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THE HINDU

Castor bean harvest in full swing at Pachamalai

Low prices force the tribal groups to shrink area under cultivation



SALVAGING THE HARVEST:Farmers dry the castor seed harvested at Pachamalai in Tiruchi district.— PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Harvest of castor beans is under way in almost all the hamlets in Pachamalai. Women workers, in batches, are seen harvesting the castor beans at Top Sengattupatti, Thannerpallam, and Nallamathi villages on the hills spread over Tiruchi and Salem districts.

It is only during the late afternoon that the harvest was being taken up after allowing the beans to dry up to the maximum during the day. The oil seed is grown as an intercrop on the boundaries of tapioca farms, using the local seeds. Pachamalai hills was highly suited for oil seed cultivation because of its red loamy soil, according to official sources. Lack of attractive price for castor had forced the tribal farmers to reduce the area under cultivation. An

estimated 40 hectares has been brought under castor cultivation as against 200 hectares till a decade ago.

“Sale of castor involves a lot of process. After harvest, it has to be dried up for about a week’s time under the sun,” says Raju, one of the farmers of Top Sengattupatti. After it is dried, the beans are separated. The average castor seed yield per plant is about 2 kg. The seeds should be plucked at the right time as it bursts after maturity, he says. Private oil mills buy these castor beans from traders in Uppiliyapuram market.

In the absence of assured price for castor, farmers resort to barter system for obtaining the edible oil. Traders from Thuraiyur and Salem bring edible oil to the hills and get the dried castor seeds.

For tribal farmers, the barter system appears comfortable though not much profitable. “Our investment on raising castor is quite negligible and the prices of edible oil are not affordable for us,” he says explaining the advantages of the barter system.

Tender coconut vendors cash in on summer



The rising temperature has unprecedentedly lifted the demand for tender coconuts.

With the escalation of summer comes a rise in demand for tender coconuts. Farmers in Mandya, who grow coconut on 1.6 lakh hectares and get at least 18 crore tender coconuts a year, have reason to cheer.

Where once they had to wait at the market in Maddur — considered Asia's biggest tender coconut market — for prospective merchants to buy their produce or sell at cheap prices to middlemen, today it's a different story.

The rise in temperature has increased the demand for tender coconuts, besides increasing the procurement price.

Ranging between Rs. 4 and Rs. 10 per nut until a few weeks ago, the price is now between Rs. 5 and Rs. 18. The procurement price is decided based on the size and quality of the coconut. While a small and poor quality coconut fetches Rs. 4 or Rs. 5, the superfine variety fetches Rs. 18.

6.5 crore nuts sold

The Maddur market, situated on the premises of the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee on the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway, has sold over 6.5 crore tender coconuts since January 1 this year. The merchants supply around 13 crore nuts to Maharashtra, Goa, Delhi, Gujarat, and other States. The average procurement of tender coconuts is around 6 lakh a day. However, the Maddur market broke an all-time record by procuring 7.5 lakh nuts on March 13.

Horticulture farmers in Anantapur face uncertain future

The horticulture farmers in the mandals abutting Penna river in the district, famous for their luscious Banisha variety of mangoes and award winning sized Sapota (Chikoo) besides sweet lime orchards, are facing an uncertain future.

Lack of groundwater coupled with the heat wave has forced some farmers to take extreme steps to save their orchards, while many others are letting the trees dry, and even die, as it is beyond their financial means to save them.

The mandals abutting Penna river — Pamidi, Tadipatri, Yadiki, Yellanuru and Putluru — in the Anantapur revenue division have been home to luscious mangoes, sweet lime and sapota primarily while many have taken to guava cultivation too in the last decade.

“It is hard to maintain these orchards in the existing conditions. The ground water has depleted beyond reach. Lakhs of rupees have been wasted on drilling deep holes (borewells) in our orchards with little yield. The last time Penna river witnessed decent flows is at least two decades ago. With no ground water recharge in sight, surface water is the only answer and chances of that also seem remote,” says B. Ravindranath Reddy, a farmer from the Chukkaluru village of Tadipatri mandal, who owns 35 acres of sapota orchard, and has been a winner of State-level awards for producing high quality sapota using modern agricultural practices a few years ago.

Just a decade ago, he and his brothers were successful farmers earning more than Rs 7 lakh to RS. 8 lakh a year off their orchards. Today, they are just a bunch of farmers who paying money for water tankers to save their orchards spending lakhs of rupees every year.

“I have spent Rs 1.5 lakh on buying water for my plants. But the crop is looking bad, as the water is insufficient for producing quality fruit with enough juice in it, while the excessive summer heat is dehydrating the trees faster,” says Narasimha Reddy of Vennapusapalli village of the Yellanuru mandal of the district, who is trying hard to save his 13-year-old sweet lime trees. In all, while the government scheme of ‘Panta Sanjeevani’ is yet to make any mark in the district, the farmers feel surface water alone can save their day, and that if no solution comes into sight, in the next year or so, many more farmers will be left with no option but to consider extreme steps.

“Government scheme ‘Panta Sanjeevani’ is yet to make any mark in the district”

With the heat on, it's business unusual for tender coconut growers

GOING NUTS		
➤ Maddur is touted to be Asia's biggest tender coconut market	➤ 7.5 lakh tender coconuts procured on March 13, 2016	
	➤ Average production is 18 crore a year	➤ Farmers have taken up cultivation on 1.6 lakh hectares

With the escalation of summer heat, comes a rise in demand for tender coconuts. Farmers in the district, who grow coconut on 1.6 lakh hectares and get at least 18 crore tender coconuts a year, have reason to cheer.

Where once they had to wait at the market in Maddur — considered Asia's biggest tender coconut market — for prospective merchants to buy their produce or sell at cheap prices to middlemen, today it's a different story.

The spike in temperature has brought on a corresponding escalation in demand for tender coconuts, besides increasing the procurement price. Ranging between Rs. 4 to Rs. 10 a nut till a few weeks ago, the price is now between Rs. 5 to Rs. 18. The procurement price is decided based on the size and quality of the coconut. While a small and poor quality coconut fetches Rs. 4 or Rs. 5, the superfine variety will sell for Rs. 18 each.

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Ambareesh Muttanahalli, chairman, APMC, said the market's sale was 17.5 crore, which was worth Rs. 137.27 crore during 2015-16.

The merchants supply around 13 crore nuts to Maharashtra, Goa, Delhi, Gujarat, and other States. The average procurement of tender coconuts is around 6 lakh a day.

However, the Maddur market broke an all-time record by procuring 7.5 lakh nuts on March 13, 2016.

TNAU admission process to start on May 12

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, will start the admission process for the academic year 2016-17 on May 12.

Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy told journalists here on Friday that after the University would issue notification in the media, it would host online the application form on May 12. Those interested should apply online by visiting [http://www.tnau.ac.in/](http://www.tnau.ac.in/admission-html)

[admission-html](http://www.tnau.ac.in/admission-html).

The last date for submission of online application form would be June 11. The University would then publish the rank list on June 20. Thereafter, the counselling process would begin. The first day of counselling would be on June 27 for those applying under sports, ex-servicemen, decedents of freedom fighters and differently abled quotas.

The first phase of counselling for the general category students would start on July 4 and extend to the third phase till August 11 but only if necessary.

Those interested may dial 0422-6611345, 6611346 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on working days for admission-related details.

The email id for communication is isugadmissions@tnau.ac.in.

The University, its constituent institutions and affiliated colleges offer B.Sc. in agriculture, horticulture, food science and nutrition and forestry and

sericulture, B.Tech in agricultural engineering, biotechnology, agricultural information technology, bioinformatics, horticulture and energy and environmental engineering. There is a B.S. programme in agribusiness management.

In the science programmes, there are 2,295 seats and in technology programme another 305.

The University would follow the single-window counselling system, Mr. Ramasamy added.

Encourage ryots to cultivate soybean, CM tells officials

Curbs on subsidies on purchase soybean and machinery will be removed for

Chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has asked the officials to encourage farmers to plant alternative crops in the coming Kharif, as the market for cotton is set to come down.

Referring to the World Trade Organisation meet in Nairobi and removal of export subsidies on cotton, during a drought review meeting here on Friday, Mr. Rao directed officials to persuade farmers to plant soybean, maize and other crops by widely publicising about the same.

He wanted the area under cotton cultivation to be brought down from 42 lakh acres to 15-20 lakh acres, and directed for removal of curbs on soybean subsidies for offering it to all.

He also asked officials to offer subsidies on purchase of tools and machinery required for soybean cultivation.

As the responsibilities on the Agriculture Department are set to increase once the irrigation projects are completed, the Department will be strengthened by recruitment of new staff. Agriculture officers will be given promotions and moulded as Agronomists, Mr. Rao said. He told officials to give top priority to drought relief measures in the situation arising out of

heat-wave conditions, and depletion of groundwater. Employment guarantee works should be restricted to morning and evening hours, and medicines for heatstroke should be kept ready in towns and villages. Mr.Rao also directed officials to apply 'Apathbandhu' scheme to the families of all who die of heatstroke.

Vegetable cultivation models for you

The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) is encouraging vegetable farming in every household in the State with tailor-made cultivation models.

A training session on hi-tech farming organised by the university recently called for attaining self-sufficiency in production of at least a few vegetables in every home.

“If you have the will to produce vegetables, we have the model suited for you,” Director of Extension P.B. Pushpalatha told potential vegetable growers.

Addressing the training programme for homemakers and youngsters, at Instructional Farm, Vellanikkara, Dr. Pushpalatha said this was to ensure food safety and nutritional security.

The lack of availability of land is not a constraint since appropriate farming models are available for all households, she added.

“The enthusiasm in vegetable production has been triggered by the public awareness of the hazards of pesticide residue in vegetables available in the open market. Reports from KAU’s pesticide residue analytical lab have brought out an attitudinal change. Now every household, whether rural, urban or peri-urban, wants to produce vegetables on their own rather than paying for produces of unknown origin, unknown quality and safety,” she noted.

The KAU is imparting training in hi-tech horticulture and organic farming at various centres across the State and the public response has been overwhelming.

The KAU is also producing quality seeds and seedlings to encourage homestead-farming. Advanced technology packages are also available.

P. Suseela, course coordinator, and V.S. Sujatha Head, Instructional Farm, participated in the programme.

KAU is imparting training in hi-tech horticulture and organic farming across the State.

KAU to focus on wood science research

The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) and the French Academy of Wood Science (Ecole Supérieure de Bois -ESB) will join hands to foster academic and research activities.

This was decided at a meeting attended by a high-level delegation led by Antoine Lebeau, the International relations and Corporate Training Coordinator of the ESB, and his colleague, Mr. Marc Irle, a renowned Wood Scientist and a specialist in Wood Recycling, and KAU Vice-Chancellor Dr P. Rajendran, and other officials.

The Vice-Chancellor said the university was proud to enter in to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the ESB for collaborative research, exchange of students, and training faculty. “The diversity of bio mass and heterogeneous wood species available in Kerala should provide a richer research platform for forestry experts from France. Industry linkage is an area in which our faculty and students need exposure,” he said. Wood processing offers enormous potential to facilitate use of hard wood as well as soft wood.

Recycling

For example Rubber, Palm and Acacia wood, available in plenty but underused, can prove much useful after processing.

Recycling used wood is also very pertinent in the current scenario, the VC said.

The French scientists later took part in a conference on wood recycling involving scientists in wood science from the KAU, the KFRI and the Kannur University, as well as students and representatives of wood industry.

The French scientists made presentations on wood recycling and various courses on wood science offered at the ESB.

Dr P.B. Pushpalatha, KAU Director of Extension, who presided over the conference, stressed on the environmental impact of wood recycling, which India was yet to be get familiar with.

Officials come to the aid of cattle

They set up cattle camp to supply fodder and water to them



Timely gesture: The 'Pasu punaravasa kendram', a shelter run by the Animal Husbandry department at Sultanabad in Medak is offering fodder and water to the cattle. -PHOTO: Mohd Arif

Mohd. Gulam was one among several farmers who arrived at Sultanabad along with their cattle from different parts of the district to attend the cattle camp organised by the district administration.

The camp resembled a cattle bazaar with thousands of cattle being brought here by farmers. The district administration, taking a cue from Maharashtra, decided to set up cattle camps to supply fodder and water to cattle as farmers were unable to feed them owing to severe drought conditions.

The Animal Husbandry Department set up the camp on one acre land and sheds were erected to provide shade to both farmers and their cattle. Inaugurated by local legislator M. Bhupl Reddy and K. Lakshma Reddy, Joint Director, Animal Husbandry, the camp was aimed at supporting farmers and prevent distress sale.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Bhupl Reddy said such a camp would help farmers in distress. The administration had estimated that about 600 to 800 cattle would be brought here the first day, but about 3,000 cattle arrived at the camp in the initial hours, with the number surging every passing hour, taking the officials by surprise. They had a tough time managing the registrations.

“Such a camp is organised for the first time in Telangana. It’s a relief for us and I am thankful to the government for taking the initiative to help us,” said Sangareddy, a farmer from Bokkasgam, a neighbouring village.

At the camp, water is being supplied from Nallavagu. Each cattle is being given about six kilograms of fodder free of cost in addition to one kilogram of concentrated feed at Rs. 6.50 per kilo.

Arrangements are also in place for collection of milk and payment for the same would be done by evening. A veterinary clinic has also been established here and farmers are given lunch in the afternoon.

“Farmers’ rush with their cattle has really surprised us and the number is more than what we expected. It took us lot of time for registrations and we are preparing to meet the demand without fail,” Dr. Laksmha Reddy told *The Hindu* .

Set up more fodder centres: Talasani to officials

State Minister for Animal Husbandry, Dairy and Fisheries, Talasani Yadav, has asked the officials to set up more fodder centres at the earliest in view of prevailing drought conditions in the State and give extensive publicity to welfare programmes being implemented by the government.

Mr. Srinivas Yadav, who assumed charge of the new portfolio, held a review meeting with the officials at the Secretariat here on Friday. He also directed them to prepare proposals for filling vacancies in their respective wings.

Officials said that at present, one fodder centre at Narayankhed and two in Mahabubnagar were set up and assured the Minister that more would be established depending on the demand.

The Minister wanted immediate measures to provide modern equipment in veterinary hospitals and to set up 100 mobile veterinary clinics. About Rs. 398 crore was ready with them to sanction loans for sheep rearing farmers and officers should cut down delay in extending loans.

The government was giving 20 per cent subsidy to those who sanctioned loans, he said.

Earlier, officials of Animal Husbandry and fisheries gave a presentation on the status of the State in these sectors.

Reviewing the Fisheries Department, Mr. Srinivas Yadav said officers should adopt scientific methods while collecting statistics and should go to the field.

He suggested that Vijaya dairy sale centres should be set up near tourist places, temples and on highways to market dairy products and provide livelihood to the unemployed and generate additional revenue to the department.

Steps to protect cattle from heat stress

The Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) has initiated awareness measures to sensitise farmers to the need for protecting their cattle from heat stress in the context of rising summer temperature.

According to AHD officials, crossbred cows are more vulnerable to heat stress than local breeds. Around 93 per cent of the cattle population in the State is crossbred. While the milk yield normally decreases during summer months, extra care should be taken to protect of lactating cows from rising heat.

“We are advising the farmers to make sure that their cows are not let out to graze between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.,” said V. Prashanth, Assistant Director, Special Livestock Breeding Programme here. Fodder and green grass should be given when the animals’ body temperature is lower. In the day time when the temperature is high, concentrated feed can be given. The animals should be given more water for drinking, he said. The farmers are advised to provide immediate treatment when the animals show symptoms of heat stress which include salivation and panting. Water should be poured on them frequently.

– Special Correspondent

Crops droop and die in summer heat



Capital district registers a 40% deficit in summer rain

The simmering summer heat has not only taken a toll on the quantity and quality of drinking water being supplied in the district, but has also dented the hopes of farmers, especially banana cultivators, with standing crops in around 134.84 hectares withering.

As the district faces a “40 per cent deficit in summer rain” and an “above normal temperature,” crop loss has been reported from Edava, Venganoor, Thiruvallam, Vellarada, Kattakada, Uzhamalakkal, Ulloor, Tholikkode, Poovachal, Perumbazhathoor, Nagaroor, Athiannoor, Kilimanoor, Attingal, Kazhakuttam, Pothencode, Kulathoor, Maranalloor, Vizhinjam, Vellanad and Chenkal.

Field visits by Agriculture Department officials revealed substantial damage to banana, pepper, rubber and vegetables. Principal Agriculture Officer V. Subha said crops on 134.84 hectares of land withered due to the prolonged dry spell and unprecedented rise in mercury level. More than 2.5 lakh banana plants wilted completely.

“This seems to be one of the worst summers. We are still in the middle of the summer and if the mercury level fails to come down and rain continues

to elude, the damage will be more. We are still collecting details from field officers. A detailed report will be sent to the government for further action,” she said.

“Only 10 per cent of the farmers who have lost the crops has enrolled for the insurance scheme,” she said. In 2014, standing crops on over 69 hectares were damaged due to summer heat, she added.

Confirming the concerns of the Agriculture Department, Director of Meteorological Centre, Thiruvananthapuram (Indian Meteorological Department), K. Santhosh, said the temperature had been on the higher side from January and it peaked in March.

“As in the rest of the country, the capital district is too not having a favourable summer. Above normal temperature coupled with less rainfall and dry climate has made matters difficult,” he said.

The average summer rainfall recorded in the capital district is 40 per cent deficient. The district registered a rainfall of 76 mm as against a normal rainfall of 128 mm from March 1 to April 26, he said.

Substantial damage to banana, pepper, rubber, vegetables

Atmospheric conditions not conducive to summer rain

IICPT gets new director

C. Anandharamakrishnan, a renowned scientist in the field of food engineering, has assumed office as the Director of the Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology (IICPT) here.

Dr. Anandharamakrishnan has over two decades of experience in R&D and administration at the CSIR — Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysuru, a prestigious food research institution in the country. He was Principal Scientist and Coordinator for the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR) there.

Dr. Anandharamakrishnan completed his Doctoral degree in Chemical Engineering from Loughborough University, United Kingdom, under the Commonwealth Scholarship programme. Prior to that he had pursued his B.Tech (Chemical Engineering) and M.Tech from A.C. College of Technology, Anna University, Chennai.

His areas of research include design of engineered nano and micron scale delivery systems for the controlled and targeted release of food bioactive compounds, spray drying, and spray-freeze-drying of food products.



El Nino dries up Asia as its stormy sister La Nina looms

Much of Asia has been punished by a bone-dry heat wave marked by record-high temperatures, threatening the livelihoods of countless millions.

Withering drought and sizzling temperatures from El Nino have caused food and water shortages and ravaged farming across Asia, and experts warn of a double-whammy of possible flooding from its sibling, La Nina.

The current El Nino which began last year has been one of the strongest ever, leaving the Mekong River at its lowest level in decades, causing food-related unrest in the Philippines, and smothering vast regions in a months-long heat wave often topping 40 degrees Celsius.

Economic losses in Southeast Asia could top USD 10 billion, IHS Global Insight told AFP. The regional fever is expected to break by mid-year but fears are growing that an equally forceful La Nina will follow.

That could bring heavy rain to an already flood-prone region, exacerbating agricultural damage and leaving crops vulnerable to disease and pests.

“The situation could become even worse if a La Nina event — which often follows an El Nino — strikes towards the end of this year,” Stephen O’Brien, UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and relief, said this week.

He said El Nino has already left 60 million people worldwide requiring “urgent assistance,” particularly in Africa. Wilhemina Pelegrina, a Greenpeace campaigner on agriculture, said La Nina could be “devastating” for Asia, bringing possible “flooding and landslides which can impact on food production.”

El Nino is triggered by periodic oceanic warming in the eastern Pacific Ocean which can trigger drought in some regions, heavy rain in others.

Much of Asia has been punished by a bone-dry heat wave marked by record-high temperatures, threatening the livelihoods of countless millions. Vietnam, one of the world’s top rice exporters, has been particularly hard-hit by its worst drought in a century.

In the economically vital Mekong Delta bread basket, the mighty river’s vastly reduced flow has left up to 50 percent of arable land affected by salt-water intrusion that harms crops and can damage farmland, said Le Anh Tuan, a professor of climate change at Can Tho University.

In India, about 330 million people are at risk from water shortages and crop damage, the government said recently, and blazing temperatures have been blamed for scores of heat-stroke deaths and dead livestock.

Rubber Board asks industry to take up cheap imports issue with govt



Rubber Board Chairman, A. Jayathilak, has urged the industry to participate actively in the discussions on anti-dumping and safeguard measures organised by the Government.

In his inaugural address at the national rubber conference organised by the All India Rubber Industries' Association (AIRIA) at New Delhi, the Chairman said the influx of cheap imports from China is hurting the rubber MSME sector.

The tariff concessions offered under Free Trade Agreements could be leading to a surge in imports. The dumping of finished rubber products also could not be ruled out, which is causing distress, especially for the MSME rubber sector, he said.

Jayathilak said the Rubber Board places equal importance on the development of both natural rubber producing and consuming interests.

According to Mohinder Gupta, President AIRIA, the domestic production of natural rubber and some of the synthetic rubber is far less than consumption. In the last fiscal, the production of natural rubber in India was about 50 per

cent less than domestic consumption. Not only was the availability of natural rubber in short supply, domestic rubber prices were ruling 20 per cent higher than international prices.

The import duty on raw materials of the rubber industry were much higher than the duty on finished products. Finished rubber products could easily be imported as the import duty on rubber products was between 0 to 10 per cent, while the duty on natural rubber was 25 per cent and the import duty on latex was 70 per cent.

This inverted duty structure has forced many rubber product manufacturers to turn traders of Chinese rubber goods and stop manufacturing, leading to shutting of plants and job losses. Especially, moulded rubber goods, rubber compounds, rubber rice rollers and balloon manufacturers have been severely impacted, he said.

AIRIA has reiterated its demand for a separate Rubber Export Promotion Council (Rubexil) to maximise the export potential of the industry.

He said India's share in the international rubber exports market was a paltry 1.48 per cent while that of China was 11 per cent. The country's share could easily be enhanced to 5 per cent in the next 5-7 years and India's ranking could rise to fifth from the current 19th if the government addresses the problems faced by the rubber sector, he said.

Soil moisture set to improve with rains ahead; heat wave to continue

Soil moisture conditions are expected to improve over major parts of the country from Sunday, with the likely commencement of rain/thundershowers.

Heat wave conditions may sustain over parts of Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern Madhya Pradesh, northern Chhattisgarh, and Vidarbha, up till Sunday.

Maximum day temperatures may stay above normal over eastern India and the South Peninsula until May 5, and normal or below normal up till May 25.

This is as per the outlook of the Extended Range Forecast by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology. Meanwhile, heat wave conditions were recorded over Kerala for a second day on Friday.

Rain for Kerala

But the India Met Department has forecast the possibility of heavy rain in Kerala on May 3 as seasonal summer showers announce their delayed arrival.

It also predicted an increase in rainfall over Kerala and Lakshadweep for the next four days until May 6.

According to the US Centres for Climate Prediction, the rains will be heavier to the south of Kerala and extend into coastal Karnataka, south-interior Karnataka and parts of Madhya Maharashtra and Marathwada.

Soil moisture

Even as parts of the south take a much-needed break from the heat, rains will have started to pelt the hills and plains of northern and western India. The US agency forecasts said rain would be heavier over Himachal Pradesh and adjoining Punjab, while being scattered to moderate over Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand during May 5 to 11.

Parts of Delhi and Haryana, as well as most of south-west Rajasthan may benefit from spill-over showers.

Dust storms

India Met Department has said that heat wave conditions may abate over north-western, central and eastern India from Monday (May 2) due to dust storm/thunderstorm activity.

Before this happens, maximum temperatures may rise by up to 2 degree Celsius over north-west India on Saturday and Sunday. Heat wave conditions on Saturday would however be confined to the east over Bihar and Odisha, and isolated areas over Gangetic West Bengal.

On Sunday too, heat wave conditions are forecast to sit mainly over Bihar and Odisha, while the weather over north-west starts to cool down.

Dust storms and thunderstorms may lash Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Rajasthan during the day.

From the next day, this activity will spread out to western UP, towards the east and J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to the North.

Turmeric offtake improves

Sale of the turmeric improved on Friday. “After a holiday on Thursday, the turmeric market assembled as usual.

About 11,000 bags of turmeric arrived for sale and traders, after examining samples, procured all the 4,000-odd local hybrid varieties and 200 bags of Salem Turmeric variety.

Traders quoted the previous sale price. Around 75 per cent of the stock was sold, though traders were yet to received fresh upcountry demand,” said RKV Ravishankar, President of Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

At Erode, finger turmeric sold at ₹9,229 -9,809 a quintal. Root variety sold at ₹8,349-8,955 a quintal. *Our Correspondent*

Pulses down on slack physical demand

Sluggish trend in pulse seeds and pulses continued on slack physical demand and lower imports, with masur (bold) prices declining to ₹5,650 a quintal and masur (Madhya Pradesh) declining to ₹5,300.

Compared to last week, masur ruled ₹250 a quintal lower. Decline in masur also impacted its dal, with masur dal (medium) being quoted at ₹6,750-6,950 and masur dal (bold) ruling at ₹7,050-7,150.

Downtrend continued in moong and urad on slack physical demand. With a rise in arrival of new crop, moong prices in local mandis declined by ₹500 a quintal in the past one week, with moong (bold) being quoted at ₹6,500-6,800, while moong (medium) ruled at ₹6,000.

Spot pepper up on tight supplies

Spot pepper prices moved up on Friday on short supply, amid good buying interest. Only six tonnes of pepper arrived on the terminal market from high ranges in small volumes, and were traded at ₹700, ₹705 and ₹710 a kg, market sources told *BusinessLine*.

They said growers and dealers who could afford to hold on did not release material on expectations that prices would shoot up due to severe drought in Vietnam and India.

Spot prices increased by ₹300 a quintal to close at ₹68,800 (ungarbled) and ₹71,800 (garbled) a quintal.

Business Standard

From agri-friendly budget to positive monsoon forecast: Will 2016 be a year for agriculture?

Dealing with the agricultural crisis needs much more than knee jerk reactions. Developing infrastructure to support irrigation system is one of the most cogent needs, says Rajesh Agarwal



From the major drought in Uttar Pradesh's Bundelkhand region to severe water crisis in Maharashtra's Marathwada, the news media has off late been flush with reports of the crisis afflicting the farm sector across the country.

With two subsequent failed monsoons severely affecting crops, wiping away incomes and depleting the ground water levels, the rural economy has without doubt been in major stress. At the same time, with rising food prices, the entire economy is suffering the consequences of the agriculture crisis.

With the normally urban-tinted media finally waking up to the survival issues being faced by a large part of the rural economy, the government also seems to have stirred into action.

The water train travelling to Latur captured much national attention recently. However, dealing with the agricultural crisis needs much more than knee jerk reactions.

It needs comprehensive long-term efforts to replenish ground water levels and major plans to reduce agriculture's dependence on monsoon by strengthening irrigation facilities.

A month after a very encouraging budget for the farm sector comes the recent forecast from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) of a normal monsoon season, giving a major confidence boost to millions of farmers who have been reeling under the impact of two consequent below par monsoons.

With the need to instil the same confidence in farmers about what the future entails for their source of livelihood, as among experts, it is time to really reflect on whether this could be the year for agriculture, given all the shining positive indicators.

Agro friendly budget

A downslide in the agriculture sector automatically has a ripple effect on the entire economy. Considering the significance of the primary sector in the Indian economy, with more than 70 per cent of the population dependent on it, it is integral that fiscal policies take into account its importance.

And the annual budget, as announced by the finance minister this year, kept up with the promise to enable an environment for agricultural growth.

With a rise in the budget allocation for agricultural sector, additional funds to NABARD to encourage credit facilities to farmers, and the intention to not only increase farm income but also employment in agriculture through government initiatives like MNREGA, there was a special emphasis on the needs for farmers among the Indian public.

Along with these policies to push forward the growth in agriculture, there has also been special provision for rural development, banking and infrastructure.

With the addition of provisions for saving through credit policies for rural banking like under Jan Dhan Yojana, and the boost to transport and accessibility to markets through investment in roads and infrastructure, India has finally set some clear guidelines on how to increase farmers' incomes, encourage their holistic development and raise their standard of living. This creates a conducive environment for agriculture growth.

Rain god expected to smile on farmers

What makes 2016 stand out as the year of agriculture is the prediction of an above average monsoon by the IMD.

As it estimates a growth in rainfall with forecasts of a weakened El Nino, the meteorological department especially indicates respite for drought hit areas.

Poor rainfall has been the main cause of concern in agriculture for the past couple of years, and the resultant crop failures have driven many distressed farmers to suicide.

This monsoon prediction brings with it a new hope for agriculture revival after two years of downslide. There is an indication of an increase in overall consumption and demand with chances of inflation, also pointing towards increased demand and rising prices for agricultural products.

High rainfall will allow high crop productivity and lead to an increase in revenue for farmers.

Agrochemicals sector stands to gain

The revenue of the agrochemical sector is directly proportional to the state of the agriculture. A good monsoon and a more conducive environment for

the farm sector results in better crop yields, greater sowing and better demand for agrochemicals. The demand which had been sluggish and not up to the mark over the past couple of years stands a chance to pick up again with a better monsoon and improvement in farm incomes.

The outlook, therefore, looks positive for not just the agriculture sector but also the agrochemicals industry, keeping the fingers crossed.

Challenges to be tackled

Despite the positive vibes, there is still a lot to be achieved in truly rejuvenating the state of agriculture in the country. Even as the monsoon prediction provides a temporary respite to the problem, a more permanent and long term solution is required.

Developing infrastructure to support irrigation system is one of the most cogent needs of the Indian agriculture. For an industry that not only feeds a billion people but also amounts to major export earnings in the economy, the agriculture sector cannot be excessively dependent on nature and suffer due to its vagaries.

It is essential to draw in expert planners and learn from international examples on improving irrigation facilities and reducing farm dependence on monsoon to the possible extend.

Farmers also need to be encouraged in adopting methods of water conservation, rainwater harvesting, ground water replenishment and a collaboration of scientific technology in boosting agriculture has to be stressed upon.

While agriculture seems to be definitely be a turning point in the national economy in 2016, there is still a need to continue making conscious efforts in its growth and sustainability.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University online application to begin on May 12

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) will issue online application for agriculture and allied courses starting May 12. The single-window admission will commence on June 27.

TNAU offers 13 courses in agricultural sciences and engineering in 10 constituent colleges and 18 affiliated colleges, of which two are new colleges.

The university has approved Adhiyamaan College of Agriculture and Research, Hosur, and Krishna College of Agriculture and Technology, Madurai. Both the colleges will offer the four-year BSc agriculture programme.

"The colleges have been trying for approval for the last three years, but there were issues pertaining to land requirement, which the colleges fulfilled this year," said TNAU vice-chancellor K Ramasamy.

The addition of two new colleges has increased the intake capacity from 2,460 seats in 2015-16 to 2,600 this year. Also, the university has introduced the central government rule of restricting 35% seats in affiliated colleges under the management quota.

Also, 15% of the total seats in the constituent colleges have been allotted for admissions in other state quota and NRI category. A total of 10 seats in each degree programme has been allocated for candidates sponsored by agro-based industries and NRI quota.

Like last year, candidates will be able to apply online only. TNAU has set up help desks in its constituent colleges and research centres to help candidates with applying online.

While 70% of the candidates who appeared for the single-window counselling last year wanted to join BSc agriculture, this year, the university see a sharp rise in demand for BSc forestry.

"We are receiving calls from students every day enquiring about the forestry course. This is due to the government order that states that first preference should be given to forestry candidates while recruiting forest rangers," said S Mahimairaja dean, agriculture. The GO was passed last month.

The university VC said that most students in the engineering courses landed a job in the academic year 2015-16.

"Rural banking, seed manufacturing, fertilisers and agricultural machinery are the major recruiters. Our students also get government jobs," Ramasamy said. Around 20% of the students pursue higher studies.

Dry spell in Andhra forces tenant farmers to take a summer break

Confirming the worst fears of experts in the agriculture sector, several district collectors have informed the state government that a large number of tenant farmers have opted out of their profession.

In their reports to the government, the collectors explained that the prevailing drought conditions and non-release of water from irrigation projects are forcing them to quit farming.

The district collectors gauged the pulse of the farming sector during the recently-held grama sabhas where the response to Loan Eligibility Cards (LECs) was poor.

Worried over dry spell on account of poor rainfall and empty reservoirs in the state, the tenant farmers looked resigned to their fate and decided not to obtain LECs which are mandatory for securing bank loans during the coming kharif season.

Despite the government taking up an aggressive campaign, the farmers have virtually turned silent as they did not even file the applications.

However, experts say such a situation might pose a big problem triggered by foodgrain shortage in the state.

"Failure of the state government in infusing confidence among tenant farmers is driving them away from cultivation. The bungling of loan waiver scheme has only added to their woes," criticised former ICAR member M V S Nagireddy.

Krishna delta jala sadhana samiti convenor Kolanukonda Sivaji alleged that the state government is deliberately delaying the issue of LECs as it completely failed to make the bankers advance loans to tenant farmers.

In fact, chief minister Chandrababu Naidu has set high hopes on the agriculture sector to turn around the state's GDP and wanted all the district collectors to gear up for the coming kharif season.

The CM's decision to release a whopping Rs 3,200 crore towards the second instalment of agriculture loan waiver scheme has also stemmed from the fact that he wanted to reap rich dividends from agriculture production particularly in the wake of completion of a few irrigation schemes including Pattiseema.

With a view to putting the district administrations on track in the ensuing kharif, the state government recently reviewed the progress of LECs with the district collectors.

To its utter shock, district collectors reported that only 21 per cent of the target was achieved due to prevailing drought conditions and poor response from tenant farmers.

According to information, Guntur district collector Kantilal Dande is said to have informed the government that tenant farmers have lost interest in cultivation due to drought conditions prevailing in the district and non-release of water from Nagarjuna Sagar, Krishna Western Delta.