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THE HINDU

Agricultural varsity develops coconut basin digg



The Agricultural Research Station (ARS), Mannuthy, of the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has developed new coconut basin digger for the benefit of farmers.

The ongoing Large Area Exercise (LAE), using the new coconut basin digger developed at the Agricultural Research Station, has been attracting the attention of coconut farmers.

The basin digger developed by modifying the power tillers and adding certain attachments was found to be highly beneficial to the coconut farming community, which had to abandon the traditional basin digging activity due to labour shortage and exorbitant labour cost, said KAU sources.

The yield and productivity of coconut palms in the State has been found decreasing drastically due to lack of attention to palm specifically annual manuring and plant protection. Manual basin digging has been stopped for several years and availability of an appropriate machine was a long-felt

need. Basins of about 2,000 palms attached to the ARS, Mannuthy, are being opened during Large Area Exercise launched by P. Rajendran, Vice Chancellor, KAU. After LAE, another exercise to dig basins of 2,000 palms would be taken up in nearby panchayats, the sources said.

Koppal Zilla Panchayat members seek paddy procurement centres

The demand to set up paddy procurement centres dominated the general body meeting of the Koppal Zilla Panchayat here on Thursday.

Even as the meeting began, members cutting across party lines, tried to draw the attention of Amaresh Kulagi, zilla panchayat president, who was in the chair, about the plight of the paddy growers in the district and wanted the authorities to come to their rescue by setting up procurement centres.

They pointed out that ready-to-harvest paddy crop on about 26,861 hectares and horticultural crops on about 434 hectares in the district was damaged in the heavy rain recently and it had affected the yield.

A compensation of Rs. 25,000 a hectare for agricultural crops and Rs. 13,500 a hectare for horticultural crops, announced by the government, was yet to be distributed.

Adding insult to injury, the price of paddy in the open market had crashed too. From Rs. 1,200 a tonne, it had come down to Rs. 800 and below. In this background, the government should come to the rescue of the growers by intervening in the market by setting up procurement centres.

When Y.H. Lambu, Deputy Director, Food and Civil Supplies, informed the meeting that procurement centres could be opened only after getting orders from the government, Mr. Kulagi directed him to take up the issue with the Deputy Commissioner and forward a proposal.

Following complaints from the members that eggs were not being provided to children of anganwadis, Mr. Kulagi directed the Deputy Director, Women and Child Development, to stop crediting the amount meant for eggs to the accounts of anganwadi workers and to procure eggs directly by fixing an agency, by floating tender, and distribute them to children. Mr. Kulagi also appealed to the members and officials to achieve the target of construction

of 49,610 toilets in the district during the current year under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan.

After Vellayani, Panakkad to get pesticide residue lab

The second pesticide residue analysis laboratory in the State is coming up at the College of Agriculture, Padannakkad, in the district.

The first public sector pesticide residue laboratory in the State is at Vellayani College of Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) in Thiruvananthapuram.

The effort is a major step towards checking increasing use of pesticide in fruits and vegetables. Agricultural Minister K.P. Mohanan will lay the foundation stone for the laboratory at the college at 10 a.m. on Friday.

The laboratory will facilitate periodical analysis of vegetables and fruits collected from various sources.

Report

The Vellayani college has been filing its report to the University and the State government to aid authorities in taking corrective measures as per the lab reports.

The pesticide residue analysis laboratory at Vellayani has also helped to enhance public awareness on the presence of pesticide residues in vegetables and fruits, KAU Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran said.

Samples from north

The laboratory coming up at the Padannakad agricultural college will take care of samples collected from north Kerala, Dr Rajendran said, adding the KAU was planning to soon set up a similar laboratory in Thrissur.

P. Karunakaran, MP, will inaugurate the two-day annual 'Malabar Mango fest', displaying diverse mango varieties and plants on the sidelines of the inaugural function.

A chance to know mangoes



Knowing about mangoes, including the innumerable varieties, is as important as eating them. The Calicut Mango Exhibition - 2015, which began at the Gandhi Park, near the Fourth Gate here on Thursday, is a venue for both, say its organisers, the Calicut Agri-Horticultural Society.

Besides the sale of a wide variety of ‘naturally ripened’ mangoes, the show takes the visitors closer to more than 50 varieties of mangoes grown in different parts of the country. While some are indigenous varieties, the rest are hybrid ones developed by various farm research agencies and agricultural universities.

“We have not used any toxic agents to ripen the fruits, but followed only natural methods,” says R. Ravi, secretary of the Muthalamada Agriculture Improvement Cooperative Society, which distributed mangoes for the exhibition. “You can see that the mangoes here are not uniformly ripened,” says Mr. Ravi as a proof for his argument.

Popular varieties such as Malgovala, Kudadath, Benganappalli and Alphonso are the favourites of buyers while north Indian varieties such as Himapasanth, Nasipasanth and Jahangir, known for their association with the Mugal rulers, are also available. Besides native varieties such as Kalapadi, Chandrakkan and Sinduram, recently developed varieties such

as H44, H4 and H151 are also on display. The organisers have arranged facilities for serving mangoes and mango juice at the venue. A mango eating competition will be held at the event at 4 p.m. on Sunday.

Saplings for sale

Seeds of vegetables and a wide collection of grafted saplings of mango and fruits such as jack fruit, grape and gooseberry are on sale.

The show is on from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. till May 13.

Pepper yield fails to cheer growers



The increase in pepper production atop Kolli Hills failed to cheer up the growers as the price has fallen considerably when compared to last year.

Prevailing weather conditions, soil content, elevation and rain at the right time help the small pepper growers who have lands less than two acre to cultivate the plants.

The pepper plants are trailed on shade trees such as silver oak and pepper is plucked every year in the month of April and May.

Also, coffee plants are grown in the shade of the silver oak trees in the same field.

Later, the plucked pepper seeds are withered from the central cone, dried up and sold in the market.

It is cultivated in more than 2,000 acre in the hill and is the main source of income for over 500 families.

About 250 pepper plants can be grown in one acre and a single plant yields about five to eight kg pepper.

The life span of a pepper plant is 30 years after which it is to be removed and new plant has to be planted.

Increase in production

Last year, growers sold the black pepper for Rs. 650 to Rs. 750 per kg. to the traders and also in the local market.

But growers attribute the current drop in price due to increased production.

“The harvesting season is about to end this month. But the price remains at Rs. 580 per kg”, said Raja of Thanni Mathi village in Pailnadu.

“We sell pepper to traders and middlemen directly as there are no cooperative societies to procure pepper grown here”, he added.

“We do not get right price for our products. Branding should be done for the pepper grown in Kolli Hills and marketed by the government”, growers said.

Zero-budget natural farming need of the hour



Sustainable farming crusader Subhash Palekar has advised the State Government to put in place a policy framework for Zero Budget Natural Farming as it is the only way to make agriculture profitable.

Zero Budget Natural Farming does not involve construction of major irrigation projects and it only required judicious use of available water resources for securing optimum yields. The founder of ZBNF who was here to participate in a programme in Penamaluru told *The Hindu* that districts in North Andhra and Rayalaseema were water stressed while the remaining districts had a surplus. Farmers cultivating paddy in areas with surplus water were using 90 per cent water in excess of what was required.

Mr. Palekar made this remark when asked about the scope for shortage of water in Andhra Pradesh owing to the problems relating to water release it was facing from the neighbouring Telangana State.

He said ZBNF would go a long way in enhancing the moisture retaining capacity of the soil. “Jeevaamrutham” (culture of micro-organisms) and mulching used in ZBNF not only improved the fertility of the soil, but also increased moisture in it. This was another form of water conservation.

He said crops cultivated using ZBNF were resistant to natural calamities in relative terms. This could be seen from the recent Hudhud cyclone which resulted in extensive damages to paddy, mango and coconut crops while the crops cultivated using ZBNF suffered minimal damage.

April-May showers may affect monsoon's impact

THE IMPACT

HOW A 'GOOD' PRE-MONSOON RAINFALL IN STATE AFFECTS MONSOON

It reduces temperature, but creates high-pressure islands in atmosphere, especially over Arabian Sea

Monsoon clouds, however, move away from high-pressure areas

This results in the State losing out on monsoon rainfall to an extent

If you are one of those heaving a sigh of relief over the good spell of pre-monsoon showers that has brought down the temperature, think again. There is a strong possibility of it affecting the southwest monsoon's performance in the State this year, according to an initial forecast.

The Agro Meteorology Department of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, has indicated that the State may witness "below normal" monsoon mainly due to the impact of good pre-monsoon showers which are in excess of the normal by 12 to 15 per cent.

Professor at Agro Meteorology Department M.B. Raje Gowda, who is also the Registrar of the university, told *The Hindu* that the good pre-monsoon showers were bound to reduce soil and atmospheric temperature. This would result in the formation of high-pressure islands in the atmosphere over Arabian Sea along the State at a crucial time when monsoon activity is supposed to pick up. But the monsoon clouds move away from high-pressure atmospheric islands, resulting in the State losing out on monsoon rainfall to an extent, he explained.

The initial forecast puts the likely average deficit in the southwest monsoon rainfall for the entire State in the range of 3 to 7 per cent, he said.

According to him, such a deficit is bound to affect agricultural activity as the actual deficit for some of the areas, especially those witnessing high rainfall, could be higher than the State average.

More accurate details regarding the degree of impact of pre-monsoon showers as well as the quantum of deficit in the monsoon rainfall for the State would be known by the third week of May when further forecast would be done, Dr. Gowda said.

The southwest monsoon accounts for about 70 per cent of the calendar year's rainfall in the State. Any deficit in monsoon rainfall is bound to affect agriculture, he observed.

The pre-monsoon showers occur from April to May and sometime extend till June.

Initial forecast puts average deficit in southwest monsoon rainfall in State in the range of 3 to 7 per cent

Total organic farming in State by 2016'

The government was making efforts to make Kerala an organic farming State by 2016, K.P. Mohanan, Minister for Agriculture, has said. Speaking on the occasion of the foundation-laying ceremony of the district veterinary complex at Kodimatha, the Minister said the government wanted the students to spread the message of organic farming.

As part of the campaign, the department would distribute vegetable seeds to all the school students in the State. "This will help to bring the whole family into organic farming," he said. According to him, the campaign to make the State self-sufficient in milk production has also gathered momentum. The plan is to produce 30 lakh litres of milk from three lakh cows.

According to him, 30 blocks in the State would have veterinary hospitals where the farmers could get round-the-clock service. "Two blocks in Kottayam will be benefited by this project," he said.

Centre urged to keep tabs on pulse prices

The Odisha Government has sought intervention of the Centre to stabilise the rising prices of moong, arhar, urad and masoor dals.

“Prices of pulses have spiked in last 15 days sharply. Odisha is a consuming State and most of the dals are being procured from other states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattishgarh. The stiff rise in price at the source points is reflected all wholesale and retail markets of the State and is adversely affecting the consuming public,” wrote State Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare (FSCW) Secretary Madhusudan Padhi to his counterpart at Centre.

Mr. Padhi said: “The supply position of pulses has deteriorated mainly due to unseasonal rains and it is learnt that imports of pulses is being done in a big way to meet the supply shortfall. It is requested that appropriate authority of Union government may be assigned the task to ensure that the information of landing prices of imported pulses be disseminated on regular basis across the country to control the undue profit taken by the importers.”

Besides, the Odisha Government has demanded exclusion of pulses from NCDEX listing for next six months or till the next crops arrive.

“There is inclusion of three types of pulses such as Tur, Channa and Urad in National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX) product listing. Since NCDEX is dealing with determination of future price of pulses, the element of speculation might be there. To reduce speculation, these commodities may be excluded from the NCDEX listing for next six months or till the next crops arrive,” he stated.

The government had made a move to strengthen enforcement mechanism for stabilising dal prices. All district collectors were asked to prepare inventory of dal product stocks available in State.

Green tea with exercise daily may reverse Alzheimer's



A compound found in green tea and voluntary exercise slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease and may even reverse its effects, a new research has found.

According to the researchers, the green tea extract, epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), which was found effective in mice could lead to advancements in the treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's in humans too.

"In Alzheimer's patients, amyloid-beta peptide (A-beta) can accumulate and clump together causing amyloid plaques in the brain," said Todd Schachtman, professor of psychological sciences in the College of Arts and Science at University of Missouri. Symptoms can include increased memory loss and confusion, agitation and a lack of concern for your environment and surroundings.

"We looked at ways of preventing or postponing the onset of the disease which we hope can eventually lead to an improvement of health status and quality of life for the elderly," he noted.

The researchers decided to investigate the effects of voluntary exercise and EGCG on memory function and A-beta levels in mice known to show

plaque deposits and behaviour deficits. Researchers administered EGCG in the drinking water of the mice and gave them access to running or exercise wheels.

The findings appeared in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.



Govt works to finetune farm subsidy as per WTO



The government is working on a “paradigm shift” in the country’s agricultural subsidy regime — now mainly centered on minimum support prices (MSP) and provision of fertiliser, water and other inputs at below cost — to make them WTO-compatible without any reduction in the overall quantum of assistance to farmers.

“The intention is not to reduce domestic support. Instead, it is only to shift the present form of subsidisation based on price support to that of public investment for irrigation systems, R&D for environment-friendly cultivation

practices and increasing farm productivity. We need to make greater use of untapped categories of green box subsidies such as structural adjustment assistance, income insurance programmes and support to disadvantaged regions,” Commerce Ministry officials said.

The latest exercise follows a directive from the Prime Minister’s Office in mid-November seeking quantification of all subsidies and support measures extended to India’s farm sector under the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture. Subsidies coming under the green box are not subject to any reduction commitments, as these are considered to be non-trade-distorting.

“We are examining the possibility of moving as much subsidies as possible under the green box, which is a safe haven. Only in the case of MSP-based procurement, which is a price-support measure, is such a shift not possible”, the officials noted.

India has until now been claiming green box protection for its support towards public stockholding for food security purposes. The opponents to its stance have contended that food security-linked stockholding programmes are trade-distorting, if they entail procuring grain from farmers at above market prices.

India successfully negotiated an open-ended “peace clause” at the WTO’s General Council last November. Under this, no country can be dragged to the WTO’s dispute settlement body for any alleged breach of farm subsidy limits on account of food security-linked stockholding, pending the finding of a “permanent solution” to the issue.

But in the meantime, the government on its own has sought to limit MSP increases and cracked down on states announcing bonuses over and above these.

and Finance ministries, the idea of an appropriate model of direct “decoupled” farm income support — that is, not linked to prices or production — in the Indian context was also discussed. This will require identifying the beneficiaries to whom such support would be directed, based on the creation of a comprehensive database of tillers/owners, digitization of land records and fixing the per hectare support to be paid annually to them.

There is a similar plan of overhauling the entire input subsidy delivery mechanism through direct benefit transfers (DBT) in fertilizers, electricity and water. The DBT model is already being implemented in delivery of subsidized LPG cylinders. It is also being proposed to begin this on an experimental basis for distribution of foodgrains, which could also be extended to other urban areas.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Common entrance test for farm PG courses

Candidates appearing for multiple entrance tests to get admission to 40-odd postgraduate courses at farm universities of the state can heave a sigh of relief. From the coming academic year, the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) will conduct a common entrance exam for the Masters programmes. The first test will be conducted by UAS, Dharwad on June 11. For three decades, the UAS situated in Bengaluru, Dharwad and Raichur and

the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga and the University of Horticultural Sciences, Bagalkot have been conducting their own entrance exams. MB Rajegowda, registrar, UAS, Bengaluru told TOI that till last year, PG aspirants not only paid separate fees for multiple entrance exams but also travelled to different places to appear for them. This caused stress among students, he said, adding that the common test was devised to help them. The new test will have two papers,

each of 100 marks, and objective-type questions. Counselling and seat allotment will be done at UAS, Dharwad. UAS, Bengaluru will conduct the common test in 2016-17.

Admission timeline * Commencement of filing online application -- April 19 * Last date for filing online application -- May 10 * Download hall tickets -- June 6

* Entrance examination -- June 11 * Marks list of entrance examination -- June 25 * Merit list - July 4

* Download checklist for counselling -- July 5 * Counselling at UAS, Dharwad -- July 10-17 * Second round counselling -- August 5-7 *

Commencement of semester classes - August 17 * Third and final round counselling - August 26

‘Sunset clause’ nears its sunset

Chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar on Thursday said that the 'sunset clause' from the Goa Agriculture Tenancy Act may be nearing its sunset phase. Its end may either come in the form of an ordinance or a legislation during the legislative assembly's monsoon session.

The Act was amended in 2014 by way of the Goa Agricultural Tenancy (Amendment) Bill, 2014 and one of the new additions was the 'sunset clause', putting a time frame for a person to apply for tenancy declaration.

The chief minister said that he would soon discuss the issue with his colleagues and bring it to the cabinet. "So far, we have only discussed it at the party level and not with my cabinet colleagues. I will do it soon", Parsekar told TOI on Thursday.

'Won't allow foreign vessels to fish in EEZ'

The Union agriculture ministry has said that foreign vessels will not be allowed to fish in the Indian exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Fisheries

development commissioner B Vishnu Bhat has assured the fishing community that any final decision on B Meenakumari committee recommendations related to fishing in Indian EEZ will be taken in consultation with the defence ministry.

In reply to a letter sent by Kerala fisheries coordination committee chairman V Dinakaran, the commissioner said the recommendation of the Meenakumari committee for creation of a buffer zone will not be accepted.

He said the Union agriculture ministry had, in March, convened a consultation meeting, which was attended by fisheries ministers of all coastal states and the defence minister. "All issues raised on the recommendations of the expert committee have been noted," the reply said.

The fishing community had sought the cancellation of the order issued by the agriculture ministry on deep-sea fishing on November 12, 2014 with immediate effect. However, the ministry replied that guidelines for fishing operations in the EEZ were revised to ensure hassle-free operation of fishing vessels in the zone by Indian entrepreneurs and sustainable exploitation of deep-sea fishery resources.

It said the public notice and guidelines for fishing in the EEZ beyond the 12 nautical miles was issued so that any Indian entrepreneur could venture in deep-sea fishing and they would not affect the livelihood concerns of traditional fishermen.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the fishermen committee had demanded that the Meenakumari committee report should be rejected and a new report should be submitted after considering the recommendations of the 1993 Murari committee report and suggestions of fishermen organizations.

The organizations had sought a review of the G Syda Rao committee report on review of the ban period by considering the social condition of fisherfolk. "A majority of state ministers had agreed on extending the ban period for 61 days from the existing 47 days based on the findings of the technical

committee. Accordingly, an order had been issued for implementation of uniform fishing ban in EEZ," the letter said.

The development commissioner said the Centre would favourably consider the demand for provision of fuel for mechanized boats and craft on subsidy rates to states.

Online registration of farmers soon

In a major initiative to ensure quick and direct intervention for assistance, the state agriculture department has started the process of online registration of farmers in the state.

UP has nearly 2.35 crore farmers and their online registration would be a gigantic task, but the agriculture department has made up its mind. The move would not only help the department map agrarian activities from sowing to harvesting, but also provide a window to directly interact with farmers bypassing the existing system in case of an urgent need like the present farm crisis, says principal secretary Amit Mohan Prasad.

Giving the details of the multi-pronged strategy for registration, Prasad said that the department had pulled up its socks to complete the formalities by starting an awareness campaign in this regard. Apart from whatever information asked by the farmers related to the department's plans and programmes and government assistance, if required the agriculture department officials would also do the spot inspections, he said.

On the instruction of Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, the department is also making efforts to ensure transfer of subsidy to farmers through the direct benefit transfer into their accounts. As per a decision taken at meeting chaired by Prasad, this would be the first time when the farmers would get their subsidy on seeds through the DBT. This time for paddy seed costing Rs 25,000 a quintal, the government would give a subsidy of around Rs 13,000 a quintal.

The department is also launching drives to create awareness among farmers to switch over to scientific ways of farming, particularly in the forthcoming kharif season which is going to witness a weak monsoon .

With 100 seeds on display, four-day agro fest kicks off

Aiming to provide a platform to agro-based industries, four-day fair, 'Agro India', began on Wednesday. Organized by Madhya Pradesh Seeds and Pesticides Association and Indore% Infoline Private Limited, the fair aimed at increasing investment in agriculture% sector.

Madhya Pradesh Seeds and Pesticides Dealers Association president Dilip Bakhliwal said, "Agriculture sector is one of the biggest sectors of state. This fair has showcased more than 100 seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and machineries. It will help increase business of agriculture sector."

"It is important to train our farmers with modern techniques and technology. For the agriculture sector to grow modern techniques, usage of pesticides and skilled farmers would play a significant role in growth of the industry. The B2B platform will also help dealers and farmers generate more income," he added.

Go green: 9 Delicious Drinks that 'll help you get healthy



Plant-based foods which have large amounts of phytonutrients increase the body's ability to detoxify naturally. Just one glass full of green juice can give your body the much-required energy, nutrients and also helps get rid of toxins. So take your pick from these healthy green [juices](#) that will help cleanse your body.



Cilantro Fiesta: Give your sugary smoothie a miss and drink up some of this healthy juice which has just 100 K Cals and a whole lot of vital nutrients.

Ingredients:

6 leaves romaine lettuce

¼ bunch cilantro

½ lime

1½ cup pineapple

Method: Add all the [ingredients](#) in a mixer and add some water for consistency.



Green Paradise: Iron-rich spinach, kale leaves and celery give this juice a rich green colour and lemon adds that citrusy flavour. Along with being a detoxifier, it's also a pretty refreshing beverage.

Ingredients:

5 handfuls of spinach

3 kale leaves

3 celery stalks

½ cucumber

½ lemon juice

2 apples

Method: Cut the apples into pieces and grind all the ingredients together. Mix it until it gets a smooth consistency.



Pineapple Kale Cucumber Drink: Pineapples have a natural sweetness and smooth texture, while cucumber, kale and green apples add the refreshing green colour to this vitamin-rich drink.

Ingredients:

1 cucumber

1 green apple

½ cup of pineapple

4 kale leaves

3 chard leaves

Method: In a mixer, add all the ingredients together and blend into a smooth juice consistency.



Pineapple Mint Detox Drink: For a tasty detoxifier, make this drink with mint leaves. The flavour can be enhanced with some lime juice.

Ingredients:

- A few spinach leaves
- 4 kale leaves
- 1 cup pineapple
- 1 handful of mint leaves (4-5)
- 2 green apples

Method: Blend all together and drink. Add a pinch of cinnamon and honey for flavour.



Green Goddess: Chard leaves are rich in Vitamins, cucumbers are have a cooling effect and ginger adds taste thus this combo is a hit.

Ingredients:

6 chard leaves
1 to 2 cups of green grapes
½ cucumber
1 green apple
½-1 inch piece of ginger

Method: Blend together in a mixer and enjoy.



Matcha Latte: Matcha is the newest superfood and this Matcha Latte will give you an instant energy boost along with antioxidants.

Ingredients:

1 cup almond milk (you can substitute with soy milk)
½ tsp matcha powder

Method:

1. Heat the milk till it reaches boiling stage. Do not boil.
2. Add the matcha powder in the mug and pour half a glass of milk. Then whisk it together till it gets frothy.
3. Add the remaining milk.



Green Cleanse: This is the perfect cleanser with just the right amount of nutrients to keep you energised all day.

Ingredients:

- 1 zucchini
- 3 pears
- 1/2 fennel bulb
- 4 broccoli florets
- 1 bunch of spinach

Method: Blend all the ingredients together and consume immediately.



Kale and Kiwi Camaraderie: With the natural sweetness of kiwis and apples, this drink scores real low on calories and makes for an enriching drink.

Ingredients:

1 bunch of kale

3 kiwis

1 to 2 green apples

Method: Blend all together and drink.



Kale, Orange and Mint Drink: The vitamin-rich orange juice when mixed with kale and mint give you a unique tasting drink that detoxifies your body.

Ingredients:

3 to 4 oranges

5 kale leaves

A handful of mint leaves

Method: Blend all the ingredients together and add honey and cinnamon to enhance the flavour.

Pepper exporters want foreign trade policy anomaly set right



The pepper trade has asked the Chairman of Spices Board to take up with the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) of the anomalies/mistakes in the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme reward given for black pepper in the recently announced export-import policy.

A group of exporters who have facilities to process pepper here has alleged that the announced rates will only benefit those who process pepper in their in Vietnam and are exporting from there. On the other hand, those undertake the processing in India adhering to the “Make in India” concept of the Prime Minister, and exporting, will be hit, they said.

They said, according to new policy, the reward for black pepper garbled (processed) is only for emerging and focus markets while shipments of ungarbled (non-processed farm-grade) attract 3 per cent incentive. .

Given the efforts to promote “Make in India Products”, the reward announced for the garbled pepper appears to have been wrongly put in a different code. The reward is only two per cent that too, for shipments to traditional, emerging and focus markets.

Most of the European countries, which are traditional markets, are buying garbled pepper from India and therefore, the benefit of the scheme reward of 5 per cent will have to be given to exporters shipping to these countries.

European and other developed nations have slowed down their buying from India and started demanding pesticide residue guarantees. However buyers/importers not specifying any particular pesticides to be tested except a general remark they make while placing order to provide pesticide residue free pepper certificates. When approached about the specific pesticide residue for testing, a list of 300 pesticides have been provided. The testing for the entire lot of pesticides will cost higher than the pepper consignment itself, exporters said. Therefore, those exporters who are exporting to traditional markets should be given the benefit of MEIS reward of 5 per cent.

The Spices Board, according to reliable sources, is understood to have taken up the matter with all concerned at the Centre.

Exporters have urged the Government to initiate steps to remove the anomaly and issue corrected the rates with effect from April 1.

LEDs lighting up Dutch horticulture sector



Step into any of the greenhouses in the Netherlands and one is unlikely to miss out on the arrays of tiny blue and red coloured light emitting diodes (LEDs) amidst the tomato or capsicum plants or cucumber vines.

Horticulturists across Netherlands, the second-largest exporter of agri-products after the US, are experimenting with the use of the multi-coloured LEDs for a potential enhancement of yield, improvement in quality and taste of the produce and also reduce their greenhouse energy costs.

Cutting down costs

Add to this, a section of large growers have also started tapping geo-thermal energy, heat generated at great depths, to warm their greenhouses. Geo-thermal energy and LEDs are the latest buzzwords in the Dutch horticulture sector, where growers are trying to reduce their energy costs while making their operations more sustainable. The LEDs are far more energy efficient and consume less energy compared to traditional fluorescent growing lights.

As operational costs rise amidst shrinking profit margins, the energy-intensive Dutch horticulture industry is increasingly looking at alternatives that are sustainable and could possibly help them reduce costs. Netherlands has now close to 10,000 hectares under greenhouses against a peak of 11,000 hectares a couple of years ago. Besides shrinking profits, reduced interest among younger generation in horticulture has led to consolidation of holdings. **Russian ban**

Also, the one-year ban imposed by Russia in August last year on food imports from the Western countries in retaliation against sanctions imposed on its defence, oil and financial sectors over its support for rebels in East Ukraine has hit vegetable growers hard in Netherlands, affecting their margins. Russia was among the biggest importers of fruits and vegetables from the European Union.

“We have been experimenting with the LED lightings for the past one year,” said Ted Duijvestijn, owner Duijvestijn Tomaten, considered the most innovative producer of tomatoes in a sustainable way. Duijvestijn Tomaten won the award for Best Tomato Grower Worldwide 2015 at the Fruit Logistica in Berlin recently. In a corner of the Duijvestijn greenhouse spread across 13.5 acres at Pijnacker near The Hague, arrays of various coloured LEDs have been installed amidst several rows of tomato plants.

Yields improve

“We have been told that LEDs help improve the quality of tomatoes. We are trying to figure it out ourselves,” said Duijvestin, who grows 9 million kg of tomatoes annually. Eva van Rijsingen, consultant researcher at HAS

University of Applied Sciences, said it was possible to influence the yields and improve parameters such as taste and quality of horticultural produce by using various coloured LEDs to grow the plants and fine-tuning their wavelengths.

Rijsingen, who leads Brightbox, a collaborative research initiative in hi-tech horticulture between the HAS University of Applied Sciences, Philips Horticulture LED Solutions and the Dutch province of Limburg, said results of the research on usage of LEDs in greenhouses were expected to be published later this year.

Geo-thermal systems

Duijvestijn is also among the 13-odd large horticulture farms that are using the geo-thermal energy to heat up their greenhouses for the past couple of years. As part of the process, hot water of around 70 degrees centigrade is extracted from great depth of around 2,000 metres and is brought to the surface, where it is pumped through heat exchangers.

In these exchangers, the heat of the hot water is absorbed by a second stream of water. This hot water (second stream) is used to heat up the greenhouses. After passing through the heat exchanger, the water (extracted from the ground) would have turned cooler by around 10 degrees, which is then pumped back into the stratum.

The deployment of geothermal heat plant that entails drilling through stratum at great depths and installation of heat exchangers is highly capital-intensive and the Dutch Government has supported the growers through various incentives such as tax breaks and soft loans.

“It cost about €15 million for setting up the geo-thermal energy system. We expect to recover the costs over a period of 5-7 years,” said Pieter Wijnen, owner, Wijnen Square Crops, that grows mainly capsicum and cucumbers and exports to countries such as China and Japan.

(The writer was in the Netherlands at the invitation of Netherlands Enterprise Agency)

Coconut oil loses floor to other cheaper alternatives; copra dips

Copra prices decreased this week on slack demand.

“One of the leading firms quoted lower price as the demand for the edible copra is almost nil. Further they also quoted lower price for the local copra which has reflected in all markets.

On Wednesday, the copra was sold at ₹8,700-8,900 a quintal, which is ₹1,000 less than last week’s price. The sale of copra was also very poor,” said RM Palanisamy, a trader.

He also said the price of the coconut oil has come down to ₹1,820-1,920 for a 15-kg loose pack.

“This price is certainly low when compared to last week’s price. For such a decreased price the sale was very poor.”

Oil crushers said that demand for the palm kernel and palm oil were very high.

Local consumers have switched over to Sunflower and palm oils as these are cheaper than coconut oil.

Copra farmers stopped procuring coconut as they are having ample stock of unsold copra with them.

TAUPA silver jubilee this week

The Silver Jubilee celebrations of Pensioners’ Association of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TAUPA) is scheduled on May 9 and 10 at the Anna Auditorium, TNAU Campus, Coimbatore. Mooted by the retired staff of the University with just about 20 members at start in 1990, TAUPA’s membership has grown to 1,400. The association’s office in Coimbatore is located in TNAU campus. To broaden the services to its members who reside in different parts of Tamil Nadu and outside as well, the association has spread its wings into Madurai, Trichy, Thanjavur and Chennai by opening a branch office in each of these places.

The association has, in all these years, felicitated members who completed 75 years during its annual day celebration and on the National Pensioners' Day (observed on December 17, every year) remembered those that had completed 85 years. Our Bureau

World food prices fall to nearly 5-year low in April: UN FAO



Global food prices fell in April to their lowest since June 2010, as dairy led most commodities down, the United Nations food agency said today.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy, meat, and sugar, averaged 171 points in April, 1.2 per cent below its reading in March.

High global production, a strong US dollar and cheaper crude oil have helped cap food prices for the past year and the index has been declining since April 2014.

There are no major concerns about supply, so external factors are likely to have more influence over price developments in the near future, FAO senior economist Abdolreza Abbassian said.

"My gut feeling is that the exchange rate would have the biggest influence, and if the dollar does get weaker this could be supportive to prices," Abbassian said.

Meat prices bucked the trend, rising in April for the first time since August 2014.

The FAO forecast world cereal production in 2015 would fall by 1.5 per cent from the previous year, with overall output reaching 2.509 billion tonnes. Most of the decrease would come from reduced planting of maize, the agency said.

Cereal stocks at the end of the 2015-16 season are forecast to reach 626.6 million tonnes and world wheat output is due to hit 719.1 million tonnes, the FAO said.

Turmeric pales on inferior quality arrivals

Spot turmeric prices decreased by ₹200 a quintal on Thursday due to arrival of poor quality.

“Despite a meagre arrival of 5,000 bags, the buyers quoted lower price and procured 50 per cent of the stocks. The arrivals may drop further due to severe summer. The traders are now getting very minimum demand from North India and may increase only after first week of June,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

The Salem finger turmeric and local finger turmeric prices decreased by ₹200 a quintal and the Salem root variety by ₹230. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹5,019-8,349 a quintal; the root variety ₹4,666-7,619.

Salem turmeric: The finger turmeric went for ₹6,889-8,892; the root turmeric ₹5,811-8,219. Of the arrival of 1,067 bags, 310 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric traded at ₹7,317-8,459 and the root variety ₹6,399-7,987. Of the arrival of 989 bags, 782 were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹7,019-8,384 and the root variety ₹6,819-7,689. Of the 990 bags offered, 956 were sold.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric traded at ₹6,809-8,269; the root variety ₹6,262-7,259. Of the 454 bags placed for sale, 405 found takers.

Business Standard

Environment protection voices ebb in economic downturn: IIM-A study



Voices in support of environment protection have ebbed during economic down-turn, according to a study conducted by the Indian Institute of Management here.

It cautions that such situation can be potentially problematic from the perspective of a developing country like India.

"There was a clear shift in support for the economic growth over environmental protection between the year 2006, that represents a period of economic boom, and the year 2014, which represents a period of economic down-turn," it said.

"In the year 2006, while 52 per cent of people have a clear preference for environmental protection, only 35 per cent of the people have clear preference for economic growth," it said.

"This reverses in 2014, when the percentage of people favouring environmental protection is only 36.2 per cent relative to a much larger proportion of 49.3 per cent with a clear preference for economic growth," said the study carried out by associate professor Rama Mohana Turaga.

There is not only a clear increase in the percentage of public favouring economic growth, but also a clear drop in the proportion preferring environmental protection, revealed the study.

However, low support for environmental protection during economic downturn is potentially problematic from the perspective to ensure environmentally sustainable development, it said.

India is already suffering from severe environmental degradation. According to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), in which countries are ranked based on the status of environmental health and ecosystem vitality, India is ranked 155 out of 178 countries in 2014, said the study.

India's capital New Delhi is among the worst polluted cities in the world and according to some estimates, the cost of environmental degradation in India is anywhere between 2.6 per cent and 8.8 per cent of GDP, the IIM study said quoting a world bank report of the year 2013.

"India cannot ignore environmental protection even as it develops policies that favour economic growth.

However, poor public support for environmental protection can provide opportunities to groups to lobby policy makers to give priority to growth at the expense of environmental protection and make it more difficult for environmental groups to mobilise support for stronger environmental regulations, the study said.

The first survey of 2006 was conducted during December 2006 to January 2007 in 18 of 28 states in India, representing 97 per cent of Indian population with a random survey of 2,354 households, it said.

While the survey in 2014 was conducted during March to April last year with random survey of 6,781 households across the country, it said.

"In India's context, these results are not surprising as even in the post-materialist (developed) countries, public opinion on the environmental issues has been affected by the vagaries of the economic conditions as evidenced by declining support for climate change mitigation in the US and Europe," it said.

"In developing countries, still afflicted by poverty and underdevelopment, it is not surprising that unfavourable macro-economic conditions reduce support for environmental protection over economic growth," it added.