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THE HINDU

A boost for agricultural sector



Pocharam upbeat even as the government continues to grapple with several farmer-related issues. The government sanctioned Rs.4,250 crore in 2014-15 and relief of an equal amount will be provided this year too.

Unabated suicides by farmers have cast a shadow on the efforts of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) government to rejuvenate major economic activity, in which over 55.5 per cent of the population is still engaged in Telangana.

The first government of the newly-formed State is still grappling with farmer-related issues. Farmers, backed by Opposition parties, took to the streets to protest the government's apathy in ensuring power supply to protect standing crops as irrigation is done mostly through borewells by using energy supplied under free-power scheme in the State.

Withering of standing crops due to huge power demand-supply gap led to scores of farmers' suicides. The Opposition parties estimated the toll to be over 1,000 during the last one year, while the government contends that it was only 10 per cent of the figure put out by its detractors.

“The government had moved heaven and earth to meet the demand for power, compounded with denial of Telangana’s rightful share by Andhra Pradesh, and by the time of Rabi cultivation, we ensured that the farm sector got at least seven-hour supply,” Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy said, explaining the efforts put in by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao to tide over the crisis.

On the positive side, the government announced crop loan waiver of over Rs.17,000 crore to over 36 lakh farmers with a waiver of up to Rs.1 lakh to every farmer who availed institutional credit. The government sanctioned Rs.4,250 crore in 2014-15 and relief of an equal amount will be provided this year too.

New initiatives such as provision of subsidy for poly/green houses, micro irrigation and farm mechanisation with Rs.550 crore to make farming a profitable venture are likely to have a positive impact on the sector. As the government could do little last year, it has allocated nearly Rs.8,000 crore to agriculture and allied sectors this year in addition to loan waiver of Rs.4,250 crore.

“With the help of a multi-pronged approach, we have plans for 6 per cent growth trajectory for the farm sector this year,” Mr. Srinivas Reddy stated. Complementing the efforts of the Agriculture Department, the Marketing Department has plans to modernise market yards and construct new storage space (godowns), all aimed at ensuring better price for farm produce.

Criticism from Opposition parties aside, the government is confident of supplying uninterrupted power to the farm sector in the daytime itself from next year. “The Mission Kakatiya programme and irrigation projects in the final stages of progress are sure to give a boost to the agriculture sector,” said Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao.

Paddy seed production provides supplementary income to farmers

Seed production enhances returns for paddy cultivators in the wake of the growing demand for quality seeds, said scientists at a day-long training programme on “production of quality paddy seeds” organised at Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Vamban near here on Saturday.

They said that most farmers found it difficult to purchase quality seeds and, hence, production of seeds of high-yielding varieties would go a long way in ensuring more returns.

L. Nirmala, Programme Co-ordinator, said that farmers should be fully aware of the importance of season-specific demand for quality seeds. For instance, during the forthcoming 'kuruvai' season, the demand for quality Co-51 variety released by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University would be on the rise. "Being the short duration fine variety, 'kuruvai' farmers will opt for this variety," she said appealing to farmers to produce seeds for such varieties.

M. Kathiravan, Assistant Professor Seed Sciences, in his power-point presentation, said seed production fetched more income for farmers. For instance, quality seeds would fetch a returns of up to Rs. 50,000 an acre.

He said that April-May and December-January were the two ideal 'pattam' when farmers could go in for raising quality seeds.

Selection of fields for raising paddy seeds was more important. Fields where the same paddy variety had been raised earlier would be more conducive. "Fields where other varieties had been harvested earlier often cause variation in the characteristic and botanical behaviour of seeds, resulting in quality of seeds," he warned. The fields should be free from weeds and pest attack.

A question hour session was held in which farmers got their doubts clarified.

Generate income by adding value to jackfruit produce, say farm scientists

Jackfruit mela organised at Anuganalu in Hassan taluk

Agriculture scientists here on Sunday called upon farmers cultivate varieties of jackfruits and adopt techniques to generate income by adding value to the produce.



Senior scientists from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru; Agriculture College in Hassan, and officers of the Forest Department spoke on the need to diversify products at the jackfruit mela organised by the Biodiversity Conservation and Research Trust at Anuganalu in Hassan taluk.

Great demand

L. Manjunath, Dean of Agriculture College at Karekere, who inaugurated the mela, said that jackfruit had great demand. Farmers should understand the value of the crop and preserve varieties of high demand for future generations. Research institutes including the Agriculture College would help the farmers generate income by growing jackfruit trees, he said.

Ganesh S. Bhat, Deputy Conservator of Forests, said the Forest Department had been providing saplings of different varieties at Re. 1 to Rs. 3 to encourage farmers to plant them in their land. The farmers would also get a support price up to Rs. 45 per tree for three years. “In coastal areas, people have been making money by marketing jackfruit chips. Similarly, in other places, farmers should take up income generating activities,” he said.

S. Shyamamma, scientist from Gandhi Krishi Vignana Kendra in Bengaluru, said the university had conducted jackfruit mela in areas near Doddaballapur to collect data about different varieties of jackfruits.

Data on genotype

“This time the mela has been organised in Hassan so that data of locally available genotypes of jackfruit are collected. More than 30 farmers have participated in the mela with jackfruit grown on their land,” she said.

H.P. Mohan, honorary wildlife warden; and Malali Gowda, founder of BCRT, were present. Hundreds of farmers and environmentalists from different parts of Hassan participated and tasted different varieties of jackfruits in the event.

Ryots to get soil health cards

Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao on Sunday launched the Soil Health Management Programme at Lingamguntla village in Chilakaluripet by handing over soil health test cards to farmers.

The soil health cards is a report sheet prepared by the Department of Agriculture which will give details about the percentage of minerals and micro nutrients available in a soil profile. Later, farmers would be provided with the required micro-nutrients on a 50 per cent subsidy.

Mr. Rao said the government would spend Rs. 300 crore on the programme this financial year. In Guntur district, 32,000 farmers would be given the soil health report cards.

The truth about your food



Did you know that the nature of apples is to be sour? Or that fruit is Nature's candy? Here are some nutrition facts you didn't know

1 Protein has the highest thermic effect among macronutrients. Just like how walking and running require energy, digestion is a process that requires energy too. When you eat food, the body breaks the macronutrients down into simpler units. This breaking down requires energy and protein is the hardest to breakdown and hence requires the most energy for breakdown. For this reason, and because protein is more satiating than any other macronutrient, upping the protein is a good idea when fat loss is a goal.

2 Fruit is nature's candy and are healthful too. No doubt. But when you look into the nutritional profile, you'll realise that fruit is basically water, sugar and some micronutrients.

While some fruits contain more of some micronutrients than the others, fruits in general should be considered as nature's candy and consumed in moderation.

3 Most of the fruits we eat today were selectively bred for sweetness. For example, apples used to be sour. Well, most of them.

We humans liked the sweeter ones among them and so we started looking for them. Slowly, with agricultural evolution, we started breeding more of the sweeter ones, and today, we know apple as sweet and the only type of apples we get are sweet.

4 Not all vegetables are created equal. Some contain more starch, while some others contain more micronutrients. Roots and tubers like potatoes, carrots, radishes and raw banana are starchy in nature while leafy green vegetables like spinach, kale and ladies finger are lower in starch and are packed with vitamins and minerals.

The way things are today, we don't have any problems getting enough starch, but we struggle to get even half the required amount of micronutrients. So, get as much green leafy vegetables as possible.

5 As a general rule, it's a good idea to eat little to no oil when eating outside. Firstly, oils are expensive and most restaurants cook with low-quality vegetable oils.

The oils used in high heat cooking are detrimental to your health due to the high levels of polyunsaturated fatty acids they contain. Secondly, it's safe to assume most oil used outside is reused, which makes the already harmful vegetable oil just plain dangerous.

6 Vegetarian protein options are limited but not non-existent. Being a vegetarian, you won't be able to get big doses of protein like a non-vegetarian could from meat or seafood.

So it is important to eat plenty of protein-rich vegetarian foods and reduce the amount of protein-deficient foods. For example, a meal dominated by lentils, millets, vegetables and curd is a great idea for a vegetarian, while a starch-dominated meal with a tiny portion of vegetables and daal is not.

7 You are gaining and losing weight every moment. You may only check it once a week or month, but it is happening right now as you read this. Every moment of your life, you are either consuming or expending energy. At any moment, if the amount of energy you consume is more than the amount you expend, it is stored as fat for future use.

Likewise, the opposite is true too. So understand that fitness and wellness are continuous processes and not challenges you do for a week or a couple of months. In other words, you will constantly need to stay active and eat smart to stay in shape and enjoy good health.

Water colour turns red in Ooty check dam



With the colour of water in a check dam in the Nilgiris district turning red, government officials inspected it on Sunday and found that it occurred because of pollen emitted by a weed, but concluded that it was a seasonal phenomenon

Ooty summer festival concludes



The Nilgiris district will probably become the top tourist destination in the country. While Mumbai holds that spot now, the difference between the number of tourists visiting the two places is only 17,000, according to Tourism Secretary R. Kannan.

Addressing the valedictory of the Ooty summer festival on Saturday, he expressed the hope that the district would soon overtake Mumbai. Towards this direction, a host of development activities were under way.

He said that Rs. 2.5 crore had been allotted to the Hill Area Development Programme not only to renovate the existing tourist attractions, but also to set up new ones.

Further, Rs. 37 lakh had been sanctioned in the State Budget to develop Ooty.

In addition, the Asian Development Bank had sanctioned a loan amount of Rs. 27.27 crore to set up an underground drainage system in Ooty.

While this would be the most complicated of projects, he was optimistic that it can be efficiently executed.

The Tourism Secretary added that signboards would be erected across The Nilgiris and additional benches would be installed in all the parks and tourist sites. Nearly 80 per cent of all these works had been completed, he told the audience.

The Nilgiris Collector P. Sankar and Udthagamandalam municipal chairperson K. Sathyabama took part in the valedictory.

The Ooty summer festival comprised a host of shows ranging from flower, fruit, vegetable, rose and spices shows to cultural programmes and art shows.

Crashing price of skimmed milk powder worries dairy farmers

The copious rain earlier this week, unfortunately, does not herald good for the Aavin and private dairies in the backdrop of crash in the price of skimmed milk powder in the global market.

A sudden abundance in the availability of green fodder fostered by the wetness in the coming weeks would lead to 20 to 30 per cent higher milk yield by cattle, causing additional complications for the dairies that are already unable to absorb even the normal production.

Production of skim milk powder by private dairies has come to a grinding halt, as the global price has crashed to almost half of what existed some months ago.

According to suppliers of milk to cooperative societies, they will have to brace themselves up for a drawn-out struggle as there is no quick solution in sight.

On the one hand, Aavin is unable to procure milk beyond its handling capacity and on the other private dairies, most of which are focussed on production of skim milk powder, find no reason to continue with their usual procurement. Aavin appears to bear the brunt since the regular suppliers to the private dairies who have been turned back look up to Aavin for procurement of their produce. The price of skimmed milk powder has crashed from Rs. 300 to less than Rs. 150 in the international market and the

problem is only going to precipitate in the coming months and years, according to an owner of a private dairy in Erode.

Abolition of European Union milk quota system in 2015 is set to create a new context for international trade in milk products, analysts say, citing a research study indicating increase in EU milk production by 3.5 million tons (18.4 per cent) to 22.6 million tons in 2022 over time. Correspondingly, the EU exports of milk products are also expected to increase to 15.74 per cent from 13.7 per cent.

So far, dairies in India were able to export skimmed milk powder only because of the quota system that has been in existence for the last 30 years.

According to EU Commission forecast, exports of SMP will go up from 4, 50,000 tonnes to 6, 25,000 tonnes in 2017. After the lifting of the quota restrictions, the EU nations are set to dominate global market in milk production and exports owing to the favourable climatic conditions wherein green fodder is available all through the year in plenty and the high milk-yield, analysts say

Fish prices unlikely to come down



Even though the annual fishing ban in Tamil Nadu came to an end on May 29, the price of sea food is unlikely to drop in a big way in the near future, thanks to the ban period coming into force in the neighbouring State of Kerala from June 1.

The 45-day ban came into force in Bay of Bengal on April 15, leading to considerable increase in the price of all varieties of sea fishes across Tamil Nadu. The ban was aimed at facilitating breeding of fishes and conservation of fish stock in marine ecology. The price of sea fish has registered a marginal fall in the Suramangalam fish market on Sunday, due to the lifting of ban on Friday. The vanjeeram fish was priced at Rs. 700 per kg, the vilai meen and mutta parai at Rs. 350 per kg each.

The trend of higher price is expected to continue for the next couple of months as the ban in Arabian Sea comes into effect immediately.

Sea food is a favourite food item among Keralites and as such traders from Kerala descend on coastal villages in Tamil Nadu to purchase the produce during the ban period in Arabian Sea.

Demand

The Kerala traders are prepared to offer any price for fish varieties due to heavy demand in their State.

Thus the prices are not expected to come down during the months of June and July. The markets in Tamil Nadu are expected to receive their regular quota only from the month of August, says S. Habibullah, running Abi Fish Stall in Suramangalam fish market.

The fishermen of coastal villages took advantage of the ban period for undertaking repair works of boats, nets and other equipment. The State Government provided a relief assistance of Rs. 2,000 per marine fishermen family to compensate the revenue loss suffered by them by abstaining from fishing.

Spices Park to add flavour to Nizamabad

The sanction of a Spices Park by the Centre with the constant persuasion of Member of Parliament Kalvakuntla Kavitha is one of the major

achievements of the TRS government in the district. The park is all set to come up in 40 acres at Padagal village in Velpur mandal.

The Telangana government has already released an amount of Rs.5 crore towards compensation to farmers who lost their land for the establishment of the park, which will cost around Rs.100 crore.

This initiative has brought hope to farmers on a remunerative price for turmeric as in the last few years, they were unable to get a remunerative price.

“Turmeric is grown in large tracts [40,000 hectares] in Balkonda and Armour Assembly constituencies and more than 80 per cent of the crop comes from these areas. It is believed that the Spices Park will improve marketing facilities for turmeric fingers and eliminate the intervention of middlemen in fixing prices,” said Velmal Vimala, ZPTC member Velpur.

The previous Congress government sanctioned the Turmeric Special Project that includes supply of necessary equipment for improving the quality of the product and supply of superior quality seed. Two training centres – one at Velpur and another at Dharpally were set up under the project and an amount of almost Rs.4 crore was spent on this mission. The project, proposed to be completed with an outlay of Rs.20 crore, however, came to a grinding halt for reasons not known. Paucity of funds and the lack of political initiative are said to have come in the way.

Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy said that problems of turmeric processing and marketing would disappear as soon as the Spices Park became operational. “To begin with, our government on its part, immediately released Rs.5 crore. The Centre will come forward with the required funding,” he said.

Ryots stick to cotton cultivation

Cotton being a commercial crop, it can be cultivated even under low rainfall conditions. Farmers in the district continue to grow it despite problems such as labour, low remuneration and growing input costs.

They cultivate cotton in an extent of six lakh acres annually but due to unfavourable conditions, it was grown only in five lakh acres last season.

However, agricultural scientists believe that next season it will be cultivated in six lakh acres or more as there is forecast of low rainfall. “Many opted for maize last season but again, farmers will opt for cotton in view of the deficient rainfall this time,” said District Agriculture Technology & Transfer (DAT) centre director R. Uma Reddy.

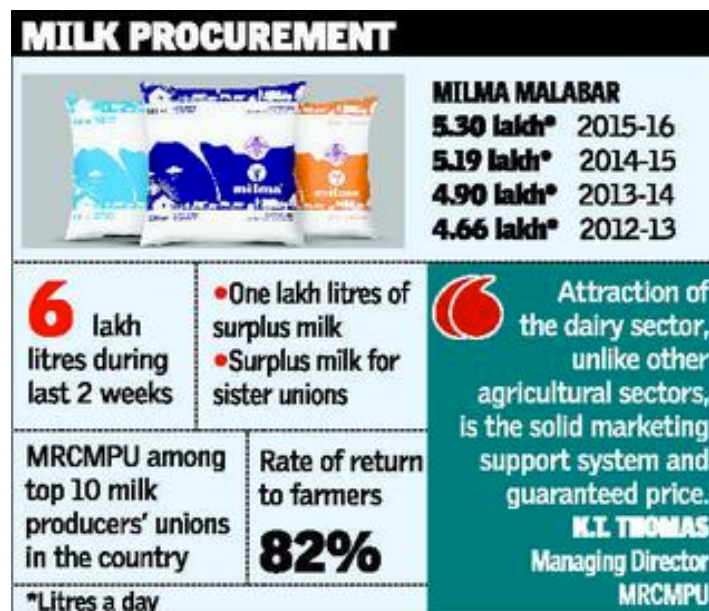
Farmers have been demanding a good remunerative price, which was fixed at Rs. 4,050, but majority were paid between Rs. 3,800 and Rs. 3,900 per quintal. Farmers were also facing the problem of inadequate labour in villages owing to the MNREGS programme. Not many were willing to work with farmers as they get more wages under the programme.

“The only solution is to introduce farm mechanization in a big way. Sowing and harvesting can be done by machines,” Mr. Uma Reddy said.

Agricultural scientists have been asking the government to set up a Cotton Research Centre to develop local varieties that would be beneficial to farmers. There was only one centre in the erstwhile State but there is no research centre in Telangana.

Mr. Uma Reddy said they had been advising farmers to sow only the non-BT variety of cotton and cultivate the crop in black soil only. Otherwise, there would be a problem of low yield and pests.

Milk production in Malabar goes up



The milk production in the Malabar region has recorded a huge increase over the past few years and has exceeded the requirement.

The quantity of milk procured by the dairies of the Malabar Regional Cooperative Milk Producers' Union (MRCMPU of Milma) is an indication that the overall production in the northern districts has gone up even during the lean season (summer months) and is expected to further increase in the flush season (rainy season) when procurement naturally exceeds beyond demand.

MRCMPU officials said that one lakh litres of surplus milk procured by the union every day is now being given to sister unions in the southern regions of the State. MRCMPU's daily milk requirement for marketing is five lakh litres.

The procurement figures of the union shows that the quantity of milk procured by the union reached 5.30 lakh litres a day in the current fiscal as against 5.19 lakh litres in 2014-15, 4.90 lakh litres in 2013-14, and 4.66 lakh litres in 2012-13.

Milestone

The milk procurement of the union over the past two weeks has crossed six lakh litres a day, almost double the quantity procured by the union 10 years ago.

“Milk procurement by the MRCMPU this year recorded 22 per cent increase over last year's figure,” MRCMPU Managing Director K.T. Thomas told *The Hindu* .

The attraction of the dairy sector, unlike other agricultural sectors, is the solid marketing support system and guaranteed price, he said.

Milk powder

The dairies under the MRCMPU are procuring milk from one lakh milk producers in six northern districts.

The surplus milk is transferred to the sister unions and converted to milk powder, Mr. Thomas said.

The union is now bracing for higher procurement in the flush season when production increases and demand decreases.

The MRCMPU is among the top 10 milk producers' unions in the country ranked on the basis of high return to the members.

According to MRCMPU officials here, the rate of return to farmers is 82 per cent by way of milk procurement price, veterinary aids, and farmer supporting systems, including insurance coverage and cattle feed subsidies.

They said that the huge increase in milk production in the Malabar region was a salutary effect of the crisis being faced by rubber growers owing to price fall.

More farmers are now shifting from rubber to dairy farming, the MRCMPU officials added.

‘Land Bill a boon for farmers’

With the coming Assembly elections in mind, Union Minister for Food Ram Vilas Paswan has said the Land Acquisition Bill, being scrutinised by a parliamentary panel, will be a “boon” for farmers, especially in his home State of Bihar which lacks development and which witnesses large-scale migration.

Mr. Paswan, whose Lok Jan Shakti Party is in alliance with the BJP, discounts himself as a chief ministerial candidate; he also rules out the former Chief Minister, Jitan Ram Manjhi, who has considerable influence over the Mahadalits.

Mr. Manjhi last week met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ostensibly to discuss a possible alliance in Bihar and said that whichever formation declared him a chief ministerial candidate, he would go with it. “I am not in the race for Chief Minister. We have left it to Mr. Modi. Although caste politics is dominant in the State, this election will be contested on Mr. Modi’s image and the issue of development. ‘Power to the poor and development’ will be our slogan,” Mr. Paswan told *The Hindu* in an informal chat. The tenure of the Bihar Assembly expires in November.

Mr. Paswan has been sceptical from the start about the merger of socialist parties into the Janata Pariwar and said it was unlikely that RJD chief Lalu Prasad would agree to contest the election with Nitish Kumar as chief ministerial candidate.

Sample collection under Soil Health Card Mission to be completed by June-end

Intensive soil sample collection is progressing steadily in 125 out of 375 revenue villages in Erode district.

A sensitisation programme was conducted in April for officials of Agriculture Department and Village Administrative Officers for

implementation of the grid soil sample collection program in the 125 revenue villages during 2015-16. The programme was initiated at Nanjanapuram village by Joint Director of Agriculture M. Selvaraju.

To ensure precise and accurate soil sampling, Agricultural Officers' of Soil Testing Laboratory and Mobile Soil Testing Laboratory were trained by master trainers. Soil samples will be taken before the sowing period of Kharif season, Nodal Officer of Mission on Soil health Card R. Savithiri said.

Under the Mission, soil samples are collected in representative areas or grids in every village. The samples are analysed for physical and chemical properties before issuance of soil health cards once in three years for site specific nutrient management.

Soil test-based application of fertilizers is critical to enhance efficient use of fertilizers. Blanket fertilizer recommendation that is generally followed rarely matches soil fertility. "Balanced and judicious use of chemical fertilizer along with bio-fertilizers and locally available organic manures based on soil testing values is very crucial to maintain soil health and crop productivity," Ms. Savithiri explained.

The Mission being implemented under chairmanship of District Collector S. Prabakar with the Joint Director of Agriculture as Member Secretary envisages testing of soil in 42,000 hectares over the next three years. This year, 14,000 hectares are to be covered.

So far, a nominal Rs. 20 used to be collected from farmers to conduct macro/micro test. Under the Mission, the sampling will be conducted free of cost. Assistant Agricultural Officers have been assigned villages for testing soil with geo-tagging, replete with specification of latitude and longitude and survey number for easier location.

Collection of samples will be completed by June-end. The samples will be shade-dried and preserved for subsequent analysis.

Here, the focus is on after-sales service

With increasing use of modern plumbing systems and accessories, several newly-built houses are going in for booster pumps.

Pumpsets are almost like consumer durables and hence after-sales service is becoming important, says Jayakumar Ramdass, Director of Mahendra Pumps.

He told *The Hindu* here on Saturday that Coimbatore has 100 to 150 brands of locally-made pumps. Pumpset manufacturers comply with several norms to meet quality and energy-efficiency standards and the market has also become competitive.

Quality

Apart from the focus on quality of the product while manufacturing, the initiatives through post-sale services are to leverage on the quality factor. Each manufacturer takes different efforts to showcase the strengths of the product. Thus, there is thrust on after-sales service.

A couple of brands in the market offer two-year warranty. Now, Mahendra Pumps has launched five-year warranty with a small premium, for domestic and agricultural pumps.

The warranty is available in south India now and will be extended to the north soon. “We have a wide service network. We have invested heavily in training and equipping the service centres. The first step is to ensure that the product does not fail. If there are complaints, then we need to attend to it in 24 hours,” he says. This effort also ensures that the manufacturer gets direct

feedback from the customer and develops the confidence of the customers, he says.

Soil health card project makes headway

Nearly a thousand farmers in various parts of the district have been issued free soil health cards. The soil health cards had been distributed to farmers in Kalady, Amballoor, Chennamangalam, Puthenvelikkara and Kottuvally panchayats, said a statement issued by the Department of Public Relations.

The statement said work on issuing the remaining soil health cards was progressing smoothly in the district and the farmers were expected to be issued soil health cards soon. The issue of soil health cards is part of a programme by the Department of Agriculture to help farmers understand the nature of the soil for their farming activities.

‘Niravu’ programme

The soil health cards are part of the larger objective of creating the soil-based plant nutrient management information system.

Soil sample collection for testing and issue of soil health cards was launched in 2011 under the ‘Niravu’ comprehensive agricultural development programme.

A total of 855 soil health cards were issued during 2011-12 under the panchayat-level soil testing programme. Eighteen farmers in Chennamangalam panchayat and 2,040 farmers in Puthenvelikkara and Kottuvally panchayats were issued soil health cards during 2013-14.

Another 3,838 farmers in Puthenvelikkara, Chennamangalam and Kottuvally panchayats were issued soil health cards during 2014-15.

“The Soil Survey and Conservation Department is also engaged in developing infrastructure facilities for the rural areas using the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund,” the press release said. This includes the work on the Panangarathode wetland near Kothamangalam and the drainage project for the Mekkadambu in Moovattupuzha taluk.

Milma to set up bulk cooling units

Ernakulam Regional Cooperative Milk Producers' Union will set up 25 new bulk milk cooling units worth Rs. 4.43 crore in Ernakulam, Kottayam, Idukki and Thrissur districts.

The new plan was unveiled in the budget for 2015-16. The zonal union has presented the budget for 2015-16 envisaging a total income of Rs. 568.57 crore; expenditure of Rs. 562.1 crore and operational profit of Rs. 6.47 crore, said a press release.

The Cooperative expects milk collection to rise by 11 per cent during the budget period. During the period, sales are envisaged to go up 15 per cent, the press release added.

P.A. Balan, zonal union chairman, informed that Rs. 3.25 crore has been set aside for pension payments to dairy farmers and Rs. 2 crore for other benefits to the dairy cooperatives.

'Sugarcane can help produce alternative energy'



Sexagenarian A.V. Mohan Rao was instrumental in establishing a bio-gas company at Kodoli near Kolhapur of Maharashtra in partnership with Warana Sugarcane Cooperative, one of Maharashtra's largest cooperatives by Spectrum Renewal Energy Limited (SREL). He is founder and CEO of SREL.

Equipped with a Ph.D in mechanical engineering, he established the unit in 2010 and completed it in 2012 November with an investment of about Rs.

30 crore, the unit handles 100 tonnes of press-mud, a by-product in sugar mills and an ideal medium for vermicomposting. It produces 7,000 kg of compressed bio-gas with high methane content and 30 tonnes of organic manure on a daily basis.

CBG packed in 400, 600 and 1,000- litre capacity cylinders with 250 bar pressure (a measurement for pressure to compress – LPG cylinders carry 6 bar pressure) is being supplied to meet industrial needs there by reducing the dependency on general power production.

“We can produce compressed bio-gas which is equal to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)- grade fuel. By using press-mud we will produce compressed bio-gas (CBG) and organic manure / soil conditioner. Though it is a bio-gas initiative, SREL holds the key to energy security and has the capacity to reduce the demand for electric power and consumption of chemical fertilizer.

About 600 farmers in Warna area are using the organic manure being supplied by us for a nominal cost,” Dr. Mohan Rao told *The Hindu*, who was at International Crops Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) recently.

Mr. Rao says that with three sugar mills located in Medak district, it has a vast potential to produce CBG as well as organic manure. He also said that he can make about 100 farmers beneficial on pilot basis by encouraging them to buy back sweet sorghum, which also carries similar prospects of producing CBG and bio-manure.

Mr. Rao also stated that this can be used for domestic cooking purpose as well. “We are ready to make use of this in place of LPG,” he said.



Agrarian Distress: State to bring in stringent norms for private moneylenders



The Maharashtra [government](#) is chalking out stricter norms for licensed private moneylenders to protect farmers in rural areas, while simultaneously trying to make loans available to them on easier terms from financial institutions like cooperative banks.

There are also proposals from elected representatives to co-opt licensed moneylenders into the system, with a code of conduct to follow, to widen the scope of fund allocation to the agriculture sector.

The ministries of cooperation, finance and agriculture are working out guidelines to ensure that farmers forced to seek loans from licensed private moneylenders are not financially overburdened.

Licensed moneylenders will be asked to bring down interest, and give farmers more time to repay loans.

Last week, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis spelled out a slew of reforms and interventions to reschedule loans availed by farmers from recognised district cooperatives, and national banks.

The most significant was bringing down interest from 12 per cent to 6 per cent, extending zero interest loans to farmers in the first year, and increasing repayment period from the existing three years, to five years.

A senior official in the ministry of agriculture and cooperation said, “It is our endeavour to bring similar reforms in the private moneylending business. The [government](#) cannot get rid of private moneylenders. The only way is to ask them to follow guidelines or face stringent punishment.”

“We have come across cases where farmers sought loans in desperation at 30 to 40 per cent interest,” he added. A source said licensed private moneylenders would be asked to keep interest rate between 9 and 12 per cent.

Sources revealed, “There is no account of how many farmers seek financial help from non-licensed private moneylenders. Their operations are discreet. We need to strengthen monitoring mechanism.”

“Exploitation of farmers by licensed operators, if reported, will lead to cancellation of license,” said an official.

In 2013, 347 licenses were cancelled and in 2014, 450 were cancelled. Fadnavis said, “Sweeping reforms in loan rescheduling is to make farmers less dependent on private moneylenders. It is our relentless effort to strengthen financial institutions to ensure farmers can have easy access to loans.”

Conceding that banking norms make it mandatory for some discipline in loan repayment, he said, “The [government](#) would step in, to give farmers a breather in the first year to give zero interest loans. But we will simultaneously have to provide alternative financial support to farmers who have small land holdings and whose repayment capacity in times of crop losses is the worst.”

How green tea could cut prostate cancer development in men

In a new study, scientists have revealed that a component found in green tea may help reduce development of prostate cancer in men facing high risk.

A team of researchers led by Nagi B. Kumar, Ph.D., R.D., F.A.D.A. at Moffitt Cancer Center assessed the safety and effectiveness of the active components in green tea called, “catechins” to prevent prostate cancer development in men who have premalignant lesions.



20 percent of green tea is consumed in Asian countries where prostate cancer death rates are among the lowest in the world and the risk of prostate cancer appears to be increased among Asian men who abandon their original dietary habits upon migrating to the U.S.

Laboratory studies have shown catechins inhibit cancer cell growth, motility and invasion, and stimulate cancer cell death. Green tea catechins also prevent and reduce tumor growth in animal models.

Epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) is the most abundant and potent catechin found in green tea responsible for these cancer prevention effects. The study is published in the journal Cancer Prevention Research.

Express Recipes: How to make sweet and salty Spinach Corn Curry

Spinach Corn curry

Ingredients

1 cup corn kernels (you can use frozen ones or steam fresh corn kernels for about 20 mins)

1 onion, chopped 4 cloves of garlic,
chopped 1 green chilli,

chopped 2 cups spinach puree

A pinch of asafoetida

2 tsp coriander powder

1 tsp cumin powder

Salt to taste
1 tsp garam masala
1 tsp chaat masala
2 tbsp oil



Method

- * If you are using fresh spinach, roughly chop and blanch it in a little water. remove from heat, let it cool and puree.
- * On a side, put corn kernels for steaming. It usually takes about 15-20 mins for them to become soft.
- * Heat oil in a pan. Once the oil is hot, add asafoetida, garlic and green chillies. Saute for a couple of minutes till the garlic just start to brown.
- * Add the chopped onions and sauté for another 8-10 minutes till the onions become soft and turn slightly brownish.
- * Now add the spinach puree and all the spices. Cook for another 5 minutes. Remove from heat and blend together with a stick blender. I prefer stick blender because then I can control how much to blend, I do like a few pieces of onions here and there.
- * Return to heat, add the steamed corn kernels. Cook covered for 2-3 minutes. * Serve hot with paranthas.

Agriculture ministry aims to end monopoly of some traders in mandis

In a bid to end the monopoly of a few licenced traders in agriculture mandis, who often manipulate prices and resort to unfair practices, the agriculture ministry has moved a proposal seeking Cabinet approval to set up a National Agriculture Market.

The scheme, to be implemented by creating e-market platform for 585 regulated wholesale markets in three years, will start with first 50 Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees. (APMCs) in five states.

According to the Cabinet note, which has been circulated for inter-ministerial consultation, the objective of this initiative is to create a barrier-free efficient market for marketable surplus items that are available in mandis across the country. The scheme will involve Rs 200 crore investment.

Sources said the scheme aims to create appropriate common e-market platform that would be deployable in almost all regulated wholesale markets. "At present, there are licencing barriers for traders to do business in each APMC. So, only a small group of traders who capture the first lot of licences to operate in the committee have monopoly on the business and trading of each category of fruits and vegetables," said a government official.

Moreover, majority of 2,456 principal markets and 4,734 market yards have inadequate infrastructure and there is less use of technology, which leads to loss of quality as well as wastage. Mandis have opaque processes of price discovery often leading to charges of price manipulation and unfair practices.

"Once you have e-platform for all mandis, you can come to know the best suitable prices to place orders. Traders will come to know about the surplus availability of certain items in different markets, which they can buy. It will remove the present physical barriers across mandis and states," said an official.

The new system will also put an end to the high market charges that mandis levy, which ranges from 0.5% to 2% in most cases and in some cases it is as high as 10% to 15%.

For smooth rollout, the Centre will provide Rs 30 lakh to each mandi for the hardware and the department of agriculture cooperation (DAC) will meet the expenses on software. '

States will have to apply for the scheme. However, states that have carried out key reforms -- single trade licence for all mandis across the state, single point levy for market fee and provision for electronic auctioning of items for price discovery - will only be eligible for this central fund.

The lead agency for national e-market scheme initially will be Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) and later a new entity will take it over.

Apple grower gets back Rs32 lakh in dues from APMC

A Kashmir-based apple grower received his Rs 32 lakh due to him in a dispute settled by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) in Pune.

The apple grower, Bashir Ahmed Bhat, who hails from Shopian district in Kashmir, had supplied a consignment of apples to a city-based trader in December 2014. After failing to receive about 40% payment from the trader for six months, Bhat approached the APMC.

The matter was brought before the disputes' committee which conducted hearings and finally a cheque amounting to the dues was handed over to Bhat on Sunday by guardian minister Girish Bapat.

"I am happy to get back my dues. The consignment was worth Rs 1 crore.

The fruit was sent to the market in about 20 vehicles. The payment was delayed for more than six months. Despite repeated attempts, the trader did not pay. I was in the city for many days to get back my money. After the trader did not respond to me, I approached the APMC," Bhat said.

He also supplies apple consignments to markets in Mumbai and Delhi, and had sent the consignment to Pune for the first time.

Dhananjay Doiphode, secretary of APMC, said, "We have a disputes committee that looks into cases wherein farmers face problems over non-payment of dues, delays in payments and traders not cooperating with the farmers. The committee, in this particular case, conducted a hearing and asked the trader to deposit the remaining amount with the APMC. Action was also proposed against trader for non-payment of dues in the stipulated time period. The case was handled as per the provisions of the APMC Act, 1963," Doiphode said.

According to Pravin Patil, who helped Bhat, "The trader had handed over about 60% payment to Bhat. However, after repeated follow-ups Bhat failed to get the remaining amount after which we approached the APMC."

Meanwhile, in a similar case Ahmednagar-based flower trader Amol Auty got back dues of Rs1.20 lakh on Sunday after the case was taken up by the APMC disputes' committee.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

A better future for farmers

The farmer gets a good bargain now as the NCDEX price serves as the benchmark



After falling sharply in the aftermath of the NSEL scam, volumes in the agri-commodity derivatives market have begun moving up again. Jayant Nalawade, Chief of Operations and Compliance, NCDEX, spoke to *BusinessLine* on the changes the exchange has brought to the country's commodity markets in the last decade of its operations.

What changes has NCDEX brought to the commodity market?

NCDEX has been in existence for about 10 years now and it has established itself as the primary exchange for agri-commodities through its national online platform. Our significant achievement was bringing in transparency in price discovery and dissemination.

It is a fact that there is no other agency in the country that gives price data for various agricultural commodities in a consistent manner for a specific quality.

There are agencies like agmarknet. The price data they publish is a modal price — essentially an average price for the quantity that was traded. But you don't know for which (grade) quality those prices pertain to. The spot price the exchange disseminates is collected from many markets and a number of polling participants. The methodology and scientific robustness of the method adopted by the exchange is acknowledged. Second, we have created awareness among farmers about the quality of their produce.

Earlier, the farmer would just take his produce to APMCs and accept whatever price was paid to him — he neither had the price information nor did he know about the quality of his produce. But now he gets to find out the quality of his crop and then relates it to the price of the benchmark in the NCDEX.

How does the polling process work?

We have appointed agencies to collect price data. They call up specified polling participants from major centres for each commodity. These participants are traders, processors, wholesalers and stockists and work on a voluntary basis.

The exchange does not pay them anything for the inputs they give. The entire process of data sifting and arriving at the median prices is automated through statistical methods.

The credibility of this data is high. It is disseminated through the exchange website, its trading terminals and through various media channels.

The exchange also provides this data to the Centre.

Has the futures market helped the farmer in any way?

There is increasing evidence that farmers are now looking at futures prices and taking decisions on which crop to sow in a season. The other benefit is that they know when to sell.

Earlier farmers used to sell 70 per cent of their produce during harvest time and that resulted in a glut in the market. Prices fell and farmers could not get a fair price for their produce. But in the last two-three years, only about 50 per cent of the produce comes to the mandis in the harvest months.

This is clear evidence that the farmer is observing the price trends.

The exchange has created scientific warehousing infrastructure where goods are deposited after they are assayed for quality.

So, when a trader purchases from a farmer, he can deposit the produce in the exchange-approved warehouse and sell them online on the futures platform, where price discovery is based on the demand-supply scenario.

This promotes transparency in the prices of agri-commodities as against the opacity that existed in the physical mandis. There is a close correlation in the futures prices and the mandi prices that directly benefits the farmer.

You launched forward contracts recently. How different is it from futures?

A forward is a bilateral transaction — you do not square off the transaction. There is compulsory delivery. Farmer producer organisations — a small association of farmers in a specific area and registered with the government — can use the exchange-traded forward market to sell and get a better price.

More than 8,000 tonnes have already been traded in forwards since launch. Also, these are ‘compensation guarantee’ contracts.

Suppose, a buyer and a seller agree to execute a trade three months from now; they will pay the required margins to the exchange. If either party defaults, 90 per cent of that margin money goes to the counter party as compensation.

In the physical market, where forwards are taking place, if you enter into an agreement to sell 20 tonnes to someone three months from now and the party backs off because the price has fallen, you will be left with the 20 tonnes and will have to find another buyer while taking the price risk.

Has investor confidence in agri-markets returned?

The NSEL event affected the sentiment of mainly traders. About 40-50 per cent of our business is from physical market participants or hedgers who are processors or exporters of various commodities. With the SEBI-FMC merger now, the commodity markets will have stronger regulation. That will be in the interest of all the participants in the commodity market.

Turmeric follows futures, slips

Spot turmeric prices decreased at Erode markets following weak futures.

“Turmeric futures was down 4 per cent and this has reflected in the local sale. The traders quoted decreased price and purchased little quantity of turmeric for their local sales. Of the arrival of 3,800 bags, only 1,690 bags

were sold,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.



The finger turmeric lost ₹200 a quintal in the Regulated Market Committee and Erode Cooperative Marketing Society and ₹300 in the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. The root variety was down ₹200 in the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹5,115-7,819 a quintal and the root variety ₹5,109-7,314. Of the arrival of 845 bags, 340 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric went for ₹6,274-7,455 and the root variety ₹6,199-7,350. Of the 439 bags on sale, 159 were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric fetched ₹6,499-7,440; the root variety ₹6,409-7,259. Of the 892 bags placed for sale, 552 were sold.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹6,500-7,298; the root variety ₹6,173-7,099. Of the arrival of 138 bags, 118 found takers.

Business Standard

Agri output almost stagnant in 2014-15



A bad monsoon during the kharif season and unseasonal rain during the rabi harvest took a heavy toll on India's agricultural growth for 2014-15, dragging down overall economic growth, too.

The Central Statistics Office said on Friday that agriculture grew a mere 0.2 per cent in 2014-15 as against 1.1 per cent in the advance estimate. In 2013-14, agriculture and allied sectors grew by almost 3.7 per cent.

The 2014-15 growth was the lowest since the new GDP series was introduced in 2012-13. Farm growth in 2012-13 was 1.2 per cent.

A change in methodology of GDP calculation and positive growth of 2.1 per cent in horticultural crops, fruit and vegetables saved the day or else the numbers would have been worse.

Quarter on quarter, growth in agriculture and allied activities in the third and fourth quarter of 2014-15 (October-December and January-March) was a negative. Output fell 1.1 per cent and 1.4 per cent, respectively, as compared to growth of 3.8 per cent and 4.4 per cent in 2013-14 for the same periods.

In the third advance estimate issued by the department of agriculture in March, foodgrain production in 2014-15 was estimated at 251.12 million tonnes, almost six mt less than the previous estimate in February and 5.25 per cent less than the production in 2013-14.

“Given rabi and kharif production, farm figures (on growth) should be negative. However, due to the changed methodology of value addition, these showed growth in 2014-15,” said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at CARE Ratings.

D K Joshi, chief economist at CRISIL Ratings, told Business Standard a bad monsoon in the kharif season would have had a limited impact if the rabi harvest was good but the untimely rains killed that hope.

He said the fate of farm growth in 2015-16 would depend on the monsoon in 2015. Initial signals from both the state-run India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Australian Weather Bureau are not very encouraging.

“We should keep a close watch on the second forecast of IMD, expected in June, as that would show which regions could get low rains,” Joshi said.