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# THE HINDU

**This year, mangoes from State are heading to the U.S.**



Great yield: The State is expecting a bumper crop of nearly 13 lakh tonnes of mango this year.— file photo: v. sreenivasa murthy

## STATE OF THE FRUIT

➤ **Karnataka** is the third largest mango growing State after Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra

➤ **Grows** 80 varieties on 2 lakh hectares

➤ **Kolar** has 47,000 hectares and 3 lakh tonnes of produce

➤ **Varieties** grown are Alphonso (also called Badami), Malgova, Mallika, Banganapalli, Totapuri, Neelam, Raspuri, Kesar and Sindhura

➤ **Exports** would largely comprise Alphonso and Kesar

Karnataka is all set to export 10,000 tonnes of mangoes, and this time the fruit will reach the United States and Malaysia too, according to the Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation.

R. Roshan Baig, Minister for Infrastructure Development, said, “Karnataka generally exports a measly 500 tonnes to some European countries and Singapore. Hence, getting export orders of 10,000 tonnes is a big leap.”

This year, the State is expecting a bumper crop of nearly 13 lakh tonnes, which may hit the market from mid-May onwards, said M. Kamalakshi Rajanna, chairperson, State Mango Development Corporation. “Increased humidity without moisture has played spoil-sport to the otherwise good season that has seen a 58 per cent increase in production compared with last year,” she said.

Rajesh B. Hiremath, a farmer from Belagavi, said, “Increased heat and humidity with no moisture has resulted in 10 to 15 per cent of the fruits falling to the ground.”

### **Tests for export**

The export varieties have to undergo a series of tests conducted by the Innova Agri Biopark, Malur.

“The mangoes will be graded, sorted and dried. Then there would be a 48 degrees Celsius hot-water treatment followed by Ethylene ripening and packing,” said K.P. Venkatesh, Senior Manager, Innova Biopark.

He said this year, as many as 4,500 farmers have registered with them for exporting their produce. So far, 20 tonnes have already been shipped.

*Karnataka generally exports around 500 tonnes to some European countries and Singapore*

### **Cotton auctioned for Rs. 15 lakh at Konganapuram**

Cotton was auctioned for Rs. 15 lakh at the agricultural producer cooperative marketing society at Konganapuram near here on Saturday.

While BT variety fetched a price between Rs.4,400 and Rs.4,900 per bag.

DCH variety fetched a price between Rs.5,800 and Rs.6,400.

A total of 800 bags of cotton were auctioned for Rs.15 lakhs, sources said.

### **Ginger farming adds to woes**



harsh reality:Commercial cultivation of the water-intensive crop is impacting the groundwater table.— file Photo: M.A. Sriram

Commercial cultivation of ginger gaining popularity in parts of Mysuru district is impacting the groundwater table, adding to the water woes in the rural hinterland in a year of drought.

The water-intensive crop, which is grown mainly in H.D. Kote, Hunsur, Periyapatna, and Nanjangud taluks, is gaining popularity owing to a spike in the price.

The cultivation is fuelled by contract farming in which the land is leased by the local farmers to contractors from Kerala for an attractive commission.

But the economics of ginger apart, the authorities are waking up to the harsh reality of depleting water table in a region where groundwater is the only source for nearly 800 villages in the district. Hence, the administration is planning to takeover the borewells being used to irrigate ginger fields.

The proposal is significant as there are 1,210 villages in Mysuru district of which only 188 have surface water — supplied either from the Cauvery or the Kabini — as the source. In the rest of the villages, borewells are the only means. “If public borewells go dry and we find water being flushed to irrigate ginger cultivated on private land, we will takeover those borewells with the help of

Revenue authorities and the local gram panchayat,” said Manjunath, Executive Engineer in charge of water works in the Mysuru Zilla Panchayat.

Ginger is cultivated on nearly 10,000 acres, spread across the four taluks, and the acreage is increasing, which will impact groundwater table and compound water scarcity significantly.

The groundwater level is below 500 feet in most places in the region and many of the existing borewells that pumped water from 150 feet to 200 feet have gone dry. “We are re-drilling such borewells and have managed to strike water at about 600 feet,” said Mr. Manjunath.

While the Agriculture Department said there is no law under which ginger cultivation could be stopped, B.G. Prakash of the College of Horticulture said drip irrigation should be adopted instead of flushing the field which results in runoffs and waste of precious water.

### **Guidelines to protect cattle against summer temperatures**

The Animal Husbandry Department has reached out to farmers with the methods of protecting their cattle from heat stress due to the harshness of summer.

Erode district accounts for 3.7 lakh heads of cattle in the district, and a number of milk dairies.

The productivity of the lactating cows is bound to decrease during the summer months.

For this reason, the farmers have been advised not to let out their animals for grazing between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., Regional Joint Director of Animal Husbandry Department P. Ravichandran said, informing that the awareness initiative was a precautionary step and that there have been no cattle death so far due to heat stroke.

Keeping the animals in shade during the course of the day when the temperature gets too hot outside, pouring cool water on the animals at frequent intervals, and providing them cool water to drink are ways to prevent dehydration and loss of productivity, Dr. Ravichandran said.

According to veterinary experts, cows with higher productivity exhibit more signs of heat stress since they eat more feed for higher production. When the temperature gets high, their intake capacity gets diminished significantly.

Cows drink more water when the temperature shoots up.

Likewise, farmers raising backyard poultry have also been advised to place enough water to protect the birds from death inflicted by dehydration.

The same applies to pet animals as well. Intake of adequate water must be ensured to safeguard the lives of pet animals, Dr. Ravichandran said.

### **Directive to dairy farmers**

FANS TO BE INSTALLED

IN COWSHEDS

The prevailing intense heat in Palakkad has forced the Department of Animal Husbandry to advise dairy farmers across the district to install electric fans in cowsheds apart from ensuring sufficient drinking water for cows. Heat stress affects milk production, reproductive health and dairy profitability, said an official release issued here. While the native breeds can withstand the climate change to a certain extent, crossbreeds fail to withstand the soaring mercury. “Cows under heat stress are more susceptible to mastitis and other diseases,” it said. Palakkad is witnessing temperature at 40 degree Celsius.


### **Panama disease stalks banana cultivation in Kerala**

*Scientists recommend soil treatment with fungicides to check its spread*

The Panama disease caused by a soil-borne fungus is threatening banana crops across Kerala, posing a potential crisis for farmers, even as global efforts to control the disease gain momentum.

Scientists are concerned that the sporadic cases of infestation could turn into an epidemic. Most of the popular cultivars have shown signs of infestation. Scientists at the Kerala Agricultural University recommend soil treatment with fungicides for control of the disease but they are worried that farmers who are yet to recognise the enormity of the threat would ignore the need for intervention.

Also called Fusarium Wilt of banana, Panama is caused by the soil-borne fungus *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. Cubense (Foc)*. The fungus enters the plant through the roots and goes on to colonise the plant through the vascular system. It causes discoloration and wilting of leaves, and eventually kills the plant.

<b>IMMINENT THREAT</b>		
<p><b>Caused by</b> a soil-borne fungus <i>Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. Cubense (Foc)</i></p>		
<p><b>KAU RECOMMENDATION</b> Soil treatment with fungicides</p>		
<p>The fungus enters the plant through the roots and goes on to colonise the plant through the vascular system, blocking the flow of water and nutrients</p>		<p><b>SYMPTOMS</b> Leaf yellowing, wilted leaves, stem splitting</p>
<p><b>MEDIUM</b> Fungus spreads through infected planting material, soil, water</p>	<p><b>FUNGAL SPORES</b> can survive in the soil for up to 30 years</p>	<p><b>RACE FOUR</b> The current strain now attacks Cavendish and other cultivars</p>
	<p><b>RACE ONE</b> The first strain which wiped out the Gros Michel</p>	

In the 1950s, Panama wiped out the Gros Michel banana, the dominant cultivar. Over the years, it spread from Panama to neighbouring countries. A new virulent strain of the disease known as Tropical Race 4 (TR4) is now threatening banana crops in Asia, Australia, Africa and the Middle East.

## From Plate to Plough — The big thirst

It's not that Maharashtra has spent less on irrigation. The real problem is its high cost.



The water train chugging into Latur on its fourth run. (Express Photo by Pradip Das)

Latur in Maharashtra has become a symbol of acute water scarcity. Several “jal doots” (water trains) had to ferry water to thirsty Latur. The Maharashtra government also imposed Section 144 to maintain law and order near water bodies/ distribution points.

The high court intervened in the case of IPL matches and asked these to be shifted out of the state to save about 60 lakh litres of water.

It's not the first time, and certainly won't be the last, that trains had to ferry drinking water in water-stressed areas.

Their frequency and coverage may increase, unless some major corrective actions are taken. Back-to-back drought has exposed the vulnerable water

situation not just in Latur but in more than 250 districts (out of 678) in India. While the timid curse the nature, the bold and wise rise to the challenge, and convert a crisis into an opportunity for change that can benefit the masses.

Nitin Gadkari, in his Express Adda programme on April 15, flagged the issue by pointing out that Maharashtra is hugely under-investing in developing its irrigation cover, just Rs 7,000 crore compared to Rs 25,000 crore in Telangana.

Maharashtra has only 18 per cent of its cropped area under irrigation cover compared to an all-India average of 47 per cent and states like Punjab with 97 per cent. No doubt, one needs to invest more in irrigation.

If Maharashtra can think of a bullet train costing Rs 90,000 crore, why can't it put similar priority in developing its water resources? The first thing needed is removing the elitist biases in public policymaking and resource allocation.

But let's look at how much money Maharashtra has already put in public irrigation during the 10 years of 10th and 11th Plans (FY03-12), and what came of it.

To make them comparable, we converted yearly expenditures to 2014-15 prices. The cumulative public expenditure for irrigation over these 10 years in Maharashtra works out to Rs 1,18,235 crore.

During this period, the irrigation potential created (IPC) was 8.9 lakh ha and irrigation potential utilised (IPU) was just 5.9 lakh ha. This gives us the cost of IPU at Rs 20 lakh/ ha. Compare this with Gujarat, which spent only Rs 46,888 crore (at 2014-15 prices) over the same period and created irrigation potential of 22.5 lakh ha and utilised 17.3 lakh ha, with an IPU cost of only Rs 2.71 lakh/ ha. For MP, the similar cost works out to Rs 4.26 lakh/ ha over the same period.

So the real issue is not that Maharashtra spent less on irrigation. It's why its costs are so high (Rs 20 lakh/ ha) compared to MP (Rs 4.26 lakh/ ha) and Gujarat (Rs 2.71 lakh/ ha).

Is it really topography or the massive leakages in irrigation systems? Although one would tend to agree with Gadkari that more resources are needed in



Maharashtra's irrigation, without fixing leaks, pouring more money will not have the desired results.

Maharashtra needs a white paper scrutinising its irrigation expenditures and irrigation potential, created and utilised, in comparison with similar states to find out why such huge investments haven't yielded results.

Let's now turn to the issue of sugarcane. Just one fact should expose the story. Sugarcane occupies about 4 per cent of gross cropped area in Maharashtra's agriculture but takes away almost two-thirds of the state's irrigation water.

Such a huge inequity doesn't exist in any other state. In a market economy, a progressively rising price of irrigation water, with increasing usage of water (and power), can solve this anomaly.

But when water and power for agriculture are highly subsidised, it artificially creates excess demand, triggering a scramble for these scarce resources. No wonder, the more powerful win and take away the potential prosperity of others.

The fact that cotton area in Maharashtra is just 3 per cent irrigated, while sugarcane is 100 per cent irrigated, and cotton needs just four-five irrigations while sugarcane is flooded with 25-30, tells the sordid story.

In Gujarat, cotton is 57 per cent irrigated. No surprise then that Gujarat's yields are double that of Maharashtra.

What can be done on the demand management side? The government has already decided that in the next five years, no new sugar factories can come up in Marathwada.

It's a welcome step, but what about the 20 sugar factories that came up in the last three years? When water is scarce, the only way to manage its demand is either by raising its price progressively with use, or by rationing quantity.

Can the government move in that direction, giving everyone water on the same per ha basis and letting them trade thereafter? Short of that is making drip irrigation almost compulsory for sugarcane in Maharashtra.

Can the government ask sugar factories to ensure at least 75 per cent of sugarcane area is brought under drip in the next three years, else they lose the right to operate? Drip will save almost 40-50 per cent water.

Historically, eastern UP and Bihar were sugarcane centres, which are naturally endowed with a lot of water. But the licensing priority to cooperatives brought sugar to a belt that doesn't have ample water. So the water conflicts are obvious.

Finally, what about the HC's decision on IPL matches? One kilogram of sugar uses more than 2,000 litres of water.

Only three tonnes of sugar, costing about Rs 1 lakh, could have supplied the equivalent water for IPL matches that were supposed to generate Rs 100 crore in revenue. How much emotion, hype, drama and rationality there is in these policies and pronouncements, readers can judge for themselves.

### **Poultry business hit as Maharashtra reels under drought**

Maharashtra sees placement of around 3.5 crore birds per month, of which around 50 lakh kgs of chicken is supplied to Mumbai alone.

As Maharashtra continues to face the ravages of drought, the poultry industry has started reporting almost 35 per cent production losses in the state. Ironically, this comes when for the first time in many months, the industry started reporting profits in the sales of broiler.

Maharashtra sees placement of around 3.5 crore birds per month, of which around 50 lakh kgs of chicken is supplied to Mumbai alone.

The industry has a monthly turnover of over Rs 800 crores in the state. Pune district sees placement of around 40 lakh birds per month. The input cost of production of a kg of broiler chicken, of late, has been between Rs 70-75. Prior to December last year, the price of per kg broiler chicken was lesser than the input cost, resulting in losses for farmers.

Since December 17, the price of broiler in market has been higher than the input cost and in Pune, at present it is Rs 90 per kg.

Prasanna Pedgaonkar, deputy general manager of Venkateshwara Hatcheries Private Limited, said the water scarcity has seen around 35 per cent drop in production.

Districts in Marathwada, Vidarbha, Ahmendnagar, etc, he said, were witnessing severe water crisis which has led to many poultry farmers temporarily closing their sheds.

“Using tankers to water, the farms are not viable and also the supply of tankers is not reliable,” he said. The increase in cost was a direct result of the askew demand-supply ratio.

However, the rise in price, he said, has not benefitted much as the industry has to make do with the accumulated losses of the last few months. Due to the water scarcity, around 10-15 per cent of the poultry sheds in the state have closed down. Mangesh Dhumal, chief managing director of Sakar Poultry, said the situation in even Western Maharashtra is equally bad.

“Around 20 per cent of our farmers have ceased operation,” he said. The drought, he said, has seen a 15 per cent dip in the body weight of the birds and an increase of five per cent in their mortality.

Another worry for the industry is the rise in price of maize and the scarcity of soyameal, which form the basic feed for the industry. Parameshwar Thite, industry analyst and director of Techence solutions, said that for the first time, India had to import soyameal due to the failure of soya crop in the country.

“Also, over the last few weeks, the price of maize has gone up increasing the input costs,” he said. The rise in price, he said, has not resulted into much gains for the farmers at large.

“Only those players who had kept up the placement would gain from the price rise but that too only marginally,” he said.

## World Bank boost for Maha to fight drought



People gather at a public water tap in Latur. (Satish Bate)

The World Bank will fund Rs5,000 crore for a project on water conservation and agriculture reforms for 6,000 drought-hit villages in Vidarbha and Marathwada. This was announced by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis at a media briefing in the Capital on Sunday.

Fadnavis said the first-of-its-kind project that will include the implementation of various plans including drought proofing, watershed management to improvisation of the agriculture practices and changing crop patterns, will be kicked off in next six months.

“After our primary talks with the World Bank, it asked us to submit the comprehensive plan through department of external affairs for drought mitigation and agriculture related to funding. Our plan was accepted by the orld Bank and it has admitted to fund the project costing about Rs5,000 crore,” he said.

“Generally, the approval processing and commencement of the actual implementation of the World Bank funded drought-mitigation projects take about a year and a half, but treating it as an exceptional project the international funding agency has admitted to begin it in next six months,” said Fadnavis.

The CM said that 4,000 villages covering half of the Marathwada and 2,000 villages in Vidarbha would be benefitted from the project. He added that the municipal corporations in Mumbai Metropolitan Region have been directed to adopt practice of recycling of the waste water at least for the industrial use.

“We have also directed MIDC, which supply drinking water to the industries, to replace it with the treated water,” he said.

Fadnavis, meanwhile, said that the action initiated against the culprits involved in Deonar dumping ground fires was the tip of the iceberg and many more malpractices are yet to be revealed.

“Many shocking malpractices have come to the light. The investigating agency has seized hard disks of the digital system at the dumping ground and other evidence that will help expose the wrongdoings,” he said.

## THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

### **Shun cotton, Telangana tells farmers**

Farmers have been under tremendous financial pressure in the last four years, with monsoon & cottonseed having failed them

With a likely fall in cotton prices globally this year, the Telangana government has asked farmers to go for alternative crops in the ensuing kharif season and reduce the cotton area.

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao will take up this issue at the District Collectors’ conference, scheduled to be held here on April 29.

“Cotton prices have been falling in international markets.



But farmers are continuing to grow the crop. The CM will discuss this issue in detail and ask the Collectors to advise farmers to look at alternatives,” a State government official has said.

Telangana is among the top cotton growing States in the country. But farmers have been under tremendous financial pressure in the last three to four years, with monsoon and cottonseed having failed them. The crop was completely damaged in the last two seasons, triggering a spate of suicides.

This year, they faced another challenge. Pink bollworm developed resistance to the Boggard II technology, leaving the crop vulnerable.

“Farmers are investing heavily but not getting good returns. In fact, they are losing heavily. Moreover, India has signed a pact at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meet held in Nairobi on cutting concessions on duties on cotton exports,” the official said.

“The government has decided to protect farmers from market vagaries. We would like to tell them what is happening globally,” the official added. The

Chief Minister has asked Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy to direct his Department to prepare an action plan in this regard.

## **Business Standard**

### **No interest subsidy on crop loan beyond Rs 3 lakh, says panel**

The government had set the farm credit target of Rs 8.5 lakh crore for the 2015-16 fiscal and is believed to have exceeded the target



A government panel, set up to suggest ways for better implementation of Rs 9 lakh crore farm credit scheme, has recommended that interest subvention should not be provided to farmers if short-term loan amount is higher than Rs 3 lakh.

It also suggested that the interest subsidy should be given for the entire repayment period and not for just one year.

To ensure crop loan reaches the needy small and marginal farmers and best use of its interest subvention scheme, a nine-member panel was set up by the Agriculture Ministry under Chairmanship of V C Sarangi, former National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development chairman.

Under the interest subvention scheme, farmers currently get short-term loan of up to Rs 3 lakh for a period of one year at an interest rate of 7%. Those farmers repaying on time get loan at 4%.

In this year's budget, the government has increased the agricultural-credit target to Rs 9 lakh crore and has allocated Rs 15,000 crore for interest subsidy in this fiscal.

The panel, which recently submitted the report, has noted that agri-credit flow has improved after the introduction of interest subsidy scheme in 2006-07.

However, it has suggested various reforms for better targeting of this programme. Based on this report, the ministry is preparing a Cabinet note.

Among key recommendations, the Sarangi Panel has said that interest subvention scheme should be continued with a cap on sanctioned short-term crop loan limit of Rs 3 lakh per farmer.

"The facility may not be extended where the crop loan sanctioned exceeds Rs 3 lakh," it added.

At present, if the sanctioned loan amount is more than Rs 3 lakh then farmers get subsidy only up to Rs 3 lakh as permitted under the scheme. The panel has suggested not to give interest subsidy at all to farmers who take loans of more than Rs 3 lakh, sources said.

In order to bring down farm distress due to indebtedness, the panel has suggested extending the interest subsidy on crop loan up to the due date even if it is beyond 12 months to prevent farmers from taking loans from private lenders to repay the crop loans within one year.

There are some long-duration crops such as sugarcane and banana, therefore farmers face difficulties in repaying loans within a year, the panel argued.

These recommendations have come at a time when farmers are facing distress and even taking extreme steps like suicide because of fall in income and indebtedness in the wake of two consecutive droughts in several parts of the country.



Earlier this month, Agriculture Secretary Shobhana K Patnaik had spoken about gaps in implementation of the crop loan scheme and asked states to ensure to take steps to ensure agriculture credit reaches small and marginal farmers.

"In spite of so much money given for small and marginal farmers, credit is not flowing to this sector. As a result, this small and marginal farmers are knocking on the door of money lenders.

As a result, we have seen the maximum number of suicides during the last year," Patnaik had said.

"That shows the institutional credit mechanism is not working the way it should be working. This is something that we all should ponder and take measures so that agri credit is made use of by the vulnerable section," he had said.

The government had set the farm credit target of Rs 8.5 lakh crore for the 2015-16 fiscal and is believed to have exceeded the target.



### **Traditional crops vanishing in Kullu**

With winter coming to an end, thousands of farmers in Kullu have returned to their farms. However, nobody is cultivating traditional crops like kodra (eleusine corocana), sariara (amaranth) and kathu (buck wheat), and the number of them growing wheat, barley, red rice and corn too are on the decline.

This is because, tempted by greater profits, farmers in this region are now growing vegetables. In some cases, even apple-growers have taken to cultivating vegetables like tomato, cauliflower and cabbage.

Global warming having an adverse impact on the yield of apple in region is a major reason behind farmers dumping apple for vegetables.

Two decades ago, a majority of the 65,000 hectares of agriculture land in the district was under paddy, wheat, barley, corn, pulses and other traditional crops.

As fruits helped improve the returns for farmers, they started converting agriculture land into fruit orchards.

Agriculture department deputy director Rajinder Singh Verma said 'kodra' and most traditional crops had vanished in Kullu.

"Very few people are now into wheat, barley and corn cultivation. The graph of these crops is decreasing regularly.

Farmers are getting no income from these crops and they are choosing to cultivate only cash crops which have encouraged them to go for vegetable production," he said, while talking to TOI.

### **Farmers awaiting payments for their crops: Manpreet**

Congress leader Manpreet Singh Badal on Sunday claimed that farmers were still are waiting the payment of the crop sold in grain markets of the state even after 24 days of the start of procurement.

He said though the union government has sanctioned cash credit limit of Rs. 17,500 crore but it is not sufficient and the sanction in part will create shortfall of more than Rs. 3000 crore.

And despite the sanction of CCL the government is shying away in providing money to farmers, said Manpreet on Sunday while visiting Talwandi Sabo grain market in the district. He talked to farmers in the grain market who had come to sell their produce.

Manpreet said the SAD-BJP government of Punjab has misappropriated funds meant for purchase of grains and the fact came to light in CAG report.

The farmers of the state are facing the heat due to this loot and are committing suicides.

He said All India Congress committee vice president Rahul Gandhi had asked me to study the needs of the people to prepare manifesto for 2017 and I along with Punjab Congress president Captain Amarinder Singh will meet various sections of society to know about their expectations from Congress.

### **Under crop diversification, fish farming most profitable: Gulzar Singh Ranike**

Gulzar Singh Ranike, minister for animal husbandry, fisheries, dairy, SC/BC Welfare, has said that the farmers of Punjab should leave the wheat-paddy cropping cycle and join the crop diversification so that the depleting underground water table is checked.

He said this while addressing the gathering after inaugurating first ever two-day "Punjab Fish Mela-2016" at Punjab Agricultural University, here on Sunday.

Ranike said that the farmers of Punjab are going through a rough patch because the cost of agricultural inputs have increased and the income is decreasing.

He said that at present, agriculture is not a profitable venture and that is why the farmers should indulge into crop diversification and adopt subsidiary occupations. He said that fish farming is a very profitable venture and it is being fast adopted across the globe.

He called upon the Punjabi youth to play important role in ushering an era of blue revolution in the state. He said that in Punjab, around 38,000 acres of land is under fish farming and it is a matter of great pride that Punjab ranks number one in terms of fish production in the country.

He said that the average fish production per hectare per year of our country is three tonnes, whereas in Punjab its 6.5 tonnes. He said that while keeping in mind the benefits of fish farming, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal had visited China some time back so that their fish farming techniques can be implemented in our state.

## **No interest subsidy on crop loan beyond Rs 3 lakh, says panel**

Delhi, Apr 24 () A government panel, set up to suggest ways for better implementation of Rs 9 lakh crore farm credit scheme, has recommended that interest subvention should not be provided to farmers if short-term loan amount is higher than Rs 3 lakh.

It also suggested that the interest subsidy should be given for the entire repayment period and not for just one year.

To ensure crop loan reaches the needy small and marginal farmers and best use of its interest subvention scheme, a nine-member panel was set up by the Agriculture Ministry under Chairmanship of V C Sarangi, former Nabard Chairman.

Under the interest subvention scheme, farmers currently get short-term loan of up to Rs 3 lakh for a period of one year at an interest rate of 7 per cent. Those farmers repaying on time get loan at 4 per cent.

In this year's budget, the government has increased the agri-credit target to Rs 9 lakh crore and has allocated Rs 15,000 crore for interest subsidy in this fiscal.

The panel, which recently submitted the report, has noted that agri-credit flow has improved after the introduction of interest subsidy scheme in 2006-07.

However, it has suggested various reforms for better targeting of this programme. Based on this report, the ministry is preparing a Cabinet note.

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"The facility may not be extended where the crop loan sanctioned exceeds Rs 3 lakh," it added.

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These recommendations have come at a time when farmers are facing distress and even taking extreme step like suicide because of fall in income and indebtedness in the wake of two consecutive droughts in several parts of the country.

Earlier this month, Agriculture Secretary Shobhana K Patnaik had spoken about gaps in implementation of the crop loan scheme and asked states to ensure to take steps to ensure agriculture credit reaches small and marginal farmers.

"In spite of so much money given for small and marginal farmers, credit is not flowing to this sector. As a result, this small and marginal farmers are knocking on the door of money lenders. As a result, we have seen the maximum number of suicides during the last year," Patnaik had said.

"That shows the institutional credit mechanism is not working the way it should be working. This is something that we all should ponder and take measures so that agri credit is made use of by the vulnerable section," he had said.

The government had set the farm credit target of Rs 8.5 lakh crore for the 2015-16 fiscal and is believed to have exceeded the target. LUX MJH MKJ SOM

## **Farmers discuss prospects at 2-day PAU 'Fish Mela'**

promoting fish farming and for encouraging farmers towards diversification, a two-day "Fish Mela-2016" commenced at Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) on Sunday.

Experts from different parts of the country were present to provide valuable information about fish farming. Also, some fish farmers were honoured who have taken up fish farming at their native places.

Minister for animal husbandry, fisheries, dairy, SC/BC welfare, Gulzar Singh Ranike, was the chief guest who advised farmers to leave wheat-paddy cropping cycle and join diversification so that depleting underground watertable is checked.

Ranike said that farmers of Punjab are going through a rough patch because cost of agricultural inputs have increased and income is decreasing.

He said that at present, agriculture is not a profitable venture and that is why farmers should indulge into crop diversification and adopt subsidiary occupations. He said that fish farming is a very profitable venture and it is being fast adopted globally.

He said that while keeping in mind the benefits of fish farming, chief minister Parkash Singh Badal had visited China some time ago so that their fish farming techniques can be implemented in our state.

Ranike said that for boosting fish farming in Punjab, the state government is giving 90% subsidy and with a cost of Rs 25 crore, 14 fish seed farms in 13 districts are upgraded.

He said that these fish seed farms were earlier in a pitiable condition. He said that the state government has decided to set up these farms in some districts. He said that for proper marketing, a fish market has been established in Ludhiana that would benefit in a big way.

He said that similarly, fish markets are being established in Amritsar and Bathinda.

One of the farmers from Faridkot, Kulwant Singh, said that he was into wheat farming but now viewing opportunities they have in fisheries. "The fair has provided me a good platform".

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Punjab releases Rs 2,612.50 crore for payment towards wheat procurement**



Punjab on Friday released Rs 2,612.50 crore to pay for wheat procured during the current rabi marketing season, offering relief to farmers who were worried about payments because of central bank curbs on cash credit limit.

CHANDIGARH: Punjab on Friday released Rs 2,612.50 crore to pay for wheat procured during the current rabi marketing season, offering relief to farmers who were worried about payments because of central bank curbs on cash credit limit meant for food grain purchase.

The Akali Dal-BJP coalition government was in a spot of bother after the Reserve Bank of India held back the credit.

The RBI had also told banks to make provisions against loans given to Punjab for purchase of grains, suspecting large shortages in the grains bought. The state had refuted it, maintaining that the costs showed were the actuals for procurement, storage and transportation of grains.

Farmers were awaiting lifting of their wheat from mandis as the procurement process was delayed due to the debacle.

On Wednesday, much to the relief of the Punjab government, the RBI sanctioned a cash credit limit of Rs 17,523 crore for wheat procurement.

While announcing that issue of payments to farmers has been resolved, Punjab Food and Civil Supply Minister Adash Pratap Singh Kairon said all transactions have been electronically documented and payments have been disbursed. He said from Friday, transactions would be done regularly and that the pending payments would be cleared within two days.

So far, 66.55 lakh tonnes of wheat has been procured in the state, the minister said. Of this, government agencies bought 65.62 lakh tonnes.

The government would ensure that every grain is lifted during the current procurement operations, he said.

The minister assured farmers that with the approval of the cash credit limit, farmers would be paid for their crop within 48 hours of procurement.



## Experts say timely pre-monsoon rainfall needed to boost water level



India's major reservoirs had water only up to a fifth of their capacity this week, lower than a year earlier as well as the 10-year average.

NEW DELHI: India's major reservoirs had water only up to a fifth of their capacity this week, lower than a year earlier as well as the 10-year average.

Experts said the situation is worrisome, but it can change if pre-monsoon rainfall is on time.

The 91 key reservoirs held 34.082 billion cubic metres of water as of April 21, compared to 52.178 bcm a year earlier and the 10-year average of 45.08 bcm.

These reservoirs have a combined capacity of 157.799 bcm and get 80-85% of their water during the June-September monsoon season.

India has total capacity to store 253.388 bcm of water.

The Central Water Commission, which monitors water level in major reservoirs across the country, has said that the most deficient river basin is the Krishna, which caters to Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

The Indus, Tapi, Mahi and Cauvery river basins have deficient water. However, Kutch, Mahanadi, Ganga, Sabarmati and Narmada rivers have normal water in the basin.

For the past five weeks, reservoirs from Nagarjuna Sagar, Bhima (Ujjani), Jayakwadi and Girna have had no water.

The Yeldari reservoir had 1% water of the normal storage while in Salanadi and Lower Bhawani reservoirs it was 13% of the normal storage.

The situation was much better in Vanvillas Sagar and Mettur reservoirs, with the water level at half of the normal capacity, CWC said.

The CWC has issued an advisory for state governments on judicious use of water for irrigation, drinking and industrial purposes.

The government has launched a number of projects to augment water storage capacity. Currently, 80 projects are underway, of which 40 projects are likely to be completed by next year and help irrigate an additional 8 million hectares.

### **No drought here? It's bumper crop in dry Jaisalmer**



At a time when several parts of the country are facing drought, the dry and arid region of Jaisalmer has doubled its annual crop production.

AISALMER: At a time when several parts of the country are facing drought, the dry and arid region of Jaisalmer has doubled its annual crop production.

Jaisalmer's crops this year are worth Rs 300 crore, up from Rs 150 crore last year, thanks to a continuous flow of water through the Indira Gandhi Canal, said agriculture officer Ranjeet Singh Sarva.

The canal is one of the largest starting from Punjab and terminating in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. Areas that benefited the most include Mohangarh and Ramgarh, where damages due to extreme weather and hail storms were also minimum.

The government will also get a revenue of Rs 2 crore in taxes. Chana's worth this year is Rs 150-200 crore.

Other crops include mustard, isabgol and jeera. Crops worth Rs 200 crore will be sold in mandis and the rest will go to markets.

Crops have started arriving in mandis and farmers are happy. Mohangarh mandi has the maximum buzz. Mandi secretary Rajnish Singh said the mandis will generate a record revenue this year.

### **President Pranab Mukherjee recommends bill providing protective measures for farmers of arid areas**

The Farmers of Arid and Desert Areas (Welfare and Other Special Provisions) Bill, 2014 was introduced by senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel in Rajya Sabha in December 2014.

NEW DELHI: At a time when many states are reeling under severe drought, President Pranab Mukherjee has recommended consideration of a private member's bill that provides for protective measures for farmers of arid, desert and drought-prone areas and a welfare fund with an initial corpus of Rs 10,000 crore.



The Farmers of Arid and Desert Areas (Welfare and Other Special Provisions) Bill, 2014 was introduced by senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel in Rajya Sabha in December 2014.

The bill, if enacted, will involve expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India.

"It is estimated a sum of Rs 20,000 crore may be involved as recurring expenditure per annum. A non-recurring expenditure of Rs 5000 crore may also be involved from the Consolidated Fund of India.

A non-recurring expenditure of Rs 5000 crore may also be involved from the Consolidated Fund of India," the Financial Memorandum of the Bill says.

Under the rules, a Bill which, if converted into a law and brought into operation would involve expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India, cannot be passed by Parliament unless the President has recommended to that House its consideration.

In a letter to the Rajya Sabha Secretary General a few days back, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has stated that the President, having been informed about the subject matter of the particular private member's bill has recommended its consideration under article 117(3) of the Constitution by the Rajya Sabha.

The Upper House has listed the bill for consideration, which seeks to provide for the establishment of welfare fund for farmers of arid and desert areas with initial corpus of Rs 10,000 crore to be provided by the central government.

### **Odisha seeks 5,000 tonne of pulses, as price rises**



While Arhar dal is selling at Rs 150 per kg in the market compared to Rs 125 last week, the price of toor dal has increased from Rs 151 last week to Rs 165 per kg.

**BHUBANESWAR:** In an effort to check the rise in prices of pulses in the state, the Odisha government has placed an order of 5,000 tonne of dal from the central pool, an official said.

The state government's action in this regard came after the Centre decided to sell arhar and toor dal to the states. The state may provide pulses to the consumers at a price not exceeding Rs 120 a kg.

"We have placed an order for around 5,000 tonne in the first phase. The Centre had asked us to inform it on the state's requirement in view of rise in price of pulses," Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Secretary MS Padhi said.

Controlling prices of pulses is a difficult task as the state government has limited role to play in this regard, Padhi said.

All Odisha Byabasaye Mahasangha secretary Sudhakar Panda welcomed the state government's effort to procure pulses from the central pool.

While Odisha consumes about 4 lakh tonne pulses of different varieties per annum, the state produces only about 1.5 lakh tonne every year. The remaining quantity of pulses is imported from the states like Maharastra, Panda said.

The prices of different varieties of pulses have been on a rise in the last few days across the country. Prices of pulses have increased about by Rs 20 per kg during a span of only 10 days.

While Arhar dal is selling at Rs 150 per kg in the market compared to Rs 125 last week, the price of toor dal has increased from Rs 151 last week to Rs 165 per kg.

Padhi said the Centre would release the pulses from the buffer stock they have created. "The intervention would help market stabilisation," Padhi said.