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Campaign against harmful pesticides

The Agriculture Department has begun a campaign against harmful pesticides, which were either banned or regulated, in the district. The State-wide programme will conclude on September 7.

Inspectors attached to the department would be tasked to carry out checks at marketing and distribution centres of pesticides. Stern action would be taken against those storing banned pesticides or keeping in their possession any pesticides without licence. Provisions of the Insecticides Act would be initiated against them. The Act aims at regulating the import, manufacture, sale, transport, distribution and use of pesticides with a view to preventing risk to human beings or animals.

Measures would be adopted to check the smuggling of pesticides from other districts and neighbouring States. A district-level vigilance committee has been constituted for the purpose. Besides, a State-level vigilance squad would carry out surprise checks in the district as well.

For organic farming

Officials said that complaints had risen against the overuse of pesticides in hilly regions and plantations in the district. Harmful pesticides were being imported by people in this business from other places. The Agriculture Department with the support of the district administration would act against them, they said.

As a rule, manufactures and distributors of pesticides should not directly sell pesticides to farmers and agriculture societies. Without the consent of the department, pesticides companies should not conduct any demonstration and farming experiments at agriculture lands, the officials said.

The objective of the campaign is to reduce the use of pesticides and thereby encourage farmers to adopt organic farming. This could be achieved with the support of the farmers, the public and voluntary agencies, they said.

More sambar deer to arrive at zoo



The lone sambar deer at Amirthi Zoo will soon get company. Four or five of its kind from the Vandalur Zoo will be brought here.

Home to 190 animal and birds, the Amirthi Zoo is all set to feature added attractions.

“There is a seven-year-old male sambar deer here. We will be bringing four or five more from the Vandalur Zoo soon,” Somesh Soman, district forest officer, Vellore, said.

At present, there are 60 spotted deer in the zoo. Apart from this, it houses marsh crocodiles, peacocks, porcupine, cobra, python and, common kite. The zoo, on an average, receives at least 300 to 1,000 visitors a day. “We are also planning to get more water birds. The zoo houses a pelican. We want to get spoonbill and more water birds. We are also planning to get black buck from Vandalur,” he said.

The Central Zoo Authority had visited the Amirthi Zoo in February and given certain instructions.

New facilities

“Based on these instructions, we are taking up works for landscaping, setting up lawns, planting horticulture plants, laying new pathways and barricades,” he said.

Heavy rain in Kodaikanal

Sharp showers hit Dindigul and nearby areas bringing the temperature down considerably here on Tuesday.

Kodaikanal hill too recorded heavy downpour in the evening.

Mist covered roads blinded drivers in Kodaikanal as temperature plummeted in the hill station.

This rain would be ideal for horticulture crops and rain-fed farming activities, said agriculture officials.

Cumbum, Thevaram, Theni, Bodi, Kombai and Bodi areas in Theni district also experienced showers.

Scheme for sustainable land use

The Kerala State Land Use Board (KSLUB) is gearing up to prepare a comprehensive databank of resources coming under the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation for their effective utilisation.

The project, christened Sustainable Land Utilisation Model, aimed at resource mapping of the 100 wards of the Corporation. The programme, which has been recommended by the State Planning Board, has been included in the annual plan of the KSLUB this fiscal.

Mayor V.K. Prasanth will formally launch the project at a function to be held at the SNDP hall at Kazhakuttam on Thursday. Deputy Mayor Rakhi Ravikumar will preside.

Objectives

According to Land Use Commissioner A. Nizamudeen, the main objectives of the project included identifying the resources in the region and understanding the availability and distribution of various crops in each ward. This would enable proper utilisation of each part of the entire area, including fallow lands. Such an endeavour would enable the local body to take stock of the available agricultural resources and explore the possibility of extending farming to unused areas, paving way for self-sufficiency in crop production.

The topographical survey and aerial mapping of the region will enable the Corporation to identify waterlogged areas and reclaimed wetlands. The satellite images and utilisation of the Geographical Information System (GIS) will enable the preparation of a digital databank. The reference material is bound to benefit civic planners, development agencies, and researchers

The project will also aid in utilising the drainage network in the city to its maximum potential by understanding the available resources. It will also help in taking stock of the existing public wells and bore-wells and arriving at steps to revive those remaining defunct.

The study will also assist in demarcating the boundaries of each ward and thereby enable urban planning in a scientific manner.

No pesticide limits prescribed for veggies, fruits sold in State

The absence of prescribed limits on the use of chemical pesticides for various crops could hinder the government move to step up enforcement of food safety during the Onam festival season, experts feel.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has not prescribed the Maximum Residue Level (MRL) of many of the pesticides used on vegetables and fruits.

This, according to official sources, poses legal hurdles in cracking down on the indiscriminate use of pesticides by domestic farmers and curbing the import of pesticide-contaminated items from other States.

MRL is the legally permitted level of pesticide residue in food items. The MRL value is fixed on the basis of a rigorous evaluation. It acts as an indicator of the correct use of pesticides and ensures compliance with legal requirements for food safety.

“It is a matter of concern that the majority of pesticides that have been detected in vegetables, fruits, spices and condiments do not have MRL values,” says a senior scientist associated with pesticide safety.

“This makes a mockery of the periodic monitoring of food items for pesticide residue,” he said.

The State government conducts regular surveillance sample testing of food items and the reports are published on the official website. But in the absence of MRL values, officials are hamstrung in taking legal action.

“For example, Profenophos is a typical highly neurotoxic insecticide registered for use only in cotton. But it has been detected in chilli, chilli powder, curry leaf, coriander leaf, mint leaf, cardamom, cumin seed, fennel seed, and curry powders. The FSSAI has not fixed the MRL for this insecticide in any of these commodities, because its use is not approved in any of these crops,” says an official.

Vice Chancellor, Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), P. Rajendran said the multiplicity of pesticides used for various crops posed a problem in regulation. “Fixing the MRL value for a pesticide used on a crop is a complex, time-consuming process, often taking years. To complicate matters further, pesticide manufacturers come up with new products every now and then, by changing the formulation.”

Under a special food safety drive for the forthcoming Onam festival season, the Pesticide Residue Research and Analytical Laboratory under KAU is screening samples of vegetables and fruits collected from markets across the State.

hindustantimes

Patanjali to set up orange juice plant in Nagpur



Yoga guru Ramdev's company Patanjali Aurved will be setting up a huge plant in Nagpur for the production of orange juice. Patanjali, that emerged as the sole bidder for 230-acres of land in Multi-model International Cargo Hub and Airport, Nagpur (MIHAN) project has been given a letter of acceptance of bid by the Maharashtra Airport Development Company (MADC) on Tuesday.

The company plans to develop a modern food park by building a Rs1000-crore plant, and launch juices made from the famous Nagpuri orange. It will be for the first time that orange juice made from local oranges will be packaged as a brand, informs managing

director of Patanjali Ayurved, Acharya Balkrishna. This will also be the first expansion of existing facility near Haridwar, Uttarkhand.

Read: Ramdev's company to set up food park in Nagpur

With the setting up of the food park, the MADC was optimistic that the Vidarbha region will get economic support, capability building and provide employment opportunities to the local population. The huge export potential of the processed food industry can be tapped at minimum time and cost due to the upcoming international airport and cargo terminal in MIHAN.

After floating global tender thrice earlier, the MADC finally succeeded when Patanjali appeared on the scene for the huge project.

The MADC, as part of betterment of Vidarbha region and to overcome the backlog had decided to develop agro, food, herbal and forest based industrial park on 230 acres of sprawling land on one corner of MIHAN.

The MADC set a condition that the financial capacity of the bidder should have a minimum turn-over of Rs 300-crore per annum from agro, food, herbal and forest based processing business in last three years and whose net worth should be Rs 75-crore in last financial year.

Patanjali Ayurved was found to be the right choice in the bidding. The MADC wanted a commitment to procure raw materials to the tune of at least Rs 100 crore per annum from the farmers and members of tribal community within the surrounding area.

It also laid a condition that the bidder should make a commitment to train minimum 1000 farmers per year across Maharashtra to improve productivity, quality and market intelligence to get them ready for agro business development in consultation with agriculture department.

Patanjali is not in the region for business alone. The larger aim is to develop this backward region that is infamous for farmers' suicide. The proposed plant is expected to link nearly 50,000 farmers' suppliers, create direct employment for over 5,000 people and eventually provide indirect employment to nearly five-lakh families, Balkrishna pointed out.

Besides, farmers will be trained to grow crops like orange, aloe vera, tomato and herbs according to the specification of the company and given a purchase guarantee. A team of scientists and other experts is also working on the project that is expected to change the farm economy of the region, Balkrishna further claimed.

The government of Maharashtra formed a special purpose entity in the name of MADC for development of MIHAN. The state government has acquired over 4,000-hectare land to develop the entire project, including a special economic zone.

Centre tells Nafed, FCI to buy moong in Karnataka at MSP



BENGALURU, AUGUST 31:

As prices of greengram or moong continue to rule below minimum support price levels in States such as Karnataka, the Centre has asked agencies such as Nafed and FCI to start procurement operations immediately.

Moong, a minor pulses crop, is the first among kharif crops to be harvested and in Karnataka, the market arrivals of the new crop had commenced about three weeks ago. The modal prices of the new moong crop have been ruling below MSP levels in major markets in Karnataka such as Gadag, Kalaburgi and Bagalkot for the past several weeks.

The Centre had announced an MSP and bonus of ₹5,225 a quintal for moong for the ongoing kharif season. In a bid to encourage production of pulses, the Centre had increased the MSP and also announced a bonus for tur and urad as a decline in output had led to a sharp increase in prices of pulses in recent months. For tur, the Centre had fixed a

support price of ₹5,050 per quintal, while for urad it was ₹5,000 including a bonus of ₹425.

On Wednesday, the Food Ministry, in a statement in Delhi, said that Nafed and Food Corporation of India have been directed to submit a State-wise roadmap of procurement for the new crop of pulses directly from farmers.

Direct payment

Chairing the inter-ministerial committee meeting on prices in Delhi on Wednesday, Hem Pande, Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, also asked the government agencies to ensure direct payment to the farmers. Pande said that procurement centres, including mobile centres, should be arranged near farmgates. Wide publicity should be given to the procurement price — that is MSP plus bonus — procurement schedule and to the locations of the centres so that farmers benefit, the Food Ministry said. Meanwhile, trade sources said buyers have adopted a wait-and-watch stance as prices remain volatile amidst higher arrivals of pulses.

Relax stock limits

Also the government is yet to relax the norms on stock limits imposed for both millers and traders, which is preventing them from entering the markets at a time of higher arrivals.

“There is a sense of fear among the traders on the stock limits. Considering the bearish trend in prices and increase in market arrivals, the government should immediately relax the stock limit norms imposed on pulses,” trade sources said.

High prices and the increase in support prices had prompted farmers to plant an increased area under pulses this kharif. Traders are expecting a bigger crop in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Eyeing larger soyabean crop, trade sees scope for exports to Far East



AHMEDABAD, AUGUST 31:

After the latest field survey of the soyabean crop in key growing regions, trade bodies expect a 'much bigger' crop this year against last year's estimated 69 million tonnes (mt) of production. Soyabean prices are likely to dip by 8-10 per cent on higher production estimates this kharif.

In its crop health survey conducted from August 21-29, the Soyabean Processors Association of India (SOPA) found 'satisfactory crop health' in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, covering 41 districts and 85 per cent of the soyabean area.

“The crop prospects are very encouraging and satisfactory. Looking at the crop condition and the acreage, we can expect a much bigger crop than last year. However, a formal crop estimate will be announced later,” said Davish Jain, Chairman, SOPA. The trade body reported a drop of about 9 per cent in the acreage in Madhya Pradesh, and 8 per cent in Rajasthan. But Maharashtra witnessed an increase by about 6 per cent over the last kharif season.

In States such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat, the soyabean acreage has increased by 30 per cent over last year owing to the shift from other crops such as cotton.

The harvest is likely to start by September 25.

Prices sliding

According to Jain, prices have already started declining. “There is already a downward trend in the prices as we expect higher production over last year. In the next one month or so, prices may further go down by about 8-10 per cent, making it a favourable situation for exports,” said Jain.

A higher crop will have exportable surplus with prices aligned with the international market thereby, providing parity.

“With this higher crop we can re-enter the Far East markets, where we have been almost absent for the last two years. A parity in prices will open the export window for us,” added Jain, who is leading a delegation of soyabean processors to Japan from September 18 to 30 to explore business prospects.

The Union Commerce Ministry has written a letter to the Embassy of India in Japan explaining the plight of India’s soyameal business.

“During the last couple of years, our (India’s) exports have fallen drastically due to disparity in prices. This year, the crop looks very good and there is every possibility that we can re-enter these markets with competitive prices and the added advantage of being totally non-GM,” the letter stated.