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THE HINDU

ICRISAT scientist bags award for water management

Suhas P Wani, Director of ICRISAT Development Centre at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has been honoured as one of the ‘50 Most Impactful Leaders in Water & Water Management.’ He was given the award at the World Water Leadership Congress held in Mumbai on 17 February.

With 35 years of service in ICRISAT, Dr. Wani was one of the early pioneers in watershed management in India.

“Earlier farm watersheds were implemented in different states like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and revisited in 1995-96 to assess the impact. Based on the learnings, except in the use of fertilizer and improved seeds, farmers did not continue other interventions such as soil and water conservation. In 1999, based on these experiences, a new model was developed for enabling community participation and evaluated at Adarsha Watershed in Kothapally,” noted Dr. Wani. He has been a catalyst, contributing to the creation of the Bhoochetana initiative in Karnataka state, a strong partnership that reached 4.75 million farmers in five years, with a 20-66 percent crop increase and total net benefits of \$350 million.

PM

DIGITAL AGRI MARKET PLATFORM TO BE LAUNCHED

A digital platform for enabling farmers to sell their produce at a better rate anywhere in the country will be launched on April 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced here Thursday as he resolved to ensure doubling of the farmers’ income by 2022. Mr. Modi, who unveiled guidelines for the recently launched Prime Minister’s Crop Insurance Scheme at a rally here, said this was one of the various initiatives of his government aimed at ensuring the welfare of the farmers who have been in distress due to vagaries of weather.

Besides, he spoke about Soil Health Card scheme, Organic farming, ensuring adequate availability of urea and ethanol-blending programme to

help the sugarcane farmers and also pitched for ‘Start-Up’ initiatives in the agriculture sector.PTI



They show the way in organic farming



Students and teachers of Goodwill English School, Pookottumpadam, with officials of the Agriculture Department at their vegetable farm near the campus.

The students of Goodwill English School, Pookottumpadam, are setting a model for other CBSE schools to follow by taking up organic farming. Supported by the State Department of Agriculture, the school is promoting high-tech organic vegetable farming.

Amarambalam Agriculture Officer Liju Abraham on Monday inaugurated the farming activities taken up by the students under the banner of Goodwill Farm Club.

“We call this high-tech because we are using not only modern technology, but high-yielding seeds as well,” said farm club president Shanil Salam. Vegetables such as lady’s finger, brinjal, snake gourd, bitter gourd, long beans and tomato are being grown on an acre of land near the school. The children take care of the crops every day. They have intercropped Mallika to ward off pests.

Ajil Pulath, who won the best student farmer award this year, was present at the inaugural. P.V. Satish, agriculture assistant, directed the students on ways to be adopted to achieve their goal in organic farming.

Sahodaya School Complex district president M. Abdul Nazar delivered the keynote address. He demanded that the CBSE sanction grace marks to the students for farming.

Goddess in the fields



Women constitute almost 50 per cent of the human species. Yet, they are peculiarly vulnerable to the impacts of global warming. Why is it so?

As per the latest Census (2011), roughly 48% of India’s population is female – about 580 million of them. Given that women live longer, this shows a tilt, suggesting some systematic way of eliminating females from the population.

The well-known practises of female foeticide and female infanticide remove millions of baby girls every year. So vulnerability begins at birth.

The vulnerability continues as the baby girls grows. She is often less educated: with attendance in school falling steeply as she enters puberty, especially in rural India. Thus, on average, she has already been placed on the “slower” track.

This vulnerability is compounded when she (and if she) enters the workforce. An overwhelming portion of urban women don't work as they enter their marriage and child bearing years. A larger number of rural women continue to work, often as marginal workers. There are strong cultural and social factors at play. The latest census data is damning. The urban, educated woman works (outside the home) the least, while the Illiterate rural woman works the most. Given the costs of educating and marrying girls, cold economics perhaps explains the falling sex ratio amongst children in the past 10 years.

Moreover, for women who work, data from the World Bank suggest wages for women performing casual labour are 20% lower than those received for men and 20% lower for the same task.

This set of vulnerabilities is worsened by the changing climate. Consider this: almost three quarters of the working women in India work in agriculture. Falling agricultural yields and the mechanization of agriculture are twin threats to this large group. Also, this group has few alternates for work: either in the form of alternate rural employment (textiles is a notable exception) or the ability to migrate. What this large group will do in the coming decades is an important question of our times.

The second set of problems caused by climate change for women has to do with some of the roles that women perform: child and household care. As we saw in an earlier article, both the incidence of mosquito-borne diseases and the incidence of health problems related to floods (diarrhoea etc.) are set to rise. With children being a vulnerable group, child carers, who are overwhelmingly women, are set for bad time. They will have less time to work or to relax thus reducing their well-being. The collection of water is another burden on women, especially little girls, that is going to rise. As the incidence of drought increases, more and more girls will have to walk

further each day to collect water – stealing time that could have been put to school or leisure.

One contributor to global warming on a local scale is the black smoke that emanates from cook stoves fuelled by solid fuels like wood or dung. The black smoke is said to cause warming in a local scale as well as cause tremendous health problems as the tiny particles in the smoke enter our lungs and wreak havoc. Across India, millions of households use such stoves contributing to over a million deaths a year. The bulk of this burden is borne by women who cook.

The last set of problems has to do with violence against women: dowry deaths rise when drought occurs. A study by Sekhri and Storeygard (2013) looks at data from 500+ districts in India over the past decade. Whenever rains fall by a standard deviation, or 240mm in a season, dowry deaths in that district rise by eight per cent. Studies show that domestic violence reports in the US increase by seven per cent for every degree C rise in temperature. With violence against women already making regular headlines, this is a risk we cannot afford to let rise. Another vulnerability has to do with nutrition: several studies show that as drought increases and the available nutrition available for a family falls, women often forego their share in such scenarios so that their families benefit, worsening their health in the process.

So what can we do?

Let us understand, for most, power stems from money in our society today. To improve the position of women, this translates to ensuring they work and removing the social, psychological and economic barriers that prevent them from doing so. Given that the most harshly affected category of women are rural women, we need to explore avenues of employment for them. This could be through encouraging textile employment (already the largest non-agricultural employer of women in India) or it could be through preferential allocation in the NREGA. Next, simple vitamin supplements or protein powders will help improve the nutritional status of women, this could be provided through ration shops throughout the country. Another option is providing access to improved cook stoves. There are several companies and organizations already working on this front.

The only non-option is inaction.



(Climaction is a fortnightly column that is published in MetroPlus Weekend on alternate Fridays. The views expressed in the articles are those of the author.)

The next article in this series will appear on March 4, 2016.

Feedback and questions may be e-mailed to climaction2015@gmail.com

Central team to visit districts hit by crop loss

It will arrive in Bidar on February 23

A 10-member Central team headed by Dineshkumar, Joint Secretary of the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna, will tour the districts affected by crop loss in the rabi season to assess the damage, from February 23. They will also study the drinking water shortage in these areas.

Deputy Commissioner Vipul Bansal told *The Hindu* on Thursday that the team would divide themselves into three groups. One of them would be headed by Mr. Dineshkumar.

Compensation

The State government has estimated the crop loss during the rabi season at Rs. 7,208.86 crore and sought an assistance of Rs. 1,417 crore. The district requires Rs. 217 crore to pay compensation to farmers.

Mr. Bansal said that the team would arrive in Bidar on February 23 and tour the affected areas on February 24. In Kalaburagi district, the team would

visit the worst affected villages in Aland taluk such as Madanhipparga, Dhannur, Allapur, and Lad Chincholi.

He said that the team would have a first-hand experience on the loss of horticulture crops due to the lack of rainfall and the condition of defunct borewells and open wells due to the fall in groundwater levels in Aland taluk.

The team would also inspect the goshala established at Madanhipparga where more than 2,000 head of cattle had been housed, and some of the horticulture fields.

The team would also visit the spots where the affected agriculture labourers were being provided employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

The team would visit some of the villages facing drinking water shortage in Aland taluk. Mr. Bansal said that a presentation would be made to the team after their visit to the affected areas. The Deputy Commissioner of Yadgir district would also be requested to make a presentation.

Drinking water

To a question, he said that 80 villages in the district, most of them in Aland taluk, were now being provided drinking water through tankers and it would have to be continued till the onset of monsoon in June. “The situation in Aland taluk is very bad,” he said.

Instructions had been issued to disconnect the power connection to irrigation pumpsets along the banks of the Bhima and Kagina, which were drying up, to meet the demands for drinking water in the future.

To overcome the shortage of fodder, 17 fodder banks had been established and 40 tonnes of fodder were being imported from Ballari a day to meet the demand. Fodder was being sold at Rs. 3 per kg against the market price of Rs. 6 per kg.

The team will visit Madanhipparga, Dhannur, Allapur, and Lad Chincholi in Kalaburagi

Training programme for farmers

As many as 300 farmers from the district took part in a programme held at Bheemarayanagudi in Shahaur taluk on Thursday.

They interacted with professors of University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, and were informed about the methods to prevent pink bollworm attacks. M. Bheemanna, professor, UAS, explained about protecting cotton crops from pests. “The pink bollworm destroyed thousands of hectares of cotton crop in Raichur and few areas of Yadgir recently,” Chetana Patil, Joint Director of Agriculture, said.

Draw up plans for more agricultural funds, officials told

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has asked officials to draw up plans to get more Central funds for agriculture though the sector had less allocation in the Union budget.

At an official meeting to discuss proposals for agriculture in the State budget, Mr. Rao told officials to come up with an action plan to address the demands of farmers and ensure that the money allocated to agriculture was spent optimally. He advised revival of past glory of agriculture in the background of neglect of the sector by previous governments on the ground that it was not income generating. However, agriculture was the source of livelihood of a large population and, hence, it should get adequate funds in the budget.

Soil and water conservation scheme

: Minister for Agriculture K.P. Mohanan will inaugurate the soil and water conservation scheme being envisaged by the Department of Soil Survey and Soil Conservation in association with the NABARD at the Naduppoyil U.P.School, near the Vadayam watershed project, at 3 p.m. on Saturday. — Special Correspondent

Steps to promote organic farming

A meeting to finalise the action plan of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) in the State held at the Directorate of Extension, Kerala Agricultural University, Mannuthy, on Thursday decided to strengthen farm interventions for promoting effective organic farming protocols.

It also called for value-addition of fruits and vegetables to curtail post harvest loss.

The meeting chaired by Dr. P.B. Pushpalatha, KAU Director of Extension, proposed to utilise front line demonstrations and farm trials in collaboration with farmers for effective technology transfer.

Programme coordinators and subject matter specialists of KVKs from various districts participated. Proposed action plans will be subjected to detailed scrutiny and will be finalised in the meeting to be held at CPCRI, Kasaragod, on February 22 and 23.

Bringing together farmers and customers

The Kothamangalam Agriculture Producer Company is the first in the district under a National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) programme to launch full-fledged operations as an agricultural producer company with a view to linking farmers with their customers directly.

The Kothamangalam venture is one of the 100 farmer producer companies targeted to be incorporated in Kerala by the end of the current financial year, said a Nabard official on Thursday, pointing out that the bank's programme of action was set in Union Budget 2013-14, which wanted 2,000 farmer producer companies to be set up to help small and marginal farmers.

Kothamangalam producer company secretary Sunil Cyriac said there were a total of 30 farmers' clubs under the new company, of which 15 were active. Each farmer club comprises around 100 members.

Produce from the farmers' group is aggregated and sold to consumers in places such as Ernakulam and Kalamassery now. "Marketing operations will be widened further as the new company gains experience and expands its production base," said Mr. Cyriac.

Vegetables to houses

One of the ventures that has been launched is packaging vegetables and taking them to housing complexes in Kochi. The experiment has been a success. "Besides, vegetables aggregated from Kothamangalam have been a hit with customers at Cochin Shipyard's consumer store in the city," he said.

Around four to five tonnes of vegetables are sold in the city areas per week by the farmer producer company at present. Mr. Cyriac said the produce was being sold as 'safe to eat', and not as organic. The company was also engaged in marketing rice from a farmer group in Palakkad, he added.

The producer company helps farmers by providing agricultural inputs.

New crop insurance scheme soon

Under it, a farmer will have to pay Rs. 450 per acre to get maximum sum assured of Rs. 15,000



AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Union Minister for Urban Development M. Venkaiah Naidu presented with a wooden plough by Minister for Agriculture P. Pulla Rao at a public meeting in Chilakaluripet on Thursday.– Photo: T. Vijaya Kumar

In a move which could provide some succour to farmers reeling under successive droughts, the Central Government will bring in new crop insurance scheme from April this year. Farmers who enrol in the new insurance scheme would have to pay Rs.450 per acre and the maximum sum assured is Rs.15,000 per acre.

Announcing the scheme at a public meeting held here on Thursday, Mr. Naidu said that the scheme is designed to bail out farmers.

The year 2015 has been particularly worse for farmers in delta and Palnadu regions, as deficit rainfall has resulted in low yields.

Chilli and cotton farmers have borne the brunt of erratic rainfall and have plunged into losses.

Flagship programme

Reaffirming that the Centre would continue to extend support to revenue deficit AP, Mr. Naidu said that Andhra Pradesh has been allotted 1.93 lakh houses under Housing for All scheme, a flagship programme of Central Government to provide housing for all by the year 2024.

Of the sanctioned houses, Guntur district has got 24,576 houses, which includes 11,808 units sanctioned for Guntur alone.

He also said that the State would get a new Railway Zone and added that the airport at Gannavaram would be upgraded into an international air port on the lines of Visakhapatnam and Tirupathi.

Police station inaugurated

Earlier, the Union Minister, along Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu unveiled a pylon for the development works to be taken at an estimated cost of Rs. 450 crore in Chilakaluripet Municipality.

He also inaugurated the newly built Chilakaluripet Urban Police Station.

Speaker Kodela Siva Prasada Rao, Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao, MP, Narsaraopet, Rayapati Sambasiva Rao, Inspector General of Police N. Sanjay, SP, Guntur Rural, K. Narayan Naik were also present.

Now, get to the jackfruit without getting your hands sticky

UAS-B's machine can peel a tender jackfruit in less than a minute.

While going through the messy job of manually peeling a jackfruit, have you ever wished for a machine that would do it? Such an option is now available.

An innovative machine has been developed by University of Agricultural Sciences-Bangalore through a private entrepreneur for peeling tender jackfruits.

The instrument resembles a simple lathe machine, which is used in automobile industries. It is possible to peel a tender jackfruit in less than a

minute as against nearly 30 minutes taken in the manual process, according to Vasudevamurthy, who developed the machine.



Shyamamma S. from UAS-B's Department of Biotechnology, who has been working on processing and value addition of jackfruits, said the peeling machine had been developed mainly to support the efforts to promote nutritious tender jackfruit as a vegetable.

Explaining the process, she said a four to six-week-old tender jackfruit whose seeds have not matured would be peeled. Following this, the fruit is cut into small cubes and processed to prevent browning before being packaged. The processed fruit will have a shelf life of five days if stored in room temperature, she said.

The idea is to promote the sales of such processed tender fruits through self-help groups by using mechanised peeling as each machine may cost Rs. 65,000.

The focus is particularly on tender jackfruit as this can be eaten even by diabetics, she said. The tender jackfruit is rich in potassium, phosphorous, calcium, iron, zinc, fibre, and vitamin-C. Describing tender jackfruit, which is a delicacy in the coastal region, as “vegetable meat”, she said this could be used to prepare sambar, curry, pallya and vegetable kebab , among others.

Using the flour in bakery items

Did you know that the flour made from jackfruit seeds and its hydrated bulbs can be used in bakery preparations? University of Agricultural Sciences-

Bangalore has worked on protocols for this. According to Shyamamma S. of UAS-B, the blending of such nutritious flour, which has 6 per cent to 7 per cent protein content, can reduce the requirement of maida (refined and bleached wheat flour) by 30 per cent to 40 per cent.

Similarly, the university has developed a technology to use jackfruit pulps in ice-creams. The Karnataka Milk Federation has shown interest in harnessing this technology, she said. The university is imparting training on jackfruit value-added products such as tender jackfruit preparation, chips, papad, jam, squash, and seed and bulb flour, she said.

‘Godavari water for irrigation by next kharif’

Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao said that irrigation water would be supplied to farmers by the next kharif.

Addressing a gathering after laying foundation stone for the construction of Sri Ranganayaka Sagar left canal on Thursday, Mr. Harish Rao said that water would be supplied for more than one lakh acres through this project.

“The previous governments had failed to complete the irrigation projects and farmers with even 10 acres of land became labourers under NREGS. We will certainly change the situation for better. We are committed for the welfare of the farmers and hence, farm loans to the tune of Rs. 18,000 crore was waived off,” said Mr. Harish Rao, adding that godowns are being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs. 1,000 crore. Informing that some of the tanks were already restored at a cost of Rs. 3,000 crore, the Minister said that another 10,000 tanks would be restored at a cost of Rs. 4,000 crore this year.

Promoting oyster mushroom cultivation

B. Swaminathan, General Manager, NABARD, at a session on value-added mushroom products organised jointly by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and NABARD at Kalpetta on Wednesday.

The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) here in association with NABARD has launched a project titled ‘Value chain development in mushrooms’ to promote entrepreneurship development in mushroom cultivation in the district.

The project aims at promoting oyster mushroom cultivation which has immense production potential over other varieties of mushrooms, N. Anilkumar, Director, MSSRF, said.



A recent study by the MSSRF revealed that the agro-climatic conditions in the district provide ideal ground for the growth of oyster mushrooms in the district, he said.

As many as 100 farmers from three grama panchayats and one municipality in the district would be trained in mushroom cultivation in the initial phase of the project. Mushroom production and marketing units would be set up in those local bodies to ensure a sustainable income to the farmers, he said.

Inaugurating the project on Wednesday, B. Swaminathan, General Manager, NABARD, urged farmer producer organisations to set up mushroom units in grama panchayats. Though the demand for mushroom had increased considerably in the district after the tourism boom, nearly 65 per cent of the demand was being met by the produce from neighbouring States, he pointed out.

N.S. Sajikumar, District Development Manager, NABARD, Wayanad, released a study report on the feasibility and status of mushroom cultivation in Wayanad on that occasion.

Direct Procurement Centres to be opened in 14 places

Direct Procurement Centres (DPCs) to procure paddy from farmers at the support price will be opened soon in 14 places at Tiruvannamalai district.

According to District Collector A. Gnanasekaran, the direct procurement of paddy for kharif season of 2015-16 would be done at these centres to be set up by the Tamil Nadu Civil Supply Corporation.

For a quintal of fine variety of rice Rs.1,520, including Rs. 70 as incentive would be paid.

For a quintal of general variety of paddy Rs.1,460 including Rs.50 incentive would be paid. Sales proceeds would be credited in the bank accounts of farmers through Electronic Clearing System (ECS).

Places of DPCs in every taluk (Taluk name followed by village/town name): Tiruvannamalai-Narthampoondi and Kilpennathur; Thandampattu-Radhapuram; Chengam-Pudupalayam; Kalasapakkam-Elathur; Polur-Vasur; Cheyyar-Cheyyar and Echur; Vembakkam-Brammadesam; Vandavasi-Mazhaiyur, Peranamallur and Keel Kodungalur.

For a quintal of fine variety of rice,

Rs. 1,520, including

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Two crore more saplings to be planted

Focus on second phase of Harita Haram

Following the bitter experience of the previous rainy season which had adversely impacted the growth of saplings planted in Harita Haram programme, the district administration is planning to implement the programme with more care.

While last year the target fixed was 3.57 crore saplings plantation, the officials were able to distribute only 1.18 crore saplings due to adverse weather conditions which prevented even the interested persons to come forward and plant saplings.

About 2.38 crore saplings remained at the private and government nurseries and they were protected for the past several months by watering so that they

can be used this year. It was estimated that only 60 per cent the saplings planted in the first phase survived.

The initial target fixed this year was t 5 crore saplings, but was reduced to 2.38 crore new saplings in addition to previous stock in view of the prevailing adverse conditions. The social forestry department would take care of 1.13 crore saplings followed by District Water Management Agency (DWMA) 65 lakh, District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) 10 lakh and Horticulture 3 lakh saplings.

In the first phase of Harita Haram, the demand for Indian dates was high the officials were unable to supply them in the season. At least three to four showers are required for the survival of the plant. In view of the previous experience the officials kept about 11 lakh Indian dates saplings ready for planting. They would be supplied to the farmers once the season commences in the month of May/ June depending on the rain fall.

Different industries and government departments are placing indent for saplings with the social forestry department which would coordinate with other departments. For example Siddipet, Sangareddy and Zaheerabad municipalities and Dubbak and Gajwel Nagar panchayats put together placed an indent for about 8.3 lakh saplings. Similarly, the irrigation department gave an order for 12.4 lakh, industries department 5 lakh, endowment and education departments two lakh each saplings for plantation.

The saplings being offered included Maredu, custard apple, Neem, Bhunia, Bignonia and others. "We are making all arrangements for the second phase of Harita Haram. About 2 crore saplings are getting ready in addition to about 2.23 crore saplings remained from the first phase.

However, availability of water is a serious problem," said Mr. D. Sudhakar Reddy, District Forest Officer (Social Forestry).

Grievance day

The monthly farmers grievances meeting would be held at 10 a.m. at the Collectors' Office here February 26, Collector S.Palanisamy said in a press release.

‘Efforts on to complete irrigation projects’

The State Government is trying to complete all irrigation projects on a war-footing to provide irrigation facilities to farmers in all the 13 district by this year end, Minister for Water Resources Devineni Umamaheswara Rao has said.

The Minister, accompanied by World Bank consultants S.K. Jain (environment) and B.K.D. Raja (safeguards), inspected the modernisation of the NSP third zone canals in Ottigudipadu in Agiripalli mandal of Krishna district on Thursday.

The Minister said that after bifurcation, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu was taking all steps to tide over the severe irrigation and drinking water crisis facing the State. He said that standing crop in the Krishna delta could be saved after linking the Godavari with the Krishna.

He said that efforts were being made to complete the modernisation of canals in the NSP third zone.

He told the consultants that work on the 25-km Vempadu Link Canal was in progress. The work involved digging of new canals up to a stretch of 14 km and widening of the existing canals for a stretch of 15 km. The consultants thanked farmers for providing land required for new canals.

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.

Exotic fare at fruit exhibition



: Most Malayalis are familiar with Mangosteen, at least the word, through the works of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer. But there may not be many who have actually seen the fruit.

The fruit, mostly cultivated in Indonesia, is one of the exotic ones on display and sale at the Kitchen and Fruits Expo under way at the Jubilee Hall in Kozhikode since Wednesday.

At a time when the demand for imported fruits is rising, the expo features a variety of such fruits such as Rambutan from Malaysia, Dragon Fruit from Vietnam, Kiwis from New Zealand, Grape Fruits from Egypt, Blue Berries

and Red Berries from Holland, Longon from Thailand, Shandong Pear from China Plums and Apples from USA and a whole range of native fruit items.

The concern for safety among the local people is behind the sudden increase in the demand for imported fruits. “While many fruits we get here are pesticide ridden and chemically ripened, we export only the best to other countries and the process involved rigorous quality check. The same applies for imported fruits and this gives the buyer confidence that they are safer than the locally available fruits. The prices are a bit high, but there are people who do not care,” said Nawaz.P of PKC Fruits, the organisers of the expo.

That the prices of imported fruits have come down over the years has also contributed to the demand. “Earlier, the fruits were brought in flights and hence cost more. Now they are brought in ships, cutting down the cost to one-fourth,” Mr. Nawaz said, adding that apples from the U.S. and China are mostly in demand among the imported fruits. The expo also features various stalls that feature fertilizers and equipment for organic farming, jackfruit products and such.

The way ahead: biogas plants in every ward?



Wet waste being processed in a plant at Doddabidarakallu. Photo: Chitra V Ramani

BBMP is considering setting up mid-size biogas plants in every ward to process wet waste

Virulent protests against the waste processing units in the city seem to have forced the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to change its strategy from large processing units to decentralised ward-level biogas plants. Mid-size biogas plants in every ward to process wet waste are likely to be the future of garbage processing in the city.

While Bengaluru has adopted a ‘no landfill’ policy and moved to a processing strategy, the combined capacity of the six processing plants in the city is 1,800 tonnes a day. The estimated generation of wet waste is 2,500 tonnes a day. The ward-level biogas plants are being planned to fill this gap locally.

Multiple studies have put the average wet waste generated by a ward at around 12 tonnes a day. According to BBMP sources, a biogas plant with a capacity of 12 tonnes will cost about Rs. 3.5 crore and require 12,000 sq ft of land.

BBMP is working on a model to provide the land, and has asked all the councillors to identify suitable plots in their wards. The private investors would have to put up the plant under the ‘Build, Own, Operate’ (BOO) model, and they will get to recover their investment by selling the biogas generated.

The question of land

The biggest hurdle would be the limited availability of land, especially in the core parts of the city, BBMP officials concede.

“We will first begin with biogas plants in the outer zones, where earmarking land will be relatively easier. The core city is a challenge which we will try to handle later. Even if we manage to put up biogas plants in half the wards, we can effect a paradigm shift in waste processing in the city,” said N.S. Ramakanth, member, Expert Committee on Solid Waste Management, BBMP.

SOP being drawn up

Though biogas plants run on anaerobic fermentation model (airtight) and don't emanate foul smell, the officials are not discounting resistance towards setting up such plants in residential localities.

“This is being accounted for and a standard operating procedure is being drawn up. What needs to be standardised is how the streams of waste, including pineapple, that cannot go to a biogas plant are handled. Care needs to be taken to prevent dumping of garbage at these plants,” a BBMP official said.

WHAT GOES WASTE

Total: 3,500 tonnes/day

Wet waste: 2,500 tonnes/day

Dry waste: 1,000 tonnes/day

Waste processing capacity

IN A NUTSHELL

- * Most waste processing plants are facing opposition from locals
- * There is a capacity deficiency of 700 tonnes of wet waste a day
- * BBMP is moving towards biogas to fill the gap
- * Average wet waste in each ward: 12 tonnes a day
- * A biogas plant will need around 12,000 sq ft space
- * BBMP will provide land, investors can sell biogas produced
- * Biogas plants won't emanate foul smell

* Biomethanation plants a big success in the city for handling waste from hotels and eateries

Subodh Yadav, Special Commissioner, Solid Waste Management, BBMP: We are working on the modalities of the scheme. The project, which will be taken up in collaboration with local RWAs (resident welfare associations) and others, will ensure no waste leaves the ward. It will make it a zero-waste ward.

N.S. Ramakanth, member, SWM Expert Committee, BBMP: The only efficient way to deal with waste is by decentralising management. Why should a village on the outskirts take the city's waste? We need to take responsibility of our waste, process it in our ward itself. Biogas plants are our best bet.”

Taking care of leaf litter

The civic agency is also looking to set up leaf litter compost plants in all wards of the city. These units can be set up in smaller spaces, say around 400 sq ft. BBMP is likely to set them up within public parks.

The major technical infrastructure needed for these hyper-local compost plants is leaf shredders. Leaf litter is usually shred into a fine powder, which will speed up the process of composting. “A leaf shredder costs around Rs. 4 lakh. We are planning to buy a shredder for every three or four wards, and set up a cluster management system,” a BBMP official told *The Hindu*.

At present, leaf litter from across the city is being transported to the Karnataka Compost Development Corporation (KCDC) plant in H.S.R. Layout and the the MSGP plant in Chigarenahalli, Doddaballapur.

NABARD plans for digitisation of SHGs in Salem and Dharmapuri

The NABARD has plans for digitisation of all Self Help Groups in two districts as a pilot project for easy access to wide range of financial services and ensure transparency in SHG and its financial transactions, quick credit appraisal and disbursement, according to K. Venkateswara Rao, Chief General Manager, NABARD.

Talking to *The Hindu* at Dharmathupatti village near here on Thursday, he said that

Salem and Dharmapuri were identified for implementing this pilot project. Data of all SHGs and their members in these districts and union territory will be created. Individual data linking their Aadhar and mobile number will also be included. All the data will be available in the mobile sets or tabs of the SHG members. The members and groups will update all their transactions periodically.

Banks will be given viewing rights of activities these groups. Such measure will help banks view the group's activities and sanction loans through its branch quickly," he added. Digitisation software will be developed in regional languages.

Digitisation will also ensure transparency and creditability of their operation. It will also help bankers credit appraisal and monitoring, Ultimately it will benefit rural members of SHGs. In 1993,

TN had just 500 groups. Now it has 9.5 lakh groups, , he pointed out.

The NABARD also planned to launch livelihood entrepreneurship development project in Kanyakumari, Pudukottai, Cuddalore in TN and Pondicherry in order to generate better livelihood activities of the poor.



Twitter Poll: Farmers, Make in India get most public votes

The ministry had opened online voting through its Twitter handle for five days, seeking public opinions for four questions relating to Budget on February 11.

If the latest round of online suggestions are an indicator for Budget 2016-17, finance minister Arun Jaitley is likely to focus more on agriculture, farmers and schemes such as Make in India, Skill India, Mudra Yojana.

According to the final results of the Twitter poll conducted by the official Twitter handle of Ministry of Finance for inviting suggestions for the Budget, farmers garnered 57 per cent as the most preferred section among youth and women, middle class and underprivileged.

For another question, agriculture was voted for the maximum with 55 per cent of the votes out of 4,021 votes, followed by manufacturing and infrastructure, startups and services.

Among the government schemes, Mudra Yojana, Make in India and Skill India have found favour among the public for greater focus in the upcoming Budget over other schemes such as Swachh Bharat, Digital India, Jan Suraksha and gold schemes among others.

The ministry had opened online voting through its Twitter handle for five days, seeking public opinions for four questions relating to Budget on February 11. In December, the finance ministry had invited suggestions and views from public for Budget on the ‘<http://mygov.nic.in>’ portal. –

PM Narendra Modi promises e-agri market from April 14

The PM said all state governments should take a vow to increase farmers’ income two-fold by 2022, the 75th anniversary of India’s independence.



PM Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Sehore on Thursday. (Source: PTI)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday unveiled operational guidelines for his government’s flagship crop insurance scheme — the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana — at a farmers’ rally in Sehore, Madhya Pradesh.

Asserting that the new scheme will win the trust of farmers, the PM said shortcomings of earlier schemes unveiled by his predecessors had been addressed. “Even those people who are bent on portraying me as ‘anti-farmer’ have not been able to criticise it,” he said.

At the event, Modi also announced the launch of the ‘National Agriculture Market’ — a new digital platform that will be available to farmers across the country from April 14, the birth anniversary of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

“We are setting up a National Agriculture Market, a virtual and digital platform, in the coming days....On April 14, the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar, we will launch the online platform,” he said at the rally which was attended by Union ministers Sushma Swaraj, Radha Mohan Singh and Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Under the e-agri platform, the government is working towards integrating all the 585 wholesale mandis of the country by 2018 in a phased manner, for which Rs 200 crore has been earmarked as of now. In the first phase, 200 mandis will be integrated by this March-end, while another 200 will be connected to the online platform in 2017 and the rest by 2018. The Centre has received proposals from states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Telangana and Maharashtra for developing necessary infrastructure in wholesale markets. A strategic partner for implementing the national agri e-market has also been identified.

The PM said all state governments should take a vow to increase farmers’ income two-fold by 2022, the 75th anniversary of India’s independence. Unlike his previous rallies in Madhya Pradesh, the chant of ‘Modi, Modi’ was heard from the audience only once when he talked about the three-fold increase in the compensation under the new crop insurance scheme. CM Chouhan, however, chanted “Modi, Modi” for a much longer period from the stage while describing the PM’s popularity. He also bestowed the title of ‘Kisan Mitra’ on the PM. Modi reciprocated by praising Chouhan for winning Krishi Karman Award in wheat production for the fourth consecutive year and for achieving high agriculture growth over the last few years. Hardselling the crop insurance scheme, Modi appealed to all farmers to avail its benefits and said technology will be used extensively for early settlement of claims. “Twenty five per cent will be paid immediately and the rest as soon as possible,” he said. The PM said that premium to be paid by

farmers for kharif crop will be just 2 per cent and for rabi crop just 1.5 per cent. –

Ahead of PM Modi's visit, Naveen Patnaik announces projects worth Rs 450 crore

The projects include Upper Indravati canal and two mega lift irrigation points at Kesinga and Gudvela.



Naveen Patnaik

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's farmer rally in the western Odisha district of Bargarh on Sunday to popularise the Centre's new crop insurance scheme, the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Thursday held two farmers' rallies in Balangir and Kalahandi districts.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik laid the foundation stones of projects amounting to Rs 450 crore in Kesinga of Kalahandi and Gudvela of Balangir districts and addressed farmers. BJD spokesperson Pratap Deb, however, said Patnaik's visit was part of the scheme to implement the announcements made at a farmers' rally in Bargarh district last year.

The projects include Upper Indravati canal and two mega lift irrigation points at Kesinga and Gudvela. "There is no attempt to upstage anyone. The CM is just keeping his promise to farmers," the spokesperson said, adding, "We will hold several such meetings in western Odisha."

Party sources said through such meetings the party wants to show it still cares for farmers. The party also hopes that Patnaik's meetings would energise grassroots functionaries ahead of next year's panchayat polls and

reduce farmers' anger against the government over largescale farmer suicides. About 150 farmers killed themselves in the state last year.

At Bargarh, the PM is expected to speak about Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. State BJP leaders expect at least 2 lakh people to turn up. Besides Modi, BJP chief Amit Shah, Union agriculture minister and other BJP leaders, including Union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan, are likely to be present and target the state government over farmer suicides.

hindustantimes

Budget likely to focus on rural-economy schemes to blunt farm crisis



Back-to-back droughts have deepened a farm crisis in the country leading to a spurt in suicide by farmers. (REUTERS)

The Modi government is looking to address a worrying agrarian crisis with a set of schemes and Budget provisions aimed at ramping up the larger rural economy, rather than just the farm sector, people familiar with the development told HT.

Budget 2015-2016 is likely to provide for a more effective Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayin Yojana, a flagship scheme announced last year to create irrigation infrastructure, with substantially higher allocations. The scheme, which had failed to make much headway because it was strewn across several ministries, is likely to be consolidated and given a mission mode under a single command, an official said.

A back-to-back drought and falling commodity prices have hurt rural earnings, impacting the livelihoods of nearly half of all Indians who depend on a farm income in Asia's third largest economy.

On February 21, the Modi government will kick off the Rurban Mission, a new scheme to create non-farm employment for rural youth by creating urban centres, which will act like employment hubs. The budget is likely to set aside sufficient funds for it.

In his review meetings with the rural development ministry, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed employment generation as the key focus area, the official added.

According to a Cabinet note, the first phase will target creation of 100 such job-spinning centres that will have the hard infrastructure for generating economic activity, such as roads, power and digital connectivity. The overall target will be to create 300 such zones.

The budget is also likely to inject money for rural housing to kick off the rural component of the Modi government's mission for housing for all by 2022. Rural housing units should last at least 40 years without much damage to the structure, according to the proposed new guidelines.

The current amount of Rs 70,000 for Indira Awaas Yojana, the government's free housing scheme, is insufficient and the rural affairs ministry expects higher infusion of funds in the budget needed to achieve a target 30 million dwelling units.

The irrigation programme will bundle all ongoing schemes such as the accelerated irrigation benefit programme of the water resources ministry, integrated watershed management programme of the department of land resources and on farm water management component of National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture of the farm ministry into a consolidated programme.

Digital agri market platform to be launched on April 14: PM



PM Narendra Modi (file photo)

A digital platform for enabling farmers to sell their produce at a better rate anywhere in the country will be launched on April 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced here today as he resolved to ensure doubling of the farmers' income by 2022.

Modi, who unveiled guidelines for the recently-launched Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme at a rally here, said this was one of the various initiatives of his government aimed at ensuring the welfare of the farmers who have been in distress due to vagaries of weather.

Besides the Crop Insurance Scheme, he spoke about Soil Health Card scheme, PM's Irrigation Scheme, Organic farming, ensuring adequate availability of urea and ethanol—blending programme to help the sugarcane farmers and also pitched for 'Start—Up' initiatives in agriculture sector.

He pushed for more and more use of modern technology and equipment along with traditional wisdom of farming to boost the agriculture sector, not only to meet the domestic needs but also cater to the demands from abroad.

“We want to integrate technology in the agriculture sector. There should be a mix of progressive farming and age—old wisdom,” the Prime Minister said.

Noting that the farmers do not get adequate price for his produce despite working hard as he has no choice but to sell in the nearby mandis, he said the government has decided to address this by adopting a digital mechanism.

“We are setting up a National Agriculture Market, a virtual and digital platform, in the coming days....On April 14, the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar, we will launch the online platform,” Modi said at the rally which was attended by union ministers Sushma Swaraj, Radha Mohan Singh, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan besides others.

He said this platform will enable the farmers, using a mobile phone, to sell their produce anywhere in the country, wherever they can get a better price.

At the rally, the Prime Minister said all states as well as agriculture community should take a pledge to double the farmers’ income by 2022, the 75th year of the country’s Independence. “We will do whatever is required achieve this.”

Under the e-agri platform, the government is working towards integrating all the 585 wholesale mandis of the country by 2018 in a phased manner, for which Rs. 200 crore have been earmarked as of now.

In the first phase, 200 mandis will be integrated by this March—end while another 200 will be connected to the online platform in 2017 and the rest by 2018.

The Centre has received proposals from states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Telangana and Maharashtra for developing necessary infrastructure in wholesale markets. A strategic partner for implementing the national agri e-market has also been identified.

‘Hike Budget outlay for all agri-related departments’

Agriculture: Shrinking Outlays					(₹ in crore)
Ministry/Departments	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Ministry of Agriculture (Plan & Non Plan)	24,176.72	27,931.59	29,772.83	31,062.64	24,909.78
Dept of Agriculture & Cooperation	17,522.87	20,530.22	21,933.5	22,652.25	17,004.35
Dept of Agricultural Research & Education	4,957.87	5392	5,729.17	6,144.39	6,320.00
Dept of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries	1,696.25	2009.37	2,110.16	2,266.3	1,585.43

Source: compiled by ASHA from budget.nic.in

Several organisations and individuals have sought higher Budget outlays for all departments dealing with the agriculture sector if the Centre is really serious about farmers' welfare.

“Budget 2015-16 was a serious disappointment in that it actually cut down allocations for Ministry of Agriculture to levels less than 2011-12, i.e., five years earlier! (see table) It is clear that farmers' welfare added to the Ministry's mandate cannot be fulfilled unless adequate public investments are made in the sector,” said the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA), an umbrella of farmer organisations in 23 States, in a letter to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

The alliance said unless the outlays are enhanced not only will the agriculture sector not be able to deliver on growth expectations and thereby impact the rest of the economy, but will also mean serious distress and increased numbers of farmer suicides in India.

Among other things, ASHA sought a guarantee fund of ₹5,000 crore to increase the bankers' confidence in lending to non-land owning “licensed” cultivators, both as individual farmers and in Joint Liability Groups.

With climate change challenges badly hitting the sector, ASHA said there was need for serious overhaul of the disaster relief system, with outlays of ₹25,000 crore set aside for relief from extreme weather events. “This year for instance, the allocation was only ₹8,679 crore while the approved assistance was around ₹13,549 crore which itself is much less than what is needed!” it said.

The organisation also called for setting up a Farm Income Commission for making interventions toward delivering minimum living incomes to farm households.

Spot rubber up further

Spot rubber firmed up further on Thursday. RSS 4 improved to ₹95 (₹93) a kg, according to traders. The grade finished firm at ₹94 (₹93) and ₹91 (₹90) respectively, according to the Rubber Board and dealers. March futures improved to ₹98.06 (96.89), April to ₹101.10 (99.82), May to ₹102.90 (101.51) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) slid to ₹87.55 (₹87.72) at Bangkok.

February futures closed at ¥141(₹84.84) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (₹/kg): RSS-4: 95 (93); RSS-5: 91(90); Ungraded: 87 (85); ISNR 20: 87.50 (87) and Latex (60% drc): 77(77).

Edible oils in bear grip

Barring soyabean oil which rose by ₹6 per 10 kg, all other edible oils was unchanged on the BCE on slack demand amid weak overseas futures. T Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹545, super palmolein ₹566 and soyabean refined oil ₹635.

Ruchi's rates: palmolein ₹542, soyabean refined oil ₹632 and sunflower refined oil ₹765. BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 930 (930), soya ref. 631 (625), sunflower exp. ref. 690 (690), rapeseed ref. oil 800 (800), rapeseed exp. ref. 770 (770), cottonseed ref. oil 602 (602) and palmolein 525 (525).

Turmeric farmers told to store and sell the produce



Falling acreage due to poor rainfall during June-July coupled with the increased demand for turmeric of Tamil Nadu origin has tended to push the price of the yellow spice northwards.

The current trend supports the farmgate price of quality turmeric at around ₹10,500-11,500 a quintal during March-April 2016, say Farm Varsity experts after analysing the price movement of the produce in Erode market.

Advising farmers to store and sell the produce at a later date to get better income, the Back Office of Agro Marketing Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI & BPC) of Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University said that the arrivals are currently from Bhavani, Sathyamangalam and some parts of Karnataka (Ulsur, Ramapuram).

And the quality produce is fetching the seller ₹10,500/quintal. Salem local variety appears to be more preferred, the analysts said.

The total area under turmeric during 2014-15 has been estimated at 0.18 million hectares. Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka and West Bengal were the major turmeric producing states contributing to 85 per cent of total turmeric production of the country.

The area under turmeric in TN during 2014-15 has stood at 0.03 million hectares with Erode, Salem, Dharmapuri, Coimbatore and Thiruvannamalai contributing to a major chunk of the produce.

Business Standard

Farmers to have pan-India access to mandis: Modi

e-based platform will be launched on April 14 to mark Ambedkar's anniversary; Modi asks country to double farm income by 2022



Prime Minister Narendra Modi presenting settlement claims of Kharif 2015 crop insurance to a selected beneficiary at Kisan Kalyan Mela in Sehore, Madhya Pradesh. State CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan is also seen

Come April and Indian farmers will have pan-India access to all agriculture mandis for selling their farm yield. The platform, to be known as National Agricultural Market, will allow farmers to know best rates for their yield through the internet. He also asked governments and farmers to join hands to take a pledge to double income for farmers by 2022, when India will mark 75th anniversary of its Independence.

“The platform will be launched from April 14, to mark the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar this year. The e-platform will provide Indian farmers access to minimum five hundred mandis of the country,” Prime minister Narendra Modi said in Sherpur village, Sehore district, Madhya Pradesh. He was in the village to launch guidelines of a newly launched crop insurance scheme at a rally called Kisan Mahasammelan.

“A farmer can have access to all mandis through his mobile phone, so he can know where he can fetch best rates for his commodity. He can trade the commodity anywhere in India through this facility. This way, he need not go to a nearby mandi or do distress-selling. This is what the real meaning of Digital India is, which we want to implement for our farm community,” Modi said.

Elaborating upon his mission Digital India for farmers, he pitched for start-up initiatives in agriculture, by calling young entrepreneurs to join the Stand Up India scheme and begin with start-ups for farmers. “Why cannot there be start-ups for the farm community?” the prime minister asked. “Our young people should come forward and launch their start-ups for farm and allied sectors like dairy, fisheries, horticulture, poultry, etc.” On guidelines of the newly launched crop insurance scheme, Modi said, “Unlike previous schemes, we have decided to cover each farm as a survey unit.

Farmers will have to pay only two per cent of the total premium of the kharif crop and 1.5 per cent of the total premium during rabi crop, unlike 12 per cent mandatory as minimum in previous schemes.” He called on farmers and said more and more farmers should join the scheme, though it would put strain on the national kitty.

“We have covered entire anticipated farm income under the scheme. Even in case a farmer fails to till his fields due to drought-like conditions, he will be compensated to a certain extent,” Modi assured a mega congregation of farmers waiting for his arrival for past two days at the venue located on the Bhopal-Indore highway.

Also, the prime minister spoke about Soil Health Card Scheme, organic farming, irrigation scheme, ensuring adequate availability of urea, and ethanol-blending programme to help the sugar cane farmers.

On promoting organic farming he pointed out, “Sikkim has become first lead state in organic farming in the country. Entire north-east is ready to become organic capital of the world. We want to integrate technology with farm sector by tapping age-old traditions and knowledge of our farmers by adopting new technologies,” the Prime Minister said.

At the rally which was attended by Union Ministers Sushma Swaraj, Radha Mohan Singh, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan besides others Modi said all states and agriculture community should take a pledge to double the farmers’ income by 2022, the 75th year of the country’s Independence. “We will do whatever is required achieve this.”

Haryana, Punjab may cut Bt cotton sowing

The move comes after a joint action panel recommended use of traditional varieties as they were immune to pest attacks



Farmer suicides in Punjab and Haryana in the aftermath of extensive damage to the cotton crop in 2015-16 due to pest attack has led to a swing in official opinion against genetically modified (Bt) seeds.

A Joint Action Committee was appointed by the two state governments on the causes and to suggest remedies for white fly infestation. Its report says the native variety (arboreum) is immune to cotton leaf curl viral disease and comparatively tolerant to white fly and other sucking insect pests. Hence, its cultivation should be promoted in Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Punjab and Haryana provide 15 per cent of the nation’s cotton output.

Highly placed sources in the Haryana government say an effort is on to assess the availability of traditional variety seeds with the agriculture universities, the Central Institute of Cotton Research and private seed producers. “We expect to replace 15-20 per cent of the area under Bt cottonseed with the traditional one this year (rabi 2016-17) and in the next few years to take it to 50 per cent. Co-existence of Bt and non-Bt crop would curtail the chance of spread of epidemics like white fly, as the two crops are resistant to different kinds of diseases. Monoculture in agriculture is one of the cause of widespread diseases in plants. Presently, 95 per cent of the cotton grown in Punjab and Haryana is the Bt variety and this triggered the quick spread of disease.”

The peak season of cotton picking is over, though it lasts till the end of March. Cotton arrivals in Punjab have fallen 60 per cent this year from the corresponding period in the year before. The dent is lesser in Haryana and is estimated to be about 35 per cent less but some farmers had lost the entire crop. Punjab is yet to take a decision on the remedy. The state had to pay Rs 800 crore in compensation to the affected farmers.

COTTON STATISTICS						
Year	Area (mn hectares)		Production (mn bales)		Yield (kg/hectare)	
	Punjab	Haryana	Punjab	Haryana	Punjab	Haryana
2012-13	0.48	0.61	2.10	2.60	743.75	719.87
2013-14	0.45	0.54	2.10	2.30	800.45	761.19
2014-15	0.42	0.65	1.20	2.05	485.71	537.80
2015-16 (P)	0.45	0.58	0.60	1.40	320.00	480.00

Note 1 bale = 170 kg, (P) Average estimated projections
Source: State Agriculture Departments & Cotton Advisory board

Said a source in Punjab’s agriculture department: “We would like to cultivate desi (native) cotton in at least 10 per cent of the total area and are trying to educate farmers. We don’t have the seed stock to support this much area but will try to organise seed from neighbouring states.”

There is a big problem of spurious seeds and pesticides in Punjab and that is also considered an important reason for outbreak of the disease at an epidemic scale. One result is that only about 60 of Punjab's 400-odd cotton ginning factories are operational. The state government has plans to take charge of the distribution of seeds through own agencies. Growing two rows of sorghum or bajra millet or maize as a barrier crop around cotton fields is also being recommended to help contain the spread of white fly.

The Union ministry of agriculture, in its second estimate for crop year 2015-16, pegged cotton production at 30.9 million bales (a bale is 170 kg), scaling it down from 33.51 mn bales in the first advance estimate.

The states of Punjab and Haryana lost a large part of the crop due to pest attack (white fly) and arrivals in Punjab this year have been at least 60% lesser than the last year.

Year	Area (in lakh hectares)		Production (in lakh bales of 170 kg each)		Yield (kg/hectare)	
	Punjab	Haryana	Punjab	Haryana	Punjab	Haryana
2012-13	4.8	6.14	21	26	743.75	719.87
2013-14	4.46	5.36	21	23	800.45	761.19
2014-15	4.2	6.48	12	20.5	485.71	537.8
2015-16 (P)	4.5	5.76	6	14	320	480

(P) Average estimated projections

Source: State Agriculture Departments and Cotton Advisory board



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture to hold seminar on 'solar rooftop systems

Aurangabad: Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture (CMIA) will be hosting a seminar on 'Solar Rooftop Systems' in collaboration with Pune-based Clean Max Solar, on Friday at CMIA Hall, Railway Station MIDC.

"India is experiencing a boom of solar power awareness and CMIA is taking many initiatives under its energy cell to emerge as a thought leader for the government's initiatives to promote renewable energy," said CMIA president Ashish Garde.

"Clean Max's first solar power plant was set up in June 2013, and it has commissioned 25 plus MWp by 2015, growing at the rate of two times every six months," he added. The company's technical experts will give a detailed presentation, including the technical, commercial, economics and legal aspects of solar power purchase agreement (PPA) and system sale.

Government aims to give 'Digital India' benefits to farmers: PM Modi

OPAL: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said his government aimed to provide the benefits of the 'Digital India' initiative to the country's farmers, for which a virtual platform of a national agricultural market is in the works.

Plans were also afoot to connect 550 farmer markets in the country through the use of technology, Modi said while formally launching the 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana' at a farmers' rally in Sherpur in Sihore district of Madhya Pradesh.

Giving details of the programmes and schemes launched by the BJP-led central government for the farmers, he said the national agricultural market will provide a platform so that the farmers get the maximum price for their produce.

He pointed out that the prices of various farm produce varied in different markets in the country but the farmers sold their yield at the nearest available market.

This resulted in unremunerative prices to the farmers, which was sought to be redressed by the virtual platform of national agricultural market, Modi said.

The prime minister said the 'Digital India' initiative would also help the farmers by giving them access to information on the best price offered for farm produce on their mobile phones in an instant.

He said that the Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme, launched by his government last month, will be a panacea for all problems faced by the farmers.

"Farmers did not believe in the crop insurance policies of the previous United Progressive Alliance government. It is the main reason that not even 20 percent farmers in the country opted for crop insurance. We have now come up with this scheme keeping in mind the lack of interest among farmers,"

Taking a dig at the previous UPA government at the Centre, the prime minister said that the earlier insurance schemes benefitted the companies and not farmers. He said the new crop insurance scheme will definitely benefit the farmers in the country.

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Fasal Bima Yojana will solve farmers' problems: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday released the guidelines for operationalisation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, which was approved by the Union Cabinet last month.

"This scheme has the solution to problems the farmers face," PM Modi said at a function in Madhya Pradesh's Sehore district.

"We are placing the guidelines of the crop insurance scheme, here, in the

presence of the farmers of MP," PM said at Kisan Kalyan Mela where he was felicitated by the farmers for launching Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme.

The scheme will come into effect from the upcoming Kharif season. It envisages a uniform premium of only 2 per cent to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops, and 1.5 per cent for Rabi crops. The premium for annual commercial and horticultural crops will be 5 per cent.

There is no upper limit on government subsidy for this scheme. The provision of capping the premium rate, which existed in earlier schemes, and resulted in low claims being paid to farmers, has been done away with.

Farmers will get claims against the full sum insured, without any reduction.

DECCAN Chronicle

Test the mustard

The GEAC asking for an RARM document is fully in line with international practice.



Representational image

The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), the body that takes the ultimate decision on genetically modified (GM) crops, has reviewed the

data presented on the GM mustard hybrid DMH 11 and decided that the data is not adequate. It has asked the developer for more information, including additional biosafety tests and a risk assessment and risk management (RARM) report.

It is also to be welcomed that the GEAC has decided to proceed in a systematic manner in this case, instead of the usually ad hoc nature of its earlier responses. The committee will meet to draw up the concrete modalities of the additional data required to write up the RARM document pertaining to DMH 11.

This will include details like the timeline for the preparation of the report and specific roles and responsibilities. Given the embarrassing nature of the rather cut and paste review document that was prepared by science academies in the case of Bt brinjal, it is understandable that the GEAC is proceeding with caution.

Asking for overarching evaluations like an Environment Impact Assessment or a RARM document is fairly standard procedure in responsible nations testing genetically modified organisms (GMO).

The United States department of agriculture, the federal department responsible for agriculture, forestry and food, including GM food in the US, emphasises the need for environmental risk assessment as well as the Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) of GMOs. Another risk evaluation instrument, the Zurich Hazard Analysis, developed some 20 years ago, has been used since in a variety of sectors, including biology, to identify and manage risks from specific activities/interventions.

Incorporating a hazard analysis increases risk awareness among the operators in the specific sector and enables both the evaluation of the risk as well as assessment of its manageability. The GEAC asking for an RARM document is fully in line with international practice. In fact, an EcIA should become standard procedure in biosafety assessments of GMOs in India. This is currently not the case.

In the latest development on GM mustard, the apex regulatory body has done well to publicly take note of the specific concerns expressed by people and to make an effort to address them. This must be a first and it must be welcomed. After all, there is a body of international science which has done sound studies and pointed out, when such has been the case, the shortcomings of data generated from hasty, shoddy testing protocols.

These critiques have come from scientists of calibre who are conversant with research in the field and its methodologies. It is an indication of the validity of such critical appraisals that the defenders of GM crops, the pro-GM lobby as they are popularly called, immediately begin to trash, calling it “pseudoscience” or “parallel science”.

Actually, if you were to follow the trajectory of the pro-GM lobby and the positions they have taken on a range of GM products, the only science that counts is the science which has never, ever shown a single instance where anything wrong was found with any GMO. You are asked to believe that in all the experiments conducted on GMOs, the results were always positive, the product always proven to be safe. Is this plausible?

It is anything but a subtle approach of coming out both barrels blazing at anyone who raises a question about the safety of GM crops that should prompt questioning. Ordinary citizens who could become the consumers of GM foods should ask whether it is possible that all the scientific evidence provided by scientists who have shown that damage can be caused when animals are fed GM foods, is all wrong.

Media reports say that the national controversy and debate over GM mustard DMH 11 is taking place even though the hybrid is being developed by the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP) in the Delhi University. It is curious that commentators, including the media, are emphasising that genetically engineered mustard hybrid is a Delhi University, read “national”, product, rather than an “international” one foisted on us by Monsanto or its likes.

One of the key questions relating to DMH 11 or for that matter any other GM crop is that of safety. The concerned consumer would like to know if adequate biosafety tests have been done. And do the results, which should be made available to the public, show unequivocally that the genetically manipulated mustard (or whichever other crop is being tested) is safe for the consumption of humans and animals? The source of the GM crop has little bearing on whether or not the product has been carefully tested.

A shoddy, unsafe product is as unacceptable from the Delhi University as it is from Monsanto or Syngenta. Nor does the CGMCP GM mustard become a more acceptable product just because its development was funded by another “national” organisation, the National Dairy Development Board, or that the Delhi University has committed to distributing the mustard hybrid for free. The data from tests conducted to evaluate the safety of GM mustard

for the environment, for the genetic diversity of mustard and for human and animal health must establish clearly that the product is safe.

Millions of dollars are being spent by the pro-GM lobby on bullying, hectoring, intimidating and compromising scientists and government regulators in different countries that are questioning the relevance and safety of GM foods. In this backdrop, the GEAC must be congratulated for taking seriously the cogently articulated concerns of state governments (Bihar and Madhya Pradesh) scientists, farmers, including those affiliated with the ruling party (the Bharatiya Kissan Sangh and the BJP Kisan Morcha) and concerned citizens and consumers. It is hoped that the GEAC stays the course and continues to do the right thing.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Digital farm market platform to be launched on April 14: PM Modi



A digital platform for enabling farmers to sell their produce at a better rate anywhere in the country will be launched on April 14.

SEHORE (MP): A digital platform for enabling farmers to sell their produce at a better rate anywhere in the country will be launched on April 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced here today as he resolved to ensure doubling of the farmers' income by 2022.

Modi, who unveiled guidelines for the recently-launched Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme at a rally here, said this was one of the various initiatives of his government aimed at ensuring the welfare of the farmers who have been in distress due to vagaries of weather.

Besides the Crop Insurance Scheme, he spoke about Soil Health Card scheme, PM's Irrigation Scheme, Organic farming, ensuring adequate availability of urea and ethanol-blending programme to help the sugarcane farmers and also pitched for 'Start-Up' initiatives in agriculture sector.

He pushed for more and more use of modern technology and equipment along with traditional wisdom of farming to boost the agriculture sector, not only to meet the domestic needs but also cater to the demands from abroad.

"We want to integrate technology in the agriculture sector. There should be a mix of progressive farming and age-old wisdom," the Prime Minister said.

Noting that the farmers do not get adequate price for his produce despite working hard as he has no choice but to sell in the nearby mandis, he said the government has decided to address this by adopting a digital mechanism.

"We are setting up a National Agriculture Market, a virtual and digital platform, in the coming days....On April 14, the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar, we will launch the online platform," Modi said at the rally which was attended by union ministers Sushma Swaraj, Radha Mohan Singh, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan besides others.

He said this platform will enable the farmers, using a mobile phone, to sell their produce anywhere in the country, wherever they can get a better price.

At the rally, the Prime Minister said all states as well as agriculture community should take a pledge to double the farmers' income by 2022, the 75th year of the country's Independence. "We will do whatever is required achieve this."

Under the e-agri platform, the government is working towards integrating all the 585 wholesale mandis of the country by 2018 in a phased manner, for which Rs 200 crore have been earmarked as of now.

In the first phase, 200 mandis will be integrated by this March-end while another 200 will be connected to the online platform in 2017 and the rest by 2018.

The Centre has received proposals from states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Telangana and Maharashtra for developing necessary infrastructure in

wholesale markets. A strategic partner for implementing the national agri e-market has also been identified.

While talking about the Crop Insurance Scheme launched recently, the Prime Minister took a dig at his detractors, saying "even those who never stop attacking Modi and try various means to project him (Modi) as anti-farmer have not dared to criticise this programme".

At the 'Kisan Kalyan Mela', he said the earlier Crop Insurance Schemes were such that the farmers did not have trust and only 20 per cent of them took the policies.

Targeting at least 50 per cent coverage of farmers under this scheme, Modi said the new programme addresses all the apprehensions of the farmers, has no cap on claims and has a cap of 2 per cent on premium unlike the premium of up to 14 per cent in earlier schemes.

Contending that welfare of farmers has been top priority of all BJP governments, Modi said, "The first attempt of crop insurance was made by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. Then the government changed and some alterations were made to that scheme. Because of that the (UPA) government benefitted but led to mistrust among the farmers.

"The result was that farmers started running away from this scheme. Despite natural calamities, they were not willing to take this insurance policy and not more than 20 per cent farmers associated with it."

He said his government's effort has been to create trust in the insurance scheme by addressing all their apprehensions.

"I have an expectation from you (farmers). At least, try it once, repose faith in this new scheme, at least once... More and more farmers should take this policy. Today, only 20 per cent of farmers have taken this policy, can it be raised to 50 per cent? If more number of farmers take this policy, it will mean more financial burden on the government. Despite this, I urge you all to associate with this scheme," he said.

He said earlier the farmers would get compensation only when 50 per cent crop was damaged due to natural calamity but the norms have been relaxed

and compensation will be given even if the damage is caused to 1/3rd of the crop area.

He then highlighted some features of the scheme like the provision that 25 per cent of the claim will be given immediately in case of crop damage while the rest will be settled at the earliest.

Another provision is that if a crop is damaged even up to 14 days after harvest, farmers will get the insurance claim.

Also, even if a single farmer is affected in a village, the insurance will be granted as per the rules.

A farmer, who does not even do sowing because of failed rainfall, will be entitled to some insurance claim.

"If farmers join this scheme, then the natural calamities will not be able to hurt them. The government also will stand shoulder-to-shoulder to help them," Modi said.

"This scheme, along with the Soil Health Card Scheme, will provide protection to the farmers," he said.