

11.06.2015

THE HINDU

Plant health clinic established

The major problem faced by the farmers for low productivity of crops in Kerala is the crop loss caused by the attack of various pests and diseases in cultivated crops.

It is known that the incidence of pest and diseases varies with the weather, soil and ecology and a clear understanding of this variation is inevitable for providing proper advisory.

By the continuous monitoring of the pest situation and weather parameters, it is possible to forecast the incidence of pests and diseases. This will help the farmers in taking up prophylactic management measures even before pest population crosses the threshold level.

Along with these farmers can be advised to improve the plant health status based on soil nutrient status so that the requirement for chemical based pest management can be further reduced. The Department of Agriculture had formulated a project “Crop Health Management” for filling the gaps in sound crop health management and to adopt scientific plant health management. Plant Health Clinics were also established under the scheme for providing adequate diagnostic and advisory facilities to farmers on time and also to facilitate eco friendly and scientific pest management strategies to increase production and productivity. A Plant Health Clinic was established at Krishibhavan, Vadakkenchery in Alathur Block of Palakkad district during 2013-14. In the initial phase the functioning of the Plant Health Clinic was mainly on pest and diseases diagnosis but when the pest surveillance progressed the functions of the Clinic extended beyond diagnosis to advisories and various field activities for the benefit of farming community.

The Clinic is now promoting various sustainable technologies such as Ecological Engineering, Agro Ecosystem Analysis, Onfarm production of biocontrol agents etc along with regular pest and diseases diagnosis and surveillance based advisories. The activities and outreach activities of the Plant Health Clinic are acting as a total solution which strengthens the whole plant health system.

Grow your own veggies all through the year



Kerala is a small state with high population density. The number of small families (with 4-5 members) is increasing in the state in urban as well as rural regions.

Farm lands are being rapidly converted into housing plots and this causes a severe reduction in crop grown area. Especially for vegetables, a reduction in their yield has a severe impact on the economy.

The market share of vegetables cultivated in Kerala is less than 33 per cent. About 67 per cent of vegetables coming in Kerala market are from neighbouring States. Moreover, it is evident that the agricultural commodities coming from outside can contain hazardous pesticide residues in them.

“The growth of conventional system of vegetable cultivation has its limits in the light of farm land unavailability and labour shortage in Kerala. Hence, major thrust needs to be given to the technological development and proliferation of vegetable production in small plots,” says Dr. C.P. Robert, Programme Coordinator, ICAR-Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Pathanamthitta district.

Vegetable farming in homes is an approach to address this concern. The proposed project ensures production of minimum 50 per cent of the family demand of vegetables. This could effectively make the rural and urban household self sustained in vegetable consumption.

The existing system and practice is insufficient to produce enough quantities of vegetable for the households. So, modern cultivation practices with adoptable precision farming techniques are incorporated through introduction of ultra density vegetable production systems. “The major objective set by us was to promote eco-safe vegetable production

unit through this technology based farming to overcome the limitations of vegetable production due to lack of land and labour,” says Dr. Robert.

The system is meant to ensure regular availability of vegetables for every family by increasing the productivity through the optimization of space and time.

The institute was keen to make it possible to ensure self sufficient, safe and sustainable vegetable production in every rural and urban household in Pathanamthitta district.

In short, this method is an innovative and unique one for enhancing the nuclear family to produce their own vegetables from a limited area round the year.

It is a modern farming system in which the vegetable crops are grown in an intensive manner taking care to see crops get sufficient amounts of sunlight through transparent poly sheets, irrigation through drip and essential elements and micro nutrients through fertigation. The crops are grown in 18 sq. metre space inside the rain shelter in grow bags. The All India Coordinated Research project on pesticide residues conducted at Kerala Agricultural University revealed that the vegetables like amaranthus, chilly, curry leaf, cowpea etc coming from outside states contain pesticide residues in severe amounts.

“This technology encourages the family to produce vegetables in a hassle free manner. Different vegetables can be cultivated in batches accordingly with the season of corresponding crops. The project provides a portable rain-shelter with grow bags, fortified growing media and drip irrigation system to 100 households across the district. Members of the selected household will be given training in ultra density vegetable cultivation under rain shelter. Regular management of the drip irrigation system, fertigation facilities, identification and remedy of major pests and diseases, crop calendar etc are the foremost topics for the training,” explains Mr. Sreekanth, agriculture engineer at the institute.

When polyhouse cultivation promoted with huge subsidies does not lead to break even in 3-5 years, if people are given 75 per cent subsidy (the total cost of the unit is Rs. 33,000) of the total cost this can cover more people and enables per capita vegetable production with a motto “ grow your own vegetables.”

For details contact Dr. C.P. Robert, Programme Coordinator, ICAR-Krishi Vigyan Kendra -Pathanamthitta District, (Farm Science Centre,

Indian Council of Agricultural Research(ICAR), Kolabhagam P.O., Tiruvalla (Via),Pathanamthitta Dist., Kerala, Phone:0469 2662094/2661821, mobile: 09447139300, web: www.kvkcard.org and Mr. Sreekanth, mobile:09995005751.

Now get cyclone alerts on phone

Your phone will alert you to cyclones brewing off the coast. In line with its various user services, the India Meteorological Department recently started a service to send mobile-phone alerts on cyclones.

S.P. Thampi, Deputy Director-General of Meteorology, says those wishing to receive the text messages may register their details on the department's website. Many people, including officers involved in disaster management and farmers, are registering for the free national-level service.

The department's officials say registered users will get alerts relevant to their region. The department has already been offering Agromet advisory mobile services to over two lakh registered farmers to enable them to plan activities.

The text messages sent twice a week comprise weather forecast and advice on crops and other agricultural aspects. Several agencies such as the Horticulture Department and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University too provide advisories.

Farmers who have registered on mkisan.gov.in too benefit from the Agromet mobile service. At present, users log in on the website to know the forecast before going on a tour or planning other activities. The department is considering offering venue-specific forecasts and weather alerts through text messages.

Summer showers improve kuruvai prospects



The summer showers have come as a blessing to the farmers of Uppliyapuram block where kuruvai cultivation is apace.

Though there is paucity of labour, the copious groundwater seems to have enthused farmers about the season's prospects. Durairaj, a farmer of Nettavelampatti in Patchaiperalpatti village panchayat, says that he had cultivated kuruvai crop after a gap of about four years on an acre of land.

He anticipates a yield of about 30 bags, which, he says, will be sufficient for his family of four for one year. Since the 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme' has crowded out farm labourers, I have to utilise the service of farmhands who are not members of the scheme, he said. "The wage for each labourer for four hours of transplanting nurseries is Rs. 80," he said.

Agriculture department officials say that most farmers have raised 'ADT 43' or 'ADT 45' variety with duration of 110 days.

About 1,000 hectares were expected to be covered under kuruvai this year. So far, 10 hectares had been covered after the summer showers in the block.

Last year, there was a serious shortfall in kuruvai cultivation, when the total area under kuruvai shrunk to just 150 hectares. Adequate quantity of seeds was available with the department, the officials said.

Storage position of most of the major tanks in and around Uppliyapuram is comfortable for raising kurvai.

Influx of water from the tanks to the fields is quite rapid and this has forced farmers to go in for paddy cultivation as no other crop could withstand such condition, sources said.

Kerala to rope in other States to curb pesticides in veggies

REGULATORY MEASURES	
Chandy to write to neighbouring CMs	Food Safety dept. being strengthened
	Testing facilities worth Rs.2.45 crore
Inter-State coordination meeting in July	Measures to boost production of vegetables in the State
	State production 30% short of requirement
Checks at check-posts to be intensified	464 food safety cases pending
	Special courts being contemplated

The State government, as part of its efforts to bring in regulatory measures to check the import of vegetables with high pesticide residual content into Kerala from neighbouring States, has decided to work in cooperation with the neighbouring States so that the practice of using pesticides in farmlands may be regulated.

At a high-level meeting with the Ministers of Health, Agriculture, and Civil Supplies, and Food Safety officials here on Wednesday, to discuss how far regulatory measures can be made effective, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said that he would be writing to the Chief Ministers of neighbouring States seeking their help in creating awareness about dangers of pesticide-ridden foods and in enforcing the checks.

An inter-State coordination meeting of government officials of neighbouring States at the Secretary-level will be held in the first week of July to discuss the joint measures to be taken by the States to regulate the use of pesticides on vegetables.

Regulatory measures

In order to coordinate the regulatory measures being adopted, the government will seek the cooperation of wholesale vegetable traders and set up State-level and regional committees for effective implementation.

The meeting also decided to create more awareness among the public and vegetable traders on the dangers of consuming pesticide-ridden foods.

Mr. Chandy said that steps were being taken to strengthen the Food Safety Department and that testing facilities worth Rs.2.45 crore would soon be put in place in the State laboratories.

In the long term, the State will take effective measures to boost the production of vegetables so that there is self-sufficiency in vegetables. At present, vegetable production in the State is 30 per cent short of the actual requirement

Meanwhile, the Food Safety wing will intensify checks in hotels and eateries to ensure that harmful food additives and flavour enhancers are not used in excessive quantities in cooked food. The department has also decided to conduct checks on all branded spices and condiments available in the market to check for adulteration.

At border check-posts

Checks at border check-posts will be intensified and the government will be firm about the regulatory provisions regarding the need for registration/licence for vegetable traders and their vehicles, as per the Food Safety and Standards Act. With about 464 food safety cases pending before courts, special courts are also being contemplated to dispose of these cases.

Health Secretary K. Ellangovan; Food Safety Commissioner T. V. Anupama; Secretaries of various departments and senior officials were present.

Steps initiated to promote sheep breeding with integrated approach



The Karnataka State Sheep and Wool Development Corporation has drawn up very ambitious plans to increase sheep population with an integrated approach to enhance the livelihood of rural people.

Panditrao Chidri, chairman of the corporation, said it had been decided to distribute native and new variety lambs to farmers throughout the State.

While the native breed of the State produces only one lamb a year, the new variety NARI-Suvarna sheep gives birth to twins, he said.

Speaking to The Hindu here on Wednesday, Mr. Chidri said, "Sheep rearing plays an important role in the development of rural economy. Therefore, we have resolved to increase the population of Bandur, Deccani, Kenguri and Hassan breeds. Moreover, we will be initiating measures to develop these breeds apart from distributing NARI-Suvarna."

NARI-Suvarna was developed by a government-funded agriculture science group called the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute.

Breeding centres

At present, there are sheep breeding and training centres at Dhanagur in Mandya, Kudhapura in Chitradurga, Guttal in Haveri, Anagawadi in Bagalkot and Suthatti in Vijayapura districts. The farmers can also get Rambouillet breed sheep and Osmanabadi breed goat at these centres.

According to Mr. Chidri, the breeding centres have distributed a total of 873 lambs of sheep and goats in the last three years.

The number would be increased by many folds in the coming days with the Corporation deciding to distribute at least 600 lambs of NARI-Suvarna breed this year.

The corporation has decided to introduce 18 ambulances in the State for providing the sheep/goat with proper and prompt treatment; establish cooperative societies on the lines of KMFes; vaccinate an estimated 1.5 crore sheep/goat throughout the State; establish modern sheep meat selling centres in all districts; set up offices in each district and provide weighing machines to prevent farmers from being cheated by middlemen] at district centres where the farmers bring their sheep to sell, he said.

Mr. Chidri has appealed the shepherds and sheep farmers to avail the benefits of compensation - for both sheep and shepherds - schemes.

With an objective of increasing the sheep population in the State, the corporation has decided to hold a mega convention of sheep farmers across the State. A convention in Mandya would be held on July 7.

Later, Mr. Chidri convened a meeting with sheep farmers and discussed various issues pertaining to development schemes and the Corporation.

Sheep farmers to get new variety lambs M.T. Shiva Kumar, Staff Correspondent

Food science college to come up in Nizamabad

The Telangana Cabinet on Wednesday gave the nod for starting a new college of Food Science & Technology at Rudrur in Nizamabad district, with an intake of at least 40 students a year. This is in tune with the vision of the Centre and State to add value to food products and avoid losses that are estimated at 20 p.c. in non-perishable food products and 60 p.c. in perishable category.

The Cabinet discussed the fact that application of modern advances in the field of food processing and preservation techniques would help retain the nutritional quality besides slashing post-harvest losses to a large extent. There was a demand for qualified technical human resource personnel in food industries, universities and research institutions concerning food science and technology

In this regard, the Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University Board had on May 12, passed a resolution to establish such a college at Rudrur.

Commerce graduate turns successful organic farmer



He is a post-graduate in Commerce, and as a crusader for organic farming he won the 'National Virtual Academy Fellowship' from the M.S. Swaminathan Foundation.

Meet Addala Gopalakrishna of Amalapuram who motivated more than 4,000 farmers to set up vermi-compost units to protect their soil for a long period.

For the past two decades, his dedication to organic farming has paid rich dividends, and he has proved that agriculture is profitable like other field.

His 'Rythumitra Rural Technology Park' has worked wonders in 16 mandals of Konaseema (Amalapuram Revenue Division) by making agriculture profitable without using fertilizers and pesticides and getting good yield with low investment. Mr. Gopalakrishna says farmers spend a fortune on fertilizers and pesticides, but in return they get less yield. "Organic farming will enhance the health of the soil and will multiply the yield," he adds.

Now, he has requested the government to release Rs. 1 crore through the Agriculture Department to distribute bio-fertilizers to farmers to boost organic farming. "After experiencing benefits, farmers would start buying bio-fertilizers," he says.

According to Gopalakrishna, organic farming will not give fruit on the first crop completely, but farmer could get cent percent return from the third crop.

He says farmer get 33 percent yield in the first crop, 78 percent yield in the second crop and 100 percent yield in the third crop. He maintains that his endeavour will now be to cut down the gap between production cost and Minimum Support Price.

Addala Gopalakrishna has made more than 4,000 farmers set up vermi-compost units to protect their soil for a long period

Cardamom farmers fear further drop in prices



The falling prices of cardamom have hit the farmers who are already faced with high cost of labour and increased prices of fertilizers and pesticides.

The average price of cardamom has fallen to Rs.650 a kilogram from over Rs.750 a couple of weeks ago.

According to Josy George, a farmer at Puttady, the prices have fallen to the lowest level in a week and there is the threat of further drop in prices as the new harvesting season will begin in a couple of days following the onset of the monsoon.

The prime season for cardamom is June to December and thousands of workers including those arriving daily from the border district of Tamil Nadu are engaged in the cardamom plantations. According to Mr. George, to make the cultivation profitable, at least a price of Rs.700 has to be received.

Farmers expected a bumper crop this season as the weather conditions were mostly favourable. According to K.S. Mathew, a planter, the prices have fallen as there was an expectation of a

bumper crop this season. But the cardamom hill reserve (CHR) areas are experiencing a high temperature after the summer rains that would negatively impact on the production. When the prices fall below the cost of production, it would not be possible to continue in the sector, he said.

Highest price

The highest price for cardamom was received in 2010, when it nearly touched Rs.2,000 a kg.

Last year, the price reached Rs.1,400 though the average prices prevailed were at a lower level for most of the season. The high fluctuation of prices in the auction centres was controlled to an extent after they were opened to a large number of businessmen.

It reduced the scope for auctioneers forming a cartel to keep the prices at a low. However, as the season is spanned over six months (with the harvesting done within 45 to 50 days), a high expectation of production could play spoilsport for the farmers.

Paddy ryots advised not to raise nurseries

Thanks to water scarcity in the Krishna river reservoirs, delta farmers may have to go for direct sowing of paddy this year.

According to Irrigation Department records, the earliest date for release of water to the Krishna delta in the past two decades was way back in 1994: June 7. Last year, water was delayed with the department managing to open the head sluice only on August 5, two months late. But in most other years, release of water to the Krishna delta took place June 15. This year, the government has written a letter to the Krishna River Management Board to release 10 tmc ft from Nagarjunasagar from June 12 for drinking water needs in delta villages and to enable raising of seed beds. But going by the current levels of water in different upstream reservoirs, that's an unlikely possibility.

Rythanga Samakya president and former State Drainage Board member Yerneni Nagendranath said it would be better for farmers not to expect water from the reservoirs this year. "I personally recommend paddy farmers to opt for direct seeding of paddy instead of the conventional puddled transplanting. In such a scenario, losses will be minimal if rains fail to arrive on time," he said.

Mr Nagendranath said precious water was wasted on raising an unauthorised crop in a small area and now farmers from the entire Krishna delta and upland areas irrigated by NSP have to go without a crop.

The Farmers Association said the government did not have the wisdom to store a few tmcft in the incomplete Pulichintala project. The Rythu Sangham said ryots were confused about what they should do. The government usually announces kharif plans in the June first week, but this year nothing has been done so far.

Plant health clinic established in Kerala

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Live Organic!



People of Madurai, it seems, are gradually taking to organic products if the steady rise in the number of organic stores in the city is any indication

Every Wednesday morning inside Madurai's first organic store – Navdanya in Gomathipuram that was launched in 2010 -- is a scene of brisk activity. Heaps of vegetables and fruits arrive from the farms of organic farmers in Palani, Theni, Kodaikanal, Sattur and Alagarkoil that are checked, neatly packed and home delivered to 200-plus customers in and around the city.

For the first 12 months, I never had more than 15 customers wanting organically grown produce, says Ms.Gajalakshmi, owner of the cute little store stacked inside the residential colony. Today her database has over 300 registered customers of whom 200 regularly order farm produce, she says. All her customers place weekly orders over phone, e-mail, sms and now whatsapp by Monday and get it at their doorstep before noon every Wednesday.

When she started her business with organically produced farm products and grocery items five years ago, they did not move well. “But I did not give up,” says Gajalakshmi. She would travel, keep herself updated meeting farmers and google searching for information, follow tips from friends and check out stores in other cities. What worked she feels, was the quick and smart move of including organic cosmetics. That changed the fortune to the extent that now she is planning to launch a total organic ‘Ancient Living’ spa for women next month.

Perhaps sensing the demand for cosmetics, Shen's Farm – the city's one-stop organic shop in Besant Road -- opened its second and swankier outlet within a year and a half at Vishal de Mall last month with focus on beauty products. There is lot more awareness about organic products among people now, says founder-owner J.Shenbagaraj. He has seen 20 per cent growth last year and perceives 40 to 50 per cent rise in demand for organic products in the coming year. “I am planning to add more to my product profile,” he says.

If his first store was largely meant to orient the city's residents to organic shopping in a calm environment, the second one inside the mall is aimed at the floating population that crowds the mall especially on weekends. People from Sivagangai, Sivakasi, Virrudhunagar, Cumbum, Rajapalayam, Theni, Tirunelveli regularly come to Madurai for an outing and the mall visit is a must for them. “When they walk into our store, organic knowledge is a bonus,” he adds. The movie-goers are the

additional walk-ins at his new store while the old store continues to get his dedicated customers.

Between them, Navdanya and Shen's Farm stock over two dozen brands such as Organic India, 24 Mantra, Pure & Sure, Pro Nature, Organic Tattva, Organa, Vedanthika, Khadi, Terra Greens, Eco-Care, Auroshikha, Rustic Art, SOS Organic, Ancient Living, Soul Tree, Soul Flower, Last Forest and their products include groceries and snacks to health, home and baby care products and cosmetics. But Shen's shop is larger and with more variety to choose from.

Mr. Deepak Parmar, an insurance surveyor who was also into selling Patanjali products for the past few years saw the benefits of what he describes as "mindful eating with organic diet." A month ago he launched Shree Organic Shop in P and T Nagar and is himself surprised by the response. Though he has started by introducing limited items like juices, beverages, cereals, powdered grains and everyday snacks, he says he is impressed with peoples' queries and the fact that they come asking for specific items. "It shows how much more they know and also their determination to use organic products only." Deepak too plans to expand as he says he has the advantage of being the only shop selling organic edibles in the area.

Likewise the Organic Grocery Garden in Iyer Bungalow, Ko in Tallakulam, Boomi on New Natham Road and a dozen more in Anna Nagar, Pudur, Bypass Road are among the smaller shops that have all come up in the last two-three years and are cashing in on the trend. In most of these shops the farm fresh produce is supplied on a weekly basis only by certified farmers in the region. These shops also stock limited local and branded packaged products and cater to the residents of the area.

Without making much noise organic products are entering people's homes now, says K.Karthikeyan of Grocery Garden. What was considered a passing fad till a few years ago is slowly becoming a trend with people's attention turning to health and environment.

True, who will deny that all of us have a new goal of healthy living nowadays? And this goal can perhaps largely be fuelled by buying organic produce because man can no longer afford to continue the environmental destruction. It is better he starts watching what he eats and wears. Organic farming is not just about greens any longer. It has become a very good business and the shop owners guesstimate the market is worth Rs. One Crore in small town Madurai.

Even the departmental stores and supermarkets like the Nilgiris have increased their organic product-portfolios though a broad selection is missing there. The supply chain may still be small in the city and is largely left to the speciality organic food stores to answer the increasing demand for such products. But each of them has the potential to grow.

“People are slowly but definitely changing as they are fed up of being held responsible for destroying the environment,” says Shenbagaraj. “The middle class is waking up and willing to pay more for healthy products,” adds Deepak.

What was considered a passing fad till a few years ago is slowly becoming a trend with people’s attention turning to health and environment.

2.7 metric tonnes of paddy procured

The East Godavari district administration has procured 2.7 lakh metric tonnes of paddy from farmers through paddy procurement centres for the Rabi season. The centres will remain closed from June 20, according to S. Satyanarayana, Joint Collector. Reviewing the procurement process with officials and rice millers, Mr. Satyanarayana asked millers to complete the custom milling process at the earliest and hand over rice to the Food Corporation of India (FCI). He said the FCI would soon provide warehousing facilities.

Jackfruit festival on B.C. Road this Sunday

Jackfruit lovers can head to B.C. Road on Sunday (June 14) to taste varieties of the fruit in its festival.

Organised by the South Canara Photographers’ Association for its silver jubilee there would be many programmes at Hotel Srinivas Residency.

More than 30 varieties of jackfruit would be exhibited and their bulbs would be sold. There would be exhibition and sale of their saplings, a release said. There would be cooking competition of jackfruit recipes for women. Each participant would have to cook a dish sufficient for five persons.

In addition, there would be jackfruit eating competition. Those who ate maximum number of bulbs in two minutes would be given awards.

There would be interactive sessions in which farmers, those who made value-added products of jackfruit, other entrepreneurs would share their experiences on marketing aspects.

The organisers have arranged a paid ‘jackfruit lunch’ costing Rs. 199 per head. It would be served from noon to 4 p.m. This special lunch would have 25 food varieties of jackfruit.

The varieties include kabab, ice cream, payasam and the like.

India richer by 349 new species



Bananas, jamun and orchids among new discoveries

At a time when plants and animals are under threat across the world, nature lovers and conservationists in India have 349 reasons to feel happy. Scientists and taxonomists of the country have discovered 349 new species of flora and fauna in the past one year — 173 species and genera of plants and 176 species of animals.

The list of new discoveries by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), both headquartered here, were released on the World Environment Day on June 5.

“Of the new plants, some of the significant findings include nine new taxa of wild *Musa* (bananas), four species of black plum (jamun), three species of wild ginger and 10 species of orchids,” BSI director Paramjit Singh told *The Hindu* .

Biodiversity hotspots

According to scientists of the BSI, the Western Ghats accounted for 22 per cent of the new discoveries, while the Eastern Himalayas and the north-eastern States each accounted for 15 per cent of the species found.

In Arunachal Pradesh alone, 25 species of seed plants were discovered.

At the ZSI, 176 new species were added to the list of animals of India. These include 93 species of insects, seven species of collembolans, 12 species each of arachnidan and crustacean and one species of mollusca.

Reptiles too

Interestingly, two species of reptiles have also been located for the first time in the country — one in Tamil Nadu and another in Madhya Pradesh.

“As in the previous year, insects outnumbered other animal groups this year also. But surprisingly, a large number of amphibians and fish made it to the list with 24 and 23 new species respectively,” ZSI director K. Venkataraman told *The Hindu* .

While most of the new species of amphibians were discovered from the Western Ghats, majority of fish species were from north-east India.

Scientists of both BSI and ZSI agree that the Western Ghats and the northeast are biodiversity hotspots where most new species were found.

Apart from the new species, the BSI has also added 105 new records and ZSI 61 ‘new records.’ Animals and plants that are found elsewhere in the world but have been spotted in India for the first time are called ‘new records.’

Last year, 614 new species of plants and animals — 366 plants and 248 animals — were discovered. “It is natural that with every passing year, the number of new discoveries will decrease,” Mr. Venkataraman said.

In India, 96,891 species of animals and 47,791 species of plants have been recorded so far.

Most new varieties were found in Western Ghats and the northeast

Sugar companies still bitter



Sugar companies in Tamil Nadu have welcomed the Rs 6,000 crore interest-free loan approved by the Union Cabinet, but feel that this is just a band-aid approach and not a healthy solution.

“The Rs 6,000-crore loan amount will not be solving the problems of the industry. When cane arrears alone stands at Rs 21,000 crore, how will Rs 6,000 crore help,” asks Palani G Periasamy, president of The South Indian Sugar Mills Association. Instead this could have been given as subsidy for the farmers, he said. “I welcome the government’s move but balance sheets of sugar mills in Tamil Nadu are already painted red. If we borrow more where is the way to repay,” says N Ramanathan, Managing Director of Ponni Sugars.

Industrialists are also upset that Tamil Nadu has become a dumping ground and sugar from neighbouring states is killing the industry in the State.

Added to this, VAT is also a burden for the industry here. Sugar mill owners feel that there should be uniform adoption of the Rangarajan Committee formula throughout the country.

Murali Mohan, secretary, Maduranthakam Cooperative Sugar Mills Farmers' Association, while welcoming the move, said this is only the first step, not the last. The difference between cost of growing sugar cane and amount of realisation, which is fixed by the government, made the venture financially unviable, he said and wanted restrictions on price fixing to be removed.

450 get briefed on integrated farming

An estimated 450 farmers from different parts of the State were briefed on the advantages of integrated farming at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University – Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute in Tiruchi.

A two-day workshop on ‘attracting and retaining youth in agriculture’ was organised here by the TNAU and M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation.

The participants visited various fields to understand the importance of integrated farming. One of their field visits was to a farm where high density planting was adopted in guava cultivation. P.Pandiyarajan, Dean, and A.Nithyadevi, Assistant Professor of Horticulture, explained the benefits of high density cultivation in guava. The plants, which were just one year old, have started yielding fruits, indicating the benefits of integrated farming. Further, the number of plants in an acre was nearly double the normal number.

Training in ‘scientific country chicken rearing’



S.Thilagar, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, handing over a certificate to a trainee at Veterinary College and Research Institute in Tirunelveli on Wednesday.

The Veterinary College and Research Institute, Tirunelveli organised a training programme on ‘Scientific country chicken rearing’ on Tuesday.

As many as 38 persons participated in the training programme conducted by the VC and RI’s Department of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Extension Education.

Lectures on breeds of country chicken, systems in rearing of country chicken, management of day-old and young chicks, feeding management of country chicken and diseases affecting country chicken and its control / prevention measures were delivered by the experts of the college.

The beneficiaries were also demonstrated on various activities of chicken farm like setting up of brooder, common farm equipments, methods of vaccinating the chicken and debeaking techniques.

S. Thilagar, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Chennai, who presided over the valediction, distributed certificates to the trainees.

He briefed on the facilities extended by this college to livestock and livestock farmers.

S. Prathaban, Dean, Veterinary College and Research Institute, Tirunelveli, emphasized the need for reducing the feed cost and vaccinating birds as a part of disease management to increase the profit through country chicken rearing.

S.C. Edwin, Professor and Head, Department of Livestock Production and Management, VC & RI, Tirunelveli, M. Murugan, Associate Professor, Department of Livestock Products Technology and C. Manivannan, Professor and Head, Department of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Extension Education spoke.

New fish canteen serves ready-to-eat seafood dishes

Fresh and cooked seafood dishes are available at a fish canteen opened by Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation here on Wednesday.

Consumers can taste a variety of ready-to-eat fishes at a reasonable price at the canteen near Pearl City beach. Apart from display of price menu, nutritional values of fish consumption have been highlighted. Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) P. Isaac Jeyakumar inaugurated it in the presence of Manager of TNFDC B. Karthikeyan and Deputy Manager E. Kuppurangan.

This canteen will remain open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. To start with the menu, soups made of crab and prawns at Rs.15 each and fish cutlet at Rs.30 will be available to serve from 10 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. and also from 3.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. At lunch time, delicious meal with fish curry will be ready at Rs.50 and consumers can get food from noon to 3 p.m.

Besides, the extensive menu also provides a mouth-watering choice of fried fish items. Squid and cuttle fish fry is available at Rs. 50. One plate of chilly fish, fish finger, fish chukka and fish manjurian is priced at Rs.70 each.

Further adding dishes to delight of consumers, he said fish 65 and fish ginger fry could also be tasted at Rs. 70 a plate. Moreover, varieties, including fish pepper fry at Rs. 80, prawn 65, prawn chukka, prawn manjurian and prawn ginger fry at Rs.90 each, are also found a place on menu. Prawn pepper fry was priced at a maximum of Rs.100 a plate, the Deputy Manager said.

Maggi will now go to CFL, Kolkata

The samples of Maggi noodles, already tested at the two National Accreditation Board for Testing (NABL)-certified laboratories in Bengaluru, are being sent for testing at the Central Food Laboratory (CFL) in Kolkata, said Minister for Health and Family Welfare U.T. Khader here on Wednesday.

“As these are private laboratories, we want tests to be done by a government lab and hence we are sending it to the CFL in Kolkata,” Mr. Khader told presspersons. He said the two NABL-accredited laboratories have found traces of glutamic acid (a component of MSG) in the samples tested.

“We have sent both the reports to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and sought clarifications.” Based on the FSSAI’s advice and the CFL report, further action would be taken, the Minister said.

Fruit market to come up in conservancy space



K.B. Prasanna Kumar, MLA, performing bhoomi pooja for the construction of a fruit market in Shivamogga on Wednesday.

The Shivamogga City Corporation will soon convert the conservancy space in Hosamane extension here into a fruit market. K.B. Prasanna Kumar, Shivamogga MLA, performed the *bhoomi puja* for the ground-breaking ceremony for the work here on Wednesday.

Mr. Kumar, in his addresses, said the fruit market would be constructed at a cost of Rs. 35 lakh. The plan was to construct 40 fruit stalls in the available space.

Fruit vendors

The vendors who were selling fruits in pushcarts along the Kuvempu Road would be shifted to the upcoming fruit market. This would ease vehicular traffic on the Kuvempu Road.

The conservancy spaces available within the city limits would be utilised for providing civic amenities like parking facility and construct shops for street vendors, he said. Mayor of the corporation Mangala Annappa and Deputy Mayor Palakshi were present.



Making DBT in fertilisers work

India's largest nutrient maker tells The Indian Express how 11 crore farmers can directly receive subsidy now going to the industry.

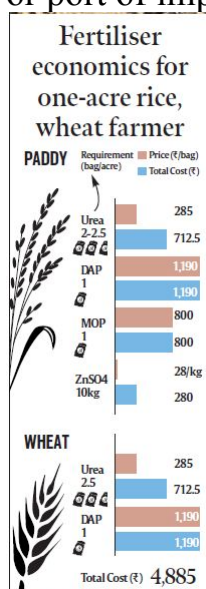


Iffco, in 2014-15, sold 11.13 million tonnes (mt) of fertilisers — one in every five bags bought by farmers in India — including 7.19 mt of urea, 1.89 mt of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and 2.02 mt of complex fertilisers.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of fertiliser subsidy to farmers is an eminently feasible proposition and the [Narendra Modi government](#) should lose no time in going ahead with its implementation, says US Awasthi of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (Iffco).

“People interested in stalling DBT are giving all sorts of excuses. They say it won’t work because a significant part of cultivation is today done by tenant farmers or sharecroppers not owning the land and without any formal lease agreements. But these concerns can easily be addressed,” claims the managing director of the country’s largest fertiliser producer and marketer.

Iffco, in 2014-15, sold 11.13 million tonnes (mt) of fertilisers — one in every five bags bought by farmers in India — including 7.19 mt of urea, 1.89 mt of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and 2.02 mt of complex fertilisers. The first requirement for DBT is a system to track the movement of every bag of fertiliser, right from the [manufacturing](#) plant or port of import till the last-mile point of sale to the farmer.



*Prices are existing MRPs.
MOP: Muriate of Potash; ZnSO4: Zinc sulphate.

The [government](#), Awasthi points out, already has a Fertiliser Monitoring System (FMS). This web-based software application, operational since 2007, captures the dispatches of material to over 600 districts via 750-odd railway rake points. From 2012, the system’s coverage has been extended to nearly 1.6 lakh fertiliser retailers in the country. In 2014-15 alone, 38

lakh-odd invoices involving sale of 54 mt of fertilisers up to the retail point were posted on the now mobile-enabled FMS. And all this information is available on a daily, real-time basis.

“The next step is to capture transactions from the retail level to the farmer. For this, we need to build a farmers’ database and enter it in a centralised system, which could then be used to develop a platform for tracking sales from the retailer end. This middleware platform can be further integrated with banking software, to enable transfer of subsidy to a farmer’s account whenever a transaction happens and is captured in the system,” notes Awasthi.

Besides creating a robust data capture platform, DBT would require retailers to have wireless devices with bank connectivity and facility for farmers to swipe smart cards for claiming subsidy.

The swipe cards could be issued to anybody wanting to buy fertiliser. “You can have Aadhaar, Rupay or Kisan Credit Card for basic farmer identification, but there is no necessity for the person to be owner of the land being tilled. Also, there will be only one card for every person with an annual subsidy limit of Rs 5,000 per card,” suggests Awasthi.

The Rs 5,000 cap and only one card per person conditions would, more or less, ensure that only genuine farmers — tenants and sharecroppers included — get the subsidy, which is automatically transferred to their bank accounts whenever they purchase fertilisers and swipe the card through the wireless device/computer attachment with the retailer.

At current maximum retail prices (MRP), the Rs 5,000 subsidy entitlement per card would meet more than 100 per cent of the fertiliser costs for a one-acre farmer in Punjab or Haryana growing a crop of paddy and wheat every year (see table). With larger farms or in the event of MRPs going up, the percentage of costs covered would get progressively lower. “The Rs 5,000 cap has been arrived at by simply taking the government’s total annual subsidy bill at Rs 55,000 crore and dividing it among the country’s 11 crore farmers.

The government can always raise these if it so desires. Besides, the smaller farmers may be permitted to transfer their unutilised subsidy entitlement to the bigger farmers,” states Awasthi. The main issue in DBT is over the practicability of making direct payments to crores of farmers, as opposed to the current system where the government pays subsidy to just 100 or so manufacturers and importers of fertilisers. “It

isn't difficult to track every purchase made by a farmer. In the last one year, we have captured all retail-end sales taking place in two districts — roughly 33,000 transactions in Ranchi (Jharkhand) and 5,700-plus in Bilaspur (Himachal Pradesh) — and uploaded this whole data in the FMS. I am prepared to extend the experiment to 50 districts and even install swiping machines at each of Iffco's 36,000 societies", contends Awasthi.

DBT, according to him, is workable provided there is political will. "If almost 16 crore bank accounts can be opened under Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, which is twice the target of 7.5 crore that was set for January 26, why should implementing DBT for 11 crore farmers be so difficult? The direction for it must also perhaps come from the top," adds Awasthi. - See more at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/making-dbt-in-fertilisers-work/2/#sthash.Lqh6j7d0.dpuf>

Inside a farm, a cardboard factory

Gurdeep started his trials from 24 acres of his own land. Today, farmers across 400 acres are giving him stubble that he stocks for the whole year.



Gurdeep Singh is a recognisable name in this area.

It was only four years back that this farmer from Bukan Khanwala village here sought to experiment with making cardboard out of the paddy stubble remaining in the fields after combine harvesting, rather than just burning it as was the established practice.

Gurdeep started his trials from 24 acres of his own land. Today, farmers across 400 acres are giving him stubble that he stocks for the whole year to run Supreme Cardboard, as the unit in his field is called and which has even attracted scientists from the Punjab Agricultural University.

“I was earlier like all other farmers burning the fields after combine-harvesting (which leaves behind 14-15 inch stalks) that was also reducing the fertility of the soil. But in 2011, I decided not to burn and after gaining some knowledge started this small cardboard unit in my field with the help of my sons, Jagjit and Sukhdev”, says Gurdeep.

The three initially used straw reapers to cut the straw from their own 24 acres for use in the unit. But the very same year, more farmers volunteered to supply stubble from around 100 acres. They gave it free of cost, though Gurdeep had to bear the entire cost — around Rs 135 per quintal — of harvesting and transporting the straw from their fields.

Today, apart from Bukan Khanwala, farmers from neighbouring Jhok Harihar are also supplying the left-over paddy stubble from their fields. Gurdeep has his own straw reaper and baler machine, used to compress the harvested straw into compact bundles that can be easily transported from the field. Besides regular farm income, he now also nets over Rs 40,000 a month from the sale of cardboard to traders in and around Ferozepur. The cardboard made by his unit contains 95 per cent paddy straw and 5 per cent gunny bags that are added mainly for fine grinding of the stubble.

“The usage of urea and di-ammonium phosphate in my fields has reduced to a third because of improved overall soil fertility from no burning of stubble,” claims Gurdeep. Punjab farmers produce an estimated 20 million tonnes of paddy straw every year that has few takers, as it — unlike wheat straw — is not fed to cattle. The bulk of it is, hence, simply burnt to clear the fields for planting the next crop. Farmers like Gurdeep are, perhaps, making a small difference — by making cardboard.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

[Mahanand reverts to Rs 38/litre of milk](#)

Mahanand Dairy on Wednesday reverted to its rate of Rs 38 per litre for toned milk within days of increasing it to Rs 40. The cooperative had on May 16 increased its prices to appease retailers who were demanding a

higher printed MRP so they could legitimately overcharge customers.

However, the rate of full cream milk remains untouched.

State agriculture minister Eknath Khadse has been urging dairies to drop prices to benefit consumers, for the past two weeks. Mother Dairy on May 29 initiated a price cut of Rs 2 for toned and double toned varieties but kept the price of full cream milk intact.

Mahanand managing director Vishwas Patil said, "The price reduction will come into effect on Thursday. Ours is a cooperative dairy which is bound by the welfare of farmers and consumers. Moreover, the minister was keen that we drop prices and we had promised to consider the suggestion favourably." On whether the cut will cause Mahanand to compromise on profits, Patil said they would "bear the loss in larger consumer interest".

India's largest dairy, Amul, maintains that it will not follow suit. Managing director R S Sodhi said, "We have no plans to cut prices as we have not increased the rate of milk in the last 13 months. We are paying Rs 6-7 per litre more than the minimum recommended price to milk producers."

Gokul's managing director D V Ghanekar also said the financial dynamics of private dairies are different from cooperatives so they will not cut the MRP.

Amul, Mahanand, Gokul, Warana and Mother Dairy are leading brands of milk in Mumbai region, including Thane. But Gowardhan, Krishna, Govind and Swabhiman have made space on the shelves since vendors have pushed these brands for offering higher margins. Milk retailers have been overcharging on MRP by Rs 2-3 per litre since 1995, citing "poor commission and no refrigeration costs". Amul said the MRP includes cost of transportation and refrigeration, while Gokul promised to print the information on its packets.

Poultry sector launches promotional drive



After close to three decades of operations, the broiler and poultry sector in the country has launched a promotional campaign to highlight the benefits of consuming chicken.

C R Selvakumar, Deputy General Manager, Venkateshwara Hatcheries Pvt Limited, told *BusinessLine* that despite the sector becoming more organised, every time there is a report of bird flu in the country, the industry reports a loss of Rs. 2,000 crore.

No panic

The loss is both direct (due to steep decline in prices) and indirect (farmers forced to cull birds resulting in production loss).

“There is no need to panic as the bio safety measures at the farm level ensure eradication of the outbreak at the farm level itself. Further, it has been proved that chicken and egg consumption is safe in India considering our climate and cooking pattern,” he said. Stating that India ranks third in egg production (next only to China and the US) at 65 million and fourth in broiler production at 3.8 million tonnes, Selvakumar said.

To boost offtake

“But our per capita consumption is still low at 3.5 kg against NIM’s recommendation of 11 kg and nowhere near the US and European consumption of 45 plus kg.”

While the sector is trying to tell people the goodness of chicken and egg, some disturbing and unconfirmed reports are hurting its growth from time to time, he said.

The industry has started to air the wellness of chicken consumption via the FM radio channel.

“We have many more plans going forward,” he said.

Monsoon prepares to cover north interior Karnataka, Rayalaseema



The monsoon has now covered the whole of south interior Karnataka and Tami Nadu and entered parts of north interior Karnataka and Rayalaseema.

On Tuesday, the northern limit linked Ratnagiri on the West Coast with Bellary, Anantapur and Chennai elsewhere in the south peninsula with Dhubri and Gangtok in north-east India.

Flows to resume

Cyclone Ashobaa is approaching for a landfall over the Oman coast by Wednesday evening.

This will help the monsoon flows over Arabian Sea to reorganise and resume their track towards the West Coast.

The flows would take a couple of days to consolidate; they might hit the coast from south later in the week.

This phase will also see the all-important offshore trough spread itself out along the coast.

This is an elongated area of lower pressure that serves as a receptacle for the incoming flows from where they make the final lunge towards the coast.

Formation of the trough is normally taken as a sign of monsoon health during a given time.

The trough collapses when the flows weaken; it will come back into place as the flows strengthen again.

Heavy rain

The US Climate Prediction Centre has forecast moderate to heavy rain for the west coast for the week beginning Tuesday. The Konkan-Mumbai stretch is bracing for a fair amount of rain, as per this outlook.

The flows are forecast to hold forth during the week that follows (June 17-23) during when parts of east India too are expected to benefit.

This is expected to be triggered by a weather system crossing in from the northwest Bay of Bengal and entering Gangetic West Bengal/Odisha, says an experimental tracker featured by the US forecaster.

India Met Department in its projections too seem to suggest an expansive phase of the monsoon playing out in the context of the blow-out of cyclone Ashobaa.

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology had also hinted at the evolving offshore trough along the West Coast after the cyclone makes the landfall.

Slack buying pounds turmeric

Spot turmeric prices lost Rs. 200 a quintal at Erode markets due to non-receipt of upcountry orders.

“Though the price was up Rs. 70 in the futures market, it did not reflect in local trading,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. The finger turmeric prices were down Rs. 200 a quintal in the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association and Rs. 300 in the Erode Cooperative marketing Society. The root variety lost Rs. 300 a quintal.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at Rs. 5,536-7,819 a quintal; the root variety Rs. 5,389-7,212.

Of the arrival of 1,062 bags, 320 bags were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric went for Rs. 6,300-7,900; the root variety Rs. 6,069-7,319.

Of the 788 bags offered, 695 were traded.

Lohiya group to set up Rs. 500-cr edible oil plant

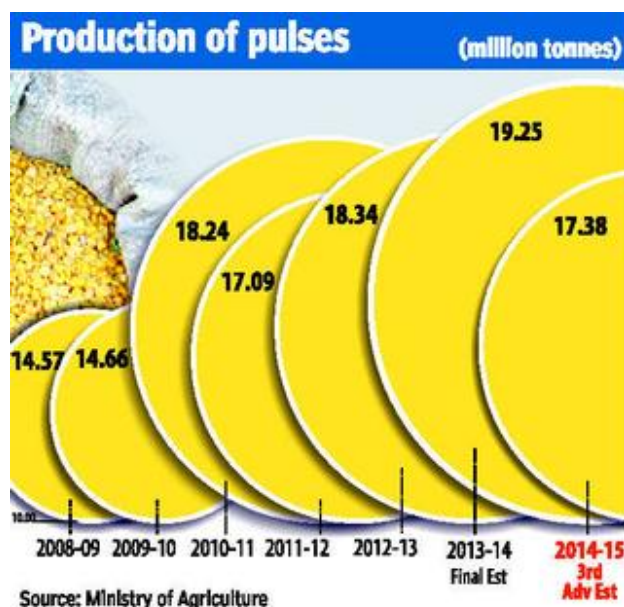
Edible oil maker Lohiya group with its flagship brands Gold Drop and Gold Plus is setting up a new refinery plant in Nellore in Andhra Pradesh with an investment of Rs. 500 crore.

“We are expecting land allotment from Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation and hope to start operations in the first phase of the proposed plant in about 10 months from now,” Mahaveer Lohiya Managing Director of the group, told newsmen here on Wednesday.

While the first phase of the plant will involve Rs. 100 crore investment to create 500 tonnes new capacity, the total investment in the subsequent phases will go up to Rs. 500 crore in next two to three years, he said.

The Rs. 2,200-crore company, which commands over 55 per cent share in the branded market in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, is present in 10 States including those in the north. “We will go pan-India once the new capacity adds up from the Nellore plant,” he said.

Centre okays large-scale pulses imports



With prices of pulses rising as much as 64 per cent over the last year, the Centre on Wednesday approved large-scale imports.

“The Cabinet discussed rising prices of pulses and express concern...to keep domestic prices under check it has been decided to import pulses in large quantities,” said Nitin Gadkari, the Union Transport Minister, at press conference after the Cabinet meeting. The Centre has also directed States to take strict action against hoarding to keep in supply and prices in check. No canalising agency has been decided as yet.

The production of pulses is estimated to have fallen to 17.38 million tonnes (mt) in the 2014-15 crop year (July-June) from 19.25 mt during the previous year.