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THE HINDU

Bengaluru's tomato varieties get researchers national award



Bengaluru's very own high-yielding tomato varieties of Arka Rakshak and Arka Samrat have helped their researchers bag a prestigious national award.

A team of horticultural scientists from the Hessarghatta-based Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) who had developed these varieties after a five-year research has been honoured with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's award for "Outstanding Interdisciplinary Team Research in Agriculture and Allied Sciences."

These varieties represent the city even in their names as 'Arka' stands for the Arkavati river on whose bank IIHR is located.

According to Dr. A.T. Sadashiva, one of the main criteria for the award was the social and economic impact the research work had on society. These tomato varieties are not only high-yielding, but also show high resistance to three major diseases.

This reduces the cost of cultivation by 10 to 15 per cent in terms of savings towards the cost of fungicides and pesticides, he noted.

The fruits of these varieties are suitable for long-distance transportation as they are firm and have a shelf life of 15 to 20 days as against 10 to 12 days of other hybrids, and six to eight days of ordinary tomato varieties, Dr. Sadashiva added.

Arka Rakshak, which gives a yield of up to 19 kg a plant, is already sought after by farmers and traders in eight countries.

The award for the year 2013-14 was presented recently at a programme held in New Delhi to the nine-member team led by Dr. Sadashiva, principal scientist and Head of the Division of Vegetable Crops, IIHR.

The other members of the team are Dr. Peter Hanson, Dr. M. Krishna Reddy, Dr. Girija Ganeshan, Dr. C. Gopalakrishnan, Dr. K. Madhavi Reddy, Dr. S. Shankara Hebbar, Dr. T.H. Singh and Dr. K.V. Ravishankar.

Punjab farmers opt for paddy over cotton

Farmers of Punjab, where a massive whitefly attack occurred last year, have opted for paddy this year and about 30.10-lakh hectares has been sown during the ongoing kharif season.

Decline in cotton acreage because of fear of whitefly pest and lesser area under other crops against targeted area are being attributed to increase in acreage in paddy.

With completion of the crop sowing, area under paddy has grown to 30.10 lakh hectares in current kharif season as against 29.75 lakh hectares last season. The target for current kharif season for paddy was set at 27.10 lakh hectares, an official of Punjab Agriculture department said.

”...this time is an all-time high acreage in the State. The major reason...has been the reduction in cotton acreage during current kharif season,” he said.

Besides, the area under basmati crop has also dipped by 35 per cent because of low prices fetched by growers, thus forcing growers to sow traditional varieties of paddy. Area under basmati was 4.90 lakh hectares as against 7.63 lakh hectares of acreage.

“After facing damage in cotton crop last year because of whitefly pest, growers this year brought down acreage under cotton and preferred to sow ordinary and common varieties of paddy which is a risk free crop because of assured marketing,” Punjab State Farmers Commission, economist, P. S. Rangi said on Wednesday.

“Growers even shifted area under basmati to common varieties after they failed to fetch remunerative returns from aromatic varieties. These factors primarily led to increase in area under paddy,” he said.

Crop diversification programme

State government had launched crop diversification programme which has been pushing growers to shift area under paddy to other crops like cotton, maize, basmati, sugarcane, pulses.

As far as other crops are concerned, area under maize stood at 1.45 lakh hectares as against the target of 2 lakh hectares. Similarly, sugarcane area was recorded at 96,000 hectares.

In neighbouring state Haryana, area under paddy was 12.46 lakh hectares in current kharif season as against 12.24 lakh hectares of area last year. In 2014-15, area under paddy was 12.87 lakh hectares.

Like in Punjab, area under cotton also went down in Haryana to 5.23 lakh hectares as against acreage of 5.83 lakh hectares last year.

Bad news for bees

Study claims that neonicotinoid insecticides are responsible for decline of bees across England

The large-scale, long-term decline in wild bees across England has been linked to the use of neonicotinoid insecticides by a new study.

Over 18 years, researchers analysed bees who forage heavily on oilseed rape, a crop widely treated with “neonics”. The scientists attribute half of the total decline in wild bees to the use of these chemicals. Industry sources say the study shows an association, not cause and effect.

In recent years, several studies, conducted in the lab and field, have identified a negative effect on honey bees and bumble bees from the use of neonics.

This new paper examined the impacts on populations of 62 species of wild bees across England over the period from 1994-2011. The team, from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, used distribution data on wild bees, excluding honey and bumblebees collected by the bees, ants and wasps recording scheme. They were able to compare the locations of these bees and their changing populations with growing patterns of oilseed rape across England over 18 years. The amount of this crop being sown has increased significantly over the period of the study, from around 500,000 hectares in 1994 to over 700,000 in 2011.

A key innovation was the licensing of neonicotinoid insecticides for the crop in the UK in 2002. Seeds are coated with the chemical and every part of the plant becomes toxic to pests.

Around 85% of the oilseed rape crop in England now uses this method for pest protection.

“The negative effects that have been reported previously do scale up to long-term, large-scale multi-species impacts that are harmful,” said Dr Nick Isaac, a co-author of the new paper.

“Neonicotinoids are harmful, we can be confident about that and our mean correlation is three times more negative for foragers than for non-foragers.” There was a decline in the number of populations of 10%, attributable to neonicotinoids, across the 34 species that forage on oilseed rape. Five of the species showed declines of 20% or more, with the worst affected declining by 30%. Overall, half the total decline in wild bees could be linked to the chemicals.

“Since most of the oilseed rape grown in UK was treated with a neonicotinoid seed treatment during the years this study looked at, we believe its findings would be correctly headlined that intensive agriculture is causing issues with pollinators,” said Dr Julian Little, from Bayer Crop Science in the UK.

“Whether this is due to the use of insecticides is not clear; a lack of nesting sites and pollen and nectar sources in these areas may also be critical factors.”

The European Food Safety Authority is currently conducting a review of the scientific evidence about neonicotinoids.— New York Times News Service

Farmers demand roll back of draft licensing norms on GM tech



The new draft guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture slashed Bt cotton seed prices and cut royalties to Monsanto by 74 per cent. Picture shows Bt cotton from a farm at Ranjan Kottai village, in Perambalur district, Tamil Nadu. Photo: M. Srinath

A petition signed by over 3.24 lakh farmers from 23 states demanded withdrawal of the guidelines farmers feel would deprive them of latest technology

A consortium of seven farmer organisations, RPKA, today demanded that the Centre rollback draft guidelines which prescribe new norms for licensing and royalty/trait value fixation of BT cotton seeds.

The Agriculture Ministry had issued a notification to this effect in May but it was withdrawn and turned into draft guidelines, seeking comments from stakeholders amid opposition from crop biotech industry.

A petition signed by over 3.24 lakh farmers from 23 states, demanding the immediate withdrawal of the draft licensing guidelines, was submitted to the Union Agriculture Ministry, Rashtriya Progressive Kisan Association (RPKA) said in a statement.

These guidelines, which seemed to target Monsanto, led to the Ministry of Agriculture slashing royalties payable to Monsanto, as per voluntary contracts, by 74 per cent. This was the result of the Ministry fixing royalties to be shared between Monsanto and its Indian partners for the Bt patents owned by the former Monsanto's. It also slashed Bt cotton seed prices.

RPKA National Coordinator Raghupati Singh said: "Farmers across the country realised that the draft licensing guidelines are regressive and anti-farmer. If implemented, it will lead to complete halt in the availability of new technologies."

Cotton farmers from across the country have said that seed prices form a very small part of their input costs and this has seldom been a consideration. Also, seeds have always been available, he said.

Given the lack of similar and relevant agri-technologies being available for farmers by Indian companies, such restrictions in the way of companies is detrimental to long-term farmer interest and to the overall domestic cotton economy, he said, adding that it also puts at risk the introduction of future technologies for Indian farmers not only in cotton but also in other crops.

The Association claimed that elected members from BJP, Shiv Sena, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Rashtriya Lok Samta Party among others have offered their support to the petition.

"States like Bihar and Odisha are with significant opportunities and can become big seed suppliers if agri-business in the state is well taken care of.

"Innovation is the key here but the current state of affairs is quite unfortunate. We appeal to the government to look into the matter and create a policy which will help poor farmers in the long run," BJP National Vice President Renu Devi said, extending her support to the petition.

RKPA members met Deputy Agriculture Commissioner D.S. Misra and NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand in this regard. They plan to meet agriculture as well as environment ministers.

Many incentives for paddy farming

“Kollavarsham (Malayalam calendar) 1192 will be observed as Year of Paddy,” Minister for Agriculture V.S. Sunil Kumar has said.

Addressing a Farmers Day function here on Wednesday, he said an additional amount of Rs. 60 crore would be allotted for paddy development this year.

“Steps will be taken to increase the area of paddy cultivation to three lakh hectares. A seed bank will be formed to protect indigenous seeds. The government will also promote cultivation of millets and pulses,” Mr. Sunil Kumar said.

The Minister said the support price for paddy would be ensured for farmers in the State.

Action would be taken for timely remuneration for rice procured from farmers. Steps would be taken to make land lying fallow arable again with the support of Agriculture and Cooperative departments.

“Interest-free loans will be allotted to vegetable farmers. Around 3,500 farm-fresh vegetable outlets will be opened for Onam season. The Kerala Agriculture University has been asked to develop poly houses according to the demand of farmers,” he said.

Mayor Ajitha Jayarajan presided.

The man who saved millions from famine

It was a team led by former Union Minister for Food and Agriculture C. Subramaniam that ushered in Green Revolution



Pioneering team: Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi arriving to attend a seminar on crop improvement and seeds in New Delhi in 1966. Union Minister for Food and Agriculture C. Subramaniam is seen with her. —Photo: Special Arrangement

In the early 1960s, when the country was short of foodgrains and we were forced to import wheat from the U.S., a group of agricultural scientists and bureaucrats led by the former Union Minister for Food and Agriculture C. Subramaniam steered India towards self-sufficiency in food production.

It was in the Kharif season of 1966 when farmers sowed high-yielding dwarf varieties on one million acres, and half a million acres in the Rabi season (October-March) in wheat that the Green Revolution happened, recalls J. Veeraraghavan, former secretary, Ministry of Human Resources Development, who was Secretary and chief administrative officer of the National Seeds Corporation at that time.

The short varieties were introduced as they could take more nitrogen-based fertilizers, thus ensuring higher yields — thrice that of the native varieties. This was necessary to meet the food requirement of India's growing population. A report by the Ford Foundation in 1959 on the country's food crisis set the warning bells off and 1966 was supposed to be the year by which the crisis

would mature when India's population would touch 480 million. "I remember my father sowing dwarf wheat seeds in the gardens of his official residence and trying out the crop. He did it in the midst of stiff opposition from many quarters," recalls S.S. Rajasekar, son of C. Subramaniam, popularly known as CS.

Though there was opposition from within the government and from the communist party to CS's agriculture policy that said if production had to increase, it was essential to ensure that the farmer was assured of an economic price.

"The most intense policy struggle on the price front was between the Food Ministry on one hand and the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission," writes CS in volume II of his memoirs, *Hand of Destiny, The Green Revolution*. However, when Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister in January 1966, she asked him to proceed with his policy with greater vigour.

Political opposition

While CS dealt with political opposition on the one hand, he was working with a hand-picked team of agricultural scientists and government officials to ensure increase in food production. They were mostly from what formed the Madras Presidency. G.V. Chalam, general manager of the National Seeds Corporation, and M.S. Swaminathan were the agricultural scientists, who brought in the seeds. They were awarded the Padma Sri in 1967 in recognition of their work, says Mr. Veeraraghavan.

Sivaraman, secretary, Ministry of Food, and the Joint secretary Ramamurthy too were Tamils.

Amrik Singh Cheema, who was Director of Agriculture in Punjab and then went to Delhi as Commissioner of Agriculture, Government of India, used his expertise in agricultural extension and took the wheat seeds to farmers. In the golden jubilee year of the Green Revolution, C. Subramaniam's contribution was recognised again by the Cheema Trust. His son recently received CS's life-time achievement award for agriculture.

"In a year or two, Mr. Subramaniam announced that we had reached self-sufficiency in food production, which was no mean feat. He had ensured supply

of fertilizers, seeds and other inputs to farmers by ensuring the cooperation of the State governments too,” said Jagdeep Cheema, Mr. Amrik’s son.

A foundation to empower farmers

National Agro Foundation was founded by former Union Food and Agriculture Minister C. Subramaniam



Till about ten years ago, paddy was Kamsalapuram’s staple crop. But now, the 40 farmers of the village have taken to vegetables in a big way, bringing in the much-needed profits.

“All this happened due to National Agro Foundation (NAF). When I first met them, I had just finished school and had no idea about farming. With proper training and their continuous intervention, farmers who were raising vegetables in 25 cents of land now raise them on even three acres,” said J. Thiruvengadam, a farmer. He says he has immensely benefited from the various programmes of the NAF, which was founded by former Union Food and Agriculture Minister C. Subramaniam, who engineered the country’s Green Revolution in the 1960s by supplying high-yielding seeds from Mexico.

The NAF’s contribution to the Raja Desingu Farmers Producers Company Ltd. that has a thousand farmers as shareholders is proudly mentioned by its chairman G. Radha, a retired teacher, who is now a farmer. “The Agriculture

Department and the NAF are constantly guiding us. From a company that sold fertilizers and seeds, we have now grown to procure black gram from farmers. They have been providing training to us and guiding us at every step,” he said.

S.S. Rajasekar, son of C. Subramanian and the managing trustee of the NAF, says his father wanted a second revolution where the farmers must benefit and get profits. “He termed the first Green Revolution as ‘Seed to Grain’ and the second, as ‘Soil to Market.’ He started the foundation in 2000 January, but passed away in November the same year,” he said.

From there it covers all aspects of farming, right from seed-sowing methods and implements used by farmers to limiting the use of fertilizers, explained Mr. Rajasekar.

Farmers set to derive benefit of cut in fertilizer costs

Farmers in the district have been instructed to derive utility of the cut effected in fertiliser prices from the start of this month and the leverage to judicious utilisation of fertilizers based on recommendations made in soil health cards.

Be it private entities or Primary Agricultural Cooperative Credit Societies, fertilizers have to be sold only at reduced prices to avoid inviting action under Fertiliser Control Order, District Collector S. Prabakar said in a press release.

Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited, Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited, Indian Potash Limited, Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers Limited, The Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Limited, Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation Limited, and Mangalore Chemicals and Fertilisers Ltd., have, on their part, complied with the Government instruction.

Order

As per the government order, a 50-kg bag of DAP (Diammonium Phosphate) sold by IFFCO will cost Rs. 1,100 instead of Rs. 1185. The chemical sold by Keripco has been reduced to 1135 from 1210 earlier. Likewise, IPL Potash will be sold for Rs. 200 lesser at Rs. 550 for a 50-kg bag, and potash sold by MCFL will cost Rs. 550 instead of Rs. 825, the release said.

Apt usage of fertiliser will not only cut down costs and reduce pest attack, but also enhance crop productivity. Farmers could obtain soil health cards, based on

which recommendations for fertilizer usage are provided, from the respective revenue villages, the press release said.

Drop in groundnut yield

Farmers get five to six bags as against 10 to 12 bags of the produce



DROP:A farmer near Puliyancholai showing poor growth of groundnut.—
Photo: M. Srinath

Groundnut farmers across the district in general and Thuraiyur and Uppilliyapuram blocks in particular are facing a loss due to fall in yield this season due to scanty rainfall.

They say that they did not expect such a fall this season, although they had taken all steps for proper growth of the plant. M. Rajagopal, one of the farmers of Thangampatti Pudhur near Puliyancholai in Thuraiyur block, said that he had raised the groundnut in the Chithrai pattam on about an acre. He could harvest just five to six bags of the produce as against 10 to 12 bags.

Even the size of the groundnut was far below the normal. He said that sudden fall in water table during the summer particularly during the flowering season had resulted in the poor yield. About nine per cent of the groundnut harvested this season will fetch only poor revenue, says M. Chandrasekaran, another farmer of Vadakkipatti village.

Agriculture Department officials say that Thuraiyur and Uppliyapuram had registered poor rainfall during this summer. However, they hoped that the yield would be more during the next pattam when the district was expected to get adequate rainfall.

They said that more than the Chithrai pattam, the Thai pattam was more suitable for raising groundnut.

The department has been guiding farmers towards mechanical planting of groundnut seeds which would not only bring down the cost of cultivation, particularly wages of labourers, but also ensure higher rate of germination, an official said on Tuesday explaining the special campaign being organised to sensitise farmers to this scheme.

A new variety 'GPPD 4' is being popularised among the farmers.

The duration of the crop is 130 days and per hectare yield would be one tonne in rain-fed areas and 1.5 tonnes in irrigated fields. The source said that the groundnut grown during the 'Chitrai' pattam was more prone for some pest attack and, obviously, involve more expenditure to the farmers.

'Krishippura' opened

Assistant Director of Agriculture Sheela A.G. inaugurated the Krishippura, organic manure store and nursery set up by Niravu Vengeri, here on Wednesday.

The Krishippura that was set up with NABARD aid supplies saplings, seeds, organic pesticides, manure and grow bags. There will also be classes for organic farmers. Corporation Councillor U. Rajani made the first sale of saplings.

Minister calls for self-sufficiency in food production

The State has accorded priority to achieving self-sufficiency in food production, Revenue Minister E. Chandrasekharan has said.

The government has decided to implement various projects, including use of barren land, to boost paddy cultivation, he said, inaugurating a Farmers Day function hosted by the Agriculture Department at Kanhangad on Wednesday.

He called upon farmers to make concerted efforts to boost vegetable and fruit production to attain self-sufficiency in food production.

Fair price

“The government wants to ensure fair price for agricultural produce,” he said. The Minister honoured senior farmers at the function.

Students get farm tips on Farmer Day



Students attend an orientation programme in farming at Kerala Agricultural University, Mannuthy, on Wednesday.

Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) celebrated this year’s Farmers Day with a different set of stakeholders. Those who attended the orientation and training in agricultural practices on Wednesday were students from different schools, and the trainers included farm scientists and farmers.

The orientation began with an interaction with KAU Vice Chancellor P. Rajendran, who inaugurated the event. The Vice Chancellor, explaining the nuances of plant science and food chain in simplest terms, recalled his student days when they were close with nature and used to involve in farming.

Food security

Director of Extension S. Estelita, in her presidential address, said that youngsters had wooed to farming and farm science so as to ensure food and nutritional security to future generations.

The schoolchildren were imparted lessons in pulses cultivation, preparation of delicacies with pulse varieties and hands on training in grafting.

Cotton yield is expected to rise this season

Even as the area under cotton has come down this kharif season, the production in the key cotton growing States could still be higher during the 2016-17 marketing season than in 2015-16.

This is because of better yields expected in good weather, officials told *The Hindu* .

In North India, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan are the major cotton-producing States. After the genetically modified cotton crop suffered a huge damage last year in Punjab and Haryana from the whitefly pest attack, farmers have cut down on area under cotton this season.

Sowing area

According to the India Cotton Association Limited (ICAL), cotton has been sown on 2.56 lakh hectares in Punjab and on 4.96 lakh hectares in Haryana.

In Rajasthan, the crop has been planted on five lakh hectares.

“No doubt, cotton area has dipped this year. But conducive weather conditions this season will increase the yield; hence, the production during the 2016-17 season in the northern States is likely to be higher than that in 2015-16,” said ICAL president Rakesh Rathi.

Cardamom price shows signs of surge

The price of cardamom reached Rs.1,402 per kilogram at the auction held at the Spices Park, Puttady, here on Wednesday.

The price, which had been on the decline for the past four years after hitting the Rs.2,000 per kg mark in 2012, is showing signs of surge this season mainly because of fall in production. The maximum price at the auction held by the Vandanmedu Green Gold Cardamom Producer Company Ltd. was Rs.1,402 per kg with the average price quoted being Rs.1,035 per kg. The total quantity sold

was 4,439 kg, said an official at the Spices Park, adding that the cardamom arrival was below average when compared to last year.

However, he said that since it was only the beginning of the harvest season, the production level could not be pre-judged. The prices were showing an upward trend and on Tuesday, it reached Rs.1,348 with the average price pegged at Rs.972 per kg.

For over a month, prices were on the upswing. There was also simultaneous rise in prices in the open market. A cardamom dealer at Kattappana on Wednesday said that retail prices ranged between Rs.1,100 and 1,150 per kg.

The delay in arrival was stated to be the reason for the rise in price, he said. The produce of this season was yet to reach the market. By September, the newly harvested produce will start arriving at the auction centres. The prices hit rock bottom of Rs.550 per kg in the open market during the beginning of the last harvesting season.

Binoy Thomas, a cardamom farmer at Nedumkandam, said that the drop in the production was due to unfavourable climatic conditions. There was a shortage of summer rainfall resulting in withering of cardamom plants. The atmospheric temperature was also not favourable, which affected the flowering of the plants. The unexpected winds also destroyed cardamom plants in large areas resulting in poor production, he said.

Farmers also said that this season's produce was of poor quality and that would affect the prices. They say that cardamom beans were small and would weigh less.

Farmers have not benefited from the current price rise as it happened between the end of a harvesting season and the beginning of a new season. All most all them sold their produce last season as the prices were on the decline. Moreover, they cannot store cardamom for long as it would affect the quality.

Price touches

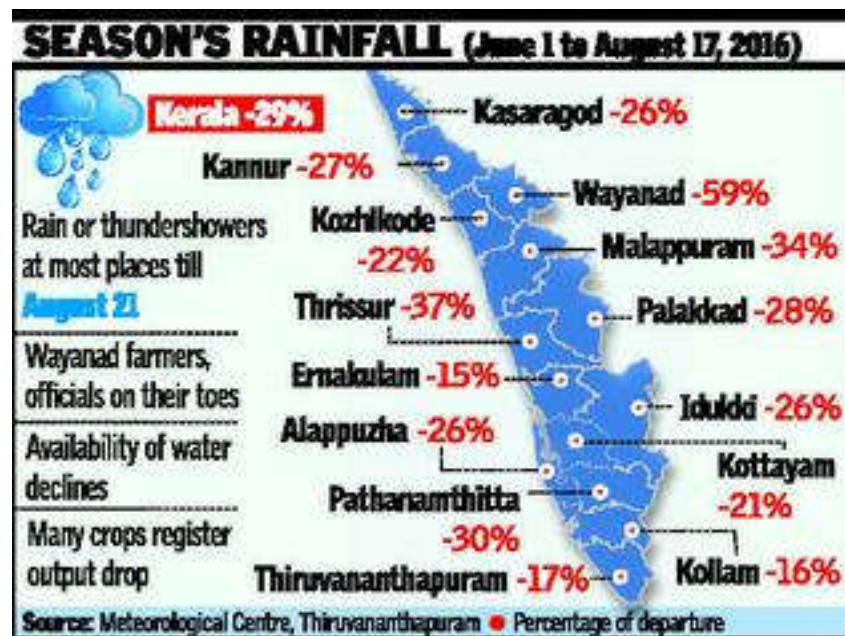
Rs.1,402 a kg after

a four-year slump, hitting a bottom

of Rs.550

Kerala registers 29% deficiency in rainfall

State receives only 1,166.7 mm of monsoon rainfall from June 1 to August 17



Kerala registered a deficiency of 29 per cent in monsoon rainfall over the period from June 1 to August 17, with Wayanad district recording the highest deficiency of 59 per cent.

The State registered only 1,166.7 mm of rainfall over the period, against a normal of 1,634.7 mm. Alappuzha, Kottayam, Kannur, Idukki, Kozhikode, Kasaragod, Malappuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Wayanad, and Palakad were rainfall deficient (-20% to -59%) while Ernakulam, Kollam, and Thiruvananthapuram registered normal rainfall (+19% to -19%), according to the season's rainfall data released by the India Meteorology Department.

Kasaragod district received 1,860.6 mm of rainfall during the season, the highest quantum in the State, while Thiruvananthapuram received the lowest quantum of 538.5 mm.

Southwest monsoon

The southwest monsoon remained weak over Kerala on Wednesday.

The Met Centre here has forecast rain or thundershowers at most places in Kerala till August 21.

Skymet Weather has predicted subdued rainfall activity over Kerala, with only a few areas receiving light to moderate rain.

A concern

Meanwhile, the rainfall deficiency in Wayanad, a district bordering the Western Ghats, is keeping farmers and officials of the district administration on their toes, as availability of water declines and many crops register a drop in output.

Wayanad registered 895.8 mm of rainfall since June 1, against a normal of 2,187.8 mm. The decreasing rainfall trend in the district has emerged as an area of concern for environmentalists as well who are worried over its impact on wildlife and biodiversity.

Capacity-building programme on August 24

The College of Horticulture, Mysuru, is organising 'Tomato capacity-building programme – interaction – exhibition' on August 24 for tomato growers, extension personnel and NGO representatives on its premises at Yalachahalli Horticulture Farm, Yelwal, near here.

Experienced growers and scientists will be taking part in the programme being organised by the Horticulture Extension Education Unit of the college.

For registration, call 7829500130, 9945832499, 8904790461 or 9880445913.

Farmers can bring pest/disease-affected plant specimens and get diagnosis based advisories from the experts at the unit, said Harish B.S., extension leader, Horticulture Extension Education Unit, College of Horticulture, Mysuru, in a statement here.

Customised advice will be provided to each farmer, he said.

Issues being sorted out: Horticorp MD

Ranjan S. Karippai, the new Managing Director of the Horticorp, told *The Hindu* that issues on the lack of quality of the vegetables supplied in some cases have come to his notice.

“Recently, I had conducted a meeting with the representatives of the vendors and they had brought this and other issues to my attention. We need some time to sort out the issues of the delay in supply.

Our first priority will be the farmers. We will ensure that all their produce will be procured. The vegetables that the farmers here do not produce, we will buy from outside. We have also given instruction to the centres like Anayara world market to have proper sorting and grading of vegetables to ensure that quality goods reach the customers,” he said.

On the issue of low commission amounts given to the vendors, he said that an increase in this commission will be considered if the shops improve their performance.

Tobacco Board pegs crop size at 130 million kg

The Tobacco Board has pegged the crop size for Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco for Andhra Pradesh for the year 2016-17 at 130 million kg, 10 million kg more than that of last year.

The board has taken the decision after taking into consideration the gloomy situation in the global market, carryover stock, declining demand in domestic market and growers’ demand for assuring remunerative prices for the produce. The decision to peg the crop size was taken at the 142nd board meeting chaired by Manoj Kumar Dwivedi in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

In another major decision, tobacco trader and member Balineni Seethaiah has been elected vice-chairman of the Tobacco Board for a period of six months from October 2016 to March 2017 as Gadde Seshagiri Rao’s tenure would end in September 2016.

Sale of vegetable, fruit seedlings by KVK

The ICAR-Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Ernakulam) is conducting a seedling sales mela on the premises of CMFRI near the Goshree Road, High Court of Kerala Junction on Thursday and Friday, said a press release here.

The sale will be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The programme is conducted as part of the KVK’s Self Farming for Safe Food programme. Ready-to-plant vegetable seedlings (tomato, brinjal, chilly, okra, cowpea) and fruit seedlings/grrafts

(mango, jack, jamba, rambutan, cherry, guava, sapota, sitaphal) are being sold. Vegetable seedlings are priced Rs. 2 apiece and fruit seedlings/graft price ranges between Rs. 30 and Rs. 350.



Maharashtra must begin water auditing, enforce policy changes soon: Chitale

Chitale, who has been championing the cause of effective water management, has often indicated that the drought-prone districts should ban on sugarcane cultivation and sugarmills as well.



THE STATE government must begin the process of water auditing and take steps to enforce changes in crop patterns to avoid another season of drought in Marathwada and Vidarbha, said water management expert Dr Madhav Chitale.

THE STATE government must begin the process of water auditing and take steps to enforce changes in crop patterns to avoid another season of drought in Marathwada and Vidarbha, said water management expert Dr Madhav Chitale. Speaking to The Indian Express, Chitale said, “The 12-month-high water intensive crop pattern should be replaced with short-term crop cycles.”

Elaborating on his ideas, he said, “There is a myth that sugarcane cultivation brings higher financial returns. But, I would urge farmers to shift to other crops like cereals and oil seeds, which have high demand not only in India but also in the international market.”

Moreover, some cereals are more adaptable and less water-intensive for this climate. Plus, the farmers can earn higher returns by growing seasonal vegetables and fruits as well, he added.

He further said, “Water management cannot overlook the allocations for animals and fodder at the very beginning. Even in the drought-hit Marathwada, dairy development is emerging as a good alternative and will have to be sustained through water and fodder. It has been proved that these sectors will fetch better returns to small and medium level farmers than cane growing.”

Chitale, who has been championing the cause of effective water management, has often indicated that the drought-prone districts should ban on sugarcane cultivation and sugarmills as well. But, out of the 205 sugarmills in the state, 70 are located in the drought-prone districts of Latur and Beed in Marathwada and Solapur in Western Maharashtra.

While stating there cannot be any ambiguity on taking drastic policy decisions, Chitale said agriculture will have to be linked to water availability, both on the surface and underground.

“CM’s Jalyukta Shivar Yojna – has yielded great results. People’s response to the jalyukta shivar has been overwhelming.”

Now that there is water in the region, the government should plan on measures to conserve it. Water management should begin from at multiple levels through scientific methods by September-end.

To fight drought effectively, he said, the government will have to create a mechanism for mapping aquifers to monitor the underground water recharge potential.

Farm mechanisation: Migrant Machines

Combine harvesters have transformed the face of agricultural operations and labour markets in many parts of India. Here's how.



Tadala's itinerant machines work for 1,800-2,000 hours over three paddy harvesting seasons — early-kharif, kharif and rabi — stretching from August 15 to around June 10.

For Varaprasad Babu Tadala, the New Year practically begins on August 15. That's when his combine harvesters — he has four of them — start working paddy fields in large tracts of southern India and even parts of Odisha on a journey lasting almost ten months.

His machines left Kakinada, the port city in Andhra Pradesh's (AP) East Godavari district where he is based, on August 5. One set of these crawler combines — which move on rubber tracks in the fields, while transported by road on regular light commercial vehicles — began harvesting the early-kharif paddy crop in Buchireddipalem and Kovur (Nellore district), and the other in Pagur (Pondicherry). Both happened on Independence Day.

“For the next one-and-a-half months, each machine will operate for 200-250 hours in Pondicherry and the Cauvery Delta areas of Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Kumbakonam and Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu (TN). They will continue to work in Nellore and surrounding rural areas such as Alluru,

Naidupeta and Sullurpeta right through October, doing a total of 450-500 hours by then,” says Tadala (in picture), a mechanical engineering graduate from the Regency Institute of Technology at Yanam, near Kakinada.

But the long march would have barely begun for the 31-year-old’s four ‘Crop Tiger Terra Trac’ combine harvesters manufactured by the €3.8 billion German farm equipment major, Claas, at its facility in Morinda, Punjab. For, the main kharif paddy crop in AP, Telangana and Karnataka is harvested only from November.

Two of Tadala’s combines will then, head from Nellore to Davangere in central Karnataka, where they’d be till the month-end, before moving further northwards to Bellary, Koppal, Raichur and Gulbarga in December.

The other two will go to the coastal Andhra delta belt of Krishna and West and East Godavari, and also the Telangana districts of Nalgonda, Khammam, Warangal, Ranga Reddy, Medak, Karimnagar and Nizamabad. Each machine may do a minimum 500 hours of work in this peak harvesting season till end-December, besides another 120-150 hours during January 1-20 in Nandyal (Kurnool), Prakasam and Guntur.

The next big season is the harvesting of the ‘samba’ paddy crop in TN during February-March, when Tadala’s machines will have business for 200-250 hours, mainly in Kumbakonam, Thanjavur, Pondicherry and Ponneri towards the AP border. From there, they would proceed in separate batches — one via Nellore to West and East Godavari, and the other to Davangere, Bellary, Koppal, Raichur and Gulbarga.

Each combine has work for 450-500 hours in this period through April-May, when the rabi paddy is harvested. A couple of them may even foray into southern Odisha — areas like Jeypore (Koraput), Bhawanipatna (Kalahandi) and Rayagada with significant Telugu-speaking farmer populations — for doing another 100-150 hours.

THEIR MIGRATORY ROUTES

SOUTH PADDY HARVESTS

| SEASON | PERIOD | STATES |
|--------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Early-Kharif | Mid-Aug to Oct | AP, Puducherry, TN |
| Kharif | Nov to mid-Jan | AP, Telangana, Karnataka |
| Samba/Rabi | Feb to early-Jun | TN, AP, Karnataka, Odisha |

CENTRAL & NORTH HARVESTS

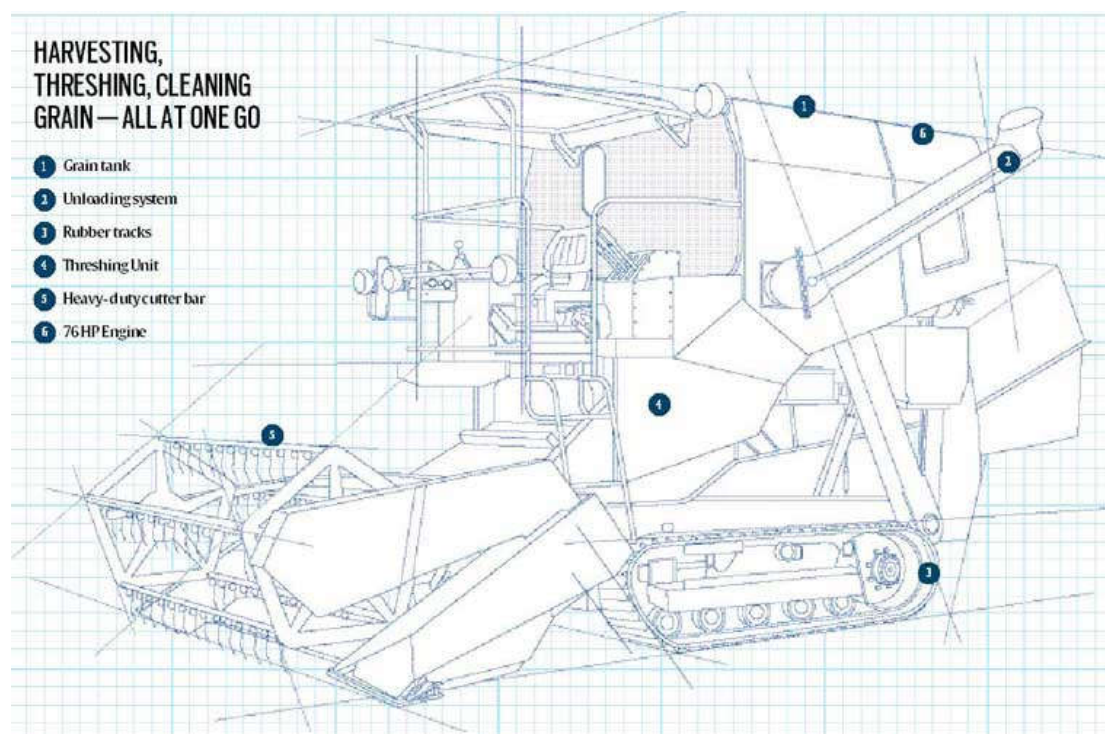
| SEASON | PERIOD | STATES |
|------------------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Kharif (soybean) | Aug-Sep | MP, Maharashtra |
| Kharif (paddy) | Oct-Nov | Punjab, Haryana, UP West & East |
| Rabi (mustard) | Feb | Rajasthan, MP |
| Rabi (wheat) | Mar | Maharashtra, MP, Rajasthan |
| Rabi (wheat) | Apr-May | UP West, Haryana, Punjab |

In all, Tadala's itinerant machines work for 1,800-2,000 hours over three paddy harvesting seasons — early-kharif, kharif and rabi — stretching from August 15 to around June 10.

Dinesh Nain, head (Market Development) at Claas Agricultural Machinery Pvt. Ltd, estimates the total stock of harvester combines in India at 35,000-40,000. Unlike Tadala, most owners have only one or two machines that they move from state to state, providing harvesting services on custom hiring basis to farmers along the way. While predominantly harvesting paddy across multiple seasons in the South, the combines operating in North, West and Central India do a variety of crops.

The northern contractors, largely based in Punjab and Haryana, usually take their combines first to Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Maharashtra in August-September for harvesting soyabean. They, then, travel to Haryana, Punjab and also parts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) during October-November, when the kharif paddy crop is ready for cutting. In the rabi season, the machines head back to Rajasthan and MP to harvest mustard in February, followed by wheat in March covering Maharashtra as well. Harvesting of wheat in western UP, Haryana and Punjab comes after that in April-May.

The combines can be tractor-driven or self-propelled, i.e. having own power source. The self-propelled machines are, in turn, either wheel-type (which move by themselves on roads) or track combines (like the ones owned by Tadala, who lugs them on Ashok Leyland Ecomet 912 and 1112 vehicles). The track or crawler machines are better suited for harvesting in wet and muddy soils and, hence, used mainly in the South where paddy is grown round the year. Elsewhere, nearly all combines are self-propelled wheel-type or tractor-mounted.



Out of the 4,500-5,000 combine harvesters sold annually, wheel-type and tractor-mounted account for 2,000-2,500 and 800-1,000 respectively. Indigenous brands like Kartar, Standard, Dasmesh, Preet and Hira dominate these segments, with the makers largely from the skilled artisan community of Ramgarhia Sikhs.

The multinationals and large corporates like Claas — which alone sells some 1,000 machines — Kubota and Mahindra-Swaraj have a lion's share of the 1,500-odd track machine market.

For the farmer, the main advantage from combines is the huge time (and cost) savings. Harvesting one acre of paddy using sickles typically involves about

five men working for eight hours and being paid Rs 500 each. Moreover, the harvested material has to be sundried for 5-6 days before being threshed, for separating the grain from the straw. Labour is again required for collecting the bundles and taking to the threshing machine, which itself takes two hours to cover an acre's produce.

The combine, on the other hand, can harvest, thresh and clean an acre of paddy all in one go in 50-60 minutes. Tadala charges between Rs 1,600 and Rs 1,800 for an acre during August-September, which may go to Rs 2,000-2,500 in the peak November-December season.

According to Nain, 50-60 per cent of the paddy in Punjab-Haryana and 70-80 per cent in the Cauveri and Krishna-Godavari delta regions of TN and AP is now combine-harvested. That ratio could be 85-90 per cent for wheat in Punjab and Haryana. "It is a function of both labour availability and landholding size. Deploying combines gets difficult when holdings are too small and fragmented," he points out.

What about the economics of combines from the owner's perspective? A track combine harvester costs Rs 24 lakh, which, together with a second-hand transport vehicle, might entail an investment of Rs 30 lakh. If it were to work, say, for 1,700 hours over eight months at an average Rs 1800/hour rate, the gross annual revenue would be Rs 30.60 lakh.

But then, there are costs, too, starting with diesel. At 10 litres per hour consumption and Rs 58/litre, that would be Rs 9.86 lakh for 1,700 hours.

Also, the truck carrying the machine itself travels some 6,000 km on road, which would consume another 1,000 litres at 6 km/litre and cost Rs 58,000.

The second major cost head is salaries and daily allowances for four men: a main combine operator, a standby, a helper (who does cleaning and other sundry tasks), and the vehicle driver. That, over eight months, would work out to roughly Rs 5 lakh.

In addition, there is outgo on maintenance.

The bearings, V-belt, sheet metal, blades and other parts suffer wear and tear, the cost of which can be taken at Rs 100/hour or Rs 1.7 lakh.

The rubber tracks, too, need replacement every two years, costing Rs 4 lakh or Rs 2 lakh per year.

Adding all other operational expenses, including on engine, hydraulic and gear oil, takes the total closer to Rs 20 lakh.

“In the initial four years or so, you also pay interest. Once that is taken care of, the operator can expect to make reasonable profits over the remaining four years of the machine.

He can also invest these in new combines,” notes Tadala, who bought his first machine in 2005 and the second a year later.

In 2007-08, he acquired two more, following these with one each in 2014 and 2015.

In the meantime, Tadala also disposed of the original combines purchased in 2005 and 2006.

But at the end of the day, this is also a business involving lot of hard work — not to speak of tensions from having to deal with police and regional transport office authorities along the way!

Karnataka government warns of another year of dry spell in state

Karnataka last year witnessed its "worst" drought in recent times and the government had already declared 137 taluks as 'drought hit'.



Drought. (Representational image)

Faced with deficit of rainfall and low water level in most reservoirs, Karnataka government on wednesday warned about another year of dry spell in the state. “We have discussed about the rainfall in the state so far in the Cabinet, even meteorological department predictions are not favourable. There are chances, we may face a situation that is worse than last year,” Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T B Jayachandra said.

Speaking to reporters after a Cabinet meeting, he said, “We have to take precautionary measures, water in reservoirs should be used for drinking purpose only, and water should be provided for standing crops only if there is severe necessity. “During Irrigation Consultative Committee meeting farmers and general public should be made aware of the water crisis that may occur on lesser prospects of good rains.”

Karnataka last year witnessed its “worst” drought in recent times and the government had already declared 137 taluks as “drought hit”. Pointing out to drinking water shortage, Jayachandra said “water level in almost all the reservoirs in the state other than Narayanapura and Almatti are low”. Narayanapura and Almatti reservoirs are full because of good rains in Maharashtra, other than that none of the catchment areas whether it is Cauvery or Krishna got good rains.

×

“Though in Harangi reservoir there is adequate water, but the overall situations is not good.” Government had last week said overall rainfall in the state till first week of August has been 503 mm against normal rainfall of 537mm, which is about six per cent less. Warning of drinking water crisis, he also advised farmers to consider water and rain situation before they go for cropping. Various cabinet committees like the one drinking water among others have been asked to meet and review the situation and take necessary steps.


Karnataka cabinet has also cleared entrusting the work of re-circulation of water at world famous Jog falls to create all season water falls to M/s BRS Ventures Abudhabi. Jayachandra said, “We had called for expression of interest for this work, only one company that had come forward was BRS Ventures of B R Shetty.” Noting that government has no financial commitment in this project, he said “B R Shetty is investing in to the project because of the personal attachment that he has towards Jog falls.”

According to their project report, they will be investing about Rs 450 crore, he had made this expression even during Investors Meet. “In return BRS Ventures has stated that it will fix a nominal entry fee in consultation with the Jog Management Authority who will be the final deciding authority on this fee fixation, he added.

Pointing out that the project will need various clearances like forest, environment and others, Jayachandra also clarified that it has been clearly told to them that there can be no deviation from the project report or any changes in the name of the falls.

Guarded optimism on maize, despite rise in acreage

| Strong Surge: Kharif Maize Acreage | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| | (Area in lakh ha) | | |
| | This Year | Last Year | Normal Area |
| Bihar | 4.30 | 4.16 | 2.62 |
| Gujarat | 3.17 | 2.93 | 3.63 |
| Jharkhand | 2.75 | 2.62 | 2.35 |
| Karnataka | 12.01 | 9.07 | 11.93 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 12.46 | 10.87 | 9.08 |
| Maharashtra | 8.82 | 7.15 | 7.41 |
| Rajasthan | 9.61 | 8.46 | 9.94 |
| Telangana | 5.51 | 3.95 | 4.62 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 7.81 | 8.00 | 7.06 |
| All India | 81.29 | 71.52 | 73.50 |



Forecast of extended monsoon, a cause for concern

As acreages under maize scale a new high this kharif season aided by ample rains, the prospects of a good harvest have turned brighter this year.

However, the predictions of excess rains in September by the Met could possibly dent the output and quality of the produce, experts and traders said.

Farmers across the country, lured by the relatively higher prices ahead of the kharif planting season, have sown an additional area of close to one million hectares (see table) under maize or corn this year, while the late planting was still going on in some areas.

States such as Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh have clocked an increase in area over last year.

Both trade and agri-experts are unanimous that the crop size will be bigger than last year, but it was too early to fix a size.

The USDA has projected that India's total corn output including kharif and rabi would expand by 2 million tonnes (mt) this year to around 23 mt.

The USDA has pegged India's kharif corn output this year at 15.5 mt. Corn is the third largest cereal being grown in India after rice and wheat.

“The crop this kharif will be definitely bigger than the last two years on better rains. But, how good it turns up is a question mark as it would all depend on the weather in September,” said Siraj Chaudhary, Chairman, Cargill India, which operates a large corn processing plant in Karnataka.

Weather plays truant

The IMD has forecast surplus rainfall for August-September with the precipitation expected to be 107 per cent of the long period average of 43.5 cm for these two months. In fact, the global models have predicted that September could be the wettest this monsoon.

“The sentiment is of higher production for corn on increase in acreages,” said Tejinder Narang, a grains trade analyst. But the actual production would depend on various factors, including the weather in the months ahead.

In last kharif, the maize production, according to the Agriculture, Ministry stood at 15.50 million tonnes — nine per cent lower than previous year's 17.01 mt.

Net imports

From a net exporter, India had turned a net importer of corn this year on decline in domestic output and rising consumption.

So far, the imports into the country this year were estimated at around two lakh tonnes.

“Though India is headed for a bumper crop, its re-entry into the world corn market would largely depend on the parity in prices,” said Rajiv Yadav, Vice-President, COFCO Agri.

Less risk crop

“However, the domestic consumers — the poultry feed and starch makers — will have a good time in the year ahead. Also the forecast of an extended monsoon this year could possibly raise some issues on the quality front,” Yadav added.

The climate is positive for maize and over the last two years, farmers have got good returns from corn, which has forced them to plant more this year, a trader in Delhi said.

“It is a relatively easy crop and the risk factors are less compared to others,” a trader said.

Corn prices, which moved up from the levels of 1,300 a quintal in April to around 1,700 in July, have eased a bit in recent days.

Trade expects the prices to stay volatile ahead of the harvest that’s expected to commence in September.

Sain Dass, former director of Directorate of Maize Research under ICAR, said the good rains has helped farmers shift to maize from crops such as cotton and sugarcane.

Acreage under hybrids

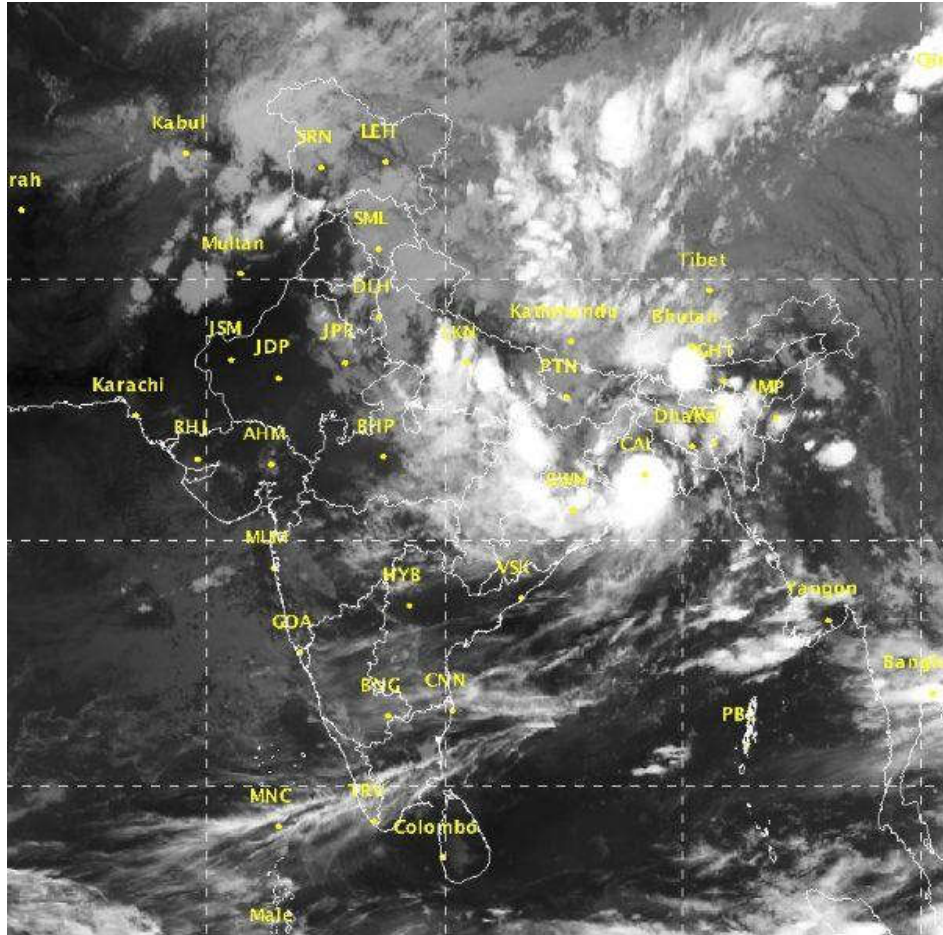
Dass felt that the widespread rains this year could have driven up the acreage under the hybrids by around 10 per cent. It is estimated that the area under maize hybrids could be around 50-60 per cent of the total acreages.

“If everything goes well, there could be a 7-8 per cent increase in kharif yields on increasing area under hybrids and better rains,” Dass said. Kharif yields of maize have been less than two tonnes per hectare.

The sowing is still on in some States including Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Haryana and Bihar and the overall acreage could be higher than 8.1 million hectares, Dass added.

He also admitted that rains during the September may pose a challenge.

Deep depression drenches East, set to cross Bengal coast



A monsoon depression in the Bay of Bengal has intensified into a deep depression on Wednesday and forecasts indicated that it would cross coast near Digha in West Bengal in the night.

The India Met Department has warned of squally winds of speeds reaching 50-60 km/hr gusting to 70 km/hr along the West Bengal and North Odisha coasts until Thursday evening. Fishermen have been advised against venturing out into the sea during this period.

‘Vigorous’ monsoon

The monsoon has been in a ‘vigorous’ phase over Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, East Madhya Pradesh and Odisha during the 24 hours ending Wednesday morning.

It was for the second consecutive time that a deep depression, only a step below the rank of a cyclone, materialised in the Bay ramping up monsoon conditions over East and North-East India.

It also indicated strong monsoon conditions prevailing in the larger trough covering the northern parts of India, contiguous Indochina and South-East Asia.

Successor ‘low’ soon

This trough spanned the expanse of the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea and adjoining North-West Pacific fuelling storms/cyclones/typhoons one after the other during the past week or so.

The Bay has been able to share the spoils of the enhanced monsoon thanks to the ‘connect’ with the sea/ocean bodies that lie upstream to its east and north-east.

The deep depression has been generated ahead of a storm building in the South China Sea and the IMD expects a successor low-pressure area to develop in the Bay by Saturday.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts sees another likely ‘low’ being generated in the Bay before the month-end.

Left ‘high and dry’

There was no indication of any meaningful rains being generated over the South Peninsula even as successive low-pressure areas/depressions have flooded parts of North and East India.

The Application Laboratory of Jamstec, the Japanese national forecaster, has hinted that most parts of the South Peninsula could hope to get good showers during September.

Festival demand lifts coconut oil



After lying low for more than a year, coconut oil market seems to be on the boil again, thanks to a firm export as well as Onam festival demand.

Coconut oil prices started moving northwards touching 8,800 a quintal in Kerala and 8,950 in Tamil Nadu this week. Copra prices also moved up at 6,010/quintal and 5,950 respectively.

According to Prakash Rao, Director, Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA), the market is in upward trend from the recent price crash. The recovery from lower levels is primarily due to the upcoming festival season and the accumulation of used stocks by major stockists and corporates.

With international prices of coconut oil now tangible with Indian prices, the market is witnessing a firm export demand, especially from the US, Europe, said PV Alexander, another Director of COMA.

This is evident from the increase in export prices of coconut oil, which fetched \$1,550 per tonne last week compared to \$1,300 in February-March.

Volume dips at Coonoor tea sale



For Sale No: 33 of the auction of Coonoor Tea Trade Association to be held on Thursday and Friday, a volume of 11.71 lakh kg has been catalogued. This is as much as 3.73 lakh kg less than last week's offer.

Of this, 8.13 lakh kg belongs to leaf grades and 3.58 lakh kg, dust grade. As much as 10.55 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 1.16 lakh kg, orthodox variety. In the leaf counter, only 72,000 kg belongs to orthodox while 7.41 lakh kg, CTC.

Among the dusts, only 44,000 kg belongs to orthodox while 3.14 lakh kg, CTC. Quotations held by brokers last week indicated bids ranging 74-76 a kg for plain leaf grades and 100-145 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged 79- 84 for plain dusts and 110-150 for brighter liquoring dusts.

AP tobacco crop size fixed at 130 million kgs

The Guntur-based Tobacco Board which met in Hyderabad on Wednesday fixed the crop size for Andhra Pradesh for 2016-17 crop year at 130 million kgs based on the indents given by the tobacco trade, according to a press release.

The main agenda of the board meeting was the fixation of the crop size for 2016-17 Andhra Pradesh crop season. The board, after detailed discussions and taking into consideration the gloomy situation in the world's market, carryover stocks, declining demand for tobacco in domestic markets, growers' demands for assuring remunerative prices for their produce, decided to fix a crop size of 130 million kgs, adds the release. Last year 2015-16, the crop size was fixed at 120 million kgs.

Balineni Seethaiah, the board Member, was elected at the meeting to take up the post of the vice-chairman of the Tobacco Board for 6 months from October 2016 to March 2017 since Gadde Seshagiri Rao's tenure ends in September 2016.

Farmers' consortium objects to Centre's seed licensing guidelines

Raising their objection on the Centre's seed licensing guidelines, a consortium of seven leading national farmer organisations under the aegis of Rashtriya Progressive Kisan Association (RPKA) on Wednesday submitted a petition demanding immediate roll-back of the draft Guidelines and format for GM technology agreements.

The draft guidelines were issued by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare in May 2016.

The petition opposing the guidelines was signed by over 325,000 farmers representing the demands from farmers of 23 States of the country.

Farmer leaders of RKPA met DS Misra, Deputy Commissioner (QC), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Ramesh Chand, Member-Agriculture, NITI Aayog.

The farmers' team will now meet Radha Mohan Singh, Union Agriculture Minister and Anil Madhav Dave, Environment Minister, besides other top authorities.

If India needs to assure its citizens of sustainable food security and low food inflation, it needs to help farmers by allowing R&D of seeds for both, cash and food crops both by public and private technology providers, they said.

In support of farmers, Renu Devi, National Vice-President, Bhartiya Janata Party, said, "States like Bihar and Orissa are with significant opportunities and can become big seed suppliers if agri-business is well taken care of. Innovation is the key here but the current state of affairs is quite unfortunate. We appeal the government to look into the matter and create a policy which will help poor farmers in the long run."

The petitioners have also implored the government to not get swayed by the 'anti-technology' lobby and ensure timely approvals for commercialisation of new varieties of crops.

Raghupati Singh, National Coordinator, Rashtriya Kisan Progressive Association, said, "Farmers realised that the draft licensing guidelines is regressive and anti-farmer. If implemented, it will lead to complete halt in the availability of new technologies."

Gunni Prakash, President — Haryana & Punjab, All India Kisan Coordination Committee, further added, "Restricting the free flow and sale of appropriate technologies threatens this fragile ecosystem that has the potential to create another 50 million jobs by 2025. We are therefore hopeful that the government announces a roll-back of this arbitrary and ill-conceived price regulation."

Business Standard

Jeera up 0.7% on pick up in demand

Spice for delivery in September contracts edged higher by Rs 80, or 0.44%



Jeera prices rose 0.75% to Rs 18,160 per quintal in futures trading on Wednesday as participants raised their bets, tracking a firm trend at spot market on rising domestic as well as exports demand.

Further, tight stocks position following lower supply from the producing belts too fuelled the uptrend.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, jeera for delivery in August contracts rose by Rs 135 or 0.75%, to Rs 18,160 per quintal with an open interest of 273 lots.

On similar lines, the spice for delivery in September contracts edged higher by Rs 80, or 0.44%, to Rs 18,285 per quintal in 20,802 lots.

Analysts said increasing of positions by traders on the back of pick up in demand in the spot market amid restricted supplies from producing regions mainly led to the rise in jeera prices at futures trade.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Government to set up international seed bank: Agriculture minister



Agriculture minister V S Sunilkumar said that the LDF government would set up an international level seed bank in the state to conserve the fast extincting varieties of paddy seeds.

Inaugurating the farmers' day observance programme organized by the corporation and agriculture department, the minister said that the government would observe this year as the 'paddy year' with an aim to promote paddy cultivation across the state.

"Arrangements to disburse the paddy procurement prices to paddy farmers without any delay will be done in the future with the help of cooperative banks," said the minister adding that interest free loans would be provided for vegetable cultivation.

"As many as 3,500 HortiCorp outlets will be started across the state to promote the produce of local farmers. Irrigation mapping to identify the existing ponds, canals, water streams etc, has been carried out by the irrigation department to conserve the wet lands and water resources," said Sunilkumar.

The minister also said that the best farmer from scheduled tribes section would also be given a special agriculture award starting next year.

Awards for the best integrated farmer, female farmer, organic farmer and student farmer were distributed during the event. The best school and PTA to take up farming initiatives were also rewarded.

Techie turns farmer, reaps profit by growing lemons



Although Udupi's climate is not the most conducive for the cultivation of lemons, a 39-year-old engineer-turned farmer, who took to growing lemons out of curiosity five years ago, has managed to reap a handsome profit from growing the citrus fruit.

Sudeesh Shetty, a BE graduate from the University of Visvesvaraya College of Engineering, Bengaluru, has worked with software giants such as Infosys and Wipro, but finds the agrarian life more interesting.

"I have been working in the fields for the past five years. Initially, I worked at the farm part-time but I now dedicate most of my time to agriculture. My parents were into small scale agriculture. I have grown lemons on two acres of land. Each plant yielded 50 lemons in the first year, but the quantity increased to 350-400 lemons by the third year. I love the lifestyle here and intend to continue it," he said.

Explaining how he came to undertake cultivation of lemons, Sudeesh said, "My parents - Sham Shetty and Vasanthi - did not try growing paddy since getting labourers was difficult. Lemon is one the best cash crops and it generates revenue every week, which makes managing money easy. The season lasts for three months, from May till July. Vegetables and dairy products give crop continuously while coconut, arecanut and rubber do not."

The profit generated by each plant rises to Rs 3000 to Rs 5000, per week during season months, against Rs 500 per, in the other months. "Lemons are in demand across seasons. While the price increases to Rs 3 in the summer, it is Rs 1 during others," he added.

Of the 22 acres of land that we have, oil palm is being grown on nine, four acres each for coconut and arecanut, while lemon is being cultivated on two acres, he said,

"Lemon plant contracts very few diseases and needs only unskilled labour. Family members undertake harvest and other work. The plants too have a stress period, like summer after which, they start flowering. In Udupi, the climate of from March to October. Yield will be six months late because November is a stress month. If the yield is proper, we can make a profit of Rs 1-1.5 lakh and the income is continuous," Sudeesh added.

The quality is sustained genetically. Many people visit the farm and I suggest buying plants from reliable nurseries. Specialised nurseries will give you the best plants, along with technical advice, Sudessh pointed out.

Farmers to start agitation over release of water for crops



If the government fails to resolve the Cauvery issue at the earliest, tourist inflow for the forthcoming Dasara festival is likely to be affected.

A federation of farmers' organizations, in association with the State Sugarcane Farmers' Association, threatened to take over the CADA office if the government failed to take back its decision not to release water for paddy and sugarcane cultivation in the Cauvery basin. Farmers were directed to try semi-dry crops due to a poor monsoon this year.

While the state government said it is not in a position to release water to Tamil Nadu, as stipulated by the final award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, farmers are also seeking water for irrigation. Though the government said it would release water for the kharif crop, it is now advising agriculturalists to go for crops that consume less water. Farmers under the banner of Federation of Farmers' Organization and State Sugarcane Growers' Association are upset with the move and laid siege to the Cauvery Command Area Development Authority (CADA) on Tuesday. It set August 18 as the deadline for the government to reconsider its decision.

In view of the state government's decision not to release water for crops owing to poor storage in major reservoirs of the region, the government has given instructions to all district agricultural departments to promote alternatives to paddy and sugarcane in areas where agriculture is supported by the canal irrigation system. Most of the farmers who cultivate paddy have already

completed sowing. The cumulative rainfall in Mysuru district is 350.02mm against the average rainfall of 454.2mm for the period January to August 10.

Kurubur Shanthakumar, president of the State Sugarcane Growers' Association said, "To avail of loans, farmers have already pledged their land, gold and other valuables. Farmers, especially in the Kabini catchment area, have been growing paddy since 1982. Even when there was severe water shortage in 2002, the government released water to grow paddy and sugarcane but now the government is posing a lot of problems to farmers. Many farmers have spent lakhs of rupees and sown paddy and sugarcane.

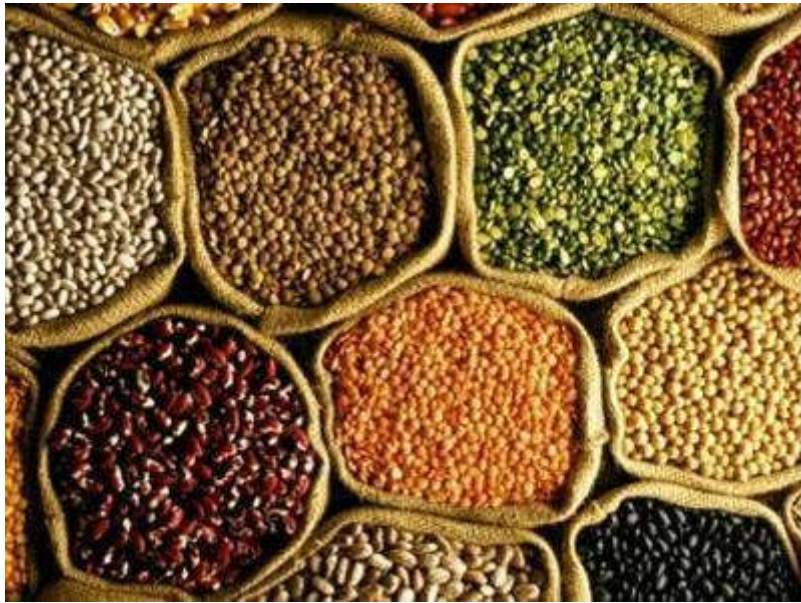
In Mysuru and Mandya alone, sugarcane is grown on 25,000 acres of land while more than 1 lakh people have grown paddy in more than 1.20 lakh acres. Keeping all this in mind, the government should reconsider its decision, which is unscientific. Last year in Mysuru district alone, 118 farmers committed suicide due to debt. If the government fails to reconsider its decision, farmers who have taken loans for cultivation of paddy and sugarcane will be put to more risk."

He also mentioned that when farmers in the state are facing severe water scarcity, there is no logic in giving water to Tamil Nadu.

"Every day, they are giving 1tmcft water to Tamil Nadu. For the past 25 days, they have given nearly 25tmcft water. To protect the interest of farmers, they should stop releasing water to Tamil Nadu, and if this is done, in just ten days most of the dams in the state will be filled.

We will wait till August 18, if the government fails to reconsider its decision, more than 10,000 farmers will take over the CADA office from August 19 and until the government reconsiders its decision, a makeshift kitchen will be set up at the CADA office and start an indefinite protest," he pointed out.

Deficient monsoon may force farmers to go for pulses, millets



Pulse and millet production in the district may increase next year, if the North-East monsoon also fails like the South-West monsoon. The district has received only 36% of the rainfall expected during the SW monsoon, forcing farmers to start considering short-term rainfed crops if the NE monsoon also fails. However, the situation might be advantageous, considering the skyrocketing pulse prices.

The district has received only 58mm of rain, against the expected 160mm since June. Though September is when a majority of the rainfall is from the SW monsoon, hopes of reaching the expected rainfall are low.

"We had expected the rainfall to fall short by about 19% compared to the 210mm received last year, but this deficit is more than expected," admitted the director of the Agro Climate Research Station at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Dr S Paneerselvam.

With ground water levels and borewells touching an alarming low level, farmers cultivating traditional crops like paddy, banana and sugarcane have now begun looking for other options. "Usually, when the rainfall is poor, the NE monsoon has not been much better," said an organic farmer based in Arasur, G Ramasamy.

"So if that is also deficit, all our banana plantations will dry up by next May. Many of us have seriously been thinking about switching to maize or pulses, considering the good prices we are likely to get," he said.

Though pulses are cultivated across 12,000 hectares in the district, a majority of farmers new to the crop hesitate to try it because of a relatively low yield. Pulses traditionally give between 1 to 1.25 tonnes per hectare. However, sky rocketing prices of the crop is making many paddy, sugarcane and banana farmers to consider switching.

While tur dal is retailing for 130 per kg, whole sale cost of gram dal is 150 per kg. The high prices are because of the drought and low yield across the 2 lakh hectars of pulses cultivated in Karnataka over the past two years.

However, with many farmers in Maharashtra now beginning to get into or increase their pulse cultivation, Coimbatore farmers are closely following the trend. "If we get a good price like 70 to 90 per kg, we will make good profit. Besides, they are usually 120 day crops which don't require that much water," said K Marappan, another farmer in Arasur.

"We will sow in October and reap by January-end, so the NE monsoon will supply the water and if needed, we can resort to irrigation," he said.

The government is banking on increased production this year to bring down pulse prices by 20% to 30% at least.

Tobacco crop size fixed at 130 mkg for the season 2016-17

Ensuring that the global market has eased, the Tobacco Board has increased the crop size for the 2016-17 season in the state by 10 million kg. Even as prices in the local market have improved marginally, the board took note of the gloomy situation in the global market into account as it slightly increased the crop size. The board has fixed the crop size at 130 million kg for the coming season which was 120 mkg last year. The crop size was fixed at the board's governing body meeting held in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

Board in-charge chairman Manoj Kumar Dwivedi chaired the session during which the officials held negotiations with the representatives of farmers as well as the trade before arriving at the decision.

Sources said that traders' lobby pressurised the board to increase the crop size through their indents. Merchants are learnt to have offered to pick up around 126 mkg without any trouble and wanted the board to increase the crop size. Although the traders would not stick to the indents given before fixing the crop size, the board took their offer seriously and increased the crop size.

AP witnessed a serious crisis in the tobacco market in the last two seasons which prompted several farmers to commit suicide. The crop season of 2014-15 was considered to be the worst ever in history when the prices dipped to just around Rs 40 per kg in southern block soils. Even the high grade varieties of Northern Light Soils (NLS) fetched just around Rs 90-95 per kg against the farmers' anticipation of Rs 140-Rs 150 per kg. Crisis continued till the last even after the intervention of Central and state governments.

Taking the crisis into account, the board slashed the crop size from 170 mkg in 2014-15 to just 120 mkg during 2015-16. Reduction in the crop size worked well with the traders as they offered reasonably better prices to the farmers.

Surprisingly, the traders claimed that they have offered nearly 20-30 per cent higher prices than last year. In reality, the prices which dipped to as low as Rs 60 - Rs 70 only bounced back to around Rs 80 - Rs 100 per kg. The farmers have actually been demanding payment of Rs 120 per kg for SLS and SBS platforms and Rs 150-Rs 170 per kg for NLS platforms.

"The average price during the current season in NLS has touched Rs 140 which is a record in the recent past," observed Indian Tobacco Association (ITA) president Mittapalli Umamaheswara Rao. He said that even the low grade varieties fetched an average price of Rs 117 per kg during the present season.

Guntur MP Galla Jayadev and former MLA Divi Sivaram represented the farmers' case at the board meeting which was attended by MP Lal Singh Vadodia, special chief secretary of AP T Vijay Kumar, director of CTRI D

Damodar Reddy, board vice-chairman Gadde Seshagiri Rao, members Balineni Seethaiah, Gaddamanugu Satyanarayana, C Kiran Kumar, P V Basavarajappa, C Krishna Kumar Mishra, board in-charge executive director C S S Patnaik and director of auctions Bipin Bihari Choudhury.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Tobacco Board fixes higher crop size for Andhra Pradesh

Earlier in March, the board had reduced the crop size under tobacco in Karnataka to 95 million kgs from 100 million kgs last year.

The Tobacco Board has increased the crop size for Andhra Pradesh to 130 million kgs for the fiscal 2016-17 as against 120 million kgs for 2015-16.

The hike was on account of increasing insistence from industry players through the Indian Tobacco Association and farmer groups as the decline in crop area was becoming uneconomical for them.

"The Board after detailed discussions taking into consideration the gloomy situation in the world's market, carryover stocks, declining demand for tobacco in domestic markets, growers' demands for assuring remunerative prices for their produce, decided to fix a crop size of 130 million kgs for Andhra Pradesh during 2016-17 crop season based on the indents received from the Indian Tobacco Association as against 120 million kgs fixed during 2015-16 crop season," said a release from the Tobacco Board after its meeting in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

An official at Tobacco board said, "This will not really be considered an increase as we had reduced the crop size considerably last fiscal to 120 million kgs from 172 million kgs in 2014-15. This was on account of low grade production of tobacco and lack of confirmation from the importers."

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