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THE HINDU

Efforts on to control diseases in banana



K.Ramasamy, Vice Chancellor, TNAU, handing over Young Innavigator Award to Tenith Adhithyaa from Virudhunagar, at 23rd Foundation day as Banana farmers day at National Research Centre in Tiruchi on Sunday, S.Uma, Director, ICAR-NRCB, (Second from Right), Prakash Patil, Project Coordinator, All india Coordinated Research Programme on Fruit crops, (Left) is in the pic. Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

Stating that fungal wilt disease and leaf spot disease have affected the banana plantations in a few parts of the country, S. Uma, Director, National Research Centre for Banana (NRCB), Tiruchi, on Sunday said banana scientists had taken up a survey in the affected areas so as to control the diseases.

Speaking at the 23 foundation day of National Research Centre for Banana here, she said that the diseases had been mainly noticed on G-9 banana variety, which occupied 60 percent of banana cultivation in the country. The fungal wilt disease was noticed in Bihar recently. The soil borne disease could spread rapidly in neighbouring banana plantations.

She said there was a need to stop spreading the diseases. Otherwise, it could cause extensive financial loss to farmers. The NRCB had taken up extensive study to control the disease. The scientists would continue to monitor the areas affected by the disease. Farmers had a greater role to play in controlling the diseases. Similarly, the department concerned of the State government should take steps to create awareness among farmers of fungal wilt disease and leaf spot disease.

Expressing his reservations over Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) decision on creating more educational institutes, K. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, said that the mandate of the ICAR was to carry out extensive research in required areas. There was a need to expand its research areas. However, it had opened up its vistas in education. It should not deviate from the focus of research. Pointing to the practice of farmers sticking to traditional crops, he said farmers should follow flexible approach in changing crops depending upon the situation. They should go for alternative crops during distress situations.

P. Prakash Patil, Project Coordinator, AICRP on fruits, Bengaluru, B. Padmanaban and J. Poorani, Principal Scientists spoke.

Earlier, Mr. Ramasamy presented award to various progressive banana farmers and scientists in recognition of their achievements in raising banana.

Rain guns to save groundnut crop



The district administration on Saturday deployed as many as 600 rain guns and 250 oil machines to rescue the groundnut crop in 1.3 lakh hectares, following deficit rainfall all over Chittoor district, particularly in Madanapalle division.

District Collector Siddarth Jain rushed senior Agriculture officials to the remote Valasapalle and Danduvaripalle villages of Madanapalle mandal and to instal rain guns and oil machines at the fields.

Deficit rainfall in August

Mr. Jain asked the farmers over cell phone not to panic about failure of rains so far in August.

“Rain guns will be at your disposal till the prospect of rainfall improves possibly by month-end,” Mr. Jain informed the farmers, asking them to widely use the services of the Agriculture Department.

Officials said that deficit rainfall in August led to an alarming situation projecting total withering of groundnut crop in over 15,000 hectares, and potential threat to thousands of acres in western mandals.

“When we brought the situation to the notice of Collector, he immediately took it to the notice of the Chief Minister, and got the equipment supplied in a couple of days,” the officials said.

For every 60 hectares, one rain gun would be supplied. “Farmers who require oil machines and water tankers could approach the field-level Agriculture Department staff. The farmers have to bear 50% of the diesel cost and water tankers’ service cost,” the officials said.

Agriculture officials deploy 600 rain guns and 250 oil machines to rescue the crop in 1.3 lakh hectares

After Raichur, pink bollworms attack Bt cotton in Haveri



Growers worried: Bt cotton crop damaged by pink bollworm at Gangapur in Ranebennur taluk of Haveri district.— Photos: Special Arrangement

Pink bollworm, a pest that left farmers of Raichur devastated last year by destroying Bt cotton crops, has now reached Haveri district, where cotton is grown in about 1 lakh hectares annually. This has once again raised questions over claims of immunity from pink bollworm made by Bt cotton seed companies.

While the scientific community is yet to begin any study in Haveri district and independent experts and officials of the Agriculture Department differ over the extent and severity of the pest attack, that the pest is affecting crops is undeniable.

Committee visit

A recent visit by a fact-finding committee comprising of environmentalists and farm experts revealed that the summer cotton crop (cultivated during summer in irrigated land) has fallen prey to the pink bollworm attack. An independent team comprising of the former Assistant Director of Agriculture Kumaraswamy, organic farming activist Vasu P.

and environmentalist Manjunath Holalu recently visited farmlands at Devi Hosur and Boodagatti in Haveri taluk and Gangapur in Ranebennur taluk and found the crop damaged.

“Initial study suggests pink bollworm attack in villages of Haveri and Ranebennur taluks only on the summer cotton crop and it is severe. While there is no report yet on the kharif cotton, the possibility of pink bollworm spreading cannot be ruled out as it is a monophagous insect (single host pest),” Mr. Holalu told *The Hindu* .

“We found labels of all the branded Bt cotton seeds claiming immunity to the crop from all types of bollworm, including pink bollworm, which is misleading. Farmers believe that Bt cotton is resistant to pink bollworm, but we see that it is not,” he said.

Mr. Holalu pointed out that a report, dated October 1, 2015, of the Crop Forecast Coordination Centre of the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare had mentioned about pink bollworm attack in Gujarat and said reports suggested that resistance of Bt (Bollgard II) cotton to pink bollworm had been breached. “Despite this, companies continue to advertise their seeds as pink bollworm-resistant, and no action is being taken,” he said.

‘Not of alarming level’

Although Joint Director of Agriculture of Haveri district Rajshekhar I.B. admitted pink bollworm attack on the summer cotton crop in the district, he said it was “not of alarming level”. “Summer cotton crop is cultivated on around 1,010 hectares of land in the district while kharif sowing is in 69,000 hectares. Of this, the pest is noticed in 500 hectares and pest attack is not of alarming level. But as a precautionary measure we have taken steps to sensitise farmers,” he said.

Companies continue to advertise their seeds as pink bollworm-resistant despite proof to the contrary, and no action is being taken against them.

Soyabean cultivation on in three districts on pilot basis

The government has taken up cultivation of soybean on an experimental basis in the districts of Mahabubnagar, Warangal and Khammam this year as an alternative to cotton. The crop is being taken up in 45,000 acres belonging to 10,000 farmers spread across 520 villages. Other alternative crops being encouraged are pulses, taken up for cultivation on 2.5 lakh acres. It is for the first time farmers are being diverted from cultivating cotton on about five lakh hectares, informed Agriculture Secretary C. Parthasarathi here on Friday.

Addressing a meeting of officials of the Agriculture Department, TS Seeds Development Corporation and scientists of the agriculture university, he pointed out that the soybean crop is in flowering stage and is prone to be attacked by pests like mosaic virus.

Inflow into Mettur increases

Mettur Dam registered further increased inflow, thanks to the release of water from the Krishnarajasagar and Kabini reservoirs in Karnataka.

Officials sources here said that about 10,000 cusecs of water is being released into river Cauvery from the Krishnarajasagar and Kabini reservoirs since Saturday.

The water has already reached Hogenakkal in Dharmapuri district.

The river which was carrying little more than 5,000 cusecs on Friday and 7,200 cusecs on Saturday evening, was carrying 8,100 cusecs on Sunday.

The inflow is expected to increase further on Monday.

The Dam was receiving 5,083 cusecs on Saturday and the inflow increased to 6,160 cusecs on Sunday.

The water level in the dam stood at 65.48 feet against its full capacity of 120 feet and the storage level was 28.939 tmc.

About 500 cusecs of water is being discharged from the dam for meeting the drinking water needs of delta districts.

This is the first time during this month that Mettur Dam was getting reasonable inflow.

Following the onset of monsoon, the dam was getting good inflow in the first week of last month, raising the hopes of the delta farmers.

But, the inflow subsided within a few days disappointing the farmers and official machinery alike.

Mettur and surrounding areas experienced 4.6 mm rainfall in the last 24 hours that ended at 8 a.m. on Sunday.

Coracle rides

Following heavy flow of water in river Cauvery, the Dharmapuri district administration accorded permission for the operation of coracles in Hogenakkal for a shorter distance from the coracle ghat up to watch tower to ensure the safety of tourists.

The coracle drivers pleaded with the authorities to allow operation of coracles at least up to Uttamalai ghat, but their request was turned down.

Due to heavy flow of water in Hogenakkal falls, the police and the fire and rescue services department personnel cautioned the tourists to take care while bathing.

About 10,000 cusecs is being released into river Cauvery from Krishnarajasagar and Kabini reservoirs

Karnataka bags award in e-market services



Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha handing over the DL Shah Platinum Award to Manoj Rajan, Additional Secretary and managing director of Rashtriya e-Market Services, at the 11th National Quality Conclave 2016 held in New Delhi on Saturday. Photo: Special arrangement

Karnataka's Rashtriya e-Market Services (ReMS) was awarded the DL Shah Platinum Award at the 11th National Quality Conclave (NQC), the annual flagship event of the Quality Council of India (QCI) held in New Delhi on Saturday.

NQC 2016 had more than 1,000 national and international delegates across sectors. Manoj Rajan, Additional Secretary and Managing Director, ReMS, delivered the keynote address in the plenary session on “Online agricultural markets - Karnataka model”.

The “Karnataka model” focused on addressing problems plaguing the agricultural marketing sector, bringing in efficiency and transparency in the functioning of agricultural markets by adopting better technology options so as to enable efficient price discovery to benefit farmers and other market participants. Karnataka has become a guidepost for states taking up market reforms in the country.

The salient features of the model are: increasing competition for a better price discovery, single unified license for traders, simplification of market practices, easier access to market price information, enhanced transparency in all market operations and quality based bidding, said an official release.

A total of 142 out of 157 Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees (AMPCs) in the state transact online, first of its kind in the Country. “Till date, we have traded 49 lakh lots with cumulative volume of 320 lakh quintals, valued at Rs. 26,000 crore on the electronic platform. About 25 lakh farmers are registered on the online markets,” Mr. Rajan said.

ReMS offers complete technology and management solution for modernising agricultural markets in state. ReMS is responsible for establishing, operating, managing, specialised electronic trading platform called Unified Market Platform (UMP) for auctioning of farmer’s produce in the agricultural regulated markets in the State. Department of Agricultural Marketing, ReMS, and the markets work in close coordination to implement the ambitious market reforms agenda of the State, he added.

Savour a jackfruit-based wedding feast



(Palakkad): More than two decades since his active engagement as a campaigner of the seemingly-innocuous jackfruit, suggesting it as a rich source of food security in the years to come, Kerala's celebrated jackfruit promoter James P. Mathew is now preparing to convert the marriage of his son, Lino, into a mega jackfruit event.

Apart from his friends and relatives, a huge gathering comprising agricultural scientists, organic farmers, opinion makers, senior officials, politicians and activists will attend the wedding on September 15 at Santhom Parish Hall in Kanjirapuzha here. The guests will savour an 18-course jackfruit-based feast. The dishes to be served along with chicken, mutton and fish include the traditional Kerala jackfruit meal and jackfruit-based delicacies such as juice, pickles, 'payasam,' wine and fries.

Talking to *The Hindu* at his residence here, Mr. James said the event has been organised in such a manner as to help policy-makers realise the importance of promoting jackfruit. Lack of awareness of its multiple benefits is directly responsible for the wastage of an estimated Rs.500 crore of the fruit in India, he said. He suggested forming jackfruit clusters and network of growers to convert its cultivation into an organised business.

“A rich source of nutrients, jackfruit has carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals. Its medicinal properties include strengthening of the immune system and anti-cancer, anti-ulcer and anti-hypertension action. The by-products include beverages, nectar, clarified juice, wine, vinegar, canned products, candied fruit, dehydrated flakes, laddus and biscuits, pickle, pappad, sweets and jackfruit bulbs and leather,” he said. “It is the duty of the government to conduct scientific studies on jackfruit to validate the claims of its promoters.”

Mr. James, who has made a set of jackfruit processing devices, has developed a basketful of products. These include golden-yellow jackfruit wine, dehydrated flakes that can be stored, a health drink, baby food and jack seed powder. His homestead has 60 jackfruit trees of the firm-fleshed ‘varikka’ variety, scattered among coconut, areca nut, cocoa and rubber.



Paradox of plenty



It seems rising agricultural productivity is now creating surpluses across most categories.

India's per capita calorie demand has been falling for at least the last 30 years. Most people do a double-take when they hear that. One can't debate the fact much: National Sample Surveys every five to seven years have documented this. What we can debate are the reasons behind this: In their 2009 paper Angus Deaton and Jean Dreze pretty thoroughly narrowed them down to reduced need for calories as lives get more automated (like less walking with heavy loads or more tractors for ploughing) and less incidence of acute diseases (like dysentery, a common form of calorie loss) as drinking water quality and immunisation improved. Likely for similar reasons, this drop in per capita calorie demand has been observed in China as well.

Further, and more intuitively, as incomes have risen, the type of calories consumed has been changing as well: More eggs and chicken, more milk, less cereals. As a result, per capita cereal demand has been falling by 1 per cent per year on average for three decades at least. Now that population growth has also slowed to about 1 per cent per year, this means our total demand for cereals is not growing anymore. Unlike in China, where diets transitioning to red meat (to get one calorie one feeds the animal four) have kept pressure on calorie production, Indians are shifting to chicken, which is far less inefficient (and consumes corn, which is not a staple here).

Cereal production, though, continues to rise, mainly due to rising yields. This started showing up in rising food-stocks from 2008 onwards, till we ran out of storage space. Then exports started, helped by high global prices. In the last two years, consecutive monsoon failures and falling global prices have brought down stocks as well as exports, but if monsoons are good (helping groundwater levels and the rabi crop too), we could see an additional 25 million tonnes of cereals this year. Weak global markets make exports unviable, particularly for wheat. What is the farmer going to do?

Cereals are not just any crop: They are the mainstay of Indian agriculture, accounting for more than half the gross cropped area. And while 60-90 per cent of this area is irrigated, only 15-30 per cent of the area used for pulses and oilseeds is. The latter crops thus get badly affected by weak monsoons. Despite rapidly growing demand for protein and fats, domestic output last year was about the same as in 2004. This meant 12 billion dollars of imports last year, nearly three times the value imported when monsoons were okay. As India seems to be the only large consumer of pulses, there is not (yet) much of a global market in them — if the Indian crop fails, prices go up. For oils, a well-supplied global market kept prices low: So low that the government had to raise import duties last year to prevent local prices from falling. This year, then, a sharp jump in output of pulses and oilseeds, as seems likely, should bring down imports, as well as dal prices.

Elsewhere, remarkable changes are afoot on the perishable side of the food basket: Milk, fruits and vegetables. Of the 160 million tonnes of milk produced in India, less than 40 per cent comes to the market: The rest is consumed within the household or the village. This is mostly due to a lack of infrastructure: Roads (without good roads one cannot transport milk), information (not just on best practices, but also on pricing), and

electricity (without electricity in the village one would struggle to keep high-yielding varieties of cattle: one needs milking machines as well as chillers).

We saw six consecutive years of double-digit increases in milk prices. It took time for supply to respond: Cattle take three years to start lactating. Improving rural infrastructure and better prices have resulted in much slower price growth despite the cooperatives supporting farmers by buying more than they needed. With global milk prices down, the export opportunity is also constrained.

Similarly, in vegetables, which are perishable, the supply response to prices has been so strong that even in onions, where the state that drives more than a third of output, Maharashtra, was reeling under two consecutive years of drought, output grew so much that farmers had to sell at near-zero prices. In potatoes, when production hit 48 million tonnes last year, more than 10 per cent of the harvest had to be stored as surplus. Researchers say the use of technology in fruit and vegetables has driven yields up and duration of crop cycles down, so farmers can produce more crops per year. Improving infrastructure (phones, roads) is also helping with transportation and price awareness.

Putting this together, it seems that rising agricultural productivity is now creating surpluses across most categories. The tell-tale signs were that, despite two consecutive years of low production, prices did not go up — this was mistakenly attributed to lower Minimum Support Prices, and to a clampdown on black-marketing. These may have helped, but the root causes go much deeper. This year, as output growth picks up again, prices could come under pressure — in many ways the poor monsoons had put a lid on this problem.

This throws up three important challenges for policymakers. First, agricultural surpluses from India are harder to export without a substantial improvement in food processing. Second, in most categories Indian farming cannot compete in global markets despite the abundance of natural resources (fertile soil, adequate water and sunlight, cheap labour). It is not just due to subsidies in other countries: Our productivity needs to improve as well. The Indian farmer is also affected by currency movements. Farmers in Brazil, Ukraine and Russia have benefited strongly from the fall in their respective currencies. And, lastly, these trends mean that agriculture will shed workers. We no longer need 49 per cent of our workforce producing food for the rest of us. In the US just 2 per cent of the population is in agriculture, with substantial agricultural exports. As one researcher we met mentioned, doubling farmer incomes may need the number of farmers to halve, and he was only half-joking. This makes the job creation challenge much bigger than it already is.

Tree talk: Easy to grow & drought-resistant, Jackfruit trees have global attention



Here's a disclaimer: don't go by its out of Jurassic Park looks, for when it comes to this big, green, spiky, hulk of a fruit that can weigh more than 15 kg, it is fast earning the reputation of being the jack of all trees and fruits.

In fact, last year, a study by Nyree Zerega, director of the graduate programme in plant biology and conservation at Northwestern University and Chicago Botanic Garden made headlines when he noted the “ginormous advantages of the jackfruit”.

Popularly known as kathal in India, the jackfruit tree or *Artocarpus heterophyllus* from the Moraceae family, is an “underutilised crop” of the world that can solve the world's food problem, as per studies.

That adds some serious wow factor to the tree whose fruit is the staple food of Kerala, and is gorged on by elephants.

Rewind to Adiparva of Mahabharata and the book, “Sacred Trees, Plants of India” by Nanditha Krishna and it is mentioned that trees with dense foliage and fruits are chaitya vriksha (protector tree). The Jackfruit tree is one of them. In a scene from Bharhut, the book mentions a five hooded naga sitting under a jackfruit tree, and how the tree is an antidote to snakebites.

From the divine to the delectable — if cooked well, kathal can give meat a run for its money. No wonder it's often called a poor man's or a vegan's meat. One of the largest tree borne fruits in the world, the jackfruit's tough exterior is matched with a soft sticky, squishy, mushy and fibrous interior, with a strong sweet flavour and aroma.

But cutting the fruit is quite an exercise.

You have to apply oil on your hands before carving its guts out. Either sprinkle some salt and enjoy it as a fruit, or cook up a rich tadka and serve it as a subzi. You can even roast, dry, add it to soups, jams, chips, ice cream — the multi-purpose kathal is actually a jack of all fruits and vegetables.

Not only is it rich in calcium, proteins, carbs, potassium, it's seed called the jack nut is also edible and the wood is used for timber, musical instruments and furniture.

Jackfruit is available from September through December, and again from June to August. Also known as Kanthal, Panos and Panasa, its cultivation in India dates as far back as 3,000 to 6,000 years.

One can find its mention in Buddhist texts as early as 400 BC, in pre-Sanskrit language of Munda and in Tamil literature from the first and third century AD (ref: KT Achya, author of the book, "Indian Food: A Historical Companion"). And while India is considered the land of its origin, around 60 to 70 per cent of the fruit here goes waste due to lack of procuring and processing.

Easy to grow, drought resistant, yields abundant fruit — the jackfruit is so versatile that the world is looking closely at it and literally jacked up its cultivation including in Vietnam (it's number one in making value-added jackfruit products), Malaysia, China and Philippines. In India too, parts of Karnataka and Odisha are pumping up the cultivation and sale, giving farmers a boost in their income.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Green shoots sighted in farm sector growth

Bengaluru, August 21:

After two rain-deficit years, bountiful showers this year have brightened the prospects of strong farm sector growth. This is likely to add a percentage point to the growth in GDP.

"Agriculture growth will be at 6 per cent this year," NITI Aayog Member Ramesh Chand told *BusinessLine* here, commenting on the progress of the monsoon and kharif sowings.

"The robust growth in agriculture can add up to 1 percentage point to the overall economic growth," Chand added.

Widespread monsoon rains have boosted the planting of key kharif crops such as rice, pulses and oilseeds, raising the prospects of a good harvest. This is expected to ease food inflation, lift farm income and boost consumption, aiding overall economic growth.

The Finance Ministry is expecting the economy to grow at 7.5 to 8 per cent this financial year. Weak monsoons in the past two years had dragged down farm sector growth to 1.2 per cent in 2015-16 and -0.2 per cent in 2014-15.

Despite a delayed start, the rapid progress of the South-West Monsoon has ensured a year-on-year growth of 6 per cent in kharif acreage, as farmers brought more area under rice, pulses, cereals and oilseeds cultivation (*see table*).

A strong growth in agriculture would check food inflation and increase farmers' income, Chand said. "One can expect inflation to come down in pulses as the acreage under pulses is 35 per cent more than last year," he added.

Farmers will gain not only through growth, but also through savings in input costs. That will be good for the overall economy, Chand added.

However, Devendra Pant, Chief Economist at India Ratings and Research, expects the growth rate of gross value added in agriculture to be around 3 per cent this fiscal, with most of it coming in during the second half.

Pant said the rise in farm incomes would largely depend on the prices of commodities; it would benefit sectors such as consumer durables, automobiles — two-wheelers and low-end cars — and also consumer non-durables and gold.

Apart from pulses, acreages under oilseeds and rice are up 4 per cent each, and coarse cereals 7 per cent (mainly on account of a higher acreage in maize). Only acreages under cotton and sugarcane are lower by 8 per cent each over the previous year. "Besides higher acreage, good rain this year is expected to boost crop yields," said Vinita Advani Acharya, Senior Research Analyst at Geofin Comtrade.

The forecast of a normal monsoon this year had prompted the Centre to raise farm sector production targets. The overall foodgrain production target is set at 270.10 million tonnes, against last year's 252.22 million tonnes, according to the Fourth Advance Estimates.

"Production of kharif pulses will get better and this may impact farmers' realisations," said Tejinder Narang, a grains trade analyst. Already, pulses prices have softened in anticipation of a better harvest, he added.

Prices of minor pulses such as moong or green gram in Karnataka have slipped below the minimum support price levels of Rs. 5,250 per quintal. Also, the prices of tur and urad have come down, Acharya added.

"The revival of industrial output also depends on the resurgence of demand, especially from the rural sector, which in turn, also depends on the prospects of the agriculture output. Even as the June IIP data shows some positive signs, a sustainable positive growth could only confirm the trend."

Going forward, the report noted that increasing agriculture productivity could help in controlling food inflation.

"The model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016, which seeks to permit owners to lease out agricultural land to tenant farmers, should be passed as it would enable consolidation of farm land, better mechanisation and lead to land improvement by allowing tenant farmers access facilities like credit, thereby enhancing productivity in the agricultural sector," Singh added.

Cardamom up 2% on upsurge in demand



Cardamom prices were up 2.06% at Rs 1,146.50 per kg in futures trade today as speculators built up fresh position amid rising domestic as well as export demand in the spot market. Besides, tight stocks position on restricted supplies from producing regions support to the uptrend.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in September shot up by Rs 23.10 or 2.06% to Rs 1,146.50 per kg in business turnover of 362 lots.

Similarly, spice for delivery in October contracts traded higher by Rs 18.60, or 1.68% to Rs 1,123.00 per kg in 45 lots.

Analysts said fresh positions created by participants, driven by uptick in domestic as well as exports demand in the spot market against restricted supplies from producing belts mainly pushed up cardamom prices at futures trade.

Tobacco farmers' lobby group demands inclusion in upcoming WHO conference

The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), which represents tobacco farmers in the country, has demanded that it be included in the upcoming Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of Parties (COP 7) meeting scheduled to be held in India from November 7-12.

The tobacco farmers' lobbying body claimed the decisions on tobacco control at this conference will affect the livelihoods of millions of tobacco farmers and farm labour connected to tobacco cultivation in the country.

Commenting on the absence of representatives of Indian tobacco farmers at the conference, B V Javare Gowda, president of FAIFA said, "As representatives of the tobacco farmers in India and in view of the fact that the COP7 is being hosted by India, we wish to make an urgent appeal that farmers should be allowed to participate in the deliberations of the conference. Our participation will help us understand the future course of actions being proposed by the WHO on tobacco control and the impact of these measures on the tobacco crop cultivated by us and the livelihood of millions that are dependent on tobacco in the country."

The federation's general secretary Murali Babu said they have also written to the government to include FAIFA representatives in the official Indian delegation at the meetings.

"It was a matter of great concern for us that FCTC decisions in the past are made behind closed doors, with media, the public and tobacco farmers excluded for the process. It is clear that the interest of tobacco growers are not represented in the debates especially when the decisions have a direct bearing on the lives of tobacco growers," Murali Babu stated.

Govt to change rules to make details on packaged foods to be more legible



The Union government is planning to amend the 2011 commodities packaging rules to ensure the details on the packaged food items are more visible and readable and also wants to incorporate barcode-kind of system to protect consumers from spurious products.

The Consumer Affairs Ministry has held several round of discussions to amend the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules 2011 in the interest of consumers. Even the industry and public have demanded changes to the rules.

"Rule 7 specifies about the font size of the declaration but most companies do not follow strictly. In smaller packs, the font size is too small for consumers to read. So, we have decided to adopt the US standard on font size," a senior Consumer Affairs Ministry official told PTI.

Right now, the font size of the declaration such as name, address, net commodity, date of manufacturing and retail price -- is less than 1 mm. "The US follows 1.6 mm size. But we are planning to keep 1.5 mm for a pack of 200 grams/ml."

The font size for a packed food item containing more than 200 grams/ml up to 500 grams/ml would be increased from 2 mm to 4 mm and for above 500 grams/ml, the font size would be doubled to 8 mm, he said.

Besides, the ministry is considering introducing bar-code or any such mark to identify food products are made in India or other country to curb sale of fake food items in the country.

That apart, the ministry is considering increasing maximum quantity of packaged food items up to 50 kg/litres from the existing 25 kg/litres.

"For smaller packs, consumers have to pay more. So, we are thinking of allowing some commodities like rice, atta and others to be packed up to 50 kg/litres. This will bring down the cost on consumers," the official explained. The ministry had last amended the rule in 2015.

Jeera down 1.2% on sluggish spot demand



Jeera prices were down by 1.17% to Rs 18,575 per quintal in futures trading today as participants trimmed their positions, tracking a weak trend at spot market on subdued demand.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, jeera for delivery in October month fell by Rs 220, or 1.17% to Rs 18,575 per quintal with an open interest 4,362 lots.

Similarly, the spice for delivery in September contracts declined by Rs 205, or 1.10% to Rs 18,370 per quintal in 19,473 lots.

Analysts said offloading of positions by traders on the back of low demand in the spot market against adequate stocks position on higher supplies from producing regions, mainly pulled down jeera prices at futures trade.

Mentha oil down 0.1% on subdued demand



Mentha oil prices softened by 0.09% to Rs 897 per kg in futures trade today as traders trimmed their positions, tracking a weak trend at spot market on sluggish demand from consuming industries.

Besides, adequate stocks position on increased supplies from producing regions weighed on mentha oil prices.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, mentha oil for delivery in September month declined by 80 paise or 0.09% to Rs 897 per kg in business turnover of 44 lots.

On similar lines, the oil for delivery in August contracts weakened by 60 paise or 0.07% to Rs 885.50 per kg in 69 lots.

Analysts said offloading of positions by participants due to muted demand from consuming industries in spot market against sufficient stocks position on higher supplies from Chandausi in Uttar Pradesh, led to decline in mentha oil

Sugar down 0.47% on low demand, adequate stocks



Sugar prices were down by 0.47% to Rs 3,589 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators cut down their bets amid easing demand in the spot market against adequate stocks position.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, sugar for delivery in December drifted lower by Rs 17 or 0.47% to Rs 3,589 per quintal with an open interest of 13,970 lots.

On similar lines, the sweetener for delivery in October contracts moved down by Rs 15 or 0.42% to Rs 3,574 per quintal in 17,390 lots.

Analysts attributed the fall in sweetener prices at futures market to lower demand from bulk consumers in the spot market against ample stocks position.

Crude palm oil down 0.9% on profit-booking



Crude palm oil prices drifted lower by 0.94% to Rs 557.60 per 10 kg in futures market today as speculators booked profits at prevailing higher levels amid easing demand in spot market against adequate stocks position.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude palm oil for delivery in August month fell by Rs 5.30 or 0.94% to Rs 557.60 per 10 kg in business turnover of 142 lots.

Likewise, the oil for delivery in September contracts shed Rs 5.20 or 0.93% to Rs 551.20 per 10 kg in 355 lots.

Market analysts said besides profit-booking by participants at existing levels, fall in demand in the spot market mainly influenced crude palm oil prices.