in April every year, around 250-300 trucks bring in mangoes every day. “But this time it is lesser, and due to the rain of the last few days, the number of vehicles has come down to about 150,” he said. He added, however, that stock could improve once more mangoes came in from Andhra Pradesh.

AMC data between April 1 and 14 showed a total of 35,707 baskets of mangoes having arrived – 3,361 lesser than the 39,068 baskets that came in during the same period last year. “Though there is not much of a shortage yet, there might be in the coming days. Also, due to State bifurcation, mangoes that used to come from Andhra Pradesh might not reach here, and may get exported to other States,” said M. Sambaiah, general secretary, Grade-2, AMC, Gaddianaram.

“Mangoes sold in retail stores or in *bandi* s are priced at Rs.60 a kilo or above. Depending on the incoming stock, it might go up in the coming days,” said Mr. Jabbar.



WPI inflation drops to -2.33 on cheaper food and fuel

Wholesale price index-based inflation hit the negative zone for a fifth straight month, falling to a new low of -2.33 per cent in March — its lowest at least since the current series was introduced in April 2005 — on cooling oil and manufacturing costs, reflecting trends that could give the RBI room to make further interest rate cuts. The headline inflation was at -2.06 per cent in February. It was 6 per cent in March 2014.

Combined with a moderation in retail inflation to a three-month low of 5.17 per cent in March, the latest drop in the wholesale price index (WPI) brightened the prospects of a rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on or before June 2 when it will meet next to review the monetary policy, said analysts.

While experts said that the inflationary pressures have ebbed out, the impact of the recent damage to crops due to unseasonal rains and hailstorm is yet to be seen in the food inflation. Meanwhile, January inflation has been revised down to -0.95 per cent from -0.39 per cent announced earlier.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Now, precious mangoes get security cover



Besides dangling hafoos, it is hard to miss the sight of eight stern-looking men on horses going around this 300 bigha mango orchards spread across five villages in Valsad district.

These stick-wielding men ensure that mangoes are not stolen by thieves and mischievous elements. There are nearly 45 such men, traditionally known as 'Pathans', who are guarding large number of orchards in nearly 25 villages of this Valsadi hafoos hub.

Mangoes have become a precious commodity that needs to be well-guarded after nearly 70% of the crop was wiped away due to five wet spells since February. These Pathans are specially called from Barmer in Rajasthan along with their horses.

"When mango production falls, chances of theft are very high as the fruit would fetch higher prices in market. We are left with no option but to deploy security to protect whatever is left on the trees," said Rasesh Desai, whose family owns 12,000 mango trees including 5,000 Valsadi hafoos trees. The orchards are spread across five villages of Lilapore, Kundi, Dhamdachi, Thakkarwada and Rabda near Valsad. Desai has been paying each guard Rs 8,000-Rs 10,000 per person a month.

The Pathans guarding the mango orchards

Musa Khan Pathan, who supplies these security men, said, "The practice of hiring Pathans from Barmer started 20 years ago. Initially, people in Valsad called us to protect their villages from thieves. But our role has been limited to mango orchards now."

"Our presence is enough for miscreants to stay away from entering the orchards," he said.

"When Pathans patrol the orchards on horse back, people think twice before any misadventure," said Desai.

In some cases the entire village hires services of these Pathans to protect their mango orchards. Village like Thigra, Solvada and Khajori in Valsad have small orchards so they have collectively hired services of Pathans and the cost will be evenly distributed among farmers.

Rajasthan researchers develop superior methi variety

Rajasthan's Methi is famous for its strong aroma and taste among spice lovers across the globe. Now, agriculture scientists here have developed a new variety which is superior to all the previous known kinds in the country.

Pratap Rajasthan Methi (PRM 45) is the new brand developed by researchers at the Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology (MPUAT), Udaipur, and its germ plasm has been registered with the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, New Delhi.

It has high seed protein and displays superiority in diosgenin content (steroid used in preparation of contraceptives), thus, having an increased therapeutic value. It has even surpassed the national check Hisar Sonali variety in terms of productivity per hectare.

"Rajasthan is considered as 'fenugreek bowl' which is grown abundantly in Nagaur, Udaipur, Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar and the surrounding belt, contributing about 80% area and production of the country," informed Prof SR Maloo, research director of MPUAT.

"With Pratap Raj Methi, the researchers have developed an improved and superior variety which is suitable for the state in terms of water budgeting. It thrives well in sandy loam to heavy soils in different agro-climatic zones of the state without lodging," Maloo said.

Yield trials conducted in Rajasthan over 17 locations during 9 years, between 2004-2013, in different districts including adaptive trial centres and farmers' fields showed consistent superiority of PRM 45 by more than 20% for seed yield (20.9 q/ha) over most popular and common check RMT-1 (17.3 q/ha).

Similarly, PRM also showed more than 20% superiority for leaf yield, hence regarded as dual purpose variety, Maloo said. Performance of PRM 45 in AICRP (All India Co-ordinated Research Project) on spice trials at national level over 3 years (2009-10 to 2011-12) at 6 locations in 5 states, viz., Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh was again convincing and produced 1,046 kg/ha against national check Hisar Sonali (944 kg/ha) and showed about 11% superiority.

Wholesale onion prices decline

The average wholesale onion price at the country's largest wholesale onion market at Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) declined marginally on Monday compared with the prices on Saturday.

Sources at Lasalgaon APMC said the decline in the average wholesale onion price is marginal and negligible with a fluctuation of around Rs 100 a quintal. At present, the average wholesale onion prices have settled in the range of Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,150 a quintal for the past week. The average wholesale onion prices are expected in the same range for the next couple of weeks at the major APMCs.

The average wholesale onion price at the Lasalgaon APMC was recorded at Rs 1,125 a quintal on Monday, against Rs 1,150 a quintal on last working day on Saturday. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 500 and Rs 1,375 a quintal, respectively. Around 20,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Lasalgaon APMC on Monday.

The onion produce arriving in the market is the kharif and summer crop. This kharif season, which usually begins by September end, was delayed by two months due to delay in arrival of monsoon. The arrival of kharif crop is in last phase and is expected to continue till the month end.

The average wholesale onion price at Pimpalgaon APMC was recorded at Rs 1,000 a quintal on Monday. The minimum and maximum prices of onions were recorded at Rs 700 and Rs 1,340 a quintal, respectively. Around 13,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Pimpalgaon on Monday.

In Yeola, the average wholesale onion price was recorded at Rs 1,050 a quintal on Monday. The minimum and maximum prices of onions were recorded at Rs 300 and Rs 1,322 a quintal, respectively. Around 15,863 quintals of onions were auctioned at Yeola on Monday.

The Centre has sanctioned Rs 5 crore advance to the National Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) under the price stability fund to procure onions and stabilize prices whenever necessary.

The government had earmarked Rs 500 crore for the price stability fund to control prices of perishable agricultural commodities in the Union Budget for 2014-15. The fund is to be used in the current fiscal and the next financial year.

The fund is to be used to advance interest-free loans to state governments and central agencies like NAFED and Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) to buy onions directly from farmers or the Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) considering the scarcity of onions and price rise in the future.

"The Centre has approved to give Rs 5 crore as interest-free loan to NAFED in the first phase and asked to start procurement of onions from APMCs. We have yet not decided when to start procurement but average wholesale onion prices in the APMCs are in the range of Rs 900 to Rs 1,150 a quintal," said sources in NAFED.

At present, NAFED has storage facilities for onions at Lasalgaon and Pimpalgaon in the district. The total storage capacity in both the places is around 2,500 tonnes of onions, including 1,000 tonnes in Pimpalgaon and remaining 1,500 tonnes in Lasalgaon. "We will need to undertake some

repairs at the storage facilities to store the procured onions," sources said.

Market sources said the summer crop, which is harvested in March and April every year, has a shelf life of six to seven months and cater to the requirement until the arrival of the kharif crop, which usually begins by mid-September.

Thereafter, the kharif and late kharif crop cater to requirement until the arrival of the summer crop. The kharif and late kharif crops have a shelf life of a month and start rotting thereafter. Hence, only summer crop is stored by farmers to get better price for the commodity. Scarcity of onions is created if this cycle is affected.

Hence, August to October is a crucial period every year, when there are chances of onion scarcity and hike in prices is expected. Considering this, the Centre has decided to use price stability fund to control onion prices.

NAFED gets Rs 5cr price stability fund

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THE HINDU BusinessLine

Keventer Agro to soon introduce Dwarf Cavendish bananas



Kolkata-based Keventer Agro, which has captured one-third of the city market for bananas, is now gearing up to expand its procurement, processing and marketing reach in nine more eastern Indian cities this year at an investment of Rs. 50 crore.

And, that's not all. The Rs. 400-crore company – flagship of the Kolkata-based MK Jalan-controlled Rs. 2,000-crore Keventer Group – is aiming for a national roll out of popular 'Dwarf Cavendish' variety, also referred as Grand Nain (G-9) variety, in a phased manner.

Acquisitions ahead

“Over the next two years, Keventer Group will invest Rs. 200 crore in food business,” Mayank Jalan, Managing Director of Keventer Agro told *BusinessLine* .

“Of the total investment, Rs. 50 crore will go in establishing the network in nine cities; Rs. 68 crore is earmarked for setting up milk collection and processing unit near Bhagalpur in Bihar. And, a lot of funds will be geared up towards acquisitions,” he says.

Mayank says the group is “in conversation with a few players” for acquisition in the existing areas of the group's food business – that includes dairy, fresh fruits (banana), fruit pulp (mango pulp), sesame seeds, spices and others.

The dairy business is spearheaded by Rs. 280-crore Metro Dairy Ltd.

The rest of the food business is managed by Keventer Agro. Nearly half of the company's turnover comes from exports. Of the total export turnover (approximately Rs. 200 crore); half is attributed to mango pulp, followed by sesame seeds (30 per cent).

Focussing home turf

With an aim to clock \$2 billion turnover in food business in 10 years, Mayank is clearly betting big on banana. He wants to move fast, and grab a sizable pie of the country's banana market.

India produces close to 17 million tonnes of banana, mostly for internal consumption. The top 10 producing destinations are Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and Odisha. As a Kolkata-based company Keventer has already established its presence in its home State and is now out to expand to neighbouring Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand and Odisha.

The company provides saplings of pest and disease resistant variety to farmers. It takes 11 months to give the first fruit. In the meantime, the company sets up its collection, ripening and processing centres to cater fresh fruits to the local markets.

Farmers to benefit

Mayank claims his business is beneficial to both end-consumer and farmer. While the consumers are getting improved quality fruit at market price, the farmer earns higher than market price.

“We will be sourcing directly from the farmers. And we will be paying them a higher price than what they get in the mandis,” he says.

The company is currently working with 4,000 small and marginal farmers in Bengal. And, if Mayank is to be believed the association has increased the average income per acre of farmers by Rs. 1.23 lakh a year.

Ahmedabad-based Azafran launches organic skin-care range

City-based organic personal care products maker, Azafran Innovacions Ltd, on Wednesday launched a range of premium organic skin care products. The company has invested Rs.20 crore to set up a complete integrated value chain from ‘farm to face’.

It has set up 40- hectare certified organic farm, which includes farming, greenhouses, manufacturing facility and a dedicated R&D centre. “We have also appointed 40 farmers undertaking organic farming to supply the raw material to us. At present, we are utilising the farm to its full capacity,” said Aditi Vyas, Director and Founder of the company. The company makes

organic cosmetics for hair, face and body. The company has, at present, a product portfolio of 25 items which is likely to go up to 40 by this year-end.

Azafran plans to launch an organic anti-aging face cream next month, informed Vyas on the sidelines of the launch here. It grows most of its raw material plants such as eucalyptus, lemon grass, sunflower among others.

The facility, located near Sanand, has been approved by the USDA. By this month end, the company will supply its products to 30 stores nationally with a focus on the metros.

By December, it plans to increase its reach to 100 cities nationally.

The products are priced at Rs. 200-700 per 50 grams. Besides the large retail stores, the products are also available online through e-retailing players Amazon and Flipkart.

Vegoil imports surge 27% in March on higher demand



Vegetable oil imports were up 27 per cent at 11 lakh tonnes in March compared to 8 lakh tonnes (lt) in the same period last year due to higher demand and lower crushing by domestic mills.

Imports have been on a steady rise in last five months as exporting countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia removed the export duty on crude palmolien to reduce their burgeoning inventory.

This apart, the high soyabean prices in the domestic market and lower realisation for oil and soya meal in export market has led to lower crushing and lesser oil availability in domestic market pushing up the imports, said the Solvent Extractors' Association of India.

Of the total shipments in March, edible oil constituted about 10.53 lt while non-edible oil accounted for the rest.

The overall import of vegetable oils in the first five months of oil year started November was up 24 per cent at 54 lt (43 lt).

As of March-end, the inventory at various ports is estimated at 6.90 lt. It consists of 4 lt of CPO, 50,000 tonnes of refined palmolein, 1.30 lt of degummed soyabean oil, 1.05 lt of crude sunflower oil and 10,000 tonnes of rapeseed oil. Another 13 lt of oil is expected to have been shipped.

The combined stocks at ports and in pipeline remain at same level of last month at 20.1 lakh tonnes. India consumes 16 lt of edible oil monthly. The current holding of over 20 lt is equal 38 days demand.

In last one year, sea-borne prices of edible oils have moved downward in line with fall in international prices.

Refined and crude palmolein prices are down 30 per cent and 32 per cent respectively.

Crude soyabean and sunflower oil dipped 23 per cent and 16 per cent.

The prices would have fallen even more if not for the rupee which depreciated by 2.5 per cent.

Festival buying heats up coconut oil, copra



The entry of adulterated coconut oil into Kerala is now on the decline and this has even reflected in the coconut oil prices in Tamil Nadu this week, recording a drop of ₹100 a quintal at ₹13,500, Thalath Mahmood, Director, Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA) said.

A senior official in the Kerala Food Safety Authority told *BusinessLine* that the checkpoint-centric examination on coconut oil consignments would make those companies involved in such tainted business more cautious. It was also decided to keep a close watch on companies who brought coconut oil and palm oil in bulk quantities into the State.

Kerala, which consumes a lion's share of coconut oil in the country, has banned the sale of nine branded coconut oils last week after they were found adulterated with palm kernel oil and palm oil.

Meanwhile, the coconut oil market in Kerala is on a steady line this week with local demand perking up due to Vishu festival season. This has slightly impacted the prices, recording an increase of ₹100 a quintal touching ₹14,000.

However, copra prices in both the States remained at the same level at ₹10,000/quintal, Mahmood said.

According to Bharat Khona, former COMA board member, the corporate and upcountry demand has not yet picked up at these higher prices and they are on a wait and watch mode.

Our Erode Correspondent adds: Copra prices decreased but the price of thecoconut oil was unchanged.

“Copra was sold at ₹10,200 a quintal two or three days back, but on Wednesday it was sold at ₹9,700-9,900 in Erode district. Oil crushers are selling the coconut oil at ₹1,900-2,000 for 15-kg loose pack. Still many biscuit firms prefer palm kernel oil as it is available for ₹8,500-9,200 a quintal,” said RM Palanisamy, an oil trader.

Similarly, the edible copra prices decreased and traded at ₹10,700 a quintal on Wednesday.

Indian appetite for pears continues to grow



Himachal Pradesh and Punjab are prime pear-growing areas in India, but in order to satiate the rising demand for pears, imports appear to be the only option. Imports of fresh pears -- from the US, South Africa and China -- have soared dramatically.

According to information available on the APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) website, India imported 14,571.90 tonnes of fresh pears in 2013-14, valued at around ₹78.93 crore. There were no imports in 2012-13, nor in 2011-12.

Rising imports

Some 9,253.58 tonnes of fresh pears, valued at ₹35.62 crore, was imported from China in 2013-14.

Though imports from South Africa were the second highest at 2,799.56 tonnes in 2013-14, compared to imports from the US at 2,518.76 tonnes, the value of pear imports from South Africa was at ₹19.75 crore compared to the value of American pears at ₹23.56 crore

India also exported 3.39 tonnes of pears in 2013-14 worth ₹1.40 lakh. There were nil exports in the previous years.

Homegrown varieties

Incidentally, several varieties of pears are grown in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Pear varieties such as William, Kashmir Nakh, Vicar of Wakefield, Beuree D Amanlis, Goshbagu, Beurre Hardy are grown in J&K.

US apple grower and exporter Stemilt Growers has moved to strengthen its position in India's lucrative pear market.

“Along with a record production of apples, we have 13 different varieties of pears grown in the US,” Bill Young, Global Sales Director at Stemilt Growers told *BusinessLine*, a recent visit to India. “Though all the 13 varieties are sold in the global market, Anjus pears (from the US) are particularly liked by Indian consumers,” he added.

Belgian imports

Tarun Arora, Director, IG International, exporter and importer of fresh fruits said that though domestic pears such as Baghugosha, Kieffer, China and sand pear are grown in India, imports from Belgium were on the rise.

“The US is currently exporting a variety called Anjou and Red Anjou, which is good to taste. South Africa primarily does the Packham's variety, while

China does Shandong pears, Ya pears, Golden pears and Su pears,” said Arora.

Stemilt’s Young pointed out that that the Conference pear from Belgium “is very good to eat, though Indians might not like its skin discolouration, which is a trademark of most pears from Belgium.”

Stemlit Growers has 9,644 acres of apple orchards and total fruit tree acreage of 11,364. Last year, the company exported 500,000 boxes of apples, 60,000 boxes of pears and 12,000 boxes of cherries to India. Stemilt has been eyeing the Indian market for increased volumes.

World pear production is forecast to increase a modest 5 per cent to over 24.4 million tonnes boosted by higher output in China, according to a report by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Global pear data

However, global trade is forecast down 7 per cent, primarily as a result of the Russian ban from the European Union.

As part of a wider embargo imposed last August, in retaliation to sanctions over Moscow’s role in the Ukraine conflict, Russia had banned all fruit imports from the European Union.

The report has noted that China’s production is forecast to continue expanding, to a record 18.5 million tonnes, as the acreage also expands.

Exports are expected to jump slightly to 320,000 tonnes, prompted by a bump in demand from its top market, Indonesia.

India’s production of 340,000 tonnes of pears has been added to the database.

Russian sanctions

The report indicated that United States production is forecast to decrease 9 per cent to 724,000 tonnes, driven by reduced area in Washington and the other western states.

Russia’s production is forecast to increase 6 per cent to 153,000 tonnes due to favourable weather. Imports are expected to drop 30 per cent to 275,000

tonnes due to the ban, which primarily affects the EU, and to a lesser extent the United States.

Business Standard

Saffron crop might recover some lost ground this season



Despite unseasonal rain in the past few weeks, the [saffron](#) crop in India is projected to post a better production in [kharif](#) this year. The high-value crop was hit last season due to flash floods in the [Kashmir](#) region.

Saffron is grown in 3,674 hectares in Kashmir and 90 per cent of it is grown in the Pampore uplands. The floods damaged almost 100 per cent crop in 2,017 hectares. In 1,604 hectares, only 30 per cent could be salvaged.

According to the state agriculture department, J&K produced 3.83 tonnes and an estimated 11.17 tonnes was lost due to heavy downpour. This amounts to a loss of Rs 860 crore.

The annual demand for saffron in India is about 100 tonnes. The huge demand gap is largely filled by imported saffron, mostly from Iran. Spurious saffron is also seen as a cause of worry. The objective of the

government's [National Saffron Mission](#) is to meet three-fourths of the demand domestically.

The state registered a yield of 4.5 kg per hectare in 2013, with a total production of 15 million tonnes. But the production fell drastically in the subsequent year due to excess rain. The crop season for saffron is from March/April to September/October.

If the rains do not persist, farmers hope to get a maximum of 3.5 kg a hectare. "The assessment can be done only after flowering starts in the months of June/July," said a senior official in the department, adding saffron is grown on highlands with a slanting landscape so the probability of waterlogging is less.

Farmers who lost their crops are short of funds, as they did not get any aid from the state government. Fresh sowing of the saffron bulb entails about Rs 2 lakh a hectare.

The president of the All Jammu and Kashmir Saffron Growers Association, Abdul Mujid Vani, expects the crop to be 10 tonnes to 11 tonnes if the weather remains consistent.

The price of saffron fluctuates between Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2 lakh a kg. It touches peak in November/December and starts declining in January. Indian saffron has a distinct flavour and is preferred over the imported one.

The government has identified 12,000 hectares in parts of Poonch, Doda, Udhampur and Jammu to bring fresh land under saffron cultivation. This could raise the total production to 76 tonnes, said [Firdos Ahmed Nehvi](#) of Kashmir University.

He said the saffron trade in India is unregulated, triggering sale of spurious products at a high premium. The government is educating farmers to seek certifications for their produce and sell as a branded product that will profit both buyers and sellers.