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THE HINDU

Sowing of green, red gram exceeds targets

Farmers have almost touched sowing target of Black Gram

Kalaburagi is all set to bounce back as the leading producer of pulses in the State with farmers sowing pulses in a larger area and exceeding the targets fixed for the Kharif season this year.

Aided by a good South-West Monsoon spell from the beginning of the season, the farmers have have exceeded sowing targets of Green Gram and almost touched the sowing targets of Black gram.

Farmers are also exceeding the targets fixed for the cultivation of Red Gram this year in Kalaburagi district.

Although Red Gram is a bi-seasonal crop, which is harvested during the Rabi season, the sowing of this 180-day crop is at the beginning of the Kharif season. Sources in the Agriculture Department told *The Hindu* here on Thursday that farmers have completed sowing of Green Gramon a record 46,600 hectares of land as against the target of 35,100 hectares fixed by the department this year. Similarly, farmers have completed sowing of the black gram in 24,009 hectares of land as against the target of 25,000 hectares fixed by the government.

The condition of both black and green grams is very good with good branching to hold higher number of pods to increased yield.

“If everything goes like this and the weather gods continued to be kind on the farmers, this year there would be a bumper yield of Black and Green Gram,” said a senior official of the Agriculture Department.

Sources also said that the farmers also completed sowing of Red Gram in 3,62,900 hectares as against the target of 3,61,105 hectares.

The sowing of all the pulses has been completed in 4,33,832 hectares as against the target of 4,23,550 hectares fixed by the department. The sowing of the oilseeds crops were also very good and already 90 per cent of the targeted area has been sown with soya bean exceeding the target fixed by the department.

The farmers have completed sowing of the Kharif crops in 92 per cent of the area with Chincholi achieving cent per cent sowing of the targeted area followed by 99 per cent sowing in Afzalpur, 97 per cent sowing in Sedam, 94 per cent in Aland, 95 per cent in Kalaburagi taluk, 92 per cent in Chittapur and only in Jewargi the sowing percentage was low at 73 per cent.

Sowing of oilseeds has also touched

90 per cent of

the targeted area in the district

Corporation Bank launches group insurance scheme for borrowers

Jai Kumar Garg, managing director and chief executive officer of Corporation Bank on Thursday launched a ‘Group Credit Life Insurance Scheme’ of Life Insurance Corporation of India at the corporate office of the bank here.

The scheme was launched by handing over insurance certificates to a few beneficiaries of Mangaluru-Poonja Arcade branch of the bank.

Availability

Mr. Garg said the scheme had been made available initially at all the branches of Mangaluru Zone which would later be extended to all branches.

He said that all the borrowers should be educated about the benefits of the scheme and all the eligible borrowers may be covered under the scheme.

Scheme

The Group Credit Life Insurance Scheme is available to customers of the bank in the age group of 18 to 60 who have taken term loans. It is a single premium group term insurance plan offering insurance cover to the loan availed by the customer, in the event of unfortunate death of the borrower.

Term loans

The scheme covers various term loans including retail loans namely, personal loan, home loans, vehicle loans, loans to MSME and agriculture.

Sunil Mehta, executive sirector, Corporation Bank; Ashok, divisional manager, LIC of India; C.K. Gopal, general manager; D.V. S Varma, general manager, and other executives of the bank and LIC of India were present.

Preparing millets

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre, is conducting a one-day training programme in "Preparation of Millets Products".

Date: August 11

Time: 9.30 am to 4.30 pm

Location: No U-30, 10th Street, Anna Nagar (near Jaigopal Garodia School).

Contact: 26263484

Golden rice isn't ready yet

This is hardly a rice ready for cultivation by farmers — it has not even entered the stage of biosafety evaluation by government regulatory institutions.

Recently 110 Nobel Laureates issued a strongly worded plea to Greenpeace to “abandon their campaign against [genetically modified organisms] in general and Golden Rice in particular.” This is not the first time notable scientists have waded into the controversy surrounding genetically modified (GM) crops. What is remarkable about this latest foray, however, is their poor grasp of the facts surrounding Golden Rice.

Golden Rice is an orange-yellow-coloured rice, genetically modified to produce beta-carotene, the precursor of Vitamin A. Advocates claim it is a powerful way to combat Vitamin A deficiency, the cause of diseases like childhood blindness, and deaths, particularly among the poor in Africa, South and Southeast Asia. Golden Rice was first developed around 1999 by two European scientists, Ingo Potrykus and Peter Beyer. The transnational agribusiness corporation Syngenta currently holds commercial rights to it. Moved apparently by humanitarian sentiments, Syngenta decided in 2004 to sub-license it free of charge (subject to several conditions, not all of which are straightforward) to agricultural research institutions in developing countries, through an entity named the Golden Rice Humanitarian Board. The project of taking Golden Rice to developing countries is housed within the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Philippines.

The Nobel Laureates argue that the reason this innovation has not started saving lives yet is Greenpeace's criminal opposition. This narrative of conspiracy glosses over the rather more straightforward explanation: As IRRI itself admits on its website, Golden Rice is not ready for farmers, yet. There are above-board reasons for this which have little to do with anti-GM activists.

The Laureates say that Golden Rice has "*the potential* to reduce or eliminate much of the death and disease caused by Vitamin A deficiency" (emphasis added). This statement begs the question: Under what conditions might that potential be actualised? At least two conditions need to be met for Golden Rice to work as hoped: it should be suitable for cultivation by farmers; and it should be bio-available, that is, the digestive system should be able to extract the beta-carotene and make it available to the body, thus improving Vitamin A levels. Questions remain on both counts.

Suitability for cultivation

The two versions of Golden Rice developed so far, Golden Rice 1 and 2, are both Japonica (sticky, dryland) rices, while people in areas with Vitamin A deficiency in South and Southeast Asia generally cultivate and consume the non-sticky, submerged Indica paddies. Japonica varieties are easier to modify genetically, but do not perform well in Asian fields. IRRI is still in the process of crossing Golden Rice into Indica varieties. In 2014, IRRI stated, “Results of the first round of multi-location trials of Golden Rice showed that… yields of candidate lines were not consistent across locations and seasons, prompting research direction toward assessing [other] Golden Rice versions.” This is hardly a rice ready for cultivation by farmers — it has not even entered the stage of biosafety evaluation by government regulatory institutions.

The question of bioavailability is even more vexed. The body does not necessarily absorb beta-carotene because one eats Golden Rice. The Golden Rice Humanitarian Board’s website quotes a study published in 2012 in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* for establishing the effectiveness of Golden Rice. On July 29, 2015, the journal retracted this paper citing ethical concerns.

Even assuming that ethical concerns do not detract from the paper’s findings, the study design merits attention. The study saw middle-income, healthy Chinese children consuming a total of 210 grams of pork and other foods over breakfast and lunch daily, with 40 per cent of their total calorie intake coming from fat. Fats help the body absorb beta-carotene, since the latter dissolves easily in fats. Unlike customary practice, the Golden Rice fed to the children had been stored at minus 70C after drying for three days, to avoid any decline in beta-carotene levels with time. Thus, the study design favoured Golden Rice, rather than reflecting the actual lives and habits of poor Asians and Africans, who generally cannot afford fat-rich meals every day. So far, there is no answer to the real question: How will Golden Rice perform as part of meals that poor people, typically malnourished, actually eat?

The Nobel Laureates accuse Greenpeace’s campaign of raising the regulatory bar for GM crops. The facts above suggest that neither Greenpeace nor regulatory hurdles have delayed Golden Rice’s release. In fact, in 2009, the distinguished biotechnologist, Dr. Swapan Datta, former Deputy Director-General (Crop Science) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, who had worked on Golden Rice at IRRI, categorically stated, “The regulatory system is not the barrier to releasing Golden Rice in India.” IRRI itself, in its last update released in 2014, said: “Golden Rice will only be made available broadly to farmers and consumers if it is successfully developed into rice varieties suitable for Asia, approved by national regulators, and shown to improve Vitamin A status in community conditions.”

Let us, for the moment, ignore the political aspects of Golden Rice and GM crops. Let us overlook the fact that many sciences (other than physics, chemistry, and medicine represented in the letter) have something to contribute to the debate over GM crops — in India, agricultural scientists, ecologists, nutritionists, and sociologists, among others, have insightfully contributed to the debate. Let us instead ask two basic questions. Is Golden Rice ready to be cultivated by farmers? IRRI itself answers no. Does Golden Rice improve Vitamin A levels among people as they actually live and eat? We don't know yet.

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Sowing picks up with increase in rainfall

Farmers in Nellore district have completed the operation in the kharif area

A file photo shows farmers sowing seeds.

Crops were sown in 58 per cent of the normal area till August first week this year compared to 40 per cent in the corresponding period in 2015 kharif season.

As much as 113 per cent of the normal area sown was covered this year when compared to just 71 per cent last year, according to Department of Agriculture.

Paddy, which is still in nurseries, is yet to be transplanted. Rainfed crops like jowar, maize, ragi, greengram, blackgram, sunflower, caster, chilli, groundnut and cotton have been sown on 23.81 lakh hectares against the normal to date (August first week) of 21.13 lakh hectares.

While jowar, maize, greengram, blackgram, sunflower, castor, chilli and cotton are in stages ranging from just sown to vegetative, groundnut is in vegetative to flowering and peg penetration stage.

Ironically, farmers in Nellore, the only district that recorded deficit rainfall, have completed sowing in the entire kharif area. Farmers of West Godavari, Anantapur and Chittoor have also sown crop in 76 to 100 per cent and farmers of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Kadapa seem to be lagging with sowing being completed only in 25 to 50 per cent of the normal area.

Minister for Water Resources Devineni Umameshwara Rao said while the normal rainfall for kharif (till date) was 260.60 mm, the State recorded a rainfall of 293.10 mm (12.50 per cent excess).

The Minister said 1,43,387 cusecs of water was being discharged from Almatti on Thursday. The outflows recorded from Narayanapur dam was 1,55,240 and Jurala it was 73,870 cusecs. The instant the level in Srisailam reservoir reached 840 feet, water would be released to Rayalaseema from the Pottireddipadu regulator, he said.

The Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme pumped 6.3 tmcft of water to Prakasam barrage. There was a three per cent increase in the groundwater table in the lands on either side of the Polavaram Right Main Canal because of Pattiseema water, the Minister said.

Dairy meet

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar will open DESK-2016 (Dairy Entrepreneurship Summit Kerala) organised by KVASU at Pearl Regency Auditorium in Thrissur on Saturday.

Pesticide residue has come down in veggies: KAU

The pesticide residue in vegetables in the State markets has come down drastically, according to a report published by the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU).

The report based on pesticide residue analysis conducted at the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited laboratory at the College of Agriculture, Vellayani, said that no hazardous element was found in samples collected from farmers' fields and vegetable vendors across the State.

Other States

The report pertaining to April to June 2016 certified that not only the vegetables produced by Kerala farmers but also those brought from across the State were also found safe to eat.

Only one of the 22 samples collected from farmers' fields in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had been found to contain residue of a pesticide but it was well below the permissible limits. This shows that the impact of pesticide residue analysis and public awareness had proved successful in curbing indiscreet pesticide application.

Completely safe

The produce from Kasaragod, the lone district declared as organic, has been found completely safe and devoid of any hazardous chemicals.

Thomas Biju Mathew, Professor and Head, Pesticide Residue Analytical Laboratory, said that residues were also undetected in vegetable samples from shops in different districts. Though residues were found in very few samples of curry leaf, salad cucumber, chilly and cauliflower, the percentage of presence was well below permissible levels. With regard to fruits, it was found that avocado contained some residues, but below permissible levels.

Out of the several samples of condiments tested, only one sample of cardamom was found to contain residues above the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) permissible levels. Though traces of hazardous chemicals were found in chilli powder, dried chilli and fenugreek, it was below the permissible level, he said. The decreased incidence of pesticide residue in vegetables and condiments is attributed to the increased public awareness about the hazards of consuming products contaminated with pesticide residues.

Reports

The KAU has been publishing periodical reports on analysis of samples collected from open market and farmers' fields. The pesticide residue analytical lab at Vellayani is the only public sector laboratory with national accreditation. Farmers can get their produce tested at this lab free-of-cost, if they submit the samples with a certificate from the agricultural officer concerned.

Training

A free one-day training programme on 'rabbit farming' will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra on Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on August 10.

A release said that the training will deal with benefits of rabbit farming, types of rabbit, selecting the rabbit, feed management, diseases and measures to prevent it and selling it for profit. The release added that rabbit farming provides substantial income and farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programme.

They should register themselves for participating in the training before August 9.

For registration, visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 / 266650.

No takers for coconut procurement centres

While farmers have been enquiring about the procedures to sell their produce, none has brought coconuts to the centres so far.— File photo

It has been over a month since the State government set up coconut procurement centres to help growers, who have been facing severe downfall in the price of coconut. Three such centres were set up in Hassan district and surprisingly, none has procured even one quintal of coconut so far.

Hundreds of farmers had enquired with the officials about the procedures to sell their produce, but none bothered to bring coconuts to the centres.

The Karnataka State Cooperative Market Federation had set up centres in Hassan, Gandasi and Channarayapatna. They began to function on July 1, ahead of the monsoon session of the State legislature. The government announced a support price of Rs. 1,600 per quintal, when the price in the open market was anywhere between Rs. 900 to Rs. 1,100.

Mr. Rangaswamy, District Manager of KSCMF, told *The Hindu* on Thursday: “So far, no farmer has brought coconuts to the centres. We have kept the centres open in all three places.”

The procedure to sell coconuts to the market federation was lengthy. The farmers had to obtain identity cards from the respective village accountants and certify the crop from Horticulture Department and approach the centre. Quality experts from the Horticulture Department would grade coconuts before purchasing. The KSCMF officers purchase the products only if the quality matches their standards.

“Farmers are hesitant to carry coconuts to the centre as it is a lengthy process. Even after taking coconuts to the centre, one is not sure of getting the fixed amount as the quality experts might reject the produces,” said S.B. Vijay, a coconut grower in Channarayapatna taluk.

Mr. Rangaswamy, the officer, said with the government’s move to purchase at support price, the price in the open market has also gone up a little. “The farmers are getting around Rs. 1,400 to Rs. 1,500 per quintal. They feel it is more beneficial to sell their produces at the prevailing rate in the market than carrying coconuts to the centres,” he added.

Rarest flowers

The show will display some of the rarest flowers such as Hawaiian hibiscus, dwarf Asiatic lily, minuscule button rose, miniature poinsettia flowers, Thai jasmine, deep blue octanthus, among others. “We will have a 45-year-old stag horn fern, apart from fruits and vegetables grown by farmers,” said Srikantaiah, vice-chairman, Mysore Horticultural Society, Lalbagh.

Drop in black gram yield, say farmers

Depletion in groundwater has an adverse impact on yield

WITHERING:A farmer couple showing black gram which withered owing to poor irrigation facility at Rajavelukudi near Nagapattinam.— Photo: M. Srinath

Farmers in parts of the district have complained of fall in yield in black gram owing to scanty rainfall. The crop has been raised in irrigated fields in Velukudi, Kombur and Neermangalam. But the failure of monsoon has resulted in depletion in groundwater table.

Nadanam, a farmer of Velukudi, said that he had incurred an expenditure of Rs. 12,000 an acre and raised the ADT 5 variety in three acres. He could realise only 150 kg against the normal yield of 4,000 kg per acre. Gurusamy, another farmer, said that borewells in a cluster of villages in and around Velukudi had failed. Farmers pleaded for adequate compensation from the state government.

Sources said that black gram had been raised on about 45,000 hectares in the district mainly as a rice-fallow crop in Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai blocks. The average yield was about 450 kg per hectare but due to poor rainfall, the yield had been affected. The crop is usually raised during April in 85 to 90 days. The summer showers had failed this year, resulting in fall in yield. Last year, the yield was highly appreciable due to timely showers.

Under irrigated condition, the yield would even go up to one tonne a hectare.

The serious depletion in groundwater had an adverse impact on the yield.

Crop loan

Farmers can avail themselves of crop loans from primary agriculture cooperative societies in the district, a release from the district administration here has said.

Over six lakh acres to get water for kharif

Fresh flows:Water being discharged from Sriramsagar project at Pochampad in Nizamabad district on Wednesday; (right) Finance Minister Etala Rajender releasing water into canals.— Photos: K.V. RAMANA

Agriculture lands in Nizamabad, Adilabad, Karimnagar, and Warangal districts will receive water from the Sriramsagar project

: Over six lakh acres of agriculture lands in Nizamabad, Adilabad, Karimnagar and Warangal districts will get water in kharif, since the Sriramsagar project at Pochampad began to discharge water.

Water in the project touched 1,078.0 ft against its full reservoir level of 1,091.0 ft, and impounding about 47 tmc, against the full capacity of 90 tmc on Thursday. Over 13,000 cusecs are coming into the project and 4,300 cusecs are being discharged through the main Kakatiya flood flow canal and Lakshmi canal. Farmers in Karimnagar and Warangal districts are happy as they are receiving water for paddy transplantation in kharif .

Farmers in the district sow paddy which is usually irrigated with rain water and water from borewells. The sudden rise in paddy farming is making it difficult to find labourers for paddy transplantation. Earlier on Wednesday, Finance Minister Etala Rajender released water from the project into Kakatiya flood flow canal (FFC) for Karimnagar and Warangal districts. About 2,200 cusecs were let out into each canal, while farmers in the district themselves began releasing 100 cusecs of water into the Lakshmi canal on Tuesday. However, it is yet to reach the irrigation tanks. Mr. Rajender, accompanied by Minister for Agriculture P. Srinivas Reddy, Mission Bhagiratha vice-chairman V. Prasanth Reddy, chief whip K. Eswar, Manohar Reddy and Vidyasagar Rao, MLAs from Peddapally and Korutla respectively, a galaxy of engineering and non-engineering authorities and the ruling party cadres, conducted a puja earlier at the SRSP dam.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Rajender said that water for agriculture from the project was being released after two years. The reservoir right now contained 50 tmc of water , he said and hoped it would get filled in the coming days. There was a possibility to fill the LMD with 25 tmc in coming days provided the SRSP is filled to its brim, he added.

Last date for crop insurance extended

The government has extended the last date for crop insurance from July 31 to August 8, according to a press note issued by the Agriculture Department on Thursday. The farmers who have failed to insure their crops under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana can do so until the cut-off date, the note stated.

‘Forest dept. destroying maize on podu lands’

CPI (ML-New Democracy), district committee, alleged that Forest Department personnel were destroying maize and other crops grown on ‘podu lands’ by the tribal community in the forest fringe villages of Yellendu and other mandals of Kothagudem division in the name of Haritha Haram afforestation drive.

Talking to the media here on Thursday, party district secretary Potu Ranga Rao, and senior leaders Rayala Chandrasekhar Rao and Avula Venkateshwarlu slammed the government for allegedly resorting to coercive measures to drive out tribals from podu lands in the tribal sub-plan mandals of the district.

‘Activists targeted’

The government is targeting the CPI (ML-ND) local activists for espousing the cause of podu cultivators by unleashing repressive measures against them, leaving the encroachers of forest, NSP and other government lands scot-free, they said.

Sapling plantation should be taken up on parched lands, open spaces and encroached lands to increase the green cover. The party will organise protests denouncing the oppressive measures against tribals and other toiling masses by the government on August 8 and 9, they said.

‘GST will improve overall business’

The complete details not yet announced. But we expect that if the Government imposes a Goods and Services Tax (GST) of 12 per cent, there will not be any impact for the pump industry. But the tax structure exceeds more than 12 per cent will be a negative impact for pump industry.

Considering the present status of pump industry we request the Government to fix the tax rates at 12 per cent, says K.K. Rajan, President of SIEMA.

GST decision is most welcomed and this would definitely improve the overall business as capital goods will cost lesser. But still there are lots of hurdles to come across and we need to wait and see how the central and state government would collaborate for implementation and establish the ease of doing business, says V. Sundaram – President of CODISSA.CII welcomed the passing of the Constitution (122 Amendment) Bill 2014 related to the GST by the Rajya Sabha on August 3, 2016.

"GST is India's most significant tax reform in decades. GST, when implemented, is expected to usher in a harmonised national market of goods and services and shall lead to a simplified, assesse-friendly tax administration system. Once implemented, it will subsume all of the country's central and state level duties and taxes, thus making the country a national market and contribute significantly to the growth of the economy", said Nethra J S Kumar, Chairperson, CII Coimbatore Zone.

The manufacturing sector, in particular, is expected to be a big beneficiary of GST as the economic system becomes more competitive. As GST will be aligned with an information technology platform, the tax payment system would also be streamlined. Consequently, the supply chain would become faster, seamless and more efficient by allowing for uninterrupted movement of goods across the country.

CII anticipates that implementation of GST from 1 April 2017 would reduce transaction costs and boost GDP by 1.5 to 2 per cent points. While government has left no stone unturned to seek a consensus, the willingness and maturity of the key opposition party in terms of understanding the issues and straightening out the differences is indeed praiseworthy.

Training in handling 'Point of Sale' system for ration shop staff

Training in handling 'Point of Sale' system to be introduced in ration shops across the district to eradicate irregularities was organised for the ration shop staff at different places on Thursday.

To avert irregularities in the sale of essential commodities through ration shops and to encourage paperless transactions, all ration shops in the district are to be provided with the GPS-based 'Point of Sale' systems.

The system, which functions with a mobile phone SIM card, will record the quantity of essential commodities dispatched from the godown to the ration shops, quantity received at the shop, any delay during the transit etc. It will also record details about the cardholders such as their address, number of persons in the families, their age, their mobile phone numbers, Aadhar card numbers etc.

After every sale, the cardholders' mobile phone will receive from the 'Point of Sale' system SMS detailing the nature of the sale (sugar / rice / kerosene etc.), quantity, bill amount etc. and hence no bill will be issued to the cardholder hereafter during the sale.

In case the mobile phone number registered with the system is 'out of coverage area' or out of service at the time of sale, all the details will reach the consumer in the form of SMS once the mobile phone becomes active or enters the network area.

After the 'Point of Sale' systems were successfully tested in Ariyalur and Perambalur districts, the State Government has proposed to introduce the system in all ration shops across Tamil Nadu in a phased manner. Hence, the personnel attached to 1,449 shops - 1,006 full-time shops and 443 part-time shops – in the district are being trained in the new system and registration of cardholders' details in the system is now going on.

Details of about 8,73,907 ration cards in Tirunelveli district has been registered under the newly introduced system. Since the Aadhar card numbers are being linked with the ration cards, bogus cards will get easily weeded out.

This would avert irregularities in the sale of essential commodities and encourage paperless transactions

Dark Blue Tiger butterflies migrate to Pachamalai

TIRUCHI: TAMILNADU: 04/08/2016 : Dark Blue Tiger Butterfly spotted in Pachamalai hills in Tiruchi District.

"This migration is one of the most charming natural phenomena in south India".

Large scale migration of Dark Blue Tiger butterflies has been recorded at the Pachamalai Hills much earlier this year, according to a field-level study.

The study was carried out last month by Q. Ashoka Chakkaravarthy, a wildlife conservationist and Assistant Professor of Environmental Science, St. Joseph's College, Tiruchi, at Pachamalai, which forms part of the Eastern Ghats. Endowed with valleys, ridges, forest areas and waterfalls, Pachamalai, the only hilly terrain in Tiruchi district, is a home for various species of birds, insects and animals.

Usually the Dark Blue Tiger butterflies migrate from southern parts of the Western Ghats to Pachamalai before monsoon in October or November. However, there has been a large scale migration of these butterflies this time in July itself which is too early. A large population of this species had been recorded from the Pachamalai foothills up to 500 metres elevation.

Dark Blue butterflies are a common species found in the hills of southern India and in the Himalayas up to an altitude of 2,700 metres above sea level. Belonging to the Nymphalidae family, these butterflies have close resemblance to Blue Tiger butterflies.

A large number of this species had been found on the ground in the morning hours and the butterflies start flying higher up in the afternoon. He believes that early migration to Pachamalai could be due to climatic factors in the Western Ghats. Post migration, these butterflies breed on mountains and their offsprings migrate back to the plains between March and May.

"This butterfly migration is one of the most charming natural phenomena in south India", says Mr. Chakkaravarthy adding that the study was done in the morning hours.

While carrying out the study, he could see many Dark Blue Tiger butterflies having got killed by vehicles on the Pachamalai road more so on the week-ends when tourists' inflow is considerable. The presence of butterflies whose life span is just two months is an indicator of healthy vegetation. Last year, we had recorded common albatross (Appias albino) in large population, he said.

"GST must be simplefor retail traders too"

The Centre's move to usher in Goods and Services Tax has raised apprehensions among retail traders. The GST should be a simplified and practical tax regime for crores of retail traders, said A.M. Vikramaraja, president, Tamil Nadu Vanigar Sangankalin Peramaippu.

Speaking to reporters here on Thursday, he said that it was learnt that the GST would usher in a simplified tax regime for big establishments. The same should apply for the retail trade as well. His federation would launch an agitation if the Union government failed to incorporate suggestions mooted by the trading community which had met the Finance Minister in New Delhi and the Parliamentary Committee members in Chennai and placed their demands with respect to the GST.

In Tamil Nadu, there were over 300 products which were exempted from tax, including rice, textiles and grocery items, while the remaining products were being taxed ranging from one per cent to 14.5 per cent.

Mr.Vikramaraja said if the products, currently exempted from tax, were to be taxed under the GST, it would eventually lead to rise in price and inflation.

The Centre had discussions only with the State governments with respect to GST legislation. It had never invited traders and discussed the crucial issue with them, he said.

The federation had been consistently seeking a single-point tax which would solve many problems, he said adding that this was one of the suggestions placed before the Finance Minister and the Parliamentary Committee.

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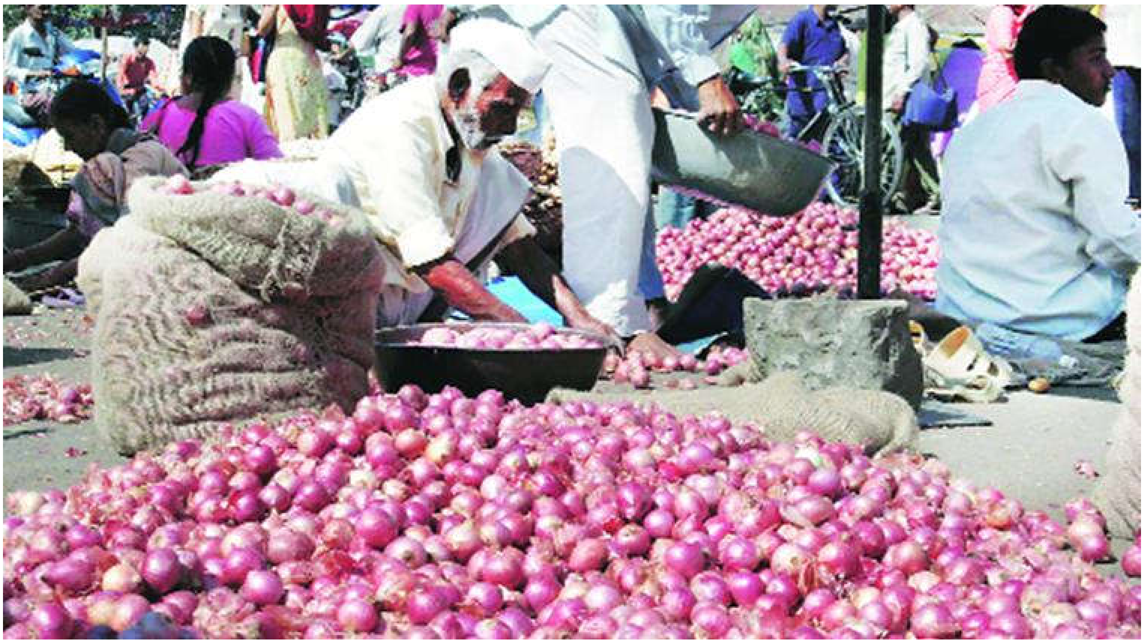
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Onion production area dips by 40 per cent

On an average, 2 lakh hectares come under kharif onion production, annually, in these three states and that includes 1 lakh hectares in Maharashtra alone.



Kharif, late kharif and rabi are the three major onion seasons round the year. Kharif onions are planted between May and July and the harvesting is done after September.

After a bumper crop last year, onion sowing has reduced significantly across the country this year. Estimates show that this year, kharif onion production will be around 60 per cent of its normal production. Drought and consistent low prices of the bulb over the past few months are said to be the main reasons for this dip in the major kharif onion growing states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Kharif, late kharif and rabi are the three major onion seasons round the year. Kharif onions are planted between May and July and the harvesting is done after September. On an average, 2 lakh hectares come under kharif onion production, annually, in these three states and that includes 1 lakh hectares in Maharashtra alone.

This year, a reduction of around 40 per cent in onion sowing area in the state would subsequently result in a dip in production in the months to come. The monsoon has picked up across the country, but lack of rainfall in June seems to be the major reason for this dip.

In Maharashtra, the state government had issued advisories to the farmers and asked them not to start sowing till soil moisture content was 30-40 per cent. This, many say, has resulted in a drastic drop in the sowing area.

Also high prices of maize, soyabean, pulses and vegetables has seen farmers using their farmland to grow these crops, instead of onions. Area under pulse production, in fact, has grown by 46 per cent in the state and many onion farmers have opted to grow pulses due to the good prices.

Over the past five to six months, the onion trade has been going through a sustained slump with prices at an all-time low. This, despite a long period of drought which had actually seen a reduction in onion area at least in Maharashtra. Over the last month or so, onion trade in the Nashik district has been in the doldrums due to the ongoing strife between traders and the market committee.

However, chances of an immediate price rise seems to be remote given the carry forward stock of onion the country has to deal with.

RBI: Farmers can get short-term crop loans at 4 per cent

Loans up to Rs 3 lakh at subsidised interest rate of 7% could go down to 4% on prompt repayment.

The Reserve Bank of India has said farmers can avail short-term crop loan of up to Rs 3 lakh at subsidised interest rate of 7 per cent and the rate could go down to 4 per cent if they repay promptly.

“A subvention of 2 per cent per annum will be made available for short-term crop loan up to Rs 3,00,000 per farmer, provided the lending institutions make available short-term credit at the ground level at 7 per cent per annum to farmers,” the RBI said in a notification. An additional interest subvention of 3 per cent per annum will be available to the “prompt payee farmers”.

“This also implies that the farmers paying promptly would get short-term crop loans at 4 per cent per annum during 2016-17. This benefit would not accrue to those farmers who repay after one year of availing such loans,” the RBI said.

In order to discourage distress sale by farmers and encourage them to store their produce, the subvention will be given to small and marginal farmers with a Kisan Credit Card for a further period of up to six months post-harvest on the same rate as available to crop loan against negotiable warehouse receipt.

To provide relief to farmers affected by natural calamities, the interest subvention of 2 per cent will continue to be available to banks for the first year on the restructured amount. Such restructured loans may attract a normal rate of interest from the second year onwards as per the policy laid down by the RBI.

In another measure, relaxing chequebook norms, the RBI has left it to the lender’s discretion on whether to issue fresh chequebooks in cases of dishonour of Rs 1 crore and above. As per existing norms, banks are not authorised to issue fresh chequebooks in such cases.

DRI unearths hawala dealings by exporters of dry coconuts

Three firms overstating value of exports to avail undue benefits in the dock

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) unearthed hawala transactions by at least three companies exporting dry coconut or copra.

The three firms — KBN General Trading Company, MN Enterprise and Rajasthan Agro Product, based in Mumbai, Jaipur and Ahmedabad — were illegally availing extra benefits on export of dry coconut to Pakistan and some Middle-East countries by declaring inflated values of the consignments. The overvalued remittances by these firms were sent through Dubai, official sources said.

According to a source, the DRI conducted searches in the offices and godowns of the three companies in Navi Mumbai, Jaipur and Ahmedabad on July 16 and found incriminating documents pertaining to overvaluation of their exports.

"Investigations have revealed that the overvalued remittances were routed from Dubai and these companies have admitted to it as well. The export data reveals that the companies have been indulging in such exports for three years," said a source.

Under current norms, the government offers incentives of 6 per cent on copra exports. While 1 per cent of it is provided through duty drawback by the customs department, the remaining 5 per cent is provided through duty credit scrips issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade under the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS).

"Four live consignments of KBN General Trading that were about to be exported on inflated values were seized at Nhava Sheva port at JNTP. The companies have accepted that they indulged in overvaluation and have paid Rs 3.5 crore so far towards undue benefits availed by them on such exports," said a source.

The export of coconut and coconut products (excluding coir and coir products) increased by 11 per cent to Rs 1,450.24 crore in 2015-16, according to the Coconut Development Board. Between April, 2015 and September, 2015, India's dry coconut exports stood at 7,700 tonnes, of which 7,289 tonnes was imported by Pakistan.

From 2011 to 2013, copra exports to Pakistan from India have doubled to at least 21,000 tonnes. Pakistan purchases copra round the year for consumption as edible dry fruit.

In current monsoon season, a bumper July and more

The current monsoon, unlike in 2015, had a bad start.

June had only 145.4 mm average precipitation, 11.1 per cent below the LPA of 163.3 mm. (Express Photo)

This July has been the fifth best with regard to the monsoon rains, since the start of the nineties. July saw the country receive an area-weighted rainfall of 308.2 millimetres, 6.6 per cent more than the normal long-period average (LPA) of 289.2 mm for July. There have been only four instances after 1989 where it rained more in July than this time: 2013 (310.1 mm), 2005 (334.1 mm), 2003 (316.7 mm) and 1995 (323.4 mm).

The current monsoon, unlike in 2015, had a bad start. June had only 145.4 mm average precipitation, 11.1 per cent below the LPA of 163.3 mm, leading to delayed kharif crop plantings by farmers. According to the agriculture ministry, total area sown by June-end was just 215.87 lakh hectares (lh), against the 279.27 lh covered in the same period of 2015.

ALL-INDIA AVERAGE AREA-WEIGHTED RAINFALL (IN MM)

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Season (June-Sep)
2009	85.7	280.7	192.5	139.4	698.3
2010	138.1	300.7	274.7	197.7	911.1
2011	183.5	246.0	284.9	186.9	901.3
2012	117.6	250.3	262.3	193.4	823.6
2013	219.8	310.1	254.9	152.6	937.4
2014	95.2	261.1	237.4	187.9	781.7
2015	190.1	241.0	204.7	131.4	760.6
2016	145.4	308.2	–	–	–
Normal*	163.6	289.2	261.3	173.4	887.5

*Long-period average for 1951-2001.

But the surplus July rains have totally altered the picture. The latest data from Krishi Bhawan shows cumulative sowing as on July 29 at 799.51 lh, which is higher than the 752.29 lh for this time last year. Barring cotton and bajra, all major kharif crops have registered expansion in acreage.

Equally encouraging is the Met Department's forecast for the second half of the southwest monsoon season: Rainfall as a whole is expected to be107 per cent of the LPA for August-September, with August alone likely to post 4 per cent surplus rains.

This is in sharp contrast to 2015, where a 16.2 per cent surplus in June was followed by rainfall deficiency that progressively got worse: -16.7 per cent in July, -21.7 per cent in August and -24.2 per cent in September. The crop farmers sowed enthusiastically in June suffered extreme moisture stress, translating into lower if not total loss of produce.

This year only, has the monsoon's temporal spread been good, but as many as 28 out of the country's 36 meteorological subdivisions have experienced normal to excess precipitation. Even Gujarat, which seemed headed for yet another drought, has had decent showers in the past few days.

As things stand, we are looking at a bumper agricultural year a la 2013-14.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Milk products should have lower tax rate, says GCMMF's Sodhi

Proposed minimum rate of 12% is double the current average tax on several milk products

The much-awaited Constitution Amendment Bill paving the way for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) may have been cleared by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, but India's largest milk products retailer, Gujarat Cooperative Milk

Marketing Federation Limited (GCMMF) is apprehensive about the minimum tax rate its products will face under the new regime.

Value-added products

While milk, curd (*dahi*) and buttermilk *(chhas*) continue to be exempted from tax coverage, some value-added products may end up incurring a higher tax rate — almost double — under GST as against the current average tax rate.

“Today average tax on value-added products such as ghee (butter oil), butter and Tetra-packed milk ranges between 5 and 7 per cent. If these items start attracting GST at 12 per cent — indicated as the lowest slab under the new tax regime, then it would be a dampener on both consumers and producers,” said Rs. Sodhi, Managing Director, GCMMF, which sells the Amul brand of milk products.

Some positives

A panel headed by Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian has put the GST rate structure into three slabs, with the lowest slab of 12 per cent for goods for the poor.

However, other value-added products such as flavoured milk and ice-creams currently attract up to 5 per cent excise duty.

With the rollout of GST, excise duty will be subsumed into GST. The single tax is seen as a ‘positive’ for the dairy sector.

Sodhi also noted that milk products such as milk powder, baby food and ice-cream currently attract average tax of 10-12 per cent.

Hence, a slightly higher rate under GST will not affect consumers much.

"We wish the minimum slab under GST be 6 per cent so that goods and commodities like ghee, butter, etc do not suddenly attract almost double the current average tax," Sodhi said.

Worry for farmers

The overall market size of the products — butter, tetrapack milk and butter oil is estimated to be around 25,000 crore, he added.

"The ultimate impact will be on the farmers. As with higher tax and costlier products it would ultimately discourage the producer," Sodhi said.

Short covering lifts jeera futures

Jeera traded up on the futures market on short covering by market participants.

It gained in the spot market as well on short supply and good demand.

Trade sources said that after the past few days' downtrend, traders started covering on expectation of fresh export demand which pushed up the spice.

On the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange (NCDEX) the jeera August contract gained 385 or 2 per cent to touch 19,410 per quintal, with an open interest of 6,648 lots.

The NCDEX September contract increased 375 to 19,810 per quintal, with an open interest of 19,488 lots.

About 3,000 bags arrived in the Unjha mandi of Gujarat and the price moved up by 50 to 3,250-3,725 per 20 kg.

At the Rajkot APMC, jeera arrivals were at 400 bags and the price gained 40 to 3,200-3,700 per 20 kg.

Turmeric gleams on quality

Spot turmeric prices at Erode markets increased by 100 a quintal on quality arrivals. Traders purchased all the medium and quality turmeric on Thursday. 4,500 bags of turmeric arrived for sale and 3,200 bags were sold.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger variety went for 7,739-9,356 a quintal; the root variety 7,509-8,514. Of the arrival of 1,402 bags, 772 were sold.

Kerala’s commodities sector reacted cautiously to the possible implications of GST on merchandise trade, saying that they will keenly watch taxation rates under GST.

“As tax rates have not been spelt out for the tea trade in the GST Bill, we are not in a position to reveal the exact impact on the sector,” JK Thomas, Chairman, Tea Trade Association of Cochin, told*BusinessLine.*

“The tax rate is very sensitive as far as the tea industry is concerned and we are hoping that tea, being an agricultural product, will be exempted from GST,” he said.

As the sector is passing through a critical phase due to low production and high wages, any rate hike will have a cascading effect on retail tea prices, impacting the survival of many SMEs, he said.

N Dharmaraj, President of the planters’ union Upasi, said plantation commodities are not being subjected to Central Excise Duty (CED) currently and that as CED is sought to be subsumed by way of imposition of Central GST, plantation commodities should be exempted from the levy of CGST.

Planters wary

Plantation commodities being mass consumption items/basic goods, the rates applicable to items of basic importance should be made applicable, aligning with the prevailing VAT rate of 5 per cent, he said.

Possibilities of input credit are not available for plantation commodities at the growing stage. These commodities are grown and manufactured/processed to make them marketable and fit for human consumption/usage.

In the plantation sector, he said there is a peculiar situation wherein both growing and manufacturing (processing) are an integrated activity. The growing of plantation crops is considered agricultural activity and no input credit is allowed on goods purchased for growing and cultivation.

This implies that input taxes levied at the growing stage cannot be set off against the final product.

This, he said, would result in cascading of taxes. Upasi has urged the Finance Minister to set right this anomaly and make a seamless credit mechanism available for plantations that grow and manufacture (process) plantation crops.

Coir view

PR Ajith Kumar, Director (Marketing), Coir Board, was of the view that coir and coir products should be exempted from the purview of GST in view of its environmental friendliness.

At present, the rate in Kerala is 0 per cent and there are reports that the tax structure under the GST regime is likely to be 4 per cent.

This may affect the competitiveness of coir-related products due to the cheap availability of synthetic, polypropylene, plastic products in the market.

The Cochin Oil Merchants Association has called upon the Centre and State governments to either remove or bring down taxes on coconut oil to a minimum level to benefit industry as well as coconut farmers. At present, coconut oil has been included in the category of edible oils, with a tax rate of 5 per cent. The industry wants clarity on the proposed tax rates under GST, Prakash Rao, Director, COMA, said.

Rubber industry happy

"In the short-term there might be some hiccups as in the case of any paradigm shift. But in the longer term it will help industry across the board. It will improve ease of doing business and remove the current cascading of taxes. Savings in logistics costs and time will be a positive for the tyre industry as logistics, transport and tyre usage are all inter-connected," said Rajiv Budhraja, Director-General, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association.

"Especially for MSMEs with meagre resources, the GST rollout will be a big positive as a lot of paperwork and resources currently employed in complying with so many layers of taxation could be saved," added Mohinder Gupta, President, All India Rubber Industries Association.

Cooking oils hold steady

Amid improved buying support and demand, majority of oils in Indore mandis were traded marginally higher with soya refined today rising to 632-35, while soya solvent ruled at 600-605.

On the other hand, palm, cotton and groundnut oil ruled stable with palm oil at 618, cotton oil at 695-700, while groundnut oil was quoted at 1,400. Mustard seeds today declined to 4,250-4,300 a quintal (down 100 from last week) on sluggish demand.

Similarly, raida traded lower at 4,300 (down 100 from last week). Plant deliveries of mustard seeds for Jaipur line today ruled at 5,150-55 a quintal. Arrival of mustard seeds across the country remained on the lower side at 70,000 bags.

Business Standard

Monsoon rains 6% above average in past week: IMD

An average or normal monsoon means rainfall between 96 and 104% of a 50-year average of 89 centimetres

Monsoon rains in India were 6% above average in the week ended Aug. 3, the weather office said on Thursday.

The weather office has retained its forecast for an above-average monsoon this year, boosting hopes of a rise in farm output and income after two years of drought.

An average or normal monsoon means rainfall between 96 and 104% of a 50-year average of 89 centimetres.

The June-September monsoon is crucial for India's rain-fed farm sector that accounts for nearly 15 percent of its $2 trillion economy.

Farmers plant crops such as rice, soybeans, cotton and pulses in the summer-sowing season that starts in June.

Pulses import fails to arrest price rise

Poor international crop resulted in further price rise as it forced importers to buy at higher rates to meet domestic demand

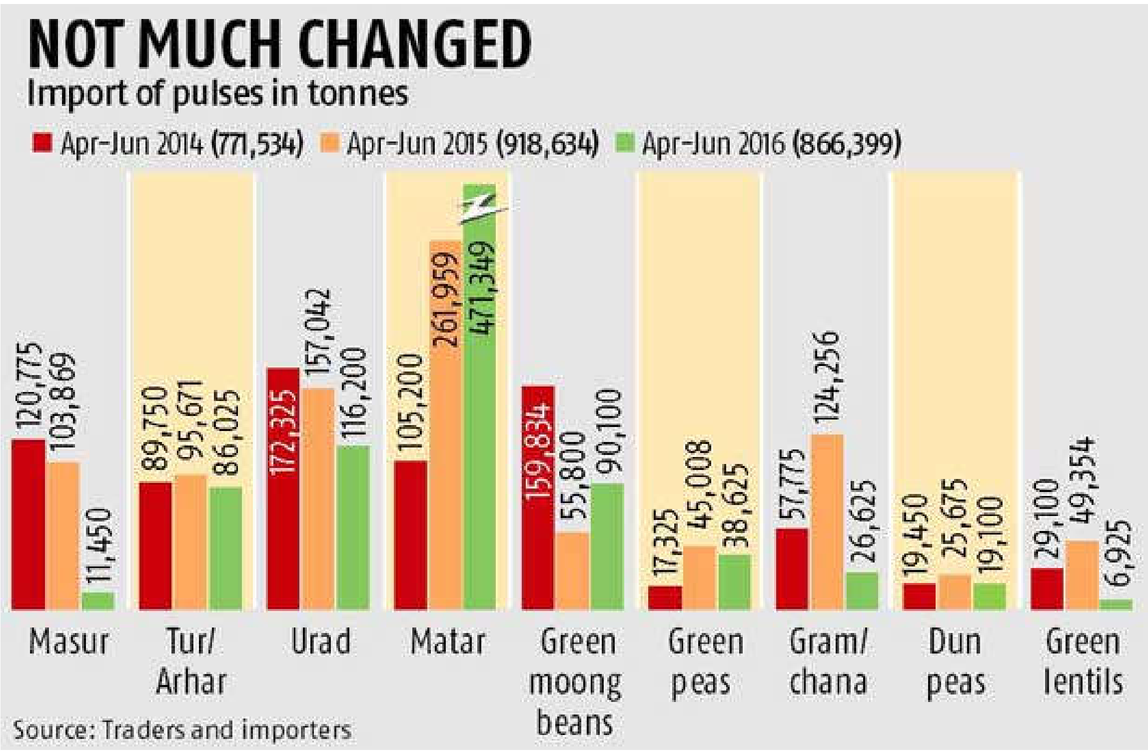
The plausible reason given is a sharp drop in 2015-16 production, the worst in five years. Imports had a big part in meeting the supply gap but with a poor international crop, importers had to buy at higher rates.

This hasn't changed much in 2016-17. Trader data shows a historic low in import during the first quarter (April-June). This didn't allow a sharp drop in prices, though there was a slight moderation. Some traders say an extensive crackdown on importers also discouraged them. Imports fell by 6.5 per cent from the same period last year, to 860,000 tonnes as compared to 918,000 tonnes.

Take chana (Bengal Gram). Government data shows the production this year at 7.17 million tonnes, the lowest since 2009-10. Yet, its import dropped almost 79 per cent in the June quarter. As a result, its retail price went from Rs 90 a kg in the first week of July to a little over Rs 110 a kg by the end of the month, before stabilising to around Rs 105 a kg, says the website of the department of consumer affairs.

Trade sources point to low availability in global markets -- what was available was taken by India between last October and January. Indian traders imported 560,766 tonnes of chana in the latter period, against 212,025 tonnes in the corresponding period a year before, a rise of 165 per cent. This left little for future commitments.

The additional allegation is that some of the imported chana was then illegally hoarded, at ports and elsewhere. Officials said around 30,000 tonnes of it has been stored at Mumbai port since December 2015. The landed price of chana at the time was Rs 45,000 a tonne; it is now Rs 80,000 a tonne.



"This clearly shows some traders are making a killing from this crisis," a leading importer said. They have complained to the government about a particular trader.

Chana apart, the trade says import of all pulses also slumped in the June quarter from a year before. That of masoor (pink lentil fell by 90 per cent over a year before. In moong (green gram) and urad (black gram) the fall was 86 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, there being no availability abroad.

The only exception was matar (peas) and beans, whose imports rose by 80 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively, mainly due to substitution from chana and arhar, and also being a cheaper alternative.

Another reason given is lack of enthusiasm from state governments in lifting their allocations from the Centre from its own buffer. According to the latter, till the start of this week, 29,000 tonnes were allocated to 11 states and 16 per cent of this was lifted by only three — Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.

Things are expected to ease after the new kharif harvest become available from October onwards.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Forests declining, but tree cover on agricultural land increasing globally

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Although deforestation continues unabated in tropical forests, a new study has revealed some unexpected good news: tree cover on agricultural land is increasing across the globe, capturing nearly 0.75 Gigatonnes (billion tonnes) carbon dioxide every year.

"Remote sensing data show that in 2010, 43% of all agricultural land globally had at least 10% tree cover, up from eight percent in the preceding decade," said Robert Zomer of the World Agroforestry Centre, lead author of the study. "Given the vast amount of land under agriculture, agroforestry may already significantly contribute to global carbon budgets."

This tree cover on agricultural land will reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and land-use change which was estimated by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at about 24% of the world's emissions. However, trees on agricultural lands are not considered in the greenhouse gas accounting framework of the IPCC.

Trees on agricultural lands - also known as agroforestry systems - have the potential to contribute to reduce the impact of climate change while improving livelihoods and incomes and providing invaluable ecosystem services at the same time. The World Bank estimates that globally 1.2 billion people depend on agroforestry farming systems, especially in developing countries.

A team of researchers from various institutions in Africa, Asia and Europe carried out a study to assess the role of trees on agricultural land and the amount of carbon they have sequestered from the atmosphere over the past decade.

The new study shows that the distribution of tree cover on agricultural land depends on climatic conditions in different parts of the world. High tree cover is found in humid areas such as South East Asia, Central America, eastern South America, as well as central and coastal West Africa. Tree cover on agricultural land was moderate in south Asia, sub-humid Africa, central and western Europe, the Amazonia and mid-west North America. On the other hand, low tree cover was found in east China, northwest India, west Asia, the southern border of the Sahara Desert, the prairies of North America and southwest Australia.

Remarkable differences are noted in changing biomass carbon stocks over time among countries. Brazil, Indonesia, China and India had the largest increases, while Argentina, Myanmar, and Sierra Leone had the largest decreases in biomass carbon stored on agricultural land.

"Study results show that existing tree cover makes a major contribution to carbon pools on agricultural land, demonstrating the potential to add to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts," said Jianchu Xu of the World Agroforestry Centre. "If tree cover is accounted for, the total carbon stock is over four times higher than when estimated using IPCC tier 1 estimates alone."

Given the large amount of agricultural land where tree cover is below its potential, the study suggests that a huge mitigation potential exists and should be explored more systematically.

Farmer 'goes bananas' instead of soya bean, smells success

On switching over to banana cultivation from soya bean farming, a small farmer Shrawan Sinha, owning six acres of land in village Bahara of Kabirdham district has not only fetched a record breaking yield of 50kg from each banana bunch but also made three times more profit of Rs3.84 lakh from each acre of banana cultivation.

Shrawan's success has influenced other farmers of his village to take up horticulture farming along with growing pulses and paddy.

Talking to TOI, Shrawan said, "Horticulture produces sell like hot-cakes, which fetch us profit in liquid cash as the middlemen or direct veggie market vendors buy produce directly from our farm. This has boosted my morale for continuing in agriculture." The farmer switched over to banana cultivation for the first time in his life under horticulture scheme of area expansion of banana cultivation.

The trees have started bearing fruits and each banana bunch is around four feet long. It weighs 45-50kg on ripening. Earlier, on growing soyabean and chickpeas, Shrawan used to earn Rs 18,000 from each acre and with banana cultivation, he is earning around Rs 85,000 from the same land. Vendors directly purchase bananas from Shrawan at a price of Rs 1,100 per quintal.

Calling whitefly attack 'natural calamity' proves govt is anti-farmer: Congress

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CLP chief Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday accused Punjab CM Parkash Singh Badal of trying to "hush up the pesticides scandal that ruined the cotton farmers in the state last year leading to spate of suicides". Reacting to the news report 'Punjab calls whitefly attack natural calamity' that TOI had frontpaged on Thursday, Channi said, "It was shocking that after conceding damage due to whitefly attack last year, the government report was now blaming the farmers thereby absolving itself of all responsibility at one level while launching cover up operations at another."

It amounted to criminal cover up of the big scandal involving agriculture minister Tota Singh in which then agriculture director Mangal Singh Sandhu was arrested, the Congress leader said, adding, "The farmers were still not recovered from the last year's loss, this year too again the fly attacked. This clearly proves anti farmer stand of SAD BJP government."

"The pesticide purchased by the department worth more than Rs 30 crore was sub-standard that added to the misery of the farmers. This particular brand of pesticide had been purchased without any recommendation and proved to be ineffective against the white fly attack," he added.

He demanded high level probe into the "gamut to cover up this scandal as it had resulted not in just financial loss but the loss of human lives and incidence of suicides by the farmers had gone up in the cotton belt and this shocking trend was still continuing".

Now the government had come out with this report to absolve itself of the criminal conduct in the purchase of pesticides, he added.

Farmers market every sunday outside Vidhan Bhavan

From August 14, every Sunday farmers will be allowed to sell their farm produce outside Vidhan Bhavan directly to consumers.

The cabinet on Thursday decided to allow the Sunday market following the passage of the Bill allowing farmers to sell their produce directly in the market without going through the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC).

Farmers will be allowed to set up their stalls outside the Vidhan Bhavan gates as also in the parking lot. They will need to pre-register for setting up the stall, said sources.

A senior official said the collector's of Yavatmal and Solapur have already started allowing farmers to set up stalls at the collector's office on weekends when offices are closed. "This will now be done across the state," he said.

Farmer takes to Facebook to auction bull

A Himachal Pradesh farmer has taken to social networking sites to publicise the auction details of his 30-month-old Murrah bull carrying a price tag of Rs 5 crore. The auction is likely to take place on Friday in the presence of a string of local politicians. Himachali Ranjha who weighs 1,000 kg, stretches 13 feet and is 5ft 8in tall has become a crowd puller at Ghori Dhaviri panchayat in Hamirpur district.

Naresh Soni, 44, who runs two jewellery shops, said if a Murrah bull, `Yuvraj', of Haryana`s Kuruskshetra could carry a price tag of RS 9 crore, his own could easily fetch Rs 5 crore. The owners of Murrah bulls earn handsome income by selling sperm doses.

Himachali Ranjha's diet includes 2.5kg soybean, 2.5 kg chana, 10kg cattle feed and 1kg desi ghee, besides lots of apples. To ensure that the bull keeps shining, two litres of mustard oil is used for his massage every day , Soni said.This costs `1,500. Soni has put out auction details on Facebook and other sites to attract buyers from states including Punjab and Haryana. The bull's another "USP" is he has not mated yet.

Soni has invited Bilaspur MLA Bamber Thakur and others. "I will be there to see the bull carrying such a price tag," Thakur said.

Crop insurance deadline extended

Giving in to Maharashtra government's plea, the Centre has extended the deadline for the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme by 10 days. The last date for filing applications under the scheme was July 31, but now farmers can file them by August 10.

In a tweet on Wednesday night, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis noted, "Good news for farmers! Last date for applying for crop insurance extended." This happened after state-appointed task force for farm distressed districts took up with Fadnavis the need to allow more time to farmers as they were not able to put together the necessary documents for the scheme, which was started this year.

Vasantrao Naik Swavalamban Mission chief Kishore Tiwari had drawn the state's attention to the farmers' plight as the banks and revenue officials had been finding it tough to deal with the last minute rush to complete processing of insurance papers. Tiwari had requested that the date be extended till August 31.

"Last year, a lot of farmers got benefit from the crop insurance. So the state as well as the mission were keen on increasing its net to more farmers since the premium rates are very low and all terms favour farmers," said Tiwari.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Area under pulse cultivation up by 54 per cent in Maharashtra

The area under oilseeds has also increased by 15 per cent, while farmers had little interest in cotton, where the gain in acreage has been the lowest at 3 per cent.

PUNE: Farmers in Maharashtra have increased the area under urad by 75 per cent and pulses by 64 per cent as on August 2, compared with the same period last year. Due to good rainfall, the kharif acreage has increased by 21 per cent over the previous year.

Of the 34 rural districts in the state, 25 have received more than 100 per cent rainfall. The area under foodgrains, including rice, jowar, bajra and ragi, has increased by 34 per cent.

The area under pulses has increased by 54 per cent, with urad registered the highest increase followed by tur and moong at 64 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively. Bumper sowing is expected to bring the more than two-year old boom in prices of pulses. Global and domestic prices of pulses have already corrected by about 15 per cent in the last fortnight.

The area under oilseeds has also increased by 15 per cent, while farmers had little interest in cotton, where the gain in acreage has been the lowest at 3 per cent. The area under cotton as on August 2 has increased from 36.36 lakh hectare to 37.33 lakh hectare during the comparable period last year.

Of the average kharif area of 139.64 lakh hectare in the state, sowing has been completed on 135.02 lakh hectare; which is 97 per cent of the average kharif area.

Soyabean meal export dips 60%

On a financial year basis, the export during April'2016 to July'2016 is 52,906 tons as compared to 1,36,897 tons in the same period of previous year showing a decrease of 61%.

KOLKATA: The export of soybean meal and its other value added products during July 2016 is just 12,272 tons compared to 30,688 tons in July 2015 showing a decrease of 60% over the same period of last year, according to Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA).

On a financial year basis, the export during April'2016 to July'2016 is 52,906 tons as compared to 1,36,897 tons in the same period of previous year showing a decrease of 61%.

During current Oil year, (October - September), total exports during October 2015 to July, 2016 is 2,38,676 tons as against 6,86,525 tons last year, showing a decrease by 65.23%.

The data has been collected and compiled by SOPA based on the information received from members, port authorities and other agencies.

Industry wants exemption of tea from GST ambit

Tea has been defined as an agricultural produce within the definition of the Service Tax Rules.

KOLKATA: tea industry wants exemption of tea from GST as it is a garden produce and coming within the purview of the definition of agriculture. The industry officials feel that in case full exemption of GST is not possible then the rate should be kept on par with the current tax rate of 5% -6%.

Tea cultivation, harvesting and manufacturing is primarily an agricultural activity. Tea has been defined as an agricultural produce within the definition of the Service Tax Rules. Further in the Draft Model GST Law "Agriculture" includes floriculture, horticulture, sericulture, the raising of crops, grass or garden produce and also grazing. Therefore tea being a garden produce should come within the definition of Agriculture.

A senior tea industry official said " It would be pertinent to note that tea is a labour intensive industry. The primary cost for a tea estate would be cost of labour aggregating around 60% of total cost. Hence, the benefit of input credit as envisaged in GST scenario is considerably low."

The official added that while tea is an item of mass consumption, it is also highly price sensitive and a high tax incidence under GST could fuel inflationary pressures adversely impacting consumer demand. This would negatively impact the industry and result in price inflation.

Currently there is no tax on inter-state stock transfer of goods between two locations of the same entity or from principal to a consignment agent. Each inter-state movement may result in levy of 1% Additional Tax, which would actually cascade to 3-4%. Since tea is a common man's beverage, it will create a cost burden to the end consumer affecting the ultimate sale price to the consumer.

The tea industry has also urged that the present concessional tax rate of 0.5 / 1% for teas sold through auctions be allowed to continue under the GST regime." Proposal to levy 1% additional tax on inter-state stock transfer should be abolished," the tea industry officials added.