

27-04-2015

THE HINDU

NABARD launches initiative to improve livestock farming

In an attempt to promote innovations in livestock farming and increase milk production, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development has launched an initiative in the district to facilitate adoption of new technologies by farmers with the help of research institutions.

“Under the project, we are training the farmers involved in cattle rearing/dairy activities, and rearing of sheep/goat, as well as country fowl in batches of 20 to 30 persons on latest farming technologies. They will also be taken for exposure visits to progressive farms with NABARD bearing the cost of exposure visits/training,” NABARD Assistant General Manager V.S. Sriram told *The Hindu* .

Technical skills

For imparting technical skills to the farmers and make them adapt to the new technologies, NABARD liaisons with Veterinary University Training and Research Centre in Tirupur, an unit under Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, which was identified as ‘technology provider’.

Mr. Sriram said that as part of the training, the farmers would be taught the methods to cultivate Azolla, a floating fern that resembles algae, for usage as a livestock feed, and methods to preserve green fodder for longer durations apart from helping the farmers to make right choice of animals/fowls for rearing.

“The hallmark of the project is that apart from just imparting and demonstrating the technologies to farmers on Azolla cultivation, they will be told the real benefits of using feeds like Azolla, which is rich in proteins, minerals like calcium and magnesium and essential amino acids so as entuse them to practise what learnt during technical sessions,” the Assistant General Manager added.

Another major component conceptualised under the project would be the training on ‘clean milk production’ by which how milk should be handled using hygienic methods and thereby, increase the shelf life of milk.

Preparations of herbal medicines for cattle and poultry and how paddy straw could be enriched using urea would also be disseminated to the farmers during the course of the project.

Need for road facility to transport farm produce



Villagers near Varadarajapuram in Thottiyam block have been demanding road facility from their interior area to Varadarajapuram so that they can easily move agricultural produce, banana, to the market at Thottiyam.

At present, the villagers bring the harvested banana headload from the fields to some distance till they can reach a vehicle. Banana is a major crop cultivated in a cluster of villages in and around Varadarajapuram.

An estimated 3,000 acres had been brought under banana cultivation by 1,500 members of the Varadarajapuram Primary Agricultural Cooperative Credit Society.

Villagers say that the road will be a short route linking Tirunarayanapuram to Thottiyam.

In the absence of road facility, the banana produce has to be brought head-load for some distance from the interior fields to Tirunarayanapuram. Using mini vans, villagers have to reach Thottiyam via Arasalur, Karthigaipatti and Balasamuthiram.

In fact, villagers have set up part of the road using sand. They want the district administration or the National Bank of Agricultural and Rural Development to lay the road. A few farmers are ready to donate the land for forming the pathway.

Himachal releases Rs. 9.14 crore for rain-hit farmers

The Himachal Pradesh government has released Rs. 9.14 crore under the Disaster Relief Fund for the rain and storm affected farmers.

“To compensate farmers and horticulturists for the loss suffered by them due to untimely rains and heavy snow, the State government has released Rs 9.14 crore under the Disaster Relief Fund to the affected, which is the ever largest cover for the first time,” an official release here said.

Besides, various horticultural and agri-inputs have been provided to the affected farmers under Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBCIS) on a pilot basis to safeguard the horticulture industry which is a major revenue earner for the state.

The State government has extended the insurance scheme to all blocks in 2015-16 and during the last two years 1,06,113 farmers were covered under the scheme for which the government was paying 25 percent of premium share amounting to Rs 12.33 crore to the insurance companies to compensate the losses.

The Agriculture Insurance Company (AIC) of India Limited, HDFC ERGO and ICICI Lombard will be the implementing agencies for the ‘hailstorm add on cover’ for 2014-15 Rabi season.

During 2013-14, 64,782 farmers were covered for apple crop, who had insured 1.26 crore trees, for which the state government had borne 25 percent premium share of Rs 6.17 crore subsidy with a claim of Rs 8.14 crore.

During Rabi season 2014-15, the scheme has been extended for apple crop from 17 to 35 blocks and for mango crop to 42 blocks.

The additional fruit crop namely citrus (kinnow) has been covered in 14 blocks, plum in 12 blocks and peach in four development blocks.

During Rabi 2014-15 Add on/Index Plus scheme for hailstorm under the WBCIS will be implemented in Shimla, Kullu and Mandi districts and the apple crop which has already been insured by the farmers under the WBCIS for the Rabi season 2014-15 shall also be covered under the Add on/Index cover.

International seed day: farmers promote use of patent-free seeds



The movement against monopoly of patented seeds is gaining traction in the State, with hundreds of activist-farmers forming a loose network to propagate the use of indigenous crops and promote the use of patent-free seeds.

The issue of patent-free seeds came to the fore during the International Seed Day observed on Sunday by the Millet Network of India (MINI). K.N. Ramachandra, convenor of MINI, cautioned against the use of genetically-modified crops and said suicides by cotton farmers would extend to the entire agricultural sector if the current free-ride of corporates on farming continued.

Traditional system

He said MINI advocated the imperatives of reverting to the traditional seed system in which the farmers exercised the freedom to save, use and propagate the seeds, without having to revert to the market time and again. MINI plans to have series of meetings with farmers, public, media, etc. to espouse its cause so that traditionally preserved seeds get priority over those sold by corporates, said Mr. Ramachandra.

The concept of patent-free seeds is percolating among various farmer networks and Sahaja Seeds, India's first organic seed company, has a network of over 2,000 farmers who are involved in the movement.

Founder of Sahaja Seeds, Krishnaprasad, told *The Hindu* that there were many loose groups of farmers conserving indigenous varieties of crops. A case in point is S.R. Srinivasmurthy of T. Narsipur who has conserved

more than 200 varieties of rice and Ghani Khan who has over 500 varieties of rice.

“These are all indigenous varieties and the farmers are free to grow and propagate their use,” said Mr. Krishnaprasad. The launch of the Karnataka chapter of the Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch during Badanvalu satyagraha last Sunday is also expected to give momentum to the movement for patent-free seeds, he added.

‘Rain likely to continue for a few more days’

There is a 70 per cent chance that it will rain on Monday and overcast condition will prevail for the next few days, say officials at the Agro Climate Research Centre at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University here. The past few days have been good for Coimbatore in that the district has received 60 mm of the 130 mm rains it is supposed to receive in April-May. The rains were good in the northern pockets of Pollachi, Thondamuthur, Sulur, Sultanpet, Annur and Karamadai. Once the showers stop, the day temperature will soar again as the ‘Agni Nakshatram’ period will start in the first week of May, they add.

Farmers trained to weed out Koorai Kizhangu in sugarcane fields



Makers of jaggery (Nattu Sarkarai) in villages in and around Kavindapadi underwent a training in weed control for preventing losses. The sugarcane crop has been affected due to infestation by sedge weed called purple nut (*Koorai Kizhangu*).

According to S. Ganesan, senior development manager, Dhanuka Agritech, who imparted the training in the farm owned by V. Murugan at Pudukaraipudur near Suriyampalayam in Bhavani taluk, weed management plays a major role in increasing productivity of sugarcane.

Koorai, declared as ‘world’s worst weed’ by agricultural scientists, affected more than 52 crops world wide. In sugarcane, it caused 60 to 70

per cent reduction in yield, he said, while demonstrating the use of herbicide Sempra. The requirement was just 36 g per acre, Mr. Ganesan, who heads the Salem branch of the Gurgaon-based company, said.

Mr. Ganesan explained to farmers the mode of action and stages of application of the herbicide, and its effect on succeeding crops. Sugarcane cultivators of Kavindapadi-Gobi belt, who are into jaggery making and had a niche customer base, faced a setback earlier this year due to a fall in procurement, due to competition from other States.

The orders placed by Palani Temple Devasthanam that sources a substantial extent of produce for making 'Panjamirtham', and Tamil Nadu Government, that provides 'Sathu Maavu' (supplementary food) made of the special jaggery as an essential component under the noon meal scheme, had dwindled this year, sources said.

The uniqueness of the jaggery made at Kavindapadi has been its chemical-free property and its delicious taste, owing to soil fertility and water quality.

The training programme helped in cutting down losses for better cost-competiveness in the market, farmers said.

Agriculture seminar

A national seminar on comprehensive agricultural growth will be held here on Monday and Tuesday under the aegis of AKG Study and Research Centre.

As many as 100 farmers from different parts of the State will share their experiences on the inaugural day. CPI(M) Polit Bureau Member S. Ramachandran Pillai will inaugurate it.

The technical session would be inaugurated by Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan on Tuesday. T.M. Thomas Isaac, MLA, will preside.

KAU develops new crop varieties



The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has developed 25 new crop varieties.

The list of crops developed by the KAU includes five varieties of rice; five of cocoa; two each of sugarcane, garcinea, seedless watermelon and cucumber; one variety each of jackfruit, chilli, mushroom, cowpea, ashgourd, brinjal and tomato.

The State Variety Release Committee has approved the list of crops for release.

The panel meeting at Thiruvananthapuram on April 25 under the chairmanship of Agricultural Production Commissioner was attended by KAU officials, Director of Agriculture, a representative of National Seed Corporation and representatives of farmers.

KAU Vice Chancellor P. Rajendran said the new varieties approved for release reflected the university's commitment to farming community and consistent research output.

“The main characteristics of these varieties are resistance and tolerance to abiotic stresses, which has been developed through focused research. Some of them are F1 hybrids, which represents our new initiative to develop F1 Hybrids of various crops. These varieties will play key roles in agricultural development of the State,” he said.

T.R. Gopalakrishnan, Director of Research, said the release of twenty five varieties was a landmark achievement by the university.

“With this the total number of crop varieties developed by the KAU has reached 308. The very fact that the development of a variety takes five to seven years explains the effort and value of a new one. Many of the new varieties are ideal for the new farming patterns and will be very important,” he said.

Change in criterion for crop damage

For the first time the eligibility criterion for sanctioning compensation for crop loss has been reduced from 50 per cent to 33 per cent. This came in the wake of the crop damage suffered by farmers during unseasonal rainfall and hailstorm between April 7 and 16.

According to the final enumeration of the damages done by the Agriculture department crop was lost in a total of 2,127 hectares across the district with sesamum accounting for 1,533 hectares. The total loss amount of input subsidy as compensation proposed is Rs. 1.08 crore. - Special Correspondent

Alappuzha Collector visits paddy polder

A team of officials led by District Collector N. Padmakumar visited the Velluthulli ‘padasekharam’ (paddy polder), near Aroor, on Sunday and took stock of the deplorable conditions of the local residents.

The visit was made on the basis of a request made by the Pokkali Samrakshana Samithy, a farmers’ collective. According to Francis Kalathungal, general convener of the organisation, the land had been provided to around 70 Scheduled Castes (SC) families in 1968 to undertake paddy farming. However, the field was used for cultivation for only a few years and has later been taken over by certain groups for fish farming in saline water. This has made the paddy field unfit for paddy farming. In addition, the intrusion of saline water has resulted in the residents’ houses getting weakened. The buildings had suffered immense damage over the years, he said. The residents also informed the Collector that a 50-hp motor and ‘Pettiyum Parayum’ (a traditional dewatering mechanism made of wooden planks), that had been purchased using government funds, stood the chance of being damaged.

The District Collector was accompanied by Karinilam Development Agency vice chairman G. Sasidhara Panicker, Agriculture Deputy Director Sudharma and Aroor Agricultural Officer Anoop.

Student collective provides career guidance



In a bid to guide SSLC and Plus Two students, ‘Aram Seivom’, a collective of college students from the city, organised a career guidance

and counselling programme on Gandhi Memorial Museum premises here on Sunday.

Speaking about the initiative, K. Vigneswaran, a second-year student of Kamaraj College of Engineering, said that the members of the collective were all second-year students who had just gone through the process of selecting colleges and branches of study last year. “When we realised that the students this year would be as confused as we were when we had to make a decision, we decided to come together and help them,” he said.

During the programme ‘Puthuyugam Padaipom’, organised by them, resource persons addressed parents and students on various fields such as architecture, law, rural entrepreneurship, studies in agriculture and media. “Most students here are unable to look beyond engineering or medicine due to lack of awareness or pressure from their family and friends. We are taking into consideration both their interests and what their family wants them to pursue, and are helping them explore more options,” said D.K. Prem Kanna, a member of Aram Seivom.

The collective plans to hold more sessions with resource persons to address the students and have a facebook page dedicated to the same where students can contact them.

“We also plan to hold special programmes in rural areas for students who are in need of guidance,” said Pandi Selvi, a coordinator of the initiative.

Agriculture College at Brahmavar in a state of limbo

Although five years have gone by since the State government announced intentions to set up an agriculture college at Brahmavar in Udupi district, its fate is now linked to the revival of Brahmavar cooperative sugar factory. The factory closed down in 2004 amid mounting losses. The then Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa had announced a grant of Rs. 10 crore for an agriculture college in Brahmavar in August 2010. But there is no progress on it.

The Congress government came to power in the State in 2013. In the three budgets presented since then, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has not allocated any funds for the proposed college.

The college was expected to give a fillip to agriculture in the coastal districts of Udupi, Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannada as none of them have an agriculture college. The college was expected to come up in

100 acres of land at the Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station (ZAHRS) in Brahmavar and affiliated to the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS) in Shivamogga.

The ZAHRS has a total of 348 acres of land. The lack of an agriculture college has led students from the coastal districts to pursue graduation in agriculture at other places such as Mandya, Hassan and Bengaluru.

Diploma course

Meanwhile, the UAHS started offering a two-year diploma course in agriculture at ZAHRS last year. It admitted 50 students last year and an equal number of students are expected to gain admission this year.

M. Hanumanthappa, Associate Director of Research at ZAHRS, said that agricultural and horticultural crops were being grown in nearly 3.64 lakh hectares in the three coastal districts. Paddy was being grown in about 1.90 lakh hectares of the 3.64 lakh hectares in the coastal districts. “An agriculture college will benefit these districts,” he said. B.V. Poojary Perdoor, president of district unit of Bharatiya Kisan Sangha, said that an agriculture college will lead to research in crops here and benefit the farmers as the coastal districts had different soil and climatic conditions compared to other places.

‘No progress’

But Pramod Madhwaraj, MLA, said that there was no progress on the proposal of starting the agriculture college. “The option of starting the college is not closed either. The fate of the college is linked to that of the Brahmavar Cooperative Sugar Factory. The government has decided to do a feasibility study on the revival of the factory,” he said.

Call to promote traditional crops

To mark International Seed Day on Sunday, Millet Network of India, Sarada Valley Development Samithi (SVDS) and Sabala came together to create awareness on promoting traditional crops and urge the government not to hand over the patents over seeds to international organisations.

After conducting a week-long programme that comprised public meeting, rally and seminars, involving farmers in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram, the trio conducted a meeting on Sunday to expose the

lacunae in seed culture and suggest concrete measures to plug the loopholes in agriculture.

Enforcing ban on genetically modified seeds, facilitating infrastructure to promote traditional crops along with steps to be taken to preserve native seed varieties and crops were some of the points highlighted by K. Saraswathi, executive secretary of Sabala and K. Jogi Naidu of SVDS.

They said that they will be submitting a memorandum to District Collector N. Yuvaraj, compiling the demands to promote and protect native seeds.

Founder-secretary of Gandhi Centre K.S. Sastry said that consuming genetically modified seeds leaves an adverse impact on one's health and that these seeds have been imported to find place in the retail outlets.

The intricacies of cultivating BT cotton and the impact of its cross pollination, undesirable agricultural practices that pave way for dependence on chemical fertilisers were some of the points discussed at the conference.

Sandhais hold their own in the age of supermarkets



In a city dominated by supermarkets and small grocery stores with shoppers spoilt for choice, the tradition of purchasing household items at weekly markets or ' *sandhais* ' still has its own charm. Groups of loyal customers throng these markets every week in different parts of the city, its immediate suburbs as well as far-flung pockets. Several hawkers with different kinds of wares assemble on a particular day of the week, mostly near temples in villages, resulting in a festive atmosphere.

Neon-lit supermarkets functioning out of gleaming showrooms and malls have not pushed these weekly markets out of business. Be it in Pallavaram, Peravallur or Putlur, each market has their own history.

Market on salary day: The monthly market at Sundaraja Perumal Koil Street, Peravallur, is held on the 9th of every month (based on the salary day of Perambur Carriage Works employees). The market has all the stuff that a family needs including vegetables, clothes, toys, bangles and kitchen ware at affordable rates.

Fresh veggies and fruits: Similarly the weekend market held on all Saturdays and Sundays at Vataranyeshwarar Temple Thiruvalangadu near Thiruvallur is famous for fresh vegetables and fruits sourced from the fields in nearby villages. The market is a big draw for the people in the locality and areas nearby.

Devotion and shopping sense: The market at Putlur near Tiruttani is held on three days during a week - Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays — on Amman Koil Street leading to the Sri Angala Parameswari Amman Temple. The hawkers at the market sell vegetables and greens and small plastic toys. The selection of the days by the hawkers is backed by sound business sense, as the devotees consider these days to be auspicious and flock in large numbers to the temple.

For fresh fish, organic produce: Potheri is a famous hunting ground for shoppers of fresh vegetables, organic items and varieties of fish. The market is open on Saturdays at Agricultural Technology Information Centre and is supported by Krishi Vigyan Kendra.

While these markets are well-known among the residents of the locality, residents of Avadi Heavy Vehicle Factory rue the discontinuance of a market held every month.

The market that used to be held near the Pattabhiram Military Siding railway station every month on the pay day of the Central government was a big draw among military personnel and local residents.

The nearly 180-year-old Friday market in Cantonment Pallavaram that is held on Old Trunk Road is also a huge draw. It attracts people from all over the city and the suburban areas of Kancheepuram district.

Ancient wisdom gets a new address



Manjulika Jhaver started Parampara to revive the forgotten practices that once enriched India. How the organisation has gone about achieving this objective is a remarkable story. The movement — as Manjukila likes to call Parampara — is now 29 years old and has evolved over the decades, helped by research and experimentation.

Manjulika says that in the initial years, the movement was centred around conducting workshops, awareness campaigns and studies. Then followed projects that have engineered for people, both the young and the old, a deeper connection with these forgotten traditions.

The Tulsi movement attempts to bring back the culture of reverence for all forms of life. The organisation has distributed over 20 lakh saplings till now and created tulsi brindavans in numerous places, including schools and colleges. Those things that are today perceived as mere rituals from ancient India were actually strategies to make men fulfil the purpose of their life — attaining salvation. Overtime, their meaning got diluted, she says. To revive the traditional practice of farming and to enable a holistic understanding of nature and pay obeisance to its elements, the Bharatiya Vedic Krishi Parampara was started. Under this programme, children are taken to the Parampara farm and introduced to agriculture.

“Through such programmes, children understand the importance of mother earth and the cow. Cows were once the backbone of rural economy,” says Manjulika.

The organisation has also created films and presentations on Indian concepts of daan and austerity (tapas). There are other films based on ancient traditions. There is one on farming too.

To promote and preserve ancient spiritual literature, Vak, its publication wing, was started.

Gale fells thousands of banana plants



Banana crop on the verge of harvest has been damaged by gusty winds in a cluster of villages in Lalgudi panchayat union on Friday night.

It was the ‘poovan’ variety raised about eight months ago with its harvest was scheduled for second week of next month.

This is perhaps the only period in the last five years when the crop escaped the winds for a good part of the season in major parts of the district resulting in huge arrivals. The sale price of the fruit had come down to a great extent. But the gale that struck the Lalgudi area for about an hour had resulted in a huge loss to farmers.

Banana trees had been uprooted in villages, including Manakkal, Nannimangalam, Mummudichozhapuram, Koppavali, and Pinnavasal. An estimated 2,000 plants on 40 acres of land had been destroyed in the fields, according to preliminary estimate by farmers.

One of the farmers of Pinnavasal, V. Parthiban said that he had incurred an expenditure of Rs. 70,000 an acre for raising ‘Poovan’ and had cultivated it on two acres. The major expenditure of Rs. 30,000 an acre went to application of fertilisers at three phases — the third, fifth and seventh month of cultivation. “We had to erect casuarinas to protect the plantain at the beginning of eighth month. “The erection of poles cost Rs. 8,000 including labour of Rs. 1,000”, he said explaining the damage had come at the end of incurring all these expenditure.

The bunches would be ready for harvest within a fortnight or so but the timing of the gale had come as a severe blow for him.

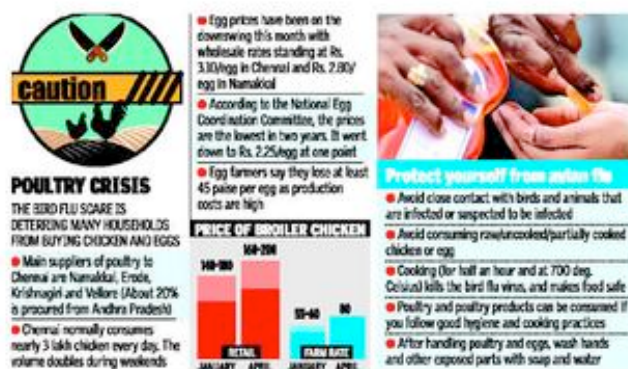
Insurance cover

Ramadas, another farmer, said banana cultivation had become a gamble. He said that the State government should sanction relief immediately. “Our fields are in a shambles with banana bunches on the ground. We had to immediately clear the trees and bunches as part of salvaging the second crop,” he said.

Farmers said the insurance companies should come to the rescue of farmers. They said that the Horticulture Department should conduct a comprehensive survey without omission.

N. Veerasekaran, coordinator of the Ayyan Vaikkal Ayacutdar Welfare Association, said within a fortnight, the bunch would have registered full growth weighing about 25 kg. He wanted immediate compensation to be paid to farmers.

The chicken & egg question



This month many non-vegetarians in the city seem to be staying away from poultry products for two reasons — the summer heat and health concerns due to bird flu in Andhra Pradesh. While the demand from households has fallen by 20-30 per cent, the price of chicken has been on the rise for the past few days.

Traders say dip in poultry production and continuing demand from hotels are keeping the price on the higher side.

According to retailers, supply has not been affected because of problems in the neighbouring State. The 47-day trawling ban in Tamil Nadu has pushed fish prices and increased demand for poultry. At present, one kg of chicken is priced between Rs. 160 and Rs. 200.

S. Thyagarajan, a resident of Mylapore who used to eat chicken dishes on alternate days, said he has now switched over to fish and mutton.

“I buy less quantity of both, however, as they are costlier than chicken. I will wait till the bird flu scare dies down before going back to poultry,” he said.

Chennai gets its supply of chicken mostly from places like Palladam, Namakkal, Vellore and Erode. About 20 per cent of the supply comes from Andhra Pradesh.

Shabeer Ahmed, State president of Tamil Nadu All Meat Traders Federation, said normally, poultry breeding decreases during summer as it is scorching hot. “Only 10 per cent of the supply is country chicken procured from Tiruvallur and Tiruvannamalai. The heat makes it difficult for poultry farmers to produce broilers of the desired weight. So, the price increases,” he said.

The problem of bird flu in Andhra Pradesh has not affected the trade here, however, as most poultry products are sourced from Tamil Nadu itself, said Mr. Ahmed.

However, egg consumption has gone down. Egg and poultry wholesaler M.V. Somaraman of Chintadripet blames it on the avian flu scare.

“The holidays are here and at least 20 per cent of the city’s population is out of town. Also, general consumption of eggs has gone down as people are changing dietary patterns,” he said. Egg prices in the city vary between Rs. 3.25 and Rs. 4.50 per egg.

Restoration of Lakkaram cheruvu begins



After remaining neglected for decades, the Lakkaram cheruvu of Kakatiya period in the town is all set to be restored, developed and beautified. The release of sewage into the tank and widespread growth of weeds besides large-scale encroachments on the tank bed have left the water body in a pathetic state making it out of bounds for farmers and inhospitable for aquatic species.

There have been persistent demands from all quarters for restoration of the tank to protect public health. The Lakkaram cheruvu, once a major irrigation source, is one among the important tanks in the entire Telangana State earmarked for restoration under the State government's ambitious, "Mission Kakatiya" programme.

According to official sources, the government has sanctioned Rs. 7.79 crore for restoration of the tank. The tank restoration works got underway here on Sunday.

The district administration has drawn up an ambitious plan to restore the tank and develop a tank bund and a flower garden in one and half acre along the periphery of the tank with the active support of the donors.

The authorities have also mooted setting up of the Lakkaram development trust for developing and beautifying the water body.

Meanwhile, Minister for Roads and Buildings T Nageswara Rao formally launched the Lakkaram tank restoration works at a programme held here on Sunday. Khammam MP P Srinivas Reddy, MLA P Ajay Kumar, Collector K Ilambarithi and others were present.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Nageswara Rao asked the Irrigation Department officials to immediately remove the piled up mounds of silt and weed, pump out the sewage water from the tank for restoring the water body expeditiously.

The storage capacity of the Lakkaram cheruvu, originally spread in 180 acres, drastically reduced due to encroachments and lack of proper maintenance of the water body in the past. The district administration should ensure restoration of the water body to its original state, he suggested. He wanted the authorities to focus on provision of alternative sites to poor people to be displaced by the tank restoration works. Mr Ajay Kumar suggested that the Lakkaram tank should be filled with fresh water from Palair balancing reservoir to improve groundwater level in the areas surrounding the tank.

Responding to specific pleas made by the speakers at the meeting, several persons and representatives of various organisations came forward to donate funds for the tank development and beautification works.

Khammam MP Srinivas Reddy and Minister Nageswara Rao announced to donate Rs. 10 lakh and Rs. one lakh respectively on the occasion, sources said.

MLA Ajay Kumar pledged Rs 5 lakh donation on behalf of the Puvvada Trust. Khammam Chamber of Commerce, Rice Millers Association, Rotary Club and other associations also announced donations for the tank modernisation project.



Beef ban: Muslim body meets BJP state chief



The [All India](#) Milli Council on Saturday met BJP state president Raosaheb Danve to discuss the beef ban issue and rehabilitation of workers whose business has been badly hit. The organisation also urged the BJP to allow meat of hybrid Jersey cows and bulls that would ensure preservation of “desi cows”.

As per the proposal, Jersey cows should be imported in place of Indian bulls and cows. This would preserve the faith of the Hindus as the cows from foreign countries weren't from 'Indian progeny'.

“We have been having regular internal discussions to figure out a solution that would benefit the society as a whole regarding the beef ban and rehabilitation of the unemployed labourers of slaughter houses,” said BJP state president Danve.

BJP spokesperson Madhav Bhandari said, “At present, we cannot decide on the proposal but we will soon come up with an answer.”

Bhandari said, “The ban on slaughter of cow and bullock was not based on religion but to benefit the agriculture sector.”

Mohammed Ali Qureshi, president of The Bombay Suburban Beef Dealer's Welfare Association, raised the issue of loss faced by the leather industry. “On an average, 4,50,000 bulls are slaughtered every year which supplies a large amount of hides to the leather industry.

The ban on beef has been a great loss to the leather industry. Other states are earning high profits from this industry.”



[Sugar mills owe farmers 900 cr](#)

At a time when farmers of Haryana are battling damage to their wheat crop following rain and hailstorm, around 80,000 cultivators of the state are waiting for payments for supplying sugarcane to the mills more than three months ago. Sugarcane was grown over 2 lakh acres in the state in 2014-15.

Sugar mills have failed to pay around Rs 900 crore to the farmers because of their poor financial health following dipping sugar prices and its high cost of production. Most farmers are waiting for their payments. Bharatiya Kisan Union Haryana unit president Gurnam Singh Chaduni said they had staged protests demanding early release of payments.

On the other hand, officials say that because of poor financial condition, mills were not able to pay to the farmers on time. "Cost of production of sugar is Rs 4,300 per quintal while it is being sold at the rate of Rs 2,600 per quintal in the wholesale market. This gap is leading to losses to the sugar mills," said an official, who handles issues of sugarcane in the state government. Apart from this, Haryana offers highest price for cane to the farmers in the country at Rs 310 per quintal. While explaining the reasons for declining sugar prices, he said, "There is surplus production of sugarcane in the country for the past five years. The country is also importing sugar from abroad."

The state has 10 cooperative sugar mills while three are run by private players. Cooperative sugar mills have to disburse Rs 556 crore to around 40,000 farmers as dues. Sources said Haryana State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Mills has sought Rs 465 crore from the government to clear dues of farmers.

Haryana agriculture minister Om Prakash Dhankar said they had decided to release Rs 290 crore immediately to the cooperative sugar mills. "We are also mulling to give loans to the private sugar mills," he added. According to Dhankar, the government planned to spend Rs 600 crore to help out the cane farmers.

Box:

Payment due to farmers

Sugar mill Amount

Panipat	Rs 53 crore	
Rohtak	Rs 78	crore
Karnal	Rs 59	crore
Sonapat	Rs 46	crore
Shahabad	Rs 65	crore
Jind	Rs 44	crore
Palwal	Rs 27	crore
Meham	Rs 62	crore

Kaithal Rs 59 crore
Gohana Rs 59 crore

Now from milk town: A cow-dung bank

Dairy farmers from Anand and Kheda were frontrunners during the White Revolution in the country. Now these progressive farmers have come up with an idea of creating a cow-dung bank and use it to generate biogas.

A 1,500-member strong Gujarat Progressive Dairy Farmers Association (GPDFA) plans to set up the first of its kind bank to collect cow dung from over 400 villages and use it to produce biogas which would be supplied to nearby industries. This project will not only provide additional income to the farmers from sale of cow dung and biogas, but also help in getting rid of the solid waste of cattle from the villages.

"Farmers get good income from milk but they have difficulty in getting rid of the cattle dung. We have thought of a project of cow-dung bank where they can sell the dung. The animal excreta collected would then be used to generate biogas," said Bharat Patel, organizing chairman of GPDFA.

The biogas plant will be run on a cooperative or public private partnership model, he said. "The green energy generated from the cattle dung would be sold to the industries and the byproduct from the gas plant would be used as organic manure in fields," Patel added.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

What have you done for farmers, CPI(M) asks Modi

The CPI(M) has questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement that his government is ready to address farmers' distress with an open mind.

Hannan Mollah, party Polit Bureau member and general secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha, in an open letter to Modi, has asked the government to keep its poll promise that the recommendations of the MS Swaminathan Committee report for the sector will be implemented.

Mollah, citing the suicide here last week of Rajasthan farmer Gajendra Singh Kalyanvat, asked the Prime Minister to explain why his government did not implement the promise of providing Minimum Support Price of agricultural produce equal to 50 per cent in addition to cost of production.

He said the decision to slash MNREGA allocation and reduce the implementation of the Act to 2,500 most backward blocks has affected rural lives. He urged the Centre to reduce the interest rate and debt burden of farmers and announce debt waiver to peasant households.

Mollah further said the Centre did not give priority to projects to support the peasantry to establish crop-wise value addition.

Damaged wheat may fan food inflation

Wheat production in India, the world's biggest grower after China, may see the greatest fall in 12 years following heavy rains and hailstorms that ravaged farms.

The harvest will probably drop 8.3 per cent to 87.9 million tonnes from a record 95.9 million tonnes a year earlier, said Rajnikant Rai, Chief Operating Officer of the agriculture business at ITC Ltd, one of the biggest buyers of wheat. That would mark the lowest yield since 2011 and the largest decline since 2002-2003, government data show.

External factors

Widespread rain and hail across most of the country since late February have ruined crops — from wheat to rapeseed and vegetables — hurting farmers and threatening to fan food inflation in Asia's third-largest economy.

Lower supplies and poor quality may spur flour mills to increase wheat imports, according to Kotak Commodity Services Pvt. "We never expected rains to wreak this kind of havoc," said Amit Kumar, a 26-year-old farmer, while cutting the rain-flattened crop with his wife at Kurana village in Uttar Pradesh.

"If we employ labourers, we won't be able to pay their wages. Even old people in our village are saying they've never had such an experience, wherein entire crops have vanished."

Crops on about 9.38 million hectares (23.2 million acres) were damaged because rainfall since March 1 has been more than double the 50-year average, according to government data.

The main wheat-producing regions saw rains almost five times the average, the data show.

The government estimates the crop will be 5 per cent below its February forecast of 95.8 million tonnes.

Grain bowl

Wheat crop damage in some regions was as high as 80 per cent, ITC's Rai said in a phone interview from Lucknow on April 16.

Yields in Punjab, Haryana and western parts of Uttar Pradesh, referred to as the nation's grain bowl, may drop as much as 20 per cent and the quality is poor, he added. For Ramesh Chand, a 52-year-old farmer who slept on the roadside overnight to join a queue of growers attempting to sell wheat at a government-run purchase centre, the crop loss was about 40 per cent.

He planted the grain on 6.2 acres with 3.2 acres taken on lease and he says he's now in no position to repay loans taken to grow the crop.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised to ease rules to allow farmers to claim compensation for crop damage.

Farmers will be paid 50 per cent more than usual and growers with 33 per cent damage can claim State aid compared with 50 per cent earlier, Modi said on April 8. The Centre has also ordered banks to restructure farmer loans.

The damage poses risks to food inflation in the next three months, Sonal Varma and Aman Mohunta, Mumbai-based analysts at Nomura Holdings Inc, wrote in a report on April 6.

A below-normal monsoon for a second straight year may lower India's farm output and incomes, Crisil Ltd said in a report. Rainfall in the June-September monsoon period will be 93 per cent of a 50-year average of 89 cm as an El Nino develops, the Meteorological Department said on Wednesday.

Mills in southern India may boost wheat imports to as much as 1,50,000 tonnes in 2015-2016 from 45,000 tonnes a year earlier, according to the Tamil Nadu Roller Flour Mills Association last month. About 80,000 tonnes have already been imported, Rai said.

State reserves of wheat and higher imports may help contain grain prices, Nomura said.

Inventories totalled 17.2 million tonnes on April 1, more than double the emergency requirement, according to government data.