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THE HINDU

Sugarcane farmers switch to flowers and soya bean



The govt-sponsored 'Beyond Sugarcane' movement has gathered pace in Osmanabad, with farmers taking to soya bean, tur and horticulture.

For many years, farmers in Latur, Osmanabad and Solapur relied on water-intensive sugarcane, expecting huge profits. The unpredictable monsoons and the groundwater depletion have forced them to rethink their strategy and for the first time, the government, too, is encouraging them to look beyond sugarcane.

The government-sponsored 'Beyond Sugarcane' movement has gathered pace in the dry district of Osmanabad, with thousands of farmers taking to soya bean, tur and horticulture, and most importantly Gerbera. This campaign supplements the much-publicised 'Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan' aimed at creating decentralised water sources.

“No matter how many water conservation programs are implemented here, the farmers will always face drought if changes are not made in the crop pattern and water use,” says Osmanabad Collector Prashant Narnavre. According to government data, every sugarcane farmer had dug three borewells in an acre of farm.

In a dry area like Osmanabad, which has three lakh hectares under cultivation, approximately 48,000 hectares had been under sugarcane till last year. This despite the fact that only six of the 15 sugar factories are operational, with only two making profit.

“Sugarcane had never been a viable option, and the district administration started educating the farmers,” says Mr. Narnavre. The immediate alternative was soya bean and tur, as they needed half the amount of water required.

The district administration brought 14,500 farmers under farming groups on the basis of crop choice. “At present, we have 220 polyhouses and produce 1.5 lakh flowers every day,” says District Agriculture Officer Shankar Totawar. Thanks to the sustained efforts in the past one year, the area under sugarcane cultivation has halved.

Solid income

The cut Gerbera flowers are sent to Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Thailand and provide an income of around Rs. 1 lakh per acre every month. The success of the Gerbera cultivation here is reflected in the fact that two new varieties of the flower will be named after two villages of Osmanabad: Padola and Upla.

Sanjay Pawar of Padola is happy that he switched from sugarcane to Gerbera. “Tired of drought every year, 12 of us from this village decided to do something new. And today, we stand here with profit, without sugarcane,” he says.

Osmanabad is not the only district in the State which is actively “discouraging” farmers from growing sugarcane. Solapur which has over two lakh hectares under the cash crop, out of a total cultivable area of 11 lakh hectares, has also moved away.

“We cannot decrease the area under sugarcane but we can certainly control it,” says Solapur Collector Tukaram Mundhe. Mr. Mundhe says drip irrigation has been made compulsory for all sugarcane farmers if they want loans. “We are even planning to ask the sugar mills not to accept sugarcane unless it is from a certified drip-irrigated farm,” he says.

Tribals seek preservation of jackfruits



Due to dearth of preservation and value addition facility, large quantity of ripe jackfruits produced in tribal pockets of south Odisha are getting wasted every year.

Tribal organisations like MITA and Ganjam Zilla Adivasi Manch (GZAM) have demanded that the government start preservation and value addition process for ripe jackfruits in south Odisha.

According to MITA secretary Jagabandhu Sabar, large quantity of jackfruits is produced in tribal pockets of Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal and Rayagada districts. At start of the fruit-bearing season, traders from north India especially from Uttar Pradesh reach the tribal and pay in advance to take the unripe jackfruits that are used as vegetables.

After the unripe jackfruits get sold, the remaining jackfruits ripen on trees. Jackfruits have heavy demand during festivals of Odisha like ‘Savitri Vrat’ and ‘Raja’. However, the demand falls after these festivals. Tribal leader and GZAM convenor Kailash Jani alleged that of the jackfruits ripening on trees in tribal pockets, only 20 per cent reach the market. The rest is wasted as the tribals do not consume all the fruits.

These tribal organisations and social activists, like Mangaraj Panda, feel pulp of ripe jackfruits can also be used to produce preserved value added products like jelly and dried flakes.

“Technology is the same like that used for mango pulp and is available with Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) and Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ACAR),” said Mr Panda.

A large quantity of ripe jackfruits are getting wasted every year

82nd sahitya sammelan in Raichur from October 9

The 82nd Akhil Bharat Kannada Sahitya Sammelan will be held between October 9 and 11 on the campus of University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur. The reception committee for organising the sammelan, headed by Minister of State for Medical Education and Raichur in-charge Sharanprakash R. Patil met at the Kannada Bhavan here on Monday evening and decided the dates and the venue for the literary festival.

It was decided to form various subcommittees for the sammelan. Referring to the 52 subcommittees formed during the 78th sammelan at Gangavathi in Koppal district, district Kannada Sahitya Parishat president Mahantesh Maski proposed to reduce their number to 32. He proposed to have a single main stage for literary deliberations and performances.

“Two main stages were set up for the 81st sammelan at Shravanabelagola. The second stage did not attract much audience. Let us arrange a single stage to avoid such an inconvenience,” he said.

It was also decided to convene meetings of major subcommittees, including the one on finance, once every two weeks for ensuring the smooth conduct of the sammelan.

Ayyappa Tukkal, a member of the Sahitya Parishat, proposed to seek financial assistance from Koppal district as Raichur had lent financial help for the Gangavathi sammelan.

Briefing the media after the meeting, Dr. Sharanprakash Patil said Rs. 5 crore would be required for organising the sammelan. “The State government could contribute Rs. 2 crore.”

Keeping alive green patches amid a concrete jungle



As you pass the busy stretches of Athipet near Ambattur, small patches of greenery greet you amidst residential and industrial localities.

Though urbanisation has caught on rapidly in many localities that have been merged with the Chennai Corporation, some people continue to cultivate crops. While some cultivate paddy, green gram and black gram, others have shifted to vegetable farming.

Even before houses and schools started coming up in Athipet, S. Venkatesan had been practising agriculture. “Many people stop by in surprise to take a look at my nine-acre field and compliment me for pursuing farming in an urban area,” said Mr.Venkatesan who recently shifting to organic vegetable farming due to shortage of labour.

He and his family cultivate brinjal, bottle gourd, ladies fingers, cucumber and greens. “I grow manure crops like *Thakaipoondu* and use bio-fertilisers. I sell my produce in Ambattur market and several regular customers also buy in bulk. I get enough to sustain my livelihood,” he added.

His desire to remain a farmer made Navasekara Reddy retain his 10-acre paddy field instead of letting it be an apartment complex. “It is increasingly becoming difficult to cultivate paddy as I use water from borewells only. But, I continue it as it is my family profession,” he added.

To encourage such farmers, the agriculture department distributes biofertilisers at subsidised cost. “We create awareness about organic manure

and seeds through meetings to motivate farmers”, said D. Vijayakumar, assistant director (Ambattur), Agriculture department.

Shortage of labour and cost escalation on raw materials is slowly driving a few of them to sell bits of agricultural land that they own in Corporation limits.

A third-generation agriculturist, P. Palanivel, (65) of Mugaliwakkam, says that though agriculture is not rewarding, they continue as it is a matter of pride. He and his relatives own pieces of land adjacent to his land on Madhanandapuram Main Road.

He brings 15 persons from Cheyyar in Tiruvannamalai district to work in his field apart from his family members. He has to depend on the team’s availability every season. Despite the hardships, he cultivates every season as Urban Land Tax would be levied if the land is kept idle for a season or two, said Mr. Palanivel.

K. Rathinammal, who cultivates in her small piece of land in Baraniputhur near Kovur, said: “Until the 1970s, there were many paddy fields around Manapakkam, Moulivakkam, Irandamkattalai and Kovur, but all have turned into housing plots now.”

A few farmers refuse to give up their traditional occupation in merged areas even as apartments take over the region

Increase in minimum support price fails to enthuse paddy farmers

The paddy procurement rate in Tamil Nadu for 2015-16 marketing season is better than that of the Centre, but still falls short of expectations as there is no conformity to rising input costs, representatives of farmers’ associations in Erode district say.

The Centre has fixed Rs. 1,410 as procurement rate per quintal for common variety and Rs. 1,450 for Grade A, effecting an increase of 50 paise per kg in each category. The change will take effect from October.

Input costs

In Tamil Nadu, the Government has fixed Rs. 14.60 per kg for coarse variety and Rs. 15.20 for fine variety. Yet, the procurement rate has not

corresponded to the drastic rise in input costs, according to Subi Thalapati, representative of Thadapalli-Arakankottai Ayacut Farmers' Association.

Farmers in the region lament that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not kept the promise made to farmers in Coimbatore during the election campaign that he would implement Dr. Swaminathan Committee recommendation of fixing 'cost of production plus 50 per cent' as procurement rate for all agricultural produces within three months after the Government formation. While accepting to fulfil pay commission recommendations for salaried Government employees even with retrospective effect, the Governments have been treating farming community in an unjust manner. The Centre must at least accept to fix the rates for agricultural produce in accordance with the rising input costs, according to S. Kulandaivelu, secretary, Kalingarayan Pasana Vivasayigal Sangam.

The farmers complain that the Centre does not accept the minimum support prices recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices. Paddy cultivators are at the mercy of the Governments since the price in the open market is only around Rs. 12 per kg, Mr. Thalapati said, adding that the farmers face a problem since the Governments have the capacity to procure only 20 to 25 per cent of the produce.

There has been only marginal variation in the minimum support price over the last five years.

But, the cost of production has increased by more than 50 per cent. There is no respite to the struggle of farmers that began during the previous Congress regime at the Centre that withdrew subsidy on fertilizers. Besides paying through the nose for fertilizers, cultivators are also unable to find farm labourers. At present, men have to be paid Rs. 500 a day and women Rs. 250. It is simply impossible for small-scale farmers to carry out mechanised harvesting, the farmers say.

Green fingers sow seeds for an organic Onam



The Njattuvela festival organised at Thammanam on Monday drew a large gathering of people as Kochiites continue to respond enthusiastically to campaigns to spread the cultivation of organic vegetables.

The who's who of the organic campaign in the city were present at the occasion to encourage the local people, who came together despite the threat of heavy rains hanging over the city throughout the day.

A.R.S. Vadhyar, a pioneer in cultivation of vegetables on terraces, called on Kochiites to come out in strength to take up cultivation of vegetables for their own use.

Henry Surro, who was named the best organic farmer in the district recently, recalled how difficult it was for him initially to undertake his farming activities as organic farming is perceived as loss-making.

No to 'use-and-throw'

Principal of Thevara Sacred Heart College Prasant Payyappilly Palakkappilly, who has been in the forefront of green campaigns in Kochi, said city dwellers must come out against the 'use-and-throw' culture, which had resulted in waste heaps springing up everywhere in the city.

Former Vice-Chancellor of Kerala Agricultural University K.R. Vishwambharan said that tests on vegetables sold in the State had brought out alarming results and people needed to venture out to end consumption of poisonous vegetables.

The *Njattuvela* festival was organised as part of the Jaiva Jeevitham campaign initiated by the district unit of the CPI(M) for spreading organic vegetable cultivation.

P. Rajeev, former member of Rajya Sabha and district secretary of the CPI(M), who inaugurated the planting of vegetables on a small plot of land in Division 45 of the Kochi Corporation said the Jaiva Jeevitham campaign had resulted in substantial acreage coming under organic cultivation in the district.

He said though the present campaign was aimed at the Onam season, the efforts would continue. Each locality should be able to produce about five tonnes of vegetables for the Onam festival market, he said.

Tapping jackfruit's trade potential

Jackfruit remains under-exploited as a food crop in India, despite its huge potential, says C.P. Robert, programme coordinator of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra attached to Indian Council of Agricultural Research at Thelliyoor.

He said KVK was imparting technology training and sharing knowledge with stakeholders to explore the commercial potential of jackfruit.

He said KVK was planning to organise a buyer-seller interface on its Thelliyoor campus soon to showcase various jackfruit products and to facilitate interaction between buyers and entrepreneurs.

Technology

The technology developed for jackfruit products under the project shall also be made available to entrepreneurs, he said.

'The KVK Pathanamthitta's effort in promoting jackfruit as a fruit with immense commercial potential had paid off and people had started accepting its importance.

Demand for its raw as well as value-added products had gone up in the region, he said.

Dr. Robert said KVK had solved technological bottlenecks in the commercial production of value-added jackfruit products.

Dehydrated products from tender and raw jackfruit, and the seed could be a nutritional dietary supplement. The fruit is rich in potassium, calcium, and iron, he said.

Krishi Vigyan Kendra to organise a buyer-seller interface on its Thelliyoor campus to showcase the fruit's value-added products.

Promoting sustainable agriculture practices



A two-day *Njattuvela* festival, intended to promote organic farming and sustainable agricultural growth, organised by the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP), began at the Town Hall here on Monday.

The planting materials on sale include saplings of hybrid coconut trees; high-yielding varieties of mangoes; jackfruits; medicinal plants such as Veppu, Lakshmitharu, and Mullanchakka; saplings of spice varieties including pepper, nutmeg, and sarva sugandhi; besides plantlets of fruits such as rambuttan, mangosteen, and gooseberry among other things.

An agriculture clinic, where experts from the Agriculture Department clarify farm-related doubts of people, including those on plant diseases and treatment, was part of the programme. Assistant Agriculture Officer V.S. Fasil and field officer (retired) P.M. Valsalan led the clinic.

“Most of the people came with samples of leaves and other parts of the affected plants, so that we could easily find the diseases,” Mr. Fasil said.

Different products developed by the Parishad including the *Choodarapetti* (hot box) which saves a great deal of cooking gas, soap-making kit, and organic fertilizers are also on display at the festival. Different organic products of Niravu Vengeri, a progressive residential forum, is also available at the venue.

Leading a session on ‘Safe food through family farming’ as part of the event, P.K. Abdul Jabbar, Assistant Professor, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Ambalavayal emphasised the importance of developing and spreading energy-efficient and sustainable technologies for the farm sector. He said people should come forward to ensure the dissemination of locally available and indigenous varieties of seeds.

Scientist and people’s science movement leader K. Sreedharan inaugurated the festival.

An agriculture awareness session for school students, a quiz, and the staging of a dance drama programme titled *Indiayude Makal* (The daughter of India) were organised as part of the festival, which will end on Tuesday.

Provide farmers access to better marketing facilities: Sorake



‘Gap between departments and farmers leads to failure of schemes’

Vinay Kumar Sorake, Urban Development Minister, has said that it was necessary to provide better marketing facilities to farmers to sell their produce.

He was speaking on Monday after inaugurating the Udupi hobli-level agricultural campaign organised by the zilla panchayat and the agriculture and allied departments, here.

Mr. Sorake said the farmers suffered as they did not get good price for their produce. A mechanism for farmers to sell their produce was essential. It was also necessary to provide cold storage and food processing facilities for both agricultural and horticultural produce. “Besides fetching better price, such facilities would add value to the produce,” he said.

Deviating from farming

A large section of the population in both the districts still depends on agriculture, horticulture and dairy farming. However, agriculture and horticulture did not appeal to the younger generation. Even agriculture degree holders preferred white-collared jobs in the cities to ploughing their fields, he said.

Though both the Union and State governments had launched several programmes to give a fillip to agriculture, it had not had the desired impact. This was because of the gap between the government departments and the farmers.

“It is essential to encourage the farmers to take to mechanisation of agriculture and inform them about new techniques to improve the yield of their crops. The government departments should go to the doorsteps of the farmers,” he said.

‘Provide assistance’

The departments should also provide information about the diseases and the pests that could affect their crops and the measures that could be taken to prevent them. “Advance information about diseases and pests would go a long way in protecting the crop and thus benefit the farmers,” he said.

Water resources played an important role in helping the farmers. The district had a huge potential as far as water resources were concerned. This potential needed to be tapped, Mr. Sorake said. Since water and agriculture were inter-connected, the agriculture and watershed departments had been merged at the district and hobli-level for better coordination a few years ago, he pointed out.

Anthony Maria Immanuel, Joint Director of Agriculture, M. Hanumanthappa, Associate Director of Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station, and Jayalaxmi N. Hegde, Programme Coordinator of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, were among those present.

Mechanical planting to be taken up on 20,000 acres

A total of 20,000 acres of land will be brought under mechanical planting under the special 'kuruvai' package in the district during the current season. The Agriculture Department has started making special arrangements for implementing the package, and 262 acres of land have already been covered under the scheme.

The department would offer a subsidy of Rs. 5 crore to these farmers at the rate of Rs.2, 500 an acre. Arrangements have also been made for the supply of micro nutrient to 72,000 acres at the rate of Rs. 315 an acre.

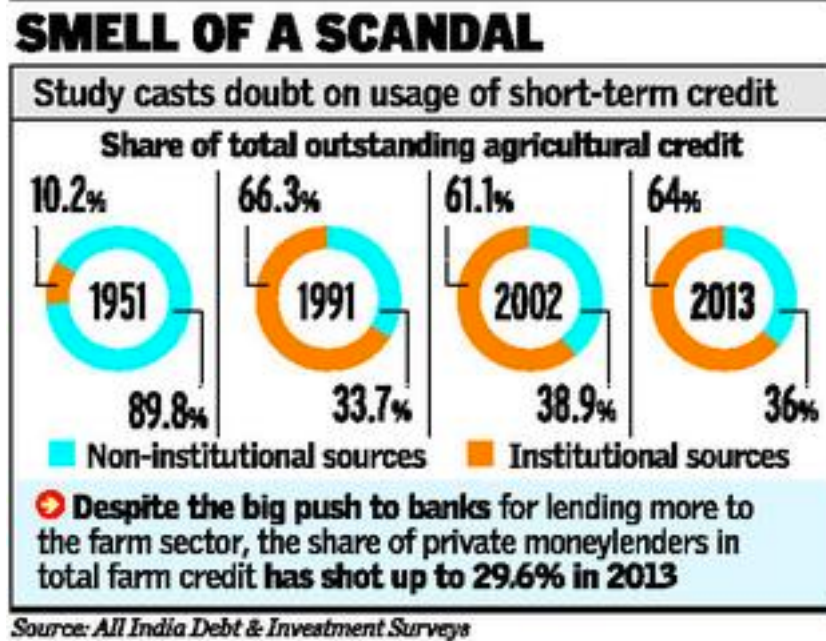
Free gypsum would be supplied to farmers to raise the crop on 15,000 acres for which a sum of Rs. 90 lakh has been allocated under the package.

The State government has sanctioned Rs.2.38 crore for ploughing and growing pulses in 14,000 acres of land where 'kuruvai' could not be raised in the Vennar belt due to the depletion of groundwater. A sum of Rs.70 lakh had been allocated for ploughing the fields at the rate of Rs. 500 an acre and Rs.1.68 crore for distribution of seeds. If pulses could not be raised, green manure could be cultivated on cluster basis in these villages.

S.Palanisamy, District Collector, said that 91.45 tonnes of seeds have been stocked at various godowns for being supplied to farmers.

Rs.2, 500 subsidy for each acre under kuruvai package

Think tank report hints at diversion of cheap farm loans



Pointing to a possible diversion of subsidised funds meant for farmers to non-agricultural uses, a research paper by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) has found that the crop loans extended in India are in fact close to exceeding the total expenditure on farm sector inputs.

In 2012-13, the aggregate short-term credit — provided primarily to finance the purchase of inputs — was as much as 99.97 per cent of the input cost, including compensation for hired labour. During the 1970s, 1980s and even till the 1990s, the aggregate short-term credit as a proportion of input costs in agriculture was in the range of 13-20 per cent.

“By itself, it does not look credible that the short-term credit market has reached a saturation point in the country... [it] casts further doubt on how much short-term credit is actually being absorbed in farm operations,” the paper by ICRIER Chair Professor Anwarul Hoda and Research Assistant Prerna Terway says.

A possible explanation for the apparent anomaly, it argues, could be diversion of funds resulting from the arbitrage opportunity created by the huge subsidy of 5 percentage points on short-term agricultural credit but adds that more research is needed to get at the truth.

Now, advanced equipment to boost grape production

From now on, farmers need not bother about pruning and can decide on the yield well in advance, as the Grapes Research Station at Anaimalaiyanpatti in Cumbum valley has got a microtome unit and stereo zoom microscope, an advanced equipment to identify cane maturity and formation of flowering in the buds, at a cost of Rs. 5 lakh.

This equipment would provide bud forecasting technique for grape growers, said Grapes Research Station Head S. Parthiban.

Two varieties of grapes – Muscat Hamburg or ‘Panneer Thraksha’, which is a black-seeded variety, and Thompson seedless, a green variety – had been ruling the State. Pruning was a very important practice in grapevine, which decided the yield and quality of the fruit. Usually pruning was done on 6-7th bud in Hamburg variety and 7-9th bud in Thompson seedless variety. Similarly, the number of fruiting bud might vary from one variety to another, he added.

Already, the Grapes Research Station had identified high-yielding varieties such as Red Globe, Medika, A 18-3, Sharad Seedless, Krishna Seedless, Nana Sahib Purple, Sonaka, 2 A Clone and Manik Chaman. Preliminary research results indicated that these varieties too could perform well under the conditions prevailing in the State. Some of these varieties were recommended to grape growers on the basis of suitability. Scope of exporting green and black seedless grapes to the Middle-East and European countries was tremendous, he added.

But farmers had to adopt viticulture practices in a scientific way in producing seedless grapes. Proper pruning was a must to get high yield and bud forecasting had to be done.

Microtome unit

To assist grape growers in pruning, the Grapes Research Station had bought the microtome unit for taking cross section of the buds and the stereo zoom microscope with image display unit for identifying cane maturity and formation of flowering primordia in the buds.

This bud forecasting techniques would be highly helpful in locating the exact number of buds for pruning in order to get higher yield. “We want to help farmers produce grapes fit for exports,” he added.

New harbour, a boon to fishermen of Nagapattinam area



The fishermen of Nagapattinam area will heave a sigh of relief once the construction of the fishing harbour at Keechankuppam near here is completed.

At present, the small old harbour, belonging to the Maritime Board, is being utilised for the purpose of landing and anchoring the boats. As the space is quite insufficient, the Fisheries Department took up the work on the sprawling space of Keechankuppam where the work is being executed at an estimate of Rs.45 crore under the World Bank-funded Emergency Tsunami Rehabilitation Package (ETRP) scheme.

The harbour, on the backwaters of the Kaduvaiaru, runs to a cumulative length of 750 metres -- 250 metres on the north and 500 metres on the south.

While the construction of the harbour on the northern side had been completed and boats are being anchored there, dredging on the southern side has been in progress, according to sources. As many as 750 boats can be anchored in this area, at the rate of a metre for each boat.

The fishing harbour would have a slew of infrastructure associated with fishing. It would have a state-of-the-art sheds for mending the fishing nets, washing the fish-crates, generator room and other essential services.

Road, street lights facilitating access to the harbour would be provided in course of time, the official said.

The construction of the harbour would bring about a great relief to not only the fishermen of the town but also the Maritime Board which has planned to utilise the space for this purpose. Although one of the contractors who had taken up the work was delaying the execution, the Fisheries Department had utilised the services of a dealer for marketing the produce.

A cross section of Nagapattinam fishermen point out that the harbour would facilitate not only easy landing but also proper maintenance of the boats.

N. Rajappa and S. Mahalingam said fishermen found it difficult to maintain their boats during the ban period due to inadequate space at the old fishing harbour.

They had to incur a huge expenditure for the transit of boats from the waters to the sand area. The modern harbour would be a big boon to them throughout the year, they said.

Milk cooperative society building opened

K. P. Ramalingam, MP, declared open the new premises of the Milk Producers Cooperative Society in Kalipatti village near here on Monday.

The building was constructed at an outlay of Rs. 6.90 lakh from the MP Local Area Development Fund.

Rangasamy, president of the Kalipatti Milk Producers Cooperative Society, Thirumalai, president of the Kalipatti Town Panchayat and others were present.

Workshop on life sciences

The School of Biosciences at the Mar Athanasios College for Advanced Studies (Macfast), in Thiruvalla will organise a lecture workshop on 'Recent trends in Life Sciences' at the college auditorium at Thukalasserry near Thiruvalla on Friday. The workshop will be organised in association with the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, and is meant for BSc and MSc students from streams of life sciences such as Botany, Zoology, Microbiology, Biochemistry, Biotechnology, etc. Those interested in attending the programme may contact the coordinator, Biju Dharmapalan,

Assistant Professor, School of Biosciences, Macfast, by email (biju@macfast.org) or over phone 9447121718.



Maharashtra: Blue Mormon declared ‘state butterfly’

Maharashtra is home to 225 varieties of butterflies and accounts for 15 per cent of the country’s estimated butterfly population.



Maharashtra has become the first state in country to have a ‘state butterfly’. It has accorded the status to Blue Mormon. The decision was taken Monday at a meeting of the Maharashtra State Wildlife Board.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis chaired the meeting that was also attended by Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar and Minister of State for Forest Ram Shinde.

The colourful butterflies add to the beauty of every garden. In our story books, we often come across the mention of butterflies. But it never got the same status as state’s special flower or fruits get,” said a senior minister.

Maharashtra is home to 225 varieties of butterflies and accounts for 15 per cent of the country’s estimated butterfly population. Butterfly academicians, research scholars and nature lovers had requested Mungantiwar to consider Blue Mormon for the status.

The Blue Mormon is the second largest in size among all butterflies, second only to the Southern Birdwing. It has velvet like black wings with bright blue spots. The lower end of the wings are black while the body has some red spots on one side. It is found only in Sri Lanka, Western Ghats of Maharashtra, and the coastal belts of India.



Kolkata to get nation's first fish hospital

A fish hospital — the first of its kind in the country — will become operational in Kolkata in two-three months. The hospital, with facilities to diagnose and treat ailments in fish commercially bred in the state, will help farmers increase their produce.

West Bengal was the country's largest fish producer till it was overtaken by Andhra Pradesh in 2011-12. Experts believe that the yield in Bengal can go up if healthier species are bred.

"The building has already been constructed and electrical work is in progress. Our aim will be to find out what ailments the fish bred in the state suffer from and help farmers increase the yield. While Bengal is one of the largest producers of fish in the country, things can certainly improve. The hospital is coming up at our campus in Panchasayar's Chakgaria in Kolkata," said Professor T J Abraham, professor (fishery microbiology) and principal investigator, department of aquatic animal health, faculty of fishery sciences, West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Services (WBUAFS).

The facility comprises 50 glass aquariums and 25 circular water tanks to house the fish. The expense of Rs 1.75 crore has been borne by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research under the ministry of agriculture. According to Abraham, the hospital will first diagnose and treat fish that are bred by farmers. At a later stage, efforts may be made to find out ailments that wild fish, caught along Bengal's coast, suffer from. A study conducted by Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) revealed that several species found in the wild, particularly marine varieties, have parasites in their intestines. This may affect their internal organs, reducing their growth and egg-laying capacity.

According to experts at WBUAFS, nearly 20% of the state's fish production is affected due to poor management practices. It is estimated that India's fish suffer from 60-65 diseases and nearly 10% of Bengal's fish is wasted due to this.

A study published in the International Journal of Bio-resource and Stress Management by four researchers, including two from WBUAFS, suggested that parasites are more prevalent in carps cultured in bheris of Bengal and around Kolkata as farmers use sewerage water. This comprises 99% water and 1% of other material, including pathogens like bacteria, virus and large parasites. These can cause primary and secondary infections and mortality in fish.

According to Abraham, farmers can approach the hospital whenever they suspect a problem with their fish. They can report abnormalities like change in colour or size. They can even bring in samples for diagnosis and treatment.

Do you really know what quinoa is?



Second only to maybe kale, quinoa is the health food star of our time.

The Food and Agriculture Organization named 2013 the International Year of Quinoa, after all. This tiny grain-like food is full of good-for-you nutrition

and tastes great in just about anything: salads, omelettes and even cakes.

We're willing to bet you've eaten a good deal of the stuff, but do you know what it really is? It's okay if you don't, because not many of us do. Today's the day we change that with a few fun facts and photos that tell us about where quinoa comes from.

Here are 8 important things everyone should know about quinoa

1. First, it's pronounced KEEN-wah. Let's just all get that straight.
2. The part of the quinoa plant that we eat is the seed -- it's not a grain. It grows from a plant in the goosefoot family, which also produces edibles such as chard and spinach. So although we treat it like a grain, it is not in fact a grain.
3. It's a complete protein -- meaning it contains all nine of the essential amino acids which cannot be made by the body and therefore must come from food. Quinoa is also naturally gluten-free, so it's perfect for healthy eaters. Bonus: This is great news for vegetarians looking to up their protein intake.
4. Cooked quinoa looks like it has a little curly "string" coming out of it. This is not something that should gross you out -- it's just the seed's germ.
5. There are hundreds of varieties of quinoa out there. The white, red and black are the most widely cultivated.
6. While we're just getting hip to this healthy seed, quinoa has long been a staple ingredient, dating back to pre-Columbian civilizations in the Andes of Peru and Bolivia.
7. Quinoa is one of the few crops that not only survives but thrives in harsh, unpredictable climates. After all, it originated in the Bolivian Altiplano, known to have over 200 frost days and severe droughts. While many countries are jumping on the quinoa train trying to ramp up production -- including the U.S. and Canada -- results have yet to be as good as Bolivia or Peru's quinoa.

8. Bolivia and Peru are at odds about quinoa farming practices. Bolivia used to dominate quinoa exports, but recently Peru has been climbing the scales.

Bolivian farmers are unhappy about the way Peruvian farmers are ramping up production, using factory farming practices and heavy amounts of pesticides while driving down the price of the crop.

By Julie R. Thompson

Sowing gathers pace as monsoon delivers ample rainfall



Farm workers plant saplings in a paddy field on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, on July 19, 2014. (Reuters photo)

Better-than-expected monsoon rains in the past two weeks have helped farmers in several parts of India sow cotton, pulses and oilseeds on time, but the country's weather office is still sticking to its forecast of a likely drought.

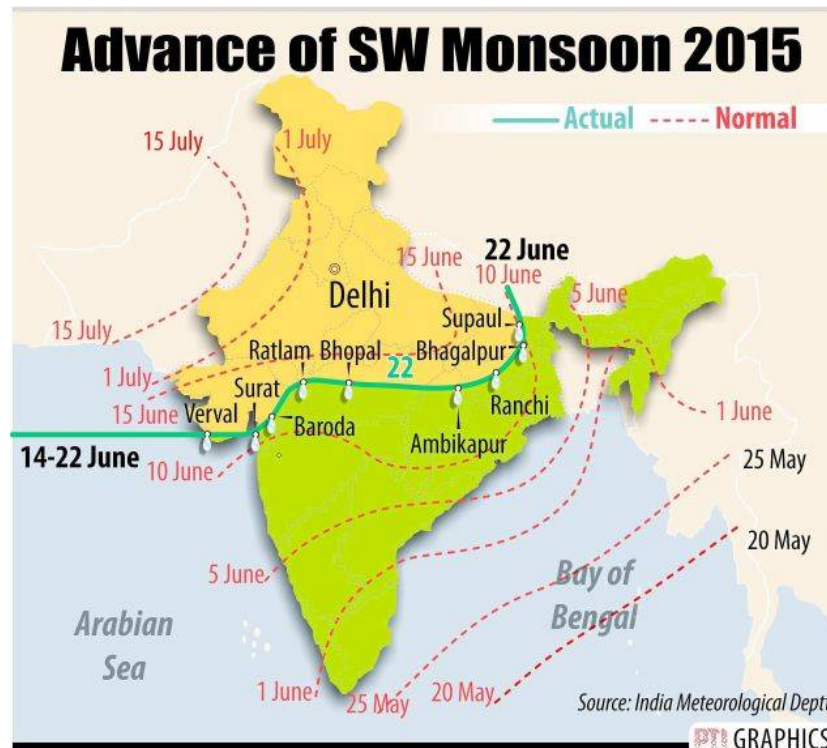
Although a delayed arrival of the monsoon had worried farmers, more than two-thirds of the country has now received normal or above-normal levels of rainfall so far this monsoon season, which starts on June 1.

Overall, rainfall was 16 per cent above normal as of Monday, helping fill up some reservoirs in a country where over half the farmland lacks irrigation systems.

"We were worried since everyone was talking about a drought," said Shivaji Pophale, busy planting cotton in his three-acre plot in the village of Hivra in central India. "Fortunately we have got enough rains to start sowing."

But Pophale is not celebrating yet, as the June-September rainy season has only started and things could change quickly. Agriculture accounts for just about 15 per cent of India's \$2 trillion economy, but three-fifths of its 1.25 billion people depend on it for their livelihood.

Officials at the India Meteorological Department (IMD) say the northern states will receive heavier monsoon rains this week but that current weather patterns still point to total rains of just 88 per cent of the long-term average, as predicted in early June, due to an El Nino weather pattern.



India received a similar level of rains last year but the government did not declare a drought as the monsoon picked up in the latter part of the season, underscoring its highly unpredictable nature, which keeps farmers on edge.

Skymet, India's only private weather forecaster, has rejected the IMD's prediction for 2015 and has forecast bountiful rains.

The recent downpour has helped rice farmers accelerate preparations for planting, which will lead to a greater area of rice cultivation this year, said BV Krishna Rao, managing director at Pattabhi Agro Foods, India's top non-basmati rice exporter.

Soybean cultivation has also been proceeding at full speed in key producing states Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, which could drive up national output by 10 per cent to over 10 million tonnes this year, said Pravin Lunkad, president of industry body the Solvent Extractors' Association of India.

Reflecting the sowing progress, soybean, cotton and chickpea futures inched down on Monday.

Higher output of soybean and pulses is good news for India, which spends billions of dollars importing the pulses and edible oil widely used in the country's cooking.

All sugar mills in state to be modernized

With a view to promote sugarcane farming, the Punjab government has decided to modernize all sugar mills in the state. The state government will also be clearing outstanding dues of Rs 200 crore. This was informed by S K Sandhu, financial commissioner (cooperation) and principal secretary, while interacting with farmers after participating in a seminar at Neelon Bridge on Monday.

Sandhu informed that the Punjab government has decided to make sugarcane as main crop for crop diversification in the state under which all sugar mills of the state are modernized.

He said that first and foremost, the capacity of sugar mills will be increased. The capacity of Bhogpur Sugar Mill has increased from 1,600 metric tonne to 3,000 metric tonne. The capacity of remaining sugar mills is also to be increased.

All sugar mills have been directed to distribute sugarcane seed to the farmers and they will start getting the seed from next two years. He said that for clearing outstanding payments, the Punjab government has kept a budget of

Rs 300 crore, out of which Rs 100 crore has already been issued while the remaining Rs 200 crore would be issued soon.

Sandhu urged the farmers to adopt drip irrigation for sugarcane farming and that the state government is giving a subsidy of 80-90%. "For the remaining 20% balance, the farmer can get easy loan from cooperative banks. For installing drip irrigation in one acre of land, an amount of Rs 60,000 is required," he said.

Haryana approves cane plan for sugar mills

With a view to ensuring sufficient sugarcane of good quality for crushing, the Haryana government has approved an intensive cane development plan of all 10 cooperative sugar mills for 2015-16. Disclosing this here on Monday, a spokesman of Haryana State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Mills said the target area under had been set at 83,800 hectares with 526 lakh quintals of estimated output.

He said according to an estimate, the availability of cane for crushing would be 355 lakh quintals. The target for sugar recovery was set at 9.50%, he said. At present, 10 cooperative sugar mills are in operation under the control of state sugar federation, he said, adding that another cooperative sugar mill was being operated by HAFED at Assandh.

He said for the next crop season, an intensive cane development plan for Rs 42.16 crore had been prepared, out of which Rs 5.70 crore would be borne by the sugar mills as subsidy and remaining Rs 36.46 crore would be made available to farmers as interest-free loan for arranging various inputs like seeds, fertilizers and agro-chemicals.

The production of sugar was 29.81 lakh quintals during 2014-15 as compared to 28.79 lakh quintals in 2013-14. Sugar mills had 91.52% capacity utilization last season as compared to 90.46% in 2013-14, he said. The cooperative sugar mills exported 8.07 crore units of power during 2014-15 as compared to 7.84 crore units in 2013-14.

Besides, power of value Rs 32.70 crore was exported by the sugar mills during 2014-15 as compared to Rs 31.75 crore during the previous year, he said. The Panipat Distillery has started production of ethanol and supplied

about 14.40 lakh litres ethanol, valued at Rs 7.24 crore. to Indian Oil Corporation Limited and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, he said.

Monsoon onset likely in 48 hours

There is good news for farmers who want to sow the Rabi crop. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Delhi on Monday said that conditions are favourable for the entry of the south-west monsoon in the state. The monsoon is likely to enter in the state from southern Rajasthan that includes Kota, Jhalawar and Baran and later a widespread monsoon activity would be witnessed from June 28 onwards.

"There is a possibility that the Kota, Jhalawar, Baran, Udaipur, Dungarpur and Pratapgarh may get moderate to heavy rainfall in the next 48 hours. Like every year, the monsoon will enter in the state from the southern part of the state," said an official with the Jaipur Met office.

On Monday, light to moderate rainfall was witnessed in Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Pratapgarh and Chittorgarh districts of the state. Other districts including Jodhpur and Barmer also witnessed moderate rainfall and provided relief from the prolonged heat conditions.

Jaipur Met office said that last year nearly 25 districts had received abnormal rainfall, five districts recorded normal rainfall and three districts received scanty rainfall. "The average rainfall of the state in 2014 was 530.08 mm," said an officer of IMD, Jaipur.

Deval received 120 mm of rainfall which was highest in the state and was followed by Dungarpur that received 110 mm, Sagwara and Dhambola received 60 mm and Rani received 50 mm. Many places in Udaipur, Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh districts of the state received a rainfall varying from 40 mm to 10 mm.

Jaipurities woke up to a warm morning as a maximum temperature of 30.0 degrees Celsius. It was followed by a sultry afternoon as a maximum temperature of 40.3 degrees Celsius accompanied with a relative humidity of 80 percent was recorded. Though dense cloud cover was seen in and around Jaipur, there was no rain till evening. However a few places including Kothputli, Dudu, Shahpura and Behror received mild to moderate rainfall.

Monsoon races to Kashmir from Kanyakumari: Equatorial system of clouds & conditions in Indian Ocean may back plentiful rains



The monsoon has already delivered 16 per cent excess rainfall since the start of the season on June 1, and is expected to remain strong at least until the end of the month.

Global climatic conditions have turbocharged the monsoon and given it the momentum to take it up to Kashmir in three to four days, a week ahead of schedule, and accelerate agricultural activity in the grain-bowl states of Punjab and Haryana on the way.

Rainfall in June is almost certain to be significantly more than normal, going by predictions of weather scientists from Australia to the US, giving a flying start to the four-month season that brings 75 per cent of the rainfall the country receives and fills up water reservoirs for irrigation and hydropower generation for a year.

The monsoon has already delivered 16 per cent excess rainfall since the start of the season on June 1, and is expected to remain strong at least until the end of the month. This should cheer the markets and calm fears of inflation, which had emerged as the monsoon made a sloppy start.



The floundering monsoon has been catalysed by an equatorial system of clouds and disturbances that traverses the globe. The system, called Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO), has strengthened rain-bearing clouds along its path and given the country 33 per cent surplus rain on Saturday and a drenching 88 per cent surplus on Sunday. "MJO is definitely influencing the southwest monsoon," said Laxman Singh Rathore, director-general of meteorology, India Meteorological Department.

The phenomenon has countered the expected negative fallout of El Nino, which disrupts rainfall in Asia and floods other continents due to a rise in the surface temperature in the Pacific Ocean. Unlike El Nino that lingers for a long time, MJO is a transient phenomenon. DS Pai, IMD's head of long-range forecasting, said MJO would weaken in the coming days and may return after some time. He said it typically recurs every 30-60 days.

The Climate Prediction Center in the US expects the phenomenon to strengthen the monsoon. "Dynamical models and MJO composites favour an enhancement of the South Asian Monsoon," it said in its forecast for the period up to June 23. For the following week, it said, "dynamical models support a continuation of enhanced South Asian Monsoon activity, excluding southern India". The Australian weather office also noted the impact of the MJO phenomenon. "MJO may also act to enhance South Asia Monsoon as it moves across the region," it said earlier this week.

Making good progress

In its current phase, the monsoon is making good progress. "Conditions are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into remaining parts of north Arabian sea, Gujarat state, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, entire Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, most parts of Madhya Pradesh and some parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi and Rajasthan during the next 3-4 days," the weather office says.

Meteorologists at the weather office also said the neutral Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) — a term that refers to differences in surface temperature in different parts of the Indian Ocean — was also strengthening the monsoon. "Parameters are quite close to being positive which generally makes for a good monsoon," said a meteorologist. IOD is an irregular oscillation of sea surface temperatures in which the western Indian Ocean becomes alternately warmer and then colder than the eastern part of the ocean. The monsoon season had given early jitters as rainfall was weak and crop planting lagged about 10 per cent behind last year.

Kerala hooks vannamei the first time



With the trial farming of vannamei shrimp culture in brackish waters proving to be a successful one, Kerala can now look forward to commercialising it.

The first of its kind harvest carried out by the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS) here has proved a success, achieving a better growth rate and 85 per cent survival of the species. KUFOS had started the trial farming of Vannamei shrimp in four ponds at its regional station in Puthuvypen in March. As part of this model farming system, 40,000 specific pathogen free (SPF) seeds of Vannamei shrimp were released into one pond in an area of 1,000 sq m.

After 94 days, a catch of 650 kg was harvested from one pond itself. The trial farming also proved that 5.5-6 tonnes of Vannamei could be produced from one hectare, earning a profit of Rs. 14 lakh. This newly-developed farming model is particularly suitable to the conditions of Pokkali rice fields.

Kerala Fisheries Minister K Babu, who participated in the harvest festival, said that the trial farming proved that this white leg shrimp can be cultured successfully in the State's brackish water ecosystem and the pilot culture would make it easier to usher in a 'Vannamei revolution' in the coming years. The newly-developed Vannamei shrimp farming model will be extended to other parts of the State, he said. According to fishery experts, States such as Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu took advantage of the introduction of Vannamei in their culture basket of shrimp more than six

years ago. However, Kerala was far behind even though the State emerged as a model in shrimp farming in the past.

B Madhusoodana Kurup, Vice-Chancellor, KUFOS, said that the University would extend the farming into more ponds and has plans to develop diversified farming practices of Vannamei shrimp by transferring the technology to more farmers.

Medium quality arrivals rob aroma off cardamom

Small cardamom prices declined last week at auctions as the material was of medium quality. Growers who are holding small stocks of cardamom from the previous crop were releasing them, trade sources claimed.

This, coupled with the initial new crop which is also of medium quality, has been keeping the prices at the current level.

Compared with the arrivals at this time of the previous season, the supply was substantially higher and that phenomenon also aided the price slip, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, told *BusinessLine*. Ranganathan, a dealer in Bodinayakannur, said the material arrived is of medium quality from the new crop.

Good quality capsules from the new crop are expected to start in early August, he said.

Export buying was slow. Availability of exportable grade capsules of 7mm and above was very thin. Exporters said to have bought an estimated 20 tonnes of cardamom last week.

Small dealers spread over the country were the buyers now. They were all covering small quantities. Therefore, what ever material arrived in the market every week is fully absorbed.

Last week arrivals stood at around 375 against 365 tonnes the previous week and 228 tonnes at this time of the season last year, market sources claimed.

At the Cardamom Planters' Association (CPA) auction held in Bodinayakannur today, a total of 16.5 tonnes cardamom arrived 16.3 tonnes were traded.

The maximum price was at Rs. 828 a kg and the auction average fell to Rs. 626.84 from Rs. 648 a kg last Monday. The individual auction average has declined and it was vacillating between Rs. 635 and Rs. 665 a kg. Total arrivals during the season up to June 20 stood at 20,729 tonnes against 20,999 tonnes during the same period last year.

The sales were at 20,152 tonnes and 20,265 tonnes respectively. The auction average as on June 20 was at around Rs. 650 (Rs. 730) a kg.

Prices of graded varieties (Rs. /kg): 8mm bold good colour 970-1,000; 7-8 mm 800-825; 6-7 mm 650-675; below 6 mm: 580-600.

Tea prices at Kochi sale lose steam on higher arrivals

Prices of several tea varieties at the Kochi auctions declined this week on increased arrivals. In sale no 25, the quantity on offer in CTC dust grades was 13,33,500 kg, showing an increase compared to last week. Others were irregular and lower by Rs. 2-4 a kg and sometimes more as the sale progressed.

Though there was a subdued demand from major tea companies, a better enquiry was noticed from exporters and upcountry buyers.

Of the 14,500 kg on offer in Orthodox varieties, the market was lower and witnessed some withdrawals. In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties fetched Rs. 90-130, mediums quoted Rs. 65-95 and plain grades stood at Rs. 57-65.

However, the demand was fair in leaf sales with 2,18,500 kg on offer in Orthodox category, which was up compared to last week arrivals. In CTC leaf, the market for good liquoring bolder broken remained barely steady. The quantity on offer was 77,000 kg.

Coffee output on the rise, set to beat 2014-15 record

Pre-monsoon showers brighten prospects; 2015-16 crop seen at 3.55 lakh tonnes

Growing Cuppa: Coffee Output		(in tonnes)
	Post Blossom	Final Estimate
	2015-16	2014-15
Arabica	1,10,300	98,000
Robusta	2,45,300	2,29,000
Total	3,55,600	3,27,000

Source: Coffee Board

The country's coffee output touched a record 3.27 lakh tonnes (lt) in the 2014-15 on favourable weather conditions despite the impact of white stem borer infestation, and is poised to increase further in 2015-16 starting October.

Aided by timely and widespread pre-monsoon showers, the crop size for 2015-16 is seen rising to about 3.55 lakh tonnes – a growth of 8.75 per cent over previous year – according to the Coffee Board's post-blossom forecast released on Monday.

The 2015-16 forecast comprised 1.10 lt of Arabicas, the mild and superior variety, that is seen rising 12.55 per cent or by 12,300 tonnes over 2014-15 final estimates, and 2.45 lt of Robusta, a growth of 7 per cent or 16,300 tonnes.

The post-blossom estimate for 2015-16 is higher by about 3.15 per cent over the similar initial forecast of 3.44 lt for 2014-15.

Rise in production

“Overall, the crops prospects of 2015-16 at post-blossom stage are quite encouraging with a promise of highest record crop thanks mainly to the timely and adequate blossom and backing showers in the traditional areas and non-traditional areas,” the Coffee Board said in a statement.

The main increase in production would be in Karnataka, the largest producer and to the tune of 23,270 tonnes, followed by non-traditional areas with 2,325 tonnes.

The post-blossom estimate for Karnataka for 2015-16 is pegged at 2.56

lt comprising 83,670 tonnes of Arabica and 1.72 lt of Robusta.

Production in all the three key districts – Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Hassan – is set to witness an increase with Arabicas projected to rise by around 12 per cent (8,915 tonnes) and Robustas by around 9 per cent (14,355 tonnes) over previous year. Besides the timely rains, the prevalence of good prices encouraged growers to adopt better husbandry practices which have helped to invigorate production, the Board said.

In Kodagu, the output is projected to grow by 15,955 tonnes or 13.07 per cent mainly driven by increase in Robusta, while in Chikmagalur the projected rise is around eight per cent or 6,170 tonnes.

State-wise break up

The forecast has pegged output in Kerala at 69,800 tonnes, up 3 per cent over previous year's final estimates of 67,700. The Kerala coffee zones also have received adequate and timely blossom and backing showers during this year and robustas have accounted for the increase.

In Tamil Nadu also, the blossom and backing showers were timely and adequate leading to good crop prospects this year.

The post-blossom forecast for this year is placed at 18,800 tonnes, an increase of 5 per cent over last year's final crop of 17,875 tonnes. In non-traditional areas of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa and North Eastern Region, the post-blossom forecast is placed at 10,500 tonnes as against previous final estimate of 8,195 tonnes.

The higher forecast has come mainly from Andhra Pradesh due to increase in bearing area in these states.

The 2014-15 final crop comprised of 98,000 tonnes of arabicas and 2.29 lakh tonnes of robusta.

The final output is marginally lower than the post-monsoon forecast for 2014-15 and was largely attributed to the decline in arabicas in Karnataka and the impact of damages caused by HudHud cyclone in Andhra Pradesh.

Soyabean in bear grip

Downtrend continued in soya oil and soyabean on sluggish demand and weak global cues with soya refined being quoted at ₹600-605/10 kg, while soya solvent ruled at ₹575-80. Soyabean prices in Indore mandis declined to ₹3,275-3,375 a quintal (down ₹200 from last week). Plant deliveries were at ₹3,425-50 (down ₹100 from last week) amid slack demand in soya oil. Soyameal prices in the domestic market were at ₹30,500-600 a quintal, while it was quoted at ₹31,500 on the port.

Record coffee output likely in 2015-16: Coffee Board



Coffee production in India is expected to touch a new peak of 3,55,600 tonnes this marketing year starting October, as the crop prospects are encouraging due to adequate rains in most growing states, state—run Coffee Board said today.

The country's total coffee output has reached a record 3,27,000 tonnes in the ongoing 2014—15 coffee year, though slightly lower than the earlier estimate of 3,31,000 tonnes made for the same period, it said in a statement.

The coffee year runs from October to September.

Releasing the initial production estimate for 2015—16, Coffee Board said: “The post blossom crop forecast for the year 2015—16 is placed at 3,55,600

tonnes. This is an increase of 28,600 tonnes over the final crop estimate of 2014—15.”

Of the total, Arabica production is estimated at 1,10,300 tonnes in 2015—16 as against 98,000 tonnes this year, while that of Robusta production is pegged at 2,45,300 tonnes as against 2,29,000 tonnes in the said period.

“Overall, the crop prospects of 2015—16 at post—blossom stage are quite encouraging with a promise of highest record crop thanks mainly to the timely and adequate blossom and backing showers in traditional areas and non—traditional areas,” it said in a statement.

According to the Board, much of the production gain is expected to come from Karnataka, where total coffee output is pegged at 2,56,500 tonnes in 2015—16, as against 2,33,230 tonnes in the current year.

“The main reason for increased crop forecast in the state is that all coffee growing areas have received timely and adequate blossom and backing showers during this year.

Additionally, prevalence of good prices encouraged the growers to adopt better husbandry practices which have helped to invigorate production,” it said.

The output in three coffee growing districts Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Hassan is estimated higher at 1,38,075 tonnes, 85,250 tonnes and 33,175 tonnes, respectively, for 2015—16.

Coffee production in Kerala is estimated to increase to 69,800 tonnes in 2015—16 from 67,700 tonnes this year, while the output in Tamil Nadu is likely to improve marginally to 18,800 tonnes from 17,875 tonnes in the said period.

In non—traditional areas, coffee production in Andhra Pradesh is estimated to increase to 9,700 tonnes from 7,425 tonnes, while the output in Odisha is expected to rise to 600 tonnes from 550 tonnes in the said period.

Coffee output in north eastern region is, however, expected to decline marginally to 200 tonnes in 2015—16 from 220 tonnes in 2014—15, the Board added.

Till last week, monsoon rains were 11 per cent more than the average. Monsoon rains are expected to be normal in June but may weaken in the next month, as per the Met department.

India accounts for only 4—5 per cent of the world's output, but exports 70—80 per cent of its produce. Italy, Russia and Germany are the top three buyers of Indian coffee.

Jain Irrigation sets up cooling units

Jain Irrigation has set up a quick freezing facility for processing fruits and vegetable at its plant in Jalgaon, Maharashtra. The freezing plant incorporates an individual quick frozen facility of 40 tonnes per day and block quick frozen unit of 16 tonnes per day. The frozen fruits and vegetable exported to the US, Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and West Asia is expected to earn a revenue of ₹100 crore annually, said the company in a statement. The individual quick facility is designed to handle about 60,000 tonnes of fruits such as mango, banana, pomegranate, papaya, jamun, strawberry and sapota.

Business Standard

Coffee output to hit new high

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Arabica and Robusta are the varieties of coffee.

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India accounts for only 4-5 per cent of the world's output, but exports 70-80 per cent of its produce. Italy, Russia and Germany are the top three buyers of Indian coffee.

Bleak monsoon: Centre may meet state representatives over food prices

Officials say the state governments will be told to keep a strict check on hoarding and black-marketing of food items



As concerns over the fate of southwest monsoon refuse to subside despite a bright start in June, the government is planning to call a meeting of all state food and civil supplies ministers to discuss rise in prices of food commodities to avert any sudden flare-up.

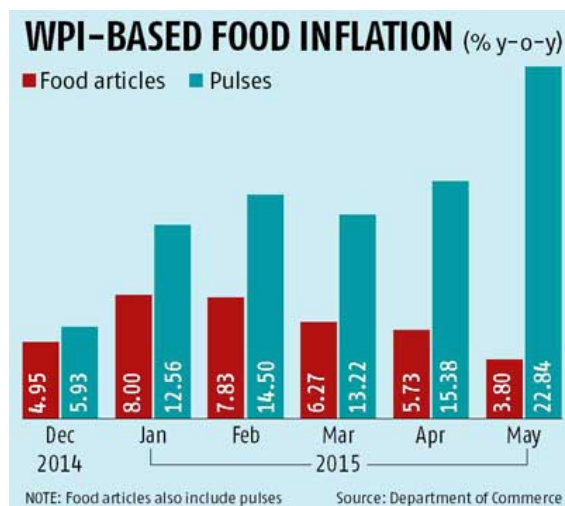
Officials in the know said in the meeting, which is expected to be held around July 7, the state governments will be told to keep a strict check on hoarding and black-marketing of food items and also initiate all possible measures to ensure that there is no stocking of items.

“The states will also be told to effectively utilise the newly created Price Stabilisation Fund (PSS) to ensure that prices of onions and potatoes do not show any artificial increase,” a senior official said.

The fund, with a corpus of Rs 500 crore, enabled states to intervene to ensure the price of onions and potatoes do not spike.

The months of July to October are usually the time when food items show a rising trend. Last year too during the same time, the Centre had held a meeting of the state food ministers to discuss the issue of price. The Centre had moved to make amendments to the Essential Commodities Act to make hoarding and black-marketing of food items a non-cognisable offence.

The amendments are currently being discussed, with the states as the implementation of the Act is within the purview of the states. The result has been that prices of most essential commodities, barring pulses, has remained more or less stable in the last one-year despite a bad monsoon and extensive damage to standing rabi crop in the unseasonal rains.



Food inflation on the basis of wholesale price index dropped from 4.95 per cent in December 2014 to 3.80 per cent in May 2015. However, in pulses, the same rose from 5.93 per cent to 22.84 per cent. The ministers of agriculture and finance, along with food, are likely to participate in the meeting.

Meanwhile, the southwest monsoon maintained its good run over most parts of India. The total cumulative rainfall this year starting from June 1 till June 22 is almost 22 per cent more than normal.

The surge has been primarily due to good showers in Central and Southern Peninsula in the last few days.

In the first 18 days of the June to September southwest monsoon season, the Central India has received 45 per cent more rainfall than normal, while South Peninsula has received 35 per cent more than normal rains. The rains have moved into North India and is expected to hit the national capital in the next two-three days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its latest weather update.

According to private weather forecasting agency, Skymet, the southwest monsoon is making a good progress and conditions are favourable for further advance.

"In a couple of days, it is likely to cover Gujarat, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, North India, including parts of Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and hilly states, including Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh," Skymet said.

However, the possibility of things going bad cannot be discounted. The Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) in an update said that there could large-scale reduction in rainfall during the first half of July.