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Drive launched to weed out parthenium

The Agriculture Department mobilised public support to eradicate parthenium from agricultural fields, wasteland and roadsides under its week-long initiative.

At Kollanakalli hamlet of periyasemmandampalayam panchayat in Kodumudi block, 55 villagers joined hands with the department in the eradication process. The villagers sprayed atrazine on the weed. At several other places in other blocks, a solution mixed with 20 per cent common salt was sprayed on the plants by sections of the public including members of non-government organisations.

The initiative, the Agriculture Department hopes, will contain the menacing spread of the weed, and safeguard biodiversity.

The Department is keen on eradicating the weed completely.

‘Pilot project on online sale of pulses’

The zilla panchayat will introduce a pilot project on the institutional sale of pulses to help farmers get better prices. The ZP will encourage farmers to store their produce in the 50-odd rural godowns and then invite online trading agencies like the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) to buy grains in one lot. If the produce is not sold immediately, then it will be stored till such time that it fetches a better price.

The ZP has taken up the construction of 120 godowns across the five taluks. Of these, 50 are complete.

GPs manage these godowns and farmers are allowed to store their produce at a nominal fee. We will tie up with banks to help farmers get loans to the extent of 75 per cent of the MSP of the grains stored in the godowns,” Pavan Kumar Malpati, ZP CEO, said. He was speaking after inaugurating the pulses festival organised in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra as part of the International Year of Pulses celebrations. He pointed out that agriculture goods sold on NCDEX always fetch a price better than the MSP fixed by the Union government.

Now, most farmers sell their produce to middlemen and pesticide and fertilizer dealers, who double up as moneylenders. Farmers take loans from them during cultivation or take

inputs on credit. They are thus forced to sell their ware to single buyers, who may fix a price of their convenience. “We want to break this chain at some point and therefore plan to start online selling of farm produce,” he added.

According to him, Bidar is the highest soya growing district in the State, with the oil seed under 1.46 lakh hectares this year. “We want to try and sell soya using NCDEX platform when the crop is harvested next month. We will also try to sell red gram in the same way,” Mr. Malpati said.

In the first phase, one hobli will be selected for each of these two crops from where it will be procured and sold. “If successful, we will extend the project to all the 186 GPs,” he said. He said the GPs will be registered as sellers in NCDEX.

Transplantation method increases red gram yield: expert

Cultivation of red gram by transplantation method increases its yield by two to three times, said farmer scientist C.R. Konda here on Monday.

He was speaking at the pulses festival in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra organised as part of the International Year of Pulses celebrations.

Usually, farmers grow red gram using traditional methods like dibbling or broadcasting. But these methods produce only around three to five quintals each acre, he said, adding that transplantation of this crop increases yield to 12-15 quintals each acre. The BSMR variety of red gram is best suited for transplantation, he added.

The BSMR variety, invented in Maharashtra, was further developed in Bidar Agriculture Research Station. It has become popular in several States now. It is showing extraordinary results in irrigated areas, he said.

Bidar district, that is among the highest pulses growing districts in the country, has red gram cultivation on 70,000 hectares. Transplantation method has been adopted by farmers on 3,000 hectares already, Mr. Konda said. Transplantation increases the cost of production by about Rs. 1,500 per acre. A temporary nursery is prepared on the field, under a tree. Seeds are sown in plastic pouches to prepare the 2,000- 2,500 saplings needed per acre. The method involves additional labour efforts like pruning the tops of the plants when they are 50 days old. Transplanted plants take longer to mature. They are harvested after 180-200 days, compared to the 150 days needed in the traditional methods. But the benefits offset the slight increase in cost, Mr. Konda added.

Mobile app for farmers

Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Monday launched a mobile app 'Kisan Suvidha' for farmers.

The app will provide basic information on weather updates, crop prices and expert advices, an official spokesman said here.

Praising the Agriculture Department initiative, he said this would go a long way to keep the farmers abreast with the changing agricultural practices and marketing support, coupled with the latest agronomical techniques to enhance productivity.

The app is a simple interface and provides information on five parameters — weather, input dealers, market price, plant protection and expert advisories, the spokesman said. - PTI

Farm studies to be part of curriculum

Minister for Agriculture V.S. Sunilkumar has said that the State government plans to include studies related to agriculture in the school curriculum from the next academic year onwards.

Speaking at a programme organised by Markazu Ssaquafathi Ssunniyya at Karanthur here on Monday, the Minister said Kerala had adopted a unique farming tradition in the past. However, the rate of agriculture production had diminished with each passing year.

Now the government planned to implement a new project to develop the agricultural sector.

Including agriculture studies in school syllabus was part of that endeavour, Mr. Sunilkmar said.

He said the production of food was essential to the survival of human beings. Thrust should be given on soil and seeds.

The green revolution had made the soil of the State infertile.

However, the State should recover the lost glory of its agricultural traditions, the Minister added.

The programme was organised to announce Markaz's new agricultural projects. Kanthapuram A.P Aboobacker Musliyar presided over the inaugural session.

“Prevent disease in banana crops”



The National Research Centre for Banana (NRCB) has asked the Bihar government to take effective steps to quarantine banana crops affected by fusarium wilt disease so as to prevent the spread of the disease to other States.

Since the disease was noticed in 15 villages of Theni district, the NRCB has advised farmers of Theni district to take effective bio-control measures to prevent the disease, which is a lethal soil-borne fungal disease.

According to the senior officials of NRCB, the fungus will block the flow of water and nutrients through the roots of the plants. The affected plants will eventually split at the base and then wither. Similarly, the fungus will persist in soil for some years and the use of chemical pesticides will have no effect.

Moreover, the disease would spread to neighbouring plantations quickly if effective control measures were not taken.

S. Uma, Director, NRCB, Tiruchi, told *The Hindu* that the wilt disease had been noticed in a few parts of the country mainly in Bihar. The Grand Nain (G-9) banana raised in Purnia and Katihar districts of Bihar had been hit due to the disease. It had become a cause of concern for all stakeholders, including farmers and scientists. There was a need to enforce domestic quarantine of the affected fields in order to prevent spread of the disease.

R. Selvarajan, Principal Scientist (pathology-virology), NRCB, said that a brain storming session was held recently in Tiruchi to discuss ways and means to prevent the disease. Since it had affected several plantations in Bihar, the State government was asked to quarantine the affected plantations. The seedlings from the affected fields should not be used. The fungus would remain in the affected soil for eight years.

He said the wilt disease had been noticed in 15 villages of Theni district, which is known for banana plantations. However, the strain of the disease in Theni villages was different from those in the affected areas in Bihar.

NRCB scientists have been closely monitoring the affected areas. It had been planned to provide intensive training at Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture in Lucknow soon on the management of the fungal wilt disease.

A day in the life of a woman farmer



The frames tell the stories of women farmers toiling in the field. The rural setting of villages Chinna Nandigama and Pedda Nandigama in Mahbubnagar district of Telangana and its women farmers in the fields are captured by a group of photographers. Ace photographer Saurabh Chatterjee, an ‘investor’ in NGO Rang De organised a workshop to the village where 13 amateur photographers also participated. Though the trip was in June this year, the Rang De team required a month of planning and preparation for the selection of photos. The exhibition with its 50 frames was titled ‘Matti Manushulu’ and was simultaneously organised in Lamakaan in the city and also Bengaluru.

Saurabh points out the main aim of the workshop was to create awareness. “I wanted to contribute and this inspired me to do the project. The purpose of the workshop was to throw light on the hardships faced by farmers. Every time I saw the sad state of farmers, I always wished that I could do something for them. Two years back, I became a social investor at Rang De, an organization which provides micro-finance to the farmers. I wanted to raise awareness as to how it is transforming the farmers’ lives. So, the participants were instructed to not simply take beautiful pictures but take ones that tell

stories of their hardships and their resilience,” he explains and adds, “We all eat the produce of the farmers but unfortunately we are not aware of the hardships they face in getting it to the market. This was to raise awareness among urban dwellers, especially the younger generation.”

Interestingly the exhibition showcases only women farmers. “Our focus was only on women farmers as we wanted to showcase their quest for financial freedom,” he states. Saurabh recalls the experience of capturing women farmers. “Initially the women were not very comfortable. It was tough. Though many of the shots taken were candid as they were working in the fields; we also asked for their permission to take a few portraits. Since it was the first time that they were being photographed, they were a bit shy initially but as we interacted with them and listened to their inspirational stories, they got more comfortable.”

Saurabh also speaks of the challenges the team faced while shooting the pictures. “The first challenge was the weather. We used to leave early morning and it would rain heavily. Despite the rains, fortunately, everybody turned up. Miraculously, by the time we reached the villages, the sky would clear up,” he says and adds, “We also had to make them comfortable before we took their shots. We spent time talking to them and hearing their stories, and that really helped.” He is also planning a similar workshop for children so that they also appreciate the process of how the food we consume reaches the supermarket.

‘Food processing industries will help stabilise prices’



The former chairman of the Karnataka Krishi Mission, S.A. Patil, on Monday urged governments to promote food processing industries as it would help farmers get better prices for their produce.

“Food processing industries will stabilise prices by creating an assured demand. Government agencies, universities, farmer groups and industries should jointly focus on

this,” he said at the pulses festival organised by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra to promote the cultivation and consumption of pulses.

Bidar for example grows soya on 1.46 lakh hectares. Most of it is sold to neighbouring States like Maharashtra to make oil, cakes or food additives. “If these items are made in Bidar, our farmers would get prices that are many times more,” he said. Soya is the base material for 32 food and other products, he added. He asked the Krishi Vigyan Kendra to organise workshops for women and train them in making processed food items like papad. He urged the University of Agriculture Sciences to tie-up with medical colleges to take up research and field studies on emerging areas like nutraceuticals.

“You should always stay in touch with other institutions engaged in research and exchange ideas about equipping farmers about advanced farming methods,” he said.

He urged zilla panchayat CEO Pavan Kumar Malpati to popularise transplantation method in cultivation of red gram on a mission mode. Bidar is the only district in the country where farmers are transplanting red gram. However, that number should increase by many folds. It is a hassle free method that demands less seeds, increases yields and is more remunerative, he said.

Farming needs a makeover to lure young people back



For Kenyan farmer Pauline Wafula, there was never a question that her children would have to get their hands dirty and learn how to grow their own food.

The 63-year-old mother of five said no other job could provide the same security as farming because people will always have to eat so there is always money to be made.

“I always insist that even if they work elsewhere, they must farm on the side,” said Wafula, a teacher-turned-farmer who grows tomatoes, onions and red cabbage in her greenhouses.

But in western Kenya's Bungoma County where Wafula lives, it's hard to spot young people working in the vast sugarcane fields. Most farmers are retirees like her.

“It is like a norm that young people go to the city to search for jobs,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Around the world, farmers are an ageing demographic as the sector fails to attract younger talent who are heading instead to cities in search of work.

Smallholder farmers produce more than 70 per cent of the world's food and to make sure there are enough of them to feed the growing global population, farming needs a makeover to attract young people, experts say.

According to Help Age International, a non-profit organisation that works with older people, farmers as a group tend to be older than the wider population.

In Africa, where 60 per cent of the continent's population is under 24, the average age of farmers is 60 years old, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“Around the world it’s a potential problem that farmers are growing older, particularly smallholder farmers in low-income countries,” said Mark Gorman, a senior policy adviser at Help Age.

Improvements in rural infrastructure such as electricity supplies and access to subsidies and credit could go a long way to support older farmers and encourage their children to stay in farming, he said.

“It’s got to be made worthwhile for people to be in farming,” Gorman added.

Banish the hoe

The ageing profile of farmers is a matter for concern, especially in sub-Saharan Africa which has very low rates of agricultural productivity, said David Suttie, a policy analyst at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Experts say agriculture must be transformed so that it offers young people an appealing alternative to urban life.

“The farming sector in developing countries is not attractive,” said Panagiotis Karfakis, an economist at FAO.

“The problem intensifies because the technologies they use are not the most productive, there is no infrastructure and there are land security issues,” he said.

Owning land is an incentive for farmers to invest in increasing productivity, which in turn boosts their income, Karfakis said.

According to rights group Landesa, 90 per cent of land in rural Africa is not officially registered.

“If agriculture is to be attractive it can't be the same agriculture we've seen in previous generations,” said IFAD’s Suttie. “This means looking at it as a business and investing in modern technologies.”

Anne Mbaabu, a programme director at the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), said she didn’t blame young people for abandoning life on the farm.

“They are running away from the back-breaking labour in the field with the technology we are using. We should banish the hoe in Africa otherwise we are going to lose our youth.”

Mbaabu said access to seeds, fertiliser, chemicals and markets were essential to making farming easier, more productive and more lucrative.

“There is hope, but you need to move fast. The clock is ticking,” she said.

Those who do decide to ditch city careers and become farmers may be making a smart move, said the FAO’s Karfakis.

“If everyone moves from agriculture to industry and services, then whoever decides to stay in farming is going to have a huge profit,” he said.

Labour of love

Thousands of miles away in Lincolnshire, eastern England, 67-year-old farmer Chris Walshaw has noticed fewer people working in the fields.

“When you have more machinery you need less men,” Walshaw said by phone from his farm in the picture-perfect green countryside.

“It’s quite a lonely life. You’ve got to really love it.”

Suttie said the focus should be on increasing productivity rather than the number of young farmers as a goal in itself.

“It's not all doom and gloom,” he said, adding that agricultural productivity in Africa has gone up by about quarter since the 1990s.

Urban farms won’t feed cities

In an urbanising world, city farming has become fashionable in recent years, with urban farms mushrooming from Accra to Mumbai and London.

According to a 2014 study, city dwellers were farming an area the size of the European Union.

But while the trend is welcome, urban farmers won't be able to feed themselves any time soon, experts say.

"It should be encouraged and supported, and it can be a part of the solution but there is a danger in overemphasising the scope for urban agriculture to feed the cities," said Suttie.

According to the Washington-based Worldwatch Institute, in 2011 around 15 to 20 per cent of the world's food was produced in urban areas.

"I would caution against seeing (urban farming) as the solution or substitute for scaling up food production and market access in rural areas," Suttie said.

Space is the main constraint and with rapid urbanisation, cities are becoming more crowded than ever before. According to U.N. forecasts, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities by 2050, up from just over half now.

Back on the farm in Kenya, Wafula tends to her three Fresian cows. She hopes the rural life will appeal to the next generation.

"Some young people are settling for farming but not in big numbers," she said. "I hope with time more people will become farmers."

Punjab: Agriculture officials, farmers to protest against government today



A body of the Punjab government's Agriculture Development Officers (ADOs), Agriculture Technocrats Action Committee (ATAC), Punjab, has mobilised farmers across the state to participate in a mass protest in Chandigarh on Tuesday.

This is for the first time after 1989 when officials of the Punjab Agriculture Department and farmers would come on a common platform to raise their demands. It is also interesting that instead of approaching farmers' unions for support, ADOs have mobilised farmers at the block level.

Talking to The Indian Express, ATAC president Kuldeep Singh Mattewal said, "The demands of the employees of agriculture department directly affect the farmers and vice-versa. Both agriculture officials and farmers have been facing apathy of the state government. Farmer cannot improve if he has no proper guidance. Besides, an agriculture officer cannot perform if farmers do not have required support from the government. So we have decided to table our demands on one platform."

He added: "All the staff of agricultural department is mentally harassed as our genuine demands related to promotion, salary hike, seniority list and implementation of government schemes on ground have been repeatedly ignored by the government. Besides, farmers have been promised implementation of the Swaminathan Report many times by the state and central governments but nothing has happened so far."

“Because of lack of reform, farmers are not in a position to follow the instructions given by agriculture officers. Farmers and agriculture officials cannot work in isolation of each other’s problems. So we have decided to put a joint protest,” said Kuldeep Singh.

With no Minimum Export Price, onion exports see a rise



Onion exports in the country seem to have picked up after being sluggish for the last few years. According to data released by the Directorate of General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGIS), 1.66 lakh metric tonnes of onion was exported from India till May 2016 as compared to the 1.18 lakh metric tonnes sent out of the country during January-May 2015.

Dr R P Gupta, director of the Nashik-based National Horticulture Research and Development Center (NHRDF), said this increase in export was due to the absence of Minimum Export Price (MEP) or other regulations in the market at present. “There is a healthy demand from the international markets and the competitive prices offered by Indian players have managed to keep the export momentum steady,” he said.

In order to remove the glut in the onion market and to increase the prices of onion in the wholesale markets, the Central government had slashed the MEP of the produce to zero in December. A bumper Rabi crop had flooded the market reducing the wholesale prices. While this might not have had the desired effect on the domestic market, it seems to have propped up the exports market.

However, the export figures are still low compared to the 2013 figure of 1.93 lakh MT during the corresponding period. The year 2014 (January to May) saw 1.37 lakh MT of onion being exported, while January-May 2012 saw 1.75 lakh MT exports. Production

wise, the country has seen an increasing trend with the year 2014-15 reporting 1,98,29,000 MT while 2013-14 had reported 1,94,01,000 MT production. In 2012-13, the figure was 1,68,13,000 MT.

India, on an average, exports just about 20 per cent of the onion it grows. This export, though minimal, is important as the domestic prices collapse otherwise.

The Kharif plantation across the country has been hit this year and the production is expected to be 30 per cent below par. With 45 lakh MT onion accounted for in the country, price rise does not seem to be a concern as of now

Haryana: Opposition will seek to corner government on crop insurance, recruitments



The Opposition parties in Haryana plan to corner the government in the Assembly on several issues including, implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY), appointment of sahyogis as well as the manner in which people are recruited for various government agencies. The session is to commence on August 26.

“Farmers are being forced to pay premium for insurance when they apply for bank loans even when they do not want it,” said Congress Legislature Party leader Kiran Choudhry. The Congress will find support in the form of the INLD over the issue.

“The government is not keeping the interests of the farmers in mind. The scheme is a fraud. Farmers are being forced to pay premium. It should be voluntary. The appointments of sushasan sahyogis will also be opposed in the House. We had given memorandums to the deputy commissioners that the appointments are illegal,” said INLD’s Jasvinder Singh Sandhu.

Also figuring in the opposition agenda will be the fallout of the Jat agitation for quota in February. “The government had constituted the Prakash Singh Committee on its own to look into the role of authorities during the agitation. Now they are taking no action on the report. A decision on the other issues will be taken in the meeting of CLP that is scheduled for August 25,” said Choudhry.

Congress MLA and former Speaker Kuldeep Sharma said, “We will tear into the slogan of transparency that the BJP keeps harping on. While the government has been talking about selection on basis of merit, the manner in which the recruitment of additional managing director of Hartron was done on the recommendation of the Haryana Chief Minister shows the lack of transparency. It is a drama that we will expose in the Vidhan Sabha.”

The session will also see an increase in salaries and allowances of the MLAs. A Bill to this affect will be brought to the House. A House committee was constituted during the Budget session that recommended a hike in the salaries. Following this, Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar had announced that a Bill regarding this will be presented in the monsoon session and the hike will be done with affect from April 1.

The session which was earlier scheduled to start from August 19 was postponed by a week with the Haryana Sports Minister Anil Vij leading a delegation to Rio and scheduled to return on August 23.

Panel calls for shift away from engineers in water management

A reforms panel has called for a ‘paradigm shift’ in water management with the involvement of professionals from social sciences, management and many other specialised disciplines, citing this as one of the main reasons for recommending the restructuring of engineer-heavy Central Water Commission and Central Ground Water Board.

The seven-member panel headed by Mihir Shah, former member of the erstwhile Planning Commission, has recommended that CWC and CGWB be disbanded and a new multidisciplinary National Water Commission be created in their place. It has called for a shift away from engineering solutions to water management and towards a “more people-centred approach” that leads to rejuvenation of rivers and aquifers.

It has said water governance must become participatory in nature, and should involve communities and local populations, and river basins must be considered the basic hydrological unit for planning, development and management of water.

The water resources ministry has begun acting on the panel’s recommendations and initiated discussions on the institutional restructuring suggested by it.

“Civil engineers (the main discipline overwhelmingly present in the CWC) and hydrogeologists (the main discipline in CGWB) are crucial for effective water management. But alone, they cannot be expected to shoulder the entire burden of the new mandate. There is an acute lack of professionals from a large number of disciplines, without which these bodies will continue to under-perform,” the panel said in its report submitted last month.

“These disciplines include, most importantly, the social sciences and management, without which we cannot expect programmes like participatory irrigation management and participatory groundwater management to succeed... If we are to tackle demand-side management issues and implement crop water budgeting and improve water use efficiency, we need professionals from Agronomy. We need professionals from Ecological Economics for an accurate understanding of the value of ecosystem services. And to attain the national goals of nirmal dhara (clean flow), aviral dhara (uninterrupted flow) and swachh kinara (clean riverbanks), we need professionals specialising in River Ecology,” it said.

The report noted the CWC and CGWB have remained “unreformed” since the time they were created, in 1945 and 1971 respectively, when “dam construction and tubewell drilling was the prime need of the hour”.

“These institutions were set up in a different era, serving a different mandate and manned by a particular kind of personnel... During the past few decades, researches at the interface of two or more water-related disciplines have given birth to new disciplines such as Eco-hydrology, hydro-sociology, hydro-politics, and hydro-informatics. At the same time, the hydrological science has evolved into an interdisciplinary domain, heavily dependent upon wide range of natural and social sciences including ecology, environmental science, geomorphology, sociology, economics, politics, law etc, and utilises a variety of tools and techniques for data collection and analysis,” the report said. The panel noted that neither CWC nor CGWB has any expertise in these areas.

August CPI inflation likely to be in 6.1-6.3 per cent range: D&B report



Achieving a 4 per cent inflation target in the near term seems unlikely, largely due to spike in prices of food and non-food items, and the August CPI numbers are expected to be in the range of 6.1-6.3 per cent, says a report.

According to a report by Dun & Bradstreet, while a greater area is covered under sowing of kharif crops, especially rice and pulses, price correction in food articles is expected to materialise post-October.

D&B expects WPI inflation to be in the range of 4-4.2 per cent and that of CPI to be 6.1-6.3 per cent in August this year.

“Achieving a target of 4 per cent CPI inflation in the near term seems unlikely. The build-up of inflationary expectations owing to the 7th Pay Commission award and the rearing up of the food (prices) along with non-food inflation would continue to keep inflationary expectations on upside,” Dun & Bradstreet India Lead Economist Arun Singh said.

“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.

Spice of life: Food for thought - What to cook for lunch?



I had barely reached home after long-distance cycling when my wife, while handing me a glass of water and a hand towel, asked me: “So, what should we cook for lunch?”

As I stood panting and sweating, I felt like a missile with its course altered midair. Most of the time, we take turns to cook with the help of a maid but my wife has still not abdicated the office of no profit as the kitchen manager. Thus, she is always hard pressed to know the menu in advance. It is not uncommon the successful lawyer to ring me up from inside the courtroom, while I am at home, enjoying my summer holidays. “What will you eat for lunch? *Stuffed karela kha loge?* I have to ring the maid before the judge comes.”

The question what to eat for lunch or dinner cannot be called difficult but it is also not a simple worldly matter. Firstly, the question is open-ended, not a ‘yes-no’ type such as: “Should Messi go?” One would say “no, absolutely not” immediately. The opinion is unanimous and predetermined. Asked who the next US president will be, one can easily go with option A, B, or C, or none of the above, depending upon the current surveys. Making culinary choices requires much deeper reflection. One has to choose from numerous alternatives, which may not be exhausted before the judge comes.

One has to visualise an array of easy to mix combinations such as aaloo-paneer, do some serious consultation with the taste buds, examine the current status of appetite, as well as

pay heed to the cravings of the gustatory system. One has to separate the plain and spicy options, seasonal and unseasonal varieties — issues that cannot be settled in a trice.

It is most painful when the question is served with the second parantha at breakfast, when in a rush to leave for work, wife asks you: “*Lunch ke liye kya banayein?* The sabziwala is about to come. Please don’t buy useless stuff.” One cannot but say: “Please, let me relish the paratha first. I’ll make up my mind before the sabziwala comes.” One day, in the middle of a serious academic meeting, our august assembly was interrupted by this telephone call from my home. It was my daughter: “Mummy wants to know what you will have for lunch.”

Trying to hide my consternation, I chose the most handy option. “Aaloo-mutter,” I muttered under my breath. “Mummy says you don’t like *mutter-aaloo*”, my daughter remonstrated. “Tell mummy but I am very fond of *aaloo-mutter*,” I said. Thank God for the interchangeable items. Another instance when this question crops up without fail is when I am driving home from a tour. “What time are you reaching? And what should we make for dinner?” At these times, I go with the universal favourite and say with rehearsed promptness: “Don’t you worry, I’ll pick up *dal makhani* from a good restaurant on the way.”

All you wanted to know about kharif and rabi



August 22, 2016:

After a weak start in June this year, the southwest monsoon is expected to close on a positive note. Thanks to the late pick up in rains, the cumulative rainfall for the season has been near normal at 99 per cent of the long period average. Adequate rainfall this year has resulted in better sowing during the ongoing Kharif season. Higher water storage at leading reservoirs due to southwest monsoon will have a positive rub-off on the ensuing Rabi season as well. What are these two seasons and why are they important for India?

What is it?

In India, about two thirds of the land is rain fed and thus sowing and cultivation happens primarily during the two monsoon spells — Southwest and Northeast monsoon. Of them, southwest monsoon is the principal rainfall season as India gets most of its rainfall during the June-September period.

Crops that are sown during the southwest monsoon season are called kharif or monsoon crops. These crops are sown at the beginning of the season around end May to early June and are harvested post the monsoon rains beginning October. Rice, maize, pulses such as urad, moong dal and millets are among the key kharif crops.

Those that are sown around the Northwest monsoon season, which begins by October are called rabi or winter crops. These crops are sown at the onset of winter which coincides with the northeast monsoon. The harvest for these crops happens typically during April and May, during the summer season.

Wheat which is the staple grain for people in the Northern parts of the country is among the key rabi crops. Vegetables such as potato, tomato and onion are also cultivated post the winter onset and are harvested in summer.

Why is it important?

Rice and wheat being country's staple crops, a good kharif and rabi harvest is critical to the country's food security. Rice and wheat accounted for 40 per cent and 37 per cent of the country's food grain production of 257 million tonnes in 2014-15 (second advanced estimate). Good monsoon rainfall, particularly during the southwest monsoon, is critical to the sowing and harvest of these crops.

Besides a large domestic market, India is also the largest exporter of rice. The country raced ahead of Thailand with export of 10.23 million tonnes in 2015, making it the top rice exporter in the world. Likewise, India also exports a significant portion of wheat produce; however the exports over the last two years took a beating, thanks to surplus production in Australia.

Why should I care?

A good kharif and rabi season is very critical to ensure food availability to feed the country's growing population. Also, a weak monsoon and lower crop output may cause the government to increase minimum support prices to farmers, as a measure of support to the larger farming community. This in turn can translate into higher market price.

This means that you may have to shell out more as your monthly food bill. On the other side, if you are an investor in agri stocks — be it inputs or commodities, it may be important to keep a close tab on the progression of rabi and kharif season.

Monsoon matters

After growing at an average rate of just 1.7 per cent in the last four years, farm GDP is expected to rise by 6 per cent in 2016-17, thanks to a bountiful and reasonably well distributed monsoon. This is expected to lift overall growth by one percentage point to at least 8 per cent — given that agriculture accounts for 16-17 per cent of the GDP. For a

demand-constrained economy grappling with a capacity utilisation of just about 75 per cent, these are happy tidings. It will lift the fortunes of the consumer goods sector in particular, which has borne the brunt of the long-drawn-out crisis in the rural economy. Urban India, which fared better in recent years, going by the performance of certain consumer durables, is likely to get a boost anyway once the Seventh Pay Commission outgo begins to take effect. It is just as well that this should be matched by a fortuitous boost to the rural economy, or else a widening rural-urban divide could have serious socio-economic consequences. Assuming that the rabi season too goes off well, foodgrain output is expected to touch an all-time high of 270 million tonnes in 2016-17, against 252 in 2015-16. The most encouraging aspect of this kharif season is the increase in acreage under pulses (from 10 million hectares in 2015-16 to 13.6 million hectares) and coarse grains (from 16.7 million hectares to 18 million hectares). The generous hike in support prices (8-9 per cent across categories) of pulses has obviously worked; the issue now is to sustain this interest. Timely rain contributed to a 10-million hectare increase in paddy acreage; this could lift the fortunes of distress-prone, rainfed regions such as Telangana and Odisha.

However, a decent monsoon cannot fail to mask some sobering truths. A May 2015 RBI paper on whether the Indian economy is “conjoined” or “decoupled” from the monsoon observes that a ‘positive’ monsoon shock (above normal rainfall) does not impact output as much as a ‘negative’ shock does — a pointer to productivity constraints in agriculture. It also observes that farm output is more responsive to changes in acreage than rainfall, which points to the significance of the right policy environment. The spatial and temporal distribution of rain, rather than the actual quantum, is more important in assessing the impact of monsoon on agriculture. Owing to climate change, the dry days in the monsoon months has increased, accompanied by bouts of extraordinarily heavy rain destroying standing crop and livestock. The impact of the floods in central and western India can turn out to be serious.

Agriculture policy should be increasingly about managing water sensibly and being prepared for extreme weather events. The *Economic Survey 2015-16* does well to recognise the centrality of water. Crop insurance should be promoted on a war-footing. The ICAR must work on preserving native, sturdy strains and evolving new ones resistant to droughts and floods. A good monsoon should not lead to a sense of complacency on these fronts.

Business Standard

Pulses production may exceed 20 Mt in FY17



Pulses production may touch a record 20 million tonnes (Mt) in 2016-17 (highest since 1957) as the sowing of pulses increased by 35.46 per cent in the ongoing kharif season. Encouraged by better returns, farmers have diverted to pulses from rice, coarse grains and soyabean in many states.

The rise of Rs 600 per quintal in average pulse MSP has played a major role in the increase in area sown under pulse and eventually higher production.

Rating agency SMERA believes that domestic production of pulses will exceed 20 million tonnes. The highest production ever since 1957. This is based on the current area sown per crop (year to date) and future outlook of available land and substitute crops.

As per data from the agriculture department of India, area under pulses has reached 13.60

million hectares as on August 19, 2016 as against 10.05 million hectares in corresponding period of 2015.

"Production of pulse is all set to exceed the government estimate of 20 million tonnes, cooling prices substantially. A healthy monsoon complemented by significant increase in minimum support price (MSP) has supported this gain. Inflation pressures will however subside once domestic supply reaches the market," said Sankar Chakraborti, chief executive officer of SMERA Ratings Limited.

Taking cues from the current situation, SMERA believes that farmers have strategically planned their cultivations to maximize gains. Rise in pulse MSPs and extraction of higher yields per hectare from sugarcane plantations through the use of technology and fertilisers has extensively helped these agricultural gains.

"As the country witnessed weak monsoon in last two years, acreage of pulses had gone down. But now because of attractive prices, farmers have harvested pulses more in this year. Sowing may touch to 12 or 13 Mt in this kharif season," said G Chandrashekhar, economic advisor of Indian Merchant Chamber (IMC) and member of Commodity and Derivative Advisory Committee of Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

According to Chandrashekhar, area of soyabean dipped in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra and shifting in favour of pulses. Similarly, farmers diverted from rice and coarse grains to pulses as well this year.

About 67 per cent of domestic pulse production takes place during the rabi season and an additional 13 Mt are expected to enter the market by the end of Q4 2016-17 and beginning of next financial year.

With domestic demand for pulses of about 24 Mt for the current year, a shortfall of 3.2 Mt is expected. India's agreement with African countries such as Mozambique for import of pulses will further add five million tonnes of buffer stock to this aggregate.

Punjab CM Prakash Singh Badal launches mobile app for farmers



Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal on Monday launched a mobile app '*Kisan Suvidha*' for farmers.

The app will provide basic information on weather updates, crop prices and expert advices, an official spokesman said here.

Praising the Agriculture Department initiative, he said this would go a long way to keep the farmers abreast with the changing agricultural practices and marketing support, coupled with the latest agronomical techniques to enhance productivity.

The app is a simple interface and provides information on five critical parameters — weather, input dealers, market price, plant protection and expert advisories, the spokesman said.

An additional tab directly connects the farmer with the Kisan Call Centre where technical graduates answer their queries, he added.

To begin with, a farmer has to register his mobile number, choose a language (English, Hindi or Punjabi) and enter the details of the state, district and block or sub-district.

The 'weather' button shows the temperature, humidity, wind speed and rainfall for the current day and the forecast for the next five days, he said.

Additionally, a farmer can get extreme weather alerts like hailstorms or unseasonal rains.

The 'market price' button shows the latest price of all the crops traded at a mandi or the registered agriculture market of the particular district of the farmer.

The 'plant protection' button provides pest, weed and disease-related information as well as management practices for each stage of crop development, from nursery to harvesting.

The 'agro-advisory' section shows messages for farmers from district agriculture officials and state universities in their local language, he said.