

12.03.2015

THE HINDU

IMF raises India growth forecast to 7.2 % this fiscal

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast India will grow 7.5 per cent in 2015-16, up from 7.2 per cent in the current year, a projection less optimistic than that of the Modi government.

In the Union budget 2015, the government estimated growth of up to 8.5 per cent in 2015-16.

The Indian economy is the bright spot in the global landscape, becoming one of the fastest-growing big emerging market economies in the world, the IMF said in an official statement. The report stressed the urgency of certain key reforms, including the bottlenecks in the energy, mining and power sectors; infrastructure gaps, land acquisition processes and environmental clearances.

In its annual assessment of the Indian economy in the mandatory Article IV annual report, the IMF said that India's vulnerabilities have receded more than those of most emerging markets and sentiment has been revived.

"The Indian economy is reviving, helped by positive policy actions that have improved confidence and lower global oil prices...To continue on this trend, India needs to revitalise the investment cycle and accelerate structural reforms," according to the statement.

"New investment project announcements have started to pick up, particularly in the power and transport sectors," said IMF Mission Chief for India Paul Cashin. He also noted that bolstering financial sector health and further financial inclusion would support growth going forward.

Mr. Cashin said that while India is well placed to cope with external shocks, there are possible risks on the horizon, both external and domestic. These include spillovers from weak global growth and potential global financial market volatility that could be disruptive, including from any unexpected developments as the United States begins

to raise its interest rates. On the domestic front, the weaknesses in corporate balance sheets, especially in light of the increase in corporate leverage of the past few years, and worsening bank asset quality bear watching, as they could weigh on growth.

The IMF report also said that India's economic profile recently got a lift as the country improved the way it measures economic output. "The revised national accounts series incorporates numerous conceptual and methodological improvements that make them more consistent with international best practices," it said adding that the report itself was prepared before the revisions were released by the Central Statistics Office.

Mr. Cashin also gave thumbs up to the Modi government's recent move to introduce a flexible inflation-targeting framework. "It will help deliver low and stable inflation, and diminish the prospect of renewed bouts of high inflation," he said.

Among the reforms the report recommended are steps in the agriculture sector for efficient procurement, distribution, and storage of food in the public system. Greater flexibility in labour markets and improvements in education for meeting the rising shortages of skilled labour were among the key reforms suggested.

Foodgrain output to be high in Tuticorin

Foodgrain output in Tuticorin district is projected to be at an all-time-high this year, thanks to copious monsoon rainfall. The production of paddy, pulses and millets is expected around 3.5 lakh tonnes, official sources from Department of Agriculture told *The Hindu* here on Tuesday.

Pulses cultivated on an area of 77, 000 hectares will account for 66,900 tonnes, with an average yield of 869 kg per hectare. Paddy has so far been raised on 16,300 hectares and the crop has registered an yield of 4.9 tonnes per hectare.

The total yield of paddy is projected at 85,000 tonnes. Millets have been grown on 50,000 hectares and they have registered an average yield of

4,000 tonnes per hectare. The district recorded a production of 2.85 lakh tonnes in 2011-12, when it experienced normal rainfall. But in subsequent fiscals, until 2013-14, food grain production came down due to monsoon failure. In 2014, the district recorded a rainfall of 763 mm, against the annual average of 662.2 mm.

Impact of rising temperature on pests

Climate change resulting in increased temperature could impact crop pest insect population in several complex ways. Increased temperature can potentially affect insect survival, development, geographic range and population size.

Temperature can impact insect physiology and development directly or indirectly through the physiology or existence of hosts. Depending on the development strategy of an insect species, temperature can exert different effects.

Reproductive biology of an insect may be affected both positively and negatively. Climate, temperature and precipitation in particular, have a very strong influence on the development, reproduction and survival of insect pests and as a result it is highly likely that these organisms will be affected by any change in climate.

Warmer temperatures in temperate climates will result in more types and higher populations of insects. Some insects like arctic moths take several years to complete one lifecycle.

Some crop pests are 'stop' and 'go' developers in relation to temperature—they develop more rapidly during periods of time with suitable temperatures. Increased temperatures will accelerate the development of these types of insects, possibly resulting in more generations per year.

Insects that spend important part of their life histories in the soil may be more gradually affected by temperature changes than those that are above ground simply because the soil provides an insulating medium that will tend to buffer temperature changes more than the air.

Rise in temperature in winter may help to continue the lifecycle of some pests. Lower winter mortality of insects due to warmer winter temperature could be important in increasing insect populations.

Insect species diversity for a particular area tends to decrease with higher latitude and altitude indicating that rising temperature could result in more insect species attacking more hosts in temperate climates.

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Groundnut research to get a boost at Tirupati



The inauguration of a sub-centre for All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on groundnut at the Regional Agricultural Research Station (RARS), Tirupati, is all set to take research on this crop to a new high.

S. Ayyappan, Director-General of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), inaugurated the facility here on Wednesday on the sidelines of the two-day national conference on 'Emerging trends in Agri-nanotechnology' conducted by Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU). The project has been sanctioned with two scientists and three technical assistants with a budgetary allocation of Rs. 98 lakh.

While groundnut research is on as a voluntary activity here, the sanction of a dedicated sub-centre will strengthen research to meet the needs of farmers in the region. In fact, this RARS has so far developed 12 groundnut varieties. As 80 per cent of the 10.13 lakh hectares in which groundnut is grown in the State is rain-fed, which is a major constraint in

kharif, the centre has developed drought-resistant, stem rot-tolerant, low light and high yield potential varieties.

Dr. Ayyappan wanted the scientific fraternity to strengthen research to meet the needs of the country's 100 arid districts which receive less than 500 mm rainfall. On the need to take the biotechnology route to enhance profitability, he lamented that the lone outcome was 'Bt Cotton', after research in biotechnology had been initiated ten years ago.

"Every rupee invested in agriculture is yielding returns of Rs.13.50, which is the highest in any sector," he said, adding that farmers required technology rather than subsidy.

He also gave an account of nanosensors, nanomaterial and nanodiagnostic and their usage in detecting adulterant, population and safety aspects.

ANGRAU Vice-Chancellor A. Padmaraju, Director (Research and Extension) K.Raja Reddy, Associate Director of Research T.Giridhara Krishna, organising secretary T.N.V.K.V. Prasad and principal scientist (genetics and plant breeding) R.P. Vasanthi took part.

A vegetable bowl waits for an unwelcome change



Given the abundance of agricultural land in the three mandals of Thullur, Mangalagiri and Tadepalli, one may be tempted to call it a land of milk and honey.

Cultivable area in these mandals, which have been notified as the Capital region, is a veritable vegetable bowl of Andhra Pradesh.

Transformation of the fertile area into an urban agglomerate could have serious consequences to food security, prompting a cross-section of people to declare at least the river bed area as a green belt. It could also affect the rural economy in a significant way, throwing thousands of farm labourers out of the fields.

The total cultivable area of vegetables, fruits and flowering plants is 5,128 hectares. Unlike other agricultural crops such as paddy, cotton and maize, the horticultural crops are being grown throughout the year using modern drip irrigation techniques.

The Department of Horticulture has collected particulars of the crop area in the three mandals. Thullur, chosen for the construction of core capital area, has a farm area of 2,260 hectares on which vegetables, fruit-yielding trees and flowering plants are being cultivated. Banana crop alone is cultivated in 1,180 hectares. Banana cultivated using drip irrigation method has high yield of 30,000 kg per acre.

A kilogram of banana is sold in the market for Rs. 30 to 50 depending on the grade and quality.

“Traders from north India arrive here during March-April and pay advances before placing orders. I got Rs. 2 lakh per acre last year, and this year, I expect better price this time,” says Naresh Reddy from Penumaka.

More than 25 varieties of vegetables are grown in 2,911.2 hectares in the three mandals. Some of the high-yielding varieties of vegetables are Yam, which yields 16,000 kg per acre, coccinia (Donda -186.8 hectares) and Bhendi (459.2 hectares). The other vegetables include Onion cultivated in 645.6 hectares, Cauliflower (314 hectares) and Ridge Gourd (140 hectares).

The area close to river bed also has a vast expanse of flowering plants adding a touch of elegance. Jasmine is grown on 219 hectares, followed by Rose 207 hectares and Mari Gold 118.4 hectares. The flowers are plucked by evening and sold in the flower markets at Vijayawada and Guntur. “The State government should seriously think of declaring the

river bed area as green belt” said P. Narasimha Rao, Professor of Economics at Acharya Nagarjuna University.

Groundnut yield hit

Disease in groundnut has been affecting the yield. Agriculture Department officials and scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendra visited various fields where the crop had been hit and ascertained the damage during a detailed study over the past couple of days.

R.P. Gnanamalar, Professor and Head of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, said groundnut was a major crop in the district and about 9,100 hectare had been brought under the crop during ‘rabi’ season.

The crop is largely cultivated in Tiruvarangulam, Karambakudi, Gandarvakottai, Aranthangi, Annavasal, Kundrandarkovil Ponnamaravathy and Pudukkottai blocks.

The crop had been damaged in most blocks due to incidence of leaf spot and stem and pod rot diseases. She said that symptoms included sudden appearance of lesions in circular or sub-circular shapes.

The colour varied between dark brown and black. Severely infected plants have dried leaves which wither away in a few days.

Further, the infected stems turn another vital source for quick spread of the disease, she said explaining the impact of the disease on plants in a few villages.

In pod rot infection, the problem starts from an early stage itself particularly during peg formation stage. Pegs show light to dark brown lesions.

They later become shredded and pods become detached once they are infected.

S. Mathiyazhagan, Assistant Professor, Plant Pathology, Vamban, said the spraying of fungicide, (Mancozeb Chlorothalonil and Tebuconazole) would go a long way in controlling late leaf spot disease. Seed treatment was also essential. Farmers could dial 9944520544 for any clarification.

Banana cultivation: farmers to visit Theni

Collector K.S.Palanisamy directed the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri Business to take a team of banana growers from the district to Theni and Vathalagundu areas to study the cultivation of Grand Naine variety of banana.

Since the Grand Naine variety offered good export potential, farmers from Tiruchi district too could cultivate it for better returns, he said after inspecting banana auction at the Integrated Market Complex for Banana at Thiruchendurai on Tuesday.

Mr.Palanisamy also instructed officials to provide a weighing machine at the market complex so that farmers could sort, grade and sell their produce based on weight for better returns. Currently, banana was auctioned as bunches.

Israel offers latest technologies to farmers



Israel is keen on offering latest technologies to farmers in the country to boost food production. All assistance will be extended to Indian farmers to improve production and scale down production costs, said Yoram Eisenstadt, Soil and Water Extension Specialist, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Government of Israel.

Interacting with horticulture officials and farmers during his visit to the Indo-Israel Centre for Excellence at Reddiyarchtram near here on Wednesday evening, he said Israel will play an effective role in offering technologies to farmers.

Reddiyarchatram centre will get water irrigation technologies and also improving quality of water for irrigation, he assured.

He also wondered why there was no water meter in farms to calculate water use throughout the country. It was a basic requirement in every farm to calculate quantum of water required for each crop. He also wanted to know whether the centre had any mechanism to assess evaporation level, radiation and wind speed in assessing use of water in the fields. Without calculating water demand, how will you recommend crops to farmers and assess production costs, he questioned.

In Israel, quality of water was assessed and top quality of water could not be used for raising cotton crop. Different quality of water was being used to raise different variety of crops, he said.

Centres of Excellence

Of the nine Centres of Excellence, four centres meant for vegetables in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Odisha have started functioning. Two centres in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat will become operational within two months. Another centre for cut flower was under progress at Krishnagiri, said officials.

Joint Director of Horticulture S. Raja Mohamed said that two hi-tech integrated poly houses at Reddiyarchatram Centre for Excellence, each on 2600 sq.m., will produce 30 lakh hybrid pro-tray seedlings of all vegetables and supply to farmers.

Agriculturists had to register their requirements well in advance to get hi-tech seedlings. Supply of crops will vary based on seasons.

Besides, five net houses in the centre will produce seedlings of brinjal, beet root, cucumber, bitter guard, snake guard, ridge guard, cabbage, water melon, papaya and other vegetables.

‘Inclusive growth hinges on transformation of manufacturing sector’

Manufacturing sector requires transformation in sync with the nation’s ‘Make in India’ slogan not only to produce products for the global

market, but also absorb the abundance of uneducated rural workforce who are jobless due to agricultural mechanisation, former Chairman of Confederation of Indian Industry, Tamil Nadu, and Managing Director of Loyal Textile Mills Ltd., Manickam Ramasamy' said on Wednesday.

Only then can inclusive development be made possible, Mr. Manickam said while addressing the first anniversary celebration of Young Indians, Erode Chapter, at the Kongu Engineering College that hosted the programme.

Inclusive development that warrants opportunities for all to take part in growth was vital since 200 million of Indian population was still living below poverty line, notwithstanding improvement in GDP in the last few years.

While the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme has addressed the issue to a considerable extent, there was an imperative need for the country to infuse skill and absorb rural work force to derive advantage of the unfavourable conditions in China in the forms of high labour cost and large-scale urban pollution, Mr. Manickam said handling a session on 'Harmony and Plenty'. Money generated through auction of spectrum and saved due to fall in crude oil prices need to be ploughed into creating the ideal eco system for manufacturing growth.

Chairman of CII Erode Zone KKSK Rafiq said potential for promoting entrepreneurship in the district through collaboration with German and Korean consulates would be explored.

T. Karthikeyan, Chairman, Yi Erode, listed the activities undertaken during the year. SKM Shree Sivakumar, former Chairman, CII Erode Zone; S. Kuppusami, Principal, KEC; and D. Shanmugasundaram, Co Chair, Yi Erode Chapter, spoke.

Coconut, copra auction at regulated market

The Salem Regulated Market functioning under the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Marketing and Agri Business Department, will conduct

auctioning of coconut and copra on the regulated market premises in Uthamacholapuram on March 13.

The Salem Market Committee runs 19 regulated markets in different parts of the district.

A total of 17 products including paddy, cholam, ragi, kambu, groundnut, cotton, chillies, thuvarai have been notified by the department for auctioning in the regulated markets.

A pres release of R. Selladurai, Secretary of the Salem Market Committee, issued here on Wednesday said that the committee has taken initiative for the proper holding of the indirect auction of coconut and copra on March 13. A large number of traders from western districts are expected to participate in the auctioning.

Interested farmers should register their names with the Regulated Market authorities. The auctioning of coconut and copra will take pace on Fridays, the release added.

For further details the farmers and traders can contact the following officials: R. Selladurai, secretary (82207-70243); R. Rajakannu, superintendent (98420 32175) and R. Ranjitraj, supervisor (99529-82673).

600 tanks to be built to help farmers

Manu Vikas, a voluntary organisation in Siddapur taluk plans to construct 600 tanks for irrigation and distribute 25,000 saplings to help farmers have an alternative source of income under the Betta Development Scheme.

Ganapati Bhat, convener of the organisation, said in a release on Wednesday that 100 of them would be mini tanks. The organisation would set up 500 self-help groups and provide funds to them to install ovens and to encourage cultivation of paddy as per SRI method this year, he said.

The organisation had so far constructed 950 small tanks at the cost of Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 10,000 each benefiting 2,500 acres of agricultural land belonging to 1,500 farmers. It supplied learning aids to 500 schoolchildren and scholarships to 500 others. It had also set up 400 self-help groups and distributed 25,000 fruit bearing plants to farmers, Mr. Bhat added.

6 p.c. growth aimed in farming, allied sectors



AGRICULTURE

The government of Telangana has plans to achieve 6 per cent growth rate in the agriculture and allied sectors during 2015-16 with a focus on increased returns on investment to farmers as about 55.5 per cent of population is still dependent on some form of farming activity for their livelihood.

With a budgetary support of Rs.7,883 crore allocation, the government plans to achieve the targeted growth by implementing improved technologies, effective extension reach, efficient input delivery, mechanisation, marketing tie-up, adequate institutional credit and crop insurance for farming. The allocation is in addition to Rs. 4,250 crore earmarked in the budget as the second instalment of farm loan waiver.

In the Socio-Economic Outlook for 2015-16 unveiled by Finance Minister Eatala Rajender in the Assembly on Wednesday, the State's vision for agriculture sector includes empowering farmers in seed management, enabling them to acquire good quality seed.

The vision talks about providing easy access to inputs, finance and; increasing irrigated area by utilising the available surface and groundwater potential; providing means for land development for

efficient soil and water management; providing trained extension staff for technology transfer at the door step of farmers; identifying the yield gaps and bridging them through suitable technologies.

Further, the government wants to achieve the growth by motivating the farmers to adopt integrated nutrient management and balanced fertilisation with necessary demonstration and training support; providing short term weather forecasting for instant action; promoting farm mechanisation through access to farm machinery and equipment at affordable cost; strengthening IT to help the farmer in accessing information on weather, input availability and markets and improving water use efficiency through drip and sprinkler irrigation.

Concern over pesticide residue in vegetables

The government has approached the Commissioner of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India to convene a meeting of the Food Safety Commissioners of the southern States to discuss the issue of high pesticide residue in vegetables.

In a written reply to a question by I.C. Balakrishnan, about the steps taken to check the high levels of pesticide residue in vegetables being brought from neighbouring States, Health Minister V.S. Sivakumar said the Chief Minister had convened an emergency meeting to address these concerns.

At present, facilities for checking pesticide residues using Gas Chromatograph and Mass Spectrophotometer were available only at the agricultural university.

Samples

Food safety officers had been asked to collect samples from markets and to send them to the university. Action would be taken if the pesticide levels were found to be high, he said. Tender process was on to set up this testing facility at the laboratories of the food safety wing in Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam, Mr. Sivakumar added.

Post-mortems

In reply to another question by N.A. Nellikkunnu, Mr. Sivakumar said that the government had issued orders allowing post-mortems to be held in the evenings too and that the process of creating physical infrastructure in hospitals to allow this was in the final phase. He said a recommendation to create additional posts in all five medical college hospitals to allow post-mortems in the evenings was under consideration.

Awards for vegetable farming announced

The farmers' awards instituted as part of the vegetable cultivation scheme of the Agriculture Department in the district have been declared.

According to an official release, Sujith S.P. of Mayithara Market, Cherthala, has been selected for the award for the best vegetable farmer in the district. M.A.M. Lower Primary School in Panavally has been adjudged the best school for vegetable cultivation. K.K. Prathapan of Government DVHSS, Charamangalam, and Pushpa of Government J.B.S., Venmony, have been selected for the awards in the best teacher and best headmaster categories respectively.

K.H. Neelakanta Iyer, a class 8 student of Nair Samajam Higher Secondary School, Mannar, was adjudged the best student for establishing a vegetable farm in his home. Haritha Leader Cluster of Kattukada, Cherthala, has been selected for the best cluster award.

The Government J.B.S., Venmony, and S.N. Trust Higher Secondary School, Cheriyanad, have been adjudged the best in governmental and non-governmental establishments. Among the officials of the Agriculture Department, Suja George of Chengannur has been selected as the best agriculture assistant director.

Special team to check paddy field conversion

The district administration has constituted a special team to prevent illegal conversion of paddy fields and wetlands, and sand mining from rivers.

According to District Collector N. Padmakumar, the team led by Sub-Collector D. Balamurali has been entrusted to initiate action against violations of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act and the Land Utilisation Act.

Mr. Padmakumar said that the administration had taken note of excessive mining of sand that threatened the normal functioning of the Thanneermukkom barrage. He said that inspections and raids would be intensified across the district to prevent such illegal activities. Boats, equipments and vehicles that were used for sand mining would be seized.

Deputy Collectors K.R. Chithradaran and P.A. Rajeswari will lead the functioning of the special squad in the Alappuzha and Chengannur revenue divisions respectively. The Collector has directed the Alappuzha and Chengannur revenue divisional officers, tahsildars, police, and officials of the geology and agriculture departments to function closely with the team.

Meanwhile, the CPI(M) district committee has threatened to launch widespread agitations against the uncontrolled conversion of paddy fields, particularly in the Kuttanad region.

In a statement, party district secretary Saji Cheriyan said that illegal conversions were being undertaken at various areas including Nedumudy and Neelamperoor in Kuttanad.

He alleged that the activities were being led by certain officials and leaders belonging to the ruling coalition. "Certain police and revenue officials have been accused of facilitating the conversions. The support of the State government and the district administration must intervene in the issue with due seriousness to prevent such occurrences in the future," he demanded.

e-auctioning of tobacco begins on ‘promising’ note



The e-auctioning of tobacco, the main commercial crop in Prakasam district, began in the six Southern Light Soil (SLS) auction platforms on an encouraging note on Wednesday.

Buyers lapped up 90 bales offered by the peasants quoting a high price of Rs. 125 per kg for bright grade produce as the e-auctions started in Podili I and II, Kandukur I and II, D.C. Palli and Kaligiri platforms , explained Tobacco Board Regional Manager G. Bhaskar Reddy.

“The crop is relatively better this year with less pesticide residue when compared to the previous years, thanks to the sustained campaign undertaken by the Tobacco Board,” he said, adding that the crop out-turn, however, was a mixed one with lesser quantity of bright grade owing to adverse climatic condition.

“It is not a bad start. The exhibition organised by the Board recently to showcase the samples of tobacco produced in different regions has evoked a roaring response from the manufacturers and traders. We expect the price for bright grade to go up to Rs. 135 per kg in the coming days so that the growers can realise a better average price,” Virginia Tobacco Growers Welfare Association president Ch.Seshaiah said.

Mr. M. Bangara Babu, a progressive farmer wanted the Centre to pay equal attention in curbing smuggling of non-duty paid illegal cigarettes into the country. The growers wanted Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to reduce VAT (value-added tax) on cigarettes from the present 20

per cent to 14.5 per cent and also facilitate export orders from China for Prakasam tobacco during his upcoming visit to that country, said former Tobacco Board member P. Badri Reddy.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Unseasonal rain: Vegetable prices remain high but stable

PUNE: The recent spell of unseasonal rain has only marginally affected the supply of major vegetables and fruits. The prices will remain high but stable over the next one month, said officials at the city's Agriculture Produce Market Committee.

Retail prices of kitchen essentials like onion, potato and tomato are well within the normal range, hovering around Rs 20/kg. Rates of vegetables like ladyfinger, cluster beans, capsicum, bottlegourd have registered an increase in the last 10 days, selling for approximately Rs 25-Rs 70 in the wholesale market and Rs 60/kg in the retail markets. Traders expect prices to normalize in a month's time.

Wholesale prices of potatoes and onions are in check, as traders are releasing the stock of the last three months, explained Vilas Bhujbal, former chairman of the agri produce committee. "Barring these and vegetables like tomato and cauliflower, prices of almost all vegetables have shot up and are likely to remain high for at least a month," he said.

Prices are up by around 10-20%, said N D Gule, in-charge of the fruits and vegetables sub-section at the market committee. "With a slight shortfall in supply, rates have shot up marginally. Plenty of green-leafy vegetables like spinach and coriander are reaching the city," he said.

According to Ritesh Poman, a wholesale trader of onions, the supply has been normal and stable. "On an average, 100-125 trucks carrying onions are reaching the wholesale market every day, which is normal for this time of the year. The untimely rain did not have an impact on the onion

crop, therefore, the prices are expected to remain in check," he said.

Vegetable retailer Satej Mishra too concurred. "We are getting a good supply of vegetables, but rates are slightly on the higher side. Now that summer is approaching, rates are unlikely to shoot up," he said.

The rain, however, took a toll on the first mango crop of the season, said Gule. "Supply and quality of the first lot of mangoes is expected to be affected because of the rain. We are estimating a 20% increase in their prices this year," he said.

Nathsahab Khaire, a wholesale dealer of mangoes said, "Mango blossom has fallen off because of the untimely rain. Farmers are now taking stock of how much crop has been affected. What has been saved will need to be salvaged by spraying a fresh round of fungicide. We expect the season to start after March 20."

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Hold back sunflower for better price, farmers told



While farmers should consider to store and sell sunflower at a later date for better returns, growers of blackgram and greengram are being advised to sell the produce soon after harvest.

The Agro Marketing Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI & BPC) functioning in the Centre for Agricultural Rural Development Studies (CARDS) in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University has made such

a recommendation after analysing the price movement at various markets in the State.

Stating that the econometric analysis confirmed that the price of the sunflower seed would hover around Rs. 32-33 a kg in April-May, before rising by Rs. 3-4 by end-May, analysts at CARDS said that even if the storage cost works out to Rs. 1 a kg for two months, the growers would be able to fetch better returns if they considered selling the produce after May.”

The area under sunflower in Tamil Nadu dipped by 36 per cent in 2013-14 to 7,900 hectares against 10,782 hectares in the year ago period.

Karur, Thoothukudi, Tiruchi, Dindigul, Virudhunagar and Ariyalur districts account for 79 per cent of production in the State. As at end January 2015, the area under sunflower saw a marginal increase from 7,900 hectares in 2013-14 to 8,400 hectares.

Analysts predict a small increase of Rs. 3/kg in the price of blackgram in June- July, but rule out the scope for any such increase in greengram. The price of blackgram is forecast at Rs. 57-59 and for greengram at Rs. 64-65 between March and May 2015.

Blackgram and greengram production in the State stood at 0.89 lakh tonnes and 0.34 lakh tonnes respectively during 2012-13.

Row over campaign to launch golden rice

Drive seen as a covert attempt to win approval for genetically modified food



Grain of salt While the pro group says golden rice is the cure for Vitamin A deficiency, the anti alliance terms it more hazardous than GM crops

A campaign is set to be launched on March 16 in the country to allow golden rice for tackling Vitamin A deficiency in children.

This is part of the Allow Golden Rice Campaign Now, headed by co-founder of Greenpeace, Patrick Moore. The campaign for the golden rice was launched in the Philippines on March 6 and in Bangladesh on Wednesday. In India, it will begin in New Delhi and then extend to Mumbai on March 19.

Oppositions ahead

But the campaign is set to be opposed by a group of 20 non-governmental organisations across the world under the banner of “Stop Golden Rice Alliance”.

The Alliance alleges that the campaign for launching the Vitamin A-enriched golden rice is a covert attempt to win wider approval for genetically modified food. “It (golden rice) will not solve the problems of malnutrition,” the alliance said in a statement.

According to the Alliance, Vitamin A deficiency, like other problems of malnutrition and hunger, is not caused by the lack of the vitamin in food, but by people’s inability to achieve a balanced diet.

But Moore, in a statement in Dhaka on Wednesday, said: “Golden rice is the obvious cure, but because it was created with genetic science, Greenpeace and the anti-GMO movement fervently oppose it. No country has approved it for cultivation.

“If golden rice was a cure for a disease like malaria, cancer, or ebola it would have been approved years ago,” said Moore, who quit Greenpeace in 1986 saying the organisation did not care about people and it was more worried about politics than science.

The Alliance said that the Green Revolution, with a bias towards monocultures of staple crops, has led to unbalanced patterns of food production around the world.

“As the UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organisation have stated, variety and diversifying food is the key to solving vitamin deficiency; in countries where people eat more than 200 gm of vegetables per day, Vitamin A deficiency is not a major problem,” it said.

'Hazardous, unbalanced'

Issues underlying Vitamin A deficiency can never be addressed by promoting genetically-modified golden rice, the Alliance said.

Moore said golden rice has been proven to deliver Vitamin A to both adults and children; so there is certainty that it could save millions of lives.

However, the Alliance said that the increased complexity of the gene constructs of golden rice makes it more hazardous than the existing genetically modified plants.

“With inexpensive Vitamin A available in abundance from various natural sources, produced by small-scale and backyard producers, it is a mistake to turn blindly to golden rice, a crop that the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) itself admits it has not yet determined if it can actually improve the Vitamin A intake,” said the Alliance.

Proponents of golden rice say that the rice containing beta carotene, thanks to bacteria and maize genes spliced into it, will significantly reduce Vitamin A deficiency cheaply and efficiently than the long-standing Vitamin A supplementation programme.

But the Alliance said many countries have already succeeded using Vitamin A supplementation. It is proven and cost-effective: two doses of Vitamin A supplementation per child cost between \$0.25 and \$2 a year in 103 priority countries.

A discussion paper by the Centre of International Economic Studies said that India, China, South and South-East Asia stood to gain \$12.7 billion in value through improved health.

Unproven process

According to the Stop Golden Rice Alliance, the process of developing “still-unproven” golden rice has already cost millions of dollars. In addition, \$100 million has been spent in its development.

For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave an additional \$10.3 million grant to the IRRI to fund further development and commercialisation of golden rice.

Refuting the Alliance’s allegations, the Allow Golden Rice Now said a joint clinical trial by American and Chinese scientists has demonstrated that the golden rice is as effective at providing Vitamin A as beta

carotene pills. The rice has been put through a deep risk-assessment process and shows no allergenic or toxic effects.

The pro-golden rice campaigners allege that the opposition to the rice is to justify anti-GM activists' zero-tolerance approach to genetic modification in general.