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THE HINDU

'Dairy and Food Mela-2016' begins at SVVU

Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University's (SVVU) College of Dairy Technology launched a two-day 'Dairy and Food Mela - 2016' in the varsity premises here on Wednesday.

SVVU Vice-Chancellor and Special Chief Secretary (Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries) Manmohan Singh, who took part in the inaugural session, emphasised the need for innovation in food technologies and also on establishing joint committees with other universities to address the inter-disciplinary issues.

Later, at the varsity's Executive Council meeting, conducted owing to the Registrar's retirement in a couple of days, the members sanctioned Rs. 5 crore for the development of fisheries along with its value added services, inclined towards fish production and research.

Kalaburagi reaps a better red gram yieldbut is faced with unsatisfactory price

Most of the crop is being sold at lower prices to private traders and dal mills

When 110 taluks in the State have been declared drought-hit this year, Kalaburagi district, despite having three taluks in the list, Kalaburagi, Jewargi and Aland, has somehow managed to do well as far as agriculture is concerned thanks to a relatively better rainfall and a resultant good red gram crop yield.

After a loss of around 60,000 hectares of standing crop in the downpour that lashed in September 2016, red gram still remained largely unaffected on nearly 4 lakh hectares in the district. The yield too is better as compared to the previous year which witnessed one of the worst droughts in the recent times.

“I had grown eight quintals of red gram in four acres last year. This year, I have harvested around 16 quintals in the same land,” said Sharanabasappa, a small farmer from Belur village in Kalaburagi taluk. He, however, could not rejoice as the price of the crop dropped in the market.

“I had sold the produce at ₹ 8,000 a quintal last year as compared to ₹ 4,500 this year. Some people had sold it at ₹ 10,000,” he added.

Unsatisfactory price

Though the government has set up red gram procurement centres at Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) yards to purchase the crop directly from farmers at the minimum support price (MSP) of ₹ 5,050, most of the crop is being sold at lower prices to private traders and dal mills.

For instance, 8,123 quintals of red gram was purchased by private parties at the Kalaburagi APMC on Tuesday and only 154 quintals were procured at the two procurement centres. These State-established centres have procured only 1,818.50 quintals in the last one week. There are several reasons that force farmers to go to private parties to sell their crop.

First, most of the farmers take hand loans from private traders, dal mill owners and commission agents at up to 4 per cent monthly interest for purchasing agricultural inputs during sowing on the condition that they would sell their crop to the same private parties who exploit the farmers by charging higher interest on the loan and give relatively lower prices for the crop.

Second, farmers feel unsure about quick payments at government- established procurement centres.

The officials at the centre themselves agree that payment may get delayed up to a month as compared to on-the-spot cheque issuance in private trading centres. Maruti Manpade, president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, blames the government for unsatisfactory price and procurement woes.

“We had sought a minimum support price of ₹ 7,500 per quintal for the crop. The State government recommended ₹ 6,500. But, the Union government announced only ₹ 4,625, plus ₹ 425 incentive. The government is not for safeguarding the interests of the farming community,” he told *The Hindu*. The officials associated with procurement should attract farmers by ensuring speedy payment and hassle-free procurement, he added.

He also blamed private parties for exploiting farmers with lower prices and higher interests on the one hand and purchasing the crop directly from farmers to evade taxes and thus causing losses to the Exchequer.

Programme to popularise crop insurance scheme in Ballari, Koppal

A programme to not only persuade farmers to make use of the rabi crop insurance scheme under the Karnataka Raitha Suraksha and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana but also to help them to avail themselves of its benefits has been launched in a big way in Ballari and Koppal districts.

The two districts are reeling under severe drought for the second consecutive year, owing to failure of monsoon and post-monsoon rain. Kharif crops have been damaged in both the districts. To ensure that the farmers would not suffer further loss in the rabi season, the district administration has taken steps to ensure that more farmers use the crop insurance schemes by enrolling before December 31.

In Ballari district, Ramprasath Manohar, Deputy Commissioner, has said that the farmers could submit their application forms for crop insurance, along with premium and other relevant documents (photo copies) at their respective gram panchayats. Gram panchayat officials will forward it to banks and get their names enrolled.

While appealing to bankers to extend their cooperation to ensure that farmers got crop insurance cover, Mr. Ramprasath also cautioned them of action against bank staff who were non-cooperative.

In Koppal, M. Kanagavalli, Deputy Commissioner, has taken a decision to depute officials of the departments of Revenue, Agriculture and Horticulture to bank branches to assist farmers in getting crop insurance cover. She also underlined the need for the bank staff to complete the processes expeditiously.

"Officials deputed to bank branches should be present throughout the day to help farmers fill forms and guide them to provide the required documents. They should also ensure that no farmer would return without getting insurance cover. Bankers, on their part should open separate counters for collecting premium. Data entry operators attached to gram panchayats will be deputed to bank to assist the officials," she said.

Ms. Kanagavalli directed village accountants and panchayat development officers to popularise the insurance scheme. She also wanted the officials to submit a day-to-day report on the progress of insurance cover extended.

Rajasthan villages to sport a new look

Rural lifestyle in the desert State of Rajasthan is set to change with a number of gyms, supermarkets, food joints and mini-banks coming up in villages.

Primary agricultural credit societies (PACS) are in the forefront of these innovations. After providing agricultural credit to farmers for buying and selling of seeds and fertilizers through an institutional system, PACS have come forward to provide new facilities to meet the needs of their members in the changing scenario.

Pilot project

State Cooperative Minister Ajay Singh Kilak said here on Wednesday that he had given instructions for listing out services needed in the rural areas. Under a pilot project executed in Sriganganagar district recently, one PACS in each block was selected for opening new facilities. The Gram Sewa Sahakari Samiti at Padampur block had established a hi-tech supermarket and fast food centre, working on bar code basis with full computerisation. Mr. Kilak said the store was making a sale of about Rs. 3.22 lakh per month in the village comprising just 400 households.

Rural youths have been attracted to sports activities after gyms were opened by several PACS. "The gyms help the rural youth in getting rid of drug addiction and contributes to their physical and mental health. The youth use the facility under the guidance of trained instructors," he said.

Cooperative stitching centres make one more addition to the list of these innovations, imparting training to women in sewing, cutting and embroidery. Besides, the Cooperative Agricultural Yantralaya gives equipment on rent to the needy farmers, helping them in reducing input costs significantly.

Financial assistance

Two PACS in Sriganganagar district were recently given financial assistance of Rs. 15.20 lakh and Rs.19 lakh respectively for undertaking innovations to accommodate local requirements.

Mr. Kilak said Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje had recently visited Tamtiya village in the tribal-dominated Dungarpur district to see a supermarket.

Rain is too little and too late

Farmers fear that the rain is not enough to save the standing crop

The skies opened over the delta region on Tuesday and Wednesday but the prospects of samba paddy crop remained dark and cloudy. Farmers fear that the rain is too little and too late to save the standing crop.

Several parts of Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts experienced widespread rainfall on Tuesday and Wednesday and that came as a brief respite to the withering samba and thalady paddy crop standing on over eight lakh acres in the delta region including Nagapattinam district. However, farmers who have been hard pressed to irrigate the crop using river water or rain water see little benefit from the showers.

“We don’t see this rain as a solution to our multifarious crises. The rain has come in too little a quantum and too late in the season to be of any help to standing crops. The rain could help sustain greenery in the crops for some more days. At the end, during harvest there would be more chaff than grain,” observes V. Jeevakumar of Budalur.

The rain could to some extent help thalady paddy crop raised with the help of pumpsets. However, for the vast majority of the samba paddy the rain is of no use, says another farmer Arupathy P. Kalyanam.

In the Vennar Division, the samba paddy crop has almost been entirely wiped out and farmers don’t hope to see even a decent harvest. There paddy crop has been completely devastated and what use the rian could bring to them, he wonders. At the same time, if the rain continued for some more days, those crops raised using groundwater and were nearing harvest period could be affected adding to the woes, Mr. Kalyanam says.

Meanwhile, in the 24 hours ending at 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday, Manjalaru recorded 51.26 mm rainfall followed by Nannilam that registered 44.2 mm. The chief amounts of rainfall (in mm) recorded in major centres in Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts during the corresponding period included Kodavasal 39.8, Valangaiman 38.2, Tiruvarur 36.2, Tiruthuraipoondi 35, Neivasal Thenpathy 34.1, Mannargudi 28, Pandavayar Head 25.6, Tiruvidaimarudur 24.1, Nidamangalam 24, Madukkur 18.2, Budalur 16.6, Orathanad 15.96, Thanjavur 15.7, Adirampattinam 15.2, Kumbakonam 15, Vettikkadu 13.6, Peravurani 13, Papanasam 11.3, Tiruvaiyaru 11, Pattukkottai 10, Muthupettai 9.20 and Kurungulam 9 mm.

Tiruchi

A quick survey of villages in and around Tiruchi and Ariyalur revealed that farmers had incurred a huge loss due to continued failure of north east monsoon. Even where some cultivation activity could be taken up, the crops have not registered adequate growth due to paucity of irrigation water in canals.

Although parts of Tiruchi district experienced moderate showers on Wednesday, it was not quite sufficient for the agricultural operation, farmers said.

At M. Kannaur on the border of Tiruchi and Ariyalur districts, Sahayaam, one of the farmers said he had ploughed his fields shortly after the rain in summer and early June. “But, to my shock, my fields had developed serious cracks, indicating the parched condition of the soil and seriouis depletion of ground water table,” he said adding that he had totally given up his plan to raise paddy on three acres of land.

DECCAN Chronicle

Telangana, Andhra Pradesh farmers have highest debt

The average value of assets owned by households in rural areas in AP and Telangana are very low as compared to those in other states.

Hyderabad: Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh have the highest rates of rural indebtedness in the country. As per the Household Indebtedness in India report released by the Union ministry of statistics and programme implementation, 59 per cent of the households in Telangana and 54 per cent in Andhra Pradesh are facing debts.

These rates are higher than national average of 31.4 per cent. Rural indebtedness among cultivators is the highest in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and they stood at 69 and 63 per cent respectively.

The reports also shows that the reach of institutional credit in both states is less than 50 per cent, which means a large percentage of people are taking loans through non-institutional sources, which might be charging higher rates of interest than institutional sources like banks.

Looking at the high indebtedness and lack of access to institutional credit among cultivators, it should not be surprising that Telangana state had the second and AP the fourth highest farmer suicides in India, as per the National Crime Record Bureau 2014-15 data. A major reason for this was found to be bankruptcy or indebtedness.

The average value of assets owned by households in rural areas in AP and Telangana are very low as compared to those in other states, including Telangana. Average Value of Assets per rural household in AP stands at Rs 4,11,939, the third lowest in the country and Telangana the ninth lowest at Rs 6,37,509.

While AP tops in Debt-Asset Ratio (DAR) at 14 per cent, Telangana state even though ninth in owning assets, comes second in DAR with 8 per cent. This means that, in both the states, rural households are borrowing much higher amount of loans in proportion to the assets they owned. For example, while average assets owned by a rural household in AP is Rs 4.11 lakh and Rs 6.37 lakh in Telangana, they have Rs 58,263 and Rs 50,692 respectively as debt. A rural household in Gujarat, by comparison, has a debt of Rs 25,536 even though assets it owned is much higher at Rs 18,42,843.

Dr D. Narsimha Reddy, former dean, School of Economics, University of Hyderabad, who has worked on agrarian crisis, says, “Farmers in both the states, especially in AP, are growing input-intensive crops. While input costs are increasing every year, the yield of crops and profits are not. Even before bifurcation, AP used to be at top in rural indebtedness. Access to institutional credit needs to be improved to pull out those stuck in the circle of debt."

2016 Year of Change: 'Follow scientific farming'

Now a major chunk of work is done by machines, resolving the issue of labour shortage.

Thiruvananthapuram: Any cultivation, be it paddy or organic vegetable, has to be scientific. But keep production costs low so that farmers find it remunerative and are motivated to increase production. Check land conversion and pool additional land thus made available for paddy cultivation.

For ages, paddy farmers have been ruing farmhand shortage. Now a major chunk of work is done by machines, resolving the issue of labour shortage. It is an opportunity. Combined efforts of labour and machinery are in evidence in Palakkad and Kuttanad. Machines do all allied work and fill sacks with rice and farmers load trucks with grains.

I have been demanding royalty for farmers who own wetland paddy. This will motivate them to come out with more ecological yields. Wetland paddy is always equivalent to evergreen forest. The Government incentivizes farmers who own upland paddy, which is actually of no use. Upland paddy production is far and few, weeding is more; it involves more labour and lesser yield. Removing potassium from paddy fields should be a priority. For one ton paddy, 33 kg potassium has to be removed as pests and diseases proliferate.

In organic farming, LDF Government's policy is to increase the area from 29, 000 ha to 50,000 ha will not be viable. Fully organic gives lot of greenery but not the expected yield. Unfortunately organic farming has been glorified by the media and the people alike.

When pests interfere with organic vegetable farming the stark reality will dawn on farmers. There should be areas in Kerala where organic vegetable farming should be focused. Agrotourism and farming should be increased in places like Idukki and Wayanad without compromising on incomes of farmers.

The area for three perennial crops-mango, rambutan and rubber -has to increase and it doesn't matter whether it has to be completely organic as we are prone to adding fertilizers to mango trees. Also in places like Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode, high income groups should take up organic vegetable farming. In such areas, Government should take steps to start a chain of outlets for farmers.

(Dr. K. M. Sreekumar, professor of agricultural entomology, College of Agriculture, Kasaragod)

2016 Year of Change: Set on green route

Haritha Keralam inauguration was commendable as 16,000 gatherings were organized in fallow spots across the State.

Kerala witnessed some early signs of change in 2016. Some welcome changes, some fraught with repercussions. Society will be watching if these signals become a trend in days ahead. It can be a boon or bane depending on how state tackles them.

Kerala is now 60. Even when it was a year old, the State produced only 50 percent of its rice requirement. Unfortunately, it has shrunk to 15 percent!

The State's only alternative is to depend on the Centre for rice. The country is an exporter of rice but the Centre is not in a position to provide adequate rice to Kerala. The current crisis is the difference in BPL lists with the State and Centre. The number of beneficiaries on the State BPL is much more than that the Centre recognizes as genuine.

When India attained self-sufficiency in grains in 1977, Kerala struggled for rice. The high cost of production and expensive labour forced farmers in Kerala to leave rice cultivation and shift to lucrative crops like rubber and other perennial crops. These two factors forced farmers and the farm labour to leave farms, resulting in the shrinkage of area under rice from 9 lakh ha to less than 2 lakh hectares. Large rice tracks are left barren.

This has not only resulted in the shortage of rice production but also in the poor supply of drinking water. It is slowly creating an ecological disaster. So the maintenance of rice cultivation and rice culture has become an ecological necessity rather than one of a mere commodity shortage.

It is in this context the State Government has decided to increase the paddy cultivation from 2 lakh to 3 lakh hectares. It is a formidable task but it is achievable. Bringing more than 1 lakh hectare under rice culture has now been attempted as a massive peoples' movement.

Haritha Keralam inauguration was commendable as 16,000 gatherings were organized in fallow spots across the State. More than 5 million people participated in this programme. The beginning is good, but how far and how long can the enthusiasm be sustained is the biggest challenge.

The reason is that currently the State is facing one of its worst droughts. We have already lost both the monsoons this year. The only season that is left is Puncha season and Punja crop needs very strong irrigation support in areas other than Kuttanad.

In this context the State Government has shifted the emphasis from rice to organic farming, which includes banana and vegetable farming and other seasonal crops. This is a wise decision. But even this requires very huge irrigation support. In short, the approach to rice culture requires a big welcome shift as the programme should not be confined to just one season. It should be a five year programme covering at least 10 seasons, which should be contiguous so that the entire infrastructure and the popular movement should be kept active. Usually what happens is that all such programmes are seasonal and after a while the infrastructure and the organizers wither away.

Remember in this context that it is the rice fields that keep Kerala green and its water table intact. When we had rice fields covering over 9 lakh hectares we faced neither drought nor shortage of water. Almost all our traditional water sources including our wells are drying up. It is because of this fact that rice fields have shrunk. So rice cultivation should be seen as a green programme and a massive drinking water project. The money spent on it should not be calculated on returns in terms of rice.

(Author is former agriculture director, who set up Farm Information Bureau)

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Minimum temperature stays below freezing point in Valley

The north Kashmir town of Kupwara recorded at low of minus 3.5 degrees Celsius even though the night temperature improved by over one degree, he said.

There was some relief from cold wave conditions in Kashmir but the minimum temperature stayed below the freezing point across the valley. Mercury rose by several degrees in Leh last night but settled at a freezing minus 7.9 degrees Celsius as the town in Ladakh region was the coldest recorded place in the state, an official of the MET department said.

Srinagar – the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir – recorded a low of minus 3 degrees Celsius, an increase of one degree from the previous night's minus 4.1 degrees Celsius, the official said.

He said the night temperature in the city is one degree below the normal for this part of the season. The north Kashmir town of Kupwara recorded at low of minus 3.5 degrees Celsius even though the night temperature improved by over one degree, he said.

The official said the minimum temperature in Qazigund, the gateway town to Kashmir Valley, was the coldest place in the valley at minus 3.6 degrees Celsius, up from yesterday's minus 3.8 degrees Celsius.

He said Kokernag in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 1.6 degrees Celsius. The famous ski-resort of Gulmarg in north Kashmir registered a low of minus 0.2 degrees Celsius, brightening the chances of fresh snowfall over the weekend.

Pahalgam hill resort in south Kashmir witnessed a low of minus 2.3 degrees Celsius, the official said.

Kashmir is currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan' considered the harshest period of winter, when the chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum and the temperature drops considerably.

However, so far, the weather has remained dry, resulting in increase in ailments like cough and common cold.

Chillai-Kalan', which, began on December 21, ends on January 31 next year, but the cold wave continues even after that.

The 40-day period is followed by a 20-day long 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day long 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold).

The Meteorological Department here has said there is possibility of isolated rains or snowfall over the higher reaches of the Valley over the next 48 hours.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Summer of 2017 may be kinder to India, predicts Korean agency

Thiruvananthapuram, December 28:

It has been raining over parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala during the final few days of what has been an extremely rain-deficient North-East monsoon season this year. The sparse rain could sustain over the next couple of days into the year-end, according to consensus forecasts.

But what is it that the country as a whole can expect to see into the New Year?

The prospects are not too bad, if an early outlook posted by the Busan, South Korea-based Asia-Pacific Climate Centre is any indication.

The Centre is of the view that while January-February-March might not yield significant gains, April-May-June may throw up a surprise on the upside, especially for the southern part of the Peninsula.

It goes on to predict a heavy build-up of rains over the South-East Arabian Sea (off Kerala) in May and the Lakshadweep Islands being at the receiving end.

This would make for the most desirable pattern for onset of the South-West monsoon in 2017, with forecasts indicating heavy rain on the entire West Coast in June, the first month of the monsoon season.

Excess rains are also indicated for Central India, most parts of the Peninsula and even parts of West Bengal, which provides for a smooth onset phase of the monsoon.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts has also made an almost similar assessment with respect to the onset phase of the monsoon.

Early days

These may be early days yet to make a convincing forecast about what might happen five to six months hence but there is near-unanimity judging from the outlook from other centres.

The onset phase would have to contend with the unpredictable — a tropical cyclone developing in either the Arabian Sea or the Bay of Bengal, which could knock down its very moorings.

Meanwhile, the Busan Centre has come out with month-wise forecasts for the country right from January to June 2017.

January may deliver normal or just-below-normal rain for most of the country except Punjab, Uttarakhand, east Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, the hills of Bengal and the North-East, where it will be dry.

In February too, normal rain is forecast for the country except in Odisha, Bihar, Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and parts of the North-East where it will be dry.

A turn for the better

March would likely see the dry patch being confined to Punjab, Uttarakhand and parts of the North-East.

The outlook will drastically change for April and May.

In April, excess rains are favoured for Lakshadweep as well as coastal Kerala. Slightly favourable climes are indicated for East and Central India while it will be slightly negative for parts of North-West India.

May is likely to see the skies come down heavy yet again over Lakshadweep and Kerala. Excess rains are also forecast for part of the North-East and south coastal Andhra Pradesh.

The build-up to monsoon 2017 becomes complete in June when heavy rains are indicated for the West Coast, East and Central India and most of Peninsular India.

Allowing wheat imports at zero duty is a well-informed decision

Critical comments from certain interest groups on the government's recent decision to allow wheat import at nil duty is not just amusing but also seems to be removed from reality.

Let's get the facts clear. That the Agriculture Ministry's production estimate of 93.5 million tonnes (mt) for 2015-16 might be overstated to the extent of 5-6 mt is now fairly evident going by procurement and stock data as well as market price behaviour.

The government managed to procure just about 22 mt versus the target of 28 mt. As of November 1, the Central Pool had only 19 mt, far below the 30 mt stock exactly a year ago.

If one were to account for disappearance (consumption demand) from November 2016 to March 2017, wheat stocks at the beginning of the next season on April 1, 2017 would touch a multi-year low and be well below 10 mt.

The earliest wheat harvest starts in Gujarat, by end-March, and the harvested quantity should be modest.

The crop will be ready in major growing States — Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan — by early April. In other words, we still have three months to go.

Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department has come up with a forecast of a mild winter. If the winter is less severe than normal, the wheat crop is sure to be affected.

It is well known that Indian wheat is at the limit of heat tolerance. Even a 1.5 degree Celsius increase above the normal day temperature will reduce yields markedly. Last but not the least is the risk of unseasonal rains and hailstorms during harvest.

We had unfavourable weather for three consecutive years — in 2014, 2015 and in 2016. There is no guarantee that adverse weather will not return in 2017.

Ambitious target

On the whole, the production target of 96.5 mt for 2016-17 seems to be ambitious. At this point in time, it is premature to speculate on the harvest size but it would be an achievement if production touches 90 mt.

The market has taken cognisance of all the risks — inventory, production, weather — and it is reflected in market prices. Wheat prices on the spot and futures segment have breached the psychological barrier of ₹ 2,000 a quintal.

Rates have spurted by over 10 per cent from September with a further upside price risk clearly visible. In view of the above, it is clear that the decision to permit wheat imports at zero duty is a well-informed one.

The Agriculture Ministry may still stick to its estimate of 93.5 mt, but the market clearly has other ideas.

Is the liberal import policy hurting growers? Hardly. The next harvest is three months away and public stocks have been falling rapidly and availability tightening. Flour mills in South India are the worst hit because of high transport cost from producing centres to consuming destinations.

Is the zero import duty forever? Certainly not, and it cannot be. Even as imports bring some relief to industrial users such as flour mills and consumers, the policymakers are sure to monitor the progress of the wheat crop and review the status, possibly by mid-March.

If the prospects appear promising and if prices move down markedly from the current high levels, nothing can prevent the government from imposing a customs duty on wheat imports.

Any apprehension that wheat import at zero duty will compromise growers' interest is misplaced. The government can use tariffs to effectively regulate and even reduce the volume of import depending on the exigencies of the situation.

Any tinkering with the duty structure — imposing duty as demanded by certain lobbies — at this point in time will encourage speculative forces in wheat and hurt consumer interest.

The author is a global agri-business and commodities specialist. Views are personal.

Saudi keen on JVs with Indian firms for coconut industries

The Arab business community is keen to form joint ventures with Indian companies for setting up integrated coconut-based industries in Saudi Arabia.

The business offers received at the recently-concluded Foodex Saudi 2016 at Jeddah are a pointer to this.

The Coconut Development Board got a series of enquiries from the trade on several value-added products, such as desiccated coconut powder, virgin coconut oil, Neera honey, coconut sugar, etc.

Trade enquiries

A CDB official who participated in the event told *BusinessLine* that there were good trade enquiries at the Board's pavilion on the export possibility of different branded value-added coconut products.

The Arab community is highly aware of the health and wellness of coconut and this could be translated into a potential business for the export of coconut products in the entire West Asia.

Many of the business groups have evinced interest in the import of de-husked nuts.

In the first eight months of the current fiscal year, ending November, India exported 631.22 tonnes of fresh coconut; 758.98 tonnes of coconut oil and 905.99 tonnes of desiccated coconut to Saudi Arabia.

Besides, coconut oil, activated carbon and coconut chutney powder are finding new markets in the country.

The figure should further increase with the firming up of more export orders after the trade enquiries from Saudi Arabia materialise into contracts, the official said.

Domestic edible oil production set to rise by 1.5 million tonnes

Import of vegoils to remain flat at around 14.5 million tonnes

Even as the sowing of kharif oilseeds has increased over last year, the trade is expecting higher oilseed availability, resulting in a rise in domestic edible oil production, but with no impact on imports.

As per the latest data shared by the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), India's overall kharif oilseeds production is projected at 178.25 lakh tonnes (lt) for 2016-17 against 126 lt last year.

Edible oil production is estimated at 7.28 million tonnes (mt) for the oil year 2016-17 (November-October) against 5.80 mt last year.

The increase in oilseeds output is attributed to the higher yield of 936 kg per hectare as against 680 kg/ha. Acreage has increased from 185.19 lakh hectares to 190.31 lakh hectares.

"There will be ample availability of edible oils as we expect about 1.2-1.5 million tonnes of extra oil production this year. However, this will not compensate imports, so the imports are likely to remain more or less at the same level," said BV Mehta, Executive Director, SEA.

Mehta attributed the growth in demand to the GDP expansion — estimated at 7.1 per cent — and double-digit growth in out-of-home consumption of edible oils. Even with a moderate population growth, the absolute increase in the number of people will be quite high.

“Due to a lower consumption base, demand could grow at 4-5 per cent in the long run. By 2025, India may consume 30-34 million tonnes. Consumption and import of soft oils like soyabean oil and sunflower oil is rising with their demand and fall in domestic production,” said Mehta.

In 2016-17, total domestic edible oil production is estimated to come in at 7.28 mt against 5.80 mt last year.

For the 2016-17 oil year total edible and non-edible oil imports are expected to hover around 14.5 mt (14.73 mt).

Rice bran oil production is likely to increase marginally to 980,000 tonnes from 950,000 tonnes last year, while local palm oil production is estimated to be at 2.30 lakh tonnes for the current year.

According to trade sources, the premium on sunflower oil over soyabean oil has been wiped out and it is now available at a discount to soyabean oil.

“This year due to the bumper crop of sunflower seeds in the Ukraine and other East European countries, sunflower oil is cheaper by $60-70 per tonne compared to soyabean oil,” Mehta added.

CMFRI submits country status report on Indian fisheries

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has submitted the Country Status Report (CSR) about the impact of climate change on coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector in India.

The report was presented at a meeting convened by SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) with representatives of SAARC nations through video conference. The representatives in the fisheries sector of all SAARC nations except Sri Lanka attended the video conference.

The video conference was part of the Dhaka headquartered SAC’s initiative to assess the impact of climate change in agricultural sectors of the SAARC member countries and come up with resilient strategies.

A 3-member team headed by CMFRI Director A Gopalakrishnan represented India at the conference.

The team India presented the report, which included the details of issues and challenges being developed owing to the climate change in the coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector in India.

PU Zacharia, Project Coordinator of National Innovations on Climate Resilient Aquaculture (NICRA) and Grinson George, senior scientist were the other members of the CMFRI team who prepared the CSR which exposed disruptions being occurred due to the climate change in areas such as marine ecosystem, fish stock, harvesting sector, aquaculture, market and trade etc. The present condition of fishing communities was also included in the report.

During the conference through Skype, the members representing fisheries and aquaculture sector of the SAARC member countries reviewed the remedial steps to be taken to mitigate the impact of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture, and finalised a set of recommendations to be followed by the member countries in future.

The meeting prioritised, in the recommendations, developing collaborative and comprehensive efforts to address climate vulnerabilities and commissioning of SAARC level taskforce to formulate strategies to mitigate climate change impact.

Conduct of awareness programmes on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and expansion of open sea cage farming and pen culture in coastal water bodies were also listed as the major recommendations.

Business Standard

Robusta coffee exports face global price pressure despite rising demand

Despite an estimated rise in consumption, global prices of Robusta variety of coffee, of which India is a major grower, are expected to fall a bit in the coming quarter.

This comes even though cultivation is expected to decline in 2016-17, due to a monsoon deficit. However, for growers of the Arabica variety, the price is expected to increase by around four per cent.

Arabica is now $135 a pound on the New York-based Intercontinental Exchange. It is estimated to rise to $138.4 in March and $140.7 in May. The London-based International Financial Futures and Options Exchange has forecast the price of Robusta to dip in January to $2,089 a tonne, from $2,103 a tonne in December, but expects it to rise in March to $2,095 a tonne.

"We have had bad weather this year, which can not only have an impact on this year's crop but the next crop as well. But, this would not indicate higher prices; those are globally set," said Ramesh Rajah, president, Coffee Exporters Association. The predicted prices are apparently below the cost of production here.

"We are going to see boom-bust cycle and right now are on the downside of the bust phase. The question is who is going to survive the bust," said Rajah. Growers in Brazil, Vietnam and Colombia survived with government support, he said.

Y Raghuramulu, director, research, at the Coffee Board said exports might dip a bit with the lower output in 2016-17. The post monsoon crop forecast is 316,700 tonnes (Arabica: 96,200 tonnes, Robusta: 220,500 tonnes) against the earlier one of 320,000 tonnes.

Exports in the first nine months of this financial year, April to December, stood at 261,536 tonnes, valued at Rs 4,001 crore, up from 219,232 tonnes (Rs 3,621 crore) a year before. The numbers include re-exports.

The reduction in the latest estimate is mainly from Karnataka, of 3,045 tonnes, followed by Tamil Nadu at 1,000 tonnes. Kerala's is higher by 850 tonnes.

The average annual growth rate in global consumption has been around 1.3 per cent since the coffee year 2012-13 (October to September).

Around 151.3 million of 60-kg bags was consumed in the coffee year 2015-16, from 149,395 bags a year before. In India, demand is growing at five to six per cent a year. In 2015-16, the demand was 1.35 million bags.

Jeera exports to remain immune to demonetization

While cotton and groundnut exporters are facing difficulties in sourcing their produce for fulfilling commitments in the peak of season due to a demonetisation-driven cash crunch, jeera (cumin) exporters have been relatively unaffected.

According to jeera exporters, while the new season is likely to start in March, farmers have gradually begun accepting payment digitally, and have therefore been able to ensure steady supply.

"Jeera exporters may not face the problems that cotton, groundnut or other commodities exporters are facing due to the cash crunch post demonetisation. The new season for jeera will start in March, by which time exporters may be able to source the required stocks," said Bhaskar Shah, managing director of Jabs international Private Limited.

As per industry data, India exported about 100,000 tonnes of the spice during April to December and more than 20,000 tonnes of additional export would be possible during the next two months. As against this, India's total jeera exports were 98,000 tonnes in 2015-16.

Currently farmers aren't selling cotton and groundnut in large quantities, leading to decline in arrivals of both commodities by almost 40 per cent. Jeera, however, is witnessing a contrarian trend. Nevertheless, jeera prices have gone up the past few days as arrivals have fallen due to lower production, not cash crunch.

As per an Angel Commodity report, jeera futures traded higher for the second consecutive session on Tuesday, tracking good demand in the physical market. The demand for exports has supported jeera prices even as good sowing progress is now weighing on prices.

Girish Brahmbhatt, managing director of Sterling Exports Inc said, "Sowing has been good so far and weather conditions are also favorable for jeera crop. As all is going well as exporters are not buying in large quantities but are waiting for the new crop. However, looking at the current trend, buyers may not take a risk and initially demand will be low at the beginning of the new season."

According to Gujarat agriculture department data, as on December 23, jeera covered 267,100 hectares, down marginally by 0.44 per cent from 268,300 hectares in the corresponding period last year. Jeera is currently trading at Rs 3,300-3,650 a 20 kg at the Unjha mandi of Gujarat and daily arrival has been reported at about 1,200 bags of 55 kg. Jeera prices have gone up by Rs 200 a 20 kg in a week.

Govt removes minimum export price of potato

The government on Tuesday removed the minimum export price (MEP) of potato, which was imposed in July, to boost shipments of the kitchen staple.

"Export of potatoes, fresh or chilled, should be permitted for exports without any MEP," Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

In July, the government had imposed MEP of $360 (abour 24,000) per tonne on potato to increase domestic availability and cool prices.

Although India was the world's second largest potato producer at 48 million tonnes (mt) in 2014-15, its exports were less than one per cent of the output.

India exported 0.18 mt of potato in financial year 2015-16, which was lower than 0.30 mt in the previous year.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Farmers bear the brunt of plunging vegetable prices

AHMEDABAD: Soon after demonetisation of highvalue currency notes by the Union government, wholesale as well as retail prices of vegetables have plummeted significantly. However, farmers are having to bear the brunt of the situation, as they are failing to get sufficient returns on their harvest. The impact was evident with the suicide of a farmer in Mansa, who reeled under losses.

Nitin Patel, 37, a farmer from Chandala, said, "The plummeting of wholesale prices for vegetables have spelled havoc for us. We grow chillies, cabbage and cauliflower on our three-bigha farm. Of these, we harvest about eight tonnes of cabbage in a season. However, cabbage is fetching wholesale price of Rs 2 per kg. Against this, we invest Rs10,000 for seeds, Rs5,000 for fertilizer, Rs2,000 for pesticides and Rs7,000 for labour."

The transportation cost to the respective APMCs adds to the cost, and therefore farmers are ending up with heavy losses. The situation is no different for farmers who harvest other vegetables such as pigeon peas and tomatoes among others.

"We harvest pigeon peas (tuvar), which grows once in twelve months. If the weather conditions are not favourable, a large chunk of our crop is destroyed. We harvest around 6,000 kg of pigeon peas every year, for which we get a return of Rs 2,000 per quintal, which is not sustainable," said Jayantibhai Dabhi, another farmer from Sukhad village.

Even as the export of tomatoes to Pakistan has halted, prices have gone down and the market supply is high putting farmers in loss. "Tomatoes are being sold at a wholesale price of Rs2 per kg. We invest close to Rs 1 lakh over a period of four months to harvest around 30,000 kg tomatoes. However, what we are getting in return is only about half our investment," said Hemant Patel, a 35-year-old farmer.

Farmers left with no money to buy seeds, manure

JAIPUR: The rural areas in Rajasthan are yet to get a respite from the currency banwoes. The long, serpentine queues for cash at banks have refused to disappear. Many ATMs in remote areas have remained closed since November 8.

Devthala village, which is among those villages which supply veggies to Jaipur, are struggling to arrange funds for sowing crops. The farmers have already incurred losses on the last crop in November. "We required cash to purchase seeds and fertilisers. Online transactions or cheque payments are new things for us. We are not aware of these fully," said Ram Singh, a far mer. The village is close to Jaipur.

So the villagers have been able to deposit the old currency but people living in those villages which are located in the interiors have failed to deposit their old notes yet. Kali Bai of Jawaja block in Rajsamand has made several rounds to deposit the old currency . She lives alone as her husband and sons work in marble quarries at Rajsamand."I even went to Beawar to deposit my old notes in Jan Dhan account and withdraw my pension amount of two months. Every time I go, the banker says that my pension has not come in my account. He asks to bring many documents to deposit the old notes in my Jan Dhan account," said Bai.

Government yet to issue notification for crop insurance scheme

KOZHIKODE: Even as the state is staring at its most severe drought in recent years, the state agriculture department has not issued a notification for the weather based crop insurance scheme (WBCIS) for the ongoing Rabi season which could have benefitted thousands of farmers.

Though the notification for the Rabi season had to be issued by October, the agriculture department is yet to select the implementing agency in the state prior to the issuance of the notification.

This is when the tender document for selecting the implementing agency, from among insurance companies', states that the last date for applying for crop insurance will be January 15.

That would leave the farmers with a very limited window period to enrol for the scheme, even if the government completes the procedures by then. The government had declared all the 14 districts in the state as drought- hit on October 31.

The central government sponsored insurance scheme intends to provide protection to farmers from adverse weather conditions, such as high mean temperature and low mean temperature, deficit rainfall and excess/unseasonal rainfall, temperature fluctuation etc., which would have come as a relief to farmers battling drought conditions in the state this season.

"Farmers in the state are already in dire straits and facing crop losses due to high monsoon deficit and a gruelling summer season on the anvil. The weather based crop insurance scheme would have provided much relief especially this season. But the delays from the government's side in notifying the scheme has made the situation all the more un

Officials in the agricultural insurance sector said that the delay in issuing notification would hinder the effective implementation of the weather based crop insurance scheme. "If the window available for farmers for taking insurance is less, then the participation of the farmers would naturally come down. As per the scheme the notification was to be issued in September and latest by the first fortnight of October," D Rajesh, regional manager of the Agriculture Insurance Company of India said.

As per the bid document, the weather-based insurance will be implemented in 12 districts for ten crops. The insurance payments will be linked to fluctuations in weather data collected from over 130 weather stations across the state.

Meanwhile, agriculture department officials said that they were in the process of finalizing the implementing agency and the notification would be issued for WBCIS soon.