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THE HINDU

Mango to be dearer by 50-65 per cent this summer



Unseasonal rain led to a production loss of up to 50 per cent in some States.

Relishing mangoes this summer will cost a lot more. Prices of the fruit have shot up by 50-65 per cent as unseasonal rain caused production loss.

A study by industry body Assocham said lower-end varieties are selling at Rs. 100 a kg in retail markets while the premium variety Alphonso is selling at Rs 500-600 per dozen in Mumbai.

Unseasonal rain led to a production loss of up to 50 per cent in some States.

“Mango crop suffered the onslaught of repeated rain accompanied by hailstorm and strong winds from end January till early April, 2015 in North and Central India, resulting in huge loss.

“Prices have shot up by 50-65 per cent, at a much higher pace than other fruits and vegetables,” the study said.

The maximum damage has been reported in Uttar Pradesh, which produces the largest variety of mangoes in over a dozen areas like Malihabad, Shahabad, Aloha, Unnao, Bulandshahr, Hardoi, Barabanki and Saharanpur.

Preliminary estimates point towards a minimum loss of 20 per cent on production, it said. In some pockets of Uttar Pradesh the loss was estimated at over 50 per cent.

With an output of four million tonnes, U.P. contributes about one-fourth of India's production, which is likely to fall to 15 million tonnes this season, the study said, adding that the situation in Maharashtra and other central Indian states was equally bad.

“Various State governments have announced relief measures and financial compensation. They are not sufficient to mitigate farmers' losses and also curb rising prices. More needs to be done to help farmers,” Assocham secretary General D.S. Rawat said.

As per the study, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh together account for about half of the total mangoes produced in India with both the States accounting for almost similar share of over 24 per cent.

Karnataka (10 per cent) and Bihar (7.6 per cent) are among the top five States with high share in mango production.

The study said the production losses were likely to impact exports of the fruit from India.

CRI Pumps makes foray into pipes



Diversification is part of Vision 2020 strategy of the leading pump maker

CRI Pumps Pvt. Ltd., a Coimbatore-based manufacturer of industrial, residential and agricultural pumps, has made a foray into pipes business with an objective to become a provider of an entire pumping system.

The company, on Monday, launched uPVC and CPVC pipes, designed with higher durability, which will have application in pumping and plumbing systems.

The company has invested Rs.120 crore to set up two state-of-the-art pipe manufacturing units at Gandhinagar in Gujarat and Hosur in Tamil Nadu. While the Gandhinagar unit, which caters to the requirement of markets in western, northern and central India, has become operational, the Hosur plant, with an investment of Rs.72 crore, will start production in August 2015.

“Making a foray into pipes segment is part of an overall business development strategy arising out of our five-year Vision 2020 by when we target to have a turnover of Rs.5,000 crore compared to Rs.1,300 crore in 2014-15. We could foresee an opportunity in the pipes segment, and we want to be an integrated pumping solution provider,” said G. Soundararajan, Vice-Chairman, CRI Pumps.

uPVC pipes are used as column pipes and casting pipes. These are used as plumbing, sewage and drainage pipes. CPVC pipes are used for hot and cold water and high pressure applications.

Mr. Soundararajan said that company would supply these pipes through its network of 4,000 dealers and 10,000 retailers.

A storehouse of everything organic



Chief Minister Oommen Chandy inaugurated an organic products-cum-eatery, Pathaayam, near the south-eastern gate of the Secretariat here on Tuesday.

Mr. Chandy was appreciative of the efforts to bring organic products and food items under one roof. Accompanying him was Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan and Chief Minister's wife Mariamma Oommen Chandy.

Pathaayam, which is a name familiar to organic food lovers in the city, has a range of organic products from chilli powder, turmeric powder, sprouts, and organic vegetables to skin-care products such as face cream, face pack, hair oil, and red sandal powder for sale.

There are also several medicines made from herbs, organic dish wash powder, mosquito coils, and various types of honey on offer. The restaurant also provides ethnic Kerala food.

Mr. Gangadharan, who heads the 'Pathaayam' team, says that only grains, seeds, and vegetables cultivated through organic means are used for making puttu, idiappam and other rice-based dishes and curries.

The preservatives used are mostly honey and rock salt. 'Pathaayam' does not offer tea or coffee.

Instead, it serves 'Jaappi', a drink consisting of water, jeera and other ingredients.

Prospects of producing bio-diesel from oil palm sludge to be explored

The prospects of extracting bio-diesel from the oil palm sludge will be explored at the proposed new oil palm factory at Apparaopeta in Dammapeta mandal, said Minister for Roads & Buildings T. Nageswara Rao.

He was speaking at a meeting held in connection with foundation stone laying ceremony in Apparaopeta late on Tuesday evening.

Earlier, Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy laid the foundation for the new oil palm factory in the village. The new factory, the second such facility to come up in the district, is expected to become operational in ten months, sources added.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Nageswara Rao said the government has promptly released Rs 10 crore for construction of the second oil palm factory in the district with a futuristic perspective. The new unit will ensure improved processing facilities to the oil palm growers in Dammapeta mandal and elsewhere in the district.

Collector K Ilambarithi and others spoke.

Govt. may hike sugar import duty to 40%

The government is likely to raise import duty on sugar to 40 per cent from the current 25 per cent to check sliding price of the sweetener and enable mills to clear mounting cane arrears of about Rs. 20,000 crore.

A meeting of informal group of ministers, headed by Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, on Tuesday, decided to recommend a hike in import duty of sugar.

A consensus also emerged on the issue of creating buffer stock, restructuring of loan, promotion of ethanol output, export subsidy on white sugar among others to help solve the current crisis faced by farmers and millers.

“We discussed the suggestions made by farmers and state governments for early clearance of cane dues. Looking at the plight of farmers and unprecedented situation which sugar industry is facing, we have arrived at a consensus on couple of them to help in solving the problems in short term as well as long term,” Mr. Paswan told *PTI*.

To implement some of the suggestions, the Cabinet proposals will be moved, while import duty can be hiked by the Finance Ministry through an executive order, sources said.

In August last year, import duty on both raw and refined sugar was raised to 25 per cent from 15 per cent to bail out the cash-starved sugar industry.

Besides Mr. Paswan, Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi and Minister of State for Agriculture Sanjeev Balyan were present in the meeting.

On April 15-16, the Food Minister had called two separate meetings of farmers and Chief Ministers to resolve the cane arrear crisis.

The Centre has recently provided a subsidy of Rs. 4,000 per tonne for the exports of 1.4 million tonnes of raw sugars to improve cash-flow of millers.

Crucial meet today on climate action

For a long time, climate action has been associated with cutting Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. And while the number one global greenhouse gas continues to retain its top spot, the evolving consensus is that cutting short-term pollutants such as hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs) and black carbon, is equally, if not less crucial.

On Wednesday, April 22, India will be among the group of countries discussing the phase-down of hydro fluorocarbons at the 35th Session of the Open-Ended Working Group of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol in

Bangkok. In a proposal submitted on April 17, India has discussed the modalities of the phase-down to be undertaken, which includes financial assistance for industry to switch to alternative green technologies, if the agreement comes through.

According to a March 2015 research paper brought out by the Institute of Governance and Sustainable Development, authors Durwood Zaelke, Nathan Borgford-Parnell and Stephen O. Andersen note that fast action under the Montreal Protocol can limit the growth of HFCs, prevent 100 to 200 billion tonnes of CO₂ – equivalent emissions by 2050, and avoid up to 0.5°C of warming by 2100.

Peter Bledsoe, Senior Energy and Policy Adviser at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, was appreciative of the Narendra Modi government's willingness to consider amending the Montreal Protocol to phase down HFCs and said India could now emerge as a global leader in climate action.

Professor V. Ramanathan, Distinguished Professor of Climate Sciences at the University of California at San Diego, told *The Hindu* that it was way back in 1975 that he had discovered the dangerous impact of halocarbons, the class of chemical compounds, including chlorofluorocarbons and HFCs.

In 2009, Mr. Ramanathan revisited this subject, and found that only by cutting short-lived climate pollutants could we stop world temperatures from reaching the 2 degree global warming threshold by 2050. He drew attention to how 1.6 million lives had been lost due to air pollution in India. Also 30-40 per cent of crops in the Indo-Gangetic plain were found destroyed due to emission of black carbons and HFCs.

Transition cost

But Distinguished Fellow (emeritus) at The Energy Research Institute (TERI) Chandrasekhar Dasgupta was wary of the enthusiasm displayed by the Indian government and climate scientists. "There is considerable cost involved in transitioning to new technologies," he said.

Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, there was an agreement to reimburse full incremental cost of any project/scheme to developing countries switching to greener technologies. But under the

Montreal Protocol, whether that would be the case is yet to be seen. Although, Mr. Bledsoe pointed out that countries bound by its agreement could access the Montreal Protocol Fund for their transition needs.

Cotton exports



Decline to 4.5 million bales this crop season

Affected by sluggish Chinese demand, India has exported only 4.5 million bales of cotton so far and the overall shipment are expected to fall by 29 per cent to 7 million bales in the ongoing crop year ending September, a top Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) official said on Tuesday. Total cotton exports from India, the world's largest producer and second-biggest seller, stood at 9.9 million bales in the last year crop year (October-September). "There is no possibility of export now as demand is not there. We have exported around 4.5 million bales of cotton so far. I don't think more than 7

million bales will be exported in this crop year,” a senior official of CCI told PTI.

Banks instructed to ensure compensation to all farmers

Authorities have issued instructions to banks here to not deny compensation to the rain-hit farmers and ensure payment to them on presenting the cheques for their crop losses, a senior official said.

The directions were issued after a farmer, Satish of Ajhai village, did not get his compensation amount due to some “technical errors”.

“Satish could not get payment for his compensation cheque on April 13 due to a technical error between two banks. Though Rs. 3 crore were deposited in SBI account on that day, however, it did not transfer the amount to Bank Of India, Chhatta, the same day,” District Magistrate Rajesh Kumar said. - PTI

The new seed bowl of Telangana



The horticulture hub of Aswaraopeta has positioned itself at the forefront of cultivation of horticultural crops and production of quality seedlings of various fruit crops in the entire Telangana State.

Endowed with favourable agro-climatic conditions and soil, the tribal sub-plan mandal emerged as a hub of horticulture crops mainly mango, oil palm and cashew over the years.

The mandal, which is home to reputed institutions such as Horticulture Research Station, Coconut Seed Garden and Oil Palm Processing unit, is poised to play a vital role in realising the Telangana government's ambitious plan of making Telangana State a "seed bowl" of India.

There are around 200 private horticulture nurseries located across the mandal. The private nurseries as well as the seed gardens of the Government Departments and agencies concerned earned wide reputation for supply of quality seedlings of different horticultural crops.

Farmers from not only the entire Telangana but also from the neighbouring States flock to Aswaraopet to procure the mango grafts, oil palm and coconut seedlings.

The coconut seed garden spread in 49 acres in Aswaraopeta is one of the prized possessions of the district.

It won wide accolades for raising quality seedlings of hybrid coconut varieties such as Chowghat Orange Dwarf (COD) and Malayan Orange, Green and Yellow Dwarfs.

The coconut seed garden is not only serving the needs of coconut farmers by supplying them quality seedlings on subsidy but also helping the Horticulture Department officials and owners of nurseries in enriching their knowledge base, says K. Suryanarayana, Assistant Director, Horticulture-II, Khammam.

A team from the Coconut Development Board of Assam had procured 12,000 hybrid coconut seed nuts from the seed garden in Aswaraopet recently. The garden has earned wide acclaim for its seed nuts and seedlings among the farmers of the State as well as the neighbouring States, he remarks.

Green tribunal's thumbs up for waste-to-energy projects

In what could be seen as a setback to those opposing burning of municipal solid wastes (MSW), the National Green Tribunal (NGT), New Delhi, has permitted the States, including Karnataka, to use incinerator technology for producing Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF), commonly known as waste-to-energy.

However, the Tribunal said no waste could be directly put into the incinerators or for power generation, except the specifically permitted. Only those wastes that are found unrecyclable after segregation should be put into the incinerators.

Also, the tribunal emphasised that it was “not putting any absolute restriction on RDF being used as power generation fuel, but first effort should be made for composting of wet waste”. The States are free to use RDF for generating fuel with due care and caution by framing necessary guidelines.

Meanwhile, the Central Pollution Control Board and the Ministry of Environment and Forests were directed to prescribe specific guidelines for emissions from incinerators.

The directions were issued on a case between city-based MSW expert Almitra H. Patel vs. Union of India that was referred to the NGT by the Supreme Court, which since 1996 had issued several directions on management of MSW across the country. Based on this case, the Centre had formulated the MSW (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000. The NGT also directed dividing the State into clusters for locating sufficient number of incinerator plants. Authorities were also asked to provide maximum space for plants to have large storage and processing area for wastes; ensure green belt of higher density around plants, and adopt new technologies.

Training in solid waste management

Training for heads of 42 village panchayats, where the district administration has proposed to introduce ‘Cleaning Guards’ system to effectively execute garbage cleaning and solid waste management programmes, was held at the Collectorate on Tuesday.

Inaugurating the programme, Collector M. Karunakaran said the 'Cleaning Guards' system was aimed at carrying out garbage cleaning to ensure better cleanliness. As this scheme is going to be implemented in 2,000 village panchayats across Tamil Nadu, the Centre has given as grant Rs.110 crore to the State. In other words, each selected village panchayat would receive Rs.5.50 lakh for the programme.

As per the norms for getting 'Cleaning Guards', the beneficiary village panchayat would have a population of 10,000 and situated close to an urban local body. Or, the village panchayat should house a tourist spot or a major industry or be located close to busy highway or railway station so that 'Cleaning Guards' system can be introduced there.

The residents, after separating the degradable and non-degradable garbage in their houses, should hand over it separately to the 'Cleaning Guards' as they visit the houses at a specified time every day. While the degradable waste will be converted into manure, the non-degradable waste will be used for filling sanitary and other pits without affecting the groundwater table and environment.

Every 150 family will be covered by a 'Cleaning Guard', who will be paid by the village-level Poverty Alleviation Association. He or she will be provided with uniforms, a tricycle, shredder, identity card, gloves, cap etc. Project Director, DRDA, H. Vijayakumar, Project Director, Tamil Nadu Rural Livelihood Programme, Jayakumar, and others participated.

Farmer discovers ancient fossil!

An Australian farmer has found the remains of a 100 million-year-old dinosaur on his property in Queensland state, a media report said on Tuesday.

Robert Hacon discovered the 1.6 metre fossilised jaw of a 'Kronosaurus Queenslandicus', a 11-metre long predator that dominated Australia's great inland sea between 110 and 115 million years ago, The Brisbane Times reported.

"I was out poisoning prickly Acacia and saw some objects shining in the distance," Robert Hacon said.

“At first glance I thought they were fossilised mussel shells so I drove away. Ten minutes later my curiosity got the better of me and I turned back.”

The Queenslandicus had a crocodile-like head, a body with four powerful flippers, jaws twice as powerful as those of a saltwater crocodile and curved teeth the size of bananas.

“I’ve been looking for something like this all my life but never thought I’d find such an amazing fossil,” Hacon said.

The first recorded Kronosaurus Queenslandicus remains were discovered near Queensland Hughenden town in 1899, though the most famous is a near-complete skeleton that resides in Harvard University’s Museum of Comparative Zoology. It went on public display in 1958. IANS

Focus on inland fish culture



Inland fish culture offers great scope for profitable revenue generation in Tiruvarur district where the potential is yet to be harnessed fully, Collector M. Mathivanan exhorted entrepreneurs at the Fisheries Mela held here on Tuesday.

Addressing the mela organised by the State Department of Fisheries and the National Fisheries Development Board to create awareness of inland fish culture prospects among the public, he said modern gadgets have come in

large numbers to facilitate inland fish culture; besides nutritive fish feed that facilitate bountiful harvest could enhance the revenue from aquaculture practices.

Tapping the market potential of inland fish and value addition were challenging areas where increased concentration would give profitable returns to fish culture entrepreneur in Tiruvarur district. Finding markets in nearby districts was a viable option that could be explored with confidence, he said.

In Tiruvarur district, inland fish culture was practiced in 650 ponds spread over 520 hectares. More than 1,165 farm ponds have been excavated in this district in the past three years and they offered huge potential for inland fish culture, he said.

Joint Director of Fisheries M. Subburaj opined that a huge scope existed in inland fish culture as farm ponds, village ponds and other possible secure water bodies offered potential sites for taking up fish culture in this district. Inland fish culture offered an avenue for a remunerative venture and the Department of Fisheries had been promoting it by offering schemes tailor-made for energetic entrepreneur. Banks were offering adequate support through lending at promising rates, he said.

Speakers discussed various State and Central government schemes for taking up inland fish culture, subsidies available, credit facilities extended by lending institutions. Fish farmers raised issues pertaining to market potential for specific varieties of fish reared in inland culture and got solutions for them. Search for newer markets was a constant desire by fish culture practitioners to ensure better returns, they said.

Assistant Director of Fisheries K. Thirunavukkarasu, Fisheries Inspector M. Kadiresan, officials from NABARD and banking institutions as also representatives of various organisations involved in inland fish culture gadget manufacturing and marketing spoke.

Gale destroys over a lakh banana saplings



Gale coupled with downpour in the early hours of Tuesday destroyed over a lakh banana saplings on over 5,000 acre in Nanguneri taluk, much to the agony of farmers.

As a few parts of the district are witnessing sporadic rain over the past few days, temperature usually hovering beyond 40 degree Celsius in the district during this period is very much under control in these ‘blessed areas.’

However, the gale destroyed the saplings in Nanguneri taluk that recorded 178 mm rainfall.

“The saplings, all aged between 8 and 11 months, cultivated in Nanguneri, Marukaalkurichi, Thennimalai, Singaneri, Kaaduvetti, Devanallur Idaiyankulam, Kokkaneri, Kaarankaadu and Pattapillai, were damaged. Since the farmers have lost the crop that was almost ready for harvest, the State government should give a compensation of at least Rs.100 per sapling,” said S.V. Krishnan, former Nanguneri MLA.

The gale and rain also damaged electric poles along the 16-feet-wide road leading from Perumal Nagar bus-stop on Nanguneri – Thisaiyanvilai stretch to Kaarankaadu, where lightning killed five cows in the wee hours of Tuesday.

When lightning struck Poolpandi (50) of Arampoondaarkulam near Nanguneri even as he was returning from his ranch, he died on the spot to take the number of victims to 3 as one Ramasamy of Perumpaththu and

polytechnic student Anto of Somanathaperi were also killed in the past few days while three more from Perumpaththu are undergoing treatment at Tirunelveli Medical College Hospital. “The State government should give Rs. 5 lakh each as compensation to the families that have lost their breadwinners to lightning,” said Mr. Krishnan.



Dietary supplements may cause cancer



Over-the-counter dietary supplements you thought were [good](#) for you may actually increase cancer risk if taken in excess of the recommended daily amount, says a [new](#) research.

“We are not sure why this is happening at the molecular level but evidence shows that people who take more dietary supplements than needed tend to have a higher risk of developing cancer,” said lead researcher Tim Byers from the University of Colorado Cancer Centre.

The line of research started 20 years ago with the observation that people who ate more fruits and vegetables tended to have less cancer.

Researchers including Byers wanted to see if taking extra vitamins and minerals would reduce cancer risk even further. They studied thousands of patients for 10 years, who were taking dietary supplements and placebos. The results were not what they expected.

“We found that the supplements were actually not beneficial for their health. In fact, some people actually got more cancer while on the vitamins,” Byers said.

One trial exploring the effects of beta-keratin supplements showed that taking more than the recommended dosage increased the risk of developing both lung cancer and heart disease by 20 percent.

Folic acid, which was thought to help reduce the number of polyps in a colon, actually increased the number in another trial.

“If taken at the correct dosage, multi-vitamins can be good for you. But there is no substitute for good, nutritional food,” he concluded.

Byers said that people can get the daily recommended doses of vitamins and minerals in their diets by eating healthy meals and that many adults who take vitamin supplements may not need them.

The findings were presented at the American Association for Cancer Research Annual Meeting 2015 in Pennsylvania, US.

- See more at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/dietary-supplements-may-cause-cancer/#sthash.FdobTGWu.dpuf>



THE TIMES OF INDIA

562mm rain in 5 days damages crops on 2,800 ha in district

Unseasonal rain measuring 562.7mm across the district over the last five days has affected 97 villages, damaged 2,807 hectares of agricultural land and caused loss to over 2,500 farmers.

"Reports reaching here stated that the rain damaged 223 houses. While one person died when lightning struck him, 200 cattle heads and hens died," an official in the district collectorate said on Monday.

The official said that crops like onion, gram, grapes, pomegranate and other vegetables have been damaged. The worst affected villages are in Igatpuri, Dindori and Chandwad, Nandgaon, Yeola, Niphad, Deola and Malegaon talukas. The quantum of loss was yet to be ascertained.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast more showers at isolated places during the next 48 hours.

Sunday will be farmers' day at APMC yards soon

BELAGAVI: With a view to curb the menace of middlemen and help farmers sell their produce directly to consumers, the state government will soon open Sunday markets at the APMC yards across the state.

The directorate of APMC, Bengaluru, has directed the secretaries of the respective APMCs to allocate space for the market which will run on every

Sunday. The state government had mooted the concept of Sunday market in its 2014-15 budget. The market will come up at Belagavi, Mysuru, Hubballi, Udupi, Kalaburagi, Ballari and Davanagere APMCs.

At the Sunday market, farmers will not have to pay brokerage to middlemen, as it happens at the regular APMC market. They can directly sell their farm and dairy products including grains, vegetables, milk, milk products and even handicrafts and homemade items like pickles and papad. There will be no interference whatsoever by brokers or any other third party.

Belagavi APMC has already allocated space for this market in its premises. A food corner selling delicious snacks and tea will be an added attraction on Sundays.

A playground for children is also coming up at the park opposite to the APMC yard so as to attract more buyers and sellers.

The state government has allocated Rs 1 crore for each of the seven APMCs to set up the Sunday market. Muddu Mohan, director, APMC directorate, Bengaluru, has directed the secretaries of the respective APMCs to prepare an action plan by discussing the proposal with executive engineers and the APMC committee.

Speaking to TOI, N Ramsubbayya, secretary, APMC, Belagavi, said that the action plan of the market is ready. "We will start the work once we get the approval from the Bengaluru office," he said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

How ICT innovations can help farmers



Public and private actors are looking for effective solutions to address challenges in agriculture, including how to address the abundant information needs of farmers and make agriculture profitable for them.

Farmers need updated information to empower themselves in taking research to land, avail timely and adequate credit, seek and act on market intelligence reports and access market and negotiate prices. This critical information may increase farmer's productivity, income as well as protect their food security and livelihoods.

Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in innovative ways through ICT-enabled services helps in disseminating timely information on agricultural advisories, financial services and agricultural

marketing and risk transfer to the farmer to improve their capacity and mitigate risks.

Agricultural advisory

Farmers' information priorities include accurate local weather forecasts, crop specific advisory sequenced according to the stage in the crop cycle and price information.

ICTs helps in capturing real time weather parameters through remote sensors, collect commodity prices through mobile technologies and acquire updated research findings regarding crops through the web-based platforms of agricultural universities and research institutes.

The information, thus, collected is stored in database and triggered automatically to disseminate localised and personalised information on weather, commodity prices and crop cultivation to registered farmers through Short Messaging Service (SMS) and Interactive Voice response (IVR) over the mobile communication channel. This updated information empowers farmer as they are better informed and prepared themselves to utilise their resources profitably.

Financial services

Availability and access to adequate, timely and low-cost credit from banks is of great importance for sustainable and profitable farming.

The challenges to bring all farmers within the banking reach at affordable cost have been fulfilled through remote bank transactions assisted by hand-held biometric transaction devices.

The Banks facilitate financial services such as savings, credit, insurance and remittance with the help of these devices accessed through smart cards. Smart cards hold farmers' information regarding the land details, crop history and financial transactions, which help bank to process and sanction crop loan faster.

Thus, the farmer needs to initiate the loan procedure through the hand-held device available at the village and visit the bank to collect the loan amount upon confirmation on loan sanction. This saves the farmer valuable time and energy to obtain institutional loans.

Agricultural marketing

The agriculture market size and its reach have increased manifold over the years due to linkages with distant and overseas markets. Farmers are using various ICT platforms viz. mobiles, web-portals, information kiosks, e-markets, etc for marketing their produce.

ICT platform adds market knowledge and give farmer greater confidence in understanding the demand and enhance ability to the control production and manage supply chains. It also helps farmers to deal directly with large wholesalers or traders or directly with the processors rather than small-scale intermediaries.

Thus, ICT platforms assist in developing a broader network of contacts which helps in making better decision regarding transportation and logistics, price and location, supply and demand and cheaper access to inputs.

Risk transfer

Volatility in commodity price and the threat of climate change have increased interest in risk transfer instruments such as insurance and price hedging more relevant and affordable for farmers.

The ability of mobile platform to facilitate financial transactions, capturing real-time data about crop loss and automatically perform damage assessment can definitely help in scaling up risk transfer instruments for farmers.

Similarly, accessing the futures and national spot markets for agri-commodities with real-time price dissemination help farmers or farmer groups to hedge their positions or opportunity to sell online at the spot markets.

Way ahead

Robust and economical mobile infrastructure is imperative for exchange of vital information between farmers and service providers.

Further, the use of smartphones and tabs for information dissemination is more efficient and tailored for the users as it facilitates to install software applications for getting advanced risk mitigating strategies such as early

warnings and advisory information. It also helps in integrating supply chain with GPS which provides mapping functionality.

Thus, ICT innovation empowers farmers by facilitating timely access to localised and personalised information for greater control of their production, risks and thus market their produce to identified market opportunities.

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

‘We want to help start-ups in food, agri space’



Eastern Group, the leading spice business conglomerate, has recently partnered with the Rs.125-crore CapAleph Indian Millennium Fund to support entrepreneurship in the food and agriculture space.

According to Navas Meeran, Chairman, the company intends to leverage the experience of the group to help budding entrepreneurs in the sector. The engagement with the fund is a testimony to the family's long-standing commitment to facilitate innovative entrepreneurs, he told *BusinessLine* in an interview. Edited excerpts:

Why did Eastern foray into private equity?

The food industry is undergoing huge changes. It is becoming more and more refined as time passes. The group has been in this sector for the past 35 years. We have experience in all the three areas – back end, processing and front-end of the food business. Therefore, we thought of taking the lead in bringing out positive changes in the sector and decided to sponsor the Rs. 125-crore CapAleph Indian Millennium SME Fund.

George Thomas, who heads CapAleph Advisors, also has experience in the food industry and a successful track record in the private equity sector. Our experience in the food and agriculture space and CapAleph's expertise in the private equity will definitely have a unique combination that can help the budding enterprises in the sector.

What kind of businesses are you looking to fund in the sector?

We are looking to fund innovative enterprises in the sector. Many opportunities exist in the food and agriculture sector. However, most proposals we received are 'me too' businesses, and a copy of the existing business models. We are not interested in them and are looking at innovative models that have the potential to impact the whole supply chain.

The SME fund is targeting a first close by June with a corpus of between Rs. 50-75 crore and a final close by December. It will make investment commitments of up to Rs. 10-15 crore in food and agriculture companies, where it will seek significant ownership to help build these businesses with deep operational engagement. It has also formal alignment with a few international funds, with a view to jointly investing in big-ticket investments of up to Rs. 75 crore.

What are the factors driving the changes in the industry?

With growing nuclear families and working parents, today people do not have much time for cooking. The disposable income and changes in lifestyle have also led to increasing demand for convenience foods and ready-to-eat products. This is expected to go up in the coming days.

However, consumers are looking for quality and branded food items. The concept of product liability is also gaining acceptance with consumers demanding products that are free of pesticides and other chemical residues. On the other side, organic farming has its own problems of viability and scale. Therefore, the need of the hour is to introduce an integrated pest

management system that would help reduce the use of pesticides, and eliminate chemical residues in food. This will help us create a win-win situation, with both the farmers and the consumers benefiting from it.

With the reduction in land availability, there is a need to increase the productivity of land for farming by adopting better technologies and quality seeds. The overall ecosystem has to improve, not just the farmer.

How could the sanctioned mega food parks help the industry?

The mega food parks should be very positive for the industry especially for Kerala, since the state is one of the leaders in the food processing sector. The high levels of hygiene and wide variety of cuisines make the State a preferred destination for players in the sector. The strong Malayali Diaspora provides a vibrant market for the food processing industry.

On the performance of Eastern group...

We have monthly spice sales of over 4,000 tonnes this year. Of this, 2,500 tonnes are being sold in Kerala, while 1,000 tonnes in other states. Exports account for 800 tonnes a month. Last year, we had recorded a turnover of Rs. 658 crore, registering an 18 per cent growth. Of this, Rs. 163 crore comes from exports. We have set a target of achieving a 60 per cent growth in sales turnover in the domestic market and over 65 per cent in exports in the current fiscal.

Bumper crop mashes potato farmers' hopes



Potato farmers in Gujarat are a worried lot. With harvest being bumper and unseasonal rains affecting the quality, potato prices have come down to one-third of what it was last year.

The first estimate, as on February 2015, puts the country's potato output at around 421 lakh tonnes (lt) – about 6 lt higher than last year.

Ill-timed rain

However, unseasonal rain during March-April in growing regions damaged the crop in some parts while in most places, it affected the crop quality. “The crop became wet and unsuitable for cold storage. Hence, farmers have started bringing the crop to market. This low quality produce flooded the market and led to a price crash,” said Ganpatbhai Ladhambhai of Batata Utpadak Khedut Sangathan Samiti, an association of potato farmers in Deesa, North Gujarat.

Arrivals up

At the Agra market, potato arrivals were 3,540 tonnes with price ruling quoting in the range of Rs. 300-425 a quintal on April 21.

Last year during the same period, arrivals were almost half at 1,840 tonnes while prices ere Rs. 1,060.

Exports rise

Meanwhile, exports of potato have increased.

However, that is not helping potato farmers to get better price for their crop. National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF) data showed exported increased from 1.66 lt in 2013-14 to 2.75 lt in 2014-15.

“Prices have remained low because of production glut this year. Secondly, rains in the growing regions during March-April hampered the quality of the 20 per cent. In most parts, about 80 per cent potato was already harvested and stored in cold storages,” said RP Gupta, Director, NHRDF. However, Gupta believes that estimates about potato production may be revised upwards.

Production cost

“Potato crop cost us about Rs. 70,000 an acre. We got the production of around 15-15.5 tonnes/acre. This fetched us only Rs. 45,000 an acre,” said Ladhahbai, who cultivated potato on about 8 acres of land.

But many farmers in Gujarat preferred not to lift potato from the field.

“It is useless to incur more cost on transportation of such crop which will fetch you just Rs. 3 a kg,” said Ramanbhai Mali, a potato farmer from North Gujarat.

Experts believe prices will stabilise after April and the trend will reverse.

Get ready to pay 65% more for mango

After unseasonal showers and hailstorms through most of March and early April, consumers are likely to feel the pinch while buying mangoes this summer.

An Assocham study released here on Tuesday estimates that prices of the fruit are up by as much as 65 per cent after crop losses of up to 50 per cent were recorded in key growing States.

The study – titled ‘Mango – Anxiety on Production and Export Front’ – found that the premium Alphonso mangoes were selling at Rs. 500-600 a dozen, while lower grade varieties quoted at Rs. 100.

Prices have shot up between 50 and 65 per cent, it estimates, at a pace much higher than other fruits and vegetables.

Damaged crops

“Both farmers and consumers are at the receiving end of the havoc caused by the rains with maximum damage reported in Uttar Pradesh which produces a large variety of mangoes in over a dozen belts such as Malihabad, Shahabad, Amroha, Bulandshahr, Hardoi, Unnao, Barabanki and Saharanpur,” said an Assocham statement.

Preliminary estimates peg production losses of at least 20 per cent with parts of UP, which accounts for one-fourth of mango output in India, recording almost 50 per cent damage. Maharashtra was another State to be affected, the statement said.

Other States which produce significant quantities of mangoes include Andhra Pradesh where output is as much as UP, Karnataka (10 per cent) and Bihar (7.6 per cent).

“Various State Governments have announced relief measures and financial compensation, they are not sufficient to mitigate farmers’ losses and curb rising prices,” said DS Rawat, Secretary-General, Assocham.

Exports scenario

The lower output will also affect exports, but overseas sales of mangoes in good times has been negligible as well, said the statement.

“Considering the production volume and variety of Indian mangoes, exports of 41,280 tonnes are significant, whereas Pakistan which produces just around 1 million tonnes exports 40,000 tonnes. Thus, India’s share in the global market is minuscule,” it said.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) accounts for 61 per cent of Indian mango exports, followed by the United Kingdom (12 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (5 per cent).

Exports have been growing quickest in Qatar (110 per cent), US (88 per cent), Oman (84 per cent), Nepal (70 per cent) and Kuwait (46 per cent).

Pre-monsoon rain peaks over Kerala, may continue into next week



Pre-monsoon rain is peaking over Kerala as heavy to very heavy rain lashed many places of the State during the 24 hours ending Tuesday morning and later into the day.

This represents the ‘pre-monsoon rain peak,’ culmination of a chain of events triggered by the warming of the south Bay of Bengal and leading up to the breakout of thundershowers over Kerala, gateway for the South-West monsoon.

Heavy rain

The pre-monsoon rain peak formed some 10 days earlier than normal this year, an indication of earlier than normal monsoon onset, according to eminent scientist and researcher PV Joseph. Resultant thundershowers have been lashing Kerala right from April 8.

An India Met Department update said that rainfall occurred at a few places over south Tamil Nadu during the 24 hours ending Tuesday morning.

Isolated rainfall was reported from north Tamil Nadu, coastal and south interior Karnataka.

Its outlook suggested that heavy rain could continue to lash Kerala through the rest of the week.

The US Climate Prediction Centre is of the view that rains, though of lesser intensity, would be the predominant theme here until the month-end. The proximate cause appears to be a persisting cyclonic circulation over Maldives-Lakshadweep.

MJO wave

What is likely making it roar into hectic activity is a passing Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) wave to the south of Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The wave travels periodically from west to east from east African coast, wades into the Indian Ocean, and is bound for South China Sea/west Pacific in due course.

The slow-moving wave traverses the high altitude, but can set up cloudiness, storms and even cyclones at the ground-level, and is also known to trigger the onset of monsoon.

Weather watchers keep a close track of the wave to seek out its movement around the time the monsoon is scheduled to make the onset over Kerala, which is June 1.

Rain in North-East

As of Tuesday, the peak cloudiness associated with the MJO hung mostly around Sri Lanka with a heavy limb extending across the Comorin region into Kerala and neighbourhood.

Apart from Kerala and neighbourhood, the other rainfall peak was located by the US Climate Prediction Centre to over the north-eastern States.

Already hosting the seasonal 'kalbaisakhi' thundershowers, these States have been marked out as a potential region for heavy rain during this week as well as into the next.

Elsewhere, heat wave conditions prevailed over Saurashtra and Kutch but seemed to have ejected out of Rajasthan, thanks to the presence of a western disturbance over Jammu and Kashmir.

AP poultry industry downplays bird flu impact

With the bird flu threat causing heavy losses in the last few days, the poultry industry in Telangana has begun a fire-fighting exercise, saying the virus has been curtailed in the State.

It seeks to downplay the incidence and possible impact on human health.

The Government has culled about two lakh birds, both broilers and layers (egg laying birds), in a radius of one km around the poultry farm that was hit by the virus first a week ago.

Leaders of Telangana State Poultry Federation, Poultry Breeders Association (Telangana) and National Eggo Co-ordination Committee (NECC) addressed a media conference here on Tuesday to allay fears.

Control measures

“The Government officials have got all the birds in a radius of one km and have collected samples of over 12,000 birds in a radius of nine km in the surveillance zone. The virus has been contained and there is no need for worry,” G Anand, General Manager of Venkateswhara Hatcheries, said.

Sales dip

The ₹10,000-crore poultry industry suffered heavily ever since the incidence was registered a week ago in a poultry farm in Hayathnagar mandal. Sales dipped in the ranges of 20-60 per cent in some areas, depending on the proximity.

The State is a top player in the poultry industry with a broiler population of 2 crore and production of 3.5 crore eggs a day.

The State is the hub for the poultry industry in the country with over 60 lakh breeders catering to farms in different States.

Lower prices

“As it is the industry was reporting lower prices than the threshold prices. The bird flu outbreak only added to it. We are hoping to overcome this in the next one to two weeks,” he said.

Telangana State Poultry Federation President Errabelli Pradeep Rao said that the virus died when cooked at temperatures beyond 70 degrees.