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THE HINDU

Irrigation, organic farming take centre stage

Reinforcing his party's "deep commitment" to farmers, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Saturday flagged the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sinchai Yojna aimed at 'per drop more crop' and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojna (organic farming) as the two most important programmes in the farm sector to enhance productivity and production.

He announced an allocation of Rs. 5,300 crore for micro-irrigation, watershed development and the "sinchai yojna" and Rs. 300 crore for organic farming with a request to state governments to "chip in" for both.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recently launched the Soil Health Card Scheme from Suratgarh in Rajasthan. Recognising that agriculture incomes were under stress, Mr. Jaitley announced that a Unified National Agriculture Market would be set up to increase farmers' incomes with an "incidental" advantage of moderating increase in prices which has been the bane of many a government. "While farmers are no longer in the clutches of traders, his produce does not command the best national price," he observed.

The 14.34 per cent reduction over the revised estimates for 2014-15 has been officially explained as being offset by more funds to states for better implementation.

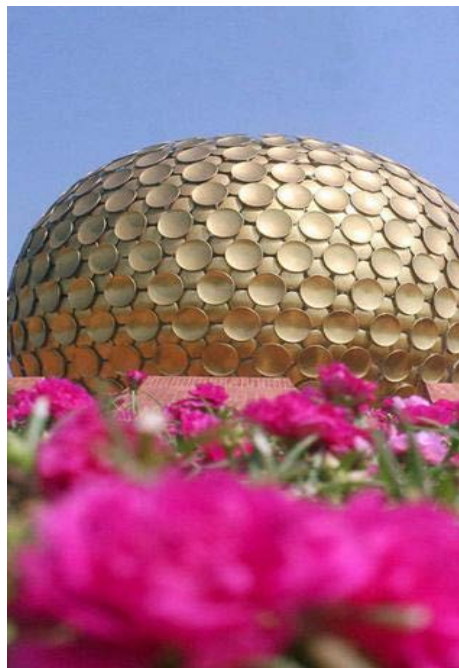
"Farm credit underpins the efforts of hardworking farmers," the Minister said raising the farm credit target by Rs. 50,000 crore to Rs. 8.5 lakh crore for 2015-16, which he expects banks to surpass.

At the same time to support the sector through effective and "hassle-free" agriculture credit with a special focus on small and marginal farmers, the Finance Minister allocated Rs. 25,000 crore to the corpus on small and marginal farmers.

However, funding for the UPA flagship programmes of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna has been reduced and the National Food Security Mission, Extension programme and crop insurance schemes have been ignored.

Former Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar did not seem impressed with the allocations to the farm sector but his successor Radha Mohan Singh said the budget has the stamp of Mr. Modi's "commitment" to agriculture. Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur whose home state got a post-graduate horticulture institute, was happy with the tax exemption to cold chains and cold storages. "Thus will give a huge boost to savings on wastage of perishables," she said.

Auroville in Chennai



"What is Auroville", a month-long festival celebrating Auroville's achievements in arts, culture, handicrafts, alternative technologies and a variety of innovative approaches to societal living, will be held across various locations in Chennai this month.

The festival intends to showcase Auroville in a nutshell, giving the participants a direct experience of the flavour and essence of what Auroville is and aims to provide a wide range of lively information and insights through its many events, cultural programmes, exhibitions, workshops, discussion forums and seminars.

There will be a lot of exposure on subjects such as afforestation, organic agriculture, educational research, holistic health care, small and medium-scale business, arts and craft and renewable energy. From March 1 to

April 17, several events will be held as a part of the festival across key locations in the city.

Some of the key highlights of the festival include — an international adult and children's choir held at the Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall on March 7, exhibition of works by 20 Aurovilian artists at Lalit Kala Akademi on March 8, a seminar and panel discussion about a 'Sustainable Future' at Music Academy on March 11 and a series of lectures about 'Auroville: A multicultural society for the development of human unity,' at Lalit Kala Akademi on March 16.

Budget should reflect farmers' sacrifices for capital: Naidu

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday described as historic the parting of 32,000 acres by farmers for the new capital under the Land Pooling Scheme and said their sacrifices should be reflected in the State's 2015-16 budget as also in the Governor's address to the joint session of legislature.

The Chief Minister held a review meeting with senior officials on the budgetary proposals and the draft report of the Governor's address.

He told the meeting that the welfare of farmers, SCs, STs, BCs, minorities, women and youth should be accorded priority in the budget. Similarly, agriculture and poverty eradication should get major attention.

Mr. Naidu wanted the budget to be realistic with proper allocations for growth engines. Government's commitment for comprehensive development of all 13 districts, particularly Rayalaseema region, should be highlighted.

The fact that the 14th Finance Commission mentioned that Andhra Pradesh would have deficit budget even after five years and the efforts made by the State government to get help from the Centre should also be incorporated in the budget.

He asked the officials to include the measures taken in the last eight months to overcome the challenges arising out of united Andhra Pradesh's bifurcation in the budget as also the Governor's address.

The highlights of the election manifesto, his promises and the implementation of various programmes and those proposed to be taken up next financial year should also to be incorporated.

Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Board Ch. Kutumba Rao, Skill Development Corporation Chairman Ghanta Subba Rao, Chief Secretary I.Y.R. Krishna Rao and other senior officials participated in the meeting.

The Budget Session of the AP Legislature would begin on March 7 with the customary address by Governor E S L Narasimhan to both the Houses.

Enhanced package, shortage of farm workers tilt the scales

Capital frenzy, government's compensation package and non-availability of agricultural labourers are apparently the factors that contributed largely to the smooth land pooling in the capital region. The Chief Minister, Ministers and Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) officials consider pooling as the first achievement in their effort to build a world-class capital. The State government has even claimed that land pooling was a "smooth sail" with more than 32,100 acre pooled within the stipulated time.

A cursory look at the land pooling and interaction with farmers hint at many factors, which could have been responsible for making it an easy exercise.

Amongst all, shortage of agricultural labourers seems to be major reason if views of farmers such as Tirupati Rao are to be considered.

And, of course, the package announced by the State government has enticed many farmers.

"It is difficult to find agricultural labourers now-a-days. Even if we are ready to pay Rs. 250 to Rs. 300 a day, the workers are not available. Farming has become a difficult proposition in these circumstances. So, most farmers have seen the land pooling a viable opportunity as it also assured future asset in the form of developed commercial land," says Tirupati Rao of Nelapadu .

Rambabu, farmer from Thullur, says he has leased out his six-acre land to tenant farmers primarily owing to lack of work force. "The package offered by the government is better than leasing out or holding the land for progeny. As a matter of fact, cost of our land appreciated more than 10 times after the announcement of capital here. We are certainly the beneficiaries," he said.

In some cases, the socio-economic factors have delayed the process of pooling. But, such issues were ironed out with additional packages. “Jareebu farmers (irrigated land farmers) consider themselves better off compared to dry land farmers. So, they didn’t show any interest in package announced initially. But, there was a complete tilt after additional package was announced,” said CRDA Commissioner N. Srikant.

Tuberose cultivation picking up



Tuberose cultivation is picking up in Tiruchi district — thanks to the promotion by Horticulture Department by giving subsidies. At present, the crop has been raised on 125 hectares of land in the district. Horticulture department has been giving a subsidy of Rs. 37,500 an hectare for meeting cultivation expenses. Apart from this, subsidy was given for putting shade net and drip irrigation.

S. Sadasivam of Thimmanayakkanpudur in Thottiyam block has raised tuberose on 1,000 sq mt. area under shade net. The plants are four months old and started flowering. He plans to harvest 5 to 10 kg of flowers a day when the crop is in full bloom.

Price varies from Rs. 50 to Rs. 400 a kg depending upon the season. Tuberose was mainly used for making garlands.

“Horticulture Department gave me a subsidy of Rs. 37,500. Total cost of cultivation came to around Rs. 75,000. The department has given Rs. 3 lakh for putting up shade net,” said Mr. Sadasivam. Tuberose cultivation had been taken up by farmers in Thuraiyur, Uppiliapuram, parts of Manapparai, Vaiyampatti, Lalgudi, and Musiri, said P. Ravichandran, Assistant Director of Horticulture.

Jasmine and Ixora are cultivated in the district on 500 hectares of land. For Ixora, a subsidy of Rs. 10,000 a hectare was given, said Mr. Ravichandran.

To encourage farmers who cultivate flowers, flower seeds, grafted plants, and saplings were given on 50 per cent subsidy.

To promote organic farming, 50 per cent back end subsidy was given to farmers who produce vermin compost.

Fifty per cent back end subsidy was given for farmers who put shade nets and green houses.

Govt. has given top priority to irrigation: CM

The State government has given top priority to completing pending irrigation projects, including the Upper Bhadra Project, and it has arranged funds for the purpose, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has said.

Speaking after inaugurating Kunchitiga convention organised to mark the silver jubilee celebrations of Vijayaraya Sangameshwar Jayanti at Hosadurga taluk here on Sunday, he said that the irrigation projects in the State were delayed owing to the negligent attitude of the previous government.

If the previous government had given importance to these projects and released funds, they would have been completed now.

The total cost of the Upper Bhadra Project was Rs. 12,340 crore and the government had spent Rs. 1,100 crore so far. “The remaining amount will be released in the coming years and we also hope to get financial assistance from the Union government,” he added. “Once the project is completed, farmers will get irrigation facility. The price of land will also increase considerably. Farmers should not sell their land as the prices are going to double in the next few years,” Mr. Siddaramaiah said. He said that the State could experience overall growth when people from all communities were given equal opportunities.

Muthalamada filled with scent of mangoes



Mango orchards spread in 45,000 hectares of land in this grama panchayat sharing borders with Tamil Nadu is bustling with activity this week with popular varieties of the fruit beginning to ripen.

Muthalamada is the biggest centre of mango production in the country and the fruit varieties are the first to reach global markets much before the mangoes mature in the gardens of the competitors, chiefly Peru and Venezuela.

Mango export alone is worth Rs.200 crore a season in this otherwise sleepy region of Palakkad. The recent decision of the European Union (EU) to lift a ban on Indian mangoes, which went on for seven months, has come as a major relief for the mango growers of Muthalamada and many have had bumper harvests, too, this time.

“Exporters have already started flocking to our villages. The yield is high this time, compared to previous years. Among the mango hubs in the country, harvesting begins in Muthalamada first, by February end every year, and the season continues till the end of July,” Mohan Kumar, general secretary of Muthalamada Mango Merchants Association, says.

Quality control

In the orchards, temporary workers are seen plucking mangoes as per their class meant for exports under the strict watch of contractors. Numerous trucks rush in and out of the orchards carrying farm-fresh mangoes to wholesale markets. Strict quality control is in place for mangoes meant for export to the Gulf and European countries.

In the face of allegations that the orchards use heavy doses of pesticides, many have come up this time with organically cultivated mangoes with a high price tag.

According to environmentalist S. Guruvayurappan, also a resident, Muthalamada produces almost all the best and most sought-after varieties of mangoes in India — Alphonso, Neelam, Mallika, Malgova,

Chenthooram, etc. — and they all have overwhelming demand in the international market. Muthalamada mangoes are also well-known for their flavour, taste, and juiciness.

P.K. Haneefa, secretary of the Mango Farmers Association, says the panchayat has over 600 contractors, 36 registered exporters, and 20 mango-parking facilities and they altogether provide jobs to a minimum of 15,000 people in a season as fruit pluckers, sorters, and packers. A number of mango lovers from areas around Palakkad are also visiting Muthalamada now to buy their preferred varieties directly from the farms.

White arecanut prices go up to Rs. 255 per kg



Prices of white arecanut, harvested during 2014-15, has gone up by 63 per cent compared to the prices during the corresponding period last season.

White arecanut harvested, from November to March and released to the market immediately, is called 'hosa adike' (fresh arrival) and it currently fetches Rs. 255 per kg compared to the Rs. 156 per kg during last season. Ramesh Kainthaje, an areca nut grower and observer of the arecanut market, said that the prices of 'hosa adike' posted a 27 per cent jump within the last two months. Market trends indicate that prices are likely to go up, he added.

Sources in the Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative Ltd. said that farmers in Sirsi (Uttara Kannada) and Sagar (Shivamogga) areas did not have white arecanut this year. Instead they went for red arecanut.

Hence there is a shortage of white arecanut in the market which is pushing the demand up. In addition, there was shortage of old stocks of white arecanut which has also resulted in the escalation in prices.

Old stocks command Rs. 315 per kg in the market and currently bulk purchasers prefer fresh arrivals which cost about Rs. 60 less per kg.

Last year, the prices of 'hosa adike' reached a peak of about Rs. 315 per kg in July, 2014. It dropped to Rs. 230 per kg and it has picked up since December, 2014. Now growers are hoping that 'hosa adike' prices might reach Rs. 300 per kg before July, Mr. Kainthaje said.

When tender arecanut is harvested, immersed in natural colours from the peels of tender arecanut and dried, it becomes red areca nut. If the tender arecanut is allowed to mature and then harvested, it becomes white arecanut.

Mr. Kainthaje, who was also a member of the G.V. Joshi Committee on Production Cost of Arecanut, said that white arecanut prices have been maintaining an upward trend for the past four years. 'Hosa adike' prices stood between Rs. 65 to Rs. 70 per kg in the beginning of 2011, he said.

Construct an eco-friendly capital: Swami Agnivesh

Social activist Swami Agnivesh said that the spirited movement launched by farmers against pooling of their fertile lands could become a testing ground for nationwide movement against forceful land acquisition.

Speaking to *The Hindu* here, he said, "It is a strange coincidence that at a time when a raging public debate is going on over the ordinances passed on the Land Acquisition Act 2013, farmers in river front villages are waging a spirited fight to retain their fertile lands, livelihood and dignity."

He said that the ordinance brought out by the NDA government already attracted widespread criticism from upper class farmers in north India, who have voted overwhelmingly for Mr Narendra Modi.

"The ordinance is triggering a mass movement similar to resistance seen against the Rowlatt Act during the days of British Raj. Jats in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are up in arms against the NDA government," Swami Agnivesh said.

Slamming the A.P government for deciding to pool in large tracts of fertile lands for construction of capital, he said farm hands used to intense agricultural activity would be left with no alternative than to take their own lives. "Forceful displacement of labourers may trigger mass suicides," he warned.

Swami Agnivesh had a piece of advice for Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu too and asked him not to insist on a 'dream' capital and instead focus on building an eco-friendly capital.

"Phrases like 'dream capital,' may appear to be glamorous but in the end they don't serve you politically," he said.

'Focus should be on agricultural infrastructure'

The Union Budget 2015 has evoked mixed public reactions in Erode district. While welcoming long-term growth measures, industry representatives, however, felt, there was nothing for the small-scale industries to cheer about.

Farmers lamented that agriculture sector continues to be neglected with less than three per cent allocation.

Farmers say that simply increasing allocation for agricultural loans would not suffice. In fact, increase in quantum of loans would only indebt the farmers more and drive them to suicides. Instead, there must be more spending on infrastructure and marketing support. The Centre has failed to realise that right returns is what the farmers look for rather than sops, C. Nallasamy, Secretary, Federation of Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, said.

The SSI sector is disappointed since its demands pleas to increase ceiling for excise duty for SSI from Rs. 1.5 crore turnover to Rs. 5 crore has not been addressed. At a time when the Centre was expected to reduce Service Tax, it has been increased. Hike in excise duty from eight per cent to 12.5 per cent was also unexpected, though reduction of Corporate tax from 30 per cent to 25 per cent was welcome, N. Sivanesan, President, Federation of All Trade and Industries Associations, Erode, said.

For the salaried class, however, the budget was a let-down since the tax slab rates have been retained. Linking of tax exemptions to investments in Clean India Campaign and Pension Fund has not evoked unanimous appreciation. The budget is disappointing since the common public ultimately suffer on account of higher VAT, C.S. Gowthaman, a silver trader, said.

Free power for agriculture

Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has said the government will bear the electricity charge for farm purposes up to two hectares of land.

Inaugurating the diamond jubilee of the Katappana Cooperative Society here on Saturday, Mr. Chandy said the decision would help in enhancing the agriculture production and saving farmers from the financial burden. He also inaugurated the newly constructed block of the Community Health Centre at Irupathekkar, near here. – A Correspondent

Water supply in drought-prone areas

The district administration has made all arrangements to meet the anticipated drought situation, as many parts of the district are expected to experience acute shortage of drinking water by mid-March.

District Collector P. Bala Kiran informed the district development committee meeting here on February 28 that all necessary arrangements were made to ensure drinking water supply in places that are likely to face drinking water scarcity in the district.

In addition to 155 water kiosks established last year to supply water in drought-prone areas, 200 more such kiosks will be purchased this summer.



‘Investors to enjoy bull run in fixed income, equity markets’

The Budget is credible as estimates are realistic. Tax revenue growth at 16 per cent, spectrum auction receipts at Rs 420 billion looks conservative. Subsidies are provided in full without rolling over to next year. While fiscal deficit reduction of 20 basis point might look little lower, it is on the back of 55 per cent higher allocation to states. The combined deficit of the Centre and the states should be lower than last year. The Budget is envisaging one country one market through roll out of GST and National Market for Agriculture products.

Economy will move on higher growth path as budget has increased capex by 25 per cent to Rs 2.4 trillion. Stringent laws against benami assets and

black money if executed well, will improve tax collections. How much the government can encourage trade and commerce in doing business will determine the growth path of economy.

Debt market will view the Budget positively as revenue deficit at 2.8 per cent and net borrowing program at Rs 4.56 lakh crore is as per market expectations. Fiscal deficit target of 3 per cent by FY18 will give confidence to the market.

The RBI will watch inflation before taking a call on policy rate cuts. It is likely that they will move slower than expected by the market. Setting up of Public Debt Office and mandating RBI to target inflation are supportive in the long term for lower interest rates.

Investors would like to check out plug-and-play approach on UMPP power and other infrastructure projects as execution risk will be reduced significantly with prior approvals. The Budget is smartly leveraging National Investment and Infrastructure Fund to make more money available for infrastructure development. Reversal in inverted duty structure on some of the commodities will help Indian manufacturing sector. Setting up of refinancing facility for micro sector and development of e-platform for bill discounting for SME sector can reduce interest cost for MSME sector. Monetisation of domestic gold through gold bonds and gold lending can free up substantial savings. Care should be taken on features for immediate acceptance by Investors. Financial savings will be encouraged by additional incentive for contributions to New Pension Scheme. The government should also extend similar benefit to retirement products by mutual funds. Introduction of Bankruptcy Code if on Chapter 11 mode will take stress out of the stressed assets through faster resolution.

Equity markets are trading at fair value despite below expectation earnings in 3 Q FY 15. Higher capacity utilisation, lower commodity prices, improved working capital cycle, lower interest rates and lower tax rates will accelerate earnings growth over next 8 quarters. If the global situation supports India than multiyear bull run in equity markets will surprise on the upside. Our peer group is busy doing self-goals. Russia is avoidable due to lower oil prices and political situation. China is facing

slower growth despite pumping huge credit. Brazil is in recession due to the populist policies of the past creating macro imbalances.

Silence on the farm



The Union budget is largely about the intentions and policies of the government of the day, as well as the arithmetic of resource mobilisation and allocation to achieve certain ends in the economy. The diagnostics of various economic problems and their probable solutions are generally found in the Economic Survey.

The Economic Survey clearly indicates that growth in agri-GDP in FY15 has collapsed to just 1.1 per cent, while the overall GDP is likely to grow at 7.5 per cent. In fact, for the first three years of the 12th Five Year Plan, the average rate of growth in agri-GDP is a meagre 2 per cent, half of the target set for the plan, and also half of what was achieved during the 11th Plan (4.1 per cent). If this is the reality of the sector that engages almost half of India's workforce, it does not auger well for us, politically or economically.

There has to be a major shake-up in policies and allocations if agriculture is to be brought back into shape. Just as a person suffering from swine flu cannot be cured by just gargling, marginal changes in allocations cannot cure agriculture of its deep-rooted problems.

The Economic Survey also gives potential solutions. It says, "Agriculture and food sectors need huge investment in research, education, extension, irrigation, fertilisers, and laboratories to test soil, water, and commodities, and warehousing and cold storage. Rationalisation of subsidies and better targeting of subsidies would generate part of the resources for public investment..."

Recommendations of the Shanta Kumar Committee provide useful suggestions for the future roadmap of food policy. Every effort should be made to bring states on board for creating a national common market for agricultural commodities”. So, the government knows the solution, but has the finance minister carried this through in his budget?

The finance minister admitted that farm incomes are under stress, and that is one of the five key challenges identified by him. His strategy to improve this situation is to allocate Rs 5,300 crore for the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sinchai Yojana, to achieve “per drop more crop”, a slogan used by the prime minister. But his major reliance is on the credit system for farmers and the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) under NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development). These schemes have been in existence for long. The new allocations are not earth-shaking and cannot resurrect a sagging agriculture. Also, it is not spelt out how a common market for agriculture will come about, although it is urgently needed.

Mango seed from Tipu’s era, rice variety that controls blood pressure

A variety of mango seed dating back to the time of Tipu Sultan, rice variety that is said to help control blood pressure, and varieties of seeds of foodgrains more than a century old — these are on display at the 5th National Organic Farming Convention that started Saturday.

The three-day event is being held at National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTTR) and Chandigarh College of Engineering and Technology, Sector 26. A few varieties of seeds for vegetables are also on sale.

Some farmers have with them varieties of paddy seeds that they say are salt-tolerant, drought-tolerant and flood-tolerant.

Black rice and red rice are the other kinds of paddy available.

Mahesh, a farmer from Chhattisgarh, has preserved 425 indigenous varieties of paddy. There are some varieties, he says, can control blood pressure.

Most of the varieties date back 100 to 150 years, he adds.

“We grow the varieties on 150 to 200 acres of land. If these are not sown, the seeds will get destroyed. We also distribute the seeds of different varieties in the villages. The other farmers are encouraged to distribute these further. This way the indigenous varieties would be preserved,” says Mahesh.

One of the traditional practices in agriculture was exchange of seeds between farmers. As hybrids started being used, seeds had to be purchased from companies. Some farmers are now reverting to the old practice of preserving indigenous seeds and distributing these among fellow farmers.

The seed savers network of India has to its credit preservation of hundreds of varieties of paddy, wheat, kidney beans, etc.

Dr Usha, who is associated with an organisation, Thanal, that is involved with preservation of indigenous seed varieties, says that in India traditionally around one lakh varieties of paddy were available. However, now the numbers are just a few thousand. She says there are varieties of paddy that are beneficial for expectant mothers, others for children.

Jaiprakash Singh, a farmer from Benaras who has studied till Class 9 and has developed 140 varieties of wheat, says: “I have been working in the field since 1990. Some of the wheat varieties I have developed contain 12 per cent iron. I am distributing these free of cost to the farmers. These do not require chemical fertilisers and some even require less water,” he says.

A Kerala stall stands out

Among all the stalls with varieties of rice, wheat and medical seeds, George Anthony’s stall stands out. It has on display air potatoes, daily bingal and elephant tusk lady’s finger — grown organically on Anthony’s Vakkachan Organic Seed Farm of Kerala. The names signify the way these common vegetables are grown. Air potato, instead of growing underground, grows on climbers, while the daily bingal can be plucked every day as it grows daily.

The stalwarts of organic farming

It was a challenge to convert a piece of barren land into a cultivable one that started the journey in the field of organic farming for Sabarmatee, a farmer and seed conservator from Odisha. For the past 25 years, she has been working for the promotion of organic farming and has preserved around 452 indigenous varieties of paddy.

Sabarmatee is among the participants at the 5th National Organic Farming Convention that started on Saturday. The convention has been organised by Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI), National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training (NITTTR), Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) and Kheti Virasat Mission (KVM).

Sabarmatee, who runs an organisation called Sambhav, said, "Sambhav means possible. When we decided to cultivate a barren piece of land, some elders said that it would not be possible. I believed it would be and hence, the name of the organisation," she said.

Sabarmatee said that there are two accusations against indigenous variety of seeds. The first that these are low-yielding, and another that lodging happens. She stressed that commercial and political interests act as a hindrance to the promotion of organic farming.

Sabarmatee said that if every person can adopt an indigenous variety, then seeds would be preserved. She, however, rued that agriculture implements are made keeping in view men.

Kavitha Kuruganti, Convenor, ASHA, has been instrumental in promoting organic farming. ASHA has a network of volunteers across the country who are actively involved with farmers. Kuruganti opined that organic farming is not a choice, but an imperative.

She said that with the advent of motorised vehicles, efforts are now being made for women to reconnect with their traditions.

Padma Bhushan Inderjeet Kaur, the president of All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, narrated her story of how the society started getting involved with organic farming. She said the society provides artificial limbs to the physically challenged. "There was an instance when a

woman gave birth to a child without legs. We felt that there was a need to bring about changes in the way we grow our crops. A model farm was developed by the society where crops are grown organically,” she said.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agriculture department reviews food grain production

MADURAI: As the harvesting season progresses, agriculture department officials from southern districts took stock of the situation at a review meeting held at Agricultural College and Research Institute (AC & RI) on Saturday. M Rajendran, director of agriculture, presided over the meeting attended by officials from Madurai, Theni, Virudhunagar, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram and Dindigul districts.

The department has fixed a target of 145 lakh metric tonnes of grain production this year. At present, production has touched 120 lakh metric tonnes and the department is optimistic that they will achieve the target as agricultural season ends by April.

The state had won the Krishi Karman award from the central government in 2011-12 for a total production of 101.52 metric tonnes and another award in 2013-14 for producing 5.08 metric tonnes of pulses, department sources said. The award on pulses was received on February 19.

Addressing the media, M Rajendran said the state had bagged the Krishi Karman award for the first time for the production of pulses and had received Rs 2 crore as cash award. This money will be used for development work in agriculture, he said. The total target has been fixed at 145 lakh metric tonnes, with 92 lakh metric tonnes of paddy, 45 lakh metric tonnes of millets and rest from pulses.

The meeting aims to review the steps taken by local officials to sensitise farmers on utilising modern technology to achieve better results thereby contributing to the annual target, he said. The department is promoting bio-fertilisers, liquid bio-fertilisers and farm mechanization, especially mechanised planting in the fields. There are adequate planting machines

to cater to farmers and agricultural engineering department also hires machines from private operators for the farming community, he added.

Land under cultivation is shrinking every year and the department is giving a lot of thrust on harnessing technology to increase food production. Besides, around 25% of farmers are showing interest to turn towards organic farming practices, officials said.

NABARD wants state to improve loan recovery

BHOPAL: National bank for agriculture and rural development (NABARD) urged the state government to "improve" recovery of loans provided at 0% interest to farmers in the Madhya Pradesh.

State government plans to disburse Rs 25,000 crore to farmers at 0% interest till 2017-18, when the next assembly elections will be due in Madhya Pradesh.

During his two-day visit to Bhopal, chairman of the bank, Harsh Kumar Bhanwala had a series of meetings with chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and senior government officials on February 26 and 27. He also visited some rural areas and appreciated agriculture growth of the state.

Addressing a press conference, however, he admitted "recovery was poor" in many cooperative banks and they became defaulters.

When asked whether there is too much politicization of cooperative banks in the state, he sounded philosophical and said, "politics is part of democracy and loans at 0% are being given by many other states including Tamil Nadu and Gujarat."

"But recovery should also be done," he said.

RN Kulkarni, general manager of NABARD accompanying him admitted, "Some banks in northern Madhya Pradesh became defaulters because of poor recovery."

Bhanwala said bank has provided Rs 250 crore more loan under rural infrastructure development fund (RIDF). Last year the loan sanctioned in

state under RIDF was under Rs 1,500 crore and this year Rs 1,925 crore have been sanctioned.

He said there is a lot of scope in dairy development and horticulture in Madhya Pradesh and state should pay attention to orange farming.

Students create natural dye out of almond leaves

MADURAI: Students in the apparel and design fashion technology department of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) are projecting almond leaves as potential sources for natural dyes.

The produce from these leaves, which have a great staining capacity, is being tried on cotton fabrics as a more eco-friendly replacement to chemical dyes.

The project was recently exhibited at the Vivasaya Thiruvizha (agricultural festival). The students explained that a component called phenol gave almond leaves a staining capacity, and they were making use of this property to propose a much more safer and eco-friendly dyeing substance.

The colour of the dye depends on the amount of phenyl present in the leaves, they said.

Colours are fixed on the fabric with the help of a 'mordent'.

Most fabrics have chemical substances as mordants, which could prove hazardous to health. However, the students are using natural mordants like alum and ferrous sulfate. Currently, they are trying out the dyes on cushion covers and handbags.

T Padmini, professor of Textile Department, TNAU, said, "Many of these dye products are also used in dyeing fabrics like Bandhani sarees or salwars. It is called the tie-dye process, wherein the fabric is tied at various ends to leave the color on the fabric. Our idea is to try eco-friendly ways to use farm resources."

Professors from the home science department in the university said they

were planning to introduce the product in the market after related tests were conducted.

"Publishing the product in the market involves a lengthy process, since various tests need to be conducted to understand the fastness of the dye. Thereafter, dye manufacturers will be enlightened on how it is produced," Padmini added.

The students explained that a component called phenol gave almond leaves a staining capacity, and they were making use of this property to propose a much more safer and eco-friendly dyeing substance.

THE HINDU Business Line

NBFC-bank parity will boost farm credit availability

The proposal to treat non-banking finance companies (of above Rs. 500 crore) on a par with banks and financial institutions for the purpose of recovery of debts and applicability of the SARFAESI (Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest) Act is a welcome and positive step for NBFC companies.

The focus on farm credit is clearly visible as the government has set a target of Rs. 8.5 lakh crore under this segment which reflects the need and opportunity for loan against agricultural products.

Not only banks but NBFCs too will be able to contribute towards wider availability of agriculture credit.

The fund allocation to Nabard will help in further increasing the support to the agriculture sector, where NBFCs can play a vital role.

The writer is CEO, Kissandhan Agri Financial Services Pvt Ltd

‘Scientific agri practices needed’

This Budget is for long-term growth and fiscal consolidation. The Finance Minister has focused on farmers’ development and of raising farm productivity and production.

He has also proposed to support Agriculture Ministry's organic farming scheme, "Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojan", and recommended hassle-free agriculture credit to small and marginal farmers. All this will be beneficial for our economy and will ensure growth and development of the country.

He has also focused on challenges faced by the agriculture industry. To augment this, the industry should focus on establishing scientific agri practices and ensure that best processes are built in post harvest agri logistics.

The need of the hour is to operate warehouses agnostic of infrastructure and weather pattern across any kind of agriculture crop. Industry players should now focus on recognising and adapting scientific practices which will help in a long run, just as SLCM has been practising since inception.

Focus on agri-biotech desirable

Ram Kaundinya:

"The interim budget in 2014 had a very modest increase in financial outlay for the agri-biotechnology sector. With regard to the Budget 2015, widely expected to be a landmark budget, we were looking forward to seeing more stimulus for the agri-biotech industry to enable more productive and long-term gains for the sector. There are several new initiatives for the agri-sector announced by the FM that includes the creation of a unified national agriculture market, a renewed focus on micro-irrigation, as well as initiatives to improve rural infrastructure and an increase in farm credit. Having said that, the focus was clearly more on infrastructure and less on incentivising the agri-industry. While this will directly benefit the farm sector and help improve farm incomes, a more conducive policy for the agri-biotech industry would have been more welcome.

Business Standard

Jaitley relies more on states to boost India's farm production

The finance minister has cut the total central [Budget](#) support to [agriculture](#) by 14.3 per cent in 2015-16 over the 2014-15 revised

estimates, hoping states will fill the deficit through their own resources.

This would also ensure states' involvement in framing programmes and schemes for agricultural development is in tune with their needs.

16 is Rs 5,648 crore less.

A big chunk of the agriculture ministry's annual allocation is spent on its flagship Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, whose allocation for 2015-16 has been slashed by almost half to Rs 4,500 crore as against the 2014-15 revised estimate (RE) of Rs 8,444 crore. The rest will be contributed by the states, as the scheme from April 1 onwards will form part of those programmes whose funds will be shared between Centre and states.

The National Food Security Mission, another major programme under which the government planned to raise output of pulses, oilseeds, wheat and rice by 2015, has been lowered by Rs 530 crore in 2015-16 as against the RE of 2014-15. The allocation is also Rs 630 crore less than the BE for 2014-15.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchae Yojana, however, saw a huge jump from the RE of Rs 30 crore to almost Rs 1,800 crore in the 2015-16 BE. Another Rs 3,500 crore has been allocated for other irrigation projects.

"The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sinchae Yojana is aimed at irrigating the field of every farmer and improving water-use efficiency. I am allocating Rs 5,300 crore to support micro irrigation, watershed development and the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchae Yojana. I urge the states to chip in substantially in this vital sector," [Jaitley](#) said while presenting the Budget.

Effective and Hassle-Free Agriculture Credit with a Special Focus on Small and Marginal Farmers Target of Rs. 8.5 Lakh Crore of Agricultural Credit:

The Finance Minister, Shri [Arun Jaitley](#) presenting the Union Budget 2015-16 here today, supported the agriculture sector with the help of effective and hassle-free agriculture credit, with a special focus on small

and marginal farmers, Shri Jaitley proposed the Budget allocation of Rs. 25,000 crore in 2015-16 to the corpus of Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) set up in NABARD; Rs. 15,000 crore for Long Term Rural Credit Fund; Rs. 45,000 crore for Short Term Cooperative Rural Credit Refinance Fund; and Rs. 15,000 crore for Short Term RRB Refinance Fund.

Shri Jaitley said that "Farm credit underpins the efforts of our hard-working farmers, therefore an ambitious target of Rs. 8.5 lakh crore of credit during the year 2015-16 is set up, which the Minister was sure that the banks would surpass.