

27.02.15

THE HINDU

Tribal foray into biotechnology



Inspired by their success in the production of biocontrol agents and biofertilizers, members of Sabari, a tribal women self-help group (SHG) of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) under Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) at Ambalavayal in the district, are planning to repeat the success story in the production of the liquid form of pseudomonas culture, which is easier to use.

The university is producing the liquid form of pseudomonas, a biocontrol agent used against crop diseases and as a growth promoter for plants, for the first time on a commercial scale, Reshmy Vijayaraghavan, Assistant Professor, plant pathology, KVK, who is supervising the project, says.

The 10 members of the Sabari in the Nellarachal tribal colony were guided towards the biotechnology venture by A. Radhamma Pillai, former head of the KVK during a field visit in 2004.

Later, the KVK trained them for six months in fungal and bacterial culture and packing. The group produced 10.24 tonnes of trichoderma, a biocontrol agent to fight quick wilt disease afflicting pepper vines, and 9.1 tonnes of pseudomonas fluorescence last year. Under a Memorandum of Understanding with the university, the group will get 35 percentage of

the income. “Last year we earned Rs.3.02 lakh from the venture,” K. Sharmila, secretary, Sabari SHG, says.

The cost of 250 ml of liquid pseudomonas is Rs.120, and 5 ml of it is mixed in one litre of water and used as soil drench and foliar spray. Apart from trichoderma and pseudomonas, the SHG is also producing bio-fertilizers such as rhizobium, azospirillum, azotobacter, phosphorous solubilising bacteria and biopotash, as well as bio-pesticides (entomopathogens) such as beauvaria, metarrhizium, and verticillium.

Breathe among the blooms: Annual Flower Festival

Begin the weekend on a floral note by walking through greenhouses and going gaga over roses, orchids and tulips at Farm Fest 2015, the annual flower, vegetable and fruit show. Get a glimpse into what exotic plants the over-the -century Botanical Gardens nurtures, pick up herbal medicine secrets, try your hand at vegetable or fruit carving, learn about organic kitchen gardening and get tips on all things eco-friendly at the festival. The show, organised by the Department of Agriculture, is on at the AFT grounds on Cuddalore Road.

NABARD aid for Odisha rural projects

National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has sanctioned assistance worth Rs.280.92 crore to Odisha Government for taking up rural infrastructure projects including irrigation and flood control structures.

Besides, the bank has sanctioned Rs. 21.95 crore towards construction of 41 godowns and warehouses of capacities 300 metric tonnes to 1,000 metric tonnes in 10 districts of Odisha under Warehouse Infrastructure Fund (WIF).

These projects envisage creation of additional storage capacity of 17,300 MT, which could be used in storage of agriculture produces.

With this, NABARD assistance during the current year has gone up to Rs. 2,265.13 crore for creation of infrastructure in various sectors such as irrigation, rural connectivity (roads and bridges), fisheries and animal husbandry.

NABARD sources said the present sanction included 31 flood protection-cum-irrigation system improvement projects involving assistance of Rs.229.50 crore and 5,124 minor irrigation projects (5,000-bore well, 79 river lift, 45- tube wells) worth Rs. 51.42 crore. These irrigation projects envisage creation of irrigation potential of 79,422 ha of land in Odisha, the bank said.

According to NABARD, cumulatively since inception of Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, the bank has sanctioned Rs.11,608 crore to the State for implementing more than 1.97 lakh projects.

GPS devices to test soil fertility

Assistant Director (Agriculture) Obulesu Naik distributed 35 Global Positioning System (GPS) gadgets to the agriculture officials from 24 mandals here on Thursday.

The devices would be utilised for conducting soil fertility tests to ensure bumper crop yield with healthy soil management. Collection of soil samples in all the targeted mandals through GPS system had been initiated from Thursday, he said.

As many as 30 samples should be collected from each revenue village and the mandal-level officials had been told to record the farmers details and soil fertility levels and the same should be submitted to the district authorities.

35 GPS devices distributed to agricultural officials

Kisan cards distributed

Kisan cards were distributed to 41 farmers for the first time in Virudhunagar district by Pandyan Grama Bank (PGB) at a function organised here on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, J. Sadakkadulla, Regional Director, Reserve Bank of India, stressed that prompt repayment of loans would help in advancing loans to others and also pay returns to investors.

He felt that the present ratio of one bank branch for a population of 10,000 should improve in Tamil Nadu. There were 50, 000 bank branches in the country operating with one crore accounts.

The Chairman of Pandyan Grama Bank, S. Karthigeyan, presided. According to a press release, financial assistance to the tune of Rs. 1.45 crore was given away to 87 beneficiaries at the function in which Chief Regional Managers of Indian Overseas Bank M. Valaiapathi and Tirugnanasambandam and top officials from the Reserve Bank of India and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development participated.

Agricultural university signs pact with SBT



The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Bank of Travancore (SBT) on Corporate Internet Banking Package (CINB). The MoU was signed between KAU Registrar P.V. Balachandran and SBT DGM A.

Sathyannarayana at a function here on Thursday. KAU Vice Chancellor P. Rajendran presided over.

S. Harisankar, GM, SBT, said the package offered instantaneous fund transfer facility to the KAU units. All employees and pensioners would be provided with zero balance accounts with special concessions, personal accident policy, unlimited transactions and auto-sweeping facility, he said.

“Employees can also avail personal loans at concessional rates without third party guarantee. All existing accounts will be migrated to the new mode with immediate effect. We are keen to launch more collaborative ventures including extending our professional knowledge to KAU students,” he said.

‘Organic farming good for people’s health’



Agriculture and agronomy experts have cautioned that if organic cultivation continues to be ignored, people will face the risk of eating harmful food produced on soil where chemicals and pesticides are used indiscriminately.

They have appealed to farmers to switch over to organic agriculture and thereby maintain soil fertility and sustainability.

“Let us have good quality food by adopting good cultivation practices where bio-manure and bio-fertilizers are used. In these days of global

warming and planet burning, it is time to prevent contamination of soil by stopping chemical-fed cultivation,” they said here on Thursday.

The experts were speaking at the inauguration of a symposium on ‘Organic agriculture for sustainable food security’ organised by Agricultural College and Research Institute (ACRI).

K.K. Krishnamurthi, president, Indian Society for Certification of Organic Products, in his inaugural address, said, “Even though we have good climate and soil, Tamil Nadu is lagging in organic culture. Microbes are important for soil life and the natural way of doing agriculture is the best way to sustain it, instead of depending on pesticides, chemicals and fertilizers.”

K. Shiva Shankar, founder, Environmental Protection Institute, Bangalore, said only one per cent of agricultural land in the world was under organic farming. “If farmers go the organic way, 10 per cent of cost will fall. Their their profit will go up,” he said.

K. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor, TNAU, said the university had launched a residential programme in sustainable agriculture to train farmers on how to grow high-value crops and market their produce easily. It would be offered at the ACRI here.

R. John Sureshkumar, senior programme officer, Change Alliance, New Delhi, said the course was offered through the open and distance learning wing. “It is a 90-day residential course to train unemployed youth in farming. They will be taught sustainable agricultural practices,” he said.

C. Chinnusamy, Dean, ACRI, and T. Myrtle Grace, Head, Department of Agronomy, said the two-day conference was held in commemoration of the golden jubilee celebrations of the institute.

Horticulture gets a boost with drip irrigation



Drip irrigation has helped the farmers of the district to take up horticulture cultivation in a big way.

Under the drip irrigation method, water is supplied without much wastage for a long time pointedly to the root of the crops. Tapioca, sugarcane, tuberose, and oil palm are the major crops cultivated in the district using drip irrigation.

Murugesan, son of Subbaiyan, a farmer of Chinnapallipalayam in Thottiyam taluk, said: “I have cultivated “mullikodi” variety of tapioca on 0.85 hectares. I received a subsidy of Rs.85, 400 per hectare under the National Sustainable Agriculture Movement for installing drip irrigation system. I got a yield of 50 tonnes per hectare, and I’m planning to sell tapioca for Rs.5 per kg.”

K.Palraj, deputy director, Agriculture, and Ravichandran, assistant director, Horticulture, said that a target of 542 hectares has been fixed as target for providing drip irrigation this year for horticulture crops and 79 hectares for other crops.

Hundred per cent subsidy is given to small farmers with up to five acres and for marginal farmers with up to 2.5 acres, and 75 per cent subsidy is given for other farmers. Under National Agriculture Development Programme banana bunch cover is given to farmers to avoid insect bite and pecking by birds at the time of ripening of the fruits. A subsidy of Rs.12, 500 per hectare is given for covering the bananas. Horticulture

crops are cultivated on 25,000 hectares. Banana, mango, guava, tapioca, onion, brinjal, tomato, bhindi, jasmine, tuberose, rose, chillies, and turmeric are the major horticulture crops cultivated in the district.

Advantage of rain-fed farming neglected

Cultivation in irrigated lands is easy compared to rain-fed lands, as farmers are completely dependent on the rains. In an effort to come to the rescue of rain-fed irrigation farming community, the Karnataka Government has taken up promoting millets in a large way.

As part of that millets were introduced in the PDS supply system and being given at the cost of rice under the Public Distribution System. However, this is not being accorded priority in Telangana State.

Two districts – Hassan and Bijapur, where rain-fed farming is taken up in large areas, were identified by Karnataka Government to procure millets – jowar and ragi - from the farmers. While the minimum support price (MSP) offered by the Union Government for millets was Rs.1,550 per quintal, the Karnataka Government has been extending an incentive of Rs.450 making it Rs. 2,000 per quintal.

“Weather conditions are worse in our state. About 70 per cent of the farming in Karnataka is rain-fed and that is why we are according top priority for farming and trying to help them out through programmes like Bhuchetana,” said Karnataka Agriculture Minister Krishna Byregowda, who was at the International Crops Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Patancheru.

The Government of Karnataka got prepared to procure as much quantity of millets as possible from the farmers. “The millets have enormous calorific/nutritional value. Even the fodder is good for cattle and that is one of the reasons for promoting millets. We are also focusing not only on procurement, but also on consumption of millets,” says Mr. Byregowda.

Meeting on March 9 to finalise cost of transporting sugar

The authorities of the Aland Cooperative Sugar Factory run by the NSL Sugars have agreed to convene a meeting on March 9 to finalise the cost of harvesting and transportation of sugarcane from the farmers' fields to the factory.

The senior officials of NSL Sugars gave this assurance to the farmers who staged a dharna outside the office of the factory demanding early fixing of harvesting and transportation charges and also the decision on the payment according to the Fair Remunerative Price fixed by the Union government.

Delay

The delay in finalisation of the harvesting and transportation charges was cited as the main reason for the factory not to pay the prices of the sugarcane as per the Fair Remunerative Price fixed by the Union government.

President of the Karnataka Pranta Raita Sangha Maruti Manpade, who led the protests of the farmers, told *The Hindu* on Thursday that the factory authorities, who held discussions with the leaders of the farmers organisation, have assured that after finalisation of the cost of harvesting and transportation, a decision regarding the payment to the sugarcane as per the FRP would be taken.



MoU signed to facilitate business ties with US firms

AURANGABAD: The Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC), the bilateral Chamber of Commerce in India committed to development of Indo-US business and trade relations, signed a MOU with the Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture (CMIA) on Wednesday. The MOU will be mutually beneficial for trade, investment, and technological

exchange opportunities between US industries and Indian industries, specially located in Marathwada.

"The signing of this MOU will facilitate promotion of bilateral trade, investment and technology transfer, business collaborations, joint ventures, marketing tie-ups and strategic alliances through a set of proactive business-oriented initiatives thus which will act as catalyst for sustainable growth of business between India and the US," said CMIA president Munish Sharma.

"The signing of this MOU will further promote mutually-beneficial trade, investment, and technological exchange opportunities between US Industries and Indian industries. It would enhance the overall global competitiveness of its members, support research and business development collaboration for its members and assist its members in strengthening the commercial and economic ties between American and Indian businesses and industries, governmental entities, and academic institutions," said CMIA vice-president Ashish Garde.

'Start policy of profitable price for crops'

CHANDIGARH: The BJP government in Haryana has urged the Centre to give farmers 30% more price than the input cost of their crops.

Haryana agriculture minister Om Prakash Dhankar told TOI on Wednesday that the state has sent a request to the Centre in this regard. According to the minister, Haryana is the first state to make such a demand. "We have also urged that Centre to start the policy of profitable price for crops instead of the present minimum support price (MSP)," he said.

Farmers' bodies have been demanding implementation of Swaminathan Commission report, which had recommended 50% more price than the input costs. The state BJP leaders feel that it may not be feasible for the Centre to offer 50% rise in one go but it should be implemented in phased manner.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had promised 50% profit to farmers in crop procurement if the party was voted to power. According to BKU leader Gurnam Singh, the state BJP unit had promised to implement the Swaminathan Commission report when a kisan panchayat was organized in Jind district in February, 2014.

There is growing impression among the farmers' leaders of Haryana that agriculture is not a profitable occupation anymore. An RTI query in 2013 had revealed that farmers in Haryana face a loss of Rs 263 per quintal on wheat as the Central government had fixed Rs 1350 per quintal as MSP against the cost input of Rs 1613 per quintal that year.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

‘Remove anomaly in gas allocation to urea, other fertiliser units ’

The proposed policy for allocation of domestically-produced natural gas, which downgrades the position of urea manufacturers in the pecking order, has prompted players in the fertiliser sector to reiterate their demand of being kept at the top of the list.

The Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) has written to the Fertiliser and Agriculture Ministries demanding not only that the fertiliser sector be given top priority ahead of CNG (compressed natural gas) and PNG (piped natural gas) sellers and atomic energy and space research sectors, but also that there should be no differentiation in allocation between urea and NP/NPK fertilisers.

Balanced fertilization

At a time when “balanced fertilisation” has become a mantra, the industry points out that the proposed re-allocation policy would hurt P&K (phosphatic and potassic) fertiliser manufacturers despite the need for higher quality fertilisers.

The 2013-14 Economic Survey estimated that proportions of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) usage should be 4:2:1, but officials point out that it is as much 38:6:1 and 53:11:1 in Punjab and Haryana, respectively, on account of excessive urea application. Nationally, it is estimated at 8:3:1.

“N beyond 4 is unproductive. Balanced use is not happening. If urea is fourth in the allocation policy now but the small quantity required by the

P&K manufacturers, about 2 mmcmd, has been given the last position which means there will be no availability,” said a senior industry official, who warned that fertiliser subsidy would increase with a policy shift and hurt farmers.

Idle assets

The official said the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) in 2013 had decided that 31.5 mmcmd allocated to the fertiliser sector which included both urea and NP/NPK fertilisers.

A change in the allocation policy would particularly hurt those P&K fertiliser manufacturers that had units located away from ports. “Nitrogen is imported through ammonia and finished products like urea and NP/NPK fertilisers. 40 per cent of domestic production of nitrogen in the country is also dependent on imported gas as LNG. Any loss of production of NP/NPK fertilisers due to non-availability of domestic gas will increase import dependence,” it said.

Outlook turns bearish for mustard

The sluggish trend in mustard and its oil continued amidst higher arrival of the new crop across the country. Mustard oil in Indore mandis on Thursday was quoted at ₹668 for 10 kg, while it was ₹660 in Neemuch and ₹670 in Morena. In Rajasthan mandis, mustard oil prices in Kota and Ganga Nagar ruled at ₹670 each (down ₹20 from last week), while it ruled at ₹685 in Jaipur (down ₹20 from last week).

In Gujarat also, mustard oil traded low at ₹665 on weak buying support. Given further rise in arrival of new crop and large stock of mustard oil with the crushers, bearish sentiment will continue in the coming days on slack buying support.

New mustard seeds were quoted ₹3,700-3,800 a quintal, while mustard seeds (old) ruled at ₹3,600-3,900. Raida ruled at ₹3,400. Plant deliveries of new mustard seeds for Jaipur line ruled at ₹3,745-50, while that of old mustard seeds were quoted at ₹3,825-30 .

Planters urge Centre to raise import duty on natural rubber to 30%

The United Planters' Association of Southern India is hoping that the Government would intervene and enhance the import duty on natural rubber to 30 per cent from the existing 20 per cent in the forthcoming Budget to save the domestic rubber industry. Upasi President Vijayan Rajes has, in a statement issued here on Thursday, said that if such immediate measures are not taken, the livelihood of the 1.2 million rubber growers would be at stake.

Refuting claims of the consuming segment that the import of natural rubber has not affected the prospects of the local farmers, he said, "India until recently was leading in productivity of natural rubber until producers stopped tapping due to non-remunerative prices on account of large scale imports, pushing the country to the fifth position. Prices dipped sharply from Rs. 241 in April 2011 to the current level of Rs. 126 a kg."

Imports have surged 22 per cent to 3.51 lakh tonnes between April and December 2014 compared to 2.88 lakh tonnes the corresponding period of the earlier fiscal. The consumption rose by just 4.4 per cent to 7.64 lakh tonnes from 7.31 lakh tonnes.

Taking exception to statements that suggested that there was no proportionate increase in imports compared to the drop in production, Rajes said, "these are statistical artifacts. The imports during the current fiscal have been in excess of domestic requirement by over 1.15 tonnes. The government should therefore intervene to safeguard the interest of the large number of small and marginal rubber growers."