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THE HINDU

Momentum in CV sales to continue

After languishing for a couple of years, commercial vehicle (CVs) sales are likely to perk up in 2015-16 due to a resurgence in economic growth, pick-up in industrial and agricultural activity, replacement demand from large fleet operators (LFOs) and better availability of finance.

For the medium and heavy commercial vehicles (MHCVs) segment, green-shoots are already visible in 2014-15 with sales picking up sharply in the second half compared with only modest growth in the first few months of the fiscal. Growth has been especially buoyant in the heavy trucks sub-segment (trucks greater than 25 tonnes gross vehicle weight) – sales volumes of these trucks rose by 69.3 per cent in the first 10 months of 2014-15.

Factors that initially buoyed this improvement in sales included large tenders floated by the Indian Oil Corporation for oil tankers and truck demand for transporting cement from Rajasthan to the National Capital Region for construction activities.

More importantly, fleet replacement demand from LFOs was spurred by better availability of freight (owing to an uptick in industrial growth), cut in excise duty rates till December 2014 (which led to a fall in vehicle prices) and an improvement in transporter profitability.

This buoyancy is also reflected in fleet utilisation rates, which have risen to 65-70 per cent in 2014-15 (as per our market interactions) from around 60 per cent in 2013-14.

Even spot freight rates rose by 4-6 per cent in the first half of 2014-15. Overall, we estimate sales volumes of MHCVs to increase by 18-20 per cent in 2014-15.

Of course, this upswing was over the low base of 2012-13 and 2013-14, when sales nosedived by nearly 25 per cent each year (in effect, volumes halved during those 2 years). But we expect this growth momentum to sustain and MHCV sales to vroom by 16-18 per cent in 2015-16 as well, propelled by a further pick-up in industrial growth (which could lift demand for multi-axle vehicles, tractor trailers and tippers) and continued

uptick in replacement demand from LFOs. However, profitability of CV manufacturers will not see a complete recovery; it will continue to remain below the decadal average (8.0 per cent between 2004-05 and 2013-14) due to high discounts (10-15 per cent) owing to low capacity utilisation (although capacity utilisation is likely to improve to 54-56 per cent in 2015-16 from 47-49 per cent in 2014-15).

We believe that freight availability will improve on the back of a gradual revival in fundamental parameters such as the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and construction and mining activity. Consequently, fleet utilisation may touch near normal levels of around 75 per cent by the second half of 2015-16, which is usually the time when most transporters make incremental truck purchases.

On the other hand, encouragingly for the industry, freight rates have remained steady since September 2014, despite a sharp drop in diesel prices, due to increasing demand for transportation services, led by freight generating sectors such as cement, iron ore, and passenger vehicles.

And, over the medium term too, with new road projects likely to be awarded leading to a boost in construction activity, fleet operators can look forward to higher transportation demand. Steady freight rates (despite the fall in diesel prices) and improving fleet utilisation rates will help transporters to improve their profitability.

While MHCV sales have perked up, light commercial vehicles (LCV) sales continue to languish in 2014-15 due to prolonged weak consumption expenditure and tighter lending norms for small-fleet operators and first-time users due to worries over asset quality. Sales may recover mildly in 2015-16 – we project 7-9 per cent growth – as caution in lending eases and consumption expenditure increases.

In the long term, pick-ups (2.0- 3.5 tonne gross vehicle weight) are likely to lead the pack in terms of sales, and grow at a faster pace than the overall CV market over the next 5 years as they offer the highest cash flow to equated monthly instalments and internal rate of returns.

The sub-one tonne segment (up to 2 tonne gross vehicle weight) will draw strength from growth in micro-trucks (500 kg payload), yet micro trucks are unlikely to eat into sales of small three-wheelers as was seen in case of mini trucks (750 kg payload) with large three-wheelers. A

structural shift to heavier vehicles may impact growth in volume terms in both LCV and MHCV segments.

Thus, over the near term, sales of both MHCVs and LCVs are expected to gather pace due to economic recovery and rise in industrial activity.

What will, however, determine the extent of growth will be parameters such as increase in fleet utilisation rates (led by growth in freight availability and rates), easing of financial constraints and the timing, quantum, and distribution of monsoons this year. The author is Director, CRISIL Research.

Popularising SRI through competition

The Agriculture Department has been organising a special State-level competition to popularise the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) techniques among paddy cultivators. A group of five farmers have opted for the test this season.

The fields are located at Vettanoor in Avudaiyarkovil block; Vadavalam in Pudukottai; Koppampatti in Gandarvakottai; Avanatthankottai in Aranthangi, and Moothampatti village in Kundrandarkovil block.

The competition was inaugurated at Vettanoor village on Thursday when the officials from the Agriculture Department ascertained the quantum of paddy harvested at the fields.

“The State-level winner will be presented with a cash prize of Rs. 5 lakh,” said K.M. Shajehan, Joint Director of Agriculture, who supervised the harvest and weighed the quantum realised.

New paddy variety fetches good returns



A group of farmers of Poongudi village near here have been awaiting the procurement of ‘TNAU Rice TRY 3’ variety introduced by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University – Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute here.

The rice variety, suitable for 'idly' flour, was popularised by the college at Poongudi and about 30 farmers have raised this crop.

Thanks to the crop protection technique and close follow-up by the college scientists, farmers could harvest an average 30 bags of paddy (60 kg per bag).

S. Narayanasamy, organiser of the People's Welfare Committee, says 30 farmers, who were conventionally cultivating 'BPT 5204' variety till 2013 had switched over to this 'idly' variety in September-October 2014. About 10 acres was brought under the variety and farmers had registered an average 1.5 tonnes an acre.

About 15 tonnes had been stocked in the village, he said.

With paddy suitable for "idly," a large number of traders had been making a beeline to the village to purchase the price. But, the farmers said that the price offered by traders was not attractive.

"We have planned to market the paddy at Rs. 900 a bag of 60 kg.; but the traders offered just Rs.800," says Mr. Narayansamy.

P. Pandiyarajan, Dean of the college, said the institute, as part of popularising the variety, was taking steps to popularise the rice which has a milling percentage of 71.30 and head rice recovery of 66 per cent. The variety was resistant to diseases, including leaf folder, stem borer, brown spot, sheath rot, and sheath blight, Mr. Pandiyarajan said.

G. Chitrarasu, Senior Regional Manager, Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation, said that he would ascertain the quality of paddy before making arrangements for the procurement of the crop.

Farmers who had harvested the paddy said that it was a tough task for them to protect the stock. Mustaffa (43), another farmer, said that he had shifted his harvested produce by tractor from Poongudi to Navalur Kuttapattu, about 2 km away, where he had a threshing floor.

For dearth of space, a few other farmers had stocked the paddy on the grounds of Sri Varasidhi Vinayagar temple in the village.

Research in planting of banana stressed

Research should be intensified in high-density planting of banana and to ensure high-quality saplings for better yield, according to Agricultural Production Commissioner Rajesh Lakhoni.

Addressing a farmers' training programme on tissue culture banana cultivation at Horticultural College and Research Institute in Periyakulam on Saturday, he said research should ensure supply of high-quality banana saplings to farmers to enable them to get better yield and scale down production costs. Demand for the banana cultivated in Theni district had been growing in the Middle East, especially in Dubai market. The farmers should adopt the latest technologies in planting and growing for better yield. Theni district had been exporting around 40 tonnes of banana to various countries every day, he said and assured that the government would provide necessary assistance for betterment of banana growers.

Collector N. Venkatachalam said productivity of banana in the district was higher than that in Maharashtra. Wider dissemination of technologies among the farmers would expand area under banana cultivation. He said the total area under tissue banana cultivation was 5,965 hectares.

Use of organic manure and reduction in chemical-based fertilizers would enhance quality of fruit and maintain soil fertility.

Drip irrigation would ensure supply of required quantum water for every plant, he added.

TNAU Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy said mango, banana, jackfruit, greens and vegetables should be included in daily diet to alleviate malnutrition.

Central Cooperative Bank to open four branches

The Salem District Central Cooperative Bank (SDCCB) will open its four new branches at Karumanthurai, Ammapettai, Kannankurichi and Gurusamipalayam soon.

Permission has been accorded for the opening of new branches immediately, R. Elangovan, chairman of the SDCCB, said while speaking at a meeting to review the performance of the bank for the quarter ending December 31, 2014 here on Saturday.

He underlined the importance of increasing the deposits of the SDCCB and its branches and primary agricultural cooperative societies attached to it.

At the same time, effective steps should be taken for the recovery of the entire loan dues, to improve the financial position of the cooperative bodies, he said.

Mr. Elangovan advocated steps for improving the performance of the primary agricultural cooperative societies with less than Rs. 2 crore money transaction.

Programmes should be implemented for strengthening the financial position of these societies.

Targets

He directed all the branches of the SDCCB and the primary agricultural cooperative societies to achieve the monthly targets without default.

The meeting discussed in detail the issues of achieving the targets in the disbursement of farm loans, assistance for the differently abled, loans for women Self-Help Groups, women entrepreneurs, petty loans, housing loans, extension of assistance to the primary agricultural cooperative banks then and there, increasing the working capital and deposits of the bank branches and the societies.

Joint Registrars of Cooperative Societies - S. Srinivasan (Salem) and V. Lakshmi (Namakkal), S. Tamil Selvan, General Manager (in-charge), SDCCB, Assistant General Managers of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) K. V. Raja (Salem) and S. Boovaragan (Namakkal) and others participated in the review meeting conducted on the occasion.

Applications invited for agri entrance

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, has invited applications up to February 23 for the All India Agriculture Entrance Examination for undergraduate (AIEEA- UG 2015), postgraduate (AIEEA- PG 2015) and research (doctoral) programmes.

The AIEEA- UG 2015 will be conducted to fill 15 per cent seats in bachelor's degree programmes in various agricultural & allied subjects (except veterinary science & animal husbandry) offered by agricultural

universities and 100 per cent seats in the Dairy Technology course offered by National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal.

The test will be used for the award of National Talent Scholarship for those opting for higher study outside the State for the academic session 2015-16.

Admission is open to 11 four-year bachelor's degree programmes, which are divided into two streams — stream A (agricultural/biology) and stream B (mathematics).

Those who have passed Plus Two/equivalent examinations with Physics, Chemistry and any one of the subjects from Biology/Mathematics/Agriculture/Home Science are eligible to apply. They should have secured at least 50 per cent marks in aggregate (40 per cent for SC/ST and Physically Challenged candidates). Those appearing for the qualifying examination in 2015 are also eligible to apply. Age between 17 and 23 years as on August 31, which is relaxable by 5 years to SC/ST and physically challenged (PC) categories.

The AIEEA – UG 2015 will be held on April 11 from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Application fee is Rs.500 (Rs.250 for SC/ST and physically challenged).

AIEEA - PG

The AIEEA- PG 2015 will be held on April 12, from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. across the country. Online and offline application facilities are available up to February 23. Application fee is Rs.600 (Rs.300 for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and Physically Challenged). Rs. 25 has to be remitted as bank charges/ service tax.

Candidates can apply online on <http://icarexam.net> or through www.icar.org.in. For offline mode, application form and information bulletin can be obtained either from Kerala Agricultural University, Vellanikara, Thrissur, or Syndicate Bank Branch, MS City Centre, Kasaragod, will distribute application forms.

Separate notification for research programmes are also given on the website.**GOPAKUMAR KARAKONAM**

VC: mechanisation key to improving agriculture

C. Vasudevappa, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, said on Saturday that mechanisation was the answer to most of the ills affecting agriculture in the country.

He was speaking after inaugurating a day-long farmers' convention organised by the Udupi Zilla Krishik Sangha here.

Dr. Vasudevappa said most youngsters in rural areas were moving away from agriculture as they think it is not profitable. The number of people dependent on agriculture had come down from 80 per cent to about 55 per cent in the country. Even this was expected to go down further.

Small land holdings were unlikely to bring down the cost of agricultural operations. Since labour costs were going up, mechanisation would solve many of the problems, he said.

Most farmers were shifting from agricultural crops to horticultural crops due to fluctuation in prices of agricultural crops. Intensive cultivation methods should be used to make farming profitable. Instead of depending on one crop, farmers should take up mixed cropping, the VC said.

In Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts farmers were leaving paddy fields fallow because of increasing production costs. Instead, they should take up cooperative farming and use the fallow lands. Since the soil had some salinity in these coastal districts, they could improve the quality of soil through organic farming techniques, he said.

He said that instead of bemoaning the state of agriculture, farmers should become innovative, visit the Zonal Agriculture and Horticulture Research Station (ZAHRS) in Brahmavar and learn new farm techniques.

The University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences started a two-year diploma in Agriculture at the ZAHRS, Brahmavar, last year. Farmers should send their children for this course. This course would open new vistas of agriculture for them.

They could also try the new techniques learnt by the students on their fields and get lateral entry for degree course in agriculture, he said.

Four farmers – Gopal Shetty, Shyamprasad Bhat, Joseph Kundar and Geeta Shetty Payyaru – were felicitated on the occasion. An exhibition of

farm equipments was held at the venue, which attracted a large number of farmers.

Farmers trained in eco-friendly management of pests, diseases

A team of experts from Agricultural College and Research Institute, Killikulam, trained farmers of the district in eco-friendly management of pests and diseases in horticultural crops on Sunday.

As a two-day seminar on ‘Horticultural Technologies’ was organised by the Department of Horticulture here on Saturday and Sunday, a few hundred farmers from various parts of the district visited the stalls to understand the latest technologies being used to ensure better harvest.

On the second day of the event, training in eco-friendly management of pests and diseases in fruits and vegetable crops was imparted to the farmers.

In his address, T. Abdul Razak, Professor of Entomology, Agricultural College and Research Institute, Killikulam, said insect pests such as sap-sucking pests, leaf-eating caterpillars and stem borers were causing significant loss to the farmers cultivating fruits and vegetables.

Sucking pests such as white flies, leaf hoppers and aphids were highly dangerous as they could spread virus diseases among healthy plants.

“The farmers usually go for indiscriminate use of toxic chemical insecticides for controlling these pests in their crops, which paves way for environmental pollution and accumulation of toxic pesticidal residues in fruits and vegetables. In order to reduce the pesticide load in the environment, eco-friendly management practices such as use of natural enemies, insect pathogens and botanical pesticides like neem should be encouraged among the farmers,” he said.

Egg parasitoids, such as Trichogramma, was found to yield promising results in destroying harmful pests at the egg stage itself.

Professor Abdul Razak explained the use of pheromone traps, yellow sticky traps, and trap crops as the low-cost eco-friendly tools that could be included in the integrated pest management programme in horticultural crops.

About 200 farmers from the district participated in the training programme.

Agri expo attracts good crowds

The two-day 'Agri Expo – Kumari 2015' attracted good crowds from different walks of life in Nagercoil.

The exhibition, the brainchild of Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan, had 35 stalls put up by agriculture and allied departments.

Officials explained to visitors various schemes offered by the government for improving agricultural practices through video documents and demonstrations.

Speaking at the valedictory function on Saturday night, Mr. Chavan said the expo was organised for the first time in the district with a view to bringing modern and scientific methods of farming to the farmers. Demonstrations were organised by the officials on how to control bugs in seedlings and agriculture produce.

Information regarding allied sectors such as animal husbandry, fisheries and agriculture marketing were also provided by the departments concerned.

Progressive farmers who achieved record yield of agricultural produce were given certificates of merit and welfare assistance.

Subsidy given

Mr. Chavan gave a total subsidy of Rs. 1.5 lakh through agriculture and horticulture departments to 15 Amma Pannai Mahalir Groups and Rs. 33,250 to four beneficiaries from Coconut Development Board.

District Revenue Officer A. Udhayakumar, Joint Director of Agriculture Pon. Kaatha Perumal were also present.

Farmers seek direct procurement of cotton



Cotton farmers are concerned over the declining price of cotton and looking forward to a better price. Though cotton production witnessed an increasing trend following good rainfall, the market price is not up to the desired level, say farmers. Hence, the affected cotton farmers have sought the intervention of the district administration to ensure a better price’.

K.P. Perumal, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Farmers Association, suggested here on Saturday that the Cotton Corporation of India could procure cotton directly from farmers to offset the price decline. Now, one quintal of cotton was sold at prices ranging from Rs. 2,800 to Rs.3,200. It did not even meet expenditure incurred on cultivation of cotton that was raised mostly in Kovilpatti block. Cotton is also cultivated in neighbouring areas such as Vilathikulam, Ottapidaram and Ettayapuram. K. Navaneethan, cotton farmer from Kovilpatti, said that the produce fetched good price last year at Rs.5,500 to Rs.6,000 per quintal.

Though cotton production in the region had gone up by 60 per cent over last year, the prices were disappointing. “With assured irrigation, average yield per acre is seven to ten quintals and in rainfed cultivation it is three or four quintals. The average expenditure incurred on cultivation per acre is between Rs.10,000 and Rs.15,000,” the affected farmer told *The Hindu*. Unlike other crops, cotton cultivation is labour intensive. One acre of cotton picking costs Rs. 1,200.

Despite rising cost of fertilizer, pesticide, transportation, electricity and labour, cotton farmers could not even enjoy a marginal profit. He wanted the government to fix minimum support price for cotton. Joint Director of Agriculture N.K. Dhakshinamoorthy said that the area under cotton had increased to 6,700 hectares in 2014 against 5000 hectares in 2013.

Mysuru farmers get ready to reap benefits of ‘superfood’



Madappa, a farmer in H.D. Kote taluk’s Bidarahalli village, had been growing cotton and ragi in his fields for years.

About three months ago, he experimented with Chia, a crop reckoned to be a rich source of Omega-3 fatty acid, proteins and dietary fibre.

Madappa is already being offered around Rs. 18,000 to Rs. 20,000 per quintal for the crop grown on one acre of plot.

The amount is about three times what he would earn from ragi and cotton.

With new-age health and wellness concepts weaning the diet-conscious away from staples like rice and wheat to high protein and gluten-less food, farmers in the Mysuru region are embracing ‘superfood’ crops like Chia and Quinoa.

Staple crop

Chia seed, a staple crop of Mexico, is considered good for general health as it possesses properties that protect the heart and regulates one’s appetite.

Quinoa, a pseudo cereal, also originally from South American countries like Peru and Bolivia, possesses very low glycemic index, which is recommended for management of Type 2 diabetes, says Ram Rajasekharan, Director of the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI).

The institute has introduced the crops for cultivation for the first time. Farmers’ leader Kurubur Shanthakumar said about 60 farmers in Mysuru district has grown Chia and Quinoa in more than 100 acres of land.

“Chia crop, which is ready for harvest, yields about five quintals for every acre. At Rs. 20,000 per quintal, a farmer can earn about Rs. 1 lakh against an input cost of just Rs. 10,000,” he said.

“The farmers have already been approached by exporters from Mumbai, who are ready to buy the crop. As they have asked for a nutrition report, we are preparing the same with the assistance of CFTRI,” Mr. Shanthakumar said.

The crops, which can be grown in minimal water, will be ready for harvesting in three to four months. Also, no major pests or diseases have been reported so far. “Now, a lot of farmers are seeking seeds for these crops”, he added. Prof. Rajashekharan said the imported varieties of Chia and Quinoa are available at select stores in India for a high price.

Soon, the home-grown varieties of these ‘superfoods’ will be available in India.

While Chia is used in breakfast cereals, energy bars and breads, Quinoa is considered healthier than white rice and brown rice and contains twice as much fiber as most grains, and is rich in iron, magnesium and manganese.

Move to double food grain production

The State Agriculture Department has proposed to double the foodgrain production in the State during the current year under the Food Grain Mission 2014-15. The proposal was aimed at augmenting the revenue of the farming community.

The State government has been extending all assistance to the farmers. Adequate manure, seeds, and fertilizers have been provided to the farmers along with technical assistance, said M. Rajendran, Director of Agriculture, while speaking at a review meeting with the officials of the six districts of Salem, Namakkal, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Tiruvannamalai and Vellore here .

Mr. Rajendran said that the government has taken effective initiative for the elimination of middlemen in the marketing of farm produce.

Govt to declare MSP for kharif crops in May: Kundariya



At a time when farmers of Saurashtra are complaining *about* low minimum support price (MSP) for cotton, Union Minister of state for Agriculture, Mohan Kundariya on Friday announced that the central government will declare base prices for crops of kharif season in May instead of the current practice of declaring them in August.

“In our country, the sowing for kharif or monsoon season generally begins in the third week of May. But the government declares MSP for crops of this season in August. In such a scenario, farmers do not know which crop will get higher incentive from the government. To help farmers take an informed decision about sowing crops, the central government has taken a policy decision to declare MSP for crops of kharif season in the month of April or latest by May 15 from this year onward,” Kundariya said while speaking at a seminar in Junagadh Agricultural University (JAU), in Junagadh.

Kundariya said that MSP for crops of rabi season or winter will be declared in month of August accordingly.

Saurashtra is the largest producer of cash crops like cotton and groundnut in the state. However, cultivators of this region had held demonstrations in November and December demanding the Central government raise the MSP for long staple cotton from the current Rs 4,000 per quintal. They argued that prices of natural fiber in the market were hovering around the MSP against an average of Rs 5,000.

The Minister, who is an MP from Rajkot, was in Junagadh to inaugurate the annual Shivratri fair in the foothills of Mount Girnar near Junagadh and to attend the seminar at JAU. Kundariya further said that JUA will soon start community radio for farmers of Junagadh district.

In a first, city to get app that provides update on ‘good’ to ‘critical’ air quality

It will soon be possible to plan one’s travel route and know the quality of air in the *city* before stepping out of the home, with just a tap on one’s cell phone. In a first, a mobile app has been developed to provide *current* air quality as well as one to three-day forecast for air quality and related *health* advisories.

The app, developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, and the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), providing air quality information for Delhi and Pune will be launched on Tuesday. Mumbaikars can avail the “System of Air Quality Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)-Air” app by April. On a scale of ‘good’ to ‘critical’, the app will indicate the city’s air quality status.

If the air quality is ‘very poor’, an advisory stating ‘people with heart or lung disease, older adults, and adults should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion’ will follow.

For Mumbai, information will be collated from the air quality monitoring stations and numerous automatic weather stations that are being set up in the city under the SAFAR project.

“The advantage of the system product is that it will give complicated scientific information in simple terms and also provide air quality index. The display boards in the city will also provide UV index, skin advisory and dynamic city pollution maps,” says Dr Gufran Beig, programme director of SAFAR.

For instance, harmful gases are discharged from vehicles, industries, slums and get stagnated in a humid region like Mumbai. Our app would help people identify the most polluted and less polluted areas in Mumbai and take precautionary measures to protect themselves from harmful health effects,” Beig added.

Two air quality monitoring stations are currently being installed in Colaba and Bhandup, as well as 10 automatic weather stations in Borivali, Malad-Malvani, Bhandup, Warsova, Andheri, Sakinaka, Kurla, Dharavi, Mahim, Worli, Byculla, Colaba, Chembur, Mahul and Mankhurd. “We have chosen locations such that we could cover various micro environments such as residential, commercial, industrial, slums in the city and around 15 display boards across the city will

showcase the same information,” said Beig. The digital display boards at traffic junctions in Mumbai will be in Marathi and English, and the integrated voice response service for air quality-related information, which is currently operational for Delhi and Pune (toll free number 18001801717), will also be available for Mumbai, once the monitoring stations are operational.



Govt to launch 'soil health card' plan on February 19



NEW DELHI: A centrally-sponsored nationwide "Soil Health Card" scheme will be finally rolled out from Suratgarh in Ganganagar district of Rajasthan on February 19.

The card, carrying crop-wise recommendations of nutrients/fertilizers required for farms of different soil types, will make it possible for farmers to improve productivity through judicious use of inputs.

Such cards will be issued to 14 crore farm holdings across the country in three years. The move will help farmers identify the "health of the soil" which will go a long way in improving productivity through judicious use of fertilizers and water.

The scheme will be launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the presence of agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh. The agriculture ministry has already formulated a national "mission" to provide 3 crore cards to farmers in 2015, 5.50 crore cards next year and remaining 5.50 crore in 2017.

A digital system is being developed so that local agriculture science centres across the country can keep details of soil-test results. Soil samples will be collected even from small tracts of farm land in remote villages.

The system will, eventually, allow farmers to download the "Soil Health Card" using "unique number" allotted to each soil sample. In that case, change of ownership of the particular farm land will not create any problem in getting such cards or getting them updated.

Though a few states including Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Haryana had successfully begun distributing such cards a couple of years ago, most of them did not make it operational beyond the villages around various agricultural universities. The Centre's fresh move will make the scheme universal.

Since collecting soil samples and uploading/updating the test results will be a mammoth exercise, the Centre has written to states urging them to take the help of students of agriculture universities for the task.

"All soil samples will be tested in various soil testing labs across the country. Thereafter, experts will analyze the strength and weaknesses (micro-nutrients deficiency) of the soil and suggest measures to deal with it. The result and suggestion will be displayed in the cards," said an official.

Farmers to be trained to rear bees

MADURAI: In order to augment food production in the country, the Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR) has planned to sensitise and train farmers to rear honey bees in their farms. Honey bees are found to significantly contribute in augmenting food production by aiding cross pollination, according to P K Chakrabarty, assistant director general (plant protection & bio-safety) of ICAR.

Its effect was evident in some plants like mustard, apple, litchi crops where the yield increased by 40 per cent. "The research found that honey bees are crucial to increase food production and we are going to promote rearing honey bees in farms across the country. We will coordinate with 23 of our state agriculture universities in sensitising farmers and help them keep the bee boxes while carrying out cultivation in coming days," he said. Chakrabarty was in the city recently to inaugurate the 36th

annual conference and national symposium on 'Challenges and Management Approaches for Crop Diseases of National Importance - Status and Prospects' at Agricultural College and Research Institute (AC&RI).

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University vice-chancellor, K Ramasamy said the university carried out a good amount of research on honey bees especially in Kanyakumari district. "Our research expertise will be used in helping the farmers in the state," he said. To increase production, Italian honey bees (*apis mellifera ligustica*) were introduced initially but the challenge was hive collapse or migration, hence farmers prefer Indian bees (*apis cerena indica*). "We are helping our farmers to protect honey bees in farms so that cross pollination boosts yield," he stated.

M Kalyanasundaram, head of entomology department in AC&RI said that research found 30% fall in food production as honey bees disappeared from the farms ruling out cross pollination. "Cross pollination is vital for agricultural production hence bees are more important than the mere honey they produce. We need to bring honey bees back to our farms," he said. Major challenge is pesticides as its indiscriminate use kills bees and turns whatever honey available into poison. "Simple steps like avoiding pesticides while flowering season and times when honey bees forage for food are enough to protect them great deal. In addition to creating awareness among farmers we are going to train them in basic apiculture so that it augments their revenue too," he added.

Fitness facts you must know

If you're looking to get fit, you need to know these must-know fitness facts. From getting the skinny on cellulite to warm-ups, cool downs and how to get the best from your workout, these facts are the very foundation for a fit body.

With enough health and fitness jargon coming our way, it's important to get your basics right, and that's exactly what this post is designed to do for you. So let's get started. First on our list, is an old friend of ours - Cellulite.

Cellulite: Subcutaneous fat pushed against connective tissue forms a broken appearance that results in cellulite. Women are more prone to getting cellulite (let's add it to our list of special woes!), although some

men with lower levels of the androgen hormone do get cellulite as well. Contrary to popular belief, surgical procedures to remove cellulite aren't effective, since they can sometimes increase your body's chances of forming cellulite. Exercising reduces cellulite, but cannot cure it. Also, anyone, thin, fit or fat, can have cellulite.

The fat burning zone is misinterpreted and misrepresented fitness advice. Low intensity aerobic activity merely uses a larger proportion of fat for energy, than high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities. But weight loss is a result of overall energy burn. This so-called fat burning zone is a half-truth at best, and will not help you boost fitness musts like metabolic rates, muscle tone or cardio health. Its wide fan-base comes from the fact that it sounds easier than rigorous activity, and is beneficial for those who would otherwise refuse any high-intensity exercise.

Avoid crash diets and starvation. Weight loss is a give and take function between nutrition and energy. By starving yourself, you are simply telling your body to store fat whenever you do decide to feed it. We aren't advocating over-eating, but know how much nutrition and food your body needs daily, and then stick to it. For example, if your Basal Metabolic Rate is 1200, and you burn approx 500 calories per workout session, then maintain a diet that caters to the required energy, and essential daily nutrition. Starving would mean eating just 500-800 calories, which would spell trouble when you start eating well again.

Not matching shoe to the workout type is a common beginner mistake. If you run on the treadmill, while wearing shoes with next to no cushioning, you're bound to hurt your shins and ankles. Similarly, dancing, kickboxing, and other kinds of training require specially designed shoes. We don't mean that these shoes are rocket science, or that you'll have trouble finding them in your local sports stores. This simply means, that before starting a new workout routine, you must conduct suitable research to ensure you wear the right shoes.

The weighing scale is not the only measure of fitness. If you're a mere 2-4 kilos above your desired weight limit, you might add a kilo or two, when you first start exercising. This is simply because your body is building muscle. More muscle means faster metabolism, so this will help you lose weight in the long run. Measuring inches, body fat percentage and body lean mass are very reliable measures of fitness. In fact, measure your thighs, waist, arms, wrist and neck before you start your workouts. After 3 months, you'll find that even though your weight hasn't gone down, your inches certainly have!

Each workout doesn't have to be a 60 minute session. Step aside from robotic fitness advice handed out to one and all. Workouts must always suit your daily schedule. If that means three short spurts of 15 minutes each, then so be it. Walk in the morning, do 5 sets of weights (after a 7 minute warm up, of course) in the evening, with another short walk before bed. What matters is that you clock in as much time as your body needs. Spread it out. Or better still, invest in training for workouts like kettlebells and functional workouts that are time-effective and big on results.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Commodities transaction tax expanded to cover 38 more items

The Finance Ministry has expanded the list of agricultural commodities on which the commodities transaction tax (CTT) is currently levied. As many as 38 items have been added to the existing list of 23 commodities. For this purpose, the Central Board of Direct Taxes has amended the CTT Rules notified in July 2013. The new items that have been added include rice, bajra, ginger, sesamum, small millets, tur, tur dal, urad, urad dal, onion, groundnut, moong dal, methi, ragi, betelnuts, cinnamon, nutmeg, jowar, linseed, gram daland sunflower seed.

Currently, some of the new items added to the list are not traded on commodity bourses. This CBDT move is significant as it comes a fortnight before the Budget for 2015-16 is to be presented. The Forwards Market Commission – the regulator for commodity futures market in India – had recently suggested to the Finance Ministry that the CTT should be either done away with in the upcoming Budget or the quantum of the levy should be reduced.

The Centre had imposed a 0.01 per cent CTT mainly on non-agricultural commodities from July 2013, resulting in the volume of trade on the commodity exchanges dropping.

According to the Forward Markets Commission's market report, the volume of trade till January during the current fiscal dropped to Rs. 51.26 lakh crore against Rs. 89.03 lakh crore during the same period a year ago. The trade value dropped to Rs. 101.44 lakh crore in the 2013-14 fiscal against Rs. 170.46 lakh crore in 2012-13.

Business Standard

When you're sure

Agriculture ministry supports using high quality seeds to boost productivity



Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh on Sunday said he supports the use of high [quality seeds](#) for sustainable increase in [crop productivity](#) and farmers' income and does not advocate genetically modified (GM) crops.

The [agriculture ministry](#) issued the clarification amid reports that Singh favoured [GM crops](#) during the 'Indian Seed Congress' organised last week in Agra.

"Some newspapers have published that the agriculture minister has advocated giving filip to GM crops at the inaugural session of the event on Friday. This is factually wrong. In fact, the minister talked about increasing [farmers](#) income and sustainable increase in productivity is closely linked to supply of quality seeds," said a statement issued by the ministry.

"The GM crop issue did not feature in the minister's speech as the matter is sub-judice in the Supreme Court. The minister mentioned about Bt cotton in the speech to inform that this was the only GM crop which is viable and grown for last 10 years," the statement said.

On Friday, the agriculture ministry had issued a statement quoting Singh's speech made in Agra, "Apart from increased productivity to produce more from less input including water and land, the losses that occur because of droughts, floods, salinity, biotic and other abiotic stresses also need to be eliminated decisively through the adoption of appropriate technologies. In this context, genetic engineering holds great promise."

"Bt cotton in Gujarat and other states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu has clearly demonstrated what these new technologies can do to enhance farmer incomes..." he had said in the statement.

The government has so far permitted commercial cultivation of BT cotton but imposed moratorium on commercial release of Bt brinjal in February 2010 due to concerns aired by green activists.

Part of the National Democratic Alliance government, right wing-affiliated groups - the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh have also expressed opposition to GM crops.