

DATE:20.01.2015

THE HINDU

Gingelly price to remain stable

The Agro Market Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI&BPC) of the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri Business has indicated that the price of gingelly would remain stable during the 'thaipattam' harvest season.

In a price advisory, the centre said the price of red gingelly would be around Rs. 85-88 per kg during harvest period from April to May.

The price advisory was based on an analysis of the prices that prevailed in the Sivagiri Regulated Markets over the past 14 years conducted by the AMI & BPC functioning at the Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies (CARDS), Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

India is the second largest producer of gingelly in the world. The crop is widely preferred for its qualities of high drought tolerance and the high oil content in the seeds.

As per Crop Forecast Coordination Centre's (CFCC), gingelly seed production during the kharif season in 2014-15 was 6.45 lakh tonnes. However, majority of gingelly is grown as a kharif crop in central and southern parts of the country.

In Tamil Nadu, gingelly is cultivated in a small area as a summer crop. Gingelly production was around 17,179 tonnes from an area of 33,181 hectares in 2012-13. Productivity was 613 kg a hectare. Erode, Karur, Salem, Cuddalore, Villupuram, Thanjavur, Tiruppur, Pudukottai and Tiruvannamalai were the major districts that contributed about 66 per cent of the total area and 70 per cent of the state production during 2012-13. Erode district has the highest productivity of 734 kg per hectare.

Main varieties cultivated in Tamil Nadu are TMV (SV)7, TMV-3, TMV-4, TMV-5, TMV-6, VRI (SV) 2, VRI(SV)-1,CO1 (black gingelly) and SVPR1 (white gingelly). TMV-3, TMV-4, TMV-5, TMV-6 and TMV-7 red gingelly varieties are used for oil purpose and CO-1 black gingelly variety is mainly used in confectionaries. SVPR1 (white gingelly) is exported.

Poverty-induced undernutrition serious challenge: Swaminathan

'Food-cum-drug approach best to treat chronic diseases'



Dr. M.S. Swaminathan speaking at the Indian Youth Science Congress at ANU in Guntur on Monday. Union Minister of State for Science and Technology, Y.S. Chowdary is seen.— Photo: T. Vijaya Kumar

Undernutrition induced by poverty is the most serious food security challenge in the country, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation founder chairman M.S. Swaminathan said here on Monday.

“Under-nourishment is the mother of malnutrition in cereal-based diets. We should replace a purely drug-based approach for treatment of TB, HIV-AIDS and leprosy with a food-cum-drug approach. After many years, agriculture, nutrition and health are coming together to treat hunger in a holistic manner,” Dr. Swaminathan said in his presidential address on ‘Science and Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security’ at the inaugural function of the 6th Indian Youth Congress at Acharya Nagarjuna University.

The focal theme of the Congress, ‘Zero Hunger Challenge’, was in response to a global movement launched in 2013 by the UN with the aim to ensure zero stunted children in less than two years, 100 per cent access to adequate food, developing sustainable food systems and zero loss or waste of food. Pointing out the disturbing facts, Dr. Swaminathan said 45 per cent of children below three years were stunted, one in three malnourished children lived in India, and under-nutrition was associated with half of under-five age deaths worldwide.

Stating that food losses and waste formed one of the main components of food security, Dr. Swaminathan said high priority should be given to establishing safe and modern food storages at the farm level, procurement centres and

thirdly, in a national food security storage grid. At least 50 such grids should be set up in the country, he said.

Application of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering in agriculture could play rich dividends, he said while recommending that a Parliament approved regulatory authority for conducting All India Coordinated Trials should be put in place.

“The present moratorium on field trials with recombinant DNA material is serving as a serious handicap in harnessing benefits of wide array of transgenic material with public and private research organisations,” Dr. Swaminathan added.

India's excess grain stocks worth Rs. 50,000 crore: expert



Cutting them is crucial for reducing inflation, fiscal deficit

India is holding excess foodgrain stocks worth nearly Rs. 50,000 crore, over and above the stipulated buffer limits, according to experts. At close to 49 million tonnes, the stocks are more than twice the norm, former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) Ashok Gulati told *The Hindu*.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday reduced the norm for January 1 to 21.41 million tonnes from 25 million tonnes with the aim of better management of food reserves in the country. Cutting excess stocks is crucial for reducing both inflation in foodgrain prices and the Centre's fiscal deficit.

Mr. Gulati said the Modi government had taken a decision four months ago to reduce the excess holdings. However, it was able to offload less than 2 million tonnes from the 15 million tonnes (10 million tonnes wheat and 5 million tonnes rice) to be liquidated, said Mr. Gulati.

“What is the point of announcing new norms if you are sitting over a heap of foodgrain that is well above the old limits... there is no rationality in India’s food stock holdings,” Mr. Gulati said adding that the excess reserves are worth Rs. 50,000 crore.

Ahead of recommending the new buffer stocks norms to the CCEA, the Food Ministry had consulted experts from various fields, including Mr. Gulati.

Besides revising the buffer norms, the CCEA also decided to offload excess stocks through open market sales or exports. An inter-ministerial group, comprising the Food Secretary, Consumer Affairs Secretary and Revenue Secretary, will work out the strategy for offloading the excess stocks to contain inflation and reduce storage costs.





The revised buffer norm for April 1 is 21.04 million tonnes of wheat and rice as against the present 21.2 million tonnes. For July 1, it is 41.12 million tonnes as against 31.9 million tonnes. On October 1, the stock should be 30.77 million tonnes as against 21.2 million tonnes and on Jan. 1, it should be 21.41 million tonnes as against 25 million tonnes.

The buffer will include five million tonnes of strategic reserves of wheat and rice. The proposal is to upgrade the quarterly buffer requirement to bring it in line with the distribution needs under the National Food Security Act.

As much as 61.4 million tonnes of foodgrain is required a year for welfare schemes — Antyodaya Anna Yojana and for the provision of 5 kg to each member of a priority household under the National Food Security Act.

Norms for buffer stocks had not been revised since 2002, while the stocking of strategic reserves for calamities and so on has been done since 2005.

Prices of vegetables and rice dip

PRICES OF VEGETABLES		
PRICES OF MOST VEGETABLES HAVE COME DOWN BY 10 PER CENT AS MARKETS GET MORE PRODUCE		
ONION Jan. Rs. 18-22 Dec. Rs. 20		CARROT Jan. Rs. 20-30 Dec. Rs. 20-25
		
GREEN PEAS Jan. Rs. 35-40 Dec. Rs. 70-80	BROADBEANS Jan. Rs. 18-20 Dec. Rs. 20-25	BEANS Jan. Rs. 20-25 Dec. Rs. 25-30

**wholesale price per kg*

As the chilly winter is on, it's not just temperature alone that has dipped. The prices of vegetables and rice have also seen a considerable drop, much to the relief of consumers.

The Koyambedu wholesale market has been witnessing 10 per cent hike in sales as winter crops arrive.

Traders say the prices of most vegetables have come down by 10 per cent as the market gets more produce.

S. Chandran, a wholesale merchant, said several vegetables like broad beans, carrots and beans have become affordable compared to last month. Green peas, a seasonal vegetable, is priced at Rs.40 a kg in wholesale market. However, retail prices vary according to the area as vendors also include transportation and labour charges.

P. Selvakumar, a retailer in Adyar, said: “Only drumsticks are sold for Rs.200 a kg. If a customer spent Rs.300 to purchase few vegetables last month, the bill has reduced to Rs.200 now.”

An increase in arrivals due to the harvest season is also the reason for a fall in prices of rice.

According to D. Thulasingham, president of Federation of Tamil Nadu Rice Mill Owners and Paddy – Rice Dealers Association, both wholesale and retail prices have come down and these prices are likely to stay till April.

D. Mohan of Saravana Rice Mandy, Adyar depot, said many customers prefer par boiled rice (*venn puzhungal arisi*) that does not become sticky.

“Unusually, this year the prices started reducing 15 days ago. Many hoteliers buy Sona Massuri rice from Karnataka. A 25-kg bag used to cost Rs.1050. Now it is Rs. 875,” he explained.

Pulses yield helps TN win Krishi Karman Award



Pulses coverage and production increased in the State in 2013-14 following a series of initiatives taken by the State Government.

That Tamil Nadu has bagged the Krishi Karman Award for 2013-2014 from the Central Government for increased food production is not news anymore.

But what is, is the technological, varietal interventions from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and the support it gave to the Agriculture Department to increase the cultivable area under pulses and yield in the State.

The University Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy says the University introduced a new variety of red gram (tur dal) - Co.R.G. 7 around five years ago - and asked farmers to follow transplantation system just as they did for paddy. In areas like Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri, it asked farmers to go in for drip irrigation,

fertigation. It gave farmers benefit. The University also promoted the C 06 variety black gram (urad dal) that saw quick takers in farmers and also traders as the quality saw better tasting *idli* and *vada*, he adds.

Aside from newer varieties, which brought down the crop cycle from 180 days to 60 days – 120 days depending on the pulse cultivated, the University joined hands with farmers to multiply pulses seeds through participatory approach, encouraged taking up system of pulse intensification cultivation, recommended the right foliar nutrition and suggested adopting integrated pest management techniques, says J.R. Kannan Babu, Professor and Head, Department of Pulses, TNAU.

The techniques meant that the farmers need not employ workers three or four times to harvest pulses. They could employ the workers once as the new varieties promoted were synchronised maturing ones. This minimised the farmers' labour cost.

Mr. Babu says one more reason for farmers taking up pulses cultivation in good number was the adaptability of the new varieties – the farmers could cultivate it round the year and also as an intercrop.

Along with introducing new varieties, the TNAU also asked farmers to use herbicides, foliar nutrition (to increase flowering content) and 'TNAU Pulse Wonder', a spray to boost production. These helped increase the yield.

The TNAU reports suggest that the average pulses yield went up from 223 kg an acre in 2011-12 to 294 kg an acre in 2014-15. (The figure for 2014-15 includes advance estimates). And, the area from 6.68 lakh hectare in 2011-12 to over nine lakh ha this year.

Red gram farmer from Coimbatore B. Ranganathan says that the yield from Co.R.G. 7 is at least three quintals more an acre than the old ADT 5 variety. It dips marginally when cultivated in December, though.

Honey hit in Coringa mangroves



‘*Aegiceras corniculatum*’ flower, the main source of nectar in Coringa mangroves.— Photo: By Arrangement

The indiscriminate use of pesticide in its adjacent farmlands has taken a toll on the honey production in the Coringa mangroves. Coringa, located near to Kakinada, is considered to be the second largest mangrove in India after the Sundarbans in West Bengal. Bhitarkanika in Odisha is in third place when it comes to the size.

Spread in an extent of 333 square kilometres, the Coringa mangrove has been the home for a wide range of flora and fauna. The honey production in Coringa is much lesser when compared to that of the Sundarbans and the Bhitarkanika. Moreover, the production has been on the decline year after year, which has prompted the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation to work on the casuarina plantation in Coringa to improve its density.

“Unlike Sundarbans and Bhitarkanika, agriculture fields are located very close to the Coringa. As the honey bees are known for their relentless travel, they happen to get affected by the pesticides being used by the farmers. As a result, there has been a visible drop in the honey production,” R. Ramasubramaniyan, senior scientist from the foundation told *The Hindu* .

‘*Aegiceras corniculatum*’, popularly known as ‘black mangroves’ and ‘Guggilam’ in the local parlance, is the source of quality nectar in Coringa mangrove.

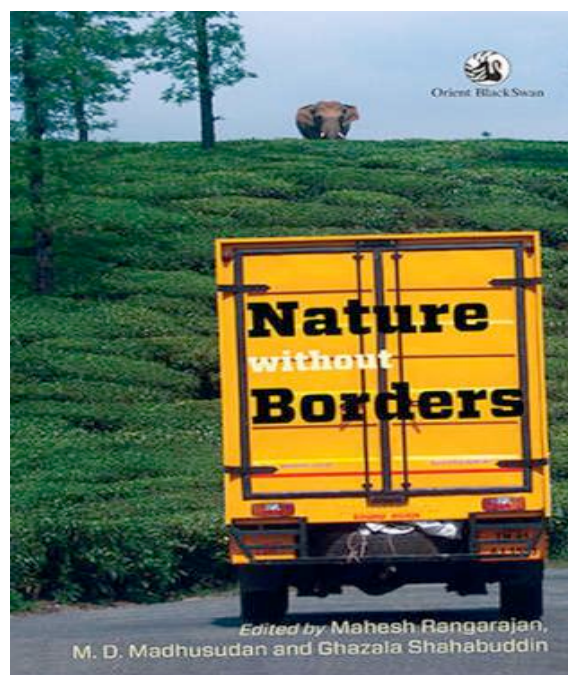
The flowering season for this plant lasts four months a year and the grown up plants are being converted into firewood by the nearby residents. “We have to take into the account the facts that nectar is available only from the lone source here and the extent of the mangrove is lesser than Sundarbans. But, still we have not seen many honey nests in the Coringa,” points out Dr. Ramasubramaniyan.

R. Ramasubramaniyan, senior scientist, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation

Agriculture fields are located very close to Coringa. Honey bees happen to get affected by the pesticides being used by local farmers, resulting in a visible drop in the honey production

Agriculture fields are located very close to Coringa. Honey bees happen to get affected by the pesticides being used by local farmers, resulting in a visible drop in the honey production

Recognising the interlink between culture and conservation



Murali Sivaramakrishnan

Nature is apparently quite simple and at the same time equally complex. To understand the way everything works is generally to recognize the interconnectedness of everything and also to realize the limitlessness of all that

is natural. These days, public debates are quite rampant on issues relating to global warming and environmental degradation and the need and necessity to conserve and preserve whatever is left of biological diversity. And so rife are issues in terms of defining and redefining Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs) on account of the inordinate deterioration of the human-nature frontier in hitherto unprecedented ways — the urgency for understanding ecological structure and function has never been so thus imminent in order to plan for a safe present and future for all life. *Nature without Borders* is certainly timely and relevant.

We read that just by maintaining green pockets or isolated reserves humans cannot forever maintain the ecological process and functions that are at the core of the ecosystem and thus forestall environmental disasters, for it is virtually impossible to enclose nature within any boundaries. It is only by inquiring into ecology, economics, and culture and by asking how they are interwoven that now we can move on ahead. The editors of *Nature without Borders* argue for acknowledging and reviewing those larger matrices which are as critical as corridors or core habitats.

Eight essays prefaced by a substantial introduction comprise the book under review. Shifting through time and space the essays deal with human-nature nexus in complex terrains across snow-clad mountains and deep jungles as well as through pastures, farmlands and urban spaces. Black sheep, grey wolf, Sarus cranes, marine life forms, fish, dolphins, and the elusive Snow Leopard all figure in the pages of this impressive collection of seminal articles.

In their study on trawling and fishing the authors draw attention to the inordinate squandering of marine life through the intervention of today's technology. Although known marine extinctions are far fewer than terrestrial ones, extensive commercial fishing has led to the collapse of about a thousand populations that once supplied the world's seafood.

The Sarus Crane is a six-foot tall majestic bird that is globally threatened, found largely in the rice-wheat landscape of the Gangetic floodplains of North India. And the essay that deals with this bird and its environment pleads for an integrated awareness of cultivation and conservation. The large cultivated fields of Uttar Pradesh are ideal for the Sarus Crane and the people's way of life conducive for their survival. The largest global population of these birds occurs in Uttar Pradesh that has over 199 million people with a density of over 800

people per square km and 57 million livestock all of whom use every bit of the land and landscape. Two aspects of farmer behaviour are critically important for the bird's survival: their practice of retaining wetland patches of all sizes and of course their positive attitudes toward these majestic cranes. The need of the hour apparently is to recognise the explicit interconnectedness of culture and conservation.

The mountain ranges of the north and the west provide an array of wild sheep, antelope, gazelle and wild goats. This is also a terrain that is interwoven with the lives of predator and prey, wild and the domesticated spaces, of herding and trading as well. It is here that the most elusive and the most beautiful of the big cats, the Snow Leopard survives. This most camera-shy big cat first filmed in the wild as recently as the 1970s treads the same mountainous tracks as humans and livestock. And quite different from the territories inhabited by the elephant and the tiger, which are merely ecological islands interspaced by human habitation that in turn endanger and hamper their natural movements and threaten their sheer survival, the snow leopard's terrain spilling over vast areas beyond its conservation range still becomes conducive to its lifestyle — in fact the snow leopard depends heavily on livestock raised and reared by human hands.

Wildlife conservation has always been threatened by the expansion of agriculture and landscapes fragmented by plantation crops. And the primary response to this has been the creation of protected areas such as national parks, sanctuaries, and nature reserves with added restrictions on resource use. We are given to understand that over 1,00,000 protected areas covering roughly 18.8 million square km or 12 per cent of earth's terrestrial surface area has been set worldwide to preserve natural areas. However, considerable biological density also exists outside these bounded territories in human-modified habitats like the plantations and farmlands. Of course, there is always the factor of conflict and confrontation, and nature never plays by the book.

“Restoring Nature: Wildlife conservation in Landscapes Fragmented by Plantation Crops in India” is a seminal essay that deals with such contexts and conflicts in an area of great regional and global significance, the Western Ghats, and the authors highlight well-researched findings and engage with on-going interventions arguing for extending conservation beyond borders and territories. Tigers and leopards, elephants and people all exist in a vibrant mosaic.

And any inquiry into conservation ecology calls for the critical appreciation of this interlink. Nature spans rather than spills over borders and people remake the land not as and when they please, but as a contingent result of a series of contests and choices by a myriad factors. Thus in order to get the bigger picture, we need to allow ourselves to be enriched by variant perspectives that draw on human ecology, history, culture and the changing social dynamics.

This is a sensitive collection of essays centred as they all are on a very pragmatic approach, be it about the conservation ecology of wolves or the fight for an urban forest in Delhi. The idea of the border has very little sense when it comes to nature. However as the editors argue the borders within which we have tried to sequester nature against the siege of human demographic and economic growth are important symbols for they remind us of what we would like to secure and against what. And in the end as we close the book we feel the wisdom of the poet emerging: when we build walls what are we walling in or walling out?

No respite from water woes for Nellore ryots

40,000 acres to bear the brunt this cropping season

Perennial PROBLEM CROPS **40,000** ACRES UNDER THE KANUPURU AND KAVALI CANALS HAVE BEEN SUFFERING OWING TO LACK OF ASSURED IRRIGATION

- Farmers' bodies have been raising the issue at every forum
- With inadequate supply of urea, ryots are reportedly forced to buy the same at higher prices from open market

“Farmers have completed transplantation operations two months ago, but there are no indications pertaining to supply of irrigation water so far”

CHIRASANI KOTI REDDY, CIFA dist. general secretary

It appears farmers in the remote areas under the Kanupuru and Kavali canals have no respite from the perennial water woes during cropping seasons, as lack of an assured irrigation source has been taking a toll on their harvest every year.

This year, it is no different situation for the ryots, even as farmers' associations have been raising the issue at every possible forum, voicing the concerns of the farmers there.

Crops in as many as 40,000 acres under both the Kanupuru and Kavali canals are in dire need of water. The Confederation of Indian Farmers' Associations

(CIFA) district unit has taken up the issue with the district level officials. CIFA district general secretary Chirasani Koti Reddy said that the farmers in these areas had completed transplantation of various crops including paddy two months ago, but there had been no indications so far that water would be provided to meet the crop needs. In another two months, the crops would come up for harvesting and this became a matter of immediate concern for the farmers.

The farmers' leaders also expressed concern over what they described as lack of sufficient urea supply which was causing lot of problems for them. Recently, Collector M. Janaki issued instructions to the officials following which there was some improvement at the ground level. The CIFA leaders said that enough supply of urea had not reached the farmers societies in villages following which the ryots had to purchase the same at far higher rates from open market.

When the agriculture officials said that the farmers were using more than the urea required, the CIFA leaders clarified that only some farmers were resorting to such practice and all the farmers could not be blamed for the same. Mr. Koti Reddy also requested the officials to provide more information on the subsidised scheme for installation of solar pump-sets as decided by the government.

Protest against Ordinance to amend Land Acquisition Act

The Ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act will be a huge blow to the livelihood of share croppers and agricultural labourers in Odisha, alleged the CPI-ML (New Democracy) and peasants' organisation All-India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha (AIKMS).

Both these organisations held a joint protest in front of the office of the Revenue Divisional Commissioner (RDC) in Berhampur on Monday. They demanded the Centre withdraws the Ordinance and urged the Odisha government to oppose it. Demonstrators raised slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, accusing them to be anti-farmer. "Modi government's claim that it was promoting 'swadeshi' is proved false from this anti-farmer and pro-multinational company Ordinance," said CPI-ML (New Democracy) State spokesperson B. C. Sarangi.

Leaders of both these organisation are of the opinion that due to this Ordinance, the poor share croppers and agricultural labourers would be worst sufferers.

Although large part of agricultural land in Odisha is tilled by share croppers, they have been completely ignored in this new Ordinance, said AIKMS State committee member Kusanath Pradhan.

It may be noted that share croppers are yet to get legal status in Odisha, which means that under the new Ordinance only the land owners will benefit, they alleged.

According to Mr Sarangi and Mr Pradhan, this 'anti-people' Ordinance would take away the right of peasants over their land.

They criticised the government for neither bringing the Ordinance to public notice nor discussing it in Parliament. Lack of social impact assessment by gram sabha was also condemned by the CPI-ML (New Democracy) and AIKMS.

Farmers in hilly areas not eager to cultivate tapioca

Farmers in hilly areas of the district are reportedly not too eager to continue with their dependence on tapioca cultivation due to declining returns. A section of farmers who had been traditionally cultivating ragi switched over to tapioca in recent years lured by a buy-back arrangement introduced by middlemen who supply tapioca to chips manufacturg units.

However, the farmers are suffering due to the vagaries of price. Not only has the procurement price come down drastically to Rs. 4,000 per tonne for tapioca, the soil fertility has also been lost due to repeated cycles of cultivation, Agriculture Department officials said. The soil has to be fertigated with organic manure before they get back to sowing ragi, the officials said.

Red gram cultivators reap high yield

Farmers cultivating red gram in Bhavani, Ammapet and Anthiyur areas, endowed with red soil, are anticipating promising returns.

A bio-metric observation carried out by the Agriculture Department indicates that a minimum of one tonne of red gram could be harvested from one acre.

With procurement price of red gram ruling at around Rs. 50 per kilogram, farmers are in a position to earn Rs. 50,000 per acre in fields where proper spacing method has been followed, Joint Director of Agriculture Selvaraj said.

Red gram cultivated in rain-fed areas grows well in drought conditions, and has been raised in nearly 2,200 hectares in the district.

The department has determined through biometric observation that each plant grown in three feet by one foot spacing yields 400 to 500 pods, each with three grains. Considering that there are 15,000 plants in an acre encompassing 43,560 square feet, a minimum of one tonne produce per acre could easily be attained, Mr. Selvaraj said.

The productivity gets higher with more spacing.

At the Bhavani Sagar Research Station, red gram plants of BSR I variety raised in spacing of three to two feet have reached five feet height, and generate yield of up to half a kilogram of grains per plant.

There are up to 1,000 pods per plant, Mr. Selvaraj said.

Welfare assistance distributed to farmers

Under the Chief Minister's Uzhavar Pathukappu Thittam 2011 (Farmers' Security Scheme), 1,87,542 farmers have received a total of Rs. 231,81,95,595 in the last three-and-half years in the district.

Under the scheme, cash assistance is given to farmers in the age group of 18 to 65 whose land does not exceed 2.50 acre of wet or 5 acre of dry.

Under the scheme, educational assistance of Rs. 6,68,48,120 was provided to 27,921 children of members till December 2014, marriage assistance was provided to 10 beneficiaries totalling Rs. 80,000, 2,999 beneficiaries received Rs. 2,72,21,000 as maternity assistance, 4,978 beneficiaries received natural death and funeral expenses for their family members to the tune of Rs. 6,98,25,000, assistance to family whose members died in accident to the tune of Rs. 4,54,99,500, old age pension of Rs. 28,28,75,510 to 33,868 beneficiaries and Rs. 139,97,97,465 to 1,15,119 beneficiaries of poor farmers.

Hence, a total of 1,87,542 beneficiaries received Rs. 231,81,95,595 assistance under the scheme till December 2014.

Under the scheme, maroon colour identity cards are provided to the members who are engaged in agriculture and allied activities, grey colour identity cards are provided to dependent family members of the member.

KAU's agriculture expo begins today

All arrangements are in place for the third edition of the National Agriculture Fiesta and the second edition of 'Poopoly', a State-level flower show, organised by Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), at its Regional Agriculture Research Station here from January 20 to February 2.

Youth Affairs Minister P.K. Jayalakshmi will inaugurate the agriculture fiesta at 5.30 p.m. on Tuesday. M.I. Shanavas, MP, will inaugurate the Poopoly at the function.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, P. Rajendran, Associate Director of Research, RARS, Ambalavayal; V. Ajith Kumar; and

M.U. George, president, Ambalavayal grama panchayat; said that the 12-day programme was envisaged to sensitise farmers, especially farmers in the high ranges, to the vast commercial potential of horticulture and floriculture in the region as well as to acquaint them with modern agriculture technologies.

An exhibition of flowers in an area over 10 acres would complement the agri expo, he said. There would be a rose garden with over 2,000 varieties of rose plants, including those from Holland and France, set up on a 2.5 acres of land; a gladiolus garden with 100 varieties on two acres; dahlia garden on 3.5 acres with more than 5,000 varieties, and a gerbera garden with 150 varieties on 1.5 acres. Various programmes, including technical seminars, cultural programmes and amusement programmes have also been arranged in connection with the programme, Dr. Rajendran said.

Highest number of waterbirds recorded at Vembanad

The Vembanad Waterbird Count 2015, taken up by the Department of Forests and Wildlife and Kottayam Nature Society, has recorded highest number of wetland and wetland dependent birds ever recorded.

According to B. Sreekumar, coordinator, 57,828 birds have been sighted from the 10 sites surveyed. They belonged to 54 families, Dr Sreekumar said. This healthy development is, however, dependent on the huge number of ducks counted at Kaipuzhamuttu areas. The area has recorded 31,232 Northern Pintail ducks and 16,501 Lesser Whistling Ducks. It has also recorded the highest number of bird species at 34.

In fact, Kaipuzhamuttu areas has recorded a steady increase in the bird population, except in 2013, during the past five years. Bird species such as Oriental Darter and Black Headed Ibis were listed as ‘near threatened’ while the Greater Spotted Eagle was listed as ‘vulnerable’ as per the IUCN Red List, Dr Sreekumar said.

What was of concern was the fact that while Kaipuzhamuttu area registered the highest number of birds, the KTDC held Kumarakom Tourist complex area, which once boasted itself as one of the finest bird sanctuaries, had a lesser count at 182. Pathiramanal, another tourism spot, recorded the second lowest bird population at 507 while it also had the lowest number of bird species at 15. Dr. Sreekumar called for regular monitoring of the area especially during the migration season when thousands of birds descended on the paddy fields. He also called for introducing incentives for informants on poaching.

The bird count initiative had formally commenced on Saturday evening when 150 participants joined the base camp organised at the Regional Agriculture Research Station, Kumarakom. The actual survey was conducted from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Sunday morning in area that commences from Thollayiram Kayal near RARS to Nedumudy-Bhoothapandy area close to Alappuzha-Changanassery State Highway.

This year’s Vembanad conservation Award was presented to K. Binu, member, tree authority committee.

57,828 birds belonging to 54 families were sighted from the 10 sites surveyed.

Plan to use Vandiyur tank for summer storage getting ready

Students, farmers, academicians and public take out rally

Students, farmers, academicians and public took out a rally from the Gandhi Memorial Museum to stress the importance of water conservation in the city on Sunday.

The rally was organised as a part of a meeting organised by NAWAD Tech, to discuss water scarcity and related issues as well as the implementation of smart waterways project.

“We are preparing a proposal to utilise the Vandiyur tank as a summer storage point which would be of great help for residents of the temple city. If the whole tank is deepened by three to four metres, its water retaining capacity and storage will also improve,” said A.C. Kamaraj, Chairman of NAWAD Tech.

Benefits

Mr. Kamaraj further elucidated on the smart waterways project which could tap flood water and benefit not only agriculture, but also aid in electricity generation and thus help in the power situation also.

Disposal practices

Speakers at the meet further stressed the importance of keeping the local tanks and the Vaigai clean and spoke about the need to evolve effective practices for the disposal of garbage and sewage to avoid polluting waterbodies.

S. Mohan Gandhi and V. Pugalagiri, Managing Director of the Vadamalayan Hospitals, also spoke at the meeting.

Works inspected

Agriculture Production Commissioner (APC) and Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Rajesh Lakhoni inspected various agriculture development works in the district on Sunday and exhorted officials to promote agriculture development works on cluster basis.

After inspecting the State Seed Farm at Karaiyiruppu in Palayamkottai block, the APC reviewed the progress of National Horticulture Mission works such as High Density Planting of mango under drip irrigation at Andipatti in Keezhappavoor block and cocoa cultivation as intercrop in coconut grove, all being undertaken by the Horticulture Development.

C. Chandrasekaran, Joint Director of Agriculture, L. Perumal, Deputy Director of Agriculture, and ‘sister department’ officials S. Raja Mohamed, Deputy Director of Horticulture, S. Muthukumarasamy, Executive Engineer, Agriculture Engineering Department and R. Sankar, Deputy Director of Agriculture (Agri business and Marketing), accompanied the APC.

‘Do not approve genetically modified seeds, food’: Chandrashekar to Govt

State president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sanga (KRRS), Kodihalli Chandrashekar said that allowing genetically modified seeds and food in the nation will have an adverse effect on biodiversity and urged the Centre not to give permission for using genetically modified seeds and food.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday afternoon, Mr. Chandrashekar said that when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he had opposed genetically modified seeds.

However, now he is taking decision in favour of genetically modified seeds which is regrettable.

He condemned the Centre for bringing ordinance on Land Reforms Act saying that it is absolutely anti-people and anti-farmer.

He said the ordinance allows the authorities concerned to grab the land from the farmers which should not be allowed to happen and warned the Union government of farmers staging protests in the nation if the government fails to withdraw the Act.

He also came down heavily on Governor of Reserve Bank of India, Raghuram Rajan about his statement against subsidies to farmers.

He said 65 per cent people of the country are dependent on agriculture and asked ‘does Mr. Rajan know the difficulties farming communities are facing in taking up agricultural activities’.

He sarcastically commented on the RBI chief saying that he did not know how farmers cultivate paddy, ragi and other food grains. If farmers were to give up the agricultural activities, what would the RBI chief eat.

Anti-farmer statements and policies will only cause food shortage and cause trouble to the farming community rather improving the financial condition of the country, he said.

State working president of KRRS, H.R. Basavarajappa, Vice-president, Anusuyamma, state secretary, Devaraj B.S., farmer leader Kadidal Shamanna and others were present.

hindustantimes

India

Chennai

Chennai

Tuesday, January 20, 2015

27°

Maximum

23°

Minimum

- **rain: 0**
- **sunrise:06:35**
- **humidity:78**
- **sunset:06:04**
- **wind:normal**
- **barometer:1017**

Recipe: Madras lamb curry



Fiery lamb curry with the flavours of southern India.

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour 15 minutes

Ingredients:

For the curry powder:

1tbsp coriander seeds

1tsp fenugreek seeds

1tsp mustard seeds

2tsp poppy seeds

1tsp cumin seeds

2tsp black peppercorns

½tsp fennel seeds

3 sticks cinnamon

6 cloves

1 tbsp ground turmeric

4 whole dry chilies

For the curry:

2 small green chilies

4 cloves garlic

1.5cm ginger

1kg lamb, cut into large cubes
1 tsp salt
1 tsp red chilli powder
3 tbsp mustard oil
1 tsp black mustard seeds
3 onions, finely chopped
10 curry leaves
250g chopped tomatoes, pureed
1tbsp tamarind paste
100ml water
150ml yoghurt
Coriander, to garnish

Method:

- Dry roast all the spices for the curry powder. Combine black peppercorns, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, fenugreek, mustard, poppy, cumin and fennel seeds, red chilies and grind to a fine powder with the turmeric.
- Wet grind the green chilies, garlic and ginger with the water to make a fine paste.
- Marinate the lamb in a large bowl with the curry powder, yoghurt and salt, and set aside for 2 hours.
- Heat the mustard oil in a large pot until smoke point. Allow to cool down a little. Heat again and add the mustard seeds, let them pop for a few seconds and then add the curry leaves and onions. Saute the onions for a few minutes till light golden in color and add the salt, green chili, garlic and ginger paste. Keep stirring to prevent the masala from catching the bottom of the pan. -Saute for 2-3 minutes till you get the aroma of toasted spice, add the tomatoes, tamarind, red chili powder and water. Bring to the boil and then add the lamb and any accumulated juices to the pan.
- Cover and simmer for 1 hour on slow fire until the masala has thickened and the lamb is tender. Keep stirring occasionally.
- Garnish with coriander leaves.

Tips to cook pasta perfectly



Here are some useful tips to help you cook that pasta perfectly

Are you a foodie at heart? Do you want to be a perfect home-chef? Well, for that, you need to get a few basics right. One of them is to cook pasta perfectly. Although this may sound very easy, getting the perfect texture of pasta can be quite a task. Here are a few tips to keep in mind while cooking pasta -

Boiling water: It is very important to boil the right amount of water at the right temperature. Pasta requires more water than you might think it does. Make sure you boil enough water and get it at the right temperature before you put your pasta in it.

Avoid the salt: Do not put salt in the water while boiling it. While boiling, pasta does not really need the salt, as then while cooking you will add some salt. Also, most pasta is topped with Parmesan cheese which also consists of salt.

Rinse after boiling: Once your pasta is boiled, rinse it with tap water to stop the cooking process. Overcooked pasta is the last thing you'll want for your meal.

Try different pasta: Pick a shape and texture of pasta according to the dish you are cooking. From fusilli to penne and so many different varieties, pasta offers you a lot of chances to experiment.

Avoid maida as much as you can: Whole wheat pasta can also be tasty depending on the way you cook them. Too much maida is not good for one's health. So if you love pasta, learn to love whole wheat pasta as well!

Recipe: Delicious Apple Pancakes



Recipe: Apple Pancakes (Thinkstock photos/Getty Images)

Who doesn't love pancakes? We all have fond memories of our childhood where our mothers would prepare heaps of pancakes covered with honey and finely chopped almonds and walnuts or with assorted berries and fruits.

It was a run for gold every morning with your siblings when you wanted to gorge on this delicacy. Here's a recipe to get those taste buds of yours going and remembering one of your fondest childhood memory and making some too for your children to reminisce about. So what are you waiting for? Go and make some pancake memories.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup plain flour
1/2 cup corn flour
3/4 cup milk
2 tbsp melted butter
Salt to taste

For the apple filling:

4 big apples, peeled and chopped into small cubes
2 tbsp butter
4 tbsp brown sugar
1/2 tbsp cinnamon powder
2 tbsp honey (optional)
Walnuts for garnish

Method:

- For the pancakes - Mix flour, corn flour, milk, salt and 1/2 cup water making a batter
- Drizzle a little butter in a non stick pan and pour a small amount of batter (approximately 2 tbsp) in the pan. Flip the pancake to the other side once golden-brown cooking both sides. Prepare the rest the same way.

For the filling - Melt the butter in a pan and add apples, sugar and cinnamon powder. Cook till the apples are soft and well coated.

To serve - Spoon the apple filling on each pancake and drizzle some honey and walnuts on top. You can also serve with vanilla ice-cream for some extra brownie points.

Recipe: Banana Milkshake

It involves the simplest of preparations

Ingredients: One litre milk, four big bananas, sugar, half tsp cardamom powder.

Method: Cut the bananas into pieces, then add milk and sugar. Run the mixer for about a couple of minutes, till the milk froths. Add the cardamom powder and shake well. If you want, you may add strawberry to enhance the flavour.

4 popular bedtime beverages

4 popular bedtime beverages

After a long day, all you want to do is unwind with a hot cup of steaming coffee. We list down a few delicious alternatives that you can sip on, on a cold wintry night.

Peppermint tea: This herbal tea has properties that will help your body de-stress, relax and eventually sleep better. It is a great option to calm jittery nerves, reduce nausea and relieve anxiety.

Cocoa: The most popular bedtime drink in the world, this is a winter favourite because of its delicious taste. Even the ancient Mayans consumed it by roasting the cocoa beans and adding some spice to it.

Chamomile Tea: Like peppermint tea, it is also another non-milk tea that has soothing qualities. For best results, drink this tea around 30 minutes before your bed time.

Hot toddy: This traditional alcoholic beverage involves pouring hot boiling water in a little whiskey and adding a twist of honey, lemon and cinnamon stick for flavour. It is good to prevent cold and flu during winter and is very delicious.

Foods that flush out toxins from your body

In olden days, fresh fruits and vegetables used to be part of one's daily diet, and food was less processed. It's hardly surprising that people lived longer and had healthy bodies.

Nowadays, one needs to take extra precautions and adopt measures to lead a healthy life and have a fit body. Diet and exercise are very important to stay healthy. Here is a list of some food items that you can include in your daily diet to flush out toxins:

LEMONS: Lemons release enzymes that help excrete toxins from the body. Health experts usually advise people to drink a glass of warm water with lemon and honey in the morning as it helps cleanse the body of toxins. It also supplies vitamin C to the body and balances the acidity in food consumed.

CURD: It's a good idea to have a cup of curd every day after a meal. Curd is an antioxidant and cleanses the body, and in the process, boosts metabolism. It also contains calcium and vitamins

GREEN TEA: It is a great antioxidant and can easily be incorporated in your daily diet. You can have a cup in the morning and one in the afternoon. The one in the afternoon generally acts as a stimulant and helps lower blood sugar.

FLAXSEEDS: Ground flaxseeds flushes toxins out of your body. The fibre from this keeps the intestinal tract clean and contains omega 3 oils. But, men should be careful while consuming as the lignans in it are similar to the female hormone estrogen.

WHEATGRASS: It contains a lot of alkaline, which helps curb acidity, detoxifies the body and protects the liver. It also lowers blood pressure, increases metabolism and even stimulates the enzymes in the body by purifying the blood.

GINGER: This is considered one of the most potent disease-fighting spices, along with turmeric. It helps the metabolism, flushes out toxins and boosts liver function. You can chew on a small piece of ginger or even include it in your cooked food every day.

PARSLEY: While parsley is mostly used as a garnish, it has more medicinal values than you know. It keeps the kidney healthy and free of infection, and reduces bloating during menstruation in women.

5 Unusual vitamin-deficiency warning signs

Vitamin symptoms may be subtle at first, but they increase as the deficiency worsens.

A diet rich in processed food is one of the main culprits, aside of the consumption of lack of food. But the main concern remains that all the chips and biscuits that you so love strips you off all the essential nutrients. Junk fare

is mostly 'dead food' and seldom has any nutrients to contribute to your health and wellbeing. Besides, it doesn't help absorb them properly as it messes with your digestive tissues. So although you may not suffer from a disease, there's a chance that you may end up with impaired functioning, because vitamins are co-factors for all the bio-chemical reactions in the body. That impaired functioning can sometimes manifest in strange ways. It's your body trying to tell you something. So listen to it. While fatigue, shortness of breath, dizziness, pale skin, irregular heartbeats and weight loss are apparent, there are unusual vitamin-deficiency warning signs.

1. SIGNAL:

Red or white acne like bumps, on the cheeks, arms, thighs and butt

DEFICIENT IN:

Essential fatty acids and vitamins A and D.

FIX IT: Tank up on the sunshine. Long hours in air-conditioned spaces and pollution make it hard. Even sunscreen lotion prevents absorption. Consuming fish, sardine, tuna, egg, and green leafy vegetables also helps. Increase healthy fats like dairy products in your meal. Add salmon and walnuts and almonds, and seeds like ground flax, and chia in your diet. For vitamin A, eat plenty of leafy greens, papaya and colourful veggies like carrots, sweet potatoes, and capsicum. This provides beta-carotene, a precursor to vitamin A, which your body will use to make the vital nutrient.

2. SIGNAL: Tingling, prickling, and numbness in hands, feet or elsewhere.

DEFICIENT IN: B vitamins like folate (B9), B6, and B12. It's a problem directly related to the peripheral nerves and where they end in the skin. These symptoms can be combined with anxiety, depression, anaemia, fatigue, and hormone imbalances.

FIX IT: You can fix the vitamin B group largely with your diet. Opt for brown rice, millet, wheat germ, nuts, wheat bran sprouted grains. Egg, chicken, mutton, salmon, banana, broccoli, red kidney beans, asparagus, cauliflower, cabbage and all green leafy vegetables.

3. SIGNAL: Cracks at the corners of your mouth

DEFICIENT IN:Iron, zinc, and B vitamins like niacin (B3), riboflavin (B2), and B12. It's common if you're a vegetarian to not get enough iron, zinc, and B12. Likewise, if you're skimping on essential immunity-building protein because of excess dieting.

FIX IT:Eat more poultry, salmon, tuna, eggs, chicken, tomatoes, peanuts, and lentils. Iron absorption is enhanced by vitamin C, which helps fight infection. Combine these foods with broccoli, and cauliflower. Ensure that you also eat dairy products like yoghurt, paneer and ghee.

4. SIGNAL:Muscle cramps in the form of throbbing pain in toes, calves, arches of feet, and backs of legs

DEFICIENT IN: Magnesium, calcium, and potassium. If it's happening frequently, it's a sign that you're lacking in these. And if you're training hard, you can lose more minerals (and water-soluble B vitamins) through heavy sweating.

FIX IT: To fix potassium, have oranges, bananas, peanuts, beans, coconut water. For magnesium, go for dark green leafy vegetable, nuts and soybean. Almonds, figs, carrots, raisins, brown rice, cashew are rich sources of calcium.

5. SIGNAL:Red, scaly rash on your face and excessive loss of hair

DEFICIENT IN:Biotin (B7), known as the hair vitamin. While your body stores fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K), it doesn't store most B vitamins, which are watersoluble. Also, eating raw eggs makes you vulnerable, because a protein in raw eggs called avidin inhibits the body's ability to absorb biotin.

FIX IT:

Cooked eggs (cooking deactivates avidin), salmon, avocados, mushrooms, cauliflower, soybeans, nuts, and bananas

India to beef up defence against US chicken legs

New Delhi, January 19:

India is preparing a second line of defence to protect its domestic poultry industry against competition from cheap chicken leg imports from the US.

With the World Trade Organisation recently ruling against India's ban on chicken import from the US on the grounds that it would lead to spread of bird flu, the Commerce Ministry has asked poultry breeders to work out fresh risk assessments that would better withstand scientific scrutiny. (Corporate such as Venky's and Suguna are likely to be affected by the ruling.)

"We are going to challenge the WTO ruling soon, but we have to be ready for a possible negative outcome. That is why we have asked the poultry industry to get other possible health risks assessed," a Commerce Ministry official said.

Taking a hit

India's over four lakh poultry farmers, who produce an estimated 3.5 million tonnes chicken annually, could take a severe beating if cheap chicken legs from the US flood the domestic market. India's poultry industry, worth an estimated Rs. 50,000 crore, is the fourth largest in the world after the US, China and Brazil.

As US chicken legs are priced much lower than ones from India (Americans, unlike Indians, don't savour legs), domestic breeders are apprehensive that they may lose up to 40 per cent of their market.

Many countries including several in the EU and Australia do not allow import of chicken from the US on various health grounds that pass the WTO scrutiny.

India's concern that low pathogenic strains of bird flu (that is occasionally found in chicken from certain parts of the US) posed health risks was dismissed by the WTO as being scientifically invalid. New Delhi has time till January 26 to file an appeal against the ruling. The Commerce Ministry feels that it stands a better chance at retaining the import ban if it can issue fresh orders based on a more valid health concern.

“Risk assessment could be done on factors such as US poultry being fed genetically modified food or the fact that frozen chicken is kept in that state for long periods,” the official said. However, New Delhi has to steer clear of risks related to factors that may not be under control in the domestic market.

Health concerns

For instance, the EU decision to ban US poultry on grounds that chlorinated water used by poultry breeders in the US posed health risks can not be cited by India where water is chlorinated as well.

“In our recent meeting with poultry breeders, we have asked them to carry out risk assessments from reputable institutes with international experts. The restrictions that we impose have to be defensible,” the official said.

India’s over four lakh poultry farmers, who produce an estimated 3.5 million tonnes chicken annually, could take a severe beating if cheap chicken legs from the US flood the domestic market

Tea prices gain at Coonoor auctions



Coonoor, January 19:

Prices continued to rise at the Coonoor Tea Trade Association auction with the average gaining as much as Rs. 5 a kg at Sale No: 3 over the previous week.

Despite this, as much as 91 per cent of the 12.12-lakh kg on offer was sold due to encouraging demand.

Darmona Tea, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing auctioneers, topped the overall CTC market at Rs. 217 a kg. Homedale Estate Tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped the leaf market at Rs. 201. Kairbetta topped the orthodox market at Rs. 251 a kg. In all, 48 marks got Rs. 125 and more .

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs. 45-49 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs. 90-160 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged Rs. 54-57 for plain dusts and Rs. 110-195 for brighter liquoring dusts.

There was some purchase for Pakistan in a wide range of Rs. 46-82 a kg.

Kochi tea prices up despite higher inflow

Kochi, January 19:

Prices of several varieties of tea at the Kochi Tea auction increased last week despite higher arrivals. Good liquoring teas in CTC dust and teas, which came under the selection of major blenders, ruled firm to dearer.

In Sale No. 3, the quantity on offer in CTC dust was 11,91,500 kg, higher compared with last week. With good demand, plainer varieties were steady and sometimes appreciated in value. Export enquiries were better for medium and plainer teas.

However, others varieties were irregular and lower by Rs. 2-3 a kg and sometimes more, the auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis said.

The arrival in orthodox grades also registered an increase at 17,500 kg with primary grades remained steady. In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties quoted Rs. 90-151, medium fetched Rs. 66-110 while plain grades stood at Rs. 55-65.

The leaf sale also witnessed some improvement in prices with increased arrivals at Rs. 200,500 kg especially in orthodox grades. The market for Select Best Nilgiri Broken, Whole Leaf, Fannings was steady and sometimes dearer.

CTC leaf also witnessed good demand with 89,500 kg offered in the auction. Good Liquoring Broken and Fannings was firm to dearer.

In dust grades, Manjolai SFD/Mayura SFD quoted the best prices of Rs. 151/kg. In leaf category, Chamraj FOP fetched Rs. 381/kg.

3 ways to promote mustard oil

Product diversification, branding and campaigning can help to make it popular



A national workshop on mustard was organised at Jaipur by Department of Agriculture, Government of Rajasthan earlier this month. One of the major recommendations at the workshop was to establish a mustard oil development board that would look into market updates, government notifications, market information updates, branding and promoting mustard oil.

Issues in processing

Mustard oil processing in India is an unorganised business. There are 7,000-9,000 oil extracting units out of which only 20 per cent are registered in the organised sector. The industry has an installed capacity to process 23 lakh tonnes annually.

Mustard oil consumption is increasing at a rate of 20 per cent every year. Demand for mustard oil comes from rural areas and is consistent owing to its multi-uses.

The rapeseed-mustard varieties/hybrids contain 40-45 per cent oil. But its recovery, realised by the mechanical crushing processor (oil expeller) – the largest segment of edible oil processing industries –, is up to 35 per cent only.

Under this process of oil extraction, substantial amount of oil (5-10 per cent) is left in the rapeseed-mustardseed meal. Even if 3-4 per cent of this leftover oil can be extracted by modernising the mechanical crushing units, then at least 2-2.5 lakh tonnes additional edible oil could be made available.

The industry requires modern technology and also appropriate technology to reduce the content of erucic acid and pungency to make the oil more acceptable among consumers and tap export potential.

For the record, production of mustard/rapeseed, a winter crop cultivated in the northern States. was 8.028 million tonnes last year with the crop sown on 6.362 million hectares.

Rajasthan is the major producer contributing up to 47 per cent of the domestic production, followed by Madhya Pradesh (11.44 per cent), Haryana (12 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (10.41 per cent).

Issues in marketing

There is a strong need to focus on marketing of mustard oil. It helps to segment and position the product in line with the need and demand.

Marketing also creates a channel for products to reach consumers. Mustard oil has an extensive demand in northern and north-eastern States.

Mustard oil fully meets domestic demand without need for imports non-existent. Rajasthan has over 20 markets for mustard, with Shriganganagar, Alwar, Jaipur, Kota, Udaipur, Hanumangarh, being the major ones.

A major issue in marketing of mustard oil is that a large portion of it is sold in loose form; it is vulnerable to adulteration as it can be blended with cheaper oils such as palm oil.

Mustard seeds are sometimes adulterated with weed seed *Argimon Maxicana* . Other edible oils such as soyabean and groundnut are positioned and marketed effectively. Therefore, consumers develop a preference to these oils.

The stickiness and low transparency of the oil reduces the acceptability of mustard oil among consumers. The unattractive packaging and poor branding by companies has also been an obstacle in realising the real value of the product.

The unique pungency of the oil is a strength for domestic market but a barrier to exports. Different grades of oils with variation of pungency and viscosity for different markets is required.

The National Institute of Agricultural Marketing (NIAM) recommends a marketing strategy for mustard oils on the basis of a SWOT analysis conducted at the workshop. The strategies are:

Product diversification: Mustard oil is viscous, dark and highly pungent. Double refinement technique reduces its viscosity, makes it translucent and reduces its pungency. Therefore, it can be made available in two or more variants with different characteristics of colour, consistency and pungency.

Further making it available in attractive bottles, tetra-packs and cans of different sizes will fetch different needs of the people. This will draw interests of the consumers towards the product.

Branding and positioning: Mustard oil is usually sold in unattractive plastic bottles with red label and cap, in canisters and tin cans and even in loose to customers. An attractive packaging and advertisement will make the oil acceptable among consumers.

This branding can be developed by having some popular brand ambassadors for promotion of organised brands.

Mustard oil is positioned as a poor man's oil. A repositioning of oil highlighting its health benefits and taste will make the consumer prefer the oil.

Campaigning: Milk and egg promotion campaigns by the government have been successful in making these products more popular and acceptable among consumers.

A campaign on the similar lines is needed for mustard oil to make people aware of the benefits and making it more acceptable among the consumers.

The writers are associated with NIAM, Jaipur. Views are personal.

12 cardamom auctions every week from now

Flavouring agent prices up on squeezed supply

Kochi, January 19:

Small cardamom gained flavour over the past week as domestic demand overwhelmed squeezed supply at the auctions.

Arrivals were only 50 per cent of previous week due to Pongal holidays.

At last weekend auction, prices moved up by around Rs. 25-30 a kg and on Monday they were steady, Bodi market sources said.

The number of auctions has been increased to 12 a week from January 17 and henceforth, there will be no auctions on Sundays, which will be a holiday. The Spices Board has said two auctions, one in the forenoon and one in the afternoon, will be held six days a week. Six auctions will be held in Puttady, Idukki district of Kerala and six would be conducted in Bodinayakannur, Tamil Nadu.

The picking has entered the fifth round and the volume has started declining. The quality of the material has also diminished, trading sources in Bodinayakannur told *BusinessLine*.

Strong domestic demand coupled with good export buying has kept prices firm.

Last week, five auctions were held as markets were closed for Pongal holidays.

North Indian buyers continued to be active and there was good demand. Sources also said stockists are buying to replenish their inventories. Exporters said to have bought an estimated 40 tonnes last week.

PC Punnoose, General Manager, KCPMC, said the continuous active participation of the upcountry dealers gives the impression that the basic demand continues to be strong. He said the individual auction average last week was between Rs. 825 and Rs. 890 a kg.

Total arrivals last week decreased to 239.5 tonnes from 604 tonnes the previous week. At the Saturday auction held by the Green House Cardamom Marketing India Limited, 46.7 tonnes arrived and the entire quantity was sold out. The maximum price was Rs. 1,072 a kg. The auction average stood at Rs. 882.37 a kg.

So far, total arrivals this season are 11,612 tonnes against 12,563 tonnes during the same period a year ago. Sales are at 11,397 tonnes against 12,160 tonnes.

The individual auction average as on Saturday was Rs. 870 a kg against Rs. 550 last year.

Prices of graded varieties (Rs./kg): 8mm bold Rs. 1,050 -1,200; 7-8mm Rs. 980-1,000; 6mm-7mm Rs. 850-900; below 6 mm Rs. 750. Medium bulk was being traded at Rs. 850-900 a kg.

Centre set to amend rules for selling tea at auctions

Marketing control order to make sale of 70% produce mandatory

Chennai, January 19:

The Centre plans amending rules governing sales of tea through auctions. It will soon alter the Tea Marketing Control Order, 2003, making it mandatory for tea manufacturers to sell 70 per cent of their produce through auctions.

This amendment is being planned to ensure transparency in pricing and help small tea growers in realising better prices for green teas.

The Centre will also soon launch a unique and modified price stabilisation fund for the tea industry. The fund will provide crop insurance for small growers.

A delegation of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Associations was given these assurances by RR Rashmi, Additional Secretary (Plantation) in Ministry of Commerce, during a meeting in New Delhi to discuss issues affecting small tea growers.

According to a press release from the confederation, the delegation had pointed out to the Commerce Ministry official a resolution passed at the 223rd board meeting of the Tea Board at Valparai in Tamil Nadu. It was then resolved that every bought leaf factory will sell not less than 70 per cent of total tea manufactured annually through public auctions.

“This will help in formulating a better price sharing formula for small growers,” said Bijay Gopal Chakraborty, President of the confederation, in a statement.

Currently, the Tea Board fixes a benchmark price for tea produced by small growers. The price varies from Rs. 11-14 a kg, depending on the region. Small growers are concerned that green tea prices have remained stagnant for nearly a decade when prices of other commodities have soared during this period.

In the modified price stabilisation fund, self-help groups comprising small growers will get 40 per cent subsidy for setting up a micro or mini tea factory, the release said.

Tea research association will provide training to small growers on various aspects of production, including quality, pesticide usage and plant protection methods, the official told the delegation.

Business Standard

Coffee prices hit 10-month low in December

Fluctuation likely till month-end

Global [coffee](#) prices, which hit 10-month lows in December, have continued a downward slide and touched a fresh low in last week's trade. The International Coffee Organisation's (ICO) composite index dipped three per cent to 149.18 cents a pound on Friday.

Over the past two weeks, prices of the [Arabica](#) variety have seen sharp movement between 179.07 and 200.22 cents before dipping to 191.73 on Friday. ICE Arabica coffee futures for March delivery fell 1.8 per cent to 176.65 a lb. The price could hover around 180 cents in the near term, traders said.

“There is lot of confusion in the market over the weather in [Brazil](#) and that has impacted the price movement. A more realistic picture would emerge only by end-January and prices will fluctuate sharply till then,” said Ramesh Rajah, president, Coffee Exporters' Association.

Prices of Robusta are more or less steady at \$1,998 a tonne. Prices could move up in the range of plus or minus \$50 a tonne, he said.

The monthly average of the [ICO](#) composite indicator was the lowest at 150.66 cents in [December](#) 2014, compared to its previous low of 137.81 cents in February 2014.

The decline is mainly attributed to reports that Brazil, the world's largest bean producer, might see quick recovery in its production for 2015-16, compared to the earlier estimates. Brazil's production is provisionally estimated between 44.1 million and 46.6 million bags (each bag is 60 kg), according to Conab, the Brazilian crop forecasting agency.

[Conab](#) has also revised upwards the production figure for 2014-15 at 45.3 mn bags, 7.7 per cent less than 2013-14. A recovery in production seen in Colombia has also added pressure on prices in recent days. The Colombian production of Arabica is up by three mn bags, to touch 12 mn this year, Rajah said.

Cotton prices slip below Rs 31,000 per candy

Weak export as well as slow buying from domestic mills are the main reasons for constant price fall in cotton

Led by weak demand and high supply, [cotton prices](#) have been constantly on decline during January 2015 with prices now being registered below Rs 31000 per candy of 356 kg. During January so far, cotton prices have fallen by more than Rs 2,500 per candy to stand at Rs 30,500 per candy.

Traders said that weak export as well as slow buying from domestic mills are the main reasons for constant price fall in cotton in this season. Moreover, rumors of cotton selling by [Cotton Corporation](#) of India (CCI) also seemed to have put pressure on cotton prices.

"At a time when the country has seen record production of cotton, exports have been very dull mainly because of poor demand and business from China this year. Moreover, higher stock expectation has limited the demand from mills. All these factors have led to fall in cotton prices," said Arvind Patel, vice president of Saurashtra Ginners' Association (SGA).

After almost remaining stable for sometime at Rs 32,800-33,500 per candy levels, cotton has moved down to Rs 30,500-30,700 per candy.

Government agencies as well as various trade associations estimate a record high output this year, citing good rains and favorable climatic conditions in the major cotton growing regions.

The Cotton Advisory Board (CAB) has estimated production at 40 million bales and also increased its estimate for last year's production to 39.8 million bales from 39 million bales as on July, 2014. On the other hand, Cotton Association of India (CAI) and Indian Cotton Federation have projected over 40 million bales of cotton supply for 2014-15 marketing season.

"Domestic mills are buying only as per their requirements as they don't want to risk by creating inventory because of weak international demand. Moreover there is some financial crunch due to dull market this year," Patel said.

To protect farmers from the sharp decline in domestic prices, CCI started the procurement operation at the minimum support price (MSP) from October 2014. Till first week of January, CCI has procured about 4.1 million bales of cotton, highest in last six years, from key growing states like Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. It expects to buy about the same quantity during the remaining period of the procurement season.

Arun Dalal, a leading traders and exporter from Ahmedabad said, "It is lowest price after 2009-10 and market is almost at its bottom. At current price level, fresh demand may come to market that may hold the downfall."

Coupled with falling prices, arrival of cotton has also decreased across the country in January 2015 from 225,000 bales to 185,000 bales per day. According to traders, farmer restricted the selling of raw cotton or kapas due to lower price of the commodity. Kapas prices have declined to Rs 780-810 per 20 kg in Gujarat as against Rs 835-860 per 20 kg at the beginning of the month.

US organic farming start-up to enter Indian market

Started in 2009, BTTR Ventures is a fast-growing business with revenues of around \$5 million

Having featured in the Forbes '30 under 30' - which the magazine's website describes as a list of the brightest young stars in 15 different fields under the age of 30 - in 2012, Indian-American entrepreneur [Nikhil Arora](#) (28), co-founder of [California-based Back to the Roots](#) (BTTR) Ventures, is planning to set foot in the Indian market.

[BTTR](#) (pronounced 'better') Ventures is a sustainable urban mushroom farm that transforms coffee ground waste into a medium for growing gourmet mushrooms.

After making waves in the US, followed by recent forays in Europe and Australia, with two innovative products for home users - 'Mushroom Kit' for growing mushrooms and 'AquaFarm' for growing lettuce, basil, mint and wheatgrass at home - Arora is currently looking for a partner in India to launch these products.

"We are currently selling our products in about 10,000 stores in the US, and have recently started exporting to Europe and Australia. We are currently looking for a partner in India as well to launch these two products in 2015," he said.

The partner will import the products and market them, and "in the long-term, we can even envision a manufacturing partner in India if demand continues to rise, as it will allow us to make a larger impact in communities in India and gain efficiencies," he added.

Started in 2009, BTTR Ventures is a fast-growing business with revenues of around \$5 million. Arora recalls that his classmate Alejandro Velez and he were slated to graduate from the University of California, Berkeley and take up jobs in investment banking and consulting, respectively.

However, "during a lecture, our professor mentioned that gourmet mushrooms could be grown on 100 per cent recycled coffee grounds. We were intrigued, became friends, and ultimately business partners and entrepreneurs."

"After much experimentation and testing, we developed a system ideal for growing gourmet mushrooms out of recycled coffee grounds. After a renowned chef approved our mushrooms as 'delicious', we incorporated Back to the Roots Ventures in 2009," he added.

The company began with fresh gourmet mushrooms, supplying about 500 pounds per week to Whole Foods and other grocers across northern California. Later, it started receiving queries from friends and customers asking how they could grow their own mushrooms at home. The partners then tweaked their business model, developing a kit that allows customers to sustainably grow their own gourmet mushrooms at home in just a few days.

"The product is a hit among consumers, so we are expanding," Arora said.

The company's second product, the aqua [farming](#) kit, he added, "is essentially a three-gallon plastic tank which, when filled with water, can grow lettuce, basil, mint and wheatgrass on the top, as it pumps up the ammonia-rich fish waste that acts as manure for the plants, while it houses fish at the bottom. It is based on a simple law - the fish feeds the plants and plants clean the water."

Arora is emphatic that since the "majority of our food is not [organic](#) and contains pesticides, it's important that people should opt for organic food."

BTTR Ventures' vision for the next five to 10 years, he said, is to become a well-recognised brand for millennials (ie, those born between 1982 and the early 2000s) - a cross-category brand that families will automatically think of when looking to connect with food by either growing it or eating it.

[Dutch government to help Punjab set up a centre for potato](#)

Spread over 50 acres, the proposed centre would be fully operational in the next six-eight months

To strengthen [potato](#) research, [Punjab](#) will set up a Centre of Excellence for Potato in Jalandhar (potato belt) in collaboration with The Netherlands, Shimla-based Central Potato Research Institute and Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, with a project cost of Rs 8 crore. Spread over 50 acres, the proposed centre would be fully operational in the next six-eight months and likely to prove as a milestone for the development of quality cultivation of potato in the state.

At the Fourth India International Potato Expo 2015, held in Chandigarh, Gurkanwal Singh, director - horticulture, said, "The Indo-Dutch Centre of Excellence for Potato, is being set up with the objective of developing advanced production and storage technologies for its growers of the state. We are going to focus on every aspect of potato farming right from development of seeds to post harvest. This collaboration will facilitate the flow of germplasm, including new varieties and advance hybrids. Besides development of new varieties, we will concentrate on best practices, mechanisation and will impart training to farmers in pre-harvest and post-harvest technologies by having a tie-up with various organisation, like farmers organisation like [POSCON](#)(Confederation of Potato Seed Farmers)."

It is worth mentioning the total area under potato cultivation is 87,000 hectares and the total production is about 2.2 million tonnes. Besides that Punjab contributes almost 75 per cent of the total potato seed demand from the country.