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DECCAN Chronicle

Kochi: Restriction on grow-bags may hit organic farming

Ban likely considering ecological impact.



Agriculture department, local bodies, Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, residents' associations and others have been selling grow-bags without any restrictions.

KOCHI: The unrestrained use of plastic grow-bags for vegetable cultivation has resulted in serious ecological impact following which the agriculture department is planning to restrict their use. The move, which will have positive results in rural areas, might affect the terrace farming and vegetable cultivation in small holdings in the city. The agriculture department, local bodies, Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, residents' associations and various other organisations have been selling grow-bags without any restrictions.

“The plastic grow-bags are being extensively used even in rural areas where there is enough land for cultivation. Abandoned grow-bags have become a serious ecological issue. Plastic grow-bags should be permitted only in the city where the residents have no holdings for cultivation,” said Shinoj Subrahmanian, senior scientist at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Ernakulam. The KVK is not selling grow-bags though it supplies all other farming inputs. Meanwhile, the agriculture department authorities are clueless on how to replace the plastic grow-bags with cost-effective and long lasting pots.

Earthen pots have no takers due to its high price and non-durability. Though KVK has tried to introduce jute bags, it received poor response due to high price. The residents' associations are apprehensive over the plans to impose restrictions on grow-bags as majority of their members are successfully doing vegetable cultivation in them. "Instead of grow-bags, plastic cement bags from big construction sites can be collected, cleaned and reused for farming in city areas. This will help minimise the environmental impact while ensuring that the farming initiatives of city residents are not affected," added Shinoj Subrahmanian.

THE HINDU

Zero import duty on wheat will lead to dumping: Unions



He said that big players in the wheat flour market had been demanding withdrawal of the duty, and this move was to suit their interests.

The Centre recently announced zero import duty from the prevailing 10 per cent to improve domestic availability and check rising prices of wheat and wheat-based products.

"Wheat traders are expecting imports to cross five million tonnes this year. The cost of imported wheat would be far below the MSP of ongoing rabi (Rs. 16,250 a tonne), resulting in crashing domestic wheat prices as the government has no effective procurement mechanism in many States," he said.

Detrimental step

Nirbhay Singh, leader of the Kirti Kisan Union in Punjab, said, "With easing norms for wheat imports, the government has taken a detrimental step towards farmers' interest. We have seen it in every season that

though the government promises to buy crop at the MSP, yet farmers sell their produce in distress at a lower price for various reasons,” he said.

Agriculture experts also expressed concern over the Centre’s decision and apprehended that the move could badly hurt farmers’ income.

“The government has been saying that wheat sowing has not been impacted by demonetisation and the area of cultivation has increased. If the area has actually increased, and there are no other indications that wh

A run to popularise millets



Mera Terah Run was conceptualised by Jagdish Damania, an IT professional and endurance runner, along with Sindhu Naik two years ago. While the last two runs were held as fund-raisers for rural development projects, this time the runners wanted to focus on the ‘super foods’.

“People who are unable to be a part of the entire journey will extend their support by either walking or running in their city,” says Ms. Naik.

The run will commence at Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru.

The runners will then take a train to Hubballi, followed by a road trip to Surashetty Koppa in Karnataka. They will be travelling to Hyderabad and Zaheerabad in Telangana, Sewagram and Wardha in Maharashtra, Bargi and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Ganiyari and Raipur in Chhattisgarh and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

In each place, the group will be running 13 miles (half-marathon). The run will culminate at Araku Valley in Andhra Pradesh. It will include six train journeys and a couple of short road trips.

Along the way, the team will interact with local communities to spread awareness on millets and meet farmers to understand the challenges in bringing these super grains back on to Indian plates. They will be taking part in a millet mela in Hubballi, an Open Street Day in Raipur and judge a cooking contest.

The event is funded by the runners. “Each one of us puts in money for the train travel. We keep expenditure minimal by staying in dormitories. At some places, food is sponsored by our local hosts. Each person spent Rs. 25,000 for the 13-day journey last year. It will cost more or less the same this year,” says Mr. Damania.

Farmers requested to donate fodder

Minister for Labour and district in-charge, Santosh Lad, and Deputy Commissioner, Ramprasath Manohar, thanked some of the farmers for their gesture of voluntarily donating fodder from their paddy fields to the district administration.

“Farmers have donated around 1,280 tonnes of fodder. The district is in need of at least 5,000 tonnes of fodder ... we request other farmers to donate fodder which would be used to create fodder banks and supplied to the needy,” they said.

The fodder donated, with the help of a machine, would be baled in bundles and stocked so that it would come handy while transporting and supplying it to the needy.

To another question, Mr. Manohar informed that onion procurement centres had procured around 950 tonnes and would continue to do so with farmers willing to sell their produce as per the prescribed norms.

He said that paddy procurement centres are yet to be opened and the administration was awaiting orders from the government in this regard.

When his attention was drawn to the plight of farmers after demonetisation, Mr. Manohar said that he had already held a meeting of bankers, APMC officials, rice mill owners among others to make payments after purchase of agriculture produce through RTGS (Real Time Gross Settlement).

Business Standard

Note ban frontlines: Onion rates halve, farmers have no cash, can't go cashless

Onions, which were sold for Rs 1,000-1,200 per quintal in weeks before notebandi, are now sold for Rs 600-700 per quintal



Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be happy with 26-year-old Deepak Patil, an onion farmer from the village of Valwadi in Malegaon Taluka, about 300 km north of Mumbai, India's commercial capital. Patil, dressed in a grey jacket, over his white shirt and jeans, said he has a bank account, a cell phone, and receives payment for his onion produce in cheque.

But Patil, who sells his produce in Pimpalgaon, a market in India's onion heartland, Maharashtra—producing a third of all onions in the country—is not happy with demonetisation, or *notebandi* as it is colloquially called, and does not believe he can go cashless.

After November 9, 2016, when notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000—86% by value of Indian currency in circulation—were declared invalid, the government pushed for cashless transactions and digital payments. Patil—with access to banking and a cell phone—could, in theory, move to cashless transactions, but in reality there is no Internet access where he lives, the closest ATM is at least 25 km away, the closest nationalised bank 15 km away, and the government has currently placed restrictions on the district cooperative bank that hosts his account.

Nashik district, which contains Lasalgaon and Pimpalgaon, two of India's busiest onion markets, contributes 10.4% of Maharashtra's gross state

domestic product, the highest of any agricultural district in the state, according to this 2014 Economic Survey report.

Patil's trials with the banking system, and the effect of demonetisation on the rural economy of Nashik, show how 800 million Indians, who depend on the rural economy, have been affected by the ban on notes over the last 35 days.

Hours in queues at a bank, only Rs 2,000 in hand

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred the bank where Patil's account is—Nashik District Central Co-operative Bank (NDCC), and all other district central cooperative banks (DCCBs)—from exchanging defunct notes for Rs 100 notes or for new notes of Rs 500 and Rs 2,000.

Patil deposited Rs 21,000 by cheque in his NDCC account, hoping he could withdraw some money to pay labourers who work on his farm, repay lenders and buy groceries—transactions that still take place in cash.

“It takes more than two weeks for the cheque to be deposited,” said Patil. “All we can do till then is wait.” Even when the money was deposited in his account, it was no easy feat to withdraw it.

“I have to stand in line at the bank from 10 am to 6 pm, and all I get is one Rs 2,000 note,” said Patil, who doesn't have any other bank account. He needed Rs 4,500 to pay labourers and Rs 4,000 for the mini truck that carries his produce to the market in Pimpalgaon, 100 km from his village. These days, he buys food on credit from the local grocer.

Patil is one of many farmers who bank with district cooperative banks. As many as 371 such banks with over 140,000 branches across the country provide banking access to 2.5 million account holders, according to the 2015 annual report of the National Federation of State Co-operative Banks.

“Seventy percent of farmers in Nashik district have their accounts with NDCC, and many have no other account,” said Shirish Kotwal, director and former chairman of NDCC.

The RBI feared that district banks, which are not under the RBI's purview, could be used to route black money back into the system, the *Indian Express* reported in December 2016. Seventy two hours after the announcement to demonetise Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes, DCCBs reported deposits of old currency eight times that of nationalised banks.

Patil, the only earning member in a family of six, does not own a vehicle, and chose the closest bank for an account. The closest nationalised bank is 15 km from his village, the district cooperative bank 10 km.

Low rural Internet connectivity

Like 83% of Indians who do not own a smartphone, Patil too does not have an Internet connection on his cell phone. So, even though he has a bank account, he cannot access Internet-based banking services.

When asked if he has an ATM card, he laughed and said: “The nearest ATM is 40 km away [**IndiaSpend** found the closest was 25 km away, but it is unclear if that worked].”

Onion prices halve, stressing rural economy

Mini truck after truck of red onions entered Lasalgaon onion market, the largest in Asia, as a sense of gloom pervaded the air. Farmers huddled in corners as traders decided the price of onions at auctions.

“Ever since *notebandi*, the rates have decreased by half,” Patil said.

Onions, which were sold for Rs 1,000-1,200 per quintal (100 kg) in the weeks before *notebandi*, are now sold for Rs 600-700 per quintal.

There were no auctions for ten days after demonetisation because of a lack of valid notes in the market. [Onions](#) stored in the market stayed unsold and when markets reopened, new produce flooded the market reducing onion prices.

[Farmers](#) have no choice but to sell the red onion at whatever price it sells, as it does not last beyond 10 days, unlike the lighter coloured ‘unhal’ onion that can be stored for three months.

Madhavrao Thorat, another marginal farmer, has no time to spare to stand in the lines outside banks as he is sowing [onions](#) in his field, in the village of Devgaon, more than 200 km north of Mumbai. The nearest nationalised bank is 8 km away, and the nearest ATM 15 km away. He has not been able to pay his labourers because of a lack of cash.

Excess produce due to good monsoon further reduces prices

Prices have further fallen because of excessive onion production, a consequence of the good monsoon this year.

A drop in prices particularly hits marginal and small farmers, who, like Patil, own less than two hectares, or 4.94 acres of land. These [farmers](#) own [78.6%](#) of all land holdings in Maharashtra.

Patil, who owns four acres of land which he farms with his brothers, has made a loss of Rs 30,000 because of low onion prices. “Farming for small [farmers](#) like us has become unaffordable,” he said.

In 2015, onion [farmers](#) from districts around [Nashik](#) brought 0.4 million metric tonne of [onions](#) to the agricultural market in Lasalgaon—called an Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC)—between April and August. [Onions](#) brought rose 150% to 1 million metric tonne, over the same period in 2016, according to the [Lasalgaon APMC](#).

Lasalgaon Agricultural Produce Market Committee is Asia’s biggest onion market, and most Indian onion is exported from this market. [Onions](#) brought rose 150% to 1 million metric tonne, between April and August, 2016, compared to the same period last year—further reducing onion prices.

“There has also been enough production of [onions](#) in Haryana and Karnataka which has led to a further drop in demand and prices,” said N S Vadhavne, an accountant at Lasalgaon APMC.

“I want to quit farming”

Profits from agriculture have been declining as costs have tripled over the last few years, **IndiaSpend** [reported](#) in March 2016. Coupled with a crash crunch due to demonetisation, and falling prices, Patil is ready to quit.

“Given a choice, I would like to find a job and migrate. Farming is a loss-making business,” said Patil, who enrolled in college, but never completed his bachelor in arts degree. His wife has a diploma in education, but no job.

“Right now, I don’t have a choice as I am supporting my younger brother,” he said. “But very soon, I will quit farming and look for another job.”

Meghalaya governor: Create agricultural-based job opportunities for youth



SHILLONG: Governor V Shanmuganathan, addressing a conference at Umiam on Thursday, called for the promotion of agriculture as a career prospect for the youth of the northeast.

The conference, organized by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industries of India (Assocham) in collaboration with the Union ministry of food and processing industries (MoFPI) and ICAR Research Centre for NEH region, was on 'Linking Prospective Food Entrepreneurs with Government Schemes and Markets'.

The governor asked the government, industries and scientists to formulate policies to attract the youth to agriculture. "Unemployment rates are very high in Meghalaya. Agriculture and food processing can play a vital role in the development of the state," he said.

The potential for agro-based food processing industries in Meghalaya is very high, he said, adding that besides major food crops like rice and maize, the state is also known for its horticultural crops.

"Meghalaya has achieved great success in the cultivation of non-traditional crops like tea, cashew nuts, oilseeds, tomato, mushroom, wheat, among others," the governor pointed out.

"There is enough potential for setting up a starch-based processing unit in the state. Plantation crops like coffee, rubber, black pepper and areca nuts are also becoming important products. A major breakthrough has been made in tea cultivation and tea gardens have come up in various parts of the state," he said.

Om S Tyagi, senior director of Assocham, said the food processing industry has made significant progress in the northeastern region. "Sectors like agro and horticulture processing, processing of plantation crops, animal husbandry and meat processing industries have been declared as potential areas in the promotion of industrial activities in Meghalaya. Special emphasis is on non-traditional crops, such as oilseeds, groundnut, tea, coffee, medicinal plants and other crops," he said.

4 rabi crops to be covered under insurance scheme



KURUKSHETRA: For the ongoing rabi season, four crops will be covered under crop insurance scheme in Kurukshetra district. The district agriculture department has stated that farmers would be provided insurance cover for wheat, mustard, barley and chana (chickpea).

The department has identified 1,14,000 hectares of area under wheat, 3000 hectares under mustard and 50 hectares under chickpea in the district so far. Area under barley is negligible till date, the department officials said.

Farmers can get their crops insured till December 31. Kurukshetra deputy director of agriculture Karam Chand said as the district was less prone to

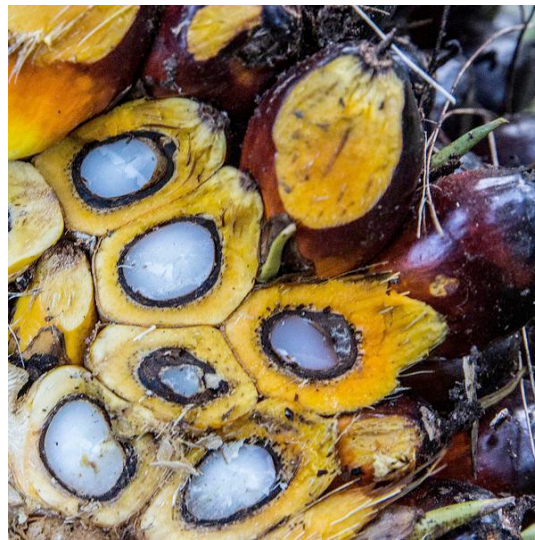
climatic hazards, the insurance company had decided low premium for the farmers.

He said, "We have one insurance agent in each block and one at district level to assist farmers in crop insurance. During the preceding kharif season, 76% farmers and 61% area under crops were covered. We have received 220 complaints in the kharif season and by mid-January the farmers are going to get their insurance claims."

Chand said if the production declined or the yield decreased than the average, it would also be covered under the crop insurance scheme. The hazards for which crop will be insured are hailstorm, water logging and landslide.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Imported oils turn hot on weak



Imported palmolein and soyabean oil continued to gain further tracking firm overseas futures amid weak rupee which makes imports costlier. On the BCE, palmolein, soya oil and sunflower oil rose by ₹4, ₹5 and ₹5 per 10 kg each. All other edible oils rule unchanged. Liberty's rates: palmolein ₹630, super palmolein ₹653 and soyabean refined oil ₹750. Allana traded palmolein for ₹628, soya refined oil ₹735 and sunflower refined oil ₹745. At Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin was at ₹1,490 (1,500) and loose (10 kg) was steady at ₹950.

CMFRI offers training to Bangla fisheries officials



The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has extended a helping hand to Bangladesh by providing technical support to improve its marine fisheries sector.

CMFRI imparted technical guidance in the area of marine fish stock assessment to the neighbouring country as part of a follow-up on the recommendations of the India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group (JWG) on cooperation in fisheries and aquaculture.

Training programme

A total of 12 middle-level officials from the Bangladesh Fisheries Department, Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute in Mymensing and the Institute of Marine Science and Fisheries, University of Chittagong, were trained at the CMFRI headquarters in Kochi.

A Gopalakrishnan, Director, CMFRI, said the training was aimed at helping them develop necessary manpower and expertise in marine fish stock assessment and encourage research in the area.

The training will be helpful to develop the data collection system for generation of fishery and biological inputs towards the conservation and sustainable management of marine fishery resources, he said.

The participants felt the technical guidance rendered by CMFRI was a valuable support to Bangladesh to conserve and manage Hilsa, a popular fish variety in their country.

Reading the tea leaves: How Assam's gardens are riding the cash crunch



For most of the 792 tea estates in Assam, demonetisation and the State government's order to move over to bank transfer of wages by January was a serious disruption to their routine.

But for NJ Borah, Manager of Namsung estate of Rossel Tea (near Jeypore of Dibrugarh), it came as a golden opportunity to remove some headaches and also bring home decent savings.

An average tea garden in Assam pays fortnightly wages of ₹10-15 lakh. The cash is transferred to gardens against insurance and police protection.

Huge savings for gardens

A garden pays ₹7,000-10,000 on insurance and ₹5,000-7,000 on security for each transfer. The average annual cost is estimated at ₹3.5 lakh for a garden and ₹28 crore for the industry.

But Borah has an additional problem. Namsung is located 10 km inside the hilly Dehing Patkai rainforest at the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal here acts as a thin buffer between Assam and Myanmar.

This is the favourite hideout of Naga and Assamese militants. And, every time his cash chest sets out for the garden through the hilly road, Bora suffers from anxiety.

He wants immediate opening of bank account for his 614 permanent and 1,000 temporary workers. But the State Bank kiosk (CSP) owner at Jeypore is not cooperating. And Borah is making repeated appeals to the authorities for a remedy.

An early mover

What Namsung is trying now, a few in the industry did well in advance. Sanjay Borah, Manager of Arun Tea of Gillanders Arbuthnot in Sonitpur district, is one of them.

In August 2014, when the Centre launched Jan Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion, Sanjay swung into action to open accounts for every worker and his/her family members, including kids.

By December 2015, the garden submitted 1,070 applications to Dhekiajuli branch of United Bank of India. Nearly 900 accounts were opened before demonetisation. The bank is yet to process the rest. That's not all. A month before the demonetisation, Sanjay encouraged his workers to save more.

Approximately, 119 workers agreed for deductions from their fortnightly wages. The plan was to open recurring accounts for each of them. With the State now asking for bank transfer of wages, Sanjay rolled back the plan.

Digital garden

Bhupindra Singh Deora went through this account opening process twice.

First during his stint in a remote Cachhar garden in 2014 and second after joining Dhekiajuli Tea Estate of Murugappa Group in January 2015.

By the time demonetisation was announced, 80 per cent of Dhekiajuli's 3,000 workers had bank accounts.

Around 150 workers volunteered to take wages through banks and convinced others about the merits of doing so. SBI agreed to install one ATM in the garden. Plans are afoot to run six more micro ATMs through educated unemployed.

Not as illiterate

But, tea workers are perceived to be illiterate.

Can they use ATMs? Can they remember PIN? Or are biometrics the most suitable option?

Sanjay has an interesting answer. First, biometrics may not work well with tea workers as years of plucking tea leaves, erases impressions.

Second, contrary to popular perception, 65 per cent of the workers sign his attendance register.

“With a little bit of training and encouragement they can use an ATM like anyone else,” he says.