

18.02.2016

THE HINDU

Punjab to diversify with hybrid maize this kharif

To give an impetus to crop diversification, the government in Punjab, India's grain bowl, plans to replace the water-guzzling paddy (rice) with hybrid maize in two lakh hectares this kharif season (2016-17).

The government will go in for hybrid maize, considered the best alternative to paddy, in 14 districts.

Data from the Agriculture Department show that during 1976-77, maize was grown on 5.8 lakh hectares, and the area has now come down to 1.3 lakh hectares.

“Since the hybrid varieties of maize that yield 6-7 tonnes a hectare are now available, the area can be increased to 8 lakh hectares to meet the requirements of cattle feed, poultry and starch production,” said an agriculture department official.

The government has established a maize board to help farmers in production and marketing.

“Farmers face problems in marketing maize because of its higher moisture content of 25-30 per cent at the time of harvest. For storage, the moisture content should not be more than 14 per cent,” the official said.

To overcome this problem, the government has installed dryers in many markets at a cost of Rs. 52.85 crore. Small dryers, costing Rs. 6 lakh each, are being given to village co-operative societies and individual farmers on a 50 per cent subsidy, subject to the maximum of Rs. 2.5 lakh.

Beavers boon for environment



BEAVERS, BOON FOR ENVIRONMENT

Beavers, a herbivorous group of rodents, are beneficial to the environment, a study says. With their ability to re-engineer the landscape, they can improve biodiversity, minimise pollutants and reduce downstream flooding.

An abundance of plant life was the most noticeable effect of beaver behaviour. The interconnected pools created by beaver dams increased retention of organic matter. Levels of agricultural pollutants were also reduced in areas occupied by beavers. The findings were published in the journal *Freshwater Biology*. IANS

Diversify income sources of small, marginal farmers: NABARD chief

With agrarian crisis steadily deepening, efforts should be made to diversify income sources of small farmers which would ensure their livelihood security, said Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, Chairman of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), here on Wednesday.

Delivering Nabakrushna Choudhury Memorial Lecture on ‘Challenges in financing small and marginal farmers in India with special reference to eastern India’ here, Dr. Bhanwala said, “Agriculture alone cannot generate enough income for their growing needs. Small and marginal farmers now are obtaining their income from multiple sources such as wages and salaries, non-farm production and animal husbandry.”

“The NSSO 70th round survey of agricultural households indicated that marginal farmers’ main source of income is wages (48 per cent) and not

income from crop. For small farmers, 57 per cent of the income is coming from agriculture. For the farmers also, income from cultivation accounted for 48 per cent only. Diversification of income sources is an important strategy to bring down distress level,” he said.

The top banker said livestock and allied sector activities are the best way to insure farmers’ incomes against crop losses. Besides contribution of horticulture sector in stabilising and augmenting farmers’ incomes is proven formula.

Pointing out that small and marginal land holdings lead to a number of problems, he said small and marginal farmers had relatively lower access to credit compared to other farmers and that as a result depend on high cost of borrowing from private money lenders.

“Farmers with higher land holdings could get as high as 79 per cent of their loans from institutional sources, mainly commercial banks. In comparison, 47 to 65 per cent of loan amount of small and marginal holding is from institutional sources. Agricultural money lenders constitute a major source of credit for smaller farmers,” NABARD chairman said.

Dr. Bhanwala expressed concern over low credit flow to Eastern India. “It is surprising that the Eastern region, in spite of having 18 per cent of the branch network, accounts for about only 9.5 per cent of the agricultural credit. The share of credit does not augur well with the share of the region in gross cropped area (14.65 per cent) or high cropping intensity (151 per cent).”

He added “We need to nurture new wave of agripreneurial by approaching farm and allied sector with innovative instruments.”

Wholesale markets may go the digital way

The Delhi government has decided on an ambitious plan to transform its wholesale fruit and vegetable markets into ‘*e-mandis*’.

As part of this project, all mandis will be connected with a centralised system with supplies being tracked on a real-time basis.

Although a mammoth task, if successfully implemented, the project would result in greater transparency by eliminating the middlemen. “The farmers would benefit the most with the e-mandi system as they would get the actual price of their produce, which at present is primarily taken away by the middlemen,” said a member of the Delhi Agricultural Marketing Board.



As of now, whatever little money the farmers get for their produce reaches them a month or so late. Officials say the new system will allow for their money to be squared off in just two days. The move is also expected to help regulate prices of agricultural produce, thereby eliminating the monopoly of some vendors.

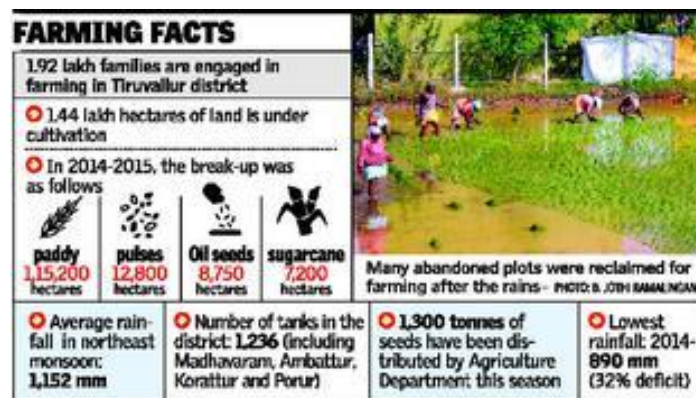
The government plans to reform the Azadpur Mandi, which is touted as the largest fruit and vegetable market in Asia, to begin with. “The plan is to make real-time data available online. There will be a transparent auction system wherein all buyers and sellers will know the type and quantity of produce entering the market,” another official said. The proposal also includes giving smart cards to registered traders, sellers and transporters, which would give daily readings of their exchanges. The system of e-auction will also be introduced later.

However, the project may prove to be an uphill task for the government as it is unlikely that the traders benefitting from the current situation will support the initiative.

Also, the Azadpur Mandi is a land-locked market, which rules out any scope of extension, and is overcrowded with more than 1,000 traders making it their base — that may become an obstacle in infrastructural works.

Post rains, farming makes a comeback

Residents of Tiruvallur district, who had migrated to city, return to cultivate paddy this season



Behind a seven-foot-high brick compound wall with iron grill gates, 42-year-old S. Kathiresan, a marginal farmer from Vada Madurai village near Avadi on the Chennai-Periyapalayam High Road, is tilling his ten hectares of farmland. He will be cultivating paddy till March.

The compound wall and the grill gates are evidence of what he wanted to do with his farmland. Due to continuous drought in Tiruvallur district from 2010-11, he had incurred heavy debts and was going to make housing plots of his agriculture land.

Four days of heavy rains that lashed Chennai, Tiruvallur and Kancheepuram in early December 2015 has stopped Kathiresan from going ahead with the plan.

Now, Kathiresan has made a comeback as a farmer.

“The paddy field is my ancestral property. I learnt farming from my father on the same soil that I cultivate now. Last year’s abundant rain saved my land,” Kathiresan said.

Kathiresan is not the only one to have taken a decision to go back to farming. Many other farmers in Tiruvallur district, especially in the tail-end

areas of water bodies in the district, are now once again engaging in paddy cultivation.

At present, paddy cultivation is the main agricultural activity in the Tiruvallur district. It accounts for more than 80 per cent of net cultivatable area in Tiruvallur district. In other words, of a total of 1.44 lakh hectares of cultivable land (where pulses, oil seeds and sugarcane are also cultivated) in the district, paddy is cultivated in around 1.15 lakh hectares.

Last year, paddy cultivation accounted for only 96,000 hectares due to deficit rainfall of 32% in the district (only 890 mm were received). The average rainfall in the district every year is 1,152 mm. “As per field reports, there has been a 20 per cent increase in net sown paddy area in Tiruvallur. This is mainly due to last year’s rains that filled most of the waterbodies in the district,” an official with Department of Agriculture told *The Hindu*.

Agriculture officials said many farmers in the district since 2010 either moved to other jobs or cultivated in small areas due to the drought. As most of crops that are grown are tank-fed and rely on lakes, farmers were badly hit.

The wells had also gone dry due to lack of outflow from upstream areas.

The rains in November-December 2015, officials said, have helped many farmers make a comeback. “Many plots in Ponneri, Minjur, Periyapalayam and Red Hills are being ‘reclaimed’ for farming,” said P. Balaji, a real estate dealer in Red Hills.

Training programme held

A large number of farmers participated in a training programme on ‘dairy farming and goat rearing’ held in Danishpet village in Kadayampatti block recently.

The programme was organised jointly by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA).

Bysu, Veterinary Assistant Surgeon, explained the food and mouth disease which attacked cattle in the state in the recent past and the various control measures.

A. Nazar, Assistant Director of Agriculture, in his presidential address explained the objective of the training programme and called upon the farmers to take full advantage of the same.

P. Ravi, Assistant Professor-animal husbandry, explained livestock production and goat rearing management techniques to ensure additional income in farm activities.

Naveen Kumaravel, veterinary assistant surgeon, spoke on animal nutrition management.

K. Rajendran, block technology manager, explained the ATMA scheme implementation.

KVK organises pre-Rabi awareness programme

In an interesting collaboration between the farm fraternity and the police, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra conducted a pre-Rabi awareness programme forging alongside a police initiative at KVK, Paaparapatty, recently.

The programme inaugurated by J. Loganathan, Superintendent of Police, Dharmapuri, coincided with the introduction of a new “Farmer Friend of Police’ initiative to bridge a rapport between farmers and the police.

With the Rabi season poised to take over, KVK here organised the campaign to sensitise farmers to the technical aspects for the current season of crops here in Dharmapuri.

In his presidential address, Mr. Loganathan highlighted the need to increase awareness towards small millets and organic farming among the farmers. H. Philip, Director of Extension Education of Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, spoke on the various activities of Krishi Vigyan Kendra at district level and the establishment of model farms at the kendras for farmers’ sensitisation.

Farmer 'Nel' Jayaraman of Tiruvarur district exhibited a collection of traditional varieties in paddy and discussed about the importance of conservation of traditional varieties of paddy and the enormous possibilities of organic farming.

Dr. Jalaluddin, Professor and Head, Regional Research Station, Paiyyur, highlighted the various varieties and technologies released by the Regional Research Station.

Participating in the programme, resource persons from departments spoke on the success of polyhouse cultivation in Dharmapuri district and the importance of farm mechanisation and utilisation of government schemes effectively to increase farm productivity. Live demonstrations were given on high density planting in Moringa and ecological engineering in paddy.

Participants were taken on a tour to the fodder bank, exposure to new crop varieties, and precision farming in vegetables.

The programme also witnessed special demonstrations on Integrated Farming System and model food processing lab; and inauguration of permanent technical exhibition at KVK.

Pending projects get Rs. 25,000 crore



Ministers T Harish Rao and Etala Rajender at the inauguration of Thotapalli link canal at Ogulapur village of Chigurumamidi mandal in Karimnagar district on Wednesday.-Photo: By arrangement.

The State government has been taking all measures for the completion of the pending irrigation projects by allocating Rs 25,000 crore in the budget, said Minister for Major Irrigation T Harish Rao.

Speaking after inaugurating the Thotapalli link canal at Ogulapur village of Chigurumamidi mandal in Karimnagar district on Wednesday, Mr Harish Rao said that they would complete the Mid Manair Dam (MMD) reservoir across the SRSP flood flow canal in Karimnagar by June 2016 and store at least 25 tmcs of water. Similarly, they would also complete Gandipalli and Gouravelli reservoirs within one year and provide irrigation sources to the upland Husnabad mandal, he added.

Stating that they were taking up Gouravelli project at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore and Gandipalli reservoir at a cost of Rs 334 crore, he said that they were taking link canal to the above reservoirs at a cost of Rs 119.93 crore. He said that they would provide compensation as per norms under GO number 123 and appealed to the farmers cooperate with the government.

He also said that they would provide incentive of one per cent to the executing agency if they complete the canal works within one year and reduce the payment of two per cent if they delayed the works. With regard to the abolition of the Thotapalli reservoir, he said that they had redesigned the reservoir to avoid submergence of villages and agricultural land and execute the project at only Rs 100 crore instead of Rs 1,000 crore as projecte earlier and saved the public exchequer.

In the name of Thotapalli reservoir, there was no developmental activity in Ogulapur, Gagigillapur and Narayanpur villages. They would cover the losses of development by announcing special package for these three villages. The land acquired from the farmers would be returned back to the farmers at lesser rates. If not, they would establish industries and provide employment to the local youth. They were also examining to purchase the land and provide the same to the SC under the three acres land scheme, he maintained.

Minister for Finance and Civil Supplies Etala Rajender said that the government had abolished the Thotapalli reservoir in the large interest of the farmers and avoid submergence of villages. Karimnagar MP B Vinod Kumar, legislator V Satish Kumar, MLC P Sudhakar Reddy, CE Anil Kumar, RDO Chandrashekhar and others were also present.

Fisheries stakeholders' meet in capital today

A meeting of stakeholders in marine fisheries has been convened by Minister for Fisheries K. Babu in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday ahead of the State government submitting its views to the committee appointed by the Union government to draw up a national marine fisheries policy.

The State government had told the central committee on Monday that it would consult the stakeholders in the State and submit its view within 10 days.

The meeting was attended by senior Fisheries Department officials from nine maritime States and two Union Territories.

The central committee is headed by Director General of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research S. Ayappan.

Foreign vessels

The first draft of the national marine fisheries policy has hinted at ending the Letter of Permit raj in which foreign vessels were issued permits to operate in deep seas off the Indian coast. There has been constant objection against the practice and fishermen are hopeful that the new policy would completely end the practice. The marine fishermen community and boat operators have opposed the LoP regime and the State government is expected to take a similar stand officially.

Trade union sources said that the central committee received nearly 4,000 submissions to the queries it had posted online to elicit opinion from the fisheries stakeholders. Sources said that more than 80 per cent of the respondents expressed their opinion against allowing foreign vessels to operate in the seas off the Indian coast.

More than 90 per cent of them are learnt to have told the committee that Indian vessels and fishermen were capable of exploiting the deep sea resources.

Meeting ahead of submitting State's views to Central panel on marine fisheries policy.

Rental rates fixed for harvesting machines

Around 240 machines needed in Alappuzha's paddy fields

The district administration has fixed the rental rates for paddy harvesting machines. The rates have been fixed at a maximum of Rs.1,700 per hour except in 'kayal' fields where the rate will be Rs.1,900 per hour.

Paddy crop is being raised in more than 500 padasekharams, spread over 25,000 hectares, in the district this crop season. The harvesting season, which begins in February, will go on till May. Around 240 harvesting machines will be required for the purpose. As many as 78 harvesting machines are available in the district. The required number of machines will be brought from other districts and neighbouring States.

District Collector N. Padmakumar said machines of poor quality should not be used for harvesting. A meeting would be convened to discuss the wages of labour for the harvesting operations, he said. The labour officer will conduct deliberations with trade union representatives at the local level. Offices of the Agricultural Department have been asked by the district administration to convene meetings within a fortnight.

Farmers have insisted on uniform rate for the harvesting machines during the forthcoming harvesting season. Different rates were charged by the operators during the previous crop season. Untimely rain had posed problems to the farmers. Non-availability of adequate number of harvesting machines had forced the farmers to engage the services of machines, some of poor quality, from other districts at higher rates. Using machines of poor quality would mean longer use of the machine, resulting in increased expenses.

Delayed procurement by the government had adversely affected the farmers the previous season. Supplyco had procured 42,400 tonnes of paddy during the previous crop season. An amount of Rs.91.16 crore has been distributed among 14,766 farmers for the procured paddy, according to officials.

- Maximum rate of Rs.1,700 an hour***
- Poor quality machines will not be used***

First solar credit camp may boost solar energy tapping

Of the 456 people, who enquired about the system, 138 submit proposals



Prasad Rao, Assistant General Manager, NABARD, A.B. Ibrahim, Deputy Commissioner, and Ivan D'Souza, MLC, checking out a stall at the solar credit camp in Mangaluru on Wednesday.— Photo: H.S. Manjunath

It is not home or car loan mela, but a mela for sanctioning loan for setting up roof top solar power units that was held here on Wednesday.

In the mela on the premises of Town Hall, 456 people enquired about the solar power system. Of them, 138 people submitted their proposals evincing interest on going for solar roof top units. Loan was sanctioned to one of the applicants on the spot.

SyndicateBank, the Lead Bank, NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) and MESCOM had jointly organised the camp, in association with the district administration.

In all, 12 banks, including eight nationalised, two private, one regional rural bank and one cooperative bank, and 15 solar equipment suppliers, took part in the mela.

Speaking to presspersons on the occasion, Raghav Yajamanya, Lead Bank manager, said that his bank had set a target to sanction loans to 1,000 applicants during this fiscal through about 300 bank branches in Mangaluru

taluk alone. Now, enquires seeking details about the loan to solar units had increased.

The process from the time MESCOM issued feasibility report and banks processed the loan application to the time MESCOM installed the unit, would take 11 days, he said.

A unit, with a 1 kW capacity could be set up in a 100 sq.ft. area. The cost involved in generating one kW of power ranged from Rs. 70,000 to Rs. 90,000, he said and added that the government had waived VAT on solar equipment.

Banks would encourage customers to obtain insurance for solar roof top equipment so as to protect themselves from any unforeseen damage to either the solar panels or the equipment.

“Insurance is not mandatory, but advisable,” Mr. Yajamanya said. Tenants could become co-borrowers for a loan with the landlord, if the parties concerned work out a mutually acceptable agreement, he said.

Deputy Commissioner A.B. Ibrahim said it was important to sell the concept of solar roof top installation as a good business proposition.

Goa Agriculture department goes hi-tech

Farmers can now apply for Krishi Card online

The Goa Agriculture Department has gone hi-tech with a farmer-savvy and service-oriented website of the department having been launched this week.

Under the Digital India initiative, Union Minister of State for Agriculture, Mohanbhai Kundariya, launched the newly revamped website, under which farmers can apply for Krishi Card and also claim subsidies. In case of any grievances or difficulties in accessing the same through online mode, the farmer can call the toll free ‘Kisan call’ number: 1800 180 1551, and ask for any technical or scheme-related information.

This initiative has been made possible through massive reengineering of services by a team of agriculture officers, consultants and the software

expertise of State-owned Goa Electronics Limited (GEL). The effort began in the year 2013. The URL for the website is www.agri.goa.gov.in.

The Goa Directorate of Agriculture visualised the need to bring in technology for the betterment of all stakeholders and this thought led to the Krishi project, an attempt to use technology for reviving agriculture and allied sectors. Krishi Card, a smart card, is the product of technology-led reforms in the Directorate. This card acts as a token to retrieve the complete history of farmers in Goa and has biometric authentication and verification of the farmer. This innovation has led to proper disbursement of funds, reconciliation of accounts, and bogus beneficiary identification, a spokesperson of the Goa government told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

There are additional benefits like faster processing of applications, status update on the application, transparent process, creation of centralised repository of farmers, identification of beneficiaries across schemes, easy access to data and more.

Followed by the success of the Krishi Card, the Directorate went ahead with streamlining other schemes by launching another technology-led intervention, wherein 60 services are covered and their processes reengineered to provide better services. This has led to huge cost savings for farmers wherein they can avoid photocopying documents, etc.

119 panchayats to implement solid waste management scheme

A total of 119 panchayats have been selected for phase-II of the Solid Waste Management scheme in Ariyalur district.

As per the scheme, the waste is separated into bio-degradable waste and non bio-degradable waste. After segregation, non degradable waste will be shredded effectively in order to utilize them for road formation. The bio-degradable waste is collected and stored in separate compost pits. Then a layer of cow dung strewn on them, and built layer by layer to grow earthworms.

The vermin compost will be sold to the interested farmers thereby bringing revenue to the concerned panchayats.

Collector Saravanelraj said that the scheme had already been implemented in 25 panchayats in the phase-I. Many of them were doing well. The phase-II plan would cover 1,57,353 households in 580 cluster habitations. A total of 1047 “Thoomai Kavalars” would be appointed for this work.

A total of 220 Thooimai kavalars have already been appointed, and are paid wages as per Mahatma Gandhi rural job scheme’s pay norms.

They would be engaged in segregation and vermi compost yard works.

The Keelapalur Panchayat Level Federation had been provided with plastic shredding machine at a cost of Rs.2,74,050.

The workers were given uniform coat, face mask, protective head cap and a pair of rubber hand gloves for ensuring safety to them.

Saraswathi Ganesan, Project Officer, District Rural Development Agency, said the Panchayat Level Federation Keelapalur had sent 500 kg of shredded plastic for laying roads. Seven roads were relaid by using shredded plastic.

Workers were given uniform coat, face mask, protective head cap

Use facilities, officials told

Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao called upon the officials to use the facilities being provided by the government and serve the people in better manner.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the Revenue Divisional Office (RDO) constructed at a cost of Rs. 2.5 crore at Siddipet on Wednesday, Mr. Harish Rao said that officials should treat people coming to them with great respect. He also promised to construct R&B EE office and Guest House in one acre land at the earliest. He has congratulated RDO Mr. Muthyam Reddy for working relentlessly in acquiring land for Pranahita Chevella project and Kothapally- Gajwel- Siddipet railway line.

The Minister has handed over pattadar pass books, mutation and pahanis to 264 farmers at the programme.

Farmers in Odisha demand monthly allowance

Farmers on Wednesday undertook a 30-km-long walk from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar demanding monthly 'secured sustenance allowance'.

Under the banner of Navanirman Krushak Sangathan (NKS), representatives of farmer associations said the government must pay monthly allowance of Rs.5,000 to each farmer so that their families do not die of starvation.

"Agriculture has become non-remunerative. A farmer after a year-long toil on field is not sure if he would earn enough to feed his family. On the other hand, by keeping himself engaged in agriculture, a farmer is ensuring food security of non-farmers. Farmers' interest should be protected," said NKS president Akshaya Kumar.

Mr. Kumar said: "The government should put aside a fund to the tune of Rs.21,600 crore for 36 lakh farmers in Odisha for monthly secured sustenance allowance."

The march started from Cuttack railway station and reached Bhubaneswar in the evening after making halt at Phulnakhara around 1.30 pm.

The NKS demanded that the Naveen Patnaik government acknowledge that farmers were committing suicide due to crop loss and their family members be immediately adequately compensated.

"Farmers should be encouraged to become self-reliant with assured irrigation, steady supply of free seeds and assured marketing linkage. Once the farmers start earning profit from farming, the agriculture would return to growth path," said Seshadev Nanda, another NKS leader.

Farmers demanded that the government accord utmost priority to develop agricultural infrastructure projects for overall development of farm sector.

94 p.c. of standing crops saved: Kurnool Collector

Ninety four per cent of the standing crops were saved by optimally utilising the available water despite the drought conditions in Kurnool district, District Collector Ch. Vijayamohan said.

Referring to an industrial hub, he told the media here that 700 acres of land was allotted to Jain Irrigation, 100 acres of Gujarat Ambuja and 150 acres to Santhiram Chemicals. A 1,000 MW solar hub, the first of its kind, was being set up in the district, he said.

Works on constructing IIIT buildings with an outlay of Rs. 354 crore were brisk and classes would commence from June, Mr. Vijayamohan said.

Under housing for all in NTR housing scheme, 14,750 houses were sanctioned in rural areas and 18,000 houses in urban areas. Applications are being received from eligible beneficiaries, he said.

The house site pattas issued in the past would be cancelled and G plus III apartments would be built with an outlay of Rs. 4.80 lakh each, the Collector said. Cement concrete roads were laid to a distance of 202 km., out of the target of 340 km., in the district.

Nearly 5,000 units sanctioned under the SC, BC and Minority Corporations would be grounded soon. Steps were taken to dispose off 48,000 representations, out of 1.93 lakh representations received during Janmabhoomi programme.

Borewells would be sunk in the lands of 2,660 eligible beneficiaries under NTR Jalasiri programme, Mr. Vijayamohan said. Of the one lakh farm ponds proposed in the district, 45,654 were sanctioned and 12,036 farm ponds were grounded so far by spending Rs. 27 crore, he said.

Chief Planning Officer D. Ananda Naik participated.

Board to buy excess tobacco from growers



The quota for sale of excess tobacco will be allowed only to growers whose stocks have been certified by the field staff.— FILE PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

Tobacco growers in Mysuru and Hassan districts, the key growing areas in the State, can exult as the Tobacco Board, on the diktat of the Centre, will soon start purchasing excess Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco produced by registered and unregistered growers for the 2015-16 Karnataka crop season.

A circular from the Tobacco Board to regional managers and auction superintendents in the State, a copy of which is available with *The Hindu*, said each registered grower has to pay Rs. 2 a kg and 7.5 per cent of the proceeds of the sale to the tobacco fund for the excess FCV produced by him or her to the extent of 10 per cent of the quota authorised for the crop season.

Likewise, Rs. 2 a kg and 15 per cent of the proceeds of the sale should be contributed to the fund by an unregistered grower.

All the auction superintendents have been directed to allow the sale and purchase of excess tobacco with immediate effect if growers agree to comply with the conditions.

Importantly, registered and unregistered growers have been asked to file an application-cum-undertaking with details of stocks of the excess or unauthorised production and declare that they will not resort to excess/unauthorised cultivation and operation of their unregistered/unauthorised barns in future.

The quota for sale of excess tobacco should be allowed only to growers whose stocks have been certified by the field staff concerned. The auction superintendents shall ensure sale of tobacco with 5 per cent variation as far as possible.

Sale of unauthorised tobacco as excess tobacco by grower to avoid penalties shall not be allowed. Any major variations, resulting in financial loss to the government, will be viewed seriously, said Ch. V. Maruthi Prasad, Auction Superintendent, Tobacco Board, in the circular. The Board said the authorised quotas of growers will get reduced to the extent of excess tobacco sold by him or her from 2016-17 onwards.

Eat right, sleep tight



Now that you have put in so much effort into the examination that is round the corner, it is time to invest some care into food and rest, to give the tests the best shot

The countdown to exams has begun. It is only matter of time you will find yourself sitting in the exam hall with a question paper in hand. With most of you facing pressure from peers, parents, teachers and from your own expectations, it is only natural to be anxious. But let it not affect your performance, most importantly your health.

It would be unfair, if you happen to fall sick after putting so much hard work into the exams. Stress not! If you take some conscious steps and tweak your lifestyle, in the run up to the exams, it could turn out to be a smooth sail.

Though seem insignificant, your well-being is depended on two mundane things you do everyday – eating and sleeping. Eating the right kind of food and getting the right amount of sleep can do wonders to your body and mind.

Our focus here is to improve energy, avoid indigestion, and to stay hydrated.

High energy food

Eat food that is high in calories and carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are the primary source of energy for the body. Carbohydrates are converted into glucose in the digestive system and the cells and tissues use this sugar for energy. Taking idly, dosa or aappam with dhal on the morning of your exam would be ideal. They boost your energy. Consume brown rice, corn, apple, banana, oranges and potatoes. These foods will give you enough energy to study long hours without getting tired.

Stress and food

Stress can affect your food intake in two ways. It can upset the stomach; and also make you overeat. Avoid spicy and fatty food (the reverse can also happen here as fat can cause stress); processed food, fries and junk food.

Plenty of water

Your body needs water to maintain temperature, remove waste and lubricate joints.

Drink a lot of water. Keep a bottle of water by your side while studying. For every chapter you finish, take sips of water.

You can also eat succulent fruits and vegetables between meals. They keep you hydrated and give your body, the requisite vitamins and minerals. Lime juice, watermelon juice and coconut water also help.

Good sleep, good performance

Sleep is not just about rest. Lack of it can affect your hormones and your overall health.

A good sleep should be about 6 to 8 hours for adults. During examination weeks, it may not be possible for you to sleep 8 hours, so ensure 6 hours of sleep. You may either choose late night or early morning to schedule your study, as long as you stick to the minimum required hours.

Mind you, sleeping two hours and then waking up to study for two hours, does not count as a good sleep. A healthy sleep pattern is not just about

quantity of sleep, but also about quality. One has to sleep continuously for the different stages of sleep to pass off perfectly.

The worrying fact about lack of sleep at this point in time is -- if you do not sleep well, you could be forgetful. Sleep deprivation affects your learning and thinking ability. You have to give your brain and body some rest.

When you wake up without catching up enough rest, you could feel irritated, less focused and restless – this leads to stress. Imagine how fretful you could become, if you go sleep-deprived for days and weeks together, as the case may be during the exam time.

For the same reason, going sleep-deprived from Monday to Friday and sleeping at a stretch on Saturdays and Sundays does not count for a good sleep too.

(With inputs from Chennai-based dietician Gomathy Gowthaman and Dr.N.Ramakrishnan, Senior Consultant & Director, Nithra Institute of Sleep Sciences.)

Benefits of pomegranates



Rich in micronutrientsA pomegranatesPhoto: NYT

Pomegranates are rich in micronutrients with potential antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. But there's little good evidence that the level of nutrients found in the fruit translates into true gains for human health, said Dr. Brent Bauer, director of the Mayo Clinic's complementary and integrative medicine program, because few clinical trials have been done.

"There's a suggestion pomegranate can do a lot of things," Dr. Bauer said. "The trouble is there's very limited data."

Among the active ingredients in pomegranates are polyphenols such as ellagitannins, which inhibit the activation of inflammatory pathways, and anthocyanins, which give the fruit its deep red colour and also have antioxidant activity. Diets high in these compounds have been linked to a reduced risk for chronic diseases, including heart disease and some cancers.

One study found that pomegranate juice had greater antioxidant activity and polyphenol content than concord grape juice, blueberry juice, cranberry juice, apple juice and orange juice.

Some small human trials have found that drinking pomegranate juice on a daily basis may aid cardiovascular health by improving vascular health, blood pressure and levels of "good" HDL cholesterol.— New York Times News Service

Union Cabinet clears LIGO-India gravitational wave observatory



In this undated photo released by Caltech/MIT/LIGO Laboratory on February 8, 2016 shows Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory Hanford laboratory detector site near Hanford, Washington. India has approved a proposal to establish a gravitational wave observatory in India in collaboration with LIGO.

The project is piloted by the Department of Atomic Energy and Department of Science and Technology.

Days after an international team of scientists, including several from India, formally announced that it had detected gravitational waves from deep space, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said it had, “in principle,” approved a proposal to have a gravitational wave detector in India.

Those connected with the project said it was an important development and marked the government formally acknowledging it but a final decision regarding the money, and how it would be spent, was still some time away. Current estimates suggest the project would cost at least Rs. 1,200 crore. As *The Hindureported* on Monday, the project is still at least eight years away. The gravitational waves were detected by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO) — a system of detectors in Washington and Louisiana.

‘Now we know the govt. is serious’

Since 2011, a consortium of Indian research establishments has been lobbying to have a gravitational wave detector — most of whose hardware is already ready in the United States — located in India.

Known as the LIGO-India project, it is piloted by Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Department of Science and Technology (DST).

“We have been waiting for this for a long time...now we know the government is serious,” Bala Iyer, Council Chair, of the LIGO-India consortium, told *The Hindu*.

The LIGO-India project will be jointly coordinated and executed by three Indian research institutions: the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune and Department of Atomic Energy

organisations: Institute for Plasma Research (IPR), Gandhinagar and the Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology (RRCAT), Indore.

The RRCAT, which has expertise in lasers and IPR, with expertise in the high vacuum and cryogenic systems, will be the institutions who will be responsible for execution of the project while IUCAA, the key science stakeholder of LIGO-India, will be responsible for the science teams, human resources development, data acquisition and scientific data computation, according to a press statement by the consortium.

“LIGO-India will also bring considerable opportunities in cutting edge technology for the Indian industry which will be engaged in the construction of an eight-kilometre-long beam-tube at ultra-high vacuum on a levelled terrain,” the statement added.

Right step on savings schemes

The 25-basis points reduction in interest rates on short-tenure small savings schemes from April 1 may have come as a huge disappointment for countless savers. For the middle class, especially for millions of retired persons, these schemes are risk-free, and provide safe parking slots for their hard-earned money. The returns these schemes offer also help them balance their budget. Read in this light, the decision to pare the interest rates on these schemes, even if only by a small measure, is bound to put the National Democratic Alliance government at the Centre in an uncomfortable position *vis-à-vis* a crucial component of society, the middle class, which is considered the core constituency of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The decision, however, must be viewed in the context of the big picture that is emerging on the national economy. The Reserve Bank of India cut the key policy rate by a total of 125 basis points in 2015, and it has only been partially transmitted to end-borrowers. In fact, a little less than half of this reduction had been passed on by banks to their clients. The problem, in a way, lies in the peculiar predicament the banks find themselves in. It is easy to put banks on the mat for not passing on the rate reduction to customers. Already under huge stress, they can do so only if they could correspondingly cut their deposit rates. But there is a catch here. The deposit mobilisation exercise of banks often encounters competition from these small savings schemes. By reducing the interest rates on short-term savings schemes, the government

has sought to erase the ‘return advantage’ they currently enjoy over similar-tenure government securities. Indeed, it has set the stage for a uniform interest rate regime — at least from a short-term perspective — and cleared a major roadblock for banks in cutting their deposit rates, and eventually the lending rates as well. Viewed from this perspective, the move is a welcome one.

By leaving the interest rates on long-term and certain special category savings schemes unchanged, the government has sent out the message that it has in mind the larger good of society as a whole, and that it is keen to encourage people to save for the future. A distorted interest regime is the principal cause for driving the economy into a costlier zone. For individuals, no doubt, the impact of the interest rate cut on small savings schemes could be immediate and visible in terms of lower returns on their savings. However, the effect of such a cut will have a cascading effect on the entire value chain, and will inevitably bring the cost structure down for the economy. Surely, that is the right way to go. The government has indeed done well to take this less-than-popular step.



Drought insulation

Total foodgrain production in 2015-16 is expected at 253.16 million tonnes (mt), according to the Agriculture Ministry’s second advance estimates.

India’s agricultural output hasn’t taken as much a hit from back-to-back droughts this time round as with previous monsoon failure episodes.

Total foodgrain production in 2015-16 is expected at 253.16 million tonnes (mt), according to the Agriculture Ministry’s second advance estimates. This is only 4.5 per cent below the 265.04 mt of 2013-14, which was, in turn, an all-time-high.

Crop production in million tonnes

	2013 2014	2014 2015	2015 2016
FOODGRAINS	265.04	252.02	253.16
Rice	106.65	105.48	103.61
Wheat	95.85	86.53	93.82
Coarse cereals	43.29	42.86	38.40
Pulses	19.25	17.15	17.33
OILSEEDS	32.75	27.51	26.34
Groundnut	9.71	7.40	7.18
Rapeseed -mustard	7.88	6.28	6.84
Soyabean	11.86	10.37	9.13
COTTON*	35.90	34.81	30.69
SUGARCANE	352.14	362.33	346.39
JUTE**	11.08	10.62	9.89

**million bales of 170 kg each;*

***million bales of 180 kg each;*

2014-15: final estimates; 2015-16: 2nd advance estimates.

If one were to compare with past droughts, the year-on-year decline amounted to 7 per cent each in 2009-10 (from 234.47 mt to 218.11 mt) and 2004-05 (from 213.19 mt to 198.36 mt), and 17.9 per cent in 2002-03 (from 212.85 mt to 174.77 mt). The last time the country had back-to-back droughts was in 1986-87 and 1987-88. Then, too, the production drop between 1985-86 and 1987-88 was higher at 6.7 per cent (from 150.44 mt to 140.35 mt).

This relative insulation from deficient monsoons can be attributed to increased access to irrigation facilities, planting of shorter-duration varieties less prone to moisture stress, and timely meteorological forecasts enabling better crop planning and preparedness among both the Centre and state governments. The effects of these were seen especially this time, with the Met Department issuing drought warnings well in advance. It is only in oilseeds where a real production fall of almost 20 per cent has taken place. But even here, the dip has been more in groundnut and soyabean, both predominantly monsoon-dependent kharif crops. It has been less for rapeseed-mustard, which is grown in the rabi season with nearly three-fourths crop area under irrigation.

Subsidy reform: Seeding change through direct benefit transfer

Uttar Pradesh has shown how DBT model is good for both farmers and the exchequer.



A Farmer showing his bank account passbook after transfer of subsidy money by Uttar Pradesh government. (Express Photo Praveen Khanna)

Whether subsidies should be given, or to what extent are they market-distorting, are matters of debate. But so long as we continue with subsidies, how to reach them to the intended beneficiaries is the main issue.

Currently, subsidy is largely provided ‘at source’. Thus, in the case of fertiliser or foodgrains and kerosene sold through the public distribution system, consumers pay below-market rates. The gap between the market price and the lower consumer price for these products is covered by the subsidy.

The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, on the other hand, entails consumers paying the full market price for the commodity upfront. The admissible subsidy is, then, transferred separately to their bank account. The experience of DBT in LPG cylinder distribution under the Centre’s PAHAL scheme points to its success in not only delivering the subsidy efficiently, but also resulting in substantial savings for the exchequer.

The challenge lies now in extending the DBT model to other subsidies, including those on agricultural inputs. That is where the recent example of Uttar Pradesh, which has successfully implemented DBT for seed subsidy, may be relevant. The programme was first tried out for providing subsidy on

hybrid seeds in the 2015 kharif season. This was followed by DBT on all seeds — both certified varieties and hybrids — during rabi 2015-16. Central to it was the creation of a farmers' database — containing their identity proofs, land particulars and bank account numbers — under a state government scheme called Pardarshi Kisan Seva Yojana. The database already covers over 40 lakh farmers and is growing by the day. The DBT programme benefited around 1.5 lakh farmers in kharif 2015. They were given the freedom to buy seeds from any of the designated retail outlets operated by private companies at market prices, with the subsidy being credited separately into their bank accounts. While in the preceding kharif season, the UP government spent more than Rs 85 crore as subsidy on hybrid paddy, maize, jowar and bajra seeds, the outgo fell to less than Rs 25 crore in kharif 2015 post introduction of DBT. In this rabi season, too, farmers bought wheat, oilseeds and pulses seeds from designated government/semi-government and cooperative outlets at market-linked rates. The total subsidy amount, transferred directly into the accounts of approximately nine lakh farmers, came to Rs 127 crore. This again was lower compared to a bill of Rs 217 crore during 2014-15 rabi. The main reason for the subsidy savings was the knocking-out of fictitious beneficiaries. In fact, the DBT system's biggest achievement has been that many farmers received subsidised seeds for the first time, thanks to the transparent manner for identification of beneficiaries. In the earlier system of "at source" subsidy, there wasn't any means to check who was getting the subsidy. And since the seeds were sold at below market prices, it led to paper transactions and diversion of subsidised material.

Under the new system, small and marginal farmers are approaching the designated outlets with a sense of entitlement, after having registered themselves online on the Agriculture Department's DBT portal. Nor is there scope for embezzlement by seed stores in-charge, as the subsidy into the accounts of farmers can be transferred only after the money collected from them has been deposited in the treasury. The readily available database also makes it possible to provide certified seeds — that require replacement only once in three years — to new sets of farmers each season. This allows for faster diffusion of technology, unlike in the earlier system where the same set of big and influential farmers ended up getting new certified seeds every year. The new system has other important spin-offs as well. The robust farmer-level data generated can be useful for planning purposes in different agro-climatic zones of UP. Also, the process of data generation and more farmers buying from designated state seed outlets has resulted in renewal of

contact between them and the agriculture department, which again is beneficial for extension of technology. There are, nevertheless, two major challenges in implementation of subsidy via DBT for all agricultural inputs. The first is the issue of upfront payment — not all farmers can pay market prices for say, fertilisers and wait for the subsidy to be credited to their bank accounts — and the second is the exclusion of sharecroppers by virtue of their not ‘owning’ land. The latter challenge can be addressed through changes in land leasing laws, which allow formal recognition of non-landowning cultivators.

As regards upfront payments, one solution could be through Kisan Subsidy Cards (KSC). Banks are now issuing Kisan Credit Card (KCC) to farmers, providing a credit limit of up to Rs three lakh linked to their landholdings. This credit limit could be split into two parts. While the existing KCC component would enable farmers to withdraw cash towards making payments towards labour or electricity/diesel for irrigation, the KSC sub-limit can be used only to make the upfront payments on subsidised inputs like seed and fertiliser. Such payments should, however, be allowed only through custom-made swipe machines, with the KSC limits getting ‘recharged’ when the subsidy amounts from the government are transferred into the farmers’ bank accounts. The KSCs cannot be used to draw cash from ATMs or to purchase other commodities; they can operate only on the special swipe machines kept at the designated seed/fertiliser stores. Technology today enables subsidy on agricultural inputs to be delivered in an efficient, transparent and inclusive manner via DBT. It makes sense to start this with seeds. Once the system gets accepted by farmers, extending it to fertilisers and other inputs is a natural corollary.

Unauthorised fodder business thrives in drought-hit areas in Maharashtra

Govt’s fodder bill shoots up to Rs 4 crore a day

Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse Wednesday admitted that the government has found a number of unauthorised fodder camps set up in the drought-hit districts of Beed, Osmanabad and Latur, all in Marathwada.

Just as Maharashtra is already footing a Rs 4-crore bill daily to provide fodder and water for cattle in drought-hit areas, Khadse conceded that

“demands to regularise even the illegally running fodder camps are being made.”

“Our appeal to those running such camps is to either apply for permissions from the government or transfer animals they shelter to units with valid permissions,” Khadse said.

The thriving fodder lobby enjoys considerable political clout, claiming that they had even succeeding in getting the government to reverse a decision that was taken to ensure the state is not hit by a fodder scam. Following report that adequate fodder for animals was available in Beed, Osmanabad, and Latur that could last till May, Khadse’s department had asked collectors to close down government-aided camps at all places where the fodder was available in surplus. Khadse, who also heads the Maharashtra cabinet’s sub-committee on drought mitigation measures, said about 10.75 lakh tonne fodder was available in these three districts. But on Wednesday, Khadse was forced to retract the decision as it was becoming politically a hot potato for the BJP. Besides the Opposition, even politicians from the BJP and the Sena were up in arms against it. Two senior ministers — Pankaja Munde (BJP) and Deepak Sawant (Shiv Sena) — spoke against the move. While Khadse was reportedly upset over the demand to reverse the decision and insisted it was being taken only as a step to prevent malpractices, Munde and Sawant had the backing of other senior ministers, who reportedly said it would be politically unwise for the government to go against popular opinion. Even the Chief Minister had asked Khadse to “reconsider the decision in light of the sentiments of elected representatives.” Though Khadse ceded ground, he also sounded a caution. “Previous experiences regarding fodder camps have not been good. We have seen scams worth several hundred crores. The administration was only taking steps to ensure no repeat.” Despite failing to secure the backing of fellow cabinet ministers for his previous decision, Khadse put up a brave face on Wednesday. “There is no question of prestige or politics. The decision was not etched in stone and has been retracted,” he said.

About 2.08 lakh animals are sheltered in 237 legally permitted fodder camps in the state. The Beed and Osmanabad districts account for most of these. The minister also fired a barb, saying the decision had been taken after reports revealed that about 1,200 animals had been brought back home, indicating sufficient fodder was available.

“The elected representatives, however, pointed out that water scarcity still prevails and insisted the camps be continued,” Khadse said. Amid all the heated argument in the cabinet, it was decided that all ministers and some Ministers of State would tour Marathwada before the budget session on March 9 to review drought mitigation measures.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Relief for MP’s Basmati farmers as Court nixes Apeda’s opposition



Court asks Madhya Pradesh to proceed with applying for GI Registration of Basmati

Basmati farmers in Madhya Pradesh, which has been excluded from Geographical Indications registration, have got a relief with the Madras High Court ordering Apeda not to take action against them.

This followed a writ petition filed by the MP government against an order of the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) which allowed GI Registration of Basmati cultivated in the Indo-Gangetic Plains while leaving out the State.

GI tag

The IPAB had said, in the order passed on February 5, that MP could apply separately for GI Registration.

When contacted by *BusinessLine*, J Sai Deepak, the Counsel for Madhya Pradesh said the High Court's order gives a huge relief to the farmers in MP.

The GI Registration in its present form leaves in the lurch over 80,000 farmers in the State producing about 10 lakh tonnes of the aromatic rice each season as they cannot claim the official stamp of uniqueness for their Basmati.

Apeda's stand

The High Court has said the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda), a statutory body under the Commerce Ministry, should not take any infringement action against MP farmers till State government's petition is disposed off, he said.

Earlier this week, GI Registration for Basmati cultivated in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Western UP and two Districts of J&K – Jammu and Kathua was granted to Apeda which is the statutory body to protect the intellectual property in the domestic markets and abroad. The IPAB's order followed a protracted litigation by MP and Basmati exporters demanding that the areas in which the rice is cultivated in the State be included in GI Registration.

The High Court has also said that it will take up the issue of GI Registration of entire States rather than specific areas where the aromatic rice is cultivated.

MP, for instance, has asked for inclusion of just 13 districts where Basmati is cultivated.

The matter is posted for April 5. The Court has also asked MP to proceed with applying for GI Registration of Basmati, Deepak said.

Sugar production up at 173 lakh tonnes so far: ISMA



Exports stand at a mere 9.5 lakh tonnes due to fall in global prices and slow pace of shipments

Sugar production by 472 mills was higher at 173.37 lakh tonnes in the ongoing 2015-16 marketing year that runs from October-September (till February 15), compared with 167.24 lakh tonnes (lt) produced by 516 sugar mills in the same period last year, the Indian Sugar Mills Association has said.

The sugar producers' body also said that the mills had started repaying loans taken last year and said they were facing "difficulties" in paying cane arrears to farmers.

However, it said ex-mill sugar prices has started improving from the beginning of the current season but had seen a fall in the past 15 days, by a couple of rupees per kg.

With a fall in global prices, the pace of contracts for further exports has slowed down.

"Around 9.5 lt of sugar has been despatched by mills across the country for exports against the quota fixed by the government. With a fall in the global prices, the pace of contracts for further exports is slowed down," it added.

Overall sugar production this season is up by 6.13 lt compared with the corresponding period last year, ISMA said, adding that of the 511 mills that started crushing in 2015-16 sugar season, 39 had closed their operations.

Mills in Uttar Pradesh have so far produced 45.55 lt (42.25 lt). However, output was lower in drought-hit Maharashtra with 177 sugar mills producing 62.70 lt – 3.5 per cent lower than last year's 65 lt.

In Karnataka, 64 sugar mills produced 32.21 lt (28.55 lt).

Rubber continues to rule firm



Spot rubber continued to rule firm on Wednesday. RSS 4 improved to ₹93 (₹92) a kg, according to traders and the Rubber Board. The grade was quoted at ₹90 (₹89) by dealers.

The trend was mixed. March contracts firmed up to ₹97 (₹95.92) April to ₹99.90 (₹98.77) and May to ₹101.40 (₹100.23) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) inched up to ₹87.72 (₹87.54) at Bangkok.

February futures closed at ¥142.3 (₹85.30) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (₹/kg): RSS-4: 93 (92); RSS-5: 90 (89); Ungraded: 85 (85); ISNR 20: 87 (85) and Latex (60% drc): 77 (78).

Business Standard

Agriculture may get 30% hike in FY17 Budget

To boost the rural sector, the Union department of agriculture is expected to get about 30 per cent higher budgetary allocation at over Rs 20,000 crore for the next financial year for implementation of key schemes, including the newly-launched crop insurance programme, news agencies reported on

Wednesday.

Business Standard had reported on January 3 that agriculture and allied sectors would get a massive allocation push in Budget 2016-17.

Meanwhile, PTI reported quoting unnamed official sources that the department of agriculture has sought over Rs 27,000 crore budget for the 2016-17 fiscal keeping in view the implementation of major schemes, especially Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMSKY), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and Krishi Unnati Yojana (KUY). But, it is expected to get around Rs 20,000 crore. The Department of Agriculture (DAC) has received an allocation of Rs 15,500 crore for the current fiscal against the budget estimate of Rs 16,646 crore.

"The agriculture ministry is pursuing with the finance ministry to allocate more funds in order to achieve the desired growth. It is indicated that the plan budgetary allocation for DAC may cross Rs 20,000 crore in 2016-17 fiscal," PTI added. Department of Agriculture Research and Animal Husbandry are the other two wings of the agriculture ministry. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will present the 2016-17 Budget on February 29. More funds are expected to be allocated for the new crop insurance scheme, PMSKY and RKVY.

However, the budget allocation for the KUY is expected to be lower at around Rs 7,000 crore in 2016-17, as against Rs 7,500 crore this year, they said. The KUY, which was launched in 2015-16 by consolidating the various on-going schemes for better implementation, has sub-schemes like soil health management, horticulture, agriculture mechanisation, seeds and extension. The agriculture ministry has informed the finance ministry that any reduction in KUY would impact implementation of sub-schemes, including soil health card programme, the sources said.

Although agriculture contributes only 13-14 per cent to the country's GDP, about 50 per cent of the population is dependent on the farm sector.

Dhirajlal Desai: Agriculture policy guru

That despair would have been considerably greater but for the contribution of pioneering thinkers such as Desai, who worked tirelessly with scientists and policy makers to usher in and sustain the Gre

Dhirajlal Desai (91), who passed away in Ahmedabad on February 16, was the doyen of Indian agricultural economists. Our agriculture and those drawing their livelihood from it might still be in some distress today. That despair would have been considerably greater but for the contribution of pioneering thinkers such as Desai, who worked tirelessly with scientists and policy makers to usher in and sustain the Green Revolution.

Policy making in the 1960s, or what passed for it, was the exclusive domain of New Delhi, mainly of Krishi and Yojana Bhavans. What they had by way of field intelligence were the mostly routine cost of cultivation studies by agro-economic research centres.

Desai, then a professor at the fledgling Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A), offered to the ministry to take up under the aegis of the Centre for Management of Agriculture (CMA) five policy-oriented field-based research studies annually. That might not sound like a great effort in a country with as much agro-economic diversity as India, but it must be seen against the backdrop of no such work at all.

The focus of these studies was implementation (now execution or governance). It addressed the basic nuts and bolts concerns of the policy makers. That justified their award to a management institution. The coverage was diverse and novel: The new intensive programmes of the government, inputs such as seeds, fertiliser, water and mechanisation, impact on labour, employment and poverty, nutrition, community development, and processing of outputs in modern facilities. Desai broke many an inflated ego to ensure that workable and readable reports were delivered in time.

The breadth and the quickness of research made it attractive many funding agencies, including World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the United States Agency of International Development and the Ford Foundation. CMA became IIM-A's face in the research and public policy areas. It helped create the impression that IIM-A was interested not just in profit-making private enterprises but

was greatly concerned about public policies to combat poverty. CMA's association with the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration for offering a management capsule in the training of the Indian Administrative Service probationers gave wide receptivity for IIM-A in the administrative structure.

This fast and phenomenal success of CMA preceded its later claim to fame as a premier management institute based on the stellar performance of its graduates. It must be credited to the boundless enterprise and energy of its first chairman, D K Desai. IIM-A stands tall today because it is perched on the shoulders of such pioneers.

High output, demand from wine industry to ring in good times for grape farmers

Farmers expect 15-20% higher output, as wine industry is set to crush over 27,000 MT of grapes



Grape farming is in for some good times, with the farmers expecting the total production to be around 28-30 lakh tonnes. Last year, the production was about 20 lakh tonnes.

After exports of 1.12 lakh tonne in the last season, farmers are expecting record exports of two lakh tonne this year. According to Jagannath Khapre, president, Maharashtra Grape Growers Association, the total production of grapes is expected to touch 30 lakh tonnes which is 15 to 20% higher as compared to last year.

However, what has got the farmer really excited this year is the demand from the Indian wine industry. Industry players believe that over the last three years the demand for grapes from the wine industry has been growing by 20%.

In 2016, the wine industry will crush over 27,000 MT of grapes. The industry has set itself a target of 100,000 MT in the next seven years. This when at present only 2% of India's over one lakh hectares of vineyards are planted with wine grapes, while in the rest of the world the figure is over 90%. The wine grape grower gets Rs 2 to 2.5 lakh per acre depending upon the quality of grapes.

Wine grapes in India are harvested during February-April, versus September-October elsewhere in the northern hemisphere (Europe and the US).

“This year, we will crush close to 13,000 tonnes of grapes, up 20% from 2015. Total farmer payments will cross Rs 50 crore. The grapes will come from across Maharashtra at our three wineries here, and from across Karnataka for our Karnataka winery. This year the effects of climate change and global warming are highly apparent with our harvest starting two weeks earlier than ever before” said Rajeev Samant, CEO [Sula Wines](#).

India's largest wine maker, Sula Vineyards, works with over 400 grape growers in Maharashtra and Karnataka with 10-year assured buyback contracts. This year the company is expecting a total payout of Rs 50 crore for farmers. Company officials claim that in 2015, Indians consumed 15.5 lakh cases as compared to 13.5 cases in 2014.

Wine production in India, though still at a nascent stage, is likely to reach 18 million liter this year and 21 million liter by 2018 from 17 million liter estimated last year, according to a study. The year-on-year growth rate has clocked five%, a just concluded study by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) said.

Nashik district, in north Maharashtra, is the largest producer of grapes in India, with nearly 1.75 lakh acres under vineyards, while the total acreage in Maharashtra is 2.50 lakh acre. The company expects its premium wine prices to rise by at least 5% this year.

Ajay Shetty, founder and managing director of Bengaluru-based Myra Vineyards that sources around 6,000 tonne of grapes from contract farmers in Nashik and Bijapur (Karnakataka) is planning to double its production in the next three years.

“Shortage of quality grapes is always a concern for us but we do manage to get quality grapes. The demand for wine grapes is growing. We produce around 1.5 lakh to 2 lakh litres of wine every year and planning to double the production in the next three years,” he added.

The last three years were of excellent quality and quantity for grapes but 2016 looks to be much more challenging with lower yields due to unseasonal rains post monsoon and drought-like situation

Ravi Gurnani, director, York Winery is sourcing over 250 MT of wine grapes every year. It has 10 to 12 farmers associated with it on a long term contract basis. The winery produces 2 to 2.5 lakh litres of wine annually.

"The demand for wine is growing every year and more and more farmers are now associating with wine industry due to increasing prices. In the last three to five years prices of wine grapes have increased by 30-35%. Market conditions are not volatile in the last few years. As compared to table grapes, there wine grape market is much more stable."

Grape is grown over four lakh acres in Maharashtra at Nashik, Sangli, Pune and Solapur districts. Last season the crop was affected because of unseasonal rain and hailstorm.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agricultural scientists adopt 20 villages in Odisha to empower women farmers

BHUBANESWAR: Scientists of ICAR-Central Institute for Women in Agriculture (CIWA) have adopted 20 villages of the state to provide advisories and consultations to farmers for increasing farm productivity and production.

Under the programme of 'Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav' launched by the central government, the CIWA has chosen 20 villages under four blocks of two districts. These blocks are- Satyabadi and Nimapara of Puri district and Barang and Athagarh of Cuttack district, said CIWA director Dr Jatinder Kishtwaria on the occasion of CIWA's foundation day ceremony held here on Wednesday.

Kishtwaria said a group of four scientists has adopted five villages in the blocks. Total 16 scientists led by principal scientists would take the capacity building works forward, she added.

She said several uneducated women and drop out girl students live in the villages. They don't get jobs or ideas to earn a dignified living. "Through our programme, the women and girls can get knowledge for fish cultivation, backyard poultry farming, agri-based micro industries with the help of self-help groups in the village. We will also help the women in getting government help for their work," she added.

The director said the CIWA would open resource centres at the villages to give livelihood training to the rural women. "We will also teach the women to use some farm tools developed by our institute and other agricultural institutions for making their daily work easy," she added.

The institute has developed a farm tool- hand operated maize dehusker cum sheller- to dehusk and shell maize cob simultaneously. It could dehusk 60kg grain per hour. Similarly, the institution has developed and refined 30 farm tools for women farmers so far, said the CIWA director.

Dr Santosh Kumar Srivastava, a principal scientist with the CIWA, said they would work closely with the women farmers of the village and advise them to opt for best practices in farming. They would also teach the rural folk to plant the trees which would add nutrition in their food. "We will make our adopt villages as success models for other localities. Other farmers will get inspiration from it," he added.

Goa farmers can now apply for Krishi Card online



Besides gaining access to vital information through the website, farmers can now apply for Krishi Card online ... Read More

PANAJI: The agriculture community in Goa saw the dawn of a techno-savvy era with the recent launch of the revamped website www.agri.goa.gov.in under the Digital India initiative.

Besides gaining access to vital information, farmers can now apply for Krishi Card online and also claim subsidies by submitting their applications by mere click of a button.

For grievances and/or difficulties in accessing the same through online mode, farmers can also call the toll free 'Kisan call number' 1800-180-1551 for any technical or scheme related information.

Additional benefits of the website include faster processing of the applications, status updates, transparent process, creation of centralized repository of farmers, identifications of beneficiaries across all the schemes, easy access to data and more.

Computerization of information will also enable the department to identify duplicate beneficiaries.

The website was launched at Ravindra Bhavan, Margao on February 13 in the presence of minister of state for agriculture Mohanbhai Kalyanjibhai Kundariya, chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar, minister for agriculture

Ramesh Tawadker, director of agriculture UBP Kakode and director, ICAR-CCARI, Goa Dr N P Singh.

DECCAN Chronicle

Kozhikode: Jackfruit goes global via WhatsApp

Group discussions lead to discovery of recipes, products.



A picture shared by a Malaysian farmer in the WhatsApp group. (Photo: DC)

Kozhikode: Our Jackfruit (JF) is going global through a 121-member Whatsapp group of a vice-chancellor, horticulture scientists, hoteliers, entrepreneurs, farmers and a host of JF enthusiasts from countries like the US, the UK, Malaysia, Indonesia and Mexico besides India. The information shared in the Aranmula Jackfruit group triggered many successful experiments with JF.

Stephanie Shelton, an hotelier in Kansas City of the US, replaced meat in Tamale (steamed Mexican dish) with JF, and it became a huge hit. The gluten free JF Tamale is shipped frozen and now available all over the continental US.

Thea Ford, a UK woman running a coffee bar, has multiplied her customers by introducing ‘Jaffee’, the coffee brewed from JF.

“The group is providing useful information. For instance, farmers in Maharashtra never knew that JF is available in September, November months anywhere. That belief has fallen through,” says Sree Padre, the well-known agricultural journalist.

Upendra Pendse, an entrepreneur from Dapoli, Maharashtra, introduced ‘frozen ready to cook JF’ and he sold a tonne last year.

“Recipes for various products off JF are first discussed in the group,” Vishnu K. Santhosh of Aranmula, who started the group a few months back, said.

“Several new products like vacuum fry chips, products from JF seed, methods for commercialisation etc. were discussed threadbare.”

Mr Santhosh was the coordinator of JF festival conducted in Aranmula in last May and he created the group to sustain the tempo and innovative ideas to promote the fruit.

Dr G. Karunakaran, head, Central Horticultural Experiment Station (CHES), ICAR, in Tumkur, told DC that after the group interaction, he had initiated conservation of JF diversity products at CHES. Dr D.L. Maheshwar, VC of University of Horticultural Sciences, Bagalkot, Karnataka, is an active member.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Urea imports up by 11% to 81.25 lakh tonnes



Urea imports increased by 11 per cent to 81.25 lakh tonnes (LT) in the first ten months of this fiscal.

NEW DELHI: Urea imports increased by 11 per cent to 81.25 lakh tonnes (LT) in the first ten months of this fiscal.

India had imported 73.02 LT of urea in the corresponding period a year ago, according to official data.

The rise in imports was due to lower prices of the fertiliser in the international market, a source said.

The government imports urea through three agencies -- STC, MMTC and IPL.

Besides, India also has an offtake agreement with Oman-based fertiliser firm OMIFCO, a joint venture between domestic co-operatives such as IFFCO, Kribhco and Oman Oil company SAOC.

Urea is a controlled fertiliser and is sold at a fixed selling price of Rs 5,360 per tonne. The difference between cost of production and selling price is paid as a subsidy to the manufacturers.

The country's annual urea demand is 30 million tonnes (MT), while the production is stagnant at 22 MT.

The government has ensured that the urea which is being sold in the country whether indigenously produced or imported will be completely neem coated, a move aimed at checking the diversion of subsidised urea for industrial purposes.

The decision for mandatory neem coating of urea was taken on May 25 this year. In a record time of 166 days, 100 per cent urea is now being sold neem coated, Fertiliser Minister Ananth Kumar had said.

The production is expected to rise to 24 MT in the current financial year after the new energy norms framed by the government for fertiliser plants, he said.

Cabinet gives ex-post facto approval to 13 MoUs on agriculture



These MoUs are signed for capacity building, knowledge exchange through visits of scientists and technicians and exchange of genetic resources.

NEW DELHI: The cabinet today gave ex-post facto approval for memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between India and 13 countries including Israel and Syria for cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors.

"The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, today gave its ex-post facto approval for MoU signed between India and various countries for cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors," an official release said.

The approval has been given to MoUs signed with 13 countries -- Netherlands, Nepal, Cyprus, Israel, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Tanzania, Surinam, Zambia, Syria, Bhutan, Chile and Mauritius, it said.

These MoUs are signed for capacity building, knowledge exchange through visits of scientists and technicians, exchange of genetic resources, development of appropriate technologies and farm practices for enhancing agriculture productivity at farmers' field.

Expenditure incurred on implementation of such MoU is managed within the financial allocation made for the ministry, the statement added.

Sugar production by mid-Feb up 3.6 percent: ISMA



India's sugar production up by 3.6% as on February 15 as compared to same period of previous year.

PUNE: India's sugar production up by 3.6% as on February 15 as compared to same period of previous year, according to industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA).

As on February 15, 2016, 472 sugar mills in the country were in operation and they produced 173.37 lakh tonnes of sugar, as compared to 167.24 lakh tonnes produced by 516 sugar mills as on February 15 2015.

Sugar production in this season till February 15, 2016 is 6.13 lakh tonnes higher than the sugar produced upto the corresponding date last year. Of the 511 sugar mills that started crushing in 2015-16 SS, 39 mills have closed their operations.

U.P. has produced 45.55 lakh tonnes of sugar till February 15, 2016 as against 42.25 lakh tonnes of sugar production last year till February 15, 2015.

As on date, out of 116 sugar mills which started operation during the current sugar season, 1 sugar mill has shut its crushing operations. In Maharashtra, 177 sugar mills have produced 62.70 lakh tonnes of sugar till February 15, 2016, which is 3.5% lower to 65 lakh tonnes produced in last season on the corresponding date.

About 33 sugar mills have closed their operation for 2015-16 SS, as compared to 1 mill which had closed in 2014-15 SS by February 15 2015. 64 sugar mills of Karnataka have produced 32.21 lakh tonnes of sugar as on February 15, 2016, compared with 28.55 lakh tonnes of sugar production in last year till February 15, 2015. 4 sugar mills have shut their crushing operations by February 15, 2016 for 2015-16 SS, as compared to 2 mills which had shut their crushing last year on the corresponding date. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana sugar mills have produced 5.50 lakh tonnes of sugar upto February 15, 2016. This is lower to last year, during the same period, when there was a production of 6.25 lakh tonnes upto the corresponding date.

In Tamil Nadu, 37 sugar mills have produced 4 lakh tonnes of sugar as on February 15, 2016, as compared to 3.25 lakh tonnes of sugar produced by 42 sugar mills in 2014-15 SS till February 15, 2015.

As regards Gujarat, 8.08 lakh tonnes of sugar have been produced by 20 sugar mills as on February 15, 2016. 1 sugar mill has shut its crushing operation for the current sugar season. Last year, 19 sugar mills had produced 7.25 lac tons of sugar on the corresponding date.

Sugar production in Haryana and Uttarakhand till February 15, 2016 remained almost at the same level as that of last year. Repayment of loans taken by mills last year, like SEFASU and soft loans for payment of cane price of 2014-15 SS, has started in February - March 2016.

Considering the high debt burden of mills and repayment of other loans including term loans and working capital loans taken from banks, almost all mills are facing difficulties in servicing the bank debts as well as in payment of cane price to farmers at the same time.