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THE HINDU

Kuruvai cultivation to be taken up on 7,500 acres



Kuruvai paddy cultivation is expected to be taken up on 7,500 acres of land in filter point areas of the district this year with farmers being supported under the special package announced by the State government.

The normal kuruvai area is 16,000 acres in the district. But given the poor storage in the Mettur reservoir and delay in release of water in the Cauvery, kuruvai paddy could be raised in only the filter point areas in the district.

The Agriculture Department is gearing up to implement the special kuruvai package announced by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa to help farmers raise the crop. The package would be implemented in filter point areas in Lalgudi, Andhanallur, Musiri and Manachanallur, areas.

Apart from three-phase power supply for 12 hours a day, the package envisages providing Rs. 315 an acre to farmers for purchase of bio fertilizers and micro nutrients. The amount would be deposited in the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

This apart, the Agricultural Engineering Department would carry out free transplantation of nurseries using transplanters in about 1,500 acres in the district.

‘Grow Gliricidia to increase soil fertility’

As agricultural production in Andhra Pradesh is being increasingly impacted by adverse weather, farmers are searching for ways to mitigate the loss. Lost in desperation, they are not realising that there is a widely available tree which enriches the soil fertility multifold with little human intervention and negligible investments.

Commonly known as ‘fencing plant’, it is known for many generations but the farming community has almost forgotten it under the belief that chemical fertilizers are a sure-shot solution to the problem poor soil quality. Scientifically known as Gliricidia Sepium, these trees add valuable nutrients such nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous to the soil thereby increasing its fertility many times more than any other nutrient can do.

The biggest advantage is sustainable agricultural productivity that Gliricidia brings. Natural Organic Farmers’ Association treasurer Ch. R.K. Prasad told *The Hindu* that Gliricidia was a boon for farmers and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) recommends it time and again to farmers for achieving higher yields and contribute to environment but emphasis was more on use of chemical fertilizers, which was the trend in many countries.

Commonly known as ‘fencing plant’, these trees add valuable nutrients such nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous to the soil

Paddy procurement price hike measly: PMK

PMK leader S. Ramadoss on Thursday said the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs to increase the procurement price of ordinary and special grade paddy varieties by just Rs. 50 had come as a big disappointment to farmers in the country.

In a statement here, he said the increase was insufficient and would lead to farmers borrowing further to sustain agriculture, as the cost of farming was increasing every year. Recalling the promise made by the BJP in its election manifesto that steps would be taken to enhance the profitability of agriculture by ensuring a minimum of 50 per cent profit over the production cost, he said the Centre was yet to take any concrete measure.

He said it was the duty of the State and Central governments to ensure that the farmers who faced many natural calamities did not make losses.

Farmers hail hike in MSP for paddy and pulses

Farmers in Tirupur district, who faced severe drought and losses over the last few seasons, can heave a sigh of relief following the approval given by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs to raise the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for paddy and pulses for 2015-16 season. They feel that the announcement has come at the right time as the agrarian community is now in the preparatory mode to sow the seeds for paddy and pulses for the just commenced kharif season.

However, a few sections of farmers are of the opinion that the rate of increase should have been higher considering the steep escalation in production and transportation costs.

“In areas like Tirupur, we face extreme shortage of agricultural labourers as a good chunk of them had migrated to textile sector over the years. This demand-supply gap has shot up the labour charges from around Rs. 150 sought for a single shift a day five years back to Rs. 400 now,” Vanchipalayam K. Duraisami, a progressive farmer raising multiple crops, told *The Hindu* .

In Tirupur district, the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation has procured 17,880 tonnes out of the nearly 70,000 tonnes of paddy harvested between January and March of the 2014-15 fiscal at the MSP. The procurement of paddy was made at the rate of Rs. 1,470 per quintal, including the State government incentive of Rs. 70 a quintal for the fine variety. With the new rates, the paddy farmers would be able to get an additional Rs. 50 per quintal.

Apart from the procurement done by Civil Supplies Corporation, the Agriculture Department also procures paddy at slightly higher rates for seed production.

PWD takes up dredging of Kallanai Kalvai



Work to be completed within two weeks

Work on dredging the Kallanai Kalvai, the Cauvery, and the Vennar channels have been taken up by the Public Works Department at an estimate of Rs.7.50 crore and the works would be completed within two weeks.

Although funds were released earlier, the work was delayed because of summer showers, said N. Subbaiyan, Collector.

Accompanied by officials, the Collector inspected various channels where the work on dredging was executed on Wednesday.

He said that special teams comprising officials of the Public Works Department, Agriculture Department, Revenue Department, and farmers' representatives had been constituted for monitoring the effective execution of the programme.

The Collector directed the officials to complete the work before the onset of monsoon.

He said the Soorakottai Vallam tank would be dredged. Its banks would be strengthened well ahead of the onset of monsoon. Work on construction of two sluices was in progress at an estimate of Rs. 26.63 lakh at Arumulai village near Orathanadu.

The banks would be strengthened and supply channels widened after clearing the encroachments.

He said the Neeliyaru Odai at Keezhaiyur village was dredged for 3.5 km for a cumulative area of 10,000 square feet at an estimate of Rs.5 lakh.

“It aims at ensuring irrigation facility for about 69.8 acres,” the Collector said.

Revathy, Executive Engineer, Kallanai Kalvai Division, explained the progress of the work.

Sowing commences in Kalaburagi

Sowing operations of the kharif season in Kalaburagi district began on a dull note with the farmers completing sowing in about 7 per cent of the targeted area of more than 5.70 lakh hectares.

Sources in the Agriculture Department told *The Hindu* that monsoon has been weak and the district is yet to get good rainfall to enable the farmers to take up the kharif sowing in full swing. With the weather office predicting a weak monsoon this year, the Agriculture Department would take a call on the developing situation in the fourth week of this month and come out with a contingency plan for farmers in rainfed areas.

Red gram coverage

Sources said that the farmers had completed the sowing of red gram, the main stay of the farmers in Kalaburagi district in 13,313 hectares, out of the targeted area of more than 3.59 lakh hectares.

Sugarcane has been planted in 14,209 hectares, followed by short duration green gram in 4,909 hectares out of the targeted 18,000 hectares. Black gram has been sown in 1,593 hectares out of the targeted 25,500 hectares.

Although the targets for red gram has been downsized to 3.59 lakh hectare this year, due to the shifting of the red gram area to Soyabean and cotton last year, the actual coverage under red gram is likely to be more than the target fixed this year due to the bumper returns with prices touching an all-time high of Rs. 7,500 per quintal this year.

This year, the minimum support price of the red gram has been increased to Rs. 4,225 along with a bonus of Rs. 200 per quintal.

Sources in the Agriculture Department said that the farmers who had shifted to soya bean in red gram-dominated areas like Jewargi and Chitapur taluk were likely to revert to red gram this year.

The farmers who took up soya bean cultivation in these taluks last year suffered heavy losses due to low yield.

Seed-vending machine launched



The district panchayat, along with the Agriculture Department, opened a vegetable-seed-vending machine at the Jerome Nagar commercial complex in the city on Thursday. The machine was formally launched by P.K. Gurudasan, MLA.

Seeds of ten different vegetables can be bought using the machine.

Each packet is priced at Rs.10. Deputy Director (Agriculture) R. Pradeep Naik said that each variety of seed was given a code that was displayed on the machine.

After inserting a Rs.10-currency note into the machine slot, the code of the desired seed had to be selected. The machine had the capacity to store 1,155 seed packets at a time.

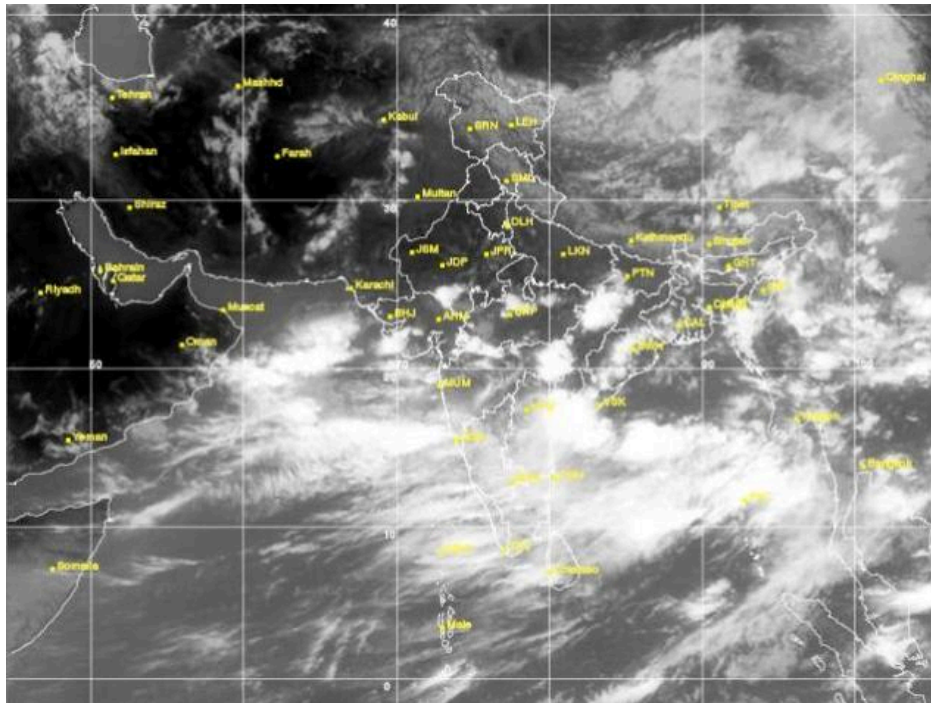
The machine would be constantly refilled in accordance with the sale.

Mr. Naik said that only quality seeds produced at government agricultural farms would be sold through the vending machine.

District panchayat president S. Jayamohan said the venture was part of a district panchayat programme to make the district self-sufficient in organic vegetables.

The project was meant to promote backyard farms, Mr. Naik said.

No progress in southwest monsoon



The southwest monsoon's progress has slowed down as it has not made any progress for the past five days, the weathermen on Thursday said.

“For the fifth consecutive day, the Northern Limit of Monsoon (NLM) has not made any advancement. It continues to pass through Veraval, Surat, Ujjain, Narsinghpur, Raipur, Kalingapatnam, Krishnanagar and Darjeeling.

“The cyclonic circulations in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea are still in the process of getting organised. Only after the weather systems organise that we can expect NLM to advance further.

“Monsoon usually arrives in Bihar by June 10 and over east Uttar Pradesh by June 15 but with NLM remaining static, further delay is expected in the onset of monsoon over these areas,” Skymet, a private weather forecasting agency said.

However, next week could see some respite from the heat. It is expected that the monsoon is to become active.

“The movement of monsoon is not like a train. It does experience some phases of lull. But it is expected to get active by next week,” India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Laxman Singh Rathore said.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event, Y.S. Chowdary, Minister of State for Earth Sciences, said the monsoon’s progress is “satisfactory” until now.

The IMD also said that over the 48 hours, the temperature in northwest India, which includes Delhi and parts of NCR, will see a rise by over two degrees and fall thereafter.

Overall, the country has received 11 per cent rain than its normal limit with east and northeast India and central India getting an excess rainfall of 16 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. The southern peninsula has witnessed a normal rainfall whereas northwest India has received seven per cent below normal rainfall.

The MET department has already made a forecast that India will receive deficient rainfall this year.

The timely onset of the South-West monsoon is crucial for sowing of kharif (summer) crops such as paddy and a deficit in rainfall may hit rice output.

Agriculture, which contributes only 15 per cent to India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but employs about 60 per cent of the population, is heavily dependent on monsoon as only 40 per cent of the cultivable area is under irrigation.

Last year, the country had received 12 per cent less rains, which hit production of grains, cotton and oilseeds.

Due to poor monsoon, agriculture growth stood at 0.2 per cent in 2014-15 fiscal. According to government’s estimate, total foodgrains production has declined to 251.12

million tonnes in 2014-15 crop year (July-June) from a record production of 265.04 million tonnes last year.

Only a measly increase in MSP of paddy: PMK

Terming Centre's announcement of 'measly' increase in minimum support price (MSP) of paddy as 'betrayal' to farmers, NDA constituent PMK on Thursday charged the Narendra Modi government with showing 'step motherly' treatment to the agrarian community while giving 'so many concessions to corporates.'

"The price of ordinary and special grade paddy varieties had been increased by a measly Rs 50. This had come us a big disappointment to farmers," party founder S. Ramadoss said.

Centre's decision in this regard was a "betrayal of farmers," he said in a statement in Chennai.

Mr. Ramadoss said the increase was lesser than what the previous UPA had offered over the last three years of its rule and said that the ruling BJP was yet to fulfill a poll-time promise made in this regard last year.

He recalled that BJP had promised to "take steps to enhance the profitability of agriculture by ensuring a minimum of 50 per cent profits over the cost of production," but after one year in office, it was 'yet to take any step to fulfill' it.

"Conversely, BJP is taking an anti-farmer stance in fixing the procurement price of agriculture produce....it is highly condemnable that the NDA government which is giving so many concessions to corporates is showing step motherly attitude while fixing procurement prices for farmers," he said.

Government has to ensure that farmers facing natural calamities 'and threats to livelihood like land acquisition' did not make losses, if not profits, he said and demanded that Centre fixed the procurement price of paddy as Rs. 2,500.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Modi had approved the MSP of paddy by Rs. 50 per quintal for common variety to Rs. 1,410 per quintal and Grade A variety to Rs. 1,450 per quintal for this year.

Farmers' grievance day on June 26

The monthly farmers grievances day meeting will be held at the Collector's office here at 10.00 a.m. on June 26, said Collector S. Palanisamy in a press release issued here on Thursday.

1,124 kg of cotton traded at weekly auction

COTTON AUCTION

About 1,124 kg of cotton was traded at the weekly auction at the Thuraiyur Regulated Market on Wednesday. Farmers from Koppampatti, Nagalapuram, Pulivalam, Alathudaiyanpatti, Nettavelampatti and Thuraiyur have brought their cotton, which fetched a maximum of Rs.39 a kg. The average price was Rs.37 a kg. The total value of the cotton traded was Rs.35,893. The next auction would be held on June 24, a release said.

Disaster management plan drawn up for Kannur

Lists vulnerabilities, moots mitigation steps

A comprehensive District Disaster Management Plan-2015 (DDMP) identifies vulnerabilities, proposes mitigation plans, and serves as a directory of people and institutions possessing equipment for use during disaster management and rescue operations.

At a press conference here on Thursday, District Collector P. Bala Kiran said the 500-page revised plan, to be released by Revenue Minister Adoor Prakash at a function here on Friday, was mainly targeted at officials responsible for disaster management operations as it contained contact phone numbers of all government departments and of individuals and institutions having rescue and disaster mitigation equipment. The document also included contact details of divers in different parts of the district, he said.

Mr. Bala Kiran said the DDMP included standard operating procedures (SOPs) — standard measures to be taken during disaster management and rescue situations. The SOPs would be made available to officials and to the public in a downloadable format. A free app operating on the Android platform would also be launched to help the public access information regarding vulnerabilities and SOPs, he said.

The Collector said disaster management and rescue equipment estimated at Rs.5.24 lakh had been purchased for the district. These included four chainsaws (Rs.2.42 lakh), 20 lifebuoys (Rs.44,609), 20 life jackets (Rs.37,989), one fire fighter's suit (Rs.1,12,500), and one hose-binding machine (Rs.87,270). The equipment would be handed over to the Revenue Department and the Fire and Rescue Services here at the function on Friday, he said.

As many as 91 families who had lost members and suffered damage to their house in monsoon-related disasters would be given financial assistance from the Chief Minister's relief fund at the function. A total of Rs.57.01 lakh would be disbursed, he said.

'Desilting of Srivaikundam dam only after getting funds from government'



Desilting of Srivakuntam dam will commence only after the funds required for this exercise is received from the State government, S. Gopalasundararaj, Sub-Collector, has informed.

Raising the issue of desilting of Srivaikuntam dam in the monthly farmers' grievance day meet held here on Thursday, K.P. Perumal, district secretary of Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, said that the district administration should start desilting the reservoir without further delay as the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had given its nod, and complete the task before the onset of northeast monsoon.

Farmer Thamizh Mani of Kurumbur said the sand to be removed from the dam should be sold to the public and the amount realised could be utilised for desilting all the 53 irrigation tanks under the dam.

Responding to the suggestions, Mr. Gopalasundararaj said that the NGT, while giving its nod for desilting, had instructed to deposit Rs. 25 lakh with the Department of Forests, since the place on which the minor reservoir was standing belonged to the department, before starting the work. Moreover, a sizable amount was required for removing the silt accumulated inside the dam over the years.

“Based on these financial requirements, proposals have been sent to the government seeking release of funds and the work can be commenced only after the funds are received,” Mr. Gopalasundararaj said.

No complaints

When Mr. Perumal urged the officials to check the fertilizer bags for underweight as was done in Tirunelveli district, the Sub-Collector said no complaint about underweight was

received from the farmers of the district and a high-level team from Chennai had conducted an enquiry in this connection.

Based on the report of the team, further action would be taken.

On a request from Mr. Thamizh Mani on the demand for reopening direct procurement centre at Kurumbur, where over 1,000 tonnes of paddy had to be purchased, Mr. Gopalasundararaj said the DPC would be allowed to function at Kurumbur.

When the farmers raised the issue of health hazards caused by an Udangudi-based fish oil extracting company, the officials pacified the agriculturists with the reply that appropriate action would be taken against the unit if it continued to violate the norms.

Sale from Tuticorin farm fresh outlet touches Rs. 4 cr. in 288 days

Sale of vegetables from State-owned farm fresh vegetable outlet (Pannai Pasumai Nugarvor Kadai) near the new bus stand here has achieved an all-time high in Tamil Nadu. The sale of vegetables and other items principally from this outlet touched Rs. 4 crore, Collector M. Ravikumar said here on Wednesday.

There was an overwhelming response from consumers, who could afford vegetables at reasonable prices, and this feat was achieved in a span of 288 days after the outlet was thrown open to public.

The farm fresh vegetable outlet, which remains open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day, catered to the needs of consumers, avoiding middlemen, who were behind the spiralling cost of vegetables in other markets. This outlet achieved a sale of Rs. 3 crore in 220 days since the launch on August 23, 2014. In 79 days, sale from this outlet realised Rs. 1 crore. Among the vegetable varieties, 13 to 15 were being procured directly from farmers in Tuticorin, Mr. Ravikumar said.

“With the keen involvement of staff from the Department of Cooperation, I look forward to achieving a sales figure of Rs. 5 crore in a year” he noted.

A. Jayasankar, Managing Director of the outlet, said that most of the vegetables were purchased from Vilangudi vegetable market in Madurai. A total of 57 items, including vegetables and fruits, were sold here. On a daily average, 850 to 900 consumers visited the outlet and the number crossed 1,000 on Sundays. In the beginning, the sale was between Rs. 35,000 and Rs. 40,000 and now the daily average had touched Rs. 1.50 lakh to Rs. 1.80 lakh.

On Sundays, the sale crossed Rs. 2 lakh. Apart from vegetables, fruits, turmeric powder from Erode, milk kova from Srivilliputhur and Muthalur honey were sold here, along with palm products, he added.

Banks told to give loans to agricultural sector

M. Kanagavalli, Chief Executive Officer, Udupi Zilla Panchayat, said on Thursday that banks should give advances to agricultural sector in rural areas. She was presiding over the quarterly meeting of the district-level review committee for banking here.

Ms. Kanagavalli said there was no point in banks opening branches in rural areas only to collect deposits. Instead of sitting in their cabins, the managers should go out and interact with farmers. The performance of banks in rural areas, especially with regard to rural credit offtake, left a lot to be desired, she said.

Reviewing the district credit plan for 2014-15, Prasad Rao, Assistant General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mangaluru, advised bankers to concentrate on lending more for the agriculture sector, particularly under term-lending. He also touched upon the area-based scheme for 2015-16 for which villages such as Mattu, Benegal and Kukkehalli had been selected.

Banks should take the help of non-governmental organisations and form joint liability groups. It would be possible for branch managers to form three to four such groups. The help of business correspondents could also be taken for the purpose, he said.

H.V. Bharmgoudar, regional manager of SyndicateBank, said banks had done well in enrolling customers under the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) and the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) in the district. They had enrolled 1,08,814 customers under PMSBY and 53,577 customers under PMJJBY. As many as 58 persons had been enrolled under the Atal Pension Yojana till May 31.

The number of women financed by banks stood at 1.14 lakh with an outstanding amount of Rs. 1,190.9 crore, which was 14.51 per cent of the total advances as against the stipulated level of 5 per cent. Education loans of Rs. 52.45 crore had been provided to 3,751 students in the fourth quarter.

Under the Kisan Credit Card Scheme, there was an outstanding level of Rs. 276.24 crore covering 32,314 card holders. As many as 17,613 self-help groups had been credit-linked in the district with an outstanding loan amount of Rs. 314.32 crore, Mr. Bharmgoudar said.

‘Banks should take the help of

non-governmental organisations and form joint liability groups’

17-day ‘Krishi Abhiyan’ launched in Mandya *Objective is to create awareness about good farm practices*

Members of the zilla panchayat and officials of Mandya district administration on Thursday launched the State government’s ambitious ‘Krishi Abhiyan-2015’, a 17-day

extensive awareness campaign where agricultural experts will go to farmers' fields in the entire district.

Vice-president of the zilla panchayat Chandrakala, standing committee president Divyashree, Mandya Deputy Commissioner M.N. Ajay Nagabhusan, Joint Director of Agriculture Rajasulochana and others inaugurated the campaign outside the Deputy Commissioner's office here.

Under the programme, officials, scientists and agricultural experts will visit all the 34 hobli centres in the district and provide consultation services to farmers. Experts will interact with farmers and provide guidelines on cropping plans and resolving agriculture-related issues, Mr. Nagabhusan said.

Meeting with farmers

The staff of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Sericulture and allied departments will meet the farmers and inform them about modern methods of cultivation, Ms. Rajasulochana said.

The officials will also explain the importance of various farm practices, including soil testing and mechanical farming during the campaign.

The Agriculture Department has arranged a specially-designed vehicle, fitted with loudspeakers, for the awareness campaign.

Sour notes for some sweet cooking



A large cane hamper filled with crusty bread, a bottle of extra virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar, fresh fruit and cheese is my idea of picnic fare.

I have used vinegar many times and in many ways. It adds not just a sour note, but also carries the muted flavours of fermented sugars, offering a complexity to the dish. Balsamic vinegar is dark, sweet and tart, and is produced in Modena, Italy. It ages well and pairs beautifully with sun-ripened tomatoes, fresh basil and baby mozzarella.

Vinegar is aged in wooden barrels. Young balsamic for a period of three to five years, the middle for six to 12 years and the aged one for anything between 12 to 60 years or more. Aged balsamic loses the intensity of young sharp vinegars and can even be drunk as an aperitif after dinner. The deep colour and sweetness is not only due to the aging, but also because of the slow cooking of white Trebbiano grapes.

There are many kinds of natural vinegars. They can be made by fermenting anything which has high natural sugar content. My German friend Joachim once brought me two bottles of raspberry and black currant vinegar.

Vinegars made from fruits such as kiwi, persimmon, strawberry and so on are popular. Apple cider vinegar is one I love for its complexity of taste.

Fruit vinegars made in India include coconut vinegar from Goa and jamun vinegar from West Bengal. Raisin vinegar and Sirka, derived from sugarcane, are also made here.

I add a splash of white vinegar while roasting root vegetables. This is made by a natural fermentation of white wine. It has a hit of sourness, accompanied by the inherent sweetness of white wine. Pinot gris, champagne, sherry and port are all used to make vinegars.

It's also exciting to create your own flavourings at home. Drop a few garlic cloves, snip in some fresh herbs or half a teaspoonful of chilli flakes into the vinegar.

Let that sit for a day or two and you have your very own flavoured vinegar. These work better with lighter wine vinegars than darker ones.

Rice wine vinegar and Chinese black vinegar are quintessential in Asian cooking. The vinegar balances the heaviness of pork, beef, etc. Chinese pickled vegetables are made by thinly slicing them, adding sugar, salt and a dash of vinegar, then letting them steep for about an hour.

A dressing of honey mustard and white vinegar, with some feathery strands of dill go beautifully with boiled eggs. Vinegar is also low on fat and cuts through the richness of heavy sauces. Not only does it enhance taste, but it also aids in digestion too.

A vinaigrette dressing can be bold and punchy, or light and zingy, depending on the seasonings added.

Vinegars are best stored airtight in a cool dark place. Once open, it's advisable to refrigerate them. If you are not using heavy spices or full-bodied masalas, add a spoon of vinegar to your dish to add vibrancy.

Bank to step up assistance to farmers

Union Bank of India deputy general manager T.S. Swamy has said that the bank will step up financial assistance to the agricultural sector in Telangana. The DGM was in Karimnagar on Thursday and conducted a meeting with the branch managers. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the Hyderabad region of the bank had won three all-India awards in the agriculture finance, recovery and retail lending sectors. New DGM M. Venkatesh, who will assume charge after the retirement of T.S. Swamy, called upon managers to provide farmers all possible assistance.



HC rejects plea challenging Bt cotton seed price cut

The court, however, said the manufacturers had failed to submit proper calculations about the production cost of the GM seeds despite repeated reminders by the government. The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court has rejected the petition filed by seed manufacturers challenging the state government's decision to cut the price of Bt cotton seeds by Rs 100 per standard bag.

A bench comprising Justices Bhushan Gavai and Indira Jain dismissed the petition Wednesday, saying the government had a right to take policy decisions. It said farmers were committing suicide and their problems had been compounded by natural calamities like hailstorms. The bench also observed that the petitioner did not submit details about the cost of seed production as sought by the government.

The Seed Industries Association of Maharashtra, the petitioner in the case, had challenged the reduction in the price of 450-gm seeds packet to Rs 830, down by Rs 100. The association, through its high-profile lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi, argued that the companies would face closure due to the price cut. The petition also claimed to have submitted representation to the government on the price calculations but the government did not give it proper attention.

The court, however, said the manufacturers had failed to submit proper calculations about the production cost of the GM seeds despite repeated reminders by the government.

The previous [Congress](#)-NCP government had initiated the move but it was kept in abeyance due to election code of conduct. Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are the only three states where prices of GM seeds are regulated by state governments. Elsewhere, the prices are as per open market rates.

With Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse reducing the Bt cotton seed price last week, the Maharashtra price is the lowest in the country now. It remains Rs 930 in Andhra and Telangana. Former advocate general Sunil Manohar represented the state.

Pulse of the matter

The [Narendra Modi](#) government deserves credit for persisting with a policy of conservative increases in the minimum support prices (MSP), which may, indeed, be its most significant reform measure to date. For a second consecutive year, the MSP of paddy has gone up by just Rs 50 per quintal, or 3.7 per cent — something that would certainly strengthen the government's inflation-fighting credibility and make it easier for the RBI to effect the interest rate cuts the economy desperately needs.

But equally important, the MSPs for pulses have been raised by Rs 250-275 per quintal — roughly 6 per cent — mainly through the grant of a one-time Rs 200 bonus. The move isn't going to be inflationary, given that open market prices are ruling way higher.

Arhar and urad are, for instance, now wholesaling at Rs 7,200-8,300 per quintal levels, as against the announced MSP of Rs 4,625 for 2015-16, inclusive of bonus. In fact, the government could have gone in for a more substantial — say, 10 per cent — hike, if only to send a stronger signal to farmers to expand pulses' acreages this time.

As a policy instrument, the MSP serves two broad objectives.

The first is to give farmers a reasonable return to cover at least the cash expenses incurred on their crops, so as to prevent distress sales. The second is in influencing sowing decisions so that farmers plant crops keeping in view the country's overall requirements. India today is surplus in rice, with public stocks nearly twice the necessary minimum buffer. In 2014-15, the country produced 102.54 million tonnes (mt) of rice, of which government agencies bought some 30 mt, and another 12 mt was exported. If, despite that, domestic rice prices have hardly risen, it only shows the extent of surplus — which is also the case with wheat, sugar or cotton.

But this does not hold true for pulses, which are retailing around 50 per cent higher than last year, even after 4 mt-plus of imports in 2014-15. It is obvious, then, that the MSPs for paddy and wheat ought to be raised only marginally, if not frozen, while being substantially increased for pulses. The government has done that to some degree.

But mere MSP rationalisation isn't enough. The government should physically procure pulses in the coming marketing season, both to tell farmers that its MSPs aren't purely in theory, but also to build up a buffer against production shortfalls resulting in domestic as well as global price volatility. If the government can procure 30-31 mt of rice and 27-28

mt of wheat annually, it can surely afford to buy 3-4 mt of pulses that are mostly grown by relatively resource-poor farmers using less water and fertilisers.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

TN veggies exported to Gulf stuck at airports

Close on the heels of neighbouring Kerala raising concerns about high level of pesticide content in vegetables grown in Tamil Nadu, many countries in the Middle East have put brakes on importing vegetables from the state.

Exporters said large quantity of vegetables and other perishable commodities like dairy products, sent from Trichy airport, was lying at airports in the Middle East as those countries have demanded a certificate for quality of the produce.

As plant quarantine division here which is the license authority not having any provision for providing a health certificate, the exporters are now facing a difficult situation. Many of them have stopped procuring vegetables and dairy products from farmers.

A group of exporters recently raised their concern with the airport director BCH Negi. Authorities at Dubai airport has refused to accept a three-tonne shipment containing vegetables, coconuts and dairy items sent through the SriLankan Airlines via Colombo. The authorities have issued a show cause notice for not providing a health certificate.

A senior official from the directorate of plant protection, quarantine and storage here said "A new set of guidelines has been issued by the Gulf authorities, which contains a column to attach health certificate for perishable items that are sent to the country. But, ministry of commerce has not issued any intimation to the cargo authorities." The official further said that the Plant Quarantine Board is not the necessary authority in providing a health certificate.

According to S Moorthy of Bravo Logistics, the show cause notice was issued to all the exporters who were supplying perishable goods to the Gulf. He further added that exporters who ship produce from Kochi and Mumbai also faced the same problem.

Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) that is involved in certifying the food processing exports has four labs in the state where the goods are being checked for pesticides and other residues. However a senior cargo official at the airport said that many exporters might not follow the procedures of APEDA. "This can be a reason for countries to insist on certificates," he added.

APEDA general manager A S Rawati said that countries had started taking precautionary steps to monitor imports after reports had come out about use of pesticides in excess by farmers.

Inventory planning is important to reduce waste generation, say experts

To minimize waste, inventory planning is needed. The surplus raw material leads to higher generation of waste, said experts.

Scientists from The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) conducted a workshop in association with the Marathwada Association of Small Scale Industries & Agriculture (MASSIA) for the entrepreneurs at Waluj MIDC on Thursday giving guidelines on techniques for minimization of waste generation, by reducing the quantity of water and resources.

Malini Balakrishnan, a scientist at TERI said, "Controlling industry generated waste is imperative. There are several techniques to control waste. With an aim to introduce technology to reduce waste generation and improve resource efficiency in industries, a project - ACID LOOP, which has been in operation since four years (2012-2016), partially funded by the European Union, under the SWITCH Asia Programme to promote sustainable consumption and production in Asia," she said.

"This project is being implemented by a consortium of seven organisations and is being coordinated by TERI. Nearly, 100 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Faridabad, Gurgaon, Chandigarh-Mohali, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Aurangabad, Pune and Chennai are participating in this project," said Prahlad Tewari, Associate Fellow, TERI.

"In Aurangabad, 13-member groups of MASSIA are involved in this project. These companies are proactive and have implemented many resource efficiency measures such as insulating hot baths to avoid heat losses, installing collecting tanks and drain boards to avoid chemical spillages, monitoring and maintaining bath concentrations, etc.

Modifications such as using polypropylene balls in hot open baths to avoid surface heat losses, installing LED lighting and implementing rain water harvesting have been adopted. Good housekeeping measures like proper storage and labeling of chemicals have also been taken up. These low cost or no-cost improvements carried out within their existing processes, are not only helping the SMEs reduce their environmental impact, but also helping them lower their cost of operation and save expenditure between Rs 20,000 and Rs 1.50 lakh," said Raman Ajgaonkar of MASSIA.

A training workshop for the metal finishing SME's was conducted by TERI at MASSIA Hall in Waluj MIDC on Friday. Eminent scientists from TERI, New Delhi, office bearers of MASSIA, entrepreneurs, supervisors, technicians and ACIDLOOP project team participated in the workshop.

Testing food samples made easy

Common citizens, who wish to get food samples tested, can now have speedy reports that courts will accept without depending on overburdened government laboratories.

The national food regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), has notified 82 private accredited laboratories in the country for carrying out analyses of food samples. Among the notified laboratories, five are from Pune.

"The FSSAI has notified 82 laboratories accredited by National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) in India for testing food samples taken under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and Rules and Regulations made thereunder on April 1, 2015," said the FSSAI order issued on June 15. NABL is an autonomous body under the aegis of department of science and technology and is registered under the Societies Act.

Shashikant Kekare, joint commissioner (food), Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), Pune said, "FSSAI notifies only those laboratories which are NABL accredited. FDA cannot send samples for testing to these notified private laboratories. Samples drawn by us are sent only to government-run laboratories. But if a manufacturer is not convinced about the test results of his/her products given by a government lab, then he or she can get the test done at FSSAI-notified labs. And if there is variation in the test reports given by the government and private notified laboratory then such a sample is sent to a referral laboratory, whose report is considered final."

As many as 18 laboratories in Maharashtra feature in the list of laboratories notified by FSSAI. Of them, 11 laboratories, the highest number, are from Mumbai followed by five in Pune.

Senior microbiologist Abhay Desai, director of Hadapsar-based Food Hygiene and Health Laboratory, which has been working in the field since 1998 and is one of the five notified laboratories, said, "Test reports given by a private laboratory are considered valid in the court of law if the laboratory is notified by the FSSAI."

"Like state government and Union government-run laboratories, these notified private laboratories are empowered to issue reports accepted the world over. NABL is accredited to international accreditation bodies," Desai said.

Food Hygiene and Health Laboratory received the NABL accreditation in 2006 which the laboratory has been maintaining since then.

Not all state government and Union government run food laboratories are accredited. "Barring a few government run laboratories that have complied with the stringent accreditation processes and bagged the NABL accreditation, most government laboratories are yet to get the NABL accreditation," said a senior health official.

The Food Safety and Standards Act 2006 which came into force in 2011 precisely states that private laboratories which has received NABL accreditation should automatically be considered as notified by FSSAI.

"It is not easy to get the accreditation and more difficult to maintain it. A laboratory's accreditation is assessed and reviewed every year. It gets renewed depending upon the performance. Hence, maintaining the accreditation is tougher," Desai said

Senior chemical analyst V S Keskar, managing director, Sinhagad road-based Maarc Labs Private Limited one of the FSSAI notified labs in Pune, said, "Our lab has received NABL accreditation over 10 years ago. It has now been notified by FSSAI. That means the test reports given by our lab is at par with state government and Union government run laboratories. There are a lot of small food laboratories that need to be brought under regulations. People should seek assistance of only private laboratories notified by FSSAI in testing food articles."

According to the FSSAI order, the recognition of these laboratories shall be valid from the date of notification in the official gazette till further orders by the FSSAI or the currency of NABL accreditation of the laboratory whichever is earlier.

The currency of NABL accreditation in respect of some laboratories has already expired. Hence, the authorization of such laboratories shall remain in abeyance till their accreditation is renewed by NABL further, the order states.

The other Pune labs notified by FSSAI are Microtech Laboratory, Wakdewadi, National Agriculture and Food Analysis and Research Institute, Tilak Road and TUV India Private Limited, Sus, Mulshi taluka.

Key facts

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* As many as 18 laboratories in Maharashtra feature in the list of laboratories notified by FSSAI. Of them, the highest 11 laboratories are from Mumbai followed by five in Pune

* The test reports from these notified laboratories will be considered valid in the court of law.

NGO warns Punjab govt against field trials for GM mustard, maize crops

Punjab chapter of the NGO 'Coalition for GM free India' has warned the state government against going ahead with field trials of genetically modified mustard and maize crops. The NGO has decided to oppose trials and commercial cultivation of these crops in future. The NGO, taking along other social groups, has decided to launch a campaign against Punjab government's efforts to start trials with the theme "Say no to GMOs in farming and food" from Bathinda from Saturday.

The Coalition for GM Free India and another NGO Kheti Virasat Mission (KVM) have also asked residents of Punjab to raise voice to save Punjab's traditional recipe of "makki di roti te sarson da saag". "The trademark 'makki di roti te sarson da saag' will not remain the same once the commercial cultivation of GM mustard and maize is allowed. We need to oppose it and declare that Punjabis are not lab rats," said KVM executive director Umendra Dutt.

He said that field trials were being done at Punjab Agricultural University research centre and it wouldn't be long when the government allowed cultivation of GM crops. Dutt said that Delhi University's GM mustard was like a backdoor entry for herbicide-tolerant crops in India. "The herbicide tolerant version has been rejected by various committees formed by the Union government over the years given the health, environmental and enormous socio-economic impact that it will leave on rural employment," he said.

ICAR delegations visits sites for setting up horticulture institute

A high-powered team comprising officials from Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), state horticulture department and Punjab Agricultural University, visited half-a-dozen locations for setting up of the proposed Post Graduate Institute of Horticulture Research and Education in Amritsar district.

Giving details, Amritsar deputy director of horticulture, Baaj Singh said the team visited Attari fruit orchard, Dayal Bharang village near Ajnala, fish farm at Rajasansi, Buddha Theh near Beas, a land piece near Guru Nanak Dev University campus and Amritsar jail. The team would submit its report to the government for further decision on the location for the proposed institute, he said. Amritsar jail is also a proposed site for setting up of the Indian Institute for Management.

Nitish Kumar for more food processing units in Bihar

Recalling his dream of "having at least one food item from Bihar in every Indian's plate", Bihar CM Nitish Kumar on Thursday called upon entrepreneurs to establish more food processing industries in the state.

He also promised all possible assistance and subsidy from the state government to the prospective investors.

"One of my dreams is to have at least one food item grown in Bihar in every Indian's plate. There are enormous possibilities in food processing sector here. Fruits like mango, litchi and banana are available in abundance. Entrepreneurs should consider setting up industries in Bihar. We will provide all help, including subsidy up to 35%, to the investors. For SC/ST and women investors, subsidy can be increased up to 40% of the investment," Nitish said while speaking at the 'agriculture and food processing conclave' organized by Assocham and the state government.

The CM said better processing would not only cut down wastage of agricultural produce and add value to production but also raise income of the farmers. The processing units would also open new avenues for employment. He also pointed out that 76% population of Bihar was dependent on agriculture. "The population is increasing. At the same time agricultural productivity is also going up due to state government's policies and agriculture road map. Food processing industries will not only encourage the farmers but also ensure betterment of agriculture sector. Food processing units will not have any shortage of raw products required for their plants," Nitish said.

Stressing on maintenance of quality, Nitish asked the investors to ensure that food processing in their plants should be of "good quality". "Bihar has a brand like Sudha milk. Today, Sudha is popular in many states. You must take necessary steps to develop your own brands in the market. Your products should be of such a good quality that people from other states and country visit Bihar and buy your products," he said.

IMD: Monsoon to be good through June

The monsoon is likely to remain strong through the month of June, the India Meteorological Department said on Thursday, as another storm system developed over the Bay of Bengal, promising widespread rain across central and south India over the next four-five days.

As on June 18, the monsoon was 10% above normal, mainly on account of excess rains over central India, the southeastern coast and parts of the Northeast.

"Looking at the rest of the month, our models do not show the monsoon weakening. Indications are that rainfall would remain good this month," IMD director B P Yadav said.

The monsoon, however, hasn't entered fresh areas since June 14. The monsoon line continues to pass through the southern tip of Gujarat, cutting through Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and south Odisha, before moving vertically through the eastern border of Bengal.

IMD has been predicting the monsoon's progress into some more parts of central and east India for the past few days. But barring Kerala, coastal Karnataka and some areas of the Northeast, rains have been good in regions covered so far by the rain system.

"The spell of good rains that started around June 10 continues. There is likely to be another surge in rainfall as a low pressure area off south Odisha-Andhra coast is expected to become a well-marked system in the next 24 hours and move inland," Yadav said.

The fresh surge, Yadav said, will lead to an increase in the intensity, distribution and spread of rains in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat - areas that are already seeing wet weather.

While the forecast of normal rains in June would encourage sowing of the kharif crop, particularly in central India, uncertainty remains over monsoon's performance in July, an agriculturally crucial month which is also the wettest of the year.

IMD has predicted an 8% shortfall in rains during July, mainly on account of abnormally warm conditions in the Pacific Ocean — a periodic phenomenon called El Niño that's known to weaken monsoons in India.

Healthy munch: Broccoli Tikki recipe



A crispy and delicious teatime/evening snack or can also be served as a starter/appetizer to any meal. Best served warm with chutney or sauce of choice.

Ingredients:

Broccoli - 200 gms, finely chopped
Potatoes - 125 gms
Plain Flour (Maida) - 100 gms
Corn Flour - 1/4 cup
Butter - 2 to 3 tblsp
Ginger Garlic Paste - 2 tsp
Oil for frying
Red Chilli Flakes - 2 tsp (adjust as required)
Salt as per taste
Black Pepper Powder as per taste

Optional:

Onion - 1/2 cup, finely chopped

Method:

1. Boil, peel and mash the potatoes well.
2. Heat butter in a pan over medium flame.
3. Saute the broccolis for a minute or two.
4. Combine the mashed potatoes, corn flour, maida, broccolis, ginger garlic paste, red chilli flakes, salt and black pepper powder.

5. Mix well and shape the mixture into small/medium tikkis.
6. Heat oil in a deep frying pan.
7. Fry the prepared tikkis until golden brown.
8. Remove and drain excess oil.
9. Serve hot with chutney or sauce of choice.

Note: If using onions, then saute with broccolis at step #3.

Here's what salt does to your food



Let's talk about the most inevitable ingredient involved in all types of cooking. Salt!

Be it meat, vegetables, ice-creams or chocolates, salt is one ingredient that remains constant in everything you cook or toss. And why not, since it makes everything taste better.

However, before you get generous with your dose of salt, remember, excessive quantity of salt in your diet can be detrimental to your health. Thus, it is vital to understand the science of salt so as to improve your cooking skills, while staying in safe limits.

Great taste enhancer

Salt has the ability to reduce bitterness, which is why aficionados add a pinch of salt before brewing or preparing chocolates. "Salt is added to chocolates, ice creams and bakeries etc as a taste enhancer. It mainly brings out the sweetness in a more rounded off taste," says Pooja Malhotra, a food technology expert.

***Tip:** While cooking a dark chocolate recipe, if you add a pinch of undetectable salt, the*

taste of the recipe will be enhanced as it will settle down the bitterness of the chocolate.

Temperature booster

Salt increases the boiling point of your water. So next time you want to boil your eggs faster, you know what to add. This is not it. Salt also lowers the freezing point of water, which is the reason it is added to ice used to prepare ice-creams.

Tip: Add a pinch of undetectable salt while preparing ice-creams or kulfis at home.

Usually, if salt is added at the table, it dominates the flavour. The reason is that when added over the table, salt doesn't bind other tastes together and leaves you with a stringent salty taste. To enjoy the real flavours, one needs to add the right amount of salt at the right time.

The right time to add salt

If you want to further enhance your cooking skills with this God-sent ingredient, here are a few tips:

Beans: It is recommended that you add salt towards the end when the beans have been cooked.

Pasta: Add salt in the beginning while boiling your pasta. As pasta soaks the content while being boiled, salt will boost its flavor. You can add lesser salt in the sauce.

Rice: Like pasta, salt will act as a taste enhancer for cooking rice too. Also, rice becomes sticky after being cooked thus if you add salt later, it might stick to some of the grains and not spread evenly. Now you know why mothers insist on adding salt later by mixing it in hot water.

Sauteing onions: Salt has a tendency to bring out moisture, thus, softening your vegetables and onions faster. So, take your decision based on what you are cooking. Example, if you are sauteing onions for Chinese, add salt later and if you are cooking an Indian gravy, then you can add salt in the beginning.

Two quick ways to cook corn

CORN SALAD

Yield:

Ingredients: Corn kernels - 1 cup

Red bell peppers - 1 tbsp

Onions and spring onions chopped - 1 tbsp each

Chopped Kairi- $\frac{3}{4}$ tbsp Celery stalk,
diced - 1 tbsp



Cherry tomatoes - 5
Pineapple diced - 1 tbsp
Parsley - 1 tsp
Cilantro leaves - 1 tsp
Basil - 3 leaves Avocado,
diced - ½ each Olive oil - 1 tbsp
Lemon juice - 2 tsp
Black salt - to taste
Tacos - 3 shells

Method: Blanch the corn in hot water with salt. Do not overcook it. Drain and set aside. Now, cut the onions, peppers, pineapple, kairi (raw mango), celery and avocado. Also dice the cherry tomatoes and add the herbs like basil, parsley and cilantro basil to the vegetables. Season this. Add the lemon juice and olive oil. Toss it well and serve it in the shells with herb buttered rice on the side.

Corn broth

Yield:

Ingredients:

Onions, chopped - 1 Leeks,
chopped - ½ cup Celery,
chopped - ½ cup Potatoes,
diced - 1 cup Corn kernels - 2 cups Yellow peppers,
chopped - ½ cup Garlic,
chopped - 1 tbsp Vegetable stock - 1 litre Milk - a cup
Parsley - 1 tsp
Chives - 1 tsp

Cream - ¾ cup
Olive oil - 1 tbsp
Butter - to taste

Method: Heat a pan and drizzle the butter into it. When it melts add some of the oil and the onions, chopped potatoes, leeks, celery plus the yellow bell peppers and corn kernels, taking care not to over cook it. Add the garlic and saute too. Add the milk and vegetable stock. Cook till the vegetables turn soft. Blend this and add cream plus the seasoning, as well as the chopped herbs. Serve hot with garlic bread.

Continuation, strengthening and establishment of Krishi Vigyan Kendras in the XII plan

PUNE: The union cabinet have given its approval for continuation, strengthening and establishment of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) with an outlay of Rs.3900 crore. The scheme envisages continuation of 642 KVKs established till date and establishment of 109 new KVKs in the XII Plan, to carry out its wide range of activities.

The scheme includes initiation of new components namely ICT in agriculture, Farmer FIRST programme, creation of the Farm Innovation Fund, Disaster Management Fund,

Technology Information Units, mini seed processing facilities, micro nutrient analysis facilities, solar panels, vKVK and KVK net, specialized KVKs and e-farmers; and extending existing components like Integrated Farming System, rain water harvesting structures, soil and water testing laboratories, minimal processing facilities, carp hatcheries to new KVKs, establishment of 16 new Agricultural Technology Information Centres (ATICs), Network Project on Expert System and New Extension Methodologies and Approaches. The scheme provides support to the Directorates of Extension Education (DEE) of State and Central Agricultural Universities.

The scheme also proposes to enhance the number of Zonal Project Directorates to 11 from the existing eight and creation of one Post of Zonal Project Director and one post of Principal Scientist in each of the three new Zonal Project Directorates.

THE HINDU
BusinessLine

No consensus yet on WTO farm tariff cuts



No consensus emerged amongst key World Trade Organisation (WTO) members such as India, the US and EU on the formula for reducing tariffs on farm products at the agriculture committee meeting early this week in Geneva.

Deadline may escape

This raises further doubts about the attainability of the July-end deadline for agreeing on a work programme for the next WTO Ministerial meeting in Nairobi in December and sealing a trade deal there.

“Most developing countries including India supported the draft text of 2008 which suggests a tiered formula for tariff reduction. This means that higher tariffs would be subjected to higher cuts while lower tariffs would be subjected to lower cuts,” a Government official told *BusinessLine*.

EU, US differ

WTO members had informally agreed on most provisions of a draft text on agriculture at a meeting of trade ministers in 2008, but it could not be formally sealed as negotiations on the overall Doha Round trade pact collapsed because of differences in some other areas including industrial goods. The EU, Norway and Canada, however, want to move completely away from the 2008 text.

The EU said that it wanted a tariff reduction formula similar to the one used in the Uruguay Round negotiations (1986-94). In that formula, members would have to bring down average tariffs by a fixed percentage; but they would will have the flexibility to much make lower cuts on individual items as long as higher cuts on other items maintains the average agreed tariff levels.

“What the EU wants will result in perpetuation of the tariff peaks (unusual high tariffs) for certain agriculture products that are prevailing in developed country markets, although their average tariffs are low. This is what India is fighting against,” the official said.

The US said that it preferred a simple average cut, which means that all tariffs would be subject to the same levels of reduction irrespective of whether they were high or low.

India’s representative at the meeting said that those members who were opposing the tiered formula should come out and specify what they had against it.

Indian subsidies

“The tiered formula is the fairest formula. Cuts in the highest tariff bands should be the most,” the official said.

There has also been no consensus yet on the permanent solution to India’s problem of treating its food procurement subsidies.

WTO members are trying to pick up pieces of the collapsed Doha Round (launched in 2001) to see if a less ambitious trade pact could be reached in the Nairobi meet.

“As things stand I see very little prospect of delivering the substantive, meaningful work programme which we have been aiming towards. That is the reality today. The question is whether we can change this situation by the end of July — and that is up to you,” WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo said addressing all members in a meeting on Wednesday.

GM mustard won’t raise yields, says anti-GM coalition

Developers claim that yield will rise by 20-25% by lowering India’s edible oil imports

The Coalition for GM Free India warned the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), under the Environment Ministry, against the commercialisation of a genetically-modified (GM) mustard strain named DMH-11 (Dhara Mustard Hybrid 11).

The mustard line was developed by the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants, Delhi University, and supported by its Biotechnology Department and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). The project was headed by Deepak Pental, Director of the Centre.

The coalition released a briefing paper on GM mustard on Wednesday and attempted to remind the GEAC of the concerns in the country when it had commercially approved the Bt Brinjal in 2009-10.

“Delhi University’s GM mustard is a backdoor entry for herbicide-tolerant crops into India, in the guise of a public sector GM crop. An attempt was made for similar GM mustard by an MNC into India in 2002 which the regulators firmly rejected,” said Rajesh Krishnan, Convenor of the Coalition.

Krishnan stated that claims of increased yield over non-GM varieties were misplaced while the genetic modification for male sterility was meant to ease seed production by sellers. “This is nothing but a Trojan horse for many other HT GM crops lined up by MNCs like Monsanto which are in the regulatory pipeline,” he added.

The DMH-11 mustard line has been created by genetically engineering bacterial genes into selected mustard parent lines to create male sterile parent plants. Developers claim that yield will rise by 20-25 per cent which will lower India’s import of edible oil.

“At a time when the entire nation is concerned with laxity in food safety regulation as seen in the Maggi case, it is outrageous that GM food crops are being pushed without adequate safety assessment and transparency,” said Kavitha Kuruganti, Convenor, Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture.

Campco in talks with Chinese co for tender arecanut exports

If the initiatives by the Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative (Campco) Ltd materialise, then the Chinese will start chewing mouth fresheners with arecanut-based ingredients from India.

K Padmanabha, President of Campco Ltd, told *BusinessLine* that a Chinese firm has shown interest to import around 12,000 tonnes of tender arecanut. The firm – Kou Wei Wang Ji Tuan You Xian Gongsi of Hu Nan province in China – wants to prepare mouth fresheners from the peel of the tender arecanut, he said. That means farmers need not wait for the processing of the commodity before releasing it to the market.

Exports, output

It may be mentioned here that India is the major arecanut producer in the world. According to an estimate, the country produces around 5.5 lakh tonnes of arecanut every year. The export of Indian arecanut to other countries is meagre compared to the import figures.

According to the Commerce Ministry figures, India exported 3,470 tonnes of arecanut to various countries in 2013-14, and 7,057 tonnes in the first nine months of 2014-15. If materialised, the new initiative of Campco will provide an opportunity to export around 12,000 tonnes of tender arecanut to a single country.

Imports up

One of the main grouses of farmers and arecanut cooperatives was the import of arecanut.

The Commerce Ministry statistics show that India imported 73,953 tonnes of arecanut in 2011-12, 99,701 tonnes in 2012-13 and 80,478 tonnes in 2013-14. The import went up to 79,005 tonnes in the first nine months of 2014-15. On June 8, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) issued a notification increasing the minimum import price for the commodity from ₹110 a kg to ₹162 a kg.

The DGFT notification had infused some amount of hopes among arecanut growers in the country. A positive development on the Chinese move to import tender arecanut to that country will further boost their hopes.

Bengal to share employee welfare costs of tea estate owners



The West Bengal Assembly on Thursday passed a Bill to share the employee welfare costs of plantation owners in line with the provisions of Plantation Labour Act (PLA). The Bill also aims to offer financial assistance for rejuvenation of sick or closed gardens.

The State government will allot ₹100 crore as the initial corpus of the fund to be managed by the West Bengal Tea Plantation Employees Welfare Board. The board will have representations from trade unions and will ensure compliance of welfare measures by the estates.

According to Manojit Das Gupta, Secretary-General of Indian Tea Association (ITA), the initiative is the first of its kind. “We are not aware of a similar initiative by any other tea growing State in the country,” he said.

To be referred as West Bengal Tea Plantation Employees Welfare Fund Act, 2015, the proposed legal provision will allow the State to offer interest subvention or matching grants as “soft loan” to the employers for meeting expenses in medical, housing, primary education and others.

The also has provisions to offer scholarships to children of tea labourers for skill development. The owners of sick and closed gardens may access soft-loan as ‘margin money’ to raise bank finance for rejuvenation of the estates.

ITA welcomes move

Explaining the reasons behind the move, the bill said that there are 283 registered gardens in the State with a total labour force of 2,62, 426. The total population in these gardens is more than 11.24 lakh.

According to PLA, the tea labourers should be provided with free housing, electricity, medical facilities primary education, crèche, potable water, sanitation. This apart, gardens should supply electricity, subsidised food grains, dry tea, fire wood, footwear, umbrella, etc.

“However... many tea gardens, particularly those not belonging to corporate groups or established tea families often violate the law, pleading fund shortage,” the bill said.

Various Inter-ministerial committees set by the Centre as well as West Bengal and Assam recommended sharing of statutory welfare costs by the government, it added.

Doubt on sick gardens

Das Gupta says the initiative should help improve compliance of labour welfare guidelines.

But tea industry sources are apprehensive if the piece of act will bring an end to the misery of labours in sick or closed gardens.

A garden turns sick due to poor management practices and poor work culture. Most of sick estates have huge defaults in paying statutory dues. This is one reason why serious deep pocket investors stay away from acquiring them.

Offering margin money to existing set of owners may not help the purpose, a senior planter in a prominent tea company told *BusinessLine*

No bulk buying in sugar



Sugar prices at mill level dropped below ₹2,100/quintal level late evening after witnessing a steady trend as some producers sold the commodity at a discount. Prices on the Vashi market ruled steady except M-grade which declined by ₹18. *Naka* rates were unchanged. Mill tender rates eased by ₹5-10. Sources said continuous supply continuous supply from mills, enough stocks at market level, need base local demand, lack of upcountry lifting, absence of exports and prices at other producing centres ruling par with Maharashtra continue to weigh on sentiments limiting volumes. Ample supply kept stockists away from bulk buys. Arrivals remained stable at 58-60 truck loads and local dispatches were about 57-58 loads. On Wednesday evening, about 19-20 mills offered tenders and sold hardly 28,000-30,000 bags at ₹2,100-2,250 (2,125-2,250) for S-grade and ₹2,220-2,370 (2,225-2,380) for M-grade.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade ₹2,246-2,471 (2,246-2,471) and M-grade ₹2,362-2,652 (2,380-2,652). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹2,210-2,280 (2,210-2,280) and M-grade ₹2,350-2,550 (2,350-2,550).

Business Standard

Farmers to get weather alerts on mobile

The climatic and weather information will be highly localised and provided within a 50-kilometre radius on their mobile phones



At a time when the country is staring at the prospect of below-normal southwest monsoon, the [agriculture ministry](#) on Thursday launched a free short message service (SMS), which would provide updated [weather information](#) to registered farmers at an interval of three hours. The climatic and weather information will be highly localised and provided within a 50-kilometre radius on their mobile phones.