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## THE HINDU

### **TNAU starts research to develop Ramnad Mundu-like chilli variety**

*Department of Horticulture initiates step to preserve the native crop*

As the Geographical Indication (GI) tag still eludes ‘Ramnad Mundu,’ the popular native chilli variety exclusively grown in this district, the Department of Horticulture recommended to Tamil Nadu Agriculture University (TNAU) to develop a Mundu-like variety to protect it from extinction.

As the department faced difficulties in supplying quality seeds of the variety to farmers, it had suggested that the TNAU come out with a similar variety without changing the quality, colour and pungency, said S. Tamil Vendhan, Deputy Director of Horticulture.

The unique variety was exclusively grown in the district, especially in Kadaladi, Mudukulathur and Sayalkudi areas, thanks to its saline and drought-resistant properties, he said, adding the university had launched research process for developing a similar variety.

As the farmers themselves preserved the seeds and cultivated the native variety for decades, the department had not ‘intervened’ to bring ‘Mundu’ under the seed certification process. There had been no instance of yield loss in the conventional method over the years, officials said.

There was a move to form ‘Ramanathapuram District Mundu Chilli Growers’ Association’ to get the GI tag for the native chilli variety, but it did not take off.

The department had even offered to help the association to move the Geographical Indications Registry and secure the tag, the officials noted.

The ‘Mundu’ variety was cultivated on about 20,000 hectares in the district and the production touched about 40,000 tonnes in a season.

It commanded good demand in both domestic and international markets. In a bid to extend the areas of chilli cultivation, the department had distributed 35 lakh portray-raised seedlings of newly introduced US 644 variety during the current season, Mr. Tamil Vendhan said.

The farmers had grown the variety on about 330 hectares in Kamudhi, Paramakudi and Mudukulathur areas and realised that they could enhance the yield by three times.

Many farmers harvested and marketed green chilli, which grew up to 13 cm long, he added.

The department had procured the portray seedlings from private nurseries and proposed to raise the seedlings on its own in the State Horticulture Farm coming up at Oriyur for the coming season, he added.

### **State will soon have more capacity to store produces**

The State will be having an additional 17.3 lakh tonnes of storage capacity to hold agricultural produces once the Rs. 1,400 crore sanctioned by NABARD from the Warehouse Infrastructure Fund (WIF) been fully utilised, according to NABARD Deputy General Manager K. Arthanareeswaran.

“We have sanctioned the amount from WIF, which is a corpus created out of the shortfalls in priority sector lending by the banks, over 2013-14 and 2014-15 fiscal and the works on various projects are currently underway”, he told *The Hindu* on the sidelines of a regional conference NABARD organised here for government officials on rural infrastructure improvement projects.

The scientific storage capacities, thus created, would help the farmers to gain better unit value for their produces and also avoid them from distress sale when glut was prevailing in the market.

According to him, the government departments and agencies should give more focus on irrigation, agricultural and allied activities like dairy when utilising the funds created under Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF).

“We have earmarked Rs. 2,000 crore under RIDF for Tamil Nadu during the current fiscal (2015-16) so as to ensure development in agricultural activities, social sector development like drinking water supply and health, and connectivity improvement through provisions of roads, all specifically in rural areas”, he said.

About 40 per cent of the RIDF allocation to the State was being used for providing irrigation and agriculture activities with the rest been meant for social and connectivity sectors.

NABARD officials briefed the representatives from various government departments/agencies on how to effectively plan rural development using the allocations under WIF and RIDF.

*The storage capacity will help farmers gain better unit value for their produces*

### **75,000 farmers to get compensation**

Nearly 75,000 farmers of the district whose agricultural and horticultural crops were damaged during the monsoon will be extended a total compensation of Rs. 26.72 crore, Collector K. Nandakumar said.

The compensation has been sanctioned based on reports submitted by the tahsildars. As many as 52,607 farmers whose agricultural crops were damaged would be extended a compensation of Rs.14.35 crore and 22,309 farmers whose horticultural crops were damaged would be provided compensation to the extent of Rs. 11.27 crore.

The compensation amount would be deposited into the account of individual farmers at the primary agricultural cooperative societies. The exercise has already begun and would be completed within the next few days, Mr. Nandakumar said in a release.

## Harita Bhavanam, for pesticide-free veggies



Rajya Sabha Member K.N. Balagopal inaugurating the Harita Bhavanam organic vegetable farming project of the Kollam Corporation on Tuesday.—  
Photo: C. Suresh Kumar

The Harita Bhavanam, a joint initiative of the Kollam city Corporation and the Agriculture Department, was launched by Rajya Sabha Member K.N. Balagopal at a function held at the Municipal Town Hall here on Tuesday. The scheme is meant to promote organic vegetable farming in the city through backyard and terrace gardens.

### **Free of cost**

Assistant Agriculture Officer (Kollam) K. Shaji said that under the scheme, saplings of 10 vegetables, a banana sapling and a curry leaf sapling would be given free of cost to each family.

In the first phase, 3,850 houses in the city will be covered — 70 houses in each of the 55 divisions of the Corporation.

The project is being sponsored by a couple of banks. Mayor V. Rajendrababu presided over the function and P.K. Gurudasan, MLA, spoke.

*3,850 houses in the Corporation to be given saplings of 10 vegetables, banana and curry leaf.*

## **Farmers' convention in Udupi on February 14**

The Udupi Zilla Krishik Sangha will organise a farmers' convention at Sharada Mantapa here on February 14.

Addressing presspersons here on Monday, Bantakal Ramakrishna Sharma, president of the sangha, said that nearly 5,000 farmers from different parts of the district were expected to participate. There would be seminars on issues related to agriculture, horticulture and dairy farming.

The topics which would be discussed at the seminars include 'Management of coconut and arecanut crops', 'Production technology in horticulture', 'Marketing and value addition of agricultural products', 'Medicinal plants for daily use', 'Importance of micronutrients for horticultural crops', 'Integrated farming system', 'Scientific cultivation of jasmine plants', 'Profitable cultivation of vegetables in Coastal belt', 'Importance of local breed of cattle', and 'Use of local technology in dairy farming'.

Experts in agriculture and horticulture would participate as resource persons in these seminars.

There would be an interaction session between farmers and heads of various government departments such as Agriculture, Revenue, Horticulture, and Cooperation, and Mescom in the afternoon from 2 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. Priyanka Mary Francis, Chief Executive Officer of Dakshina Kannada Zilla Panchayat, will preside over the interaction session.

An exhibition-cum-sale of equipment required for agriculture and horticulture, seeds and saplings, and books on farming, would be held at the venue.

M. Bhaskar Shetty from Uchila; Ravi Poojary from Kurkalu; Antappa from Perampalli; Sampa S. Bangera from Hirebettu; and Ali Abba from Uchila, farmers, would be felicitated during the inaugural function

Vidyavallabha Tirtha Swami of Kaniyur Mutt would inaugurate the convention. Narasimha Nayak, progressive farmer from Tirthahalli, would deliver the keynote address, Mr. Sharma said.

Kudi Srinivas Bhat, general secretary of the sangha, said that the sangha had written to the government and Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission to increase the minimum support price for paddy. The government should do value addition to boiled rice as it was less polished boiled rice had more demand in cities. The government should compensate banana farmers as its price had crashed from Rs. 10,000 per tonne to Rs. 2,000 per tonne in the

last five months. The sangha would soon launch a struggle for getting rights for 'kumki' lands to the farmers in the district, he said.

Dinesh Shetty Herga, vice-president of the sangha; Ravindra Poojary Gujjarbettu, secretary; and Panduranga Nayak, treasurer, were present.

*Nearly 5,000 farmers are expected to participate in the meeting*

### **Jasmine, banana farmers strike it rich**

*Nabard teams up with NGO to script a success story in Krishna district*



Banana farmers from Krishna district visiting a plantation in Tamil Nadu – File Photo

The Krishna district authorities have launched a mission to bring enthusiastic farmers under the umbrella of 'Producer Organisation' to tap market for the respective varieties of agriculture produce in Krishna district.

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in collaboration with Nestham, an NGO, has scripted success in tapping better market opportunities for jasmine, banana and a few varieties of vegetables by forming Farmers' Producer Organisations (FPO) in the selected areas in the Krishna district.

The FPO comprises of farmers those who voluntarily part with their agriculture produce and collaborate in marketing it. The active jasmine and banana farmers in Koduru and Mylavaram mandals have been reaping profit by actively running their respective FPOs in recent years. The banana and jasmine sales points with record business at Thotlavalluru and Mylavaram

mandals were a few classic examples that speak volumes about success of the FPO initiative.

“At least 23 FPOs have been formed in Krishna district. It has been targeted to set up 200 such organisations, helping them to expose to a sea of market opportunities for their agriculture produce”, said Krishna district Collector Babu. A.

He appealed to the officials of NABARD, Agriculture and Horticulture departments to achieve the target.

“Individual farmers are managing to reach big market with good number of orders in their hands.

Together, they proved the concept as a direct sources to tap the market”, Nestham Director Suresh Vesam told *The Hindu* earlier.

The FPOs would be encouraged to trade their produce through the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), through which trading was allowed with minimum of ten metric tonnes of any commodity. The organisations will have direct access to national market and get necessary support from the NCDEX for the trade. According to NABARD guidelines, the FPOs were being allowed to use the available godown space of the Primary Agriculture Credit Societies for storing and trading their commodities.

## **Market intervention**

*Procurement of redgram from farmers begins*



The Central Government, in association with the State Government, began procurement of redgram from farmers at market price in Prakasam district in an effort to stabilise the price of the dal in the wholesale and retail markets.

Transport Minister Sidda Raghava Rao formally inaugurated the market intervention scheme being handled by the State Marketing Federation (Markfed) on behalf of the Food Corporation of India and the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India Ltd (Nafed) at Rajampalli near Darsi.

With the farmers going for pigeon pea cultivation in a big way, its production touched 1.43 lakh tonne in the State.

He exhorted the farmers to benefit from the scheme that was aimed at eliminating middlemen on the one hand and protecting the interests of consumers on the other. Farmers would be ensured prompt payment through online transfers.

In all, 60 redgram purchase centres, including 25 in Prakasam district, would be in operation across the State to create buffer stock.

### **Fisherfolk reject draft national policy**

*Say they were not represented on committee; place several demands including a separate ministry*





M. Ilango, Chairperson, National Fishworkers Forum, said unless there is a separate ministry for the welfare of fishermen, their voice will remain unheard.

Fishers from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on Tuesday refused to accept the draft National Policy on Fisheries, 2016, stating among other things that they were not represented on the draft committee.

The stakeholders meet was organised by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute here to elicit the views of fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on the draft policy prepared by the Committee headed by Dr. S. Ayyappan, Director General, Indian Council for Agricultural Research.

Representatives of several fishermen's associations took the opportunity to place their demands, including a separate ministry, a bank for fishers, inclusion in Scheduled Tribes list, facilities for fish export and export agreements with countries, a detailed study on protected species of fish and educational institutions for fishers. As only four stakeholders consultations have been conducted till now, they said it was insignificant considering the country's 7,500 km long coastline.

G. Anton Gomez, president, National Union of Fishermen, said the policy aimed to control and regulate fisheries in the exclusive economic zone, an area between 12 and 200 nautical miles, whereas the fishermen of Rameshwaram did not even have 12 nautical miles to fish in. He urged the Centre not to allow non-fishermen into deep sea fishing.

U. Arulanandam of Alliance for Release of Innocent Fishermen, who cited the example of Indian fishermen having rights to dry their nets at Katchatheevu when they use nylon nets, said when non-fishermen were involved in formulating policies for the fishers, such things happen. "The policy talks about the cooperative societies... even in neighbouring Sri Lanka they have been modernised, but in India the societies barely function," he said.

Pollution and various development schemes such as desalination plants, ports and power generation plants led to depletion of resources and thereby loss of livelihood, said K. Bharathi, South Indian Fishermen's Welfare Association. "The Centre has not done anything to increase fish availability.

The policy merely mentions fisherwomen, who form the backbone of every household,” he pointed out.

The Aikiya Indhia Meenavar Sangam’s Nanjil Ravi said as part of the Swach Bharath Abhiyan effort must be taken to clean fishing harbours and the waterways that empty into the sea. “Though deep sea fishermen are encouraged to catch fish including yellow fin tuna, the government does not have any agreement with other countries to export our fish,” he said.

The need for a separate bank for fishermen was stressed by Tamil Nadu Meenavar Makkal Sangam’s Ko Su Mani. “Though we come under the agriculture ministry, even cooperative agricultural banks refuse to give us loans,” he said.

M. Ilango, Chairperson, National Fishworkers Forum, said unless there is a separate ministry for the welfare of fishermen, their voice will remain unheard. “The amount allocated for fisheries is very minimal bringing no change in the lives of fishermen,” he pointed out.

Y.S. Yadava, Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation and Paul Pandian, Commissioner, Fisheries Development, said the views of the fishermen associations would be conveyed to the Central government.

### **Cost-effective cultivation method for horticulture crops evolved**

*He claims semi-automated poly greenhouse method can cut costs, improve yield*

It is unusual for the educated youths to take up agriculture as their profession as they usually look for white collar jobs. However, a 35-year-old BE Agricultural Engineering graduate believes that he can make a difference by adopting modern farming technologies.

When the horticultural officials were looking for progressive farmers to set up poly greenhouses as part of the National Horticulture Mission in Karur district, R. Bala Saravanan of Erumapatti near Aravakurichi readily came forward to grab the opportunity along with his sister Dhanapakkiam.

Using his own ideas, experience, educational background, and knowledge, he has gone one step ahead by forming semi-automated poly greenhouse to cultivate vegetables on 1,000 square metre area.

Unlike many other poly greenhouses, his farm does not require too many workers. He controls the operations, including watering, fogging, in-house temperature maintenance, root temperature maintenance, and so on from a master control room. The operations have been brought under sensors so as to make necessary changes in the settings.

The farmer has set up Reverse Osmosis water treatment plant to use pure water for irrigation.

A water chilling plant has been set up to supply cool water to the crop. Although the actual cultivation was slated to be started in a week, he said the effort would be certainly fruitful.

“I am confident on achieving success, though there is a risk involved in it,” Mr. Saravanan said.

S. Muniandi, Deputy Director, Horticulture, told *The Hindu* that poly greenhouse technology would wean away farmers from seasonal and conventional cultivation method. High-yielding vegetables such as cucumber and capsicum could be taken up throughout the year irrespective of summer, rainy, and winter seasons. The technology could help farmers cultivate vegetables in a controlled weather condition and in protective environment. It was more cost-effective than traditional methods.

K. Mani, Assistant Director, Horticulture, said the poly greenhouse had been set up at an estimate of Rs. 9.5 lakh. Of it, the subsidy would be Rs. 4.67 lakh. The farmer had spent a few lakh more to give value addition to the technology.

Mr. Saravanan said the in-house temperature would be maintained between 30 and 35 degrees during the day. The root temperature would be between 22 and 25 degrees. The poly greenhouse had UV protection to evenly spread the light.

## **New centre for hi-tech horticulture at KAU**

The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has established a new centre for high-tech horticulture and precision farming at Vellanikkara. The centre is set up using a grant from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. Attached to the Agricultural Research Station at Mannuthy, the centre is established in an area of about five acres. A new office building, training hall and poly houses for soil and soilless cultivation and large-scale production of vegetable transplants and grafted seedlings have been set up in an acre. The remaining land will be utilised for open field precision farming. The Centre of Excellence in Protected Cultivation and Precision Farming sanctioned by the State government will now function at this new centre. The centre is expected to bring out drip fertigation packages for open field precision farming in horticultural crops, technologies for soil and soilless cultivation in poly houses and large-scale production of vegetable transplants and grafted seedlings.

The centre has already started large-scale production of vegetable transplants. The first batch of seedlings worth Rs.2.75 lakh is ready for distribution to various Krishibhavans. Around two lakh vegetable seedlings of amaranthus, snake gourd, cucumber, ashgourd , chilli, tomato and brinjal are ready for distribution to farmers.

The seedling production unit has an installed capacity to produce 15 lakh seedlings a year, said P. Rajendran, Vice Chancellor, Kerala Agricultural University.

Besides farmers, Krishi Bhavans, grama panchayats and other grassroots organisations interested in vegetable farming can book seedlings in advance, he said.

U. Jaikumaran, Professor & Head, ARS, Mannuthy, said the centre has facilities for long-distance transportation of seedlings.

## **Importance of organic farming highlighted**

P. P. Reddy, former director of Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, stressed on the need to opt for organic farming to minimise crop loss induced by nematodes.

He was speaking after inaugurating the 19th biennial group meeting on nematodes in cropping systems at Jawaharlal Nehru National College of Engineering (JNNCE) here on Tuesday.

“Nematodes are inflicting loss worth 118 billion U.S. dollars on agricultural and horticultural crop worldwide every year. There has been a fall in the quality of agricultural produce owing to nematodes. These nematodes would pose a threat to the global food security in the future,” he said.

Farmers were encouraged to use chemical inputs in the name of green revolution to enhance food production, he said and added that this resulted in a sharp decline in the quality of the soil making the crop susceptible for pest, fungal and nematode infections.

“Researches have proven that nematode activity can be controlled and minimised by opting for organic farming methods. It is necessary to create awareness among farmers in this regard,” he said.

Addressing the gathering, R.K. Walia, project coordinator on Nematodes of Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) said that nematode infection hampers the uptake of water and minerals from the soil owing to which the growth of the plant becomes stunted and there will be decline in the yield. It is necessary to control nematode infection to enhance food production, he said.

C. Vasudevappa, Vice Chancellor of University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, said that it is necessary to maintain the soil health by opting for nature-friendly farming practices to control infections caused due to nematodes.

The programme was organised by ICAR and UAHS, Shivamogga. P. Narayanaswamy, director of Research of UAHS, Shivamogga, T.H. Gowda, director of Extension and Srinivas Rao Kunte, principal of JNNCE were present.

### **Move to regulate cotton seed prices**

BJP Kisan Morcha National general secretary P Sugunakar Rao has said that the Union Government has issued orders for the constitution of Cotton Seed

Price (control) Order, 2015 only for the benefit of cotton farmers to regulate the seed prices and licensing system of the seed companies.

Mr Sugunakar, who was appointed member of the Cotton Seed Price (Control), told newsmen here on Tuesday that the committee would take all measures to reduce the cotton seed prices and ensure that the farmers were provided with reliable new hybrid variety of seeds which could protect from pest attacks. Expressing concern over exploitation of farmers by the seed companies, he said that the government should stop providing royalty to the seed companies as they have failed to provide quality seeds since over a decade.

Flaying the Monsanto company for failing to distribute pest resistant seeds to the farmers, he said that the farmers were suffering due to pink bollworm pest attack on the cotton crop in various parts of the country including Karimnagar district. He said that the Monsanto has to pay compensation to the farmers for failing to supply pest resistant BT seeds in the country.

He said that they would meet all political parties and representatives of various farmers' organisations to discuss the cheatings of Monsanto seed company in Hyderabad on February 13. BJP leaders T Harikumar Goud, Narender were also present.

### **Niti Aayog taking states' views on agriculture**

*Some of the Aayog's recommendations could find their way into the Budget considering the Prime Minister is prioritising agriculture*

The government's main policy think-tank Niti Aayog is taking the views of various state governments on key recommendations made in its recent paper on agriculture, including on genetically modified (GM) crops.

The paper titled 'Raising Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative for Farmers' has identified five issues confronting agriculture and made key recommendations to help bring about a second Green Revolution in India and sustain robust growth in agriculture.

"Niti Aayog is holding regional conferences on the key recommendations made in the paper. It has already held one for western region in Ahmedabad

and is planning to have a dialogue with other states in the coming weeks,” sources said.

The state governments’ views are being taken as it is likely that some of the recommendations could find their way in the Budget considering the Prime Minister is prioritising agriculture and rural development, the sources added. The paper has suggested measures necessary to raise productivity, policies ensuring remunerative prices for farmers, reforms necessary in the area of land leasing and titles, a mechanism to bring quick relief to farmers hit by natural disasters, and initiatives necessary to spread Green Revolution to eastern states.

“As a part of its strategy to bring a Second Green Revolution, India must return to permitting proven and well-tested GM technologies with adequate safeguards.

Additionally, India urgently needs technological breakthrough in oilseeds and pulses,” it said.

The country’s dependence on imports for meeting domestic demand for edible oils has risen to 70 per cent. Even if India doubles its current level of oilseed production, the import dependence will remain at 40 per cent level. The situation is worse in pulses, it said.

“Recognising the general sensitivity to permitting multinationals to sell GM seeds, it may be prudent for the government to proceed with domestically sourced GM seeds only.

Luckily, Indian scientists and institutions have been active and successful in this area,” the paper suggested.

The success of Bt cotton in India and many more GM seeds elsewhere in the world testifies to the potential of GM technology in giving a major boost to productivity in agriculture, it added.

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***The storage capacity will help farmers gain better unit value for their produces***



## **90,000 tonnes of paddy procured**

As many as 283 direct purchase centres (DPCs) are functioning in the district to procure paddy from the farmers in the district, Collector S.Palanisamy said in a press release.

As on February 5, over 90,000 tonnes of paddy have been procured through the DPCs, he said in a press release.

— Special Correspondent

## **Farmers' markets see a spurt in sales**

Vegetables worth Rs. 43.25 lakh were sold out in the 11 Uzhavar Santhai in the district on the Thai Amavasai day on Monday.

People thronged all the Santhai, including the four in the Salem Corporation limits, and procured brinjal, plantain, plantain leaves, fresh beans, pumpkin, and agathikeerai.

As usual, the Suramangalam Uzhavar Santhai topped the list by marketing more than 46,000 kg of vegetables worth Rs. 9.57 lakh.

A total of 9,231 consumers visited the santhai on Monday alone.

Thadagapatti santhai attracted 5,803 consumers who procured 29,364 kg of vegetables worth Rs. 5.58 lakh.

Ammapettai Uzhavar Santhai came third marketing more than 18,000 kg of vegetables worth Rs. 3.80 lakh.

Hasthampatti santhai was the fourth in the city limits marketing vegetables worth Rs. 3.45 lakhs.

The other santhai in Attur, mettur, Attayampatti, Jalagandapuram, Ilampillai, Edappadi and Thammampatti too attracted a large number of consumers, according to Uzhavar Santhai sources.

## **India to soon ratify WTO trade facilitation pact: Government**

To also seek a similar pact on services which should interest developing nations.

India is set to ratify at the “earliest” the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) trade facilitation agreement (TFA) on goods, aimed at relaxing customs rules for smoother trade flow, but the country will also seek a similar pact on services which should be of particular interest to developing nations.

“We are fully committed to it (TFA in goods). It is a complex exercise and most of the consultation is complete and we believe that we should be able to ratify it at the earliest,” commerce secretary Rita Teotia said on Tuesday at a function organised by the International Chamber of Commerce here.

However, even if India ratifies the TFA in goods, the agreement can come into force only when two-thirds of the 162 WTO members formally accept the agreement. So far, 63 countries, including most developed countries, have formally accepted the pact.

The TFA is projected to cut the cost of trade by an average of 14.5 per cent and the impact could be greater than elimination of all remaining tariffs, according to WTO director general Roberto Azevêdo. The TFA in goods was endorsed by the WTO in Bali in 2013.

“Just as the TFA (in goods), there is a need to work towards a TFA in services. This should be the next item of work. Besides accelerated flow of goods, easier flow of services and liberalising of services trade particularly in areas of interest to the developing nations has to be a high-priority agenda item,” Teotia added.

Services sector accounts for about 60 per cent of the India’s economic growth.

India, she further said would have to be careful about the domestic policies which would come under greater scrutiny with the rise of GDP.

She said that India needs to “develop a roadmap to phase out” the agriculture export subsidies.

Talking about the stalled Doha Development Agenda (DDA), the secretary said work on it must continue as the decisions taken since 2001 needs to be respected and taken forward.

“We believe that without reaching some kind of respectable progress on the DDA, it is difficult to bring in new issues into the WTO,” she said adding in the DDA, there are legitimate interest of poor farmers and food security of millions of people of developing countries.

Developing countries wants outcome on the pending Doha Round issues like commitments to cut farm subsidies by the rich nations “before we move on to the new items of work,” she said. Developed nations want the WTO to discuss new issues like investments and e-commerce among others. *FE & PTI*

### **Maharashtra: Cabinet gives go-ahead to Rs 1,012-cr package for soya, cotton farmers**

Aid is for those who suffered crop loss and were not covered under crop insurance.

THE Maharashtra government has decided to provide an additional package of Rs 1,012 crore to farmers cultivating cotton and soyabean, the two crops that were badly hit by the drought and still remained uncovered under crop insurance schemes. At a meeting on Tuesday, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis gave sanction to three proposals mooted by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Water Conservation and the Ministry of Water Resources to scale up the measures undertaken to mitigate drought-related problems.

The CM said the preparations to effectively tackle water scarcity-related problems and adequately compensate the farmers who suffered losses in kharif production for the year 2015 had to be expedited. The government will grant Rs 647 crore to cotton farmers in the Aurangabad and Nashik divisions, and Rs 365 crore to soyabean farmers in the Amravati and Nashik divisions as compensation for the losses they suffered last year. The

additional aid of Rs 1,012 crore will be over and above the relief of Rs 3,049 crore that the Union government has sanctioned for farmers in Maharashtra. Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse said, "Those farmers who have taken crop insurance will be anyway eligible for monetary compensation as per the insurance policy. However, even those farmers who don't have an insurance to compensate for crop losses will be eligible for 50 per cent of the amount that is given under crop insurance." This aid will be given to farmers with a landholding of up to 20 hectares. However, farmers who have received compensation for crop loss under some schemes would not be considered again, Khadse added. The government is still ascertaining the exact losses for rabi season. The primary report suggests 650 villages, mostly in Solapur, is worst hit in rabi season. The final tally will be done after March 15, 2016. The cabinet also gave its approval to sanctioning money for 51,500 farm ponds in the first phase in drought-hit districts. The government assistance will be of Rs 50,000 per farm pond. The farmers can apply online and get the sanction. The state has set aside Rs 207 crore for 2016-17. Earlier, responding to a supplementary demand, the government had allocated Rs 50 crore in December 2015. Rural Development and Water Conservation Minister Pankaja Munde said, "Our policy is to sanction farm ponds to every farmer who comes forward and makes a demand. The 'shettaal' (farm pond) is to create water bodies for sustainable agriculture in the drought-prone districts of Maharashtra." The state cabinet also amended the Maharashtra Water Conservation Bill to enhance the share capital from Rs 2,000 crore to Rs 10,000 crore to facilitate completion of pending irrigation projects. However, some of the projects that proved to be non-feasible have been scrapped. Of the total 2,300 projects worth Rs 4,137 crore sanctioned on paper during the previous regime (Congress-NCP), only a total of works worth Rs 900 crore have been retained in Konkan district. The disbursement of funds will be based on projects requirement suitable to every region, considering its geographical conditions. Under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, the government approved traditional agriculture development programmes. It will help in low production cost and high farm income to be taken up by group of farmers set up in villages. The state will provide 40 per cent share. Rs 6,652 lakh has been sanctioned under the mission.

## **Farmers take to e-commerce in a big way, and their efforts bear fruit**

After mango growers, grape growers taste success in online sales.



After traders and retailers, it's time for farmers in Maharashtra to embrace the e-commerce platform to maximise their direct reach to customers. While mango farmers have tasted the sweet success of e-tailing for some years now, the grape growers in the state too have joined in this year.

For the Devgad taluka Mango Growers Cooperative Society Limited (Devgad Mango), the present season would be the fifth consecutive year when they would be accepting orders online.

Omkar Sapre, advisor to the chief marketing officer of the Society, says they have been exploring the e-commerce way since 2011. "Back in those days, we tried to experiment with e-commerce following the boom the sector had witnessed. We ran a trial for two weeks only for Pune and Mumbai. Much to our surprise, it was well received by the market," he said.

In 2011, Devgad Mango managed an online sale worth Rs 5 lakh and introduced concepts like cash against pick-up and replacement guarantee. In 2012 and 2013, it registered online sales worth Rs 11 lakh and Rs 15 lakh, respectively.

Since then, Sapre said, they have covered more cities and learned more from their hands-on experience. "Initially, we faced problems like defective design of boxes, early ripening of mangoes in transit. But by experimenting with various designs and material, we managed to solve them," he said.

In 2014, the company registered online sales worth Rs 42 lakh and also started delivering consignments to all the metro cities.

Last year, Sapre said, they had delivered online orders worth Rs 42 lakh and reached out to 28 cities. This year, he said, they have set a target of over Rs 1 crore through online sales in 40 cities. “For the current season, the delivery would start from March 15. We are targetting 40 cities.”

Following suit are the grapes growers from Nashik, who are aiming to strike it big on the e-commerce this year. Under the brand name of Bestgrapes, Samir Pandit and 12 other farmers from Nashik are promoting the fruit. This would be the second year of their initiative. Last year, 3,000 kgs of grapes were sold online. Pandit says their grapes are export quality and have got all the necessary certification. “Grapes would be supplied across the country by air and the whole process of packing and sorting has minimum human touch,” he says.

Pandit says they are planning to sell over 1 lakh kgs of grapes through the online platform this year. Other than supplying grapes to exporters, Pandit and other growers are also exploring retail options in other countries for export.

Till now, 800 containers of grapes have left from Maharashtra to Europe. Manikrao Patil, secretary of the Nashik Grape Growers Association, says the consignments have started going from January 15. “We are expecting 25 per cent more trade to Europe due to the delay in arrival of Chilean grapes,” he says.

## THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

### **Vazhakulam woos food-processing entrepreneurs**

A file photo of a street vendor piling pineapples from Vazhakulam for sale at Kochi. The short shelf-life of the fruit is a big handicap as the farmers cannot hold onto their harvest for better prices

Kerala’s ‘Pineapple Republic’ to go in for a global branding; invites processing units to make value-added, packaged products



## **KOCHI, FEBRUARY 9:**

Vazhakulam, the ‘Pineapple Republic’ in Kerala’s Ernakulam district, has a little problem with the term ‘shelf life’.

The pulpy sweetness and lingering aroma of the GI-tagged pineapples that the area produces in millions do not last for more than ten days. Hence, the world outside India doesn’t get to enjoy the extraordinary taste of the Vazhakulam Pineapple.

To beat the short shelf life of its produce, Vazhakulam — the hub of pineapple farming and trade — is looking for investors and food-processing entrepreneurs to make value-added, packaged pineapple products.

“We welcome food-processing companies — start-ups or multinationals — to come to Vazhakulam and set up pineapple processing and exporting units,” said Jose Kalappura, President of the All Kerala Pineapple Farmers Association.

### **Price fluctuations**

Kalappura points out that nearly 90 per cent of the 300-plus-tonne ‘Vazhakulam Pineapple’ produced a year in around 12,000 hectares is consumed as fruit.

The short shelf-life of the fruit is a big handicap as the farmers cannot hold their harvest for better prices.

The result is drastic fluctuations in the price. So, process or perish was an existential dilemma for the sector.

A three-day 'pineapple fest' held at Vazhakulam recently by the stakeholders saw them decide to go in for a global branding.

For this they decided to focus on processing the fruit to produce a range of value-added, bottled or packaged food products that would stay on the shelf for months on end.

"We will soon call a meeting of food manufacturers to motivate them to set up pineapple processing units here," Kalappura told *BusinessLine*.

"Processing and value-addition is the way to go for the pineapple sector," Ismayael Rawther, Director of the Pineapple Mission, noted. "The Vazhakulam pineapple has the potential to secure a huge market in the Gulf and Europe."

Currently, because of the short shelf life and bottlenecks in shipping, the fruit gets rotten by the time it reaches overseas markets, he notes.

### **Expanding cultivation**

The Vazhakulam pineapple, which is basically the Mauritian variety, is now cultivated across Kerala by enterprising farmers from Vazhakulam and nearby areas.

Following the Geographical Indication tagging in 2009, cultivation has expanded and more than 12,000 hectares are now under cultivation. The Vazhakulam Pineapple has essentially been an inter-crop on young rubber plantations.

"Generally, farmers lease young rubber plantations for cultivation," says Antony Vettiyan, who now has around 170 acres of pineapple in Kollam district. "You can raise pineapple in re-planted rubber estates for three to four years."



The decline in rubber prices has led to increased availability of rubber plantations for pineapple.

Vettiyan said wild price fluctuations were the biggest enemy of the farmer. “The current price of ₹ 20/kg for raw fruit and ₹ 22 for ripe are okay,” he said.

“The recent slide in orange prices hit us really bad because they brought down pineapple prices also.”

He said the current average cost of a kg of pineapple was around ₹ 18. Labour is the principal cost.

“We almost fully depend on migrant labour from Orissa and West Bengal,” Vettiyan said. “On average, two workers are required for one acre of pineapple year around.”

Vettiyan hopes that processing of pineapples and manufacturing of value-added products will bring higher returns to the farmer.

(This article was published on February 9, 2016)

## **Beedi workers seek alternative jobs**

### **MANGALURU, FEBRUARY 9:**

Representatives of different trade unions have urged the Centre to provide viable alternative employment opportunities to beedi workers before adopting any ‘anti-tobacco’ policy.

Addressing presspersons in Mangaluru on Tuesday, Balakrishna Shetty, president of the Dakshina Kannada unit of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), said that around 30 lakh farmers have taken up tobacco cultivation in the country. Another 20 lakh people are involved in plucking tendu leaves (used for rolling beedis), and 80 lakh people roll beedis.

### **Livelihood hit**

Stating that the policies of the Centre are affecting the livelihood of these people, he said these 1.3 crore people will not have any alternative means of

subsisting their families without beedi industry. The Centre should come out a policy framework with alternative job opportunities for these people, he said.

Giving the details of beedi workers in coastal Karnataka and Kasaragod of Kerala, he said Dakshina Kannada district has around 3.5 lakh beedi labourers who roll beedis, Udupi and Kasaragod districts have around 1 lakh each. Their livelihood will be affected with 'anti-tobacco' policies of the Centre, he said.

Seetharam Berinja, a representative from All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), said that COTPA (Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act) of 2003 has already affected the livelihood of beedi workers in the country.

Based on the COTPA guidelines, now the Centre wants 85 per cent of the beedi label to contain warning from the existing 40 per cent. Such a move will lead to a little scope for the companies to print their brand names and to print other details such as date of manufacture, he said.

### **Plea for consultation**

HV Rao, representative of AITUC, said that industry representatives should be consulted and tripartite meetings held before passing any rules against the industry.

Shetty said representatives from AITUC, CITU, Bharathiya Mazdoor Sangha (BMS), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and Beedi Contractors' Union held a protest march against the policies of the Centre in Mangaluru on Tuesday.

Seeking the intervention of Bandaru Dattatreya, Union Minister for Labour and Employment, on safeguarding the interests of beedi workers in the country, he said these Unions will take a march to Delhi – 'Delhi Chalo' – if their demands are not met.

(This article was published on February 9, 2016)

## Thundershowers seen spreading across landscape from next week



An outlook by the US Climate Prediction Centre expects that the Tamil Nadu coast may get some rain during the ongoing week itself (February 9-17)

### **THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEBRUARY 9:**

Parts of East India and North-East India received occasional thundershowers during the 24 hours ending on Tuesday morning but the wait continued in the plains of North-West India and West India.

An India Met Department (IMD) update said that rain or thundershowers occurred over most parts of Arunachal Pradesh and at many places over West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam and Meghalaya until Tuesday morning.

### **Extended outlook**

Isolated places over Bihar, Odisha, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura also received thundershowers.

The occasional wet spell in the East was overseen by an upper air trough from Sub-Himalayan West Bengal to South Odisha across Gangetic West

Bengal and Jharkhand with an embedded cyclonic air circulation over West Bengal and neighbourhood.

An extended outlook by the Met from Sunday (Feb 14) to Tuesday spoke about the possibility of rain or thundershowers over North-East India, East India and South Peninsular India.

As for North-West India, the Met outlook said that isolated to scattered rain/snow is likely over the western Himalayan region on Wednesday.

Rain or thundershowers is likely to occur at isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, west Rajasthan and east Uttar Pradesh on Monday (February 15).

### **Interactive rain**

Meanwhile, an outlook by the US Climate Prediction Centre (CPC) sees an incoming westerly wave over North-West India setting up an interaction with a trough/s in the peninsular seas to trigger a line-up of thunderstorms over North-West, Central and Peninsular India next week.

There is already enhanced activity in the Bay of Bengal with a non-seasonal low-pressure area having sprung up over the Equatorial Indian Ocean and adjoining South Andaman Sea.

This has set up a wave of rainfall across the South Bay of Bengal in the direction of Sri Lanka and adjoining Tamil Nadu.

The CPC expects that the Tamil Nadu coast may get some rain during the ongoing week itself (February 9 to 17).

### **Wide swathe**

The causative rain wave in South Bay of Bengal could excite the adjoining South-East Arabian Sea around Sri Lanka and Kerala, bringing rain to these places as well.

Meanwhile, interaction between the thundershower regimes in the North-West and the South Peninsula would bring rain or thundershowers to areas in-between.

According to this outlook, heavy snow/rain could be expected over Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh during the week under reference (February 15 to 21).

Rain or thundershowers are forecast varyingly over a wide swathe covering Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, central Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, coastal Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the rest of South Peninsula and Sri Lanka.

### **Rainfall deficit**

Rainfall deficit for the country as whole from the start of the New Year (until February 3) is 63 per cent, with West India being the most affected. Entire Gujarat (comprising the Met subdivisions of Saurashtra-Kutch and Gujarat Region), Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada and Konkan-Goa recorded no rain at all (deficit of 100 per cent) during this period.

The entire North-West India falls under the 'scanty rainfall' category (deficit ranging from 60 per cent to 99 per cent). This region covers Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

The rest of the 'scanty rainfall' area is distributed in Central India and adjoining North Peninsular India followed by South Peninsula. Most of East India and the North-East fall under the 'deficient rainfall' category (20 per cent to 59 per cent).

(This article was published on February 9, 2016)

### **Groundnut oil slips on slack retail buying**

#### **RAJKOT, FEBRUARY 9:**

Groundnut oil prices drifted at the wholesale market here owing to slack demand from retailers. Cotton oil remained steady on normal demand. Traders said that weak demand from retailers against sufficient stocks pressurised the groundnut oil prices which may continue to move down in coming days. Groundnut oil loose decreased by ₹ 5 to ₹ 895-900 per 10 kg.

Jamnagar line *teliya* tin was down by ₹ 12 to ₹ 1,390-91 per 15 kg and groundnut oil new tin lost ₹ 20 to ₹ 1,585-90 per 15 kg. No trading was registered in Saurashtra's mills. Washed cotton oil stood at ₹ 543-546 per 10 kg and cotton oil new tin was quoted at ₹ 805-810 per 15 kg. About 30-35 tankers of cotton oil were traded in Saurashtra's mills.

(This article was published on February 9, 2016)

### **Turmeric gleams on quality**

#### **ERODE, FEBRUARY 9:**

Spot turmeric prices increased at Erode markets due to arrival of quality produce. "The old and new turmeric prices were up ₹ 200 a quintal and traders procured all the 400 bags of new turmeric for a higher price," said VK Rajamanickam, a trader. Of the arrival of 3,500 bags of turmeric, 2,100 were sold. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the new finger turmeric was sold at ₹ 7,789-9,719 a quintal; the old finger ₹ 7,299-9,089. Of the arrival of 1,314 bags, 560 were sold.

(This article was published on February 9, 2016)

## **Business Standard**

### **Drought blamed for negative farm growth**

India's agriculture growth, measured in terms of gross value added at constant prices, slipped into negative territory in the October-December quarter



India's [agriculture](#) growth, measured in terms of gross value added at constant prices, slipped into [negative territory](#) in the [October-December quarter](#) (first time in FY16) because of a low kharif harvest.

However, on full-year basis, the government estimates gross value added in agriculture and allied activities would rise 1.1 per cent, from negative 0.2 per cent in 2014-15, on account of good performance of livestock, horticulture, [fisheries](#) and [dairy](#) sector.

But experts question projection of recovery in agriculture and allied activities based on [livestock](#) and horticulture. "Even if you take 1.1 per cent as agriculture and allied activities growth in 2015-16, it would mean that in the first two years of the Narendra Modi government, India's [farm sector](#) grew by 0.45 per cent on an average, which is less than average annual population growth of 1.3-1.4 per cent," said Ashok Gulati, former chairman of Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices. He said lower average agriculture GDP growth than population growth also means that per capita income in rural areas is falling while almost 55 per cent of India's rural workforce is dependent on agriculture.

According to the first advanced estimate of foodgrains production by the department of agriculture, output in 2015-16 kharif season is expected to be around 124.05 million tonnes, around 4 million tonnes more than the first advanced estimate of 2014-15. This, however, is less than the final output of the same year.

This is second consecutive year of drought. The southwest [monsoon](#) in 2015 was almost 14 per cent less than normal, registering its worst performance since 2009. Due to poor monsoon, this is the first back-to-back [drought](#) year for India in three decades, and only the fourth in more than a century.

Almost 40 per cent of the country received less than normal rains in 2015, forcing more than seven states to declare drought.

### **Niti Aayog taking states' views on its paper on agriculture**

The paper titled 'Raising Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative for Farmers' has identified five issues



*A farmer casts urea on her mustard field in Allahabad*

Government's main policy think tank [Niti Aayog](#) is taking views of various state governments on key recommendations made in its recent paper on agriculture, including on genetically modified (GM) crops.

The paper titled 'Raising Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative for Farmers' has identified five issues confronting [agriculture](#) and made key recommendations to help bring about a second [Green Revolution](#) in India and sustain robust growth in agriculture. Read our full coverage on Union Budget 2016

"Niti Aayog is holding regional conferences on the key recommendations made in the paper. It has already held one for western region in Ahmedabad and is planning to have dialogue with other states in the coming weeks," sources said.

The state governments' views are being taken as it is likely that some of the recommendations could find their way in the Budget considering Prime



Minister's priority on agriculture and rural development, the sources added.

The paper has suggested measures necessary to raise productivity, policies ensuring remunerative prices for farmers, reforms necessary in the area of land leasing and titles, a mechanism to bring quick relief to farmers hit by natural disasters, and initiatives necessary to spread Green Revolution to eastern states.

"As a part of its strategy to bring a Second Green Revolution, India must return to permitting proven and well-tested GM technologies with adequate safeguards. Additionally, India urgently needs technological breakthrough in oilseeds and pulses," it said.

The country's dependence on imports for meeting domestic demand for edible oils has risen to 70%. Even if India doubles its current level of oilseed production, the import dependence will remain at 40% level. The situation is worse in pulses, it said.

"Recognising the general sensitivity to permitting multinationals to sell GM seeds, it may be prudent for the government to proceed with domestically sourced GM seeds only. Luckily, Indian scientists and institutions have been active and successful in this area," the paper suggested.

The success of Bt cotton in India and many more GM seeds elsewhere in the world testifies to the potential of GM technology in giving a major boost to productivity in agriculture, it added.

### **Badal pitches for 100% FDI in food products multi-brand retail**

The minister had written a letter to the Prime Minister requesting for a 'relook' at the country's FDI policy in multi-brand retail in food processing. [Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal](#) today pitched for 100 per cent [foreign direct investment](#) (FDI) in [multi-brand retail](#) of food products produced and processed in India, as it would benefit farmers and reduce inflation.

"I have requested the Prime Minister, that 100 per cent [FDI](#) in multi-brand retail of those food products which are produced and processed in India should be allowed. So that big companies can create [infrastructure](#) especially

for the [agriculture sector](#) and bring latest technology for the farming sector," Badal said.

This initiative would increase processing in the country, reduce [inflation](#) and create enough employment opportunities for the youngsters especially coming from an agriculture background.

The minister had written a letter to the Prime Minister requesting for a 'relook' at the country's FDI policy in multi-brand retail in food processing.

"The growth in food processing sector results in rise in income of farmers. As it grows, the demand for agricultural produce also increases which is basically a raw material for the sector," Badal said while speaking at an event here organised by industry body Assocham.

The minister said there is huge scope in the country to promote the food processing sector as we are processing only two per cent of the perishable produce.

India permits 51 per cent FDI in the multi-brand retail sector.

So far, the government has cleared UK-based Tesco's proposal in multi-brand retail sector.

During April-September, FDI in the country has increased by 13 per cent year-on-year to \$16.63 billion.

### **Gujarat's mango farmers to emulate Amul model**

Gujarat has started taking steps to boost incomes of farmers cultivating mangoes

Lavishing Satasia of Dhari tehsil of Amreli district in [Gujarat](#) is one happy [mango](#) farmer. Thanks to the budding [cooperative](#) movement in mango farming in his district, he has begun to fetch double the price for his [Kesar](#) mangoes compared to last year.

“People in my village (Sukhpur and adjoining areas) were cutting down their mango farms to make way for peanut and wheat cultivation as it was more

rewarding. Mango farming is a once-a-year harvest and the yield fluctuates with vagaries of nature (storm, unseasonal rains etc),” says Satasia. Now that he has started selling his mangoes to a farmer producer company in the region Avirat, he is fetching Rs 400-425 for 20 kg (wholesale price) compared to Rs 200-250 for 20 kg earlier.



Around 800 farmers like Satasia’s have benefited from the budding mango cooperatives in the state.

Kesar, produced mainly in Gujarat, is the second highest exported variety from the country after Alphonso, followed by Banganapalli, Rajapuri and Dashehari varieties, say traders.

Gujarat took the lead when it came to empowering farmers in dairying, and now the state has started taking baby steps to boost farmer incomes in mango farming.

Raju Deepti, a local social worker, has taken a leaf out of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, which runs the Amul brand of dairy products, and formed a special purpose vehicle called Dedicated Initiative for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (DISHA). With Avirat Agro Producer Company and Rukmavati Rural Agro Producer Company as stakeholders, DISHA does mango marketing on the lines of cooperatives. DISHA is a farmer-oriented multi-stakeholder agri business enterprise, says Deepti.

## KING OF FRUITS

(‘000 tonnes)

State	2014-15 Production	Share (%)
UP	4,347.50	23.47
Andhra	2,822.07	15.23
Telangana	1,801.75	9.72
Karnataka	1,646.51	8.89
Bihar	1,272.00	6.87
Gujarat	1,219.71	6.58
Tamil Nadu	896.78	4.84
West Bengal	799.65	4.32
Odisha	769.93	4.16
Maharashtra	758.84	4.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,334.74</b>	

Source: Apeda

Under the initiative, farmers from Kutch in Gujarat and districts such as Amreli came together to market their mangoes under a single brand, and directly to the consumer by-passing the middlemen. Last season, 750-800 farmers could sell about 130 tonnes of mangoes. Next season, the target is to bring together 2,000 farmers and sell 500 tonnes of mango. According to Deepti, they have come up with a brand ‘Omang’ for the premium range of mangoes, while the common mangoes are sold under the ‘Sangh’ brand. “As for marketing our produce, we have tied up with different channels. A cooperative dairy in Gandhinagar, which sells milk under Madhur brand sells our mangoes while in South Gujarat, J M Industries markets the mangoes; in Ahmedabad and Anand, it is marketed by Shristi Organics.”

Having retail outlets is critical for a farmer brand to survive, says Abhijeet Bhasale, managing director of Pune-based mango import-export house Rainbow International, which also sells its products through mangowale.com.

Maharashtra itself has seen some traction in mango cooperatives in recent years with cooperatives such as Devgad Taluka Amba Utpadak Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit coming into the fore. Wholesalers and exporters cannot compete in price if a farmer chooses to retail his own products, says Bhasale. He adds that the challenge lies in choosing the right channels to market the products. “Production and wholesale is one thing, and marketing the produce

under a brand is a completely different thing."

Satasia agrees. "We are producers; we do not know about marketing. Earlier, the middlemen would eat all the profits, but now we are aware and understand the strength of building a brand."

According to Deepti, a farmer basically gets one-third of the retail price of mangoes when he goes through the normal trade channel. "Here, where procurement is done by a farmer producer company like Avirat and the mangoes are marketed under a specific brand, the farmers are able to fetch better prices, about 50 per cent of the retail price."

The plan for 2016 season is to explore the exports market as well as tie up with modern trade to sell the [Omang](#) and Sangh brands of Gujarati kesar mangoes. In Maharashtra, a leading mango-producing state, cooperatives account for 10 per cent of overall production. The state produces around one million tonnes of Alphonso and other mango varieties. India produces about 15 million tonnes of mangoes, of which only 1.5-3 per cent are exported, while the rest is consumed domestically.

Bhasale, however, is of the opinion that mango cooperatives are still at a nascent stage and largely fragmented. Hence, it is yet to see the traction that cooperative dairying witnessed a few decades ago.

Shankarsinh Rana of Madhur Dairy claimed the response from customers has been phenomenal as people prefer organic mangoes that do not have residues of pesticides. "It seems the next season will be even better. The concept would gather steam soon," he noted. Devgad Taluka Mango Growers Co-operative Society was initially formed around three decades ago to bring the producers under one umbrella and command a fair price from the market or brokers. They eventually focused on building their own brand of Devgad mangoes that would fetch better prices.

Taking a cue from Devgad mangoes, DISHA now aims to market Gujarat's kesar mangoes. DISHA is supported by Aashray (a government-approved techno-social business incubator), which has been established to carry on business and undertake the activities to set up and manage Incubation and Research Centre for promotion of Innovations, setting up of social enterprises and scaling of innovative ventures and grassroots technologies.

# DECCAN Chronicle

## Fossils of two new giant-mouthed fish species discovered

The fossil found is of the fish around 92 million years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the planet.



The findings were published in the journal *Cretaceous Research*.

**Washington:** Scientists have discovered two new plankton-eating fossil fish species which could swing the jaws open extra wide, like a parachute, and swam the oceans 92 million years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the planet.

These fossil fish of the genus called *Rhinconichthys* are exceptionally rare, known previously by only one species from England, researchers said.

But a new skull from North America, discovered in Colorado along with the re-examination of another skull from Japan have tripled the number of species in the genus with a greatly expanded geographical range, they said.

"These species have been named *R purgatoirensis* and *R uyeno*, respectively," said Kenshu Shimada from DePaul University in US.

*Rhinconichthys* belongs to an extinct bony fish group called pachycormids, which contains the largest bony fish ever to have lived. The new study specifically focuses on highly elusive forms of this fish group that ate plankton.

Rhinconichthys was estimated to be more than 6.5 feet, and had a highly unusual specialisation for bony fish.

One pair of bones called hyomandibulae formed a massive oar-shaped lever to protrude and swing the jaws open extra wide, like a parachute, in order to receive more plankton-rich water into its mouth, similar to the way many sharks open their mouth, researchers said.

A planktivorous diet, also called suspension-feeding, is known among some specialised aquatic vertebrates, including the Blue Whale, Manta Ray and Whale Shark.

"Based on our new study, we now have three different species of Rhinconichthys from three separate regions of the globe, each represented by a single skull," said Mr Shimada.

The findings were published in the journal Cretaceous Research.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Small tea growers are forming global level common platform**



Crossing national boundaries, Small Tea Growers(STG) from almost all the tea growing countries of the world are going to form a common platform.

SILIGURI: Crossing national boundaries, Small Tea Growers(STG) from almost all the tea growing countries of the world are going to form a common platform 'Confederation of International Tea Small Holders (

CITES)' soon to work with an objective of giving a boost to small tea farming sector that at present contributes around 65% to the total global tea production.

"Irrespective of difference in language, geography, or Socio economical scenario, STGs from all over the world face same kind of problems like lower than rational level price realization, trouble in market potential utilization, dependency on third party processing etc. Though in India STGs contribution to total national production is 38%, at global level, it is over 65%. Despite being that important, STGs are victims of situations those demand serious global level initiative," said Mr. B G Chakroborty, President of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Association (CISTA.)

As he informed, the idea to form this common global platform first started floating in Intersessional meeting of the Intergovernmental Group on Tea of Food and Agriculture Organization (IGG FAO) of United Nation in 2014. Subsequently, it was decided in the next 2015 IGG FAO meeting in Italy to start working for the formation of 'Confederation of International Tea Small Holders (CITES).' The body will be formed in IGG FAO 2016 meeting to take place at Keniya in the month of May.

In order to give a boost to the International level initiative and to address specific issues pertaining to south Asian countries with even deeper thrust, STGs of SAARC countries have formed a SAARC STG Forum.

Under active support of Indian Tea Board, CISTA organized an International seminar as launchpad for the SAARC level platform. Attended by 185 participants from SAARC countries like India, Nepal, Srilanka or Bangladesh, the seminar took place on 29th of January 2016 at Lataguri, right at the center of Indian tea region heartland Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal. Nevil Ratnayeke, Chairman, Tea Small Holding Development Authority of Srilanka was nominated as convener of SAARC STG Forum.

"We are highly hopeful of very positive outcome of these trans-boundary forums due to very positive support from the Government agencies of all these countries," informed Mr. Chakroborty.



## Cotton prices to remain under pressure in 2016: Ind-Ra



Domestic cotton prices may remain under pressure in the coming few months due to many international as well as domestic reasons, Ind-Ra research report said.

MUMBAI: Domestic cotton prices may remain under pressure in the coming few months due to many international as well as domestic reasons, an India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) research report said on Tuesday.

According to report the Chinese subsidy on cotton in China is creating a disadvantage for the Indian cotton from the price point of view. This combined with a lower demand from spinning mills is set to keep the domestic prices under pressure. "Although Bangladesh, Pakistan and Vietnam have replaced China with India as a supplier, volumes are picking up at a slow pace, and are unlikely to match Chinese demand," said Neermoy Shah, senior analyst, India Ratings & Research

In CY17 (CY refers to International Cotton Year, which commences from August and ends in July), the agency expects cotton prices to stay firm. The domestic prices had declined in CY16 in line with Ind-Ra's expectations and are expected to remain under pressure in calendar year 2017 as well. The operating margins will stay in the 1 per cent-2 per cent range for traders, but the profit after tax margins may improve as sector companies reduce stocks and focus on receivables management. International cotton prices however will remain sensitive to the release of cotton by China from its cotton reserves, which Ind-Ra estimates to be around 59 per cent of global cotton stock at FYE16. Chinese cotton reserves will directly impact the quantum of

imports in that country and consequently the global stock levels outside China, according to the research.

The local cotton production in Pakistan and Bangladesh is unable to keep pace with the increasing demand for apparels from these locations, providing opportunities to Indian exporters. However in view of China reducing imports significantly and the moderating demand from the Indian spinning mills industry, Ind-Ra believes that the demand for cotton will increase at a marginal rate in CY17 and the prices are unlikely to increase materially from the current levels," the report added.

### **Niti Aayog taking states' views on its paper on agriculture**



The paper titled 'Raising Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative for Farmers' has identified five issues confronting agriculture.

NEW DELHI: Government's main policy think tank Niti Aayog is taking views of various state governments on key recommendations made its recent paper on agriculture, including on genetically modified (GM) crops.

The paper titled 'Raising Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative for Farmers' has identified five issues confronting agriculture and made key recommendations to help bring about a second Green Revolution in India and sustain robust growth in agriculture.

"Niti Aayog is holding regional conferences on the key recommendations made in the paper. It has already held one for western region in Ahmedabad and is planning to have dialogue with other states in the coming week," source said.

The state governments' views are being taken as it is likely that some of the recommendations could find their way in the Budget considering Prime Minister's priority on agriculture and rural development, the sources added.

The paper has suggested measures necessary to raise productivity, policies ensuring remunerative prices for farmers, reforms necessary in the area of land leasing and titles, a mechanism to bring quick relief to farmers hit by natural disasters, and initiatives necessary to spread Green Revolution to eastern states.

"As a part of its strategy to bring a Second Green Revolution, India must return to permitting proven and well-tested GM technologies with adequate safeguards. Additionally, India urgently needs technological breakthrough in oilseeds and pulses," it said.

The country's dependence on imports for meeting domestic demand for edible oils has risen to 70 per cent. Even if India doubles its current level of oilseed production, the import dependence will remain at 40 per cent level. The situation is worse in pulses, it said.

"Recognising the general sensitivity to permitting multinationals to sell GM seeds, it may be prudent for the government to proceed with domestically sourced GM seeds only. Luckily, Indian scientists and institutions have been active and successful in this area," the paper suggested.

The success of Bt cotton in India and many more GM seeds elsewhere in the world testifies to the potential of GM technology in giving a major boost to productivity in agriculture, it added.