

24-04-2015

# THE HINDU

## Banana ripening centre starts receiving growers' patronage



The banana ripening centre set up by the Primary Agricultural Co-operative Credit Society at Varadarajapuram near Thottiyam has started attracting a large number of banana growers this season, thanks to high yield and growing awareness.

The centre, which has been functioning since June 2013, received relatively poor patronage during the banana season between January and May in 2014, and it did not bring much revenue last year, “However, during the current season since January this year, the centre has started earning revenue enabling us to foot the maintenance bill, including power bill,” said P.Sankar, president of the society. The average quantity of

goods stored at the warehouse now stands at three tonnes against the storage capacity of 10 tonnes.

The society collects Rs.1,200 a tonne for storing banana for ripening for two days. The centre had netted a revenue of around Rs. 54,000 a month this season.

Through the ripening process at the centre, the shelf life of the fruit is enhanced and the nutritional content of the fruit also remains intact. S.Saravanan, secretary of the society, said the society has been organising sustained awareness campaign among banana cultivators about the advantages of the centre. About 3,000 acres of land had been brought under banana in and around Varadarajapuram by 1,500 members of the society.

The uniform ripening process is achieved at the chamber as it maintains a steady temperature of 18-21 degree Celsius. Cold storage facility available at the centre allows banana to be stored for a maximum of 20 days at a steady temperature of 13 degree Celsius.

The ripening centre was constructed at an estimate of Rs.32.14 lakh of which Rs. 28 lakh was contributed by the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development and the rest, Rs.4.14 lakh, by the Tiruchi District Central Cooperative Bank.

Although it was declared open in June 2013, the ripening process commenced six months later in January 2014 when the crop was harvested.

## The farmland as classroom



A group of researchers at IIT-Kharagpur have turned farmlands near the campus into a ‘laboratory’ to experiment with new agricultural technologies and help farmers whose land they have “adopted” to improve their yield.

Around 10 kilometres away from the campus, the team adopted 14 acres of land from a group of farmers at Khentia village.

Most of the land, in small fragments, was lying barren for the last few years. With hope in their eyes, the farmers agreed to turn in their farmlands to the IIT team.

The work began last November with tilling, ploughing and levelling of the fragmented plot to make it a single unit.

“We are introducing new technologies like SRI to increase rice yield with less water. To promote crop diversification, cash crops like sweet corn, peanut and soybean have been introduced,” project in-charge P.B.S. Bhadoria told PTI.

To encourage organic farming, they have started creating vermicompost units.

The IIT team has dug up a tubewell and also made a pond for rainwater harvesting and pisciculture.

Forty-eight-year-old Jagannath Das, who owns less than 20 decimal land, says he is now learning new things about growing crops.

“We allowed them to take charge of our land because of the trust we have on a large institution like IIT. Now we are learning new things as if our farmland has become a classroom,” Das said.

Abhishek Singhania, who studied metallurgy from IIT Madras and was working with the multinational PricewaterhouseCoopers, left his job in Saudi Arabia to join this ‘green revolution’ last month.

“After learning about the pathetic condition of our farmers I decided to help them by joining this project. My role is to convince farmers to adopt new technology,” he said.

Once the harvesting is done next month, he will help farmers get good prices for their produce, lest they fall into the trap of middlemen.

“They need the right people to guide them at every stage of farming and marketing. I am trying to make this model a sustainable one so that once we leave they are able to do everything on their own,” Singhania says.

Project officer and agriculture expert Tanumoy Bera said they are using sustainable technology for optimum utilisation of resources and minimum effect on the environment.

SRI (System of Rice Intensification) needs 30-40 per cent less water and pesticides but gives a higher yield.

Enthused by the success of the project, other farmers near the project area are also taking notes and have even approached the IIT to replicate the model.

“We would be seeking funds from the industry and other organisations to adopt more villages for demonstration of technology for a smaller period of one year,” Bhadoria says.

Khentia village, where the project would go on for a period of three years, would be developed as a model village under ‘Unnat Bharat Abhiyan’.

In the next phase, they would introduce sensor-based irrigation, sprinkler irrigation, soil testing kits, etc.

“The share of the produce would be shared among the farmers in proportion to their land holding,” he says. PTI

*They need the right people to guide them at every stage of farming and marketing. I am trying to make this model a sustainable one so that once we leave they are able to do everything on their own.*

*- Abhishek Singhanian, who studied metallurgy from IIT Madras and was working with the multinational PricewaterhouseCoopers, left his job in Saudi Arabia to join this project last month.*

### Boost to organic farming

<b>KAU- FACT Brand</b> KAU products to be marketed through FACT outlets	<b>Microbial inoculants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pseudomonas fluorescens</li><li>• Trichoderma</li></ul>	<b>Bio-fertilizers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PGPR* Mix-I</li><li>• PGPR Mix-II</li></ul>
	<b>Easy availability of organic farming inputs</b>	
<b>Kerala to be organic State by 2016</b>		
Lignocellulolytic organisms, named Composting Inoculum, is a consortium of microorganisms capable of decomposing of vegetable and food waste. This technique developed by the KAU has been successfully pilot tested.		
<b>PGPR: Plant Growth Promoting Rizobacteria</b>		

Giving a big fillip to the organic farming drive in the State, Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Ltd (FACT) for marketing microbial inoculants and bio-fertilizers.

According to the MoU, microbial inoculants of bio-pesticides such as *Pseudomonas fluorescens* and *Trichoderma* and bio-fertilizers such as PGPR Mix-I and PGPR Mix-II and composting inoculants from KAU production centres will be marketed through FACT outlets as KAU-FACT Brand.

The MoU was signed by KAU Registrar P.V. Balachandran and K. Jose Paul, Chief Distribution Manager, FACT, in the presence of KAU Vice Chancellor P. Rajendran and Director of Research T.R. Gopalakrishnan.

According to Dr. Rajendran, the pact would benefit the farming community as it would facilitate easy availability of organic farming inputs across the State. “The government has already declared to make Kerala an organic State by 2016. The combined effort of the KAU and FACT will be a catalyst to this move. KAU’s technology to produce bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers is being used by the Agricultural Department and some private agencies, but the production and marketing is well short of demand,” he said.

Bio-fertilizers provide major nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. The process of biological nitrogen fixation offers an economically attractive and ecologically sound means of reducing external nitrogen input, experts in the KAU said.

### **Panel to study deep-sea fishing**

Union Minister for Agriculture Radha Mohan Singh has assured a delegation of fishermen that the recommendations in the Dr. B. Meenakumari Committee report on deep-sea fishing will not be implemented.

The assurance came during a meeting of the delegation comprising leaders of fishermen’s organisations with the Minister in New Delhi on

Thursday, said D. Majeendran of the Kerala Swathanthra Matsyathozhilali Federation. The delegation included M. Elango and T. Peter of the National Fish Workers' Forum.

The government constituted a committee headed by Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar to study issues related to deep-sea fishing, including the Letter of Permits to foreign or joint venture companies for fishing in Indian waters.

The committee will comprise representatives of fishermen's unions, Ministers of coastal States, and Fisheries Secretaries from these States. Mr. Majeendran said the Defence Minister would meet leaders of fishermen's unions on Friday afternoon to discuss the preliminaries.

Mr. Mohan Singh also assured the leaders that stakeholders would be consulted before any policy was formulated on deep-sea fishing in the country.

The Meenakumari committee was constituted on the basis of a call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a Blue Revolution in the country. However, fishermen's unions had been on the warpath ever since the report was released on August 20 last year.

Dr. Meenakumari, formerly a scientist at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute here, had recommended, among other things, issue of Letters of Permits to joint ventures or foreign vessels as Indian fishing capabilities were not enough to exploit the resources.

### **Guidelines issued**

The Union Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy, and Fisheries had earlier this year issued guidelines on deep sea-fishing based on the recommendations of the committee.



## **Seminar on spices, medicinal crops from tomorrow**

The Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station (ZAHRS), affiliated to University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, and others are jointly organising a State-level seminar on spices and medicinal crops at Brahmavar in Udupi district on April 25 and 26.

In a release here on Thursday, M. Hanumanthappa, Associate Director, ZAHRS, said the demand for black pepper was increasing and was fetching good returns to the farmers. But the drawback was that the black pepper crop was subject to frequent destruction due to rain.

Normally such crop-related damages occurred during the monsoon. The chief objective of the seminar was to give comprehensive knowledge to farmers on protecting their crops. The seminar would also give information about ginger, turmeric and other medicinal crops to the farmers.

Another intention of the seminar, which would be held at the ZAHRS, was to give first-hand knowledge about spices and medicinal crops. The seminar would include demonstration on cultivation of crops, interaction with experts and exposure to new farm technology. Farmers could ask questions to experts and get their doubts cleared. “We want the seminar to be a farmers’ fest,” he said.

Pramod Madhwaraj, MLA, would inaugurate the seminar. C. Vasudevappa, Vice-Chancellor of UAHS, Shivamogga, would preside over the inaugural function. Homi Cherian, Director of Arecanut and Spices Directorate, Kozhikode, would inaugurate the exhibition. J. Venkatesh, Research Director, Horticulture University, Bagalkot, would release the technical booklet.



The first day of seminar would focus on spices, while the second day would concentrate on medicinal crops. Senior scientists from UAHS, Shivamogga, and other experts, would also participate in the seminar.

Nearly 20,000 farmers were expected to participate. There would be about 50 stalls at the exhibition.

These stalls will focus on different varieties of paddy, demonstration on fodder, cashew transplantation, protection of water and soil in fields, organic fertilizers, dairy farming, fisheries, among others.

*Nearly 20,000 farmers expected to take part in the event*

### **Farmers in Mysuru district gear up for starting work for the kharif season**



Agricultural activities in Mysuru district for the kharif season have gained momentum following good rains in most parts of the district in the last fortnight. According to the Agriculture Department, sowing has completed in over 7,884 hectares in the district as against the targeted 3,90,690 hectares for the kharif season. Similarly sowing has completed in over 7,884 hectares as against the targeted 2,74,090 hectares in the district. However, sowing is yet to be commence in over 1,16,600 hectares.

Farmers in most of the places in the district are busy preparing the fields to sow green gram, black gram, hybrid jowar, maize and cotton.

M. Mahanteshappa, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* here on Thursday that 'subsidised' seeds of different crops have been stored in sufficient quantity at all the Raitha Samparka Kendras, and farmers can purchase the seeds as and when they need it. Required quantity of fertilizers have also been stored at the Karnataka State Marketing Federation and at the societies, and also at the private dealers and he claimed that there would not be any fertilizer shortage during the entire kharif season.

According to the Joint Director, Mysuru district has received an average of 45 mm rainfall in the first 20 days of April. H.D. Kote had received 27.5 mm, Hunsur 31.1, K.R. Nagar 25.3, Mysuru taluk 34.3, and Nanjangud taluk received 38.7 mm, Piriapatna 30.4 and T.Narasipura received 21.7 mm rainfall up to April 20. All taluks have received over and above the normal rainfall in the past four months, he added.

Reviewing the steps taken by the department to help the farmers during the kharif season, the Chief Executive Officer of the Mysuru Zilla Panchayat P.A. Gopal on Thursday instructed the officials concerned to be on the field and help and educate farmers on the scientific way of cultivation. He asked the officials concerned to ensure that required quantity of seeds are made available at subsidised rates at all the RSKs, and he told the Joint Director to ensure that all fertilizers are made available in required quantity in the district.

Officials from departments of horticulture, sericulture and veterinary were among many other officials present at the meeting that was convened as part of the 'Krishi Divas' celebrated the office of the Department of Agriculture on Thursday.

## **Paddy farmers to launch stir**

Paddy farmers in the region are gearing up to agitate against the delay by the government in disbursing their dues for the procured paddy. According to P.R. Salimkumar, president of Kerala Karshaka Koottayma, a farmers' collective, paddy worth nearly Rs. 348.08 crore have been procured by the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation (Supplyco) across the State with the highest being from Alappuzha (worth Rs. 143.41 crore) and Palakkad (worth Rs. 107.84 crore). "It had been announced by the Chief Minister that the payments would be made directly to the farmers' bank accounts within five days of issuing the Paddy Receipt Sheet (PRS). They had claimed that the timely payment of the dues would be a 'Vishu kaineetam' for the farmers. However, we are yet to receive our dues even after over 50 days of procurement. Most farmers are struggling to prepare for the additional crop season. A total of 1,25,579 farmers are awaiting their payments," he said



## **Under priority lending, small farmers to get bigger loans**



Revamping the priority sector lending (PSL) norms for banks, the Reserve Bank of India(RBI) on Thursday set targets for lending to small & marginal farmers, revised the limits for housing loans under such lending and asked foreign banks to achieve targets by March 2018.

The RBI has also removed the distinction between direct and indirect agriculture and also added medium enterprises, social infrastructure and renewable energy to the priority sector, in addition to the existing categories.

“The lending to agriculture sector has been re-defined to include farm credit (which will include short-term crop loans and medium/long-term credit to farmers),agriculture infrastructure and ancillary activities,” the RBI said in a notification. The total PSL target will remain at 40 per cent of the bank credit.

Within the 18 per cent target set for agriculture, the RBI has fixed a target of 8 per cent lending target for small and marginal farmers to be achieved in a phased manner — 7 per cent by March 2016 and 8 per cent by March 2017.

For the purpose of computation of 7-8 per cent target, small and marginal farmers will include: farmers with landholding of up to 1 hectare (considered as marginal farmers and farmers with a landholding of more than 1 hectare and up to 2 hectares (small farmers), landless agricultural labourers, tenant farmers, oral lessees and share-croppers.

Similarly, it has fixed a target of 7.5 per cent for micro enterprises in a phased manner — 7 per cent by March 2016 and 7.5 per cent by March 2017.

The RBI said loans to individuals for educational purposes, including vocational courses up to Rs 10 lakh irrespective of the sanctioned amount, will be considered as eligible for priority sector. On the housing segment, it said loans up to Rs 28 lakh in metropolitan centres and loans up to Rs 20 lakh in other centres for purchase/construction of a dwelling unit per family will be considered as PSL provided the overall cost of the dwelling unit in the metropolitan centre and at other centres should not exceed Rs 35 lakh and Rs 25 lakh respectively.

Further, loans sanctioned by banks for housing projects exclusively for economically weaker sections and low income groups, the total cost of which does not exceed Rs 10 lakh per dwelling unit, will also be considered as PSL.

It said foreign banks with 20 branches and above will have priority sector targets and sub-targets for agriculture and weaker sections, which are to be achieved by March 31, 2018 as per the action plans submitted by them and approved by RBI. Foreign banks' sub-targets for small and marginal farmers and micro enterprises would be made applicable post 2018 after a review in 2017.

“Foreign banks with less than 20 branches will move to total priority target of 40 per cent on par with other banks by 2019-20, and sub-targets for these banks, if to be made applicable post 2020, would be decided in due course,” the RBI said. Bank loans to food and agro processing units will be part of agriculture.

According to the RBI, export credit up to 32 per cent will be eligible as part of priority sector for foreign banks with less than 20 branches. For other banks, the incremental export credit over corresponding date of the preceding year will be reckoned up to 2 per cent.

## If you want to help the farmer



As the toll of [human](#) misery and suicide mounts, official estimates of farm losses due to unseasonal rains and hailstorms in March remain controversial, with hasty downward revision. Since these estimates are largely notional, without validation from [field](#) visits, such revision smacks of deliberate fiddling. On March 24, the agriculture ministry reported that crops on 18 million hectares — about 30 per cent of the rabi crops — were damaged. Two days later, it dropped to 11 million hectares.

A rain deficit during the kharif season last year was followed by a huge excess of rainfall during this rabi season, especially in March. This is normally the time when dry weather and rising temperatures ripen the wheat crop, making it ready for harvesting.

Several states experienced heavy crop damage. Among the worst affected are Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Rajasthan recorded 10 times the normal rainfall, Haryana 4.6 times and UP 4.4 times. Wheat production was worst affected, followed by mustard and pulses.

The case of a farmer in Mathura (UP) — not an isolated one, as the death of Rajasthan farmer Gajendra Singh in Delhi shows — is gruesome. Last year's rain deficit had damaged his paddy crop. This year's excess rain

wiped out his wheat crop. He had accumulated a debt of Rs 10 lakh. In 2013, he was locked up for his failure to repay a loan of Rs 5 lakh. The standing wheat crop was his only hope of survival. Shortly after the wheat crop was destroyed, he collapsed and died on his farm. Action Aid has recorded 54 farmer suicides in the Bundelkhand region of UP. Many farmers ended their lives not just because of a consecutive failure of crops but, more importantly, because of harassment, corruption and the burden of compound interest for years.

The Narendra Modi government at the Centre was quick to announce a slew of measures to mitigate the distress. These include compensation for losses, directions to insurance companies to process claims within 45 days and to banks to restructure farm loans. It is intriguing, however, why farm labourers whose hardships are just as severe are overlooked.

In an ostensibly generous gesture, the prime minister announced that compensation will be hiked by 50 per cent and given to those who have lost a third of their crops, higher than earlier limits. As the compensation is a fraction of losses per hectare and limited to two hectares, it is an unsurprisingly measly amount. Worse, the process of determining losses is cumbersome, arbitrary and reeks of corruption.

A list of those affected and the amounts of damage are determined by the lekhpal (the local revenue official) in consultation with the panchayat head and local MLA. Although official compensation rates range from Rs 4,500 (unirrigated crops) to Rs 12,000 per hectare (perennial crops), a lekhpal in Faizabad (UP) was suspended for giving out cheques for Rs 75 to Rs 300. Allegations abound of cheques made out in the names of dead persons. These aberrations are, however, not just a feature of UP, but far more pervasive.

Quick processing of insurance claims is feasible but on an over-optimistic assumption of the assessment of losses, as it normally takes up to six



months to do so. Besides, barely 5 per cent of farmers are insured. A tiny fraction of bank loans (2.5 per cent) is reserved for crop insurance. But availing of this facility is further hampered by the fact that insurance is given only if the damage in the subdivision of a district is 80 per cent.

In a recent article by Ashok Gulati ('A Baisakhi gift for the farmer', IE, April 13), an over-emphatic case is made for crop insurance as the means to mitigate farm distress. But it rests on heroic assumptions of expanding coverage from 15 million hectares to 100 million hectares in a total net sown area of 140 million hectares, high insured values and substantial contributions from the Central and state governments. It is moot whether the fragile public finances of the Centre and the states would allow them to take on this huge fiscal burden. So private insurance companies must pick up the slack.

The high administrative costs of public crop insurance are compounded by perverse incentives. One, the collusion of insurance staff and farmers in filing exaggerated claims or losses (for example, high bribery rates in claiming indemnities) is rife; two, the undermining of sound insurance practices by governments during election cycles (higher compensation paid than required) is not uncommon; and three, premium rates are determined by government decree at unrealistically low levels.

Weather/ rainfall insurance pays the insured when rainfall is below a specified target, irrespective of actual crop yields. Besides, administrative costs are low, it is easier to market, and affordable to the poor. Above all, it is financially viable. Satellite and remote sensing technologies make the measurement of rainfall/ soil moisture less expensive than in the past, but they offer a block- or taluk-level assessment. Covariate risks (for example, excess rainfall) expose the insurer to huge

indemnities. International financial markets could be tapped for reinsurance to hedge against such risks.

From a broader perspective, much vulnerability can be reduced without involving insurance per se. Both efficiency and equity, for instance, could be enhanced through better information about risks, mobilisation of savings as a form of self-insurance and risk-coping measures such as the MGNREGA.

The MGNREGA is an attractive “option” as the wage rate is fixed while labour market wages are uncertain and employment is not guaranteed. An analysis of West Bengal data for the period 2009-12 shows that, if poor households participate in the MGNREGA over a period, they are not only able to increase their food consumption or income but also enjoy easier access to informal credit and stable consumption. However, its self-targeting potential is undermined by frequent hikes in the wage rate and dilution of the provisioning of local goods (for example, roads, percolation tanks) by favouring private assets (such as wells). For these reasons, the recent budgetary “nudge” to the MGNREGA is unlikely to make a difference.

In conclusion, as more evidence of human misery unravels, it would be tragic if the Modi government didn’t broaden its policy focus and learn from its experience of why policies haven’t worked.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Melghat farmers get first solar irrigation pump**

The farmers of Melghat buffer villages will no longer have to bear agricultural losses due to erratic electric supply. Taking solar energy to a

new height, a solar powered irrigation pump has been installed to fetch water from a tube well and discharge it in the fields.

With an aim of introducing modern technology in tribal areas, the initiative was taken by Amravati-based Nature Conservation Society. The solar irrigation pump was inaugurated at Muthawa Community Resource Centre in Melghat Tiger Reserve on Monday.

Apart from meeting the daily requirement of water for domestic use, the solar pump will solve the hardships faced by farmers. "This is a better solution for farmers in forested landscape where three phase supply is available only after 10pm. At night, irrigating their agricultural fields becomes a tough task for farmers. The solar pump will work only during daylight and farmers will be able to irrigate their fields throughout the day," said founder member of Nature Conservation Society Kishor Rithe.

He added that the technique will soon be demonstrated to all farmers of the buffer area presently irrigating their lands using diesel pumps or generators. "If the technique is followed all over the state, we might be able to resolve the climate change crisis, which is created mainly by coal fired projects and their products like electricity," pointed out Rithe.

The 5 HP submersible solar pump has been put at a depth of 160-feet in a tube well. Around 20 solar plates having capacity of 5000 watt are installed on the roof of a building. A controller to maintain output of 440 volt is acting like a starter.

MLA Sunil Deshmukh, who was present at the inauguration function, said the idea of the solar pump can do wonders for people living in

forested landscape. "The state government has also decided to provide solar irrigation pumps to selected farmers and this model will be helpful in educating farmers about its use," he added.

Earlier in 2013, the NGO had used biodiesel from Mahua oil seeds to run a generator. Later, the centre started using solar energy to light LED lamps and also installed its first solar-wind hybrid system in 2013 to run electric appliances like fans, TV and projector.

### **ICAR helps tribal fishermen with safe, sustainable fishing**

Indian council of agricultural research's (ICAR) Old Goa complex has aided tribal fishermen in Nauxim, Cacara and Odxel with inputs for safe and sustainable fishery as part of its tribal welfare projects in the state.

As an outcome of the institute's research, a mesh size of 40mm and above is found to be ecologically sustainable and economically feasible for the fishermen of Zuari estuary. Around 500 families on the banks of Zuari from Cortalim to Chicalim and Siridao to Dona Paula eke out a living on fishing activities.

"We have instructed them to use a mesh size of 40mm and above for fishing," a ICAR scientist said.

ICAR also distributed nets of 40 wire mesh size and life jackets to tribal families worth 3 lakh at a function recently, after setting aside a tribal sub-plan project for the coastal tribal fishermen's welfare.

"Some kind of life-saving appliance is also necessary for the artisanal fishermen to cope up with disasters onboard," the ICAR scientist said.

Minister for environment and forest, Alina Saldanha was the chief guest of the function at Shree Shantadurga fishermen association, Cacra. Narendra Pratap Singh, director, ICAR-CCARI briefed about the research and extension activities of the institute. Devendra Kumar, director (finance), ICAR, Sharmila Monteiro, director of fisheries, sarpanchas and members of Taleigao, Curca, Bambolim and St Cruz panchayats were present.

Sreekanth G B and Manju Lekshmi, N, scientist, fisheries section, ICAR-CCARI co-ordinated the entire tribal sub-plan TSP project and distribution programme.

Uncertain weather, including erratic and weak monsoon, has been the bane of farmers of the country's grain bowl states Punjab and Haryana. With the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting below normal rain this monsoon also, especially north west region where both states are situated, farmers in Punjab and Haryana will have to brace up for another test after untimely rain and hailstorm damaged their wheat crop over a considerable area.

Data from the Chandigarh centre of IMD shows that in the 10-year period from 2005 to 2014, monsoon rainfall (June 1-September 30 period) was deficient (between 20% and 60% below the normal) in Haryana six times and four times in Punjab.

In 2014, monsoon rainfall in Haryana was 56% deficient at 200.1mm as against the normal of 460.3mm. Even in Punjab, the situation was grim as the state recorded 50% deficient monsoon rains at 243.5mm in comparison to the normal of 491.5mm.

Deficient monsoon not only impacted the sowing of key kharif crops in both the states, it also put extra burden on farmers who had to rely on tubewells to maintain their crops, putting further strain on the depleting groundwater. It also added up to the cost of cultivation as farmers had to use diesel-run pumpsets to draw subsurface water due to shortage of electricity.

While the farmers were barely able to survive the deficient monsoon in 2014 and hoped to recover their losses with a good rabi season, untimely rainfall in March and April this year piled more misery on them. At least 12 farmers died or committed suicide unable to bear the damage to their crops in Haryana due to inclement weather. In Punjab, four cases of farmer deaths on the same account have been reported.

While the Haryana and Punjab governments have sought financial assistance from the Centre to compensate the farmers for their crop loss, forecast of poor monsoon rainfall doesn't augur well for the grain bowl as both states take stock of the losses and prepare for the kharif season.

### **Potato shines amid agri gloom, surges to record production**

Amid the gloom of severe crop damage and farmers' suicide, here comes something to cheer about -- potato production has seen a record surge in

the state with a staggering 143 metric tonne yield this year. This is highest in the past decade.

According to the horticulture directorate, 109.15 lakh metric tonne potato has already reached the cold storages, which too, officials confirm, is a record. Officials at the horticultural directorate hope that the record production of potato this year would have a cascading effect on other crops and farmers alike which might keep a check on spiraling prices due to crop damage.

Confirming the figure, horticulture director HP Joshi told TOI that the previous record was of 135.76 lakh metric tonne, achieved in 2010-2011. On the storage front, Joshi said, in the same year 100.42 lakh metric tonne potato has been stored which was the previous record. The reason for this bumper crop is conducive weather condition and increasing interest in farmers towards potato cultivation, another senior official said.

There are 1,620 cold storages in the state with a capacity of 121.24 lakh metric tonne, Joshi said and added that the record production was projected by the Central Government agency National Centre for Crop Forecasting.

Uttar Pradesh was the largest producer of potato in the country with the state accounting for around 35% to 40% of the total produce, Joshi said. This year, after UP, West Bengal is projected to produce approximately 100 lakh metric tonne potato, followed by Bihar.

These states are not only the top three producers but also account for around 70% of total production in the country, Joshi said. In UP, around a



dozen districts from West UP including Agra, Firozabad, Farrukhabad, Hathras, Kannauj, Aligarh, Mathura and Bulandshahar account for 40% of the state production.

In Central and Eastern UP region, Barabanki is the only district with respectable potato production, Joshi said. Of the total produce in UP, around 6 lakh metric tonne is consumed by 21 crore UPites, Joshi said.

Out of the total production of UP, around 10 lakh metric tonne goes to other states while around 17 lakh metric tonne is consumed as seed. The figures available with the directorate also point out that potato cultivation was fast catching up among UP farmers. Against 5.70 lakh hectare land used for producing 119.49 lakh metric tonne potato last fiscal, potato this fiscal is being produced over 6.27 lakh hectare of land.

Joshi said that unseasonal rain didn't have much adverse impact on potato production as harvesting of potato had already begun since January.

#### Round Figures

Year	Land (Lakh Hect)	Production(LMT)	Cold Storages	Stored
2010-11	5.57	135.76	--	100.42
2011-12	5.58	123.16	1522	81.46
2012-13	5.48	133.36	1555	83.05
2013-14	5.70	120.60	1607	76.79

2014-15 6.27 143.15 1620 109.15

## Reasons to Eat Walnuts Every Day



A fistful of walnuts makes for a healthy snack. Not only do they help you feel fuller, but an American study also suggests that a handful of walnuts a day could keep the fertility specialist at bay.

Here we tell you about the other health benefits this humble nut has to offer.

This nut is the only available tree nut that is loaded with **alpha linolenic acid (ALA)**. ALA is inversely proportional to cardiovascular disease (CVD). The higher the ALA in the body, the lower the risk of CVD.

Walnut also lower LDL [cholesterol](#) and apolipoprotein-B, the two risks factors for cardiovascular disease.

Walnuts improve the body's serum lipid profile by **reducing LDL cholesterol**. This also helps improve HDL performance in the body.

As reported on PubMed (O'Brien, 2014), regular intake of walnuts along with other nuts [aids](#) in **better cognitive functioning in older adults**.

Walnuts have the power to **tackle inflammatory diseases** like asthma, psoriasis, eczema and rheumatoid [arthritis](#).

Regular walnut consumption assists with **insulin resistance** and stabilises [blood sugar](#) levels in the body.

Walnuts **lower the risk of Type 2 diabetes** in women.

Walnuts can also be used to **help constipation**, as they have a laxative effect on the digestive system.

Walnuts are a key '**hair food**', as they are an excellent source of biotin, an essential nutrient known to strengthen and improve hair and reduce hair fall. A deficiency of biotin leads to frequent [hair loss](#) and breakage.

New research published in the journal *Cancer Investigation* indicates that eating 56 gm of walnuts daily may **prevent prostate cancer**, and inhibit tumour incidence and progression.

Walnuts boast of antioxidant properties that **enhance the immune system** and protect against ageing, cancer and neurological disorders.

If you cannot get a **good night's sleep**, try eating a handful of walnuts because they contain melatonin, which induces sleep and regulates it.

## **Quinoa, Peach and Walnut Salad**

### **Ingredients**

- 1 cup cooked quinoa
- 1/2 cup blanched walnuts
- 1/2 cup chopped peaches
- 1/2 cup baby spinach (palak) leaves, torn into small pieces
- 1 boiled sweet potato (shakarkand), cut into small pieces

### **For the orange vinaigrette**

- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp mustard (rai/sarson) sauce
- 2 tsp honey
- 1/8 tsp freshly ground black pepper (kalimirch)
- 1/2 tsp red chillies garlic (lehsun) sauce

### **Method**

- In a bowl, add the quinoa, walnuts, peaches, spinach and sweet potato and mix well.
- In a glass jar, mix all the ingredients for the orange vinaigrette and shake well.
- Add the orange vinaigrette to the mixed salad and toss well.
- Garnish with fresh mint leaves and serve chilled.

### **In Gujarat, groundnut set to gain ground from cotton**

As the kharif sowing season nears, groundnut is set to eat into cotton area in Gujarat. According to farmers, area under cotton is likely to fall significantly in the main growing regions of Saurashtra and Kutch.

The drop in cotton area is mainly attributed to growers continuing to lose from the crop over the last two years due to lower realisation.

Cotton prices are currently hovering in the range of Rs. 790-910 for a *maund* of 20 kg in Saurashtra. During 2013, prices had ruled over Rs. 1,000.

“Till today farmers have not been able to get remunerative price for their crop. From the sense we get from farmers in this region, there will be a drop to the tune of 30-35 per cent in cotton area. And about half of that will be replaced by groundnut and rest by guarseed or other crops,” said Dinesh Tilva, an agriculture expert from Saurashtra.

Saurashtra is a cotton bowl of India with the 11 districts making up about 16 per cent or two million hectares of the total cotton area of 12.5 million hectares in the country.

According to State government data, kharif groundnut sowing has been declining in Gujarat from 19,12,800 hectares in 2003-04 to 12,25,000 hectares last year. This resulted in a sharp surge in the groundnut prices, attracting farmers towards the oilseed crop. An indication of increase in groundnut sowing will boost the prospects of groundnut. “Cotton has been a disaster for most farmers here. Same had been the experience for past two years. We expect groundnut production to be good this year and

fetch us better returns,” said Ukabhai Patoliya, a farmer and Bhartiya Kisan Sangh leader from Junagadh district.

On the other hand, guarseed and pulses are second most preferred replacements to cotton. Guarseed acreage rose from 2,66,000 hectares in 2003-04 to 3,10,000 hectares in 2014-15.

For pulses, it will be reclaiming the lost ground as kharif sowing had fallen from 6,77,900 hectares in 2003-04 to around 3,99,000 hectares in 2014-15.

### **Commodity prices surge on low rain**

The prospects of yet another weak monsoon have triggered concerns about food inflation. This could also be a cause for worry to the Modi Government as it looks to push economic growth and faces a key election in Bihar later this year.

A poor monsoon on top of a 12 per cent deficient rainfall last year and unseasonal rains in the last couple of weeks could hurt agricultural output and slow economic growth.

The India Meteorological Department’s gloomy forecast on Wednesday has triggered a rise in the prices of many a farm commodity. Experts say they could spiral further if the IMD predictions come true. This, in turn, could force the Reserve Bank of India to take a cautious approach on rate cuts. Barring wheat, prices of all commodities have increased since the beginning of this month ( **see table** ). The surge was pronounced on Thursday with prices rising by over one per cent for most agri-commodities.

A weak monsoon will aggravate the agrarian distress, affecting rural incomes that have already come under pressure due to low commodity prices influenced by higher global supplies and crop losses due to unseasonal rains.

Lower rural income means poor demand for tractors, two-wheelers, cars, fertilisers, agro-chemicals, FMCG and white goods. Also, demand for gold could be affected. “We will have to wait till June to get a clearer picture, but we need to be prepared,” said DK Joshi, Chief Economist, Crisil.

Citi in a note on Thursday said that the recent unseasonal rain that impacted more than 10 per cent of standing Rabi crops has introduced a downside risk to Central Statistics Office’s 2015 fiscal GDP growth estimate of 7.4 per cent.

“Our 2016 fiscal GDP growth estimate of 8.1 per cent could also see a downside risk given the fact that CSO’s 2015 fiscal year growth may be lower-than-expected and agricultural growth of 3.6 per cent could be at risk in the event of deficient rainfall,” the note said.

### **Govt policies can help**

While rains pose a threat to inflation, proactive government policies such as contained minimum support price and food stock management could mitigate some of the risks, Citi said

Prices of farm commodities had bottomed out in December but have reversed since then. “There is more scope for upside movement in these commodities. If monsoon indeed remains poor as predicted, there could be a spike in food inflation,” said Ajitesh Mullick, AVP-Research at Religare Commodities.

State Bank of India’s Chief Economic Advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh said the worry is that in terms of cumulative probability, IMD’s forecast of a deficient rainfall including below normal is as high as 68 per cent. In India, since 2000, there has been four El Niño years (2002, 2004, 2006 and 2009), and three of these (except 2006) resulted in a drought. Monsoon was normal in 2006, which was an El Niño year.



Thus, it is not correct to conclude that El Nino will result in drought-like conditions, Ghosh said.

“We believe the Government should quickly go for creation of a contingency fund to stabilise any adverse impact on farmers’ income,” Ghosh said.

“The trend in domestic prices has reversed and the rupee has weakened. The wholesale price inflation and the consumer price inflation are likely to go up and could probably stay the RBI’s hands on rate cuts,” said Tejinder Narang, a grains trade analyst.

### **Mamata to Jaitley: waive loans of potato farmers**

Faced by a plunge in potato prices due to over-production, leading to suicides by farmers in certain districts, the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has written to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley seeking Central help, including loan waiver for 4.13 lakh farmers.

Prices of potato have crashed to Rs. 3-5 a kg in the State, creating an uncertain future for farmers, who are going in for distress sales.

According to some reports, so far some 17 farmers have committed suicide in the State. In the letter, the Chief Minister has urged the Centre to procure potatoes from the State for use in the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, according to sources.

She urged the Finance Minister to ask Central agencies to procure at least one lakh tonnes of the crop.

In addition, Banerjee has sought transport subsidy for inter-State transfer of the tuber through the Indian Railways, as well as subsidy on export of potato from Kolkata Port.

# Business Standard

To push procurement of wheat in Punjab and Haryana, the two states which together account for over 60 per cent of India's total annual wheat purchase, the Centre has relaxed the quality norms for procurement to enable farmers sell their damaged grain to state-run procurement agencies including Food Corporation of India (FCI).

However, the grains will be purchased after lowering their value depending upon the damage.

Punjab government though has decided to compensate the farmers for the drop in value from its resources so that farmers get the full Minimum Support Price (MSP). The MSP of wheat for 2015-16 crop season has been fixed at Rs 1,450 per quintal.

According to an official statement, in Punjab, the Centre would purchase upto 10 per cent of broken and shriveled grains as against the existing norm of six per cent.

However, it will deduct Rs 3.62 per quintal for wheat having shriveled or broken grains between 6 to 8 per cent and in case the quantum of

broken or shriveled grains is between 8-10 per cent an amount of Rs 7.25 will be deducted from the MSP.

For wheat in which more than 10 per cent but less than 50 per cent of grains have lost its luster in the recent rains, an amount of Rs 3.63 per quintal will be deducted from the MSP.

For Haryana, Centre has decided to purchase upto 90 per cent luster lost wheat, but after deducting a value of Rs 3.62 per quintal from the MSP.

As per an agriculture ministry assessment of April 7, the recent unseasonal rains and hailstorms has damaged standing wheat crop in 1.75 million hectares of land in Haryana and 0.25 million in Punjab.

Procurement of wheat in these two states has been less than half of last year's level in the first 20 days of the 2015-16 crop marketing season.

In Punjab, the Food Corporation of India, along with state government agencies, is targeting to procure 12.5 million tonnes of wheat this year. Last year, the total wheat purchased by different agencies and private traders was about 12 million tonnes in the state.

The total area under wheat in Punjab during the current procurement season is over 3.5 million hectares and the expected production is about 15 million tonnes. EoM