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# THE HINDU

## Banana growers explore new export markets



Having tapped the market in Gulf countries, banana growers of Chinnamanur have ambitious plans to tap the highly-potential banana market in the United States and European Union countries.

Initially, they reached out to the Gulf market with ‘Aroma Banana,’ the best quality branded fruit with uniform size, colour and high sweetness, superior to the banana varieties produced in Ecuador and The Philippines.

Now, they have sent one container load in two days to Gulf countries and Turkey. About 240 tonnes have been shipped so far, fetching a foreign exchange of around Rs.1 crore. They have accomplished this feat in two months through John Penny Cuick Farmers’ Trust, an association formed by banana growers.

“Additional facility will help us ship three 20-tonne containers a day,” says M. Karthikeyan, an M. Tech graduate with marketing experience in the US, looking after the exports. “Our fruit’s shelflife is 30 to 45 days. Sweet content is 18 per cent, whereas Ecuador banana has 13.5 to 14 per cent. Now, 453 member-farmers produce banana in 5,600 acres and supply it to us. Banana is being raised in 12,000 hectares in Cumbum Valley. We plan to enlighten all farmers to produce export quality banana. There should be no

black spots on peel and no damage on fruit. Acute care is essential while plucking,” he added. Local buyers procure banana for Rs. 4 a kg that does not meet even the production cost.

“We need at least Rs. 6 a kg. Now, the association offers a price of Rs. 8 a kg. They pay even Rs. 10 for superior quality banana,” said Veppampatti farmer P. Paul Durai. “Payment is irregular with local buyers. They harvest fruits after 13 months and demand 90 per cent of growth. But the association cuts fruits in 11 months when they attain 75 per cent growth,” says, Chinnamanur farmer N. Perumal.

Farmers have appealed to the officials to open the 500-tonne capacity ripening chamber-cum-cold storage facility waiting for inauguration on Chinnamanur agri marketing committee campus.

Collector N. Venkatachalam assured to create more infrastructure facilities. “Chinnamanur will soon be a banana export hub. Now, 12 private ripening chambers function in Cumbum Valley,” says S. Muthiah, Deputy Director of Agriculture (Agri Business).

### **Online data to enhance crop yield in Kerala**

Farmers in Kerala will soon have an online data support system to help them optimise the productivity of their shrinking landholdings.

The Department of Soil Survey and Soil Conservation is launching a Web-based Micro-level Information System on Soils of Kerala (MISSK) that will provide them with reliable inputs for better agricultural planning and resource management.

The system is designed to help famers assess the soil fertility status of their holdings and adopt appropriate nutrient management strategies for better yield. It will also provide planners and administrators at the local level with precise information to formulate viable agricultural and land management strategies.

MISSK features a panchayat-level resource inventory with cadastral details on a 1:5000 scale. The GIS- based system is designed to assist farmers and extension workers in selecting appropriate crops, optimizing fertilizer use and identifying the suitable agricultural machinery and tools.

The pilot project covering 88 panchayats in Thrissur and 26 panchayats in Wayanad is based on a detailed soil survey carried out by the department. The system provides soil and land resource information including soil texture, soil depth, erosion status, land use pattern, and paddy land conversion as well as nutrient status, crop suitability, and land type. The data will be hosted on the departmental website [www.keralasoils.gov.in](http://www.keralasoils.gov.in).

“The twin challenges of preventing degradation and increasing productivity can be addressed only by adopting site-specific land management technologies suitable for each plot in a village,” says P.N. Premachandran, Director, Soil Survey and Soil Conservation. He said MISSK could be interfaced with other resource inventories on climate, socio-economic conditions and marketing facilities to enable the government to make policy decisions at the grassroots level. Governor P. Sathasivam is scheduled to launch the soil information system at a function to be held here on Wednesday.

### **KAU orientation scheme in schools**

Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has planned a programme to support farming operations in schools.

Inaugurating ‘Krishisree,’ an agricultural orientation programme for higher secondary students to be implemented by the KAU, at a function at the Agricultural Research Station, Mannuthy, on Tuesday, M.P. Vincent, MLA, said that a project named ‘Manusree’ would be implemented in Thrissur district in the first phase.

Initially 50 schools would be involved in the project. Twenty students and two teachers from each school would be trained in scientific agricultural operations for six days. Thus, 1,000 students and 100 teachers would be covered in the pilot phase.

The programme, aimed at promoting agriculture and driving home the importance of food safety and nutritional security, would be implemented throughout the State, he said. KAU Registrar P.V. Balachandran, in his presidential address, said the university had decided to conduct the orientation programme in order to attract youngsters towards agriculture and agricultural science.

“The greatest and noblest vocation is food production, without which no professional can survive. The number of people who died during Bengal famine was much greater than those killed in the world wars. Importance of food production should be realised by the youngsters,” he said.

U. Jaikumaran, Head, Agricultural Research Station, spoke. The Krishisree programme is being implemented in all research stations under the KAU.

### **Agriculture university to double intake for coming academic year**

The University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, is planning to double its intake for undergraduate and diploma courses from the academic year 2016-17 by introducing new disciplines.

The university, which was established in 2012, has Shivamogga, Chikkamagaluru, Davangere, Chitradurga, Kodagu, Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts under its jurisdiction.

At present, the university is offering B.Sc. course in Agriculture on its Shivamogga campus, B.Sc. in Horticulture in Mudigere and Hiriyur, and B.Sc. in Forestry in Ponnampet. The total intake for these courses is 300.

C. Vasudevappa, Vice Chancellor of UAHS, Shivamogga, told *The Hindu* that, the university is planning to introduce B.Sc. courses in Agriculture Marketing, Agriculture Business Management and Food Science and Technology from the coming academic year. The intake for these courses would be 90 each.

### **Ample opportunities**

There was ample job opportunities in Agriculture Marketing and Food Science and Technology fields. In fact, companies in these sectors were facing a high rate of attrition and dearth of trained candidates, he said. At present, UAHS, Shivamogga is offering a two-year Diploma in Agriculture at its Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station in Kathalagere in Davangere district, and at the Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station in Brahmavar in Udupi district, with an intake of 50 each. Candidates who have passed SSLC can get enrolled for the course and 40 per cent of the seats are reserved for those whose parents are farmers.

The objective behind introduction of diploma course was to provide training for the young members of agriculture families on scientific farming practices. Those who pass diploma course are getting placements with firms engaged in sale of agriculture inputs.

### Growth in horticulture

There has been a rapid expansion in the area of cultivation of horticultural crops in the 7 districts that come under the jurisdiction of UAHS, Shivamogga. The university would also introduce a Diploma course in Horticulture at its Mudigere campus from the next academic year, he said.

The issue would be tabled in the next meeting of Board of Management of the university. The approval from both Central and State Governments would also be sought in this regard, he added.

### **Drip irrigation, modern practices increase yield, farmer's income**



With distribution of subsidy for drip and sprinkler irrigation and propagation of advanced technologies, farmers having small land holdings in rain-fed areas have managed to raise crops this season and earn a decent income in Theni district.

Major beneficiaries are horticulturists raising sapota, mango, lemon, banana, guava, cashew, papaya, hybrid amla, drumstick and vegetables, and floriculturists raising jasmine, rose, tuberose and other flowers.

With no support, K. Venkatammal and her husband Kayambu of Koduvilarpatti in Theni block had been struggling to raise crops in one acre of land owing to shortage of water.

With subsidy given by officials for drip irrigation, she raised tomato crop and got an yield of 200 to 250 boxes of tomato this season, earning at least Rs. 200 per box.

Similarly, S. Maharajan of Vellaiammalpuram in Uthamapalayam block who depended on channel irrigation shifted to drip irrigation for effective use of available water to raise crops. Labour shortage too disrupted his farm activities.

Now, he raised not only grape but also vegetables, including broad beans. With adoption of modern farm practices, he was able to increase production and profit margin.

“I have earned around Rs. 2 lakh this season from three acre land,” he said.

Durai Raj of Ambasamudram had abandoned his farm activities and became a daily wage worker in a mill owing to shortage of labour and irrigation water.

With creation of water sources and introduction of drip irrigation, he revived his farm activities and raised vegetables in his farm. He also adopted all modern agriculture practices to boost production.

The district administration had offered cent per cent subsidy for drip irrigation to small and tiny farmers and 75 per cent subsidy for other farmers.

“We had disbursed a total subsidy of Rs. 7.69 crore to 1,846 farmers in 2012, Rs. 7.53 crore to 1,976 farmers in 2013, Rs. 9.63 crore to 2,068 farmers in 2014, and Rs. 3.17 crore to 6,29 farmers till March 2015,” said Collector N. Venkatachalam.

Drip irrigation would not only supply required quantum of water to crops but also prevent growth of weeds, and reduce labour in farm work. Very limited labour force would be sufficient to man the farm till harvesting, he added.

## **Big funding push to small tea growers**

An amount of Rs.200 crore, accounting for around 14 per cent of the Rs.1,425 crore XII Plan allocation for the tea sector, has been made for the development of the small growers sector, which is emerging as a potent force in the Indian tea industry.

This is the first time that the sector has received an allocation in this manner and includes a component for growing tea in non-traditional areas.

Union Commerce Ministry officials said that special focus on the development of small holdings was a major feature of the government's plan to develop the tea sector. Tea plantation unit with area less than 10.1 hectare is considered small. They produce green tea leaf, a highly perishable input which is sold to tea factories for processing into 'made-tea'.

The proposals include a 30 per cent subsidy for new planting/replanting and rejuvenation of the tea bushes, irrigation subsidy and an educational stipend for small growers' children. The small growers would also get funds support for setting up factories and for commencing organic tea production, it was learnt.

Over 30 per cent of India's annual production of 1,100 million kg. now comes from the two lakh STG. Their production cost is lower as they are not covered by the Plantation Labour Act, which mandate certain benefits given to the garden workers. The organised tea sector supplements their own crop with output from the STG.

However, even as the sector is steadily gaining in importance, it remains vulnerable to price volatility, which often leads to distress sale of the highly perishable produce at below cost of production.

Bijoy Chakraborty, President of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Association (CISTA) says that small tea growers are the lowest level of the tea production eco-system although they are engaged in a gamut of tea plantation activities. The CISTA has been appealing to the Union Minister of State for commerce, finance and corporate affairs Nirmala Sitharaman, for support for capacity-building.

## **Konaseema paddy ryots weigh their options**

Plagued by plummeting profits in view of excess production and extended crop holiday, paddy farmers in Konaseema region have decided to switch over to other crops in a phased manner, by reducing the existing acreage and even taking up alternative ventures.

Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) announced the move at a meeting convened at the Gosala here on Thursday, marking the fourth anniversary of the Konaseema crop holiday. “In the places where the soil is not suitable for crops other than paddy, farmers will go for fish tanks. A detailed plan of action will be chalked out very soon, said BKS general secretary Mutyala Jameelu, who presided over the meeting.

Cutting across the political lines, farmer leaders having affiliations to different political parties participated in the meeting that discussed at length about the non-implementation of the recommendations made by Mohan Kanda Committee on Konaseema crop holiday and the assurances given to the farmers by the then government. The minimum support price (MSP) announced by the government for paddy was not at all viable and farmers were forced to incur debts by taking up paddy cultivation, he pointed out.

“Since crop holiday is not a solution to the issue, we have to focus on other available options such as diverting fields for other crops that have market value and for fish tanks as well,” he said.

Reiterating the same, Rytanga Samakhya president Yerneni Nagendranath said excess production had taken a toll on demand for paddy and farmers needed to switch over to market-oriented crops to make cultivation profitable. “Paddy farmers are hardly getting back their investments. Since the government is not responding to such issues, it is better to find a solution by our own,” he said.

YSRC State unit convener M.V.S. Nagi Reddy wondered as to why the government was not responding to farmers’ issues. “One lakh acres have been left fallow owing to crop holiday since kharif in 2011. The loan waiver is not being implemented and banks are not extending fresh loans,” he said, while opposing the Pattiseema lift irrigation scheme.



## Certified paddy seeds ready for distribution in Ramnad



The departments of Agriculture, Seed certification and Organic certification have readied 483 tonnes of certified paddy seeds to be distributed to the farmers during this season as the popular “Anna (R) 4”, the drought-resistant paddy variety, is all set for receiving the certified seed tag.

As quality seed played a vital role in sustained growth and development of agriculture sectors, the departments procured seeds of different varieties of paddy from the registered seed farms and provided ‘certified seed tags’ after subjecting the seeds to strict quality processing at the three seed processing units in the district.

During 2014-15, the department has grown the paddy, millets and pulses seeds on 558.40 hectares of registered seed farms in the district and made ready 483 tonnes of paddy seeds, 3 tonnes of millets and 14 tonnes of pulses after processing them in the centres, Assistant Director, Seed certification S.S. Shaiek Abdullah said.

Demonstrating the seed certification and tagging process at the seed processing centre at Thiru Uthirakosamangai near here on Tuesday, he said the centre had processed and tagged 315 tonnes of certified paddy seeds during this season. Assistant Director of Agriculture (Thirupullani region) B. Kumaravadivel was present at the centre.

Paddy was cultivated on 1.20 lakh hectares in the district and the department would meet 17 per cent of the farmers’ demand for certified seeds by making available 483 tonnes, Joint Director of Agriculture N.V.

Krishnamurthy said. Private dealers and cooperative societies supplied the balance quantity, he said. “We propose to establish seed farms on 748 hectares for paddy, millets and pulses and procure 2,270 tonnes of paddy during 2015-16”, he said. The certified seeds would help the farmers to increase the yield by 15 to 20 per cent, he added.

Mr. Abdullah said the department had procured 1.75 tonnes of foundation seed of “Anna (R) 4 variety”, marking its linking in the ‘seed chain’.

The variety would be grown on 40 hectares of registered farms this season, he said, adding “We propose to procure about 100 tonnes for processing and giving seed certification tag”.

The variety, developed by the Paramakudi-based Agriculture Research Station in 2010, crossed the crucial phases to be raised as breeder seed and foundation seed, he said. The short duration variety was already popular among the farmers and well received in the market.

### **National conference on June 6**

To create awareness among poultry farmers about deadly avian influenza, the High Security Animal Diseases Lab in Bhopal is conducting a national conference on June 6. The conference is open to both group and individual stakeholders in the poultry industry, mainly farmers and breeders. Dr. K. K. Kulkarni, director at HSADL, said the conference will shed light in identifying symptoms of H5N1 avian influenza, the pros and cons of vaccinating birds against the virus and other matters related to bird flu.

“We will also discuss measures that are taken after an outbreak to curtail it besides vaccination, which is officially not allowed by the government,” he said.

In addition to scientists at HSADL, international experts with experience in dealing with avian influenza are also set to participate. Those interested in participating can contact Dr. Kulkarni on 09425624964.

## Online healthcare services mushroom



Finding a doctor is easier now than it's probably ever been. Go online, log on to one of several portals that offer searches for doctors and book an appointment. With the mushrooming of online healthcare services, for patients, there are a plethora of options. But while patients and some doctors find these portals and apps immensely useful, other doctors express apprehension over them.

On websites such as Practo.com, s10health.com and medreach.in, you can look for a doctor by specialty, name, name of the clinic or even the area you want to go to. Some offer details of consultation fees, one gives feedback from other patients and one allows you to ask for a doctor's opinion online.

For patients, these services have been a boon. "Last year, my cousin contracted a skin allergy. I was looking for a skin specialist in Anna Nagar and I went online. The website gave me a list of options in the area I wanted, it listed reviews, fees and appointment times. I found a doctor, and my experience was very good," said V. Vinoth Kumar, a software engineer.

The Practo Ray software, which allows doctors to upload and access medical records digitally among other things has been both convenient and easy for record-keeping and inventory, said K. Dhanasekhar, consultant paediatric gastroenterologist, Apollo Children's Hospital. "The website makes it easy

for patients to find me and book appointments. They get a confirmation and so do I, and the system alerts me when the appointment is due,” he said.

Some doctors, however, say there are advantages and disadvantages. Mohan Rajan, medical director, Dr. Rajan Eye Care Hospitals, said such services were not always reliable. “If you’ve just moved to a city, such services are great. The problem is in figuring out whether you’re going to the right doctor. Patients must use these services judiciously, shortlist and decide based on first-hand information,” said Janani Shankar, senior consultant paediatrician, Kanchi Kamakoti Childs Trust Hospital.

Going by the numbers from the companies though, the services seem hugely popular. According to a representative of Practo, the service is offered in around 30 cities with 1,40,000 doctors on it and millions of users on its website per month. Sridharan Sivan, founder, S10 Health, said in an email that their Chennai user base was roughly 1,50,000 and around 500 online appointments were booked on the website daily.

“Every single doctor on our website has been physically verified. To make it easier for patients, we have a feedback system that can be used to decide which doctor you want to go to. Our intent is not to replace traditional methods of finding a doctor, just augment them – we provide the information and patients can take an informed decision based on it,” said a Practo representative.

### **Water treatment plant**

Salem Steel Plant, as part of its CSR initiative, has provided a reverse osmosis (RO) drinking water plant to Government Industrial Training Institute (ITI) for Women here at a cost of Rs. 1.75 lakh.

A.K. Jaiswal, General Manager-Maintenance, Salem Steel Plant, commissioned the project. J. C. Mohapatra, General Manager – Personnel and Administration, was present.

The plant, with a capacity to purify 500 litres an hour, would serve the needs of 400 students of the ITI and its staff.

A press release here said that the Steel Plant has been providing drinking water to villages nearby. Several borewells have been sunk, and water tanks were constructed.

## **CM to launch subsidy scheme for tuna fishing**

The Tamil Nadu government's 50 per cent subsidy scheme designed to wean away fishermen of the Palk Bay area from trawler fishing to tuna longliner and avoid conflicts with the Sri Lankan navy is all set for launch on Thursday with Chief Minister Jayalalithaa distributing the work order.

After the government announced the scheme in February last year, fishermen from the coastal districts of Nagapattinam, Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram had submitted applications to opt for the deep sea fishing. The government after scrutinising the applications, selected batches of fishermen in these districts, official sources here said.

Marking the launch of the much-awaited scheme, the Chief Minister would give work orders to five batches of fishermen on Thursday for constructing the boats, each costing about Rs 60 lakh, the sources said.

At least 15 fishermen, constituting three batches — one batch of five fishermen from Rameswaram and two batches of 10 fishermen, who returned in September 2013 after languishing in Iranian prisons for nine months have left for Chennai on Tuesday evening to receive the work orders, the sources said.

In the 2013-14 budget, the government had announced raising of the subsidy from 25 to 50 per cent with a ceiling of Rs.30 lakh.



## **To predict cyclone, ISRO to build advanced satellite**

The Ahmedabad-based Space Applications Centre (SAC) -- an arm of ISRO --- is developing a new, miniature weather-forecasting satellite --- ScatSat --- at the cost of an estimated Rs 300 crore.



In order to predict the genesis of cyclones in the oceans, the Ahmedabad-based Space Applications Centre (SAC) — an arm of ISRO — is developing a new, miniature weather-forecasting satellite — ScatSat — at the cost of an estimated Rs 300 crore.

Once launched at the end of this year, this satellite is expected to take over some of the functions of OCEANSAT-2, a satellite that had accurately predicted the landfall of cyclone Phailin on the Orissa coast in October 2013. This prediction had helped in timely evacuation and minimise human casualties.

“The scatterometer on OCEANSAT-2 that had provided accurate data about the landfall of Phailin cyclone has become dysfunctional since February 2014. We are now rapidly building a new scatterometer that will be able to predict cyclogenesis or the formation and strengthening of possible cyclones. This can be done by keeping a watch on the formation of the vortex of air over oceans,” said Tapan Misra, director, SAC.

The scatterometer on OCEANSAT-2 was launched in 2009 and became dysfunctional in about four-and-a-half years. Currently, India is depending on the NASA’s ISS-RapidScat to monitor ocean winds and cyclones.

“This ScatSat satellite will measure the wind speed and it’s direction over the ocean. It can predict the formation of cyclones, about 4-5 days in

advance. This time period is very crucial in saving lives,” he said about the satellite that will carry a payload of about 110 kilograms.

A team of 300 scientists at SAC are currently working on this satellite which is expected to be ready to be shipped for launch within a couple of months. “This satellite will cost about Rs 250-300 crore and will have a life of about five years,” he added.

The data generated by this mini-satellite will be used by NASA, EUMETSAT (European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites) and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).



### [Modi launches DD Kisan, calls for more tech in farming](#)

Steering clear of the controversial land acquisition law, PM Narendra Modi stressed on increasing farm productivity with the use of technology and scientific advancements at the launch of the country's first 24-hour agriculture channel — DD Kisan. Evoking the memory of former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri who took India towards higher grain production and self-sustainability, Modi said there was need to make the sector vibrant and dynamic.

Pointing out that agriculture was a "neglected" field and considered the last choice after job and business, the PM said it has to be made "vibrant". "The cycle has turned anti-clockwise. I think it needs to be turned back once again," he said while lauding farmers for ending India's dependence for foodgrains on foreign countries.

The PM emphasized the need for multi-cropping and diversification and expressed confidence that trillions of rupees spent on launching new satellites would help farmers by accurate prediction of weather.

Modi emphasized the need for innovative farming methods to increase productivity like growing trees instead of walls to separate individual farms.

Linking the issue of malnutrition with low production of pulses, he noted that the country was dependent on imports to meet its requirement of edible oil and pulses and urged the scientific community to work with farmers to ensure that there was enough production to meet domestic demand by 2022 when India celebrates its 75 years of independence.

Though his over 40-minute speech dealt with various issues pertaining to farmers and their betterment, he did not mention the contentious land bill on which his government is facing stiff opposition, including from NDA allies.

The PM said a study done over 200 years ago had shown that paddy productivity was 15-18 tonnes per hectare without the help of advanced techniques and fertilizers, while the average grain production was now only 2 tonnes per hectare. The world average was 3 tonnes, he said.

Invoking former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri and his slogan 'Jai Jawan-Jai Kisan', which gave a fresh thrust to agriculture and led to a huge increase in grain production, he called upon farmers and experts to use modern science to give another boost to the sector.

Pushing for competition at the "tehsil level", Modi said, "There is a need to create an atmosphere of competition in the field of farm production at tehsil level... The youth of the country, who have turned away from agriculture can again take it up if we bring modern technology to the farm and field. An atmosphere of trust will have to be created for this... we can do much through technology. A number of technological advancements has happened in the world in the field of agriculture. We need to work out how to bring this intervention of technology."

Modi also recounted his meeting in the past with "jeans clad" young farmers in Junagarh when he was chief minister of Gujarat.

Modi said if farmers focus one-third each on traditional farming, animal husbandry and growing timber wood, they would not have to depend on the government.

Speaking about the channel, the PM said if the project was done well, then it



would become the most popular channel in the country and force other broadcasters to run dedicated programming as well.

### [New advice for farmers: Grow paddy and basmati in equal ratio](#)

Setting aside agriculture department's recommendations made a year ago, that had suggested cultivation of less water-consuming basmati instead of common paddy to promote crop diversification in view of alarming dip in subsoil water in Punjab, the farm department in Amritsar has now advised farmers to grow paddy and basmati in equal proportion this kharif season.

Importantly, the advice has come as basmati failed to give higher returns to cultivators last year on account of higher arrival and weak demand from buyers, mainly rice exporters.

"Out of 1.8 lakh hectares area, paddy was grown only on 20,000 hectares last year while the remaining land was under basmati. This time we are recommending farmers to grow paddy and basmati in equal ratio," said Amritsar chief agriculture officer BS Chhina.

He said in previous years, basmati was cultivated only over 17% of the total area in the district and remaining area was under paddy.

Chhina said paddy has a minimum support price (MSP), announced by the Union government, due to which farmers remain assured of marketing their produce. "Since there is no MSP for basmati, farmers get exploited by traders and end up making distress sale," he said.

The officer said last year, paddy was procured at Rs 1,400 per quintal by the government agencies while rates of different varieties of basmati varied between Rs 2,100 and Rs 3,200 per quintal. He informed that the agriculture department recommends sowing different varieties of basmati, including Pusa 1121, Pusa 1509 and 386, so there was no glut of a particular grain in the market.

Chinna said last year a few farmers had sown short duration basmati variety Pusa 1509 before the recommended time due to which the quality of grain was poor and they had to suffer losses.

Daniel Masih, a rice broker who procures basmati for several prominent rice

millers and exporters, said paddy had almost nil demand in Punjab. "Other states like Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are producing their own paddy and it is cheaper than the crop available in Punjab," he said.

However, he said, basmati had great demand both in India and abroad. To save farmers from exploitation, Masih suggested that government should have a minimum rate for the aromatic grain that is exported to the whole of Middle East with Iran being the biggest importer followed by Saudi Arabia and UAE.

A farmer, Sukhbir Singh, who has seven acres of land, said he would be cultivating Pusa 1121 basmati. "I know yield of basmati is lower than paddy, but then it fetches good amount. Then why should I sow paddy," he remarked.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### **Cardamom gains flavour on supply squeeze**

In the first four months of current calendar, players at Coonoor Tea Trade Association (CTTA) have lost 4.11 per cent in cumulative turnover over the same period of last year.

This is because despite lowering the prices by Rs. 2 a kg, there were no takers for nearly two lakh kg to equate the volume sold to last year's levels.

In all, 18 auctions had been conducted from January to April end. On many weeks, nearly a quarter of the offer had remained unsold and to liquidate such unsold volume, producers lowered their price to an average of Rs. 77.60 a kg from Rs. 80.03 in 2014.

Despite this, the demand was slack for both exports and domestic market resulting in the volume sold falling to 1.79 crore kg from 1.81 crore kg last year.

Consequently, the overall turnover dropped to Rs. 138.90 crore from Rs. 144.85 crore. This reduction of Rs. 5.95 crore marked a decline of 4.11 per cent.

## **Higher inflow drags coconut oil, copra prices; further drop seen**

Coconut oil prices have started moving southwards with prices registering a drop of nearly Rs. 400 a quintal in Kerala and Tamil Nadu this week. A similar fall in the same price range was also witnessed in copra.

Attributing the price fall to starting of the harvest season in all production centres, Thalath Mahmood, Director, Coconut Oil Merchants Association (COMA), said that the situation is likely to continue leading to further drop. There has been sufficient copra availability especially in Kerala with the market flooded with the commodity from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Andamans etc, he added.

Coconut oil prices, he said, are now quoting at Rs. 12,900 a quintal in Kerala ( Rs. 13,500), while in Tamil Nadu the figure has come down to Rs. 12,500 against Rs. 13,000 quoted last week. Copra prices dwindled to Rs. 8,900 a quintal in Kerala ( Rs. 9,500) and Rs. 8,500 ( Rs. 9,000) in Tamil Nadu.

The drop in prices also reflected in raw coconut rates especially in the northern parts of Kerala which is now selling at Rs. 23/kg against Rs. 33.50. This is because of the decision of several coconut powder manufacturing companies in Karnataka to stop procurement. There was a daily movement of 25 tonnes of raw nuts from Kasargod, he said.

According to Bharat Khona, former board member of COMA, the unseasonal rains in Tamil Nadu have impacted copra availability affecting crushing of oil and its ready availability in the market. Arrivals may pick up once the climatic condition improves.

Arrivals marginally last week on supply squeeze at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Arrivals slipped from that of the previous week and that seems to have aided the price to move up slightly, market sources said.

Arrivals stood at 386 tonnes last week against around 500 tonnes the previous week. Whatever material arrived last week was, however, absorbed by the market. Domestic demand continued to remain good as imports from Guatemala so far this year are reportedly negligible.

Export buying was very thin as the inventories are believed to be full in the overseas markets. They are reported to have bought an estimated 20 tonnes last week.

However, the bearish sentiment continues to exist as the summer rains continued to prevail until last week, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, told *BusinessLine*.

The capsules arriving, at present, in the market are of inferior quality and that is also pulling the prices down. Good quality fresh cardamom is expected by mid-July, said Ranganathan, a dealer in Bodi. A steady/easier trend was reported from today's auction under way in Bodinayakannur by Cardamom Planters, Association, they said.

The individual auction average was oscillating between Rs. 610 and Rs. 670 a kg last week whereas, during this week last year the average price was at around Rs. 810.

Total arrivals during the season up to May 23 stood at 19,158 tonnes against 20,115 tonnes during the same period last year. The sales were at 18,601 tonnes and 19,429 tonnes respectively. The auction average as on May 23 was at around Rs. 650 ( Rs. 795 a kg).

Prices of graded varieties ( Rs. /kg): 8mm bold green 960-1,020; 7- 8 mm 825-840; 6-7 mm 710-720; below 6 mm: 610-630.

### **Sugar industry needs more than export subsidy for turnaround**

The govt should buy sufficient sugar from the market to build up a buffer stock



The sugar industry is today in crisis with cane dues owed by mills to farmers crossing Rs. 21,000 crore, with depressed prices and declining exports.

Surplus supply in the market along with lower overseas prices led to a sharp fall in domestic sugar prices; and margins of sugar companies are under strain due to weak realisation on sugar sales, making it harder for the sugar mills to make payments.

### **Raw sugar sops**

In order to provide a helping hand for the sugar industry, the government, in February 2015, passed the long-awaited proposal of export subsidy on raw sugar for the current production season.

According to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), sugar mills may export 14 lakh tonnes of raw sugar and receive a benefit of a subsidy of Rs. 4,000 per tonne for this season 2014-15 i.e. October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. The government also raised import duty on sugar to 40 per cent from 25 per cent and proposed to build a buffer stock to take out some sugar from the available surplus.

### **Depressed prices**

These steps were taken mainly to help mills to clear the mountain of dues to sugarcane growers.

Despite the subsidy announcement by government to encourage raw sugar exports, mills had to struggle to increase shipments as global prices remain weak with cheaper surplus supplies from world's largest producer Brazil.

Depressed global sugar prices make exports of sugar unviable. So far, mills have exported only 4.6 lakh tonnes of sugar till the first week of May 2015.

Another 2-3 lakh tonnes of sugar may get exported in the rest of the season.

Recently, India's largest sugar producing state Maharashtra has also announced subsidy of Rs.1,000/tonne for raw sugar exports produced in the 2014/15 marketing year with an intension to cut down the stocks.

Subsidy will be applicable for exports of 800,000 tonnes raw sugar.

## **Rising production**

ISMA data says that India's sugar production up to May 15 stood at an eight-year high of 27.848 million tonnes. Thus, there is an increase of 16 per cent during the current season as compared to 24.003 million tonnes produced in the same period last year.

It is estimated that India will produce around 28 million tonnes of sugar in the current season against the demand of 24.5 million tonnes.

According to ISMA, sugar stocks at the end of season (in September) will touch 10.30 million tonnes, the highest in the last six sugar seasons.

However, all these actions taken by government failed to support the sweetener's prices, because of surplus production, dull exports and weak overseas prices.

In order to help the industry, the government should buy sufficient sugar from the market to build up the buffer stock and also go for some active measures to help the industry. Moreover, the government should act quickly.

The writer is Research Analyst, Geofin Comtrade Ltd. Views are personal.

## **Mobile services can perk up returns for small farmers: Vodafone survey**



The introduction of simple mobile services designed to help small scale farmers could boost farm gate incomes rise by Rs. 56,000 crore by 2020, according to a report released on Tuesday by telecom giant Vodafone.

Based on research commissioned by Accenture Strategy and supported by the Vodafone Foundation, the 'Connected Farming in India' report found that average farming household lives on less than Rs. 250 per day.

Mobile services - including early warning for weather events, harvesting best practices techniques to enhance yields, access to financial products, field auditing and communication channels between buyers and sellers – could help increase earnings to Rs. 8,000 each year, it said.

“The basis for the next green revolution in India will be a knowledge revolution, and technology, particularly mobile, will play a key role in driving it ... this offers a new channel for delivering agricultural services and an opportunity to engage rural communities in new ways,” said Sunil Sood, MD & CEO, Vodafone India.

The company estimates that 46 per cent of rural Indians own a cellphone and access to services is growing rapidly.

### **National e-Governance plan**

Government officials present at the function, organised by ASSOCHAM, noted the potential of mobile services in the rural space.

“This Government is committed to connecting our farmers on the information highway and bringing latest technology advantages to them right to their fields and into their hands,” said Mohanbhai Kundariya, Minister of State for Agriculture.

Raghav Chandra, Additional Secretary and Financial Advisor, Agriculture Ministry, said that a national e-Governance had been put in place to leverage technology.

“Increasingly, there is a realisation that use of IT has to become more pervasive...that is why a national e-Governance plan has been carved out in the field of agriculture. This includes internet use, touch-screen kiosks, agri-clinics, common service centres, 'kisan' call centres and others along with physical outreach,” he said.

Agriculture contributes 13.7 per cent to India's GDP with 56 per cent of the population directly connected to the sector, he added.

## Avataa green tea creates new price record

A high quality Nilgiri whole-leaf green tea of Avataa Beverages which was crowned with ‘Golden Leaf India Award 2015’, by Tea Board and United Planters’ Association of Southern India (UPASI), has fetched a record price of ₹2,000 a kg.

“This winter speciality high-grown tea created this price record when Kesaria Co., Kolkata, bought it for marketing among discerning connoisseurs of fragrant and tasty brew,” Avataa Beverages Director G Udayakumar told *BusinessLine*.

“This tea has been made from the leaves carefully handpicked from the exclusively earmarked tea bushes at Billimalai estate, 6,400 ft above sea level. Only single-leaf and two-leaf tender winter season’s leaves are plucked. They are subject to minimal processing in hi-tech machinery to retain the green tea Polyphenol characteristics,” Avataa Speciality tea specialist ENR Vejaya Shekara noted.

# Business Standard

Onion exports jump 25% in two months

**Lack of competition in West Asia, Sri Lanka boost outflow**



Onion exports have gone up 25 per cent over the past two months, after a four-month slump, because of less competition in destinations such as Sri Lanka and West Asia.

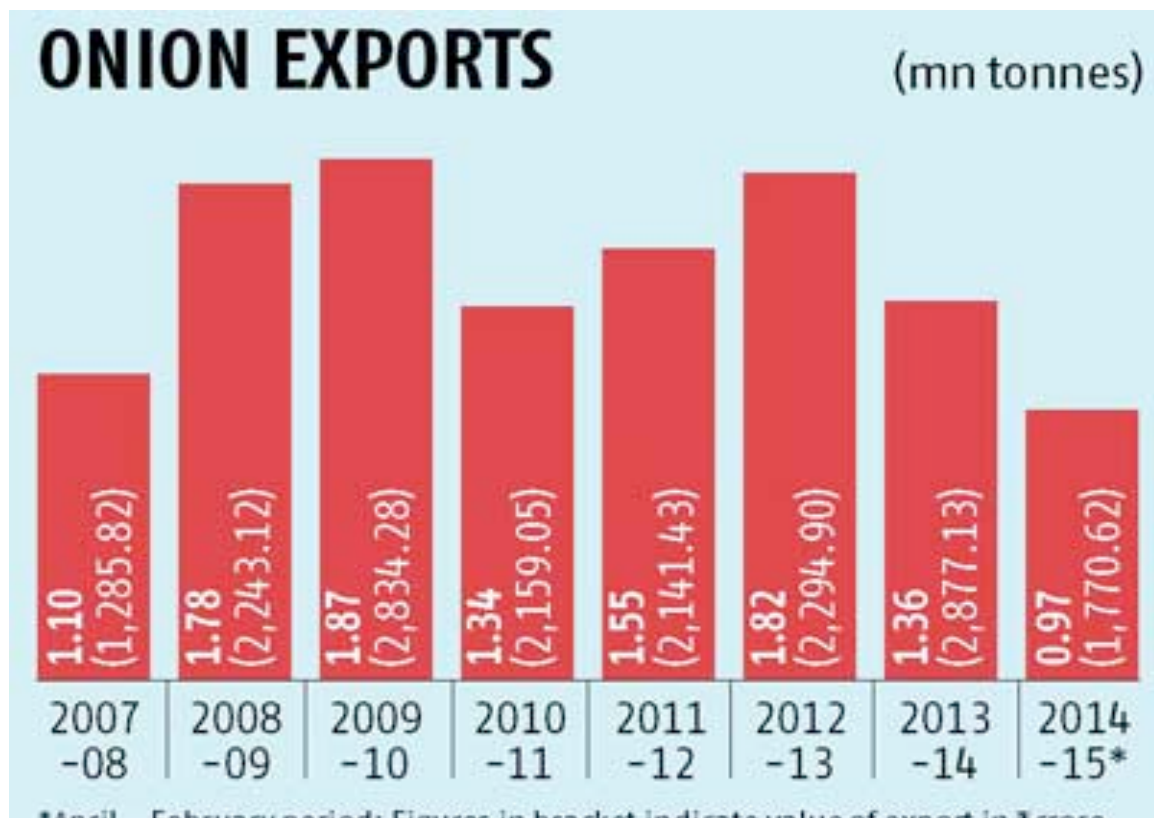


Between December 2014 and March 2015, Indian onion exporters were facing tough competition from Pakistan, both in quality and prices. Onions from Pakistan were sold in West Asia at \$100 lower than the price offered by Indian exporters. Their quality was also superior to the India counterpart, adversely affected by unseasonal rainfall in December, February and March.

Rising exports have also helped spurt modal prices in the benchmark Lasalgaon market at Rs 1,175 a quintal on Tuesday as against Rs 1,000 a quintal on May 2. Also, arrivals have risen to 13,000 tonne from 10,000 tonnes in the same period under consideration. For exports also, prices have surged by \$25-50 to \$375 so far this month.

“But, Pakistan has run out of stock. So, overseas importers do not have any option but to accept onion from India. Despite being quality inferior than global standard of the fair average quality (FAQ), the consignments are accepted,” said Ajit Shah, President, Horticulture Exporters Association.

Data compiled by the National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF) showed, India’s onion exports at 265,066 tonnes between April – May last year. Exports have been up by 20-25 per cent this year, said Shah.



\*April – February period; Figures in bracket indicate value of export in US\$ crore

In the preceding four months, however, onion exports from India remained lackluster due to high domestic prices. Onion was selling at around Rs 25 a kg in domestic market due to reports of crop damage on unseasonal rainfalls and hailstorms. In exports terms, therefore, India was uncompetitive.

Consequently, India's overall exports between April 2014 and February 2015 reported a decline of 30 per cent as Indian market was captured largely by Pakistan. Data compiled by NHRDF, onion exports in the first 11-month of 2014-15 plunged to 0.97 million tonnes as against 1.26 million tonnes in the same period last year. Considering 0.11 million tonnes of export quantity of March 2014 to remain unchanged in March 2015, India's overall onion export may hit seven-year low at 1.08 million tonnes in the financial year 2014-15.

Now, onion exports from India have rebounded as, according to trade sources, Indian exporters are offering the commodity at \$60-70 a cheaper than any other originating countries including China and Iran. Consequently, India gets advantage over competition despite poor quality of product.

Due to political unrest, consignments from Yemen were also not coming into the Middle East markets.

But now, market is slowly coming in track. Export from Yemen has started, of course, in negligible quantity. Exporters from China and Iran have also gradually initiated testing market pulse in Dubai and Doha.

“Now, stockists have started sorting out good quality from rain soaked onion for future sale. While good quality onion gets exported, the rain soaked one is brought into the market resulting into a sudden spurt in arrivals into mandis. Quality of Indian onion is inferior and therefore, such onion cannot be dispatched for long distance for fear of rotting. Consequently, onion exports from India were low until the last few months,” said R P Gupta, Director, NHRDF.

Meanwhile, onion availability may become scarce in lean season of August – September ahead of ensuing kharif crop harvest. Various estimates suggest between 25-30 per cent of crop damage due to unseasonal rainfalls in February – March.

Gupta, however, believes that much would depend upon the ensuing monsoon rainfalls which would give a fair indication of sowing, crop development and harvesting.

India's coffee exports might drop 5.6% this year: USDA

**The country had shipped 4.98 million bags of coffee during the 2013-14 marketing year (October-September)**



India's coffee exports are likely to decline 5.6 per cent to 4.7 million bags, in the ongoing marketing year ending in September, due to weak demand from major European buyers, a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) report said.

The country had shipped 4.98 million bags of coffee during the 2013-14 marketing year (October-September). One bag contains 60 kg of coffee.

According to the USDA report, India's Robusta coffee variety has a good reputation among international buyers. European countries continue to be the major buyers of Indian coffee.

Italy, Germany, and Russia are the top export destinations for Indian coffee. India exports an estimated 90 per cent of its production.

India's actual exports are virtually equivalent to production, but include one million bags of coffee that are imported duty free for processing and re-export under a special re-export programme, said the report.

On prices, the USDA report said average Arabica coffee variety prices at the International Coffee Organisation (ICO) indicator have fallen 15 per cent between January and March while Robusta prices have remained firm.

Domestic prices are largely driven by international prices and trade sources indicate that global supplies of Robusta are keeping prices at lower levels.

"Robusta prices are expected now to remain firm until the onset of the next harvest as strong foreign demand pressures Indian supplies," the report said.

According to the Coffee Board data, the major shipment ports for coffee in India are Mangaluru (Karnataka) and Cochin (Kerala) ports followed by Chennai (Tamil Nadu) in Southern India.

India's overall coffee production is estimated to be slightly higher at 5.1 million bags in 2014-15 marketing year, as against 5.07 million bags in the last year.