

30.05.2015

THE HINDU

Centre convenes meeting on pulses

Alarmed over the rising prices of pulses, the Centre has convened a meeting of committee of secretaries to review the situation. The panel will also look at onion prices as part of advance planning, sources said.

The concern is in respect of four varieties of pulses. Tur/arhar is selling 50.68 per cent higher over last year at Rs. 110 per kg, gram dal is higher by 40 per cent at Rs. 70 per kg, urad dal is up by 53.52 per cent at Rs. 109 per kg and masoor dal is higher by 36.23 per cent at Rs. 94 per kg.

The prices of pulses are appreciating owing to shortfall in production due to inclement weather and unseasonal rain that hit the rabi pulses production.

There are also reports of hoarding by traders.

The Agriculture Ministry revised downward the production of pulses this year in its third advance estimates released on May 13. The revised estimates for 2014-15 put pulses output at 17.38 million tonnes as against 18.43 million tonnes for corresponding estimates in 2013-14, a shortfall of 5.6 per cent.

Crop hit in Myanmar

What is worrisome for the government is that no pulses will be available from Canada before August and from Australia before November.

The Myanmar pulses crop has been hit by inclement weather as in India, sources said.

Agricultural wells to supply drinking water



With a water crisis looming over the city, Chennai Metrowater has started transporting water from agricultural wells rented in Tiruvallur district to manage the shortfall in resources.

At present, nearly 15 million litres a day (mld) is being drawn from about 250 agricultural borewells near Poondi, Tamaraiakkam and Minjur. This volume will be stepped up gradually to 40 mld in a few weeks from the wells.

After nearly a decade, Metrowater has acted upon its contingency plans to purchase water from agricultural wells to sustain water supply. Some of the villages from where the groundwater is being sourced are Magaral, Pullarambakkam, Kilanoor and Siruvanoor Kandigai.

As Krishna water flow from Andhra Pradesh was suspended last month, the storage in the reservoirs has dwindled rapidly and remains at 16 per cent of its total capacity. Thus arises the need to supplement the city water supply.

While Chennai is being supplied with 590-600 mld on alternate days, some areas like T. Nagar and Royapettah often complain of erratic water supply.

Groundwater purchased from agricultural wells at a rate of Rs. 15-Rs. 18 per kilo litre is being transmitted through pipeline to Red Hills treatment plant

from where it is supplied to the city. Metrowater has also started drawing 30 mld water from local sources in added areas.

Sources at Metrowater said the number of tanker trips, including those on payment, has been increased to 4,000 daily to meet the demand.

“The storage in the reservoirs will last till July-end. Veeranam tank in Cuddalore district and desalination plants in Minjur and Nemmeli will augment water supply,” said an official.

The water agency will soon start bringing 55 mld of water from borewells and mines in Neyveli to support the city’s water supply.

‘Tread cautiously with genetically engineered food’

A farmer couple from H.D. Kote in Mysuru district practising organic farming have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the dangers of Bt.Cotton and transgenic seeds, including manipulating seed supply, to generate artificial scarcity for a price rise.

Mr. Vivek Cariappa and Ms. Julie Cariappa, who cultivate organic cotton among other crops, said that past experience has shown how seed monopoly had lead to its scarcity and price rise. Despite that laws are being amended to promote seed monopoly leading to manipulated seed scarcity and sharp rise in prices. And, laws are being amended to protect seed companies against the interest of farming communities, and leading to loss of traditional bio-diversity in cotton, increased distress and risk in cotton farming, non-availability of non-GM cotton seed, corruption in the agri-scientific community and bio-piracy.

Mr. Cariappa said these negative experiences are being touted as success and alleged that people involved in scientific and bio-piracy frauds were being posted to powerful advisory and directional roles.

“As India’s sustainability and well-being is still dependent on agriculture, we fear to think what the effect would be if the same experiences are forced on the rest of our agriculture”, said the Cariappa couple. Sensing a dichotomy between urban and rural India leading to a perception of “domestic colonialism”, the farmers said they stand to lose sovereignty over the seeds which they have protected and developed for centuries. “By allowing field trials of genetically modified seeds in the final days of its

tenure, the UPA government sounded the death knell for us farmers”, they added.

The letter questioned whether the government would promote a technology that was inherently weak and would claim profits for its patent owners and their shareholders by debilitating the farmers and their agriculture. Calling upon the PM to protect the interest of the farming communities, the letter said until genetic science was more proven, irrefutable and accepted knowledge and the nation had better regulatory mechanisms in place, the authorities should tread cautiously in the realm of genetically engineered food crops.

Fruit farms to come up in 400 hectares in Ramanathapuram district



The Department of Horticulture has proposed to promote vegetable cultivation under mulching technology with drip irrigation system in 100 hectares and set up fruit farms in 400 hectares in Ramanathapuram district during this season under the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) and the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).

Showcasing the mango farm at Pandiyur near here and guava farm and vegetable cultivation at Koraipallam near Kamudhi, during a tour on Thursday, Deputy Director of Horticulture V. Gangadaran said that farmers were offered subsidies and encouraged to cultivate vegetables, establish fruit farms and set up honey bee hives under the NHM.

Vegetable cultivation under mulching technology would help them enhance yield by more than 20 per cent and produce quality vegetables.

The new technology would also help farmers control weed and increase the water efficiency by 60 to 80 per cent, he said.

The farmers would be given subsidy of Rs. 36,000 per hectare, he added.

He said the department had proposed to set up fruit farms in 100 hectares under the NMSA (Horticulture-based farming system) for this year but the government had approved the project for 400 hectares, offering a subsidy of Rs. 25,000 per hectare towards planting materials, cultivation aspects and inputs such as biofertilizer.

Mango farms

Mango farms would be established in Mandapam, Tirupullani and Kamudhi areas and guava, sapota and amla farms in Kamudhi area, Mr. Gangadaran said. Under the on-farm water management, the government offered 100 per cent subsidy for small and marginal farmers and 75 per cent subsidy for big farmers for drip irrigation.

Work orders were issued for drip irrigation in 167 hectares last year and work was in progress, he said.

This year, the government would help farmers set up drip irrigation system in 400 hectares, he added.

Cultivation of shallots

Assistant Directors of Horticulture B. Ilangovan and J. Rajendran said that during this season farmers would be encouraged to cultivate shallots in 50 hectares and Bellary onion in 70 hectares in Kamudhi, Kadaladi, Mudukulathur and Paramakudi areas by offering a subsidy of Rs. 12,000 per hectare.

For pollination support, Amma Women Empowerment Groups and other interested parties were being encouraged to set up 300 units of honey bee hives in the district. Each group was given Rs. 1,600 for setting up the units, they said.

Centre convenes meeting on pulses

Alarmed over the rising prices of pulses, the Centre has convened a meeting of committee of secretaries to review the situation. The panel will also look at onion prices as part of advance planning, sources said.

The concern is in respect of four varieties of pulses. Tur/arhar is selling 50.68 per cent higher over last year at Rs. 110 per kg, gram dal is higher by 40 per cent at Rs. 70 per kg, urad dal is up by 53.52 per cent at Rs. 109 per kg and masoor dal is higher by 36.23 per cent at Rs. 94 per kg.

The prices of pulses are appreciating owing to shortfall in production due to inclement weather and unseasonal rain that hit the rabi pulses production.

There are also reports of hoarding by traders.

The Agriculture Ministry revised downward the production of pulses this year in its third advance estimates released on May 13. The revised estimates for 2014-15 put pulses output at 17.38 million tonnes as against 18.43 million tonnes for corresponding estimates in 2013-14, a shortfall of 5.6 per cent.

Crop hit in Myanmar

What is worrisome for the government is that no pulses will be available from Canada before August and from Australia before November.

The Myanmar pulses crop has been hit by inclement weather as in India, sources said.

Tea Board in a quandary over XII Plan allocation

The Tea Board is in a quandary over the XII Plan allocation recently approved by the Centre. An allocation of Rs.1,425 crore — one of the highest ever — has been made for the tea sector, but this amount may now have to be spent within two years as three years of the Plan period are already over.

The XII Plan is from 2012-13 to 2016-17, but no allocation was made until mid-May 2015, mainly due to the policy paralysis of the previous

government. Now, the Tea Board is confused about how to apportion the huge amount of money over the two remaining years of the Plan.

Concerned about the issue, the tea industry has already made a representation to the Tea Board saying that at least some of the schemes like the crucial one on plantation development could be regarded as continuous running scheme and funded accordingly, although it may not be possible to incorporate the new provisos (like an enhanced subsidy rate).

The 'Tea Plantation & Development Scheme' (the XII Plan for tea) has seven components. This includes plantation development, quality upgrade, market development and export promotion, research and development, small growers development. This is the first instance of a separate allocation, being made for the small growers sector, which is emerging as a major force in the Indian tea industry. The XI Plan allocation was around Rs.700 crore.

New proposals have been mooted for educational support to the dependents of workers. Schemes are also on board for brand promotion, and for strengthening the auction system.

However, the tight time frame is making things difficult for the Tea Board and the industry alike, raising concern whether the fund would remain unutilised.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Chilly spices up these farmers' bank balance

Despite the heat and humidity, chilly farms of Chiraipadar village of tribal Bastar region are standing tall, lush and green, thanks to drip irrigation technology. It has helped local farmers of the village to take up horticulture cultivation in a big way.

As moderate temperature is required for growth of chilly vegetation, the existing temperature of 42 degrees is beaten by water supply to plants through drip irrigation method.

Around 12 tribal farmers cultivate chilly in a 17-hectare land and after timely harvesting, they are directly selling to vendors and brokers of vegetable markets in Raipur and Nagpur.

Horticulture department deputy director at Bastar district, Turkane said that on drip irrigation technology 70% subsidy is being facilitated to farmers.

A local farmer, Rajendra Bandhe said, "Farmers here prefer cultivating chillies because it holds promising markets and the direct contact of buyers with local farmers to procure chillies fetch decent monetary gains." He further said that under this method, water is supplied without much wastage for a long time pointedly to the root of crop and its gaining popularity among local farmers where there is poor irrigation facility.

Low voltage and electricity are some hiccups. For this, they have approached collector Amit Kataria, who assured that measures are being adopted by administration and power distribution companies to sort this issue and a decision of setting up a new electricity sub-station in village Balenga has been taken.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Cottonseed demand pegged lower at 4.5 cr packets

Weak rains may trigger shift from maize to cotton



The cottonseed industry is expecting a decline in sale of seeds in this kharif season. The industry, which sold about 4.75 crore packets (450 gm each) last year, is looking at a figure of 4.40-4.50 crore packets this year, despite a likely drop in area in the North.

The industry is saddled with an inventory of 6.5 crore packets. However, about 1.5 crore packets of this inventory is considered 'non-moving', or not-so-good quality seeds. The industry harps on a good season to clear this stock.

India grew cotton on 12.5 million hectares last year, with Maharashtra topping the list with 34 per cent of this area. Gujarat with 23 per cent and Andhra Pradesh with 20 per cent follow Maharashtra.

Quality seed varieties

Though it looks a comfortable situation with a satisfactory 'effective' inventory of five crore packets, there will be huge demand for quality seed varieties, which are in short supply.

“Though scores of varieties are available in the market, each year farmers vie for only a few varieties that they believe would give them good outputs,” a top executive of Seedsmen Association of India told *BusinessLine*. The demand for such high performing seeds is so huge that some governments put the onus on some companies to supply a certain quantity of seeds in the season.

Hostile weather

“The actual demand for cottonseeds last year was 4.2 crore packets. But the industry sold about 30-40 lakh packets because several thousand farmers had gone for re-sowing due to delayed rains. Apart from this, there was an increase demand of about 15 lakh packets,” P Sathish Kumar, former President of Seedsmen Association, said. The demand for seeds could go up if the weather turns hostile. If rains fail, maize farmers might shift to cotton as it is relatively resilient to harsh weather conditions.

If monsoon spreads well, farmers need not go for re-sowing. This could reduce the demand by about 30 lakh packets. Cottonseed firms are facing a stiff challenge in terms of output as seed-producing farmers are shying away due to poor returns.

Kharif coverage up a tad at 59.56 lakh ha

The total sown area under kharif crops stands at 59.56 lakh hectares (lh), a tad up than 59.47 lh sown during the corresponding period last year, according to data released by the Agriculture Ministry here on Friday.

The area under rice is up 21.3 per cent, from 2.54 lh in 2014-15 to 3.08 lh this year while oilseeds acreage has touched 0.16 lh from 0.04 lh a year ago.

After rice, soyabean is the most widely cultivated Kharif crop.

Sugarcane acreage slipped by 5.17 per cent to 40.70 lh . Sowing of cotton is up 14.2 per cent with 8.82 lh under coverage compared to 7.72 lh earlier while area under jute and mesta touched 6.81 lh from 6.25 lh.

The India Meteorological Department has predicted that the four-month long South-West monsoon is likely to hit Kerala on Saturday with a model error of four days.

It has predicted the monsoon this year to be at 93 per cent of the long-period average of 89 cm mainly due to developing El Nino conditions.

Poor quality wheat unlikely to be sold at discount to millers



Bulk buyers of wheat from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State agencies are unlikely to get a discount on lower quality foodgrain that had been procured after unseasonal rain and hailstorms over the harvest period.

Quality-wise data will be released next week to ascertain the volume of damaged grain that has been procured, said a Food Ministry official.

The Centre had relaxed quality norms for wheat procurement after the weather disturbances from end-February through early-April damaged the standing wheat crop.

The value cut imposed, if any, on shrivelled, broken or lustre-lost grains would be borne by it so that farmers could be provided the minimum support price. Wheat is sold to bulk buyers at ₹1,550/quintal plus freight charges.

“It is unlikely that there will any reduction in price for millers buying from government agencies. Wheat has been sold at ₹1,550/quintal and will continue to be done so even if the grain is of a lower quality,” said the official.

BusinessLine had reported earlier this month that wheat arriving at markets in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana was of poor quality unfit for making maida flour.

As on May 26, 267.06 lakh tonnes (lt) of wheat had been procured by the FCI and State agencies – 5 lt more than during the corresponding period the year before when 262.86 lt had been lifted.

“The procurement period is reaching a close and we have been tracking the numbers. Quality-wise data of the wheat lifted will be released next week,” said the official.

The FCI had a stock of 341 lt of the foodgrain as on May 1 against the buffer requirement of 210 lt a month earlier. It managed to sell 45 lt in 2014-15 against a 100 lt target in 2014-15, down from 61 lt the previous year.

To liquidate excess stocks, the Centre has decided to sell FCI wheat to millers in Punjab and Haryana from June.

Wheat output is set to slide marginally to 907.8 lt in current crop year from a record 958.5 lt in 2013-14.