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THE HINDU

Growing millets on the hills



Creating awareness on the importance of millets among children is the mission of this organisation in Gobichettipalayam. Myrada (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency) is working among tribal and their children in an area where facilities such as transportation, electricity, toilets and proper schools are still unavailable. Guna, a Class IX student, attends school after helping his parents in the field, unlike his classmates who are from plains. Their parents run small businesses and have better yielding farms. But long hours of arduous work makes him tired and sleep in the class. But the teachers are not complaining. His teacher Selvam allows him to sleep. After all the teacher's life as a child was no different from that of Guna's.

But, Guna loves farming

Neither is Guna complaining. He is learning farming from his parents and it is only going to be helpful for his future. Unlike in the plains, life in the hilly regions is complicated. Water is a big problem and farmers depend on the rains.

In tribal hamlets like the one Guna lives in, almost everyone has a small farm and tries to grow hardy food crops that can survive no rainfall.

Guna's parents have four acres of dryland and use almost all of them to cultivate millet: ragi.

Guna is already an expert in ragi cultivation, but he has no idea about other millets, until Myrada intervened. Myrada instils confidence in him about growing millets (which requires less water) and their values. And Guna is proud to uphold the ancient tradition of eco-friendly farming too.

Pilot project on energy-efficient IP sets

The government has proposed to implement a pilot project related to irrigation pumpsets (IP sets) in some parts of the State to create awareness among farmers about the necessity of installing energy-efficient IP sets.

Under the project, the government would enter into an agreement with farmers and provide them 1,000 energy-efficient IP sets in Shiggaon, Nippani, Malavalli and Doddaballapur to study their efficiency, Minister for Energy D.K. Shivakumar told presspersons here on Tuesday.

Currently, the agriculture sector alone consumes 39 per cent of the power supplied by electricity companies (Escoms). The power subsidy bill has increased from Rs. 1,200 crore in 2004 to Rs. 7,130 crore in 2015. Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Authority had directed the government not to clear the subsidy bills of Escoms till companies conducted energy audit, he said.

A convention of farmers would be organised on March 28 to create awareness among them about installation of meters to IP sets and energy-efficient IP sets. There are 22 lakh legal IP sets and 3 lakh illegal IP sets in the State.

Farmers told to make use of cold storage facilities



The poor procurement price for the horticulture crops during the off season is always a matter of concern for the farming community. Due to lack of storage facility, the farmers are often forced to market their produce at low price.

The cold storage facilities commissioned by the Salem Marketing Committee functioning under the Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board in the districts of Salem and Namakkal have come as good to the farmers in storing their horticultural produce in safe custody during the off season and market the same when they fetch good price. The Salem Marketing Committee accounted for 19 regulated markets – 13 in Salem district and six in Namakkal district.

The highlight of the regulated markets is the availability of cold storage facilities to enable the farmers to store their produce.

The Salem Marketing Committee under the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme has set up cold storage facilities with 25 metric tonne capacity each in the seven regulated markets in the centres of Salem, Attur, Vazhapadi, Mecheri and Gengavalli in Salem district and Namagiripettai and Paramathivelur in Namakkal district.

This apart, a 25-tonne capacity cold storage commissioned under the National Agriculture Development Programme is also functioning in Vazhapadi.

Farmers can stock all kinds of vegetables, tamarind, fruits, flowers besides eggs in these facilities.

The added advantage of the cold storages functioning in the market committees is that the farmers could procure loan against the agricultural products stored here at very low interest rates.

R. Selladurai, secretary, Salem Market Committee, called upon the farmers to take full advantage of the cold storage facilities to stock their produce and procure adequate loans.

For details about the cold storage facilities and the availability of space, the farmers can contact the secretary, Salem Market Committee (82207 70243).

They can also contact the superintendents of the Regulated Markets in Salem (98420 32175); Attur (98945 46039); Namagiripettai (91593 56156); Mecheri (84891 12623); Vazhapadi (97904 67330); Gengavalli (97877 19753) and Paramathivelur (95666 47333).

Farm cluster shows the way in sustainable farming



A group of farmers at Varyad, under the Muttal Krishi Bhavan, Wayanad, are adopting organic farm practices for sustainable and profitable farming.

The members of the Varyad vegetable cluster have grown nearly 10 varieties of vegetables including peas, bitter gourd, tomato, snake gourd, okra, brinjal, and green chilly on 12.25 acres of rented land near the National Highway 212.

“Our produce are in good demand among the consumers as our farming methods are transparent and can be viewed by anyone,” says cluster president Chakkalakkal Biju Mathew.

Though organic produce are priced at a premium, the cluster sells vegetables at less-than market rates. Earlier, the farmers used to sell their produce to middlemen. They then put up a temporary outlet near the NH to avoid middlemen.

“While vegetable traders in nearby towns sell vegetable procured from Gundlupet in Karnataka at a higher price, we are able to sell pesticide-free produces at rates 20 to 25 per cent lower than the market rate,” Mr. Mathew said.

They have spent nearly Rs.12 lakh for the venture, including the rent for land. “We have provided Rs.2.25 lakh to the cluster as subsidy, including Rs.60,000 for adopting new agriculture technologies such as bio-control agents and bio-fertilizers. This will promote organic cultivation,” said Sumina Nishant, Agriculture Officer, Muttal Krishi Bhavan.

“The Agriculture Department has earmarked Rs.2.71 crore for vegetable development programmes in the district. Under this, 50 farmer clusters were constituted during the current fiscal and many farmers in the clusters have shown interest to switch over to organic cultivation,” said Tom Joseph, Deputy Director of Agriculture.

Meet on enhancing sorghum exports

Developing strategies to enhance exports of sorghum, sorghum products and seed through public-private partnership (PPP) will be the focus of a two-day consultative meet on March 17 and 18 being organised by the Agri-Business Incubation Programme under the Agribusiness and Innovation Platform of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi- Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

Marketability

The meeting will map challenges and opportunities of all stakeholders in addressing the need to enhance export marketability of sorghum (food, feed and industrial products) and seed from India with the help of agri-platforms led by agricultural institutions and agencies promoting exports. The meeting will be attended by an expert panel and over 100 participants from public and private organisations, consisting of exporters, experts from research and development (R&D) organisations, government officials and representatives from the sorghum processing and seed industries. Those interested can visit the AIP-ICRISAT website: www.aipicrisat.org.

Farmers take risk by going for paddy in rabi

Farmers in a few mandals took a risk and went ahead with Rabi though the Government did not officially announce the second crop this year. Farmers in Pedana, Kruthivenu, Bantumilli and Kankipadu who do not have the option of going for an alternate crop like black-gram went ahead and cultivated paddy.

Though Rabi was not officially announced this year, farmers of these mandals have been assured of water “on the sly”. Farmers who have access to ground water have also gone for paddy in most of the delta mandals.

The Prakasam barrage authorities have been releasing the entire water being received from upstream, be it from Vajnepalli or the different rivulets that join the Krishna river near Keesara.

From 3,089 cusecs in the second week of February, the inflows to reservoir upstream the barrage have increased to 5,183 cusecs on Tuesday.

The Irrigation authorities have been releasing all the water received at the barrage into the delta canals that irrigate Krishna and West Godavari on the Left side and Guntur and Prakasam on the Right side. The authorities released 2,940 cusecs to Krishna Eastern Main Canal and 2,192 cusecs to the Krishna Western Main Canal on Tuesday. But the water level at the barrage is not being maintained at the required 12 feet for water to flow by gravity to the Narla Tatarao Thermal Power Station. The water level at the barrage was 10.6 on Tuesday. “We were given an assurance that water will be released till April end. But the crop in 90 per cent of the area in which paddy was sown would not require water after a couple of weeks,” said Kruthivenu paddy farmer Y. Raghavendra Rao.

But a few farmers (between 5 and 10 per cent) who sowed paddy late would lose their crop if the release of water stopped by March end as nothing is official.

Tip to prevent damage to grapes

University of Horticulture Sciences, Bagalkot, has given some advice to prevent the grape crop from damage.

A.B. Patil, extension director of the university, has asked farmers to add five millilitres of Trichoderma chemical in a litre of water and spray the mixture over the crop. This process should be repeated two days before the crop is harvested. This would help to increase the keeping quality of the grape for at least one week and also help farmers who are turning grapes into raisins.

CPCRI launches 'Kalparasa' neera



There is an urgent need to go for value addition and popularise technologies to enhance the income of coconut farmers, Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) Director P. Chowdappa has said.

Dr. Chowdappa was addressing a workshop on neera production technology jointly hosted by the CPCRI and the Kasaragod chapter of the North Malabar Chamber Of Commerce (NMCC) at the CPCRI here on Tuesday.

'Kalparasa,' the bottled neera brand developed by the CPCRI, was launched during the workshop, which was attended by over 200 farmers, entrepreneurs, industrialists and officials from other Telangana and Tamil Nadu. A bottle of the drink was handed over to P.J. Antony, executive editor, Jeevan TV, to mark the launch.

A memorandum of understanding on neera technology transfer was signed with select entrepreneurs from Telangana and Tamil Nadu. K.B. Hebbar, Head, Post Harvest Technology at the CPCRI, made a presentation on production of Kalparasa and value-added products of neera.

Watermelons herald arrival of summer



Juicy succulent watermelons, both light green Namdhari and dark green sugar baby variety, have begun making an appearance on the streets and in fruit stalls in the city, heralding the onset of summer.

Officials of the Horticulture Department and Horticultural Producers Co-operative Marketing and Processing Society (Hopcoms) said the watermelon yield has been good this year.

While vendors prefer the Namdhari variety to sell by slice along the roadside, the sugar baby variety is preferred by people to take home, an official of the Horticulture Department said.

Farmers, who seeded the watermelons in December, have begun harvesting the crop. The growers generally do the seeding after winter during December and January, so that the fruit is available in summer. “Watermelons are ready for harvesting 70 to 75 days after seeding and the ensuing season is expected to last till summer ends in May,” the official said.

Though summer is considered the season of watermelons, Horticulture Department officials said farmers are now growing the fruit round the year. “Some farmers time the yield around Ramzan, the month of fasting observed by Muslims, when there is a good demand for watermelons”, an official said.

Watermelons are grown on an estimated 1,150 hectares of land in the district with H.D. Kote and Nanjangud taluks accounting for the lion’s share. “The yield not only meets the local demand but are also transported to Kerala and Tamil Nadu,” an official added.

During 2014-15, about 35,000 tonnes of watermelons were grown in the district.

Bore Gowda, Hopcoms president, Mysuru, said its outlets were selling watermelons for Rs. 8 per kg and that farmers were being paid Rs. 6 per kg.

However, watermelons are sold for anywhere between Rs. 10 and Rs. 15 by fruit traders, who arrange them in mounds by the roadside. Most of the vendors seek to justify the price tag on the quality of the fruit.

Tribal coffee growers receive accolades



Girijan coffee growers have received all praise for producing a high quality coffee in spite of the Hudhud cyclone, unseasonal rain and other unfavourable conditions by following the organic and biodynamic methods introduced to them by the Naandi Foundation which is working in collaboration with the ITDA, Paderu, to improve their livelihood.

Speakers at a function held to distribute the Gems of Araku coffee brilliance awards at Thuraiguda, near this famous tourist centre,

appreciated the Girijan coffee farmers for their good work and assured to continue the foundation's support and make them take up more programmes like taking up planting 100 million plants.

Chief Executive Officer of Naandi Foundation Manoj Kumar said the foundation was determined to continue the Girijan diversity which was disappearing fast all over the world. "We would like Araku to redefine the word farmer as a family. It is a farmer's cooperative and every farm land must be managed by the entire family. Incidentally the UN has declared this year as family farming year and we have started the exercise long ago."

The foundation discussed with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who adopted a village near Araku Valley on planting more saplings and it suggested doing so on hill tops and riverbeds so that soil erosion could be arrested.

Head of the panel of judges Sarvadaman Patel from Gujarat explained the criteria for judging the best village and best farmer. He wished the farmers to produce a bumper crop next year after the losses they suffered due to Hudhud.

CSO of Naandi Foundation David Hogg, who has been working with the local farmers for a long time, spoke about the quality, biodiversity, training, assistance in marketing issues and the need for better agriculture practices like improving soil quality, preventing erosion and improving greenery on the hills.

Buyers Priscilla Daniel of DR Wakefields of London and David Warr from the Channel Island in the UK said the Araku coffee was one of the finest.

President of the Small and Marginal Tribal Farmers Mutually Aided Cooperative Society (SAMTFMAC), which is the only Girijan coffee cooperative in the country, Killo Kondala Rao, spoke.

Effects of global warming, firsthand



Though the threat of global warming still feels distant for many, it is at the doorstep of those residing at Cherikadavu area of Thevalakara panchayat in Kollam. The state of Munroethuruthu delta islands and the estuarine islands of Ashtamudi Lake is a case in point.

The Kallada river empties into Ashtamudi Lake at Cherikadavu.

Paddy cultivation

Not long ago, the 60-hectare estuarine island across Cherikadavu used to be a lush paddy field owned and cultivated by several farmers. Paddy cultivation stopped when salinity in the area increased following construction of the Thenmala dam across the Kallada river.

With global warming taking its toll, the island's geography witnessed a sea change and people there saw for themselves the apocalyptic predictions of environmentalists and climate scientists coming true over the past 20 years. The island resembles a mini-archipelago as the rising waters have submerged many areas.

Mangroves planted

Keen on saving the remaining sections of the island, the Fisheries Department planted over a lakh mangrove saplings with Central funding in 2005.

Today, only those areas of the island where the mangroves thrived remain intact and the areas where they did not are submerging. Environmentalist and mangrove enthusiast V.K. Madhusudhanan, who was active in the sapling planting programme as an officer of the Fisheries Department, said about 10,000 saplings had grown into trees.

But because of climate change, many of these trees are now standing in about three to four ft of water. “It shows that the water level is rising,” he says.

Mr. Madhusudhanan said Ashatmudi Lake was one of the biggest casualties of global warming in peninsular India. Many locations of the lake were facing an environment catastrophe.

He said the State government should stake claim to its due share of the Rs.160-crore allocation in this year’s Union Budget for climate change adaptation.

“A substantial portion of the amount should be utilised for expanding the mangrove forest cover since mangroves are nature’s acclaimed land builders,” he says.

Biodiversity awards announced

The annual awards instituted by the Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB) in various categories have been announced. The award for the best environment protection goes to Shahul Hameed of Kasaragod. K.R. Jayan won the award for protection of native varieties while Rajan Babu of Kayamkulam, bagged the award for the best organic farmer.

The other winners in the environment protection category include N.V. Balakrishnan of Kozhikode (native cattle breed), M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri of Kannur (traditional knowledge), and K.S. Anup Das, MES College, Malappuram (biodiversity research).

The awards comprises a cash prize of Rs.50,000, a citation and plaque. Christ College, Irinjalakuda, won the award for the best biodiversity club. The award for best Biodiversity Management panel has gone to Mankara grama panchayat, Palakkad.

Coconut producers to float firm



In a significant move to enhance capacity building, value-addition and market linkages, about 1,000 coconut farmers from Udumalpet and Madathukulam blocks are coming together to float a ‘coconut producers company.’

The ‘producers’ company’ will be first registered under the Company’s Act with a stipulated size of 10 farmers with the remaining farmers to be inducted subsequently.

“We have commenced the initial steps towards floating the company by constituting a committee to discuss the operational aspects and other modalities,” R. Thirumalaisamy, one of the farmers from the region, told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Thirumalaisamy, who is also the president of Amaravathi Farmers’ Club which won the third Best Farmers’ Club award constituted by Nabard last year, said the main objective behind constituting the company was to realise optimal value from their produces through utilisation of latest farming practices and marketing of value-added products under a consortium approach.

“Unless the farmers come together as an organisation, it will be difficult in the coming days to sustain economic viability not only for adopting progressive technology but also in using high yielding varieties of farm inputs like seeds/seedlings and fertilizers.

“Due to the present fragmentation of the land holdings, farmers are finding it difficult to go for value-addition of their produces individually,” agrarian community added.

Once the 'producers' company' was formed, the farmers in the said two blocks are thinking of coming out with value-added products like coconut powder, packaged tender coconut water, and coconut oil.

"We will also be thinking of brands to market the products," Mr. Thirumalaisamy said. Initially, the farmers will contribute Rs 1,000 into the company as their share. When the profits come, certain portion of the gains will be shared by the members and the rest will be pooled towards share capital/reserves.

Water level at Mettur

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 74.49 feet on Tuesday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 289 cusecs and the discharge 500 cusecs.



India's food exports dip this fiscal

PUNE: India's food export volumes have shrunk in the current fiscal with other countries eating into its business share by offering lower prices for their agricultural and food products. European Union's ban on Indian mangoes, though lifted now, and other agri produce also contributed to the slide.

A recent report of the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has showed that exports of some major commodities in agricultural and food products from India dipped in 2014-15 as compared to last year.

The highest drop in export volumes has been recorded for wheat (36%), pulses (37%) and fruits and seeds (33%) in the April to December period last year as compared to the same period in 2013. Exports of fresh vegetables fell by 3%, fruits by 7% and basmati rice by 6%, the report stated.

Officials in the agricultural and processed food authority said that the demand for Indian produce came down this year in particular, because

other exporting countries were selling their produce at a much lower price than India.

Apart from basmati rice and wheat, other cereals registered an export drop of about 10%. Exports of non-basmati rice from India, however, increased by 12% last year in the April-December period as compared to the same period in 2013.

A senior official from the agricultural and processed food authority said that general demand for Indian produce has come down internationally due to competition from other countries. "Devalued currency in Russia, Latin America, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) among others had these countries exporting the same produce at a lower price than India," the official said.

Other factors too led to the drop. For instance, India's rice is exported to Iran, but this time Iran had old stock and better domestic production of rice, which led to a dip in rice exports from India to the country.

India's fruits and vegetables are exported to all the major countries, mainly to the Middle East, Far East and SAARC countries.

Officials in the state agriculture department, however, said that the dip in exports was also due to a ban by EU on mangoes, eggplant, the taro plant, bitter gourd and snake gourd and on chillies by UAE in 2014.

"Also, this year, India did not have a good supply season. Every item is exported in a particular supply period. If before India's supply season, other supplying countries are able to sell their produce in a big way and at lower prices, then the importing countries do not exhibit much demand for Indian produce at competitive prices. At this juncture, selling the produce in the local or domestic market is more viable for the exporters," the official added.

Arrival of onions increases due to holidays, fear of rain

NASHIK: The arrival of onions increased in the market at Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) on Monday following fear of rains as forecasted by the Met department as well as holidays on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The market reopened on Monday after the weekend holiday as a result of which farmers who had already harvested their kharif crop rushed to the

APMC. Close to 25,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Lasalgaon on Monday against an average arrival of 12,000 to 15,000 quintals. The average wholesale onion prices have stabilised at Rs 1,350 a quintal despite rise in supply as the demand is also as high.

Speaking to TOI, Lasalgaon APMC chairman Nanasaheb Patil said, "There are various reasons for the rise in supply. The market reopened on Monday after a holiday on Sunday and the climate was clear. Moreover, fear of rain as forecasted by the Met department in the next few days also led to rise in arrival of the commodity in the market. The market will remain closed on Tuesday and Wednesday due to Rangapanchami."

According to a Lasalgaon APMC official, the average wholesale onion prices at the APMC have settled in the range of Rs 1,250 to Rs 1,350 a quintal in the past one week. "Although the supply has increased, the demand is also as high. But the price trend will go down in the next few days," he said.

The average wholesale onion price at the country's largest wholesale onion market at Lasalgaon was recorded at Rs 1,350 a quintal on Monday. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 700 and Rs 1,541 a quintal, respectively.

At Pimpalgaon, the average wholesale onion price was recorded at Rs 1,311 a quintal on Monday. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 900 and Rs 1,520 a quintal, respectively. Around 16,500 quintals of onions were auctioned at Pimpalgaon APMC on Monday.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Spices seed centres to soon supply planting materials to farmers

The Directorate of Arecanut and Spices Development (DASD) will establish small seed centres at the farm level to make quality planting material available to farmers, Homey Cherian, Director, DASD, Ministry of Agriculture, Kozhikode, said.

Stating that the farming community is in a fix due to non-availability of planting material, he said, "Roughly 20-30 per cent of the planting material requirement is met by government agencies. The rest is through

farmer-to-farmer exchange. Seed replacement ratio is not more than 18 to 20 per cent in spices. The Directorate has therefore decided to step in by establishing small seed centres to ensure supply of quality planting material.” Different State Agriculture Universities are also being involved to step up production of planting material with additional finance support for further multiplication, he added.

The DASD Director was here at the third edition of a two-day National Seminar on Spices organised under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture, Spices Board of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry in association with the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, he said, “Besides insufficient production of planting material, other issues such as quality, varieties, pesticide residue, microbial contamination, etc, stood in the way of India emerging a major supplier of spices to the world market. At the National Consultative Meeting on ginger and turmeric, we realised that not a single place was taken up to make planting material available and the incidence of seed-borne disease played havoc in turmeric cultivation.”

The Directorate has, therefore, in association with various State Agriculture Universities, worked out Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for each crop and in specific regions.

Nirmal Babu, Coordinator, All India Coordinated Project for Spices, stressed the importance of investing in GAP.

Record wheat output likely despite crop damage



Freshness intact Farmers from Haryana displaying vegetables using a solar-powered, evaporative, cooling vending cart at the Pusa Krishi Vigyan Mela in New Delhi. The innovative cart is priced at ₹7,000 and helps retain the quality of fresh produce. Kamal Narang

Damage to the wheat crop due to heavy unseasonal shower last week is limited to a few areas and is unlikely to lead to any short supply, Agriculture Secretary Siraj Hussain said.

Inaugurating the “Pusa Krishi Vigyan Mela”, a three-day fair being held at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), he said the country is also poised to surpass the record of 95.85 million tonnes (mt) produced in 2013-14.

“The damage caused by the recent rain is limited only to a few areas. Lodging was reported but is unlikely to hurt yields. My assessment is that wheat production will be more than last year,” Hussain said. Lodging refers to the collapse of the stems of cereal crops such as wheat when the plant cannot support its own weight. Two types of lodging are common – root lodging and stem breakage – the latter occurring in the maturity stage when the stalk becomes brittle. The phenomenon occurs due to both structural traits in the plant as well as environmental conditions such as adverse weather.

“This season’s wheat crop is expected to be higher than last year and low temperatures will improve yield. No more rain and low temperature are essential, and if the latter persists through March then yield will rise,” he said. IARI estimates point out that wheat output could top 97-98 mt, possibly as much as 100 mt if favourable weather conditions continue till harvesting. The Ministry had earlier pegged wheat production to slide marginally to 95.76 mt.

According to Government data, nearly 5 million hectares of standing crops was damaged in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Punjab Agriculture Minister Sardar Tota Singh said earlier this week that around Rs. 3,000 crore of wheat was destroyed in the northern State owing to the unseasonal rainfall and hailstorms.

The higher production will add to a global glut even as the Agriculture Ministry expects overall foodgrain output to fall by 3 per cent to 257.07 mt this season to June, against a record 265.57 mt recorded the previous season, owing to erratic rainfall that impacted rice and coarse cereals production.