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Mallapur to be seed bank for indigenous crops



Mallapur, the Adivasi village in Indervelli mandal of Adilabad district, will be made a seed bank for indigenous crops with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Utnoor, playing an active role in its transformation. The village was chosen by the ITDA for its unique effort in cultivation of indigenous crops and eventually becoming self sufficient in food.

“Also encouraging was the factor that farmers here have retained their traditional knowledge of agriculture. The incidence of intercropping in the fields in this village is quite higher, which is a proof of the traditional knowledge being retained,” says ITDA Project Officer R.V. Karnan, who visited the village and some of the fields in Mallapur on Tuesday.

Farmers in this habitation have returned, though not completely, to cultivate their traditional crops. They had sown about 24 native varieties of food grains and food crops during the last two years and harvested enough to discontinue purchase of food from market for themselves, but not sufficient to share the seed with others of their ilk.

The ITDA proposes to take up the exercise in converting Mallapur into a seed bank through promotion of the Union government’s programme in promotion of minor millet cultivation. It will also carry forward the endeavour of the Telangana government in making the State a seed hub.

“We will bring indigenous varieties from M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agriculture University and other such institutions,” Mr. Karnan revealed.

“With such intervention, I am sure the village will soon become a seed bank,” he expressed hope, as he continued about the ITDA’s plan.

Interacting with the top tribal development officer in Adilabad district, Atram Bheem Rao and Pusam Anand Rao, chairman of the local watershed and village sarpanch respectively, gave feedback on the marketing of their produce. In turn, they were told of the commercial value of seed produced in their fields and how it can benefit farmers in other tribal villages in the district.

The Project Officer also visited a sweet lime orchard and urged other farmers to take up horticulture. He promised help from the ITDA.

Farmers worry with prolonged dry spell

Ch. Srinivas Reddy is a worried man. With the early rains in the month of June, Mr. Reddy took up the cultivation of maize in six acres, three acres of his own and three acres leased from a relative. He has already invested about Rs.50,000 on the farm for seeds, fertilizers and labour charges.

Now that there are no rains for the past two weeks he fears about his investment. “I do not know what to do. Due to lack of water and heat already 10 per cent of the crop has withered. If the same situation continues for one more week the entire investment may go down the drain,” Mr. Srinivas Reddy told The Hindu.

Though he has two borewells he was unable to use them as there was no groundwater.

One Anil of Malkapur in Kondapur mandal took up cultivation of cotton in about three acres and the nurseries were about to dry. For the past few days he has been supplying small quantity of water for crop by involving all family members. They were supplying water with pots for saplings.

Situation explained by these two farmers give an indication of the prevailing conditions in the district. Even the officers of the Agriculture Department are accepting that the rainfall was not to the expected level and crops were withering away in areas like Sangareddy, Sadashivapet, Zheerabad and Narayanakhed while the rainfall was relatively good at Siddiept, Dubbak and Gajwel areas.

“Further sowing at Sangareddy, Zaheerabad and Narayanakhed was completely stopped and farmers are waiting for rains. The plantation was completed in only 40 per cent of the area in these places. Farmers face serious problems if there were no rains in the next one week or 10 days,” B. Hukya Naik, Joint Director, Agriculture told The Hindu.

Actual rain for the month of June is 127 m.m.

Normal rain fall for the month of June is 125.6 m.m.

Cumulative actual rain fall in the first week of July 129.6 m.m.

Cumulative normal rain fall in the first week of July 168 m.m.

Cumulative average for this week is – 22.9 per cent.

In the month of June no rain fall was registered at Manoor, Kangti, Narayanakhed, Raikod, Nyalakal, Zaheerabad, Jarasangam, Kohir, Patancheru, Ramchandrapuram, Regod, Kulcharam, Shankarampet (R), Ramaympet, Chegunta, Yeldurthi, Kowdipally, Andol, Pulakl, Jinnaram, Hatnoora, Narasapur, Shivampet, Mirdoddi, Chinnakodur, Kondapaka, Jagadevapur, Daultabad, Toopran and Toguta mandals.

Dry spell has Karnataka worried



The looming, dark clouds — characteristics of the monsoon — seem to have faded away, leaving a trail of withering crops and dried-up tanks in its wake.

With 228 mm average rainfall recorded in Karnataka till Wednesday, the monsoon has been quantified as being 15 per cent deficient by the Indian Meteorological Department.

Geeta Agnihotri, Director in-charge of observations at Indian Meteorology Department (IMD), said the dry spells were the worst in northern Karnataka. While an average of 135.5 mm of rainfall was expected till July 8, the region has seen just 95.2 mm. Similarly, the high rainfall areas of coastal Karnataka have seen a nearly one-third dip in the monsoon rainfall so far.

Agriculture affected

The reducing rains have seen the large area of crops sown being in a precarious position. Though sowing was 7 per cent above normal in the State, most of this was seen during the above-normal pre-monsoon showers experienced across the State.

Cases of withering of crops have been reported from Ballari district, which has seen more than a week without rain.

“If it doesn’t rain during the week, the situation will worsen,” warned K. Ramappa, Joint Director of Agriculture, Ballari, told *The Hindu* .

Similarly, in Kalaburagi, the district administration believes that chances of survival of red gram crop on 43,500 hectares of land are remote if the district does not receive rain within 10 days.

Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre observes that more than 1,800 minor tanks in the State have remained dry.

The IMD expects rains to pick up only in the “third or fourth” week of July.

Central Groundwater Board to take up study on aquifers

The Central Groundwater Board will take up a study on aquifers in Perambalur district in course of time, as the water table in all the four taluks in the district had been over-exploited, said A. Subburaj, Head of Office of the Central Groundwater Board, Chennai.

He said that a decision to this effect was taken at the two-day training on “groundwater management” organised jointly by the Central Groundwater Board, South East Zone, Chennai, Rajiv Gandhi National Groundwater Training and Research Institute and the Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganges Rejuvenation, which concluded here on Wednesday.

He said the exploitation of groundwater was several times higher than the rate of re-charge. The study on aquifers would be taken up within a couple of years or so as the board had taken up the study in other districts now.

He said the training was organised in the wake of exploitation of groundwater at all the four taluks. Students, village panchayat presidents, panchayat secretaries, Block Development officers and volunteers of various organisations were sensitised at this seminar on the need for conservation of groundwater table in the district.

Earlier, inaugurating the training, S. Meenakshi, District Collector (in-charge), appealed to the village panchayat presidents to popularise water-saving techniques such as drip irrigation in their villages.

Wastage of water should be avoided at all cost, she said.

Ms. Meenakshi appealed to the village panchayat presidents to adopt artificial re-charging of the borewells in their villages for which various agencies, including the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development funded schemes. Focus should be on re-cycling of the water.

B. Umapathy, Scientist from the Board, Velmurugan, Executive Engineer, Public Works Department, spoke.

Transplantation in full swing

intermittent showers and sufficient water supply

Transplantation of paddy seedlings is in full swing in Cumbum Valley in Theni district, stretching between Goodalur and Palanichettipatti, thanks to intermittent showers and sufficient supply of water from the Periyar dam for irrigation.

Release of water for irrigation at the right time and early onset of monsoon helped farmers prepare the land in time and raise nurseries well in advance. With sharp increase in discharge from the Periyar dam, water was available more than enough in almost all areas to expedite farming work. There was no delay in raising nurseries at several places, farmers said.

As usual, shortage of labour has been haunting landlords and this resulted in delayed transplantation in some pockets. Even farm mechanisation has not fulfilled their total labour requirement.

The existing transplantation machines in the district are not suitable to the fluffy soil condition in the valley. "We need machines suitable to our soil condition to expedite transplantation and manage labour shortage," says Sukumaran, farmer of Kokilapuram.

"At present, a majority of workforce comprises elderly persons, most of whom are women. Youngsters never prefer farm work. The number of farm labourers has shrunk in the district sizably. We have to book labourers a week in advance for transplantation," say farmers in Uthamapalayam.

In the Cumbum block alone, 1,223 hectares out of the total 1,860 hectares have been covered and the rest of the area will be covered in a week.

Progressive farmers have already started using machines for transplantation. Moreover, 60 per cent of farmers have adopted system of rice intensification method to raise paddy for better yield, according to R.P. Asokan, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Cumbum block.

Sufficient quantum of fertilizers, pesticides and other agriculture inputs are available with the Department of Agriculture and PACBs for distribution. Agriculture officials believe that yield this year will be more than the previous year. Last year, the yield per hectare was 10.34 tonnes.

‘Ensure proper supply of seeds and fertilizers’

Officers concerned should take steps to provide seeds and fertilizer systematically to farmers across the taluk. They should not give the chance for any agitation or argument to farmers in during the kharif season, Chitradurga taluk panchayat president Prathiba Ramesh has said.

Speaking at Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) monthly review meeting here on Wednesday, she said that over the last two years there was not much demand for seeds and fertilizer in the taluk as there was no ample rainfall during the season, but this time the taluk had received sufficient rainfall and the farmers are eager to take up agriculture activities. So the officers should maintain proper stocks of seeds and fertilizer, she said.

Officers of the Agriculture Department informed the meeting that farmers in the taluk have made preparations for sowing groundnut and steps are being taken to supply the required seeds to farmers. Chitradurga MLA G.H. Tippareddy has also spoken to the Agriculture Minister urging him to supply the required seeds as early as possible. The department has also maintained that sunflower seeds would be grown as an alternate crop, if the farmers don't get groundnut seeds, they added.

“Steps would be taken to create awareness among farmers on alternate crops ,once they confirm the requirement of groundnut seeds and the available stocks,” they added.

25 more APMCs to get new equipment

As many as 25 Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) in the State would get automated cleaning, sorting and packing equipment during the current financial year.

Replying to a query during the press conference of Minister for Agricultural Marketing Shamanuru Shivashankarappa, Additional Chief Secretary of Department of Cooperation Mahendra Jain said that already such equipments were being installed in seven APMCs in the State and twenty five more would get them during the year.

Mr. Jain said that the equipments would not help in providing machine-cleaned produce for the traders but also help in fetching better prices to the farmers.

As the price of the produce would depend on grading done after its arrival at the APMC yards, the farmers would also realise the importance of grading their produce for getting better price, he said.

Storing produce

Mr. Jain said that there was need for more warehouses for storing the agricultural produce in the APMC yards and to address the issue, the State government had initiated projects for increasing the warehousing capacity.

While the present warehousing capacity of APMCs in the State was 10 lakh tonnes, the government had initiated process for increasing the warehousing capacity to 16.5 lakh tonnes and already tenders had been floated, he said. Mr. Jain said that the plan was to complete the works within a span of one year.

Cucumber salads will soon have a local flavour



Poly-house cultivation of a new salad cucumber hybrid (KPCH-1) developed by the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) brings luck to farmers in the state.

KPCH-1(KAU Parthenocarpic Cucumber Hybrid-1), the first cucumber hybrid developed in south India by a public sector research team, has shown encouraging results said KAU.

The first round of harvest from twenty five KPCH -1 plants grown in the polyhouse owned by Latha Sankaran of Parappur, near Thrissur, has yielded nearly 36 kg, while the same number of plants belonging to an imported variety (Hilton) grown in the same polyhouse produced only 26 kg.

The results obtained from the polyhouse of K.V. Divakaran of Pozhuthana in Wayanad district, is more interesting as 18 KPCH-1 plants has produced 50.9 kg. T.V. Sugathan, of Kandassankadavu, also testifies the superior performance of KPCH-1 over imported varieties.

Data obtained from farmers' polyhouses in Thiruvananthapuram and Kottayam districts also indicate a promising future for the new KAU variety, said sources from the University.

Chithra, who farms on leased land, says she earns well as there is great demand for rural produce. "We don't use any high profile chemical or dangerous pesticides. Our products are readily accepted and fetches reasonable price as well. Even though salad is a new crop for rural farmers it has a lot of demand and the new KAU variety being a cheaper option than imported seeds is a blessing for us," she said.

Mr. Sugathan also endorsed the organic farming perspective. “I use only locally available bio resources for pest management. Integrated with modern fertigation techniques and foliar spray of bio agents, I get money and it creates more satisfaction as no harm is caused by my products or methods. New variety has come as a blessing for Kerala farmers,” he said.

The same team had earlier developed seedless hybrids of yellow and red watermelon. The seeds of new variety will be ready for distribution to farmers in the next season, the KAU sources said.

Need for food fortification highlighted

The significance of food fortification to combat malnutrition was stressed at a workshop organised by consumer activists here.

Speakers highlighted the need for food fortification to fight micronutrient deficiencies and also prevent lifestyle diseases. The workshop was organised by Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) along with Delhi-based Consumer Voice and CII (Food and Agriculture Centre of Excellence).

Fortification of staple food, including wheat flour, edible oil, and milk, was an easy strategy to increase vitamins and minerals and reduce deficiencies. Salt was the most recognised fortification initiative of the government, the speakers said.

Participants included students, representatives of consumer groups, and academics. Such workshops were the need of the hour to create awareness of food fortification, including edible oil and address challenges related to nutritional security, said S. Saroja of CAG. Speakers also appealed to the consumers to carry forward the message to prevent malnutrition.

Tales of trees and conservation

The green cover in Chennai city has fallen, and, along with it, the many benefits trees provide.

This is perhaps why many feel ardent ambassadors are needed to voice environmental concerns. *Bhoomi Tales*, a book published by Centre for Social Work and Research, was launched recently.

The book has stories from different parts of the State where Mother Nature takes centre stage.

According to the Mary Vidya Porselvi, who compiled and translated the stories, the aim of the endeavour was to highlight unsung environmental storytellers.

“Munniyamma, Kamatchiammal and Nallu from Rasalipatti in Pudukottai, all have stories that speak about the love of nature,” Ms. Mary Vidya said.

Water level at Mettur

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 84.43 feet on Wednesday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 3,392 cusecs and the discharge, 1,000 cusecs.

Banana auction

About 640 bunches of different varieties of banana were auctioned at the Integrated Market Complex for Banana at Thiruchendurai on Tuesday. Twenty two farmers and 11 traders participated in the auction. Top quality rasthali variety fetched a maximum of 200 a bunch, poovan Rs.190, pachalandan Rs.170 and Karpooravalli Rs.115 a bunch. The next auction at the market would be held on July 14.

Consumer organisations upset over deadline extension for food business operators

Consumer organisations are disappointed over the extension of deadline by the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India for food business operators (FBOs) to obtain registration or licence under the Food Safety and Standards Act, according to president of Indian Consumer Rights Foundation A. Sankar.

He told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday that the deadline was first extended for six months until August 2012; then for 12 months till August 4 in 2013; for another six months up to February 4, 2014 and thereafter for one year up to February 4, 2015. It had been extended for six more months.

This unending deadline to register or to obtain licence by FBOs had compelled the consumer organisations to believe that this was done to send a message that State governments can be lenient in implementation of FSSA. Hence, the consumer organisations wanted the authorities concerned to direct the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India not to further extend the deadline for obtaining registration or licence.

District Designated FSSA Officer M. Jegadis Chandrabose said that out of 17, 659 FBOs, including 3, 963 government enterprises and 13, 696 private operators in the district, registration certificates had so far been provided to 7, 497 operators and licences to 542 operators. Since the deadline had been extended up to August 4, the officials were not forcing the operators, Dr. Chandrabose said.

CCI sells 32 lakh bales of cotton

Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), which procured 87 lakh bales of cotton from farmers at the beginning of the current cotton season at minimum support price, has sold 32 lakh bales so far and plans to continue sales for another two to three months.

Director (Marketing) of the Corporation M. M. Chockalingam told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that the CCI was offering on an average nearly one lakh bale of cotton for sales every day and 60 per cent gets sold. Both, traders and domestic textile mills, are

purchasing from it. The minimum quantity that can be purchased by a buyer on a day is 100 bales and the maximum is 20,000 bales. “We have 55 lakh bales stock with us and we will have cotton for sale till October,” he said.

Meanwhile, Southern India Mills’ Association (SIMA) Chairman T. Rajkumar has said in a press release that small and medium-scale spinning mills were finding it difficult to procure cotton from the CCI as very limited number of lots of each category was offered on a daily basis. Of the 3,100 spinning mills in the country, 1,325 were in the SSI category and these units required less than 75 bales of cotton a day. The mills have to pay higher premium to traders to purchase small quantities of cotton and the price was higher in the e-auction of CCI too for smaller lots.

He appealed to the Union Government and the CCI to have adequate stocks till the next cotton season that will begin in October to maintain price stability and also ensure steady supply to the small and medium-scale mills.

E-auction of farm produce from August 1

Determined to provide remunerative price to farmers, the State government will launch the e-auction system at 10 market yards from August 1. The move aims at eliminating trade barriers and free farmers from the compulsion of selling produce to local cartel of traders at the price dictated by them. Now, farmers can sell produce through unified virtual market for the whole State and outside too. The e-auction will be held at Anakapalle market yard for jaggery, Guntur-chillies, Duggirala- turmeric, Kadapa- turmeric, Kurnool-pulses, Adoni- pulses and cotton, Emmiganur- pulses, Hindupur- tamarind and Chillies, Kalyandurg-tamarind and Eluru- lime. Farmers will bring produce to the yard and buyers will make bids on e-platform and feed the price into the system. The highest price offered by the traders will be finalised by the system and the farmer will get an SMS alert on his mobile phone. The price would depend on the quality of the produce and accredited agencies would grade the produce based on the quality, they said.



Focus on better water management as CM Devendra Fadnavis rolls out contingency plan

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Wednesday directed the state administration to roll out a contingency plan to tackle the agrarian crisis following long spells of missing rains. He has ordered procurement of more agriculture pumps for farmers to channelise the water from nearest sources to their fields.

The Ministry of Agriculture said 60 per cent farmers who had completed sowing of seeds could sustain the dry spell for a maximum of 10 more days. Fadnavis has directed the administration to press into services alternative mode for district-wise water supply in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions.

How to maximise water storage from the ongoing Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan (water conservation projects) was also discussed.

“Let us all hope rains will not play hide and seek for long. But in case the dry spell continues, we have to press the emergency plan to tackle the agriculture crisis. Effective water management will have to be stressed using both men and machines to minimise crop damages and financial and production loss to the farmers,” said the CM.

At the marathon meeting with senior officers at Mantralaya, Fadnavis discussed mechanism that would have to be deployed to facilitate lifting of water from the available sources and taking it to the fields at taluka level.

To begin with, he ordered officials to procure and distribute more agriculture pumps and restore maximum electricity supply to the farming community ahead of the ongoing sowing season.

Speaking to [The Indian Express](#), a senior official said, “The absence of rains in the last 20 to 25 days after the first showers and sowing of crops is a matter of concern. Fadnavis asked the administration to tackle the matter on emergency.”

A review of the situation across state showed almost 60 per cent fields where sowing is completed can sustain another eight to ten days of dry spell. If there are no rains, the administration will have to deploy alternative methods, including water tankers and lifting of water from nearby ponds, dams, canals and wells, to sustain the yield.

The chief minister has promised to provide the financial help to meet the contingency plan. The alternative mode of watering the fields if it does not rain in the next 10 days will have to be implemented in eight districts of Marathwada and ten districts of Vidarbha. The Western Maharashtra and Konkan with current water storage and initial rainfall can sustain the long gaps of rainfall, it was observed.

Almost 75 per cent of the cultivated land in Maharashtra is driven by and dependent on rains.

In 2014, the total rainfall recorded by the state was 70.2 per cent. The rainfall pattern saw prolonged monsoon up to October — June (24.7%), July (89.2%), August (79.5%), September (78.4%) and October (41.4%). Last year, out of the 355 talukas, 226 received deficit rainfall, 112 talukas received normal and 17 talukas received excess rainfall.

In almost 6,000 villages where water conservation projects are under way, district officials have been directed to ensure effective water management.

Falling demand: Punjab lease rent party ends as crop prices plunge

The downturn in agriculture is manifesting itself now in falling demand as well as lease rentals for farmland. This is happening in Punjab, India's granary state that had seen significant increases in lease charges over the last decade on the back of rising crop prices.

But that trend is reversing — thanks to the collapse in basmati and cotton realisations, minimal hikes in minimum support prices of paddy and wheat, damage to the recently harvested rabi crop from untimely rains and hailstorms, and forecasts of a below-average monsoon.

Last year, the Rural Development and Panchayats Department (RDPD) in Punjab had mopped up Rs 301 crore through leasing out 1,34,450 acres of 'shamlat' or village common lands. This year, it had planned to auction 1,40,260 acres, but has managed to lease out just 68,937 acres even after three attempts.

“We were earlier raising the lease rate by 10 per cent every year. This time, not only have we been unable to auction even half the available shamlat land — a third of which is reserved for Dalits — but even the lease rates are lower at Rs 17,000-18,000 per acre, against an average of Rs 20,500 in 2014,” notes Shiv Dutt, deputy-director, RDPD.

But it's not panchayat lands alone; even commercial lease rentals have shown decline. In the main Malwa belt south of the Satluj river, good fertile land was leased out last year at Rs 45,000 to Rs 53,000 per acre. This time, the rates quoted range between Rs 39,000 and Rs 44,000/acre.

The state's other two regions have also reported drops — from Rs 35,000-40,000 levels to Rs 28,000-32,000 in Majha and Rs 25,000-30,000 in Doaba.

Bikramjit Singh has for the past 15 years been taking land on lease for cultivation. “Every year, I was paying 10-15 per cent more. This time, I paid Rs 3,000-4,000 per acre less. My landlords were happy because they did not expect that I would lease in land after having suffered a Rs 4 lakh loss last year,” says this farmer from Kahlanwali village in Dera Baba Nanak tehsil of Gurdaspur district.

Niranjan Singh, who farms 20 to 30 acres of leased land near Sultanpur Lodhi in Kapurthala district, informs that his landowner has slashed his rates by 15-20 per cent, “but I am still not ready to take it due to last year's heavy losses”.

Nirmal Singh has been somewhat luckier in cultivating 20 acres of land at Chachrali village near Phagwara for the past 18 years. He started with Rs 8,000 and is now paying Rs 24,500/acre. “My landlord, an NRI, has been kind not to increase the rental in recent years. But even with that, I am unable to save even Rs 5,000 per acre, given rising inputs costs and sliding crop prices,” he complains.

Ramanjit Singh Sikki, a [Congress](#) MLA representing Khadoor Sahib constituency, has been engaged in potato farming on 10,000 acres of leased land in the Doaba region covering Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala districts.

“This year, I have cut it down to 2,500 acre, as high production costs make it difficult to pay farm rentals. Even those who were giving land at Rs 35,000-40,000 per acre last year are offering it today at Rs 20,000-25,000. The only reason farmers are still taking land on lease is to renew their bank limits and to save themselves from becoming bankrupt socially,” he claims.

Sukhpal Singh Khaira, a Congress spokesman and former MLA who has been leasing out 60 acres since long, admits that lessees are hardly making any money today: “Fuel, farm machinery, labour and harvesting costs have all gone up, even while crop realisations are plunging. In future, we may be forced to cultivate our own land, as lessees aren’t ready to take it”.

Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, District Congress Committee president of Gurdaspur and sitting MLA from Dera Baba Nanak, concurs with this view. He gave his 47 acres land at Rs 28,000/acre, after being forced by his lessee to reduce the rate by Rs 3,000-4,000.

Meanwhile, Dalit lessee farmers have holding regular protests across the state to get reserve prices in shamlat land auctions reduced. In Ghabdan village of Sangrur, the reserve price for highly fertile land meant for Dalits was fixed at Rs 50,000 per acre, yet the actual lease was done at Rs 15,000. In Kularan village of Patiala’s Nabha tehsil, the annual lease was similarly brought down to Rs 20,000 per acre, against the Rs 50,000 of the previous year.

“Our target is to get lease rents reduced to Rs 20,000 per acre. We cannot afford to pay the high reserve prices.

Also, our crop hasn’t been good this year and most of us are still awaiting payment of compensation for the damage from unseasonal rains”, says Tarsem Peter, president of the Zameen Prapti Sangarsh Samiti, which has been spearheading the campaign for slashing of annual rates on shamlat lands.

APMCs or not, farmers still get a raw deal

Over the last few months, the state government has taken a series of steps to end the oligarchy of the Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) and promote direct marketing by the farmers. However, RTI documents procured by The India Express show serious discrepancies in the way the director marketing’s office had handled the issuance and supervision of licences for alternate channels of agriculture marketing.



Direct marketing, private markets and farmers' consumer market are the major non-APMC licences which are issued by the office of the director (marketing). These licences were meant to allow more than one platform for farmers to realise better prices for their produce. Direct marketing licence allows retailers to directly purchase from farmers.

Over the last few years, the entry of organised retail in the country has seen a large number of direct marketing licences being issued.

As per data, the director (marketing) has issued 91 direct marketing, 33 private marketing and 39 farmers' consumer market licences.

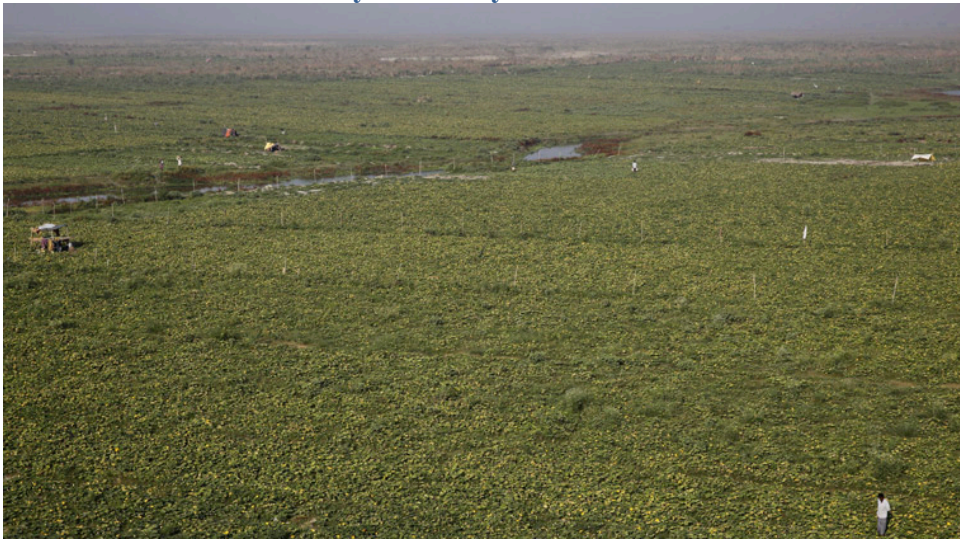
According to RTI documents procured from the state's principal accountant general (PAG), during the customary audit of the office of director (marketing), the PAG noticed that no information was available about the payment of supervision fee by the direct marketing licensees. This fee has to be paid by the license holder failing which the bank guarantee furnished by him can be revoked. The PAG noted that not only no details were available on whether the fee has been paid, there was also no assessment made to decide actual fee payable.

Another lacunae was the failure of the licence holder to submit their annual report, which is expected to give details of the business done and payments to farmers. The PAG noticed that director marketing had failed to either stipulate the information nor has called for the submission of the annual report.

When contacted, Shriram Gadve, president of Vegetable Growers Association of India (VGAI), said that the director marketing had failed to look after the interests of the farmers. "Most of the direct marketing licences are obtained by corporates rather than farmers themselves. Although they take the licences instead of directly purchasing from the farmers, they tend to purchase from APMC, thus defeating the whole purpose," he said.

Chandrakant Patil, state's Minister for Cooperatives, said he would look into the matter.

Socio-economic Status: Five key takeaways from SECC



Last week, the government released the results of the Socio Economic and Caste Census for 2011 (SECC). This exercise, based on a comprehensive door-to-door enumeration across the country, throws up valuable insights into the socio-economic status and living conditions of rural households. We identify five major ones.

1

While India is overwhelmingly rural, rural isn't as much agricultural. Out of the country's total 243.95 million households, 179.16 million or nearly three-fourths are in rural areas. However, only 30.1 per cent of rural households depend on cultivation as their 'main' source of income. A majority — 51.14 per cent — derive sustenance from manual casual labour (MCL). While that may also include working in farms, it helps dispel a common perception that agriculture 'supports' around two-thirds of India's population and contributes barely 15 per cent to its GDP. Not only is this assumption of Bharat being synonymous with Krishi misplaced, one would, in fact, argue in favour of rural becoming even less agricultural. The rising fragmentation of holdings makes it difficult for farmers to support themselves, leave alone those reliant on MCL. The latter, in particular, need alternatives to transplanting paddy or picking cotton that can provide seasonal employment at best. Getting people out of farms will, moreover, spur mechanisation and consolidation of holdings, leading to increased agricultural productivity in the long run.

2

56.25% of rural households own no agricultural land, which is consistent with the earlier 51.14 per cent figure relating to MCL-dependency. The two, indeed, virtually go together. Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have landlessness ratios between 65 and 73 per cent. The proportion of households in these states for whom MCL constitutes the main source of income also ranges from 58 to 71 per cent. This close association holds true for communities as well. The incidence of landlessness is the highest among the Dalits or scheduled castes. 67.27 per cent of rural Dalit families also report MCL as their primary income source, as against 51.14 per cent for all households. When landlessness and MCL-dependency extends to well

over half the country's rural population — and even more to less privileged social group — it is obvious that creation of gainful non-farm employment should receive top priority in public policymaking.

3

There is evidence that such non-farm job generation did happen over the past decade. National Sample Survey reports show India's total agricultural workforce to have registered a decline from 259 to 228 million between 2004-05 and 2011-12 — the first time in history — even as the size of those engaged in non-farming sectors rose from 198 to 239 million. Among other things, it helped raise rural wages and living standards, which is captured in the SECC data. 17.43 per cent of all rural households have two-wheelers, 11.04 per cent own refrigerators and 68.35 per cent mobile phones. The corresponding penetration levels are even higher in states like Punjab: 40.95, 66.43 and 79.51 per cent. Among Dalits, too, the ownership of two-wheelers and mobiles is 11.27 per cent and 66.64 per cent, respectively. Dalits in Punjab hardly own any land, yet 27.78 per cent families there have two-wheelers, 45.70 per cent refrigerators and 75.26 per cent mobiles.

4

Consumer durable ownership, while symbolising rising aspirations, may represent only superficial progress. According to the SECC data, only 17.34 million or 9.68 per cent of rural households have members with salaried jobs — and mostly in the government and public sector undertakings (10.95 million). Another 2.89 million (1.61 per cent) households operate non-agricultural own account enterprises. The bulk of rural households have no regular income source, being engaged in cultivation or MCL-dependent. The increase in rural incomes and purchasing power witnessed during 2004-2013 was basically the result of high crop prices and rising real wages. Both these positive factors have shown reversal in the last one year or more. The contraction in rural incomes is also reflected in declining sales of tractors, agri-inputs, two-wheelers and a host of FMCG/consumer durable products, following a decade-long period of impressive growth.

5

Last but not the least is the fact that deprivation levels in rural India are still far too high. The SECC data points to the main earner in 74.49 per cent of all rural households drawing a monthly income below Rs 5,000. This ratio is even more for the likes of West Bengal (82.47 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (83.52 per cent), Odisha (87.88 per cent) and Chhattisgarh (90.79 per cent), not to speak of Dalits (83.56 per cent) and Adivasis (86.57 per cent). True, the numbers are for 2011. Besides, there may be a tendency for survey respondents to under-report incomes for fear of losing entitlement benefits. But even after adjusting for these, one can safely assume that the earnings of three-fourths of rural India are nowhere close to what can guarantee existence beyond basic survival.

Food security act: Govt seeks extension of deadline as number of beneficiaries go up

The number of the beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act in Gujarat is likely to climb from current 23 lakh families to 68 lakh families, which going by the 2011 census, will be more than half of the state's population. This would put even more

pressure on the state government which on Tuesday had sought extension of the deadline for implementing the Act to March 2016.

While doing away with categories like Below Poverty Line, Above Poverty Line I and Above Poverty Line II, the government is identifying them as “priority families”, who will be eligible to get wheat at Rs 2 /kg and rice at Rs 3/kg from the fair price shops.

Gujarat’ population is nearly 6 crore, and 68 lakh families would mean around 3.74 crore people. As per the new categories set by the state government, the number of beneficiaries will be over 2.5 crore and 1.24 crore of population in rural and urban areas, respectively.

Based on the Socio Economic And Caste Census 2011 , the Gujarat government has decided the above figures while setting new guidelines for priority families. Every state government is free to decide criteria for priority families under the NFSA. Gujarat is ready with two sets of guidelines — one for rural and the other for urban. As per the Gujarat government’s definition, in rural areas, priority families would include all but those owning three or four wheelers or a motorised trawler.

It also does not include those families having one of its members in the government services, those in which a member earns more than Rs 10,000 per month, those giving income tax or owning agriculture land more than 5 acre and taking two yields or owning more than 7 acre land and having source of irrigation.

However, if a family’s adult members are not fit to earn or are suffering from serious illness, or are over 64 years old, then it will be included. State Civil Supply Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasma on Tuesday made a representation to Union Food and Civil Supplies Minister Ramvilas Paswan to extend the deadline for the act from September 2015 to March 2016.

“Survey to identify each and every member in all 1.27 crore ration cards is on by the department of food, civil supply and consumer affairs. We have been taking help of collectorates. Department has been surveying 3 lakh people. And, it is likely to take another six months,” said Principal Secretary M K Das

“Though number of priority families is likely to be around 68 lakhs, it will be less than current number of 1.27 crore families covered under ration cards. But what will be increasing is number of beneficiaries who will be getting wheat at Rs 2 per kg and rice at Rs 3 per kg,” said an official from the food civil supplies department adding, “So far under Antoyoday Yojana, which is for poorest of the poor, only 23 lakh families get wheat and rice at those nominal rates, once the NFSA 2013 becomes applicable, 68 lakh families will be able to avail the same benefits”.

After the new scheme is effected, the current one where APL 1 families get wheat at Rs 7 per kg and APL 2 at Rs 23 per kg and rice at Rs 10 (APL 1) and at market rates for APL 2, will be discontinued.

Except priority families, rest of the card holders will get the commodities at market rates. The government began process to raise required infrastructure and staff to meet increased demand of commodities once the act comes into place. While it has began

allotting new staff, the survey has begun opening up new fair price shops across all 33 districts in the state.

At present there are some 17,000 fair price shops in rural areas of Gujarat, several thousand more will be open up as under the act there should be at-least one new shop for village above 3,000 population and two shops in a block of 7,500 population in urban areas.



TNAU asks cotton farmers to sell crops right after harvest

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) has advised cotton farmers in the state to sell their produce immediately after harvest. Experts predict a fall in prices because of fast accumulating buffer stocks of cotton globally and crops becoming moist and getting damaged due to the recent south-west monsoon. Many farmers had delayed harvest, confused by the fluctuating market price. India is one of the largest cotton producing countries in the world.

The price of freshly harvested cotton in Tamil Nadu, based on arrivals at the Konganapuram regulated market, hovered around Rs. 3500-Rs. 4000 per quintal because of poor quality fibers moistened by the rain.

"According to our analysis of 18 years of market data and a survey conducted among cotton traders, we predict that cost of the long staple summer cotton will go up to Rs. 4100 to Rs. 4300 if they are of good quality over the next three weeks for a short while," said K M Sivakumar, principal investigator, agro marketing intelligence and business promotion centre at TNAU. "So, we advise them to sell the stock," he said.

Market analysts say surplus yield of cotton in states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat has already led to huge pile-up in many godowns across the country.

"We can't just export all our surplus stock because other cotton producing countries like China and the United States are seeing a growing buffer stock of cotton produced in their own countries," Sivakumar said. The global accumulation of cotton stock is pegged at 21.82 million tonnes during 2014-15. "India's cotton export had fallen to 0.89 million tonnes in 2014-15 compared to 2.02 million tonnes in 2013-14, because of sluggish markets and fall in buyers," he said. The country produced 6.4 million tonnes from 12.4 million hectares in 2014-15.

As a result, recently harvested cotton is currently being sold below the minimum support price fixed by the union government in many states. The committee had fixed prices of Rs. 3800 per quintal for medium staple cotton and Rs 4100 for long staple cotton. "In many parts of Maharashtra and Odisha, traders are buying medium staple cotton only for Rs 3500 and lesser and long staple cotton for Rs. 3800- Rs. 4000 depending on the quality of the produce," said K Narasimhan, a cotton trader from Andhra Pradesh.

"The fact that cotton that has recently been harvested or is going to be harvested now is getting spoilt or is of poor quality is not going to help matters either," said Sivakumar. "The cotton would have become moist due to the recent south-west monsoon," he said. "It is the Cotton Corporation of India's responsibility to ensure that farmers get the minimum price, but if they turn a blind eye, prices will fall further," he said.

In India, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Gujarat account for two-thirds of total cotton production. In South India, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu jointly contribute around 30% of national cotton production. Around 26.17 million tonnes of cotton is produced globally every year.

However, there might be a light at the end of the tunnel for cotton farmers in the years to come because cotton stock is expected to fall next year. The area under cotton cultivation is estimated to reduce this year.

The International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) suggests that "China is likely to see a 12% reduction in the area under cotton cultivation because they have reduced the subsidy on cotton. It can also be attributed to the fall of cotton prices globally." It also predicts a 15% reduction in area under cotton cultivation and 14% fall in production in the United States.

Gujarats agriculture growth in barren zone

Gujarat has recorded a negative growth of 3.89 per cent in 2012-13 the lowest in the country according to a Government of India study called 'Agriculture Statistics 2014'. The study also cites neighbouring Madhya Pradesh as having recorded highest growth in agriculture and allied sectors in 2012-13 and 2013-14. However, officials are yet to finalize their conclusions as Gujarat is yet to submit its data for the year ending 2013-14.

According to the report, Gujarat (3.89 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (2.2 per cent) are the only two states to have registered negative growth in 2012-13 compared to the previous year.

Statistics show that the state recorded negative growth in four years between 2004-05 and 2012-13. The data on the state agriculture and allied sector released since 2004-05 also shows that the gross state domestic product (GSDP) has not remained constant. The years 2006-07, 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2012-13 saw a drop in the GSDP.

Officials of the state agriculture department blame a deficient monsoon for the negative growth, however neighbouring states seem to have done better despite deficient rainfall.

The registrar and professor of economics at Junagadh Agriculture University, R L Siyani says the negative growth at the current price is directly related to industrial output if the industrial output increases, the share of agriculture and allied sector in GSDP will also decrease.

A president of the Produce Market in North Gujarat says agricultural production had fallen during the 2012-13 period due to low sowing activity compared to the previous year, adding that the per hectare yield with the exception of the cotton crop is decreasing, resulting in low output.

According to the state's director of agriculture, Bharat Shah, 2012-13 was a bad year for the state as deficient rains decreased the output leading to negative growth. "However, the data for the year 2013-14 is encouraging and the report shows growth to be in double digits," he says.

Minister of agriculture Babubhai Bokhiriya, when contacted said he would get the report checked as the total income of farmers from agriculture was running into 1,42,000 crore and therefore it was not possible for the state to show negative growth.

Officials say that the share of agriculture in the total GSDP of the state is only 16.16 per cent. Data shows that Madhya Pradesh has shown a growth of 31.17 per cent while that of Rajasthan is 11.16 per cent and growth in Maharashtra was at four per cent adding that the GSDP of MP has constantly been increasing since 2004-05 with the exception of 2007-08.

Sowing at 50%; rain delay worries farmers

The heavy rains in the last week of June led to increased sowing across the state. As a result, sowing in about 50% of the 85.53 lakh hectares of land in which farming takes place, had been completed. Unlike last year, there has been more sowing of groundnut than cotton this year.

According to figures released by the agriculture department, sowing of groundnut has been completed in 11.47 lakh hectares of land. This is 83.77% of the total 13.70 lakh hectares in which groundnut is usually sown. There is usually more sowing of cotton in terms of percentage but, this year, sowing of groundnut has been 7% more than that

of cotton. Cotton is usually sown in 27.27 lakh hectares but this year it has been sown only in 20.91 lakh hectares, i.e., 76.70% of the total area.

Officials in the agriculture department said that sowing of cash crops including bajari (millet) is yet to pick up. Last year, sowing of maize had taken place only in 1300 hectares while, this year, it has taken place in 1.85 lakh hectares. Officials said that sowing in the state last year was only in 16.18 lakh hectares while this year it has already taken place in 42.41 lakh hectares.

The officials said that sowing was highest in Saurashtra region. Of the 36.30 lakh hectares in which sowing had started in Saurashtra region, it had been completed in 30.56 lakh hectares. Apart from Saurashtra, sowing is yet to pick up in North, South and Central Gujarat. In the northern part of the state, sowing takes place in 18.17 lakh hectares. This year, however, sowing has taken place only in 4.24 lakh hectares.

Officials said that the delay in rains has farmers worried except in the Saurashtra region where check dams are full.

Cloud cover in Kolhapur brings hope of monsoon revival

The dense cloud cover and few drizzles through Wednesday revived the hopes of monsoon revival. Met department officials said the overall climatic conditions were favourable for more rains in coming days.

The city received a bare 1mm of rain but the dark clouds accompanied by strong winds continued through the day. Experts said monsoon may be revived if conditions remain favourable.

The half an hour of drizzle greeted citizens on Wednesday morning and intermittent showers continued through the day. The city recorded maximum temperature at 29.5 degrees celsius while the minimum temperature was 22 degrees celsius.

R H Ghadge, officer in-charge of India Meteorological Department said here, said, "The city received only 1 mm rainfall during the day, but overall climatic conditions are favourable for more rains. We are keeping a close watch on the developments."

With no rain for the past fortnight, agriculture officials had expressed concerns over the survival of the kharif crop sown in June. The favourable monsoon activity has revived the hopes of farmers.

The IMD Pune has stated that the trough created at the base of Himalayas had resulted into halting the progress of southwest monsoon over Konkan, western and central parts of Maharashtra and western India. Now, a low pressure area has been created in the Arabian Sea, which has pushed the dark clouds towards the western India bringing some rains.

The weather bulletin stated that the region could get light showers in next 48 hours. The further monsoon activity will be interpreted and predicted over the intensity of the low pressure area and other related factors that would support monsoon progress.

Taste, cost and climate change prompt return of folk rice



Having lost the race to high- yielding varieties after the green revolution, a number of indigenous varieties of rice are now making a comeback due to their aroma, taste, low input cost and resilience to climate change.

"More and more consumers are asking for the folk varieties these days as the taste is better. Farmers are also showing lot of interest in these varieties, which they had once forgotten," MC Dhara, joint director of agriculture, rice research station, Chinsurah, told PTI.

The yield per hectare was lower in traditional varieties, but it was offset by the lower cost of production and the higher price it fetches in the market.

Experts say hundreds of farmers in rice growing areas of Burdwan, South and North 24 Parganas, Midnapore, Nadia, Howrah etc have now left the modern high-yielding varieties, which were popularised during the 1960s and 70s.

Among the folk varieties, premium variety of aromatic rice Gobindobhog is the most popular and is now grown over 30,000 hectares in Burdwan district, the rice bowl of West Bengal.

"The cost of production is lesser than the modern varieties as it requires less fertiliser and pesticide," said Anupam Paul, assistant director of Agriculture.

At the Agriculture Training Centre in Nadia district's Fulia, he has around 300 such folk varieties of rice in his collection, out of which 51 were aromatic.

They have been trying to popularise indigenous varieties since the last few years before the seeds get lost forever.

Global standards for food safety set for revision

Countries all over the world have come together to revise international standards for food safety and quality, even as concerns have grown in India in the past two months after the food regulator cracked down on major brands including Maggi, Top Ramen and some products of Tata Starbucks.

As many as 185 countries, including India and the European Union, are likely to adopt new food safety and quality standards.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Kharif sowing complete in half the area, says Gujarat government

Farmers doubt the Agri Dept data as the State didn't get fresh spell of rains

Kharif sowing in Gujarat seems to have gathered momentum as about 50 per cent area has been covered under kharif sowing.

According to the latest data released by the State Agriculture Department on Tuesday, kharif sowing is over on 42.41 lakh hectares, which is 49.59 per cent of the three-year average of 85.52 lakh hectares.

Cotton and groundnut sowing remained top with coverage at 20.91 lakh hectares (lh) and 11.47 lh respectively as on July 7.

This is about 77 per cent and 84 per cent of the three-year average sowing.

Sowing area for pulses has grown to 1.25 lh , while about 75 per cent sowing is complete in soyabean on 60,500 hectares, the data showed.

However, the State has not received rains since June 24, when it flooded most parts of Saurashtra and central Gujarat. According to Met department forecast, there don't seem significant showers till next week.



“For groundnut there is not much problem. But cotton is a matter of concern for farmers. The atmosphere is windy and damaging to cotton plants,” said Dinesh Tilva, an agriculture expert from Rajkot.

Meanwhile, a section of farmers have raised doubt about the State government’s sowing figures.

“There has not been a single drop since July 24. But every week the agriculture department has increased kharif sowing area. Without water, how would the farmers take up sowing? We doubt these numbers,” said Ramesh Bhoraniya, a groundnut and cotton farmer.

Notably, the agriculture department data revealed that kharif sowing has increased multi-fold compared to same period last year, when the kharif sowing was reported at 16.18 lh.

Demand fuels value-addition in small millets



Renewed consumer interest is leading to a surge in the value-addition and processing capacities of millets in Tamil Nadu, the only State to produce all the eight varieties of the nutritive cereals.

Over the past two years, as many as seven millet processing units and 27 shops selling organic stuff including millet-based supplements have sprung up in and around Coimbatore, the main area for growing these minor millets.

Small scale units

In addition to the demand spurred by the health-conscious consumers, the awareness created by certification programmes and workshops on preparation of value-added dishes from millets, conducted by the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University and chefs of star hotels have also contributed to mushrooming of millet-based food production units in this region.

Exclusive joints such as Nalan Unavagam, a restaurant offering health and diet food options such as ragi dosa, vada, tenai pongal, pearl millet porridge etc and ready-to-eat mixes has started to attract the health conscious ones and those interested in trying something different. And there are millet cookies production units such as Joule Foods at Kasturinaickenpalayam near here and Genius Nature Herbs Private Limited near Madampatti on Siruvani Main Road, which are into production and promotion of millet-cookies, dietary health supplements and ready-to-eat mixes.

Eight varieties

“Such cookies are less expensive as compared to a pizza, burger or noodles and far more nutritive,” quips Rajamurugan, author of Nalla Soru, a Tamil recipe book, which deals with native recipes. “The local market for such cookies is still nascent as

the products have a limited shelf-life. The good news though is, it is growing,” says Eswar, Chief Executive, Genius Nature Herbs.

R Bhupesh, Partner, Joule Foods, says the company is into a daily production of around one tonnes of millet cookies.

“There is no dearth in availability of these wonder grains. Tamil Nadu incidentally happens to be the only State where all the eight millets such as maize, pearl millet (Cumbu), finger millet (Ragi), Little millet (samai), Kodo millet (Varagu), Barnyard millet (Kuduraivali), Proso millet (Panivaragu) and Foxtail millet (Tenai) are grown. We source our grain requirement from regions that offer best quality,” says Bhupesh.

Rising prices

“Quality apart, prices have also become unpredictable. The Pearl millet (bajra) for instance, costs ₹22-23 a kg in TN, but is priced at ₹14 a kg in Maharashtra. It is far cheaper to source this millet from Maharashtra as after taking the transportation cost into consideration, the rate per kg still works out to just about ₹18.”

“The price of the Finger millet (ragi), which has been growing in popularity in this region has almost doubled in the last two years. We used to buy the grain from Karnataka for ₹11 -12/kg three years back. It has now shot up to over ₹20,” Bhupesh explained.

Industry sources say that a good number of manufacturers compromise on the quality of the cookies by adding maida. “The sector is largely unorganised; a person who has just had the taste of the millet cookie will therefore not be able to say whether it is a pure ragi or bajra cookie” says R Ravikesavan, Director, Department of Millets, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

“The incidence of lifestyle disorders, especially prevalence of diabetes has significantly increased consumption of such food in the State,” says Ravikesavan.

The Director, however, admitted to not having authentic data on the area under each of the eight millets. “Our estimation is based on sale of seeds. The Varsity alone sold close to 10 million tonnes of minor millet seeds last year. Since they are all varietal releases, the grower need not come to us for seeds the following season.”

Govt initiatives help

Saraswathy, Trustee of the Coimbatore-based Ramasamy Chinnammal Trust says the aggressive drive for millets began only after the Government mooted three programmes on millets.

“Under the Initiative for Nutrition Security through Millet Promotion” the Agriculture Ministry has through the State Government given equipments worth Rs. 4 lakhs each to 27 units in Tamil Nadu. These equipments are used for cleaning, removing the

husk (hulling), pulverising and flour sieving machine. The production capacity of the machine is 250 kg/hour. We are at present using these equipments to train women SHGs and farmers,” the former TNAU professor said.

The area under maize is by far the largest, followed by ragi at around 1.15 lakh hectares, cumbu – estimated at 55,000 hectares, samai in around 18-20,000 hectares and the rest in negligible area. Though the area under these millets is on the rise at present, it is said to have dwindled from around 15-16 lakh hectares in the 80s to just half the area at present.

Basmati exports could rise by 10%: APEDA



After initial concerns arising out of reduced Kharif sowing, rice acreage increased by about one per cent, as per data released by the Agriculture Ministry last week.

While it's still early in the season, it is expected that last year's output of 102.5 million tonnes (mt) will be matched if rainfall continues to steady, particularly across eastern India. The Central Rice Research Institute expected transplantation of rice saplings to pick up over the first half of July

Basmati rice exports, as a result, are likely to register an increase of about 10 per cent over the 3.7 mt recorded during the previous fiscal, according to the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA).

“For the 2015-16 fiscal, we are projecting exports of at least 4 mt. It’s the expected growth of the product for which there is steady demand. So, one can expect around 10 per cent growth,” said AK Gupta, Director, Basmati Export Development Foundation, APEDA.

As of April, there was a shortfall in exports primarily because of Iran scaling back its imports due to surplus domestic availability, a situation that Gupta said “has stabilised now”. The country had imported 0.9 mt in 2014-15, as compared to 1.44 mt in the earlier fiscal.

Saudi Arabia became the top basmati export destination last fiscal, importing 966,931 tonnes, worth \$1,188 million.

“There was a shortfall of about 10,000 tonnes as of April, but we expect this to pick up in the next round of data that will be published by the Centre this month. Some of the Iran shortfall was compensated by Saudi Arabia,” said Rajen Sundaresan, Executive Director, All India Rice Exporters Association.

Non-basmati

A combination of external factors should also help non-basmati 5 per cent parboiled and 100 per cent broken parboiled varieties achieve higher sales abroad. Thailand’s situation due to its earlier ‘paddy pledging scheme’ has resulted in a massive glut of almost 18 mt, of which, six mt is unfit for consumption.

“The quality of Thai rice is suspect, which will benefit India since there’s good quality white rice, parboiled rice and 100 per cent broken. There are numerous varieties that keep us competitive. We are flexible in pricing, so exports should remain steady unless the rupee strengthens or there’s Government intervention,” said Tejinder Narang, a grains trade analyst.

Also, with China’s demand rising by almost one mt each year, Indian exporters can expect to cover the African and West Asian markets since Thailand and Vietnam service the 130-140 mt market.

Basmati farmers oppose extension of GI tag

Basmati farmers from Punjab have opposed an order by the Geographical Indications Registry to expand the areas to be recognised under GI for the unique variety of rice.

The farmers represented by the Basmati Growers Association – Patiala filed an impleading petition in the Intellectual Property Appellate Board here in the ongoing litigation between Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) and the GI Registry in the issue of including more areas to be recognised under GI for basmati.



The Authority has included Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Western UP and two districts of Jammu and Kathua as traditional areas for basmati rice cultivation in its application for GI registration. These are also the areas of basmati cultivation recognised under the National Agricultural Research System of the Union Agriculture Ministry.

In December 2013, the GI Registry directed Apeda to file an amended application with all areas where basmati is cultivated including MP, Rajasthan and Bihar. APEDA filed an appeal before the Board in February 2014 against the order.

The Punjab farmers are against any move to expand the areas recognised under GI for basmati. They have argued that GI recognition can only be provided to historically known areas of basmati cultivation and not other varieties developed in the name and style of Basmati. Any move to redesignate areas under basmati cultivation will only prolong the proceedings and dilute the protection of traditional basmati farmers.

The IPAB has posted the case for final hearing to November 3 and ordered all the parties to file their written arguments by October.

Farmers in Madhya Pradesh represented by their associations and basmati growers in Pakistan have also impleaded themselves in a clutch of representations associated with GI for basmati.

Cotton wilts by ₹1,000 a quintal

Cotton prices at Erode markets decreased by ₹1,000 a quintal. “The auction was started some days back in the popular Bhoodapady Regulated market Committee (RMC) and weekly auction would be conducted on every Wednesday.

During the last three weeks totally 10,000 bags of the fibre arrived for sale.

For the last three weeks the Bt cotton was sold at ₹3,700- 4,210 a quintal, which was ₹1,000 less than last year’s price,” said a spokesperson of the RMC.

He said last year the cotton was sold at ₹5,200 a quintal and in some weeks the price escalated to ₹5,600.

This year the cotton acreage in the district is on the rise and huge quantity is likely to arrive for sale.

Due to a decrease in yarn price, the buyers – mainly the spinning mill owners – quoted decreased price for the commodity and purchased all the arrived cotton.

On Wednesday 2,100 quintals (8,000 bags) arrived for sale and fetched a maximum price of ₹4,310 a quintal.

Fresh ‘low’ in Bay to benefit east, N-E, parts of North-West

A low-pressure area has formed over the North Bay of Bengal under the influence of an unusually intense typhoon (cyclone) activity in the west Pacific/South China Sea.

The ‘low’ is forecast to track not far away from the foothills of the Himalayas, which means that the rains would be confined to north-east, east and parts of north-west India.

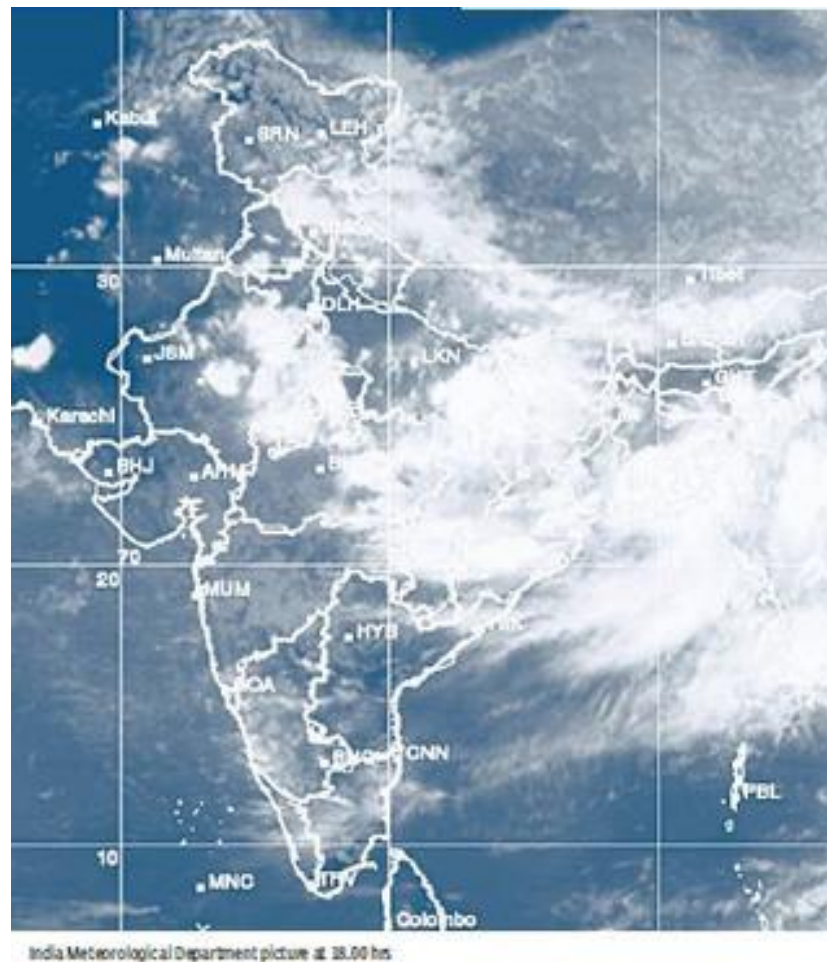
Deficient rain

The US Climate Prediction Centre sees large swathes of peninsular, central and west India receiving deficient rain during the next two weeks.

Parts of the West Coast may come under occasional spells of rain in the second week (July 14 to 20), according to its outlook.

Rainfall for the country as a whole is now in the negative territory with a cumulative deficit of four per cent. The surplus in north-west India, the lone agro-climatic division to boast one, is down to nine per cent.

But parts of the North-West (Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh) can look forward to some heavy to very heavy rain as the Bay 'low' interacts with incoming western disturbances over the region.



No break

The US agency has characterised the current recess in rain over South Asia (including India) as a 'break monsoon,' though current conditions do not support a classical event in the making.

A 'break monsoon' refers to the prolonged spells of sparse rainfall during the mid-monsoon months of July and August over the plains of northern India. In fact, strong westerlies over the plains are running into monsoon easterlies, neutralising a major feature that sets up 'break monsoon.'

Neither is there an anti-cyclonic anomaly (a ridge of high atmospheric pressure, marked by subsidence of dry air) present over central India to fulfil another vital condition.

The monsoon is in recess largely due to the enhanced typhoon activity in the Pacific. It may have helped the 'low' to form in the Bay but with minimal benefits for the Indian landmass.

The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) wave that triggered excess rainfall in June over India is now active there, and hence the formation of two intense typhoons and a tropical storm.

Pacific typhoons

Typhoon Chan-hom and tropical storm Linfa are heading in west-northwest direction and they have conspired to set up the 'low.'

The other typhoon Nangka is now turning towards north and north-east and away from Asia, and it could take away flows after Chan-hom and Linfa make landfall over east and south China respectively.

This would mean that the monsoon would be held back from getting back to strength until Nangka spends itself out after wading into southern Japanese shores.