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THE HINDU

“Adopt natural pest control methods”

Adoption of natural pest control methods, protection of farmer-friendly insects and birds and planting of flowering plants around farms will not only control pests but also scale down the use of pesticides and fertilizers, according to Director of Agriculture M. Rajendran.

Addressing a capacity-building training programme for the youth in agriculture at Kottur village near here on Tuesday, he said that Tamil Nadu and Punjab were leading in the country in using the maximum quantum of chemical fertilizers. Use of natural farming would improve soil fertility, he noted.

Despite natural calamities like lack of rain and drought, the State had been achieving good food production for the past three years. The total food production was 101 lakh tonnes in 2011-12, 110 lakh tonnes in 2012-13 and 125 lakh tonnes in 2013-14, he said, adding inter-cropping and multi-cropping would boost income of farmers.

Expressing grave concerns over the excessive application of fertilizers, he said that organic food crops produced in Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh fetched better prices – four times more than those of food crops grown on chemical fertilizers in other States.

Neera plant at Aralam Farm soon

Aralam Farm here will soon have a Neera processing plant as part of a project for the farm's development and for ensuring additional employment opportunities for the tribespeople living in the tribal resettlement areas of the farm.

The plant for production of Neera drink is being set up under the initiative of the Coconut Development Board (CDB) at an estimated cost of Rs. 7.5 crore, District Collector P. Bala Kiran informed in an official pressnote here on Tuesday. The government has already sanctioned Rs. 4 crore for the project submitted by the CDB, he said.

The production capacity of the plant will be 4,000 litres a day of Neera drink from tapping 2,000 coconuts in the first phase. A two-acre plot in the farm is being spruced up for setting up the plant, the release informed. Neera drink was officially launched by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy in March last year.

Farmers and tribespeople in the area will be given training in Neera tapping. Over 200 tribespeople in the Aralam area will be trained at the Regional Agricultural Research Station at Pilikkode in Kasaragod, it said.

Income

Once the project is commissioned, the farmers are expected to earn an income of Rs. 10,000-15,000 a month from one coconut palm, the release added.

The Neera processing plant being set up at the Aralam Farm is envisaged as a project for offering job and income for the tribespeople rehabilitated in the farm land.

Six more centres proposed in Dakshina Kannada to rent out farm equipment

Farmers in Dakshina Kannada will have to travel less to get farm equipment as the Department of Agriculture has proposed opening of six more custom hire centres, besides the five existing ones.

According to H. Kempe Gowda, Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, Dakshina Kannada, the new centres have been proposed at Moodbidri and Surathkal in Mangaluru taluk; Sullia in Sullia taluk; Kadaba in Puttur taluk; Kokkada in Belthangady taluk and Vitla in Bantwal taluk in 2015-16. The government's approval is awaited.

Shree Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project, an NGO, manages the five centres opened last financial year. They are at Panja in Sullia taluk; Uppinangady in Puttur taluk; Panemangaluru in Bantwal taluk; Gurupura in Mangaluru taluk and Kuvettu in Belthangady taluk.

He said the government was yet to decide which NGO would have to manage the centres to be opened this year.

Mr. Gowda told *The Hindu* that now each of five centres in the district had combined paddy harvesters. In addition, each centre had two paddy-transplanting machines. Of them, a machine transplanted paddy in four rows and another in eight rows.

There is demand from farmers to have small paddy harvesters at the centres. The NGO managing the centres would be told to procure them and rent out.

Some farmers have suggested if each centre had a lorry, that will save the transportation cost of farmers. This demand came up at a meeting T.N. Prakash Kammaradi, chairman, Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission had with paddy growers here on Saturday.

Herbal garden proves a major attraction at Mettur Dam GH



Tamil Nadu is famous for the traditional herbal plants which have rare medicinal values. A large number of sages and practitioners of Indian system of medicine have been using the herbs found in abundance in the forests in the State in the preparation of Siddha medicines from time immemorial.

However, there is not much awareness among the common people on the availability of valuable herbal plants in our midst and their medicinal

properties. Many herbs used in the preparation of Siddha medicines are always available in the surroundings of the households, in the fields, shrubs and forests. 'Nilavembu' plant which is disease resistant and found everywhere is the best example. Unfortunately common people are not aware of its presence and its abundant utility value.

To create the much needed awareness among the common people on the traditional herbs and their medicinal values, the Siddha unit of the Government District Headquarters Hospital at Mettur Dam is maintaining a well laid out herbal garden for the past few decades. More than 60 different varieties of herbal plants available in this garden, spread over 2,000 square feet area, provides added attraction to the GH.

The Siddha unit was set up at the Government Hospital way back in 1977 and a separate building exclusively for Siddha unit with out-patient and in-patient facility was created in 1999. The Siddha unit has proved very popular with the people of Mettur town and the surrounding villages and it attracts on an average about 200 men and women as out-patients every day.

According to S. Jayakumar, Assistant Siddha Medical Officer of the Government Hospital, more than 60 varieties of herbs for curing the diseases such as diabetes (Sirukurinjan, Seenthil, insulin plant); jaundice (Keezhanelli, Vellaikarisalai, Manjalkarisalai); acid peptic diseases (Pirandai, Manathakkali); asthma and cough (Aada thodai, Thoothuvalai, Kandankathiri, arathai, Nanjaruppan, Thulasi, Karupooravalli, Thippili), renal disorders (Siru peelai, Nerunjil) etc have been raised in the garden.

The vitamin greens (Thavasi keerai); the Nilavembu herbs which have the curing power of dengue and other types of fever; Nochi and Thumbai which play a major role in curing head ache, Avuri and Aadu theenda palai, which is used in preparing medicines for treating skin diseases are also found in the garden.

Dr. Jayakumar said that a majority of the herbal plants were procured from the Central Herbal Farm functioning nearby. The common names of the herbs, their botanical names along with their medicinal values and properties have been displayed in the garden. The herbal garden proves a major attraction, Dr. Jayakumar claims.



Interest subvention: FinMin may seek extra Rs15,000 cr



With unseasonal rains and hailstorms resulting in crop damage across vast parts of the country, the finance ministry is likely to seek an additional Rs 15,000 crore in the current fiscal to meet requirements of farmers under the interest subvention scheme for short-term crop loans.

“The scheme is very popular with farmers and it is expected that they would seek additional funds under the scheme owing to the unseasonal rains in March and April,” said a senior government official, adding that additional funds may also be required to meet the backlog of pending claims of banks.

The issue was also raised by the Standing Committee on finance in a report tabled in Parliament last week, which noted that Budgetary allocation to the scheme in the past few years has been lower than the actual requirement, leading to a backlog of settlement and release of claims by banks.

, under which banks extend short-term loans of up to Rs 3 lakh to farmers at 7 per cent interest rates. In turn, the government provides a subvention of 2 per cent to the lenders. Prompt repayment by farmers also earns them an additional 3 per cent subvention by the government.

“As against the required expenditure of Rs 11,343 crore, Rs 15,649 crore and Rs 18,904 crore for the scheme in 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2015-16, respectively, the budgetary allocation towards this end have been Rs 5,400 crore, Rs 6,000 crore and Rs 6,000 crore during 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2015-16 respectively,” the report noted.

By the end of the fiscal, a backlog of Rs 6,500 crore in settlement of claims is expected while further claims in the range of Rs 28,000 crore to Rs 29,000 crore are expected for each of the past three financial years.

“When the Committee pointed out the extent of under allocation under this head, particularly when unseasonal rains have wreaked havoc causing extensive damage to crops in central and north India, the (finance) ministry conceded that additional provision of about Rs 15,000 crore may be required depending upon actual claims received,” said the Parliamentary panel in its

report. Additional expenditure for the scheme is expected to be sought by the ministry during the course of the year, the official said.

The move comes at a time when the government is also revamping the scheme to ensure better targeting for small and marginal farmers. A new scheme is expected to be unveiled over the next few months and banks have been advised to continue the existing scheme till June 30.

According to a report by India Ratings, the losses faced by farmers impacted by the unseasonal rains are estimated at around Rs 20,000 per acre, as full crops were destroyed, affecting states including Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Why you must think twice before biting into that 'fresh' apple



You are what you eat. It's what every mother tells her child as she forces those green vegetables and lentils to be cleaned off the plate. But today, not just eating, even shopping for your daily needs has never been more complex. From reports of pesticides injected into vegetables to chemical

wax on apples to make them shine, in some sense it may be more apt to say we are what we don't eat.

Earlier fruit was bought depending on how fresh it looked. Now doctors tell us to buy something that doesn't beg to be bought. I recently saw a video of a vegetable godown in Delhi where watermelon was being injected to make it look bright red. Since then I have tried to avoid eating it. But for how long? My daughter loves it and in the summer there isn't a more refreshing fruit.

Then of course there is the apple. Like our mothers before us, we now insist on making our children eat at least one daily. After all 'an apple a day' is meant to keep the doctor away. But now as I read more and more, usually on the internet and sometimes to my detriment, it seems best to keep the apple away. I have done the test of trying to scrape the peel with a knife and yes my knife has been covered with a white substance. Every single report I have read recently lists it as one of the most pesticide affected fruit. The Environmental Group (EWG), an American organisation which focusses on toxic chemicals in fruits and vegetables takes out an annual 'Dirty Dozen' list of foods. The list for 2015 begins for the fourth year running with apple, followed by peaches, strawberries, grapes and spinach. Cucumbers and the staple of Indian household potatoes, also make it to the list.

Which is why now I look at those green sprawling farms in Punjab with a different light. Belonging to Jalandhar, it's a journey I have made all my life. Enjoying the greenery, the sight of farmers in the fields and the quaint sight of tractors. But now there is fear of repercussion of the Green revolution that started in the 60's. The short term pressure to live up to its name of being the

food basket of India and feed the burgeoning population resulted in drastic use of pesticides. And the long term results are showing today. Pesticides that are banned globally can still be bought in Punjab. But what is worse, the soil and water have already been badly contaminated. Possibly some say a big reason why increasing cancer cases and serious debilitating illnesses are being reported in large numbers from the state.

In fact, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal has himself admitted that not just the food and water, but even the air in the state is foul and dirty. Things are so bad that it is now even being referred to as the 'Other Bhopal'. The worst affected is the Malwa region, and every night from Bhatinda, which is in the very heart of the region, a packed train leaves for Bikaner in Rajasthan. It is full of patients heading to a government hospital there and is now infamously called the 'Cancer Express' So have things suddenly become this bad? Or is increased awareness now bringing the reality more into the open and making us question things. For instance milk. We grew up drinking two glasses of milk every single day.

In fact, no childhood Lord Krishna story was complete without a mention of his love for butter and milk. But now suddenly, drinking milk is controversial, with many claiming it is overrated, some going so far as to say it is actually harmful. Many kids in this generation are vitamin D deficient. Our confusion may also make them calcium deficient. Although there is yet another lobby that says it's a myth that milk strengthens your bones. In the times of too much information, internet can be a double edged sword. Now after the Green revolution, it is making us believe, we are in the midst of the organic revolution. Organic food is now the new universal fad. And a rather

expensive one. In an Indian joint family system, it is practically impossible for a middle class family to sustain their daily budget on organic fruits and vegetables which are way costlier than what you spend regularly. Moreover, how does one even know what we are paying for is actually what it claims to be.

From organic ketchup to honey, and from exorbitant costing eggs to gram flour, the markets are flooded with the feel good factor. But even if one can afford it, it is not that simple. The options are mind boggling and food labelled 'natural' or 'hormone free' still does not make them organic! Depending on your pocket, it may make sense to switch to at least those things our children consume on a daily basis, that is once we have gone past the debate on whether organic food is equally nutritious or not. But the reality is that we did not grow up eating french fries and burgers as regularly as this generation does.

Our birthday parties were simpler with most of the food cooked at home. So the exposure that our children have to preservatives whether it is in the ketchup or the party favourite chicken nuggets that it comes with, is manifold. So what then do we feed ourselves, and more importantly our children. The spinach they say has chemical residues, the lettuce in your salad isn't healthy either. Mayo Clinic perhaps has the most realistic answer. It says, it is best to mix a variety of food from a different sources. This gives a better mix of nutrients and reduces chances of exposure to a single pesticide. And of course, peel most fruits before consuming them. Yes that takes away some fiber and nutritional value. But that's a small price to pay. Not just what we eat, increased information is making a mess of our beauty regime. Because if you thought only organic pasta was on the shelves, look

again. The obsession to go natural has forced us to re-evaluate what we even put on our face. The creams have toxins, the lotions aren't pure enough. Oils with fancy names like Argon or Rose hip from equally exotic places like Morocco and Chile are all over the market. Maybe it is just marketing, but I at least had never heard of carrot seed oil until recently. So rather than get all flummoxed, I think it is simpler and not to mention cheaper, to go back to the good old ponds cream. Those times were easier. There was also less information traffic. But a man's got to eat what a man must eat. As my doctor said, choose between hormone injected chicken or the pollution. Or maybe just stop reading the internet.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Better infrastructure and technology drive agricultural exporters to private ports

AHMEDABAD: While export of agricultural produce from Gujarat ports has increased substantially over the last two years, the trend that stands out is that more exports are now shifting to private port like Mundra from state-run Kandla port.

The primary reasons are better infrastructure, technology and storage facility for agro products. Smooth cargo handling system also attracts exporters to private ports despite higher charges. Majority of the agricultural products exported from Gujarat are through Kandla and Mundra ports.

Exports of agri produce from Kandla port has been on a decline over the last

couple of years and is likely to dip further, believe experts. They believe that because of the efficiency and modern storage facility at private ports, the exporters are shifting there.

"The turnaround time for a ship is very less in Mundra than Kandla. Also, with agri products being perishable items, exporters prefer ports where it takes less to load or unload a ship," said an industry source. Further, Kandla is focusing more on liquid cargo and hence dry cargo is shifting to Mundra port, he added.

In 2012-13, Kandla port handled exports worth Rs 10,479.33 crore which has come down to Rs 5,374.79 crore in 2014-15 (till January 2015) — a fall of 48.71% in last two years.

Meanwhile, during the same period, exports from Mundra port has jumped from 51% in 2012-13 to over 68% in 2014-15 of the total exports from all ports of Gujarat.

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[6 essential nutrients you need to know](#)



As nutrition and balanced diets become greater concerns with each passing year, we had a word with Shachi Sohal, H.O.D. Dietetics Deptt at Dr. B.L. Kapur Hospital, New Delhi to take us through the top 6 essential nutrients of a healthy diet.

There are six classes of nutrients:Carbohydrates, fats, proteins, minerals, vitamins and water. Each serves a specific function in the body. A nutrient is a source of nourishment needed by any living form to sustain life. Nutrients are not only used as an energy source but are needed for growth, metabolism, to breathe, build tissue, help movement and reproduction.

(1) Carbohydrates

- Carbohydrates are referred to as either sugars or polymers of sugars such as starches and they provide energy for the body. Some of them as glucose are used to meet immediate energy needs, some are stored as glycogen in liver and muscles and rest are converted into fat and stored as adipose tissue.
- The energy value of carbohydrates is 4 kcal per gram.

- Carbohydrates are converted by our body into simple sugars (like those from fruit sugars), which are released quickly, and complex sugars (from bread, pasta, potatoes, rice, vegetables, fruits etc.) which are released at a slower rate (without the insulin rush of simple sugars).
- Around 60 per cent of your daily calories should be in the form of carbohydrates.

(2) Protein

- Dietary proteins provide amino acids to build and maintain tissues and to form enzymes, some hormones and antibodies.
- Proteins function in maintenance and growth as they are major constituents of the matrix of skin, nails, hair, blood cells, serum, bones.
- Proteins are found in the highest concentration in meats, eggs, chicken, and dairy products, soyabean which are high quality proteins.
- Around 20 per cent of your daily calories should come from proteins.
- Proteins provide energy at 4 calories per gram.

(3) Water

- Our body is made up of around sixty percent of water.
- You should drink about 10-12 glasses of water a day.
- Fruits and vegetables can also be good sources of water.
- Water is a catalyst for most of the chemical reactions and is used to transport nutrients to the cells throughout the body.
- Water regulates body temperature and eliminates waste products.

Water forms the basic structure of all cells and organs.

- Water acts as a lubricant during digestion.

(4) Vitamins

There are 2 types of vitamins: fat soluble and water soluble.

- Fat soluble Vitamins, like Vitamins A D E and K, are stored in fat tissue.

- Water soluble Vitamins, like Vitamins B and C, are released from the body if not used.

The most significant sources of vitamins are fruits and vegetables.

- Vitamin C - This is an antioxidant that builds resistance to infection and aids in the prevention and treatment of the common cold.

- Vitamin E - This vitamin is another important antioxidant also used for treatment to promote health.

- Vitamin A helps maintain healthy eyes, skin, teeth, bones and soft tissues and reduces susceptibility to infections. It acts as an antioxidant. Beta-carotene is an antioxidant that is converted into vitamin A in the human body.

- Vitamin D- Essential for formation of bones and teeth; helps the body absorb and use calcium.

- Bioflavonoid - They are essential for Vitamin C absorption, and the two should be taken together.

- B complex vitamins- These vitamins assist and regulate carbohydrate, fat and protein metabolism, Helps convert food into energy and other chemical processes in the body; helps maintain healthy eyes, skin, and nerve function.

(5) Minerals

- Minerals help form our body's structure and regulate various processes within the body.
- The major minerals are: calcium, phosphorus, sodium, chloride, potassium, magnesium and sulfur.
- Calcium is one of the most abundant and important minerals in the body and helps build strong bones and teeth.
- Iron helps in DNA synthesis, helps in growth and healing, our immune functions, reproduction, and is a vital part of hemoglobin and myoglobin, proteins that feed oxygen to our blood and muscles and prevent anemia. Iron has an important role in transporting oxygen in the body.
- Zinc is necessary for a healthy immune system, and is also of use in fighting skin problems such as acne, boils and sore throats.
- Selenium is an antioxidant that assists the immune system.
- Magnesium aids the formation of bone and teeth and assists in the absorption of calcium and potassium. Magnesium plays an important part in energy production, cellular replication (DNA and RNA) and protein formation. Magnesium and Calcium work together to help muscle contraction and aid relaxation (vital functions if you consider that heart is a muscle).
- Phosphorous It is essential for building strong bones and teeth; helps in formation of genetic material; helps in energy production and storage.

(6) Fats

- Fats are a member of a chemical group called lipids.

- Fats provide energy of 9 calories per gram.
- Fats provide Satiety - provides palatability and a feeling of fullness.
- They are carriers of nutrients - fat soluble vitamins as A,D,E,K.
- The body does need a certain percentage of fat as it acts as the body's insulator protecting organs and absorbing shocks.
- Essential fatty acids - The body does not manufacture certain fatty acids as linoleic and linolenic acid and the diet must supply these.

There are the three types of fats:

- Saturated fats are the worst, they clog arteries and are responsible for causing strokes and coronary heart disease.
- Polyunsaturated fats like Omega 3 fatty acid has less fatty acid molecules and is found in fish oils. These fats help in the development of the nervous system.
- Mono unsaturated fats (found in olive oil, peanut oil, avocado, nuts, seeds etc.) have the lowest fatty acid molecules and are the best of the three fats.

Farm boost: Four-day agro fair to begin tomorrow

INDORE: With an aim to provide platform to agro-based industries, a four-day fair 'Agro India' will commence from May 6. The fair is being held by Madhya Pradesh Seeds and Pesticides Association and Indore Infoline Private Limited.

Dilip Bakhliwal, president, Madhya Pradesh Seeds and Pesticides Dealers Association, said, "This fair will provide a platform to showcase more than

100 seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and machineries. It will help increase business of the agriculture sector."

"Training to farmers will also be provided and we will be looking at future prospects of agriculture industry. The B2B platform will help dealers and farmers generate more income," he added.

Report on sowing announced

PUNE: The union agriculture ministry has announced the report on sowing. Area under rabi/summer rice as on today stands at 40.66 lakh hectare as compared to 44.88 lakh hectare in previous year .Total area under rabi rice and summer crops stands at 64.20 lakh hectare as compared to 66.23 lakh hectare in previous year.

The statement by the ministry further stated that summer pulses have increase in sowing area to 7.56 lakh hectare from 5.68 lakh hectare last year. Similarly, sowing area of summer maize and summer coarse cereals have respectively increased to 2.74 lakh hectare and 6.32 lakh hectare compared to 1.97 lakh hectare and 5.60 lakh hectare in previous year.

It is reported that 2.03 lakh hectare area has been covered under summer pulses in Bihar followed by Uttar Pradesh (2.04 lakh ha), Madhya Pradesh (1.69 lakh ha) Gujarat (0.51 lakh ha) Andhra Pradesh (0.44 lakh ha), West Bengal (0.39 lakh ha), Assam(0.17 lakh ha) Karnataka (0.15 lakh ha), and Telangana (0.13 lakh ha). Sowing of summer oilseeds has been reported from the state of West Bengal (2.82 lakh ha), Karnataka (2.19 lakh ha), Odisha (1.31 lakh ha), Gujarat (1.24 lakh ha), Tamil Nadu (0.79 lakh

ha), Maharashtra (0.51 lakh ha), Andhra Pradesh (0.34 lakh ha), Chhatisgarh (0.25 lakh ha), and Telangana (0.21 lakh ha).

Health benefits of the most popular herb - Pudina



Pudina chai on a rainy evening or early winter morning?

That feels so blissful. Mint is one of the oldest and most popular herbs that is grown around the world. There are many different varieties of mint, each having its own subtle flavour and aroma. This herb is used in a range of dishes from stuffing to fruit salads.

Mint is an essential ingredient in many Indian and Middle Eastern cuisine and is popularly mixed with natural plain yogurt to make a 'raita' or brewed with tea to make the famous Indian 'Pudina Chai'. In Thai cooking, it is added to soups and to some highly-spiced curries. Mint grown in Asia is much more strongly flavored than most European mints, with a sweet, cool aftertaste.

Mint as *Minta Spacata* is a plant that has been long used in diverse cultures, such as India, Middle East and Europe. Mint has a sweet flavour, with a cooling after-sensation. Both, fresh and dried mint are used in preparing a large number of recipes, including curries, soups, chutneys, salads, juices, and ice creams.

Its health benefits include:

- Soothing the digestive tract and if you are having stomach ache then it can be of great help
- Drinking herbal mint tea reduces irritated bowel syndromes, cleanses the stomach and also clear up skin disorders such as acne.
- Mint acts as a cooling sensation to the skin and helps in dealing with skin irritations.
- Mint helps in eliminating toxins from the body.
- Crushed mint leaves helps in whitening teeth and combat bad breath.
- Mint is a very good cleanser for the blood.

THE HINDU
BusinessLine

Don't cut shipment sops, plead cashew exporters

The Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI) has urged the Union Commerce Minister to review the Merchandise Exports from India (MEIS) Scheme rates announced in the current Foreign Trade Policy (FTP)

for cashew kernel exports and restore it to levels that prevailed during the last fiscal (5 and 7 per cent incentive) for all destinations.

In a letter to Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman, CEPCI Chairman TKSH Musaliar said that the duty eligibility for all other tree nuts such as almonds, Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, pistachios and peanuts have been retained at 5 per cent for all countries. However, for cashew kernels the incentive has been slashed to 2 per cent for traditional markets as well as emerging and focus markets while no incentive is being offered to the rest.

He said cashew is an agri-product and village industry which was hitherto covered under the Vishesh Krishi and Gram Udyog Yojana with 5 per cent incentive. It is one of the most labour intensive industries in India, providing employment to over 10 lakh workers in farms and factories. Some 98 per cent of the workforce is women. Over 12 States in the country produce and process cashew. There are more than 4,500 processing units, almost all of them in the rural and semi-urban areas throughout the country.

In the foreign trade policy, support has been granted to cash crops such as tea, coffee, spices, marine products, etc., but not for cashew.

Though there is a mention that cashew has been supported as women centric products, the 5 per cent incentive available as VKGUY has now been slashed to 2 per cent under MEIS.

Cashew exporters, he said, are facing severe competition from Vietnam and West Africa. India used to be the world's largest processor and exporter of cashew. On the contrary, the Indian industry is under tremendous pressure to

regain its market share. Increase in labour costs and insufficient domestic production of raw cashewnuts have already eroded the competitiveness of the Indian cashew industry.

SLCM banks on ‘Agri Reach’ to curb post-harvest losses

If technology can curb crop storage losses, then agri-logistics company Sohan Lal Commodity Management (SLCM) believes it has right systems in place to validate that belief with its ‘Agri Reach’ platform.

“We have the capability to transform any infrastructure into a world-class facility without making any investment in infrastructure. It’s like having the best software in order to make a machine more efficient,” Sandeep Sabharwal, SLCM Group CEO, told *BusinessLine*.

The company managed 240 million tonnes (mt) of commodities including wheat, pulses, maize, cotton and more recently vegetables, over the last three years.

Sabharwal said that the company operated on a belief that while “noble intentions” such as increasing per hectare crop yields and irrigation coverage were welcome, food security in India can be better realised in the short-term by preventing damage to gathered crops.

“The focus of peer groups is still on infrastructure creation. This is the e-commerce era, the Amazons and Flipkarts don’t own their assets. Everything’s outsourced in a marketplace where players have their specific expertise to add to the value chain,” said Sabharwal.

Crop auditing

Agri Reach, which took eight years to develop, covers the gamut of inspection services for agri-produce by not only quality monitoring but also prescribing curative steps if crops were found to be damaged.

Weekly checks are carried out by SLCM auditors who are remotely tracked in specific geo-fenced regions and the information relayed instantly to the company headquarters.

“The warehouse owner does not have to invest crores to upgrade structures. We step in and take over and have the place running in 48 hours. Our investment is never more than Rs. 35,000,” he added.

The Government’s move away from mere storage creation to “scientific management” was a welcome step, said Sabharwal, but urged State agencies outsourcing crop handling to third-parties to focus on delivered efficiency instead of the lowest bids for a tender.

“We may be 10 per cent more expensive than others, but we’ll save 9.5 per cent of the crop. The savings needs to be accounted for in the economics and administrative mindset,” he stated.

SLCM, which counts Mayfield Fund, Nexus Venture Partners, Everstone Capital Ventures and ICICI Bank’s EIF Fund among its investors, started post-harvest operations in Myanmar last year.

Myanmar operations

It has already handled 100,000 tonnes of crops, mainly pulses and rice, across four locations in Yangon and is now eyeing the African market.

“We have had a couple of high-level meetings with the Malawi Government and should be moving into that market later this year,” he said, adding that its lending arm, called Kissandhan in India, would look to tie-up with entities there as it has with Yoma Bank in Myanmar.

Landings of marine fish dip on falling catch of oil sardines



India's marine fish landings declined 5 per cent last year to 3.59 million tonnes (mt) against 3.78 mt in 2013.

However, the value based on the price at landing centre increased 8 per cent to Rs. 31,754 crore and registered 12 per cent growth at the retail level, touching Rs. 52,363 crore compared with 2013.

The fluctuations in the availability of oil sardines in most of the southern States as well as drop in Hilsa fish landings in West Bengal contributed to the downtrend in arrivals, said Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute officials.

Oil sardine was the largest contributor of the total marine fish landings. Kerala was the leading State in oil sardine landings, said the CMFRI in a report.

Of the nine maritime States and 2 union territories, Gujarat ranked first with landings of 7.12 lakh tonnes (lt) followed by Tamil Nadu with 6.65 lt, Kerala 5.76 lt, Karnataka 4.74 lt, Maharashtra 3.45 lt, Andhra Pradesh 3.42 lt, Goa 1.53 lt, Odisha 1.39 lt, West Bengal 0.77 lt, Puducherry 0.65 lt and Daman & Diu 0.46 lt.

The landings from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Goa and Odisha registered an increase during the period while catches from Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Daman & Diu showed a declining trend.

The marine fish species/groups that contributed mainly towards landings last year are oil sardine 5.45 lt, Indian mackerel 2.37 lt, carangids 2.10 lt, ribbonfish 2.09 lt, penaeid prawns 2.06 lt, etc.

The average price per kg of fish at landing centre and retail levels were Rs. 88.65 and Rs. 146.27 respectively.

Kerala had the highest realisation of prices at the landing and retail centres, registering a growth of 18.3 per cent and 19.4 per cent respectively.

Business Standard

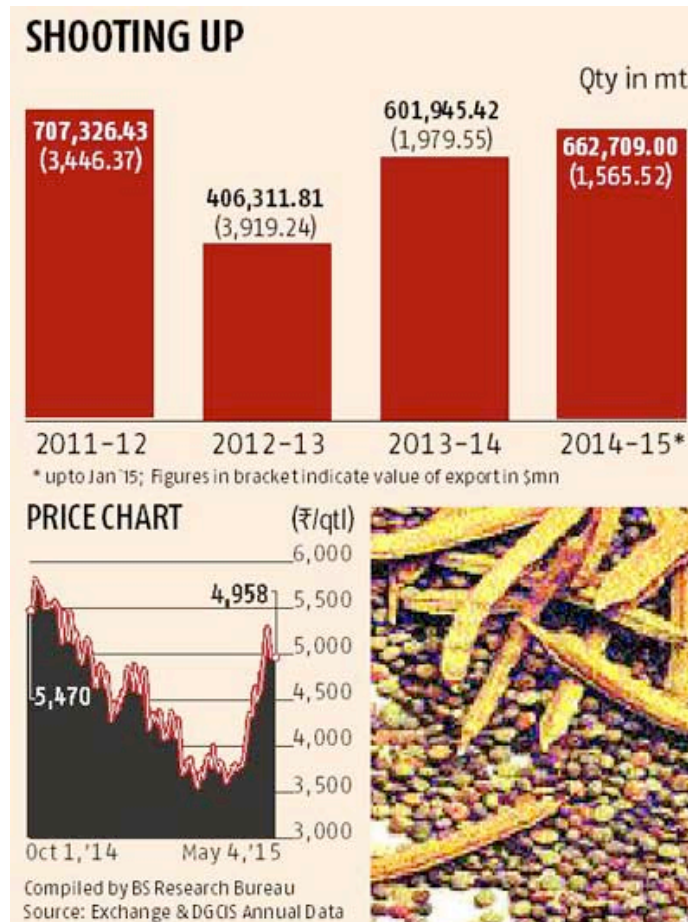
Guar seed prices spurt sharply on crop damage



Unseasonal rain and hail, followed by predictions of a weak monsoon this year, have led to a 40 per cent rise in guar seed prices through the past month. Traders say there has been no significant increase in exports during this period, adding prices had shot up due to fear of a lower crop.

They say seed prices have risen from Rs 3,700-4,000 a quintal about a month ago to Rs 5,000-5,200 a quintal at various spot mandis. “The price increase is purely on the basis of speculation, as there are predictions of a weak monsoon. There is near stagnation in demand in the US market,” said B D Agarwal, chairman and managing director, Vikas WSP, one of the largest guar gum manufacturers in India.

Though export volumes rose 20 per cent in April-February 2014-15 compared to the year-ago period, realisation in dollar terms fell 15 per cent.



Even as guar prices rise, sowing of the commodity is yet to begin in Rajasthan, the largest producer in India. The sowing season in that state is

June-July, while the crop is harvested in September-November. An early crop, which accounts for about five per cent of the production, comes from Gujarat by the end of May.

“Ahead of the new arrival, supply of the tradable commodity has been falling, which speculators have used to jack up prices,” said Ganesh Prajapat, a guar gum analyst.

“Both farmers and traders expect higher prices. The prices could go up to Rs 5,550 a quintal by the end of May. After that, prices could stabilise on account of the arrival of the new crop from Gujarat,” said Jinesh Dugar, a guar gum trader in Rajasthan.

This time, owing to poor demand, about 90 per cent of guar gum processing units have shut. Through the past few years, several companies have opened local warehouses in Houston, US. Agarwal says about 2,000 containers or 40,000 tonnes of unsold guar gum is in warehouses in the US. He adds Vikas WSP alone has about 10 containers in a warehouse in the US.

According to government estimates, guar seed production stood at 3.4 million tonnes (mt) in 2014-15. However, traders say actual production didn't exceed two mt.

This year, the carryover guar seed stock from last year is 1.2-1.5 mt, about one mt more than last year.

Demand for guar gum is linked to oil prices. Higher the oil price, higher is the demand for guar gum, which is used for exploration of shale gas, a substitute for high cost imported oil in the US.

"Till the time oil prices go up to \$70-75/ barrel, and stabilize at \$80-90/ barrel, it is difficult for demand for guar to pick up," said Agarwal.

Speculators fuelling soybean prices: SOPA



The Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA) has revised downwards the estimate of damage to soybean crop due to recent rain. The body now expects the damage to be around 10 million tonne from 10.4 mt earlier.

SOPA blamed the futures market for underestimating the crop size, which it said had pushed prices up 20 per cent in a month. Soybean is around currently Rs 4,070 a quintal.

It said speculators in the futures market were quoting abnormally low figures, hurting the fortunes of processors and their margins.

The association also said there was no change in crop estimates for Madhya

Pradesh, Rajasthan and other states, except Maharashtra where the crop size was revised to 2.6 mt.

“We are looking to protect the long-term interest of processors, not only a few large ones. Heavy speculation and manipulation of prices in the futures market through National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) is hurting the entire trade. Futures influences market sentiments through unfounded rumours of lower crop size, bad weather and other unfavourable conditions resulting into unrealistic rise in prices, which needs to be stopped,” said Davish Jain, president, SOPA.

However, NCDEX clarified, “Soybean futures contracts on the exchange platform have attracted wide and active participation from all segments of the value chain participants, including manufacturers and exporters. The exchange is constantly monitoring the trading on its platform and shall take appropriate action in case any irregularities are noticed.”

Further, “Futures prices are based on underlying fundamental factors. Recent price movement in the futures prices for soya appear to be in response to recent developments in the demand-supply dynamics”.

SOPA said heavy speculation, tax evasion by a few unscrupulous companies, very low prices of soybean oil in the world market and the historically low landed price in India are hurting the business of soybean processors.

The body has suggested making physical delivery mandatory for a certain

percentage of the futures contract, increasing the margin money and temporarily suspending futures during the off-season when the speculation is at a peak.

Jain said that, SOPA will again approach the Central government to increase import duty on soybean oil from current 7.5% to 17.5% because there is a likelihood of carry over stock in the coming season”.