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Centre to import extra 90,000 tonnes pulses to control prices

In a bid to control prices of pulses, the government has decided to import 90,000 tonnes more pulses, a move that would narrow down the gap between demand and supply.

The Consumer Affairs department on Friday held a meeting of the price stabilisation fund, in which it was decided that more pulses would be procured for the buffer stock.

“The government has decided to import 40,000 tonnes of Masur, 20,000 tonnes of Tur, 20,000 tonnes of Desi Chana and 10,000 tonnes of Urad for the buffer stock,” said a Ministry statement, after the meeting chaired by Union Consumer Affairs Secretary, Hem Pande here. The meeting reviewed the procurement and distribution of pulses across the country from the buffer stock.

“So far, the government agencies have procured about 1,20,000 MT pulses from the domestic market and farmers. Besides, the total import of pulses for buffer stock now stands at 1,76,000 tonnes,” said the Ministry’s statement.

It was pointed out during the meeting that the government agencies have been also been directed to gear up for domestic procurement for coming crop of pulses, which is expected to good this year.

Review of availability

Apart from this, an inter-ministerial committee on prices of essential commodities also met on Friday to review availability and prices of essential commodities.

The meeting was attended by senior officials of the Ministry and the Department of Agriculture, Food, Commerce, Revenue, MMTTC, NAFED among others.

It was observed during the meeting that prices of pulses have come down but have not reflected in retail. “There was an opinion that States must be asked to take immediate action under the Essential Commodities Act to ensure that decline in prices is also reflected in retail also,” said the statement.

Pulses saw an average price rise of 29.6 percent during 2015-16. Pulses prices have soared up to Rs 200 per kg in the retail markets in recent months due to fall of production in last two crop years in view of back to back drought.

Pulses, rice continue to drive acreage growth this kharif

New Delhi, August 26:

With an unprecedented rise in acreage under pulses, sowing in the ongoing kharif season has almost reached the average total normal area sown for the entire period (averaged over the last five years) with an indication that total sowing may surpass the normal area.

Rains boost sowing

Acreage under all kharif crops on August 26 was 1,019.10 lakh hectares, just 4 per cent short of normal area of lakh 1,062.50 hectares, according to weekly sowing data released by the Agriculture Ministry.

“Led by growth in acreage under pulses and rice, thanks to plentiful monsoon rains, the sowing of crops may surpass the normal area,” a government official told *BusinessLine* .

Because of late advent of monsoon this year, sowing is likely to continue well into September, the official added.

Sowing of pulses have posted a record increase of 40.22 per cent so far at 139.42 lakh hectares (lh) compared to 103.85 lh in the same period last year.

Pulses area up

It is about 28 per cent higher than the normal area acreage of 108.69 lh as farmers switched from cotton attracted by high prices of pulses and to avoid risk of pest attack in cotton.

Rice acreage, at 363.07 lh, was up 13.42 per cent than 352.23 lh sown in the same period last year.

Coarse cereals and oilseeds sowing also posted an increase of 6.19 per cent to 182.99 lh and 3.01 per cent to 177.74 lh respectively.

Cash crops lose

Cotton sowing declined 12.83 per cent to 102.78 lh as farmers sowed less of Bt cotton that got infested by white flies in the past years.

There was a marginal decline in acreage under sugarcane and jute as well.

Sugarcane sowing declined 0.66 per cent to 45.55 lh, while sowing of jute was 0.57 per cent lower at 7.56 lh.

Pearl farm: A new work culture

A dedicated couple helps villagers augment their income through backyard pearl culture



Spreading lustre The self-taught Ashok Manwani wants to take pearl cultivation to every village where there is a river, pond or other water body

While surfing the Internet, Jaishankar, a progressive farmer of Tetari village in Begusarai district of Bihar, came to know of Ashok Manwani, a pioneer in design pearl farming.

He lost no time inviting Manwani to his village to train under him. That was in 2009. Jaishankar has since harvested over 10,000 pearls in his own pond by breeding mussels from the Budi Gandak river.

“I expect to sell them in one lot to a Delhi trader, who will be visiting the village later this month.”

Jaishankar has even uploaded a video of his work on YouTube.

Another farmer, Suyog Kawle, met Manwani in 2007 at an agriculture exhibition in Gadchiroli and soon trained under him. Kawle, who belongs to village Ballarpur in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, started collecting mussels from the nearby

Wainganga river and these are now mushrooming in a pond constructed by him. He is yet to explore the market, but sells his pearls to the other farmers he meets at agriculture meets and exhibitions. He says the pearls sell for Rs. 250-1,500, depending on their quality.

Like Kumar and Kawle, more than 500 farmers have trained under Manwani and are today earning from either pearl culture or simply breeding and selling mussels.

Born into an agricultural family, Manwani had read an article about freshwater pearl farming when he was in college. Fascinated, he began experimenting on his own. He collected mussels from Morna river in Akola district but failed to develop pearls.

Finally, in 2000, he underwent training at a pearl culture institute in Bhubaneswar. A year later he started teaching the art. In 2003, he met Kulanjan Dubey and together they started experimenting with different techniques for pearl culture, despite having no outside funding.

“It was not easy. Sometimes we lived in the jungles and practised on different species of mussels,” he recalls. The duo developed simple tools like a mussel opener and a wooden mussel stand to cultivate designer pearls.

They continued with their research for several years and, at the same time, created awareness about pearl farming among villagers in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh.

Manwani and Dubey (now married to each other) have developed a simple technique that farmers can easily adopt. Manwani says that fish farming alongside pearl farming can increase the production of mussels. He wants more farmers to know that pearls come not just from the sea, but can also be cultivated in every village where there is a river or a pond or other water body.

The Bioved Research Institute of Agriculture and Technology in Shringverpur, near Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, invited the couple to offer training at its premises.

“We are developing different kinds of designer pearls instead of the usual round ones. It takes longer to produce and is more complicated. Designs in the shape of deities like Ganesha, Lakshmi, Hanuman, Lord Buddha and other shapes like a heart or cross are easy to do.” They even use mussel shells to make eco-friendly handicrafts like incense stands, mobile phone holders and other showpieces.

The couple has received several awards for their innovative work in pearl farming. Krishi Vigyan Kendras now invite them as resource persons.

Not interested in running a business of his own, Manwani says his mission is to see that even the poorest of farmers can earn through pearl culture. “That will be the ideal reward for the years of struggle my wife and I have put in,” he says unassumingly.

Tea prices will start picking up from Sept-Oct: McLeod Russel India CFO

Tea prices have declined about 8 per cent in last one month even as the cost of production is on the rise. *BTVI* spoke to Kamal Baheti, CFO at McLeod Russel India, about its impact on the tea industry. Excerpts:

Tea prices are seeing a down-trend while costs have increased. What kind of impact is this having on your business?

In July, there had been a drop in crop mainly because there had been a lot of rain in Assam and flooding in some areas, thus affecting the overall crop. In a fixed-cost industry, if you lose crop, your cost keeps on going up. Plus, there is also a normal increase in the input cost. The prices in July had been a little subdued compared with last year.

But if you look at the current situation, the weather has improved and we expect to recover the crop, which we lost in July, in August and September. Going forward, once the consumption returns because of the very good monsoon, I think the prices should also start looking up. For the month of July, we not only lost crop which had an impact on the cost, but the prices also did not go up much.

We understand that Bangladesh tea has been rising for four straight weeks. Could you give a sense of the other exporting nations, too? Is your export-realisation looking better or worse at this stage?

Tea prices are little subdued in July and August mainly because the exports have been lower compared with last year. Again, there was a record crop production in Kenya. They was good weather in February, March and April. Those months were very good cropping months for Kenya.

Current Kenyan crop is similar to last year or maybe little lower. As we go along, once the Kenyan prices start picking up, which we believe will happen from the next month, we will see that the price pick-up also happens out of India. But yes, because of the very good crop in Kenya, the quantity of exports from India had been a little subdued.

Export prices are holding out. They are similar to last year.

There has been a shift as far as demand for the lower category of tea is concerned, but a clear drop in price for the higher category. Could this have some impact on your margins going forward?

Fortunately, in McLeod Russel, we have got various categories of tea. We are not only in the top-end; a few of our gardens are in the mid segment, which has not seen any kind of drop in prices.

The top segment has dropped. Last year, we did not see much increase in the mid and lower segments and we had seen a very good increase in price in the top segment. So there are some corrections. The disparity that got created is getting narrowed down.

As we go along, demand will start picking up at all levels with all categories. I see no reason why prices won't start picking up sometime from September-October. Otherwise, it will be a difficult year for tea.

Looking at the overall consumption, it normally starts picking up from the festival season. The last two years had been drought years and the consumption had dropped. This year we expect a very good jump in consumption.

Business Standard

Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan farmers to exchange ideas to boost agriculture



In a move to promote innovation in agriculture sector, farmers of Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh will exchange experiences based on new experiments being done in the field of farming in both the states.

"The two states have different climatic conditions as well as variety in types of soil. Exchanging new ideas and best practices will help farmers of both the states to combat challenges faced in agriculture sector, besides enhancing productivity," an agriculture department official said on Friday.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh had during a meeting with Rajasthan's

Agriculture Minister Prabhulal Saini recently at Kota in the western state expressed mutual consent on this step, he said.

It has been decided that atleast 50 farmers from Chhattisgarh will be sent on a study tour to Jaipur where they will also attend the agri-tech fair to be held from November 9 to 11, he said.

The farmers of Rajasthan were also invited herefor studying advanced methods of farming, specially in horticulture crops sector.

The Rajasthan government was informed in the meeting about various new practices underway in the field of horticulture in Chhattisgarh, like preparation of clusters of guava, lemon, custard apples and berries and the ongoing plantation of cashew saplings alongside the roads at wide-level, the official said.

Besides, initiatives like use of solar energy to ensure drinking water supply in villages of Chhattisgarh and distribution of solar irrigation pumps to farmers were also appreciated by officials there, he said.

Similarly, according to Rajasthan government, the state is the leading producer of cumin, mustard, and barley and even they had developed west Rajasthan as hub of date palm production, the official said.

The exchange of innovative ideas among the farmers of different states will help them to take up production of new crops according to the standard procedure, he added.

Australia to churn out record pulse harvest; fill Indian plates



Australian farmers are set to churn out record harvests of pulses such as chickpeas and lentils after they rushed to take advantage of surging prices due to shortages in India — the world's largest producer and consumer of pulses.

Prices of the key pulses, long-used to make dishes such as curries and growing in popularity globally due to their high-protein content, soared above AU\$ (Australian dollar) 1,200 (\$915) per tonne earlier this year, according to National Australia Bank.

Although markets have since pulled back to around AU\$700 per tonne, they are still well above longer term averages of AU\$300 to AU\$500, said Nick Goddard, chief executive of industry body Pulse Australia.

The rise, largely driven by production shortfalls in India due to back-to-back droughts and irrigation problems, prompted Australian farmers to plant more pulse crops, with a total harvest of around 4 million tonnes expected this year compared to 2.2 million last season, according to Pulse Australia.

That should help cement Australia's position as a top five global exporter of pulses, alongside nations such as Canada and China, at a time when it is looking to rebalance its economy as the mining investment boom fades.

"(Prices) were double where they normally were," said Phil Christie, a farmer in southeast Australia, explaining why he chose to plant 20 per cent more chickpeas this season.

Australia typically exports two-thirds of its chickpea output to India, with most of the remainder sold to Bangladesh and Pakistan. Very little is consumed locally.

As well as chickpeas and lentils, pulse crops include field peas, lupins and fava beans.

Prices are expected to ease towards year-end as the Indian growing season gets off to a strong start and as producers such as Canada and Russia ramp up exports.

But Pulse Australia has forecast export earnings from this year's harvest would likely hit a record AUS\$2 billion, up from AUS\$1.2 billion in 2015.

Goddard cautioned that some farms in the state of New South Wales had recently had crops ruined by excessive rainfall, although he said the overall outlook remained strong.

"Even if we lose a bit because of the rain, it's still going to be a very good year," he said.

Keya Sarkar: The joys of growing your own food



It is only recently that a friend of ours allowed us to grow vegetables on a plot of land that he had bought years ago but was not using. We approached a farmer, who was

willing to do the real work, and our friend and we agreed to share the costs and split the vegetables. The house we live in is also in the midst of a biggish plot of land. But thanks to several fruit trees that my grandfather planted, which are now mature, there is too much shade in our garden to grow vegetables. So while we can enjoy mangoes, jackfruit, chiku, bel, custard apple and amla, for vegetables we needed a place ...

Maharashtra govt proposes subsidy for onion farmers



With a sharp fall in onion prices due to increase in supply and unsold stock, the Maharashtra government proposes to give a subsidy of Rs 100 a quintal to growers.

A senior official from the department of marketing told Business Standard, “A proposal has been sent to the Centre, with a request to share 50 per cent of the subsidy to be provided. The government will not procure onion but help by providing the subsidy.”

The state government will have to bear an additional burden of Rs 40 crore on account of the subsidy, to growers from Nashik, Pune, Ahmednagar, Dhule and other parts. Model

(average) onion prices were Rs 6 a kg on Friday at the major wholesale market at Lasalgaon in Nashik District; low quality onion has been offered in the past week at Rs 1.50-2 a kg, according to the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation. A year before at Lasalgaon, the price was around Rs 50 a kg.

Arrivals have also increased; 1,750 tonnes came there on Friday. And, supply of red onion has begun from South India. Onion has also come to the market from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The government's move comes after political parties and various farmer bodies protested at a farmer from Karanjgaon village in Nashik district having to have been offered no more than five paise a kg, prompting him to dump his produce of 13 quintals in protest. In general, growers' cost of production is Rs 885 a qtl; sale is at Rs 500 a qtl.

Nanasaheb Patil, chairman of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee at Lasalgaon, said the government's proposal of Rs 100 a qtl subsidy was inadequate; it should be at least Rs 500 a qtl. "This apart, the government needs to provide incentives for export. Though the Centre has kept a zero minimum export price, these are not picking up. The Centre can provide assistance from the Price Stabilisation Fund on a priority basis," he opined.

Deepak Pagar, functionary at the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana, part of the ruling coalition, demanded a Minimum Support Price for onions.