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# THE HINDU

**Moringa seedlings fetch better income than just pods and leaves**



Tamil Nadu is well known for Moringa cultivation in different districts. Though there are more than a dozen and odd varieties, many are area specific, which thrive well in that particular region alone.

For example a variety called sugarcane moringa (named after sugarcane because of its sweetness and taste) is specific to Paramathy, near Karur.

“Moringa is one crop which is still not commercially exploited fully. The oil from its pods serves as a good lubricant for watches, clocks and aircraft, but how many really know about this?

## **Open fact**

“Commercially there are no machines available for the oil extraction. A tree which requires practically no expense for its care, yet gives back multifold returns in terms of leaves, pods, stem, bark etc needs to be popularised among farmers to make them take up its cultivation on a larger scale. The fact that from one acre this tree can generate more than Rs. 1 lakh during

peak season a year is something which farmers need to experience personally,” says Mr. N. Madhu Balan, agriculture extension adviser and administrator of Vivasayam karkalam on face book.

Madurai Valaiyapatti moringa is one such variety. Nearly a decade back not much information was available on it. Today thanks to farmers like Mr. K.P. M. Sadaiyandi of Pallipatti, Dindugal, this variety has become quite popular among farmers in the region.

What is so special about this Valaiyapatti variety?

When cooking it, there is a pleasant mouth-watering odour. The quality and taste of leaves and pods are good. The trees are resistant to pest and diseases. Pod length is quite lengthy and the number of seeds per pod is also higher — up to 22-25 numbers than other varieties.

### **Only problem**

It is a perennial bearer and can be maintained for more than 25 years either as a monocrop or as intercrop in coconut gardens. The only problem is during monsoon or heavy winds the trees tend to break since their stem is not strong to withstand the heavy wind flow.

For an acre as a monocrop, about 160 seedlings are required to be planted at 5 metre distance between individual seedlings. As an intercrop about 80 seedlings are sufficient.

The farmer has planted 80 trees as intercrop in his 10-acre coconut garden. The trees are watered through drip lines and grown organically.

Vermicompost, sheep manure, panchagavya, practically any natural input is used as manure. Plant extracts like ginger paste diluted in turmeric solution are sprayed for controlling caterpillar menace common in this tree. Though small in size the variety is fast-growing. The farmer has trained the variety in such a way it produces several branches from the bottom unlike other varieties where branches grow on the top.

“Training the tree is important to get many branches. The trees are allowed to reach a height of 25 feet and bear 30-35 branches. They grow quickly

even in poor soil. Like other varieties this also does not require sophisticated and expensive farming methods,” says Mr. Sadaiyandi.

### **Option**

Farmers can opt for harvesting either the leaves or pods. If leaves are harvested, one cannot get pods and vice versa. The Madurai Valaiyapatti produces at least 100 kg of pods per tree during three seasons annually.

The farmer sells each kg of pod from Rs.10 to Rs.150 at the local market depending upon the demand. He was able to get a net income of Rs.1.6 lakhs from an acre during the 18 months of planting the trees.

“Though the income was quite sufficient from this crop I wanted to increase it. I noticed that there was a vast scope for seedlings and decided to switch over to developing and selling good seedlings than just as leaves and pods”.

Though moringa trees grow easily from seeds or stem cuttings, it takes a long time for them to get established and also mortality percentage is more in them. Suppose you need about 160 trees for an acre. While planting them about 30- 40 seedlings die.

### **Air layering**

“To avoid this I preferred a technique of air layering and started this method of propagation before six years. When tree starts flowering, I tie the branches by using moist coco peat with panchagavya called air layers.

The layers develop roots in a month. They are then separated from the mother tree and transferred to polythene bags, kept in the shade for a month for hardening,” he explains.

In a year three batches of seedlings are produced which are sold at Rs.40 each to farmers of Dindugal, Theni, Salem and Madurai.

Till now, four lakh seedlings (one lakh seedlings a year) have been developed, generating a net income of Rs. 4 lakh. About 20 trained women and three men work in his farm doing the air layering, separating rooted air layers, then transferring to polythene bags.

For details contact Mr. K. P. M. Sadaiyandi, Karthikeyan moringa nursery, Pallapatti, 624 201, Nilakottai taluka, Dindugal district, Tamil Nadu, mobile: 9791374087 and 9865078101 and Mr. N. Madhu Balan on mobile: 9751506521 Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu.

### **Impact of urban areas on agriculture**

Many water channels like rivers are loaded with domestic sewage and industrial pollutants are the main source of irritation for irrigation. Polluted water pollutes the crops grown. Especially in the periurban areas and those close to urban areas high intensive agriculture of leafy vegetables, vegetables, grass as fodder for milch animals, etc. becomes a big problem.

In recent years, small rivers or sewages have become perennial and the total flow of pollutants has tremendously increased.

### **Leafy vegetables**

Farmers in the periurban areas are cultivating throughout the year i.e., harvesting three to four crops a year. The heavy metal contaminants from these polluted waters are reaching the consumers through the food chain. Especially in the leafy vegetables the heavy metal contaminants and biological pathogens are finding their way into them.

As the domestic sewage systems have heavy loads of phosphates and nitrogen apart from other nutrients the farmers need to invest very little on the fertilizer inputs. The overall yield of some of the crops grown is very high. Some grasses are highly adapted to these polluted waters, but loaded with pollutants affecting the quality of milk and other products.

Also the demand for water in the urban areas is very high. The farmers dependent on the groundwater are having great difficulty. The ground water, as they go deeper, is saline and when applied to the fields over a period increases the alkalinity of the soil.

### **Recent times**

The leachates from the solid waste dumpyard sites pollute ground water. In recent times people are producing compost from city waste. The city waste compost has highest number of the pollutants including plastics which are carcinogenic.



Some farmers buy these materials for soil amendment / growth regulator for getting high yield of the crops. But these pollutants find their way into the food chain and finally in the products consumed by people. There are no regulatory mechanisms.

There is an urgent need to explore the possibilities of how urban areas could also support the farmers than instead of seeing urban areas affecting agriculture.

(Dr. N. Sai Bhaskar Reddy, Coordinator, ClimaAdapt Project, Walamtari, email: saibhaskamakka@gmail.com, Mobile:09676799191.)

### **Teacher for all seasons**

Jiddu Krishnamurti broke all conventional moulds from questioning age old schools of thought and traditions to shocking audiences with his clear rationale and the ability to delve deep into the functioning of the human mind.

Three decades after his demise his legacy as a World Teacher continues to benefit a cross section of all nationalities. The three main Krishnamurti Foundations located in India, USA, UK and smaller groups drawn to the teachings mainly undertake dissemination of his literature. The Jiddu Krishnamurti Centre tucked away in the bylanes of Punjagutta is one such hub that provides the perfect ambience for self exploration. Here dialogues, talks and screenings are made available in English and Telugu. “I was a victim of the corporate demand to be creative, aggressive and competitive along with juggling family and society. I

hardly found time to stop and ask myself important questions of life leave along find the answers to them.

It is in the friendly space of the Centre where joint enquiry opened up numerous possibilities for me and I am rejuvenated each time by Krishnaji’s profound insights,” says Vignesh, a young IT professional. Naimisam — their Retreat Centre located at Ghatkesar on a 25-acre green campus hosts individual and group retreats with an emphasis on silence, nature walks and organic farming facilitating the recharging of one’s inner being with the capacity to cope with demands of the outer. An alternative platform called Second Harmonic created by the centre undertakes outreach initiatives.

Collaborative efforts with NGO's in sustainable agriculture, education and health care - are frequently undertaken, for instance science and math fairs for students, opportunities for young farmers/weavers and self development workshops for professionals to name a few. 'The Essence of Life' an audio visual representation of Krishnamurti's views on education through dance by Dega Arts will be screened at LaMakaan in June.

In a world where boundaries and rules are common place – the Centre stands apart like an oasis where Krishnamurti's invitation to "begin from where you are" holds good to this day.

### **Growers ask cooperative to pay interest**



Sugarcane growers of Ganjam district in Odisha will have to pay extra interest on agricultural loans as the Aska Cooperative Sugar Industry Limited (ACSIL) has delayed payments for procured sugarcane.

A delegation of Ganjam District Sugarcane Growers' Association (GDSGA) led by its general secretary Samir Pardhan met the president of the ACSIL Bipin Patra. The sugarcane growers demanded the ACSIL to pay extra interest on agricultural loans that the farmers would have to pay up on their agricultural loans because of the delay in payments.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, vice president of GDSGA, Narayan Jena said around 4,000 sugarcane farmers of Ganjam district had provided about 80,000 tons of sugarcane to the ACSIL in January this year. During past years, the ACSIL was making payments for procured sugarcane in 15 days to one month time. But it is alleged that the ACSIL has till date not made

payments for procured sugarcane to the farmers. “Because of this, the farmers are compelled to pay extra interest to banks and cooperative bodies for their agricultural loans of the last season,” said Mr Jena.

According to Mr Jena, if agricultural loans are repaid by March 31, then the interest rate is minimal at two per cent. But delay in payment leads to penalty interest at 13 per cent from the date of commencement of the loan. The GDSGA feels as the farmers could not repay their loans because of the delay in payment by the ACSIL. The sugar mill should take the responsibility and pay the penalty interest on agricultural loans of sugarcane farmers. Moreover, this payment should be made as early as possible, Mr Jena added.

### **Summer ploughing begins**

Enthused by unexpected summer rain, farmers in Avinashi and few other nearby blocks have commenced ‘summer ploughing,’ a technique to kill weeds and harmful microorganisms, ahead of sowing groundnut in the region.

Agriculture Department officials campaign on the importance of ‘summer ploughing’ during the last few years have resulted in more and more farmers going for it.

It helps improve the yield by reducing pest infestation.

“One of the major pests faced by groundnut farmers is the red hairy caterpillar. The pupa of this moth, which is present in the soil, will get killed by exposing them to summer heat if summer ploughing is done,” said P. Santanakrishnan, a former Joint Director of Agriculture, who is into farming now.

### **Areas**

Groundnut is sown in Avinashi, Kunnathur, Perumanallur, and Uthukuli usually from June anticipating commencement of monsoon. Certain varieties of pulses too are raised as ‘intercrop.’ Castor is grown either as a ‘mixed crop’ (sowing randomly in the field) or as ‘border crop.’

M. Tamilselvan, the Deputy Director (in-charge) of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* that summer ploughing helps kill the disease causing organisms or pupae of pests, and help retain some of the moisture received through the recent summer rain in the soil.

The summer rain has been received at an apt time considering that the heat prevailing in the region till a couple of weeks back had cast fear of another dry season similar to the one experienced two years back, said some of the farmers.

Confident

The farmers now have gained confidence to sow groundnut, pulses, and castor in more areas from early June itself as they are able to store rain water in ponds.

### **Rice mills seek exemption from GST**

The rice mill owners and paddy-rice dealers in the State have appealed to the Union Government to exempt rice from Goods and Service Tax.

This was one of the resolutions passed at a state-level meeting of the Federation of Tamil Nadu Rice Mill Owners and Paddy-Rice Dealers Associations held here on Tuesday.

Since Tamil Nadu is deficit in paddy production and rice is a major food in the State, the Government has not levied any tax on these so far.

Rice millers and farmers need additional power supply during the harvest season to dry the paddy and the low tension power supply available to these units is inadequate. The federation appealed to the State Government and to the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission to pass the required orders for this.

The mills would pay the charges fixed by the commission for the additional supply.

The paddy dealers and mill owners also appealed to the State to remove the market cess levied on rice.

The State has 277 agricultural markets.

However, rice and paddy were procured by the dealers and mills directly from the farmers and also from States such as Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, they pointed out.

### **Promote modern agriculture to tackle naxalite menace, says Swaminathan**

Eminent agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan has mooted the idea of promoting modern agricultural practices to encourage people in naxalite-infested areas to abandon guns and take to the plough.

Addressing a function organised here on Wednesday by the All India Association of ICAR Pensioners to felicitate him, Prof. Swaminathan said many of the problems in the tribal and naxalite areas could be solved by providing facilities for modern agriculture such as water harvesting, irrigation, integrated pest management, and improved post-harvest technology.

“The future belongs to nations with grains and not guns. By providing an opportunity for sustainable livelihood and ensuring better access to land, water, and other inputs for agriculture, naxalites can be encouraged to give up arms.” He mooted the idea of setting up ‘Centres for Food and Peace’ to provide technical assistance for those willing to lay down arms and take to agriculture.

Highlighting the need to promote climate-smart farming, Prof. Swaminathan proposed the establishment of gene banks, seed banks, grain banks and water banks organised and managed by local communities. “Land is a shrinking resource for agriculture and we have to produce more food from diminishing per capita land and water resources. This would imply that we need new technologies and new farm equipment and management procedures.”

Prof. Swaminathan said bio-fortified plants such as moringa, sweet potato, millets, and fruits and vegetables offered a solution to the high rate of malnutrition among women and children in India. Breeding and selection of bio-fortified plants such as iron-rich pearl millet and zinc rich rice and genetically bio-fortified crops such as golden rice and iron-rich rice were other options, he observed.



In his inaugural address, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy stressed the need to maintain the positive trend in the agricultural sector in Kerala. “Today, even the youth are taking to farming, hitech agriculture has become acceptable among farmers and many student start-ups have been launched in agriculture and allied fields.”

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan; Vice Chairman, Planning Board K.M.Chandrasekhar; Director, CTCRI, S.K. Chakrabarty; and association president K.S. Pillai were among those who spoke.

### **Coconut firm launches farm info system**

Palakkad Coconut Producers’ Company Limited has launched an integrated farm information system, which would enable farmers’ start-ups to monitor their operations with state-of-the-art information system.

A statement issued by Coconut Development Board said that PCPCL was the leader among the 19 coconut producer companies formed under the aegis of the Board. Chairman of the Board T. K. Jose was cited in the press release as saying that technology induction in agriculture was of utmost importance.

The software for the farm information system is built on software as a service platform (SaaS) in order to shift the entire investment weightage to shared platforms like Cloud with strong encryptions.

### **Unseasonal rains fail to impact paddy MSP**

Unseasonal rains that lashed the State last month have not impacted the procurement price of paddy across various agricultural market yards.

Reports from the districts indicate that despite drastic reduction in paddy cultivation, the procurement price did not record downward trend.

In Warangal, the procurement price remained the same and farmers complain that they were unhappy with the existing price in the market. The fine grain commands Rs. 1,800 per quintal, while the coarse grain is being paid Rs. 1,010 per quintal.

Though there was no fall in the price, the farmers opine that it was not remunerative.

Paddy is sown in 60,000 hectares in Warangal district during rabi. As against this, in the last rabi season, paddy was cultivated only in 25,000 hectares.

In kharif, the normal extent of paddy is 1,31,000 hectares. However, owing to Indian Meteorological Department's forecast that there could be 12 per cent reduction in monsoon rainfall, the extent of paddy cultivation in the ensuing kharif is likely to be very less.

Agricultural scientist R. Uma Reddy told *The Hindu* that the groundwater level was deeper than 11 metres as against the normal seven metres. "In Warangal district, 70 per cent of paddy is cultivated under bore-wells. There will be less rainfall and there's no groundwater. Hence paddy cultivation is likely to be less than normal in kharif as well," he explained.

A Nizamabad report said that paddy procurement price in the district has constantly been Rs. 1,310 per quintal in the current rabi season and the Marketing Federation alone purchased one lakh quintals at that rate so far. The government fixed only one rate in the rabi, but there used to be three rates – Rs. 1,310; Rs.1,230 and Rs. 1,180 per quintal – for different varieties in the kharif, according to Markfed Manager B. Rekha.

To benefit farmers, the government did not reduce the MSP though paddy in the district arrived in the market after the untimely rains. Other agencies like women SHGs and PACS also purchased paddy at the same rate.

In Medak district, there was not much of a problem in procuring paddy due to unseasonal rains as the government chipped in. The government has established a total of 126 procurement centres by Indira Kranthi Patham (IKP) and Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies (PACS) across the district and so far procured 40,890 metric tonnes against the target of 70,000 metric tonnes. The minimum support price (MSP) offered for general category is Rs. 1,360 per quintal and Rs. 1,400 per quintal for A grade, according to In-Charge District Supply Officer A. Ramesh.

Even farmers said that there was not much of a problem in selling the paddy unless the quality was worse. "Recently, one of the farmers tried to sell paddy laced with mud particles which was rejected at the procurement centres. Except such cases, there was no problem," said K. Narasimha Rama Sharma, a farmer from Ismailkhanpet.

– Reporting by Gollapudi Srinivasa Rao (Warangal), P. Ram Mohan (Nizamabad) & R. Avadhani (Sangareddy)

### **Farmers moving from Kalaburagi's staple grams to commercial crops**



Changing preferences of farmers and their slow yet steady shift from traditional crops to the more lucrative crops, is reflected in the targets fixed by the Agriculture Department for the kharif season in Kalaburagi district for the year 2015-16.

Unlike the previous years when the department used to increase the area under red gram cultivation on a regular basis, there has been a marked reduction in the targets for red gram this year.

At the same time, a significant increase is seen in the area under commercial crops such as cotton and soyabean, and plantation crops such as banana and papaya.

According to the Agriculture Department's targets for the current year, the area under red gram — which used to be the mainstay of farmers in the drought-prone Kalaburagi district at around 4 lakh hectares — has come down to 3.59 lakh hectares compared with 3.62 lakh hectares fixed last year.

Similarly the area under black gram has come down from 38,000 hectares in 2014-15 to 25,500 hectares this year and the area under the green gram has come down from 20,200 hectares to 18,000 hectares.

In the current year, the cumulative area target fixed for kharif crops is 5.70 lakh hectares, with a production target of 26.96 lakh tonnes. The area under foodgrain has been fixed at 4.36 lakh hectares as against 4.55 lakh hectares last year and the production target has been fixed at 4.65 lakh tonnes.

The area under cotton has gone from 34,500 hectares during 2014-15 to 50,475 hectares this year, and the area under soyabean has been increased from 14,000 hectares last year to 20,325 hectares. The target fixed for coverage under oilseeds was 53,240 hectares, with a production target of 68,923 tonnes this year.

An increase in the irrigation network in the district has also helped in the shift from the traditional crops to other crops.

### **Sericulture finds a new home in Idukki**



The Department of Rural Development has identified Idukki as a prime area for sericulture to meet the increase in the demand for natural silks. Palakkad and Wayanad are the other two districts in which farmers in cluster units engage in sericulture.



The climate of the district was found most suitable for mulberry cultivation and breeding silkworms. Devilulam and Elamdesham blocks had been identified for cluster farm units, District Assistant Sericulture Officer Jomon Joseph told The Hindu on Wednesday. Kerala contributes only a meagre portion in terms of the total sericulture production, he said, adding that the farmers forming cluster units could make it more attractive as it involves timely transportation of cocoon to the market and the breeding of the silk worms. The main market for silkworms is Coimbatore, which is near to Marayur and Kanthallur.

China and India are the major producers of silks contributing nearly 60 per cent of the total annual production. While the Centre and State governments have announced various incentives for sericulture sector; Mr Joseph said that farmers will receive subsidy for setting up the farm units and breeding centre. About 95 per cent of the total silk industry is based on natural silks and there is a steady increase in its demand internationally, he said.

The average price of a kilogram of cocoon is Rs 400 and in a one acre plot, farmers can harvest up to 600 kg of cocoon annually. However, developing cluster units are advisable as it makes easy for the breeding of silkworms and the marketing of harvested cocoon, he said.

### **Rain damages cucumber crop**





The summer showers, though widely welcomed by farmers, have come as a bane for farmers who had raised cucumber at Iniyanur on the outskirts of the city.

A large number of farmers traditionally go for the summer crop every year as it brings them a supplementary income.

According to local farmers, the crop starts bearing fruit from 30 days and normally the fruits are harvested till about 90 days.

But this year, the entire crop in a large area in the village has been damaged due to the rain that lasted for five consecutive days. The fruits at the harvest stage have rotted on the field.

“The rain was most untimely. The fruits have all rotted and we do not know whether we can even recover the seeds, which are sold at a good rate. Never before we have sustained such a loss,” said Neelavathi, a farmer.

Farmers have invested Rs.10,000 to Rs.25,000 depending on the area cultivated. A good harvest would get returns up to Rs.50,000 an acre, they said. Some have raised the crop on leased land. They normally sell fruits to traders visiting the village and some of them even carry the fruits to the city to sell them by themselves. In view of the rain, buyers are not visiting the village.

“Normally, this part of the region does not receive heavy summer rain. But this time, it has come at a wrong time for us. We have sustained heavy losses,” said Arumugam, another farmer.

The fruits are normally in big demand during the summer as they are considered to help reduce body heat. A large number of women sell fruits directly in the city, especially along Pudukottai Road overbridge and the Gandhi Market areas in the city.

### **Vegetable prices shoot up**

Heavy rain in several parts of The Nilgiris district during the last few days and also in many other vegetable growing States in the country is said to have affected crops and prices of vegetables have shot up.



The prices of almost all the vegetables have shot up in Coimbatore.

The wholesale price of tomato on Wednesday was nearly Rs. 30 a kg.

Traders are also affected because wastage is high in vegetables transported from States such as Karnataka and Maharashtra. Coimbatore gets vegetables from different parts of the country. For instance, potato comes from even Gujarat and Agra. The prices of vegetables are expected to go up further in another week as unseasonal rains have affected crops, say traders here.

Carrot, potato, beans, leafy vegetables, and cabbage are cultivated on about 7,000 hectares in The Nilgiris. There are some farmers who cultivate spring onions, broccoli, capsicum, etc. Most of these are three-month crops and farmers usually go in for harvest in June or July.

Prakash, who cultivates vegetables in The Nilgiris, says that rains during the last few days have damaged a substantial portion of crops. So the rates have doubled in the last four days.

Cabbage, which was sold at Rs. 30 a kg was priced at Rs. 40 a kg now (wholesale rate); similarly, the price of beans had shot up to Rs. 80 a kg from Rs. 30 a kg.

Farmers started harvesting early as the prices were good and also because they feared that vegetables would be damaged in the rain.

Spring onions come from Karnataka to The Nilgiris, he says.

An official of the horticulture department in The Nilgiris contended that if the rains had continued for a couple of days, it would have damaged vegetable crops.

However, now the impact is not much.

There were reports of farmers going in for early cultivation of vegetables, especially cabbage, in one or two fields, the official said.



### **E-commerce bears fruit, local traders feel heat**

E-commerce growing at the expense of brick-and-mortar stores might not be new for Pune, but its rapid growth in perishable items like fruits and vegetables has been astounding.

Thanks to technology-enabled platforms, the fruits and vegetable segment of the market is witnessing an increase in the number of users who prefer ordering online rather than going to the markets.

Pegged at Rs 300 crore per month, the fruits and vegetable market has been mostly been off the radar of e or mobile commerce. Industry experts say that in this segment, the customer wants to “touch and feel” before finalising their purchase. Even in malls, sale of fruits and vegetables account for less than 10 per cent of the total sales.

BigBasket, a technology-based platform for home delivery of groceries, fruits and vegetables started its operations in Pune last December. Four months later, it's getting 1,500 orders daily on an average.

Vipul Parekh, co-founder of BigBasket, says Pune has seen the fastest growth in their business. "A majority of the orders are from Hinjewadi and other areas, but we serve across the city. Around 99 per cent of the orders we get are from the mobile app or online," he said.

Since December, BigBasket has served more than one lakh orders, the average size being Rs 1,400-1500.

Parekh says fruits and vegetables constitute 20 per cent of their total orders. "Fruits and vegetables we sell through our platform is of superior quality and is better packed. Once the customers get the confidence that they will get quality goods, they repeat orders," he says.

The company has tied up with around 120 farmers in and around Pune for sourcing. "We also have tie-ups with aggregators but avoid sourcing from marketyards," he Parekh says.

The company is planning to launch express delivery, wherein orders will be delivered within an hour.

Another start-up that has decided to enter fruits and vegetables segment in the city is the Bengaluru-based ZopNow\_One, which helps in e-purchases by tying up with the Hypercity chain of malls.

Mukesh Singh, its founder and CEO, says they have started recently in Pune and serve around 200-300 orders per day. "Thanks to the access to the Hypercity inventory and our management, we are able to reach out to customers where the malls are not able to go," he says.

Transcool, a city-based public-private partnership focusing on fruits and vegetables, would also be entering the business over the weekend.

Pavan Gurav, co-founder of Transcool, says their target customer would be the [\*IT professionals\*](#) and the growing middle class. Transcool would be supplementing its mall-on-wheels business through the e-commerce site.

Shivlal Bhosale, president of the association of fruits and vegetables sellers in the Pune Agricultural Products Market Committee (APMC), concedes the growth of e-commerce in the [\*sector\*](#), but says the APMC reach is too huge to be challenged.

“Every day, we deal with 800 trucks of fruits and vegetables. So, the e-commerce players will not be any threat to us. As and when this platform grows substantially, we may also go for it,” he says.

# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## **Power to farmers raises alarm bell for APMCs**

The Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) have decided to hold a meeting on May 31 to discuss the fallout of the state government notification that allows farmers to sell their farm produce directly in the open market. The notification was issued on Tuesday.

The notification gives the farmers a free hand to decide where they want to sell their vegetables and fruits and this will allow them to decide the prices for the produce. Now, the farmers can directly go to the shop owners and sell their produce. They will, however, have the option of going to the APMCs.

The government is also planning to give special permission to the APMCs to the set up retail counters in various parts of the cities where they operate.

On May 31, APMCs discuss who would benefit the most in view of the



government decision. Ketan Patel, the chairman of the APMC Ahmedabad, said: "We will discuss the fallout of the notification. But I feel that the farmers will suffer. We were fixing the prices based on the flow of the produce, but the traders would fix the rate according to their wish and the farmers would be helpless in this."

He said even the traders in the APMC will suffer and hence if required they will make a representation to the state government. "We may be from the same party but when it comes to the farmers, we will definitely inform the government of the ground reality," he said.

However, a farmer who is member of the APMC, says: "We will have the right to sell it directly in the market but if we do not get adequate price we can definitely come back to the APMC. The notification will benefit the farmers and will reduce the role of the APMC."

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### Canada opens market for Indian grapes



Canada has granted market access for the Indian fresh grapes. This follows the recent Indo-Canadian bilateral discussions held in New Delhi.

However, the Indian exporters will be able to take advantage of this development only from the next season as shipments for 2015 have almost ended.

Canada will open a new market for the Indian exporters, who have been mainly shipping the fresh grapes to European countries.

The Netherlands is the largest buyer of Indian fresh grapes, accounting for more than half of the exports, followed by the United Kingdom and Germany.

### **Exports down**

The Indian fresh grape exports for the recently-ended 2015 season were down by 36 per cent, with multiple spells of hailstorms and unseasonal rains impacting the output in the key growing regions of Maharashtra.

According to GrapeNet, the Indian shipments for the 2015 season were down at 3,288 containers against 5,108 containers in the corresponding previous year. In terms of volumes, the exports this year were estimated at 41,783 tonnes against last year's 65,611 tonnes.

### **Trial period**

Commenting on the green signal from the North American nation, in an advisory to exporters, Officials at the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority said, "The Canadian side has communicated that India can export fresh grapes subject to a trial period during which the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will inspect up to 100 per cent of the consignments entering Canada to verify compliance."

Further Canada has imposed conditions that exporters have to register the vineyards and pack houses, and maintain traceability.

"Canada will open up a new opportunity for Indian grapes," said Vikram Puri, CEO of Mahindra Shubhlabh Services Ltd, the country's largest exporter. The Canadian grape imports are estimated at 1,70,000 tonnes annually and are mainly sourced from Peru, Chile, South Africa, Egypt and even US.

“We have a window to export from February to May as India is the only producer around that time of the year,” Puri added.

### **Maharashtra likely to reduce interest on crop loans to 6%**



The Chief Minister of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said that in view of the agriculture distress in the State, the government is considering a reduction in the interest rate from 12 per cent to 6 per cent for crops loans.

Fadnavis said the government is also mulling increasing the loan repayment period from three to five years. After a loan is availed, there would be a one-year moratorium on the collection of principal and interest by the banks.

He said for the development of cotton growing district of Amravati and Yavatmal, his government is also concentrating its attention on developing the local textile industry. Incentives for setting up textile units have already been provided and eight large units have been set up in the districts.

Amravati and Yavatmal districts have seen the highest number of farmer suicides in the State.

Fadnavis said the State Cabinet has also decided to amend the Factories Act of 1948, which will provide for over-time duty for industrial workers.

The workers will not be required to take prior permission from the management for working over-time. The cap on over-time hours in a fiscal has also been increased from 75 days to 115 days, he said.

### **Wheat procurement set to cross 27 million tonnes**

	Rise in wheat procurement	
	This Year	Last year
Punjab	97.66	105.67
Haryana	67.55	64.14
Uttar Pradesh	12.91	2.99
Madhya Pradesh	68.69	65.96
Rajasthan	10.75	15.26
<b>Total*</b>	<b>258.29</b>	<b>254.10</b>
* includes other states Till May 20		

Wheat procurement by Government agencies has picked up pace and exceeded last year's levels on higher buying in states such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

However, Punjab and Rajasthan saw a drop in procurement, largely due to lower market arrivals, official sources said.

### **Private players absent**

Total procurement could exceed 27 million tonnes by early June as daily market arrivals across states are in the range of two lakh tonnes, official sources said.

“The absence of private players in the market is forcing the government agencies to purchase all the cereal that's coming into the markets,” they added.

Private players, amidst lack of export viability, have been selective in purchases as the quality of the grain this year has been impacted due to the unseasonal rains and hailstorm in the key producing states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The government expects the wheat output to be lower at 90.78 million tonnes (mt) against last year's 95.85 mt.

In view of the crop damage, the government had relaxed the quality norms for purchases by state agencies.

### **Relaxed quality norms**

Sources said the storage position of the procured wheat has been comfortable till now.

However, storage of the quality affected wheat could pose a challenge for the government agencies.

The Government could take a call on disposing the quality affected wheat once the procurement is over by early June.

Meanwhile, the weakening of rupee in recent past has forced the millers to adopt a wait-and-watch approach on contracting further imports. The rupee has weakened by about 3 per cent against the US dollar since early April till now.

### **Millers' stand**

The rains that affected the quality of wheat have forced the flour millers to purchase wheat from Australia. "We are waiting for the rupee to stabilise. Also we are keeping a close watch on the international prices to decide on our further purchases," a miller said.

It is estimated that millers have so far, contracted anywhere between 3 and 5 lakh tonnes of Australian wheat, which has a high protein content. The high protein wheat is used to blend with the local wheat to produce maida that's used in bakery products and the growing chain of quick service restaurants.

### **Russian imports**

Indian millers are also considering importing wheat from countries such as Russia and Ukraine, but are hesitant to enter into any contracts due to the strict phytosanitary norms that are in place.

Unless the government relaxes the phytosanitary norms, as they had done in 2005-06, it may be difficult to import from Russia, which has recently withdrawn the export tax on its shipments, sources said.



## Blushing pear to grace Indian shelves soon



A breeding programme in Norway has borne fruit, with pears that appear to blush. Sensing a huge potential to market the blushing beauties in India early next year, Kris Wouters, co-owner of Belgium-based Fruithandel Wouters that has been operating for over four generations, is gingerly testing the market.

Aptly called QTee, the red blush pear does not have any discolouration on its skin, commonly called russeting, and is unlike the well-known Conference variety of pear from Belgium.

“The first trial fruit pallets, containing QTee and some other Belgian pears, will be sent to India the next season,” Wouters told *BusinessLine*. “We have planted a lot of trees over the last two winters, and production is set to increase,” he added.

Belgium is one of India’s important trading partners in the European Union. After years of ‘overcoming the bureaucratic challenges of market access,’

many exporters are looking to enter India with their new varieties of fruit and vegetables.

### **Closed market**

As Russia has banned fruit imports from the EU, importers have been eager to crack the Indian and the Chinese markets to counter the export slowdown from their region.

Russia has been the most important market for Belgium pears. Stating that his company had not yet exported any fruit to China, Wouters explained that some other Belgian companies were doing so for a couple of years and that volumes were slowly increasing, which gave an indication to the inherent market potential. “Russia was our main market for pears. In future, it will be India and China, and of course we will continue to sell in the European market,” he said. The main markets for Belgium pears are Spain, France, Germany (which incidentally increased quite a lot this year), Scandinavia, UK, and Poland among others.

The aim is to market a blushed pear when there are no Forelles available from South Africa, which are only available between March and August. QTee is available in the period in between, and has reportedly even got growers in South Africa showing interest.

### **Higher dollar**

Wouters insists that fruits from Belgium are set to score over those imported from the US.

Mixed US economic data has been pushing the dollar higher. As the US dollar rises significantly over the past few weeks, Wouters states that the higher dollar is bound to dent US pear imports to India.

The Pear Bureau Northwest, a US marketing organisation, had earlier told *BusinessLine* that the 2014 pear crop was its second largest crop, and that India was a huge market for exports.

Dismissing the fact that the US has enjoyed a steady increase in pear shipments to India over the past five years, Wouters said, “It is not only the volume of pears that are available in the USA that is of importance, but also the USD/Euro rate. The very strong dollar has ensured that we have a higher

chance than ever before of meeting Indian consumers expectations of good quality pears,” said Wouters.

### **Apples & pears**

Stating that there existed a “very big potential for our pears” in India, Wouters said, “First of all, we need to market Conference pears in India, and in the immediate future, the QTee. At the moment, we are in the midst of a promotional activity, whereby we are educating Indian consumers about the excellent taste of the Conference pear.”

Maintaining that the main pear variety from Belgium was the Conference pear, Wouters explained it was also the most popular variety in Europe and in Russia. “What is prominent about the Conference pear is its excellent taste and its longer lasting properties. But to introduce Conference pears in a new market is not easy, because of the typical russeting (skin discolouration).”

He added that Indian consumers are used to pears without russeting, “and that is why they do not like Conference. But we are sure once they get used to the taste, they will buy it again. We have shipped some limited volume of Conference pears to India in the past season. We also shipped some Alexander Lucas (pear), which was more successful, as it is a pear with no russeting.”

Though he did not give out specific statistics, Wouters said around 15 containers with 20,000 kg each of the fruit had been shipped to India.

### **Volume at 1-year high at Coonoor tea sale**

The rising trend witnessed in the offer for Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions in the past one month continues this week with the volume of 20.70 lakh kg for Sale No: 21 on Thursday and Friday to be the highest so far this calendar.

This week’s offer is as much as 1.02 lakh kg more than last week’s offer which was the year’s highest until then.

Of this, 14.64 lakh kg belongs to leaf grades and 6.06 lakh kg, dust grade As much as 19.49 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 1.12 lakh kg,

orthodox variety. In the leaf counter, only 67,000 kg belongs to orthodox while 13.97 lakh kg, CTC.

Among the dusts, only 54,000 kg belongs to orthodox while 5.52 lakh kg, CTC.

In the Leaf market last week, among corporate buyers, Hindustan Unilever Ltd operated on brighter liquoring, good medium and also medium varieties. Tata Global Beverages Ltd. was fairly active on good medium varieties. In the Dust market, HUL and Tata Global were selective on good medium varieties. Indcoserve was fairly active on medium smaller grades.

There was some enquiry from exporters for medium and plainer teas. Internal buyers were less active. There was fair demand for brighter liquoring teas from upcountry buyers.

## Business Standard

### Gujarat farmers can sell fruits and vegetables in open market



The Gujarat government on Tuesday allowed farmers to sell fruits and vegetables in open market, enabling them to get competitive prices for their agricultural produce. The government also relaxed the rules of compulsory license for traders to buy fruits and vegetables. Traders need not pay market fees to the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) for buying fruits and vegetables from farmers.

The announcement was made by the director of agriculture marketing and rural finance of the state's agriculture and cooperative department on Tuesday.

Buyers will have to pay minimum user charges of 30 paisa and maximum Rs 2 for every purchase of Rs 100 to use facilities of APMC.

According to the release, as the agriculture produce fell under controlled commodities, farmers could only sell to licensed traders and because of this, some traders formed cartels to buy at lower prices. After removing fruits and vegetables from controlled commodities, farmers can now get better price and this will also benefit customers.