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# THE HINDU

## **Develop farmer-friendly technologies, scientists told**

Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS) S. Thilagar has called upon the scientists to develop farmer-friendly technologies so as to improve productivity.

Speaking at the inauguration of the four-day off-campus training programme on 'Developing winning research proposals' at the Veterinary College and Research Institute here on Thursday, he said that the State Government had given Rs. 60 to Rs. 70 crore for various research activities in the university and also for strengthening the Ethno Veterinary Research Unit and improving animal health services delivery system through Animal Ambulance.

He emphasised the need based research, development of farmer-friendly technologies and dissemination of technologies to the end users. Faculty members should draw suitable research proposals and transfer new technologies to the farming community, he added.

## **Skills**

Organised by the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM), Hyderabad in collaboration with Directorate of Research, TANUVAS, the training programme is to help the young scientists to develop the skills in drawing winning research proposals. The inaugural was held on Thursday in which 25 participants from the veterinary colleges participated.

D. Rama Rao, Director, National Academy of Agricultural Research Management, Hyderabad, M. Babu, organising secretary and director of Research, TANUVAS, L. Gunaseelan, Dean, Veterinary College and Research Institute, Namakkal also spoke. The programme would continue till February 21.

## **'Viable account will help banks sanction micro credit'**

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and Rose Trust, a service organisation, jointly organised a financial literacy awareness programme at Perambur village near here on

Thursday. About 150 villagers participated and benefitted in the programme.

S. Ganesh, District Collector, inaugurating the programme, stressed on the importance of small savings. The Collector cautioned villagers against some fraudulent chit funds which, under the guise of offering higher interest, resorted to looting of their savings.

He said that viable savings accounts would prompt the bank managers to sanction micro credit facility to the poor. He advised them to take the best of the Centrally-sponsored loan programmes.

On the credit flow from the cooperative sector, he said that primary societies appreciated the prompt repayment by sanctioning interest-free loans to the farmers.

S. Somasundaram, District Development Manager, NABARD, said the bank had organised 90 financial literacy programmes in the last two years. He administered a pledge on effective financial management with a focus on savings. N. Balu, Assistant General Manager, Reserve Bank of India, in his address, explained the role of NABARD in sensitising the rural masses to banking services.

P. Sulaiman, Lead District Manager, spoke on Jeevan Jyothi Bhima Yojana, Suraksha Bhima Yojana, and Atal Pension Yojana introduced by the Centre.

Chandrasekaran, Manager, Indian Overseas Bank, Perangalur, and A. Adappan, Director, Rose Trust, spoke.

### **Now, NABARD plans digitisation of SHGs**

*Pilot project to be implemented in Salem, Dharmapuri districts*

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (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 to ensure transparency in the SHGs and their 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 would be created.

Individual data linking their Aadhar and mobile numbers would also be included. All the data would be available in the mobile sets or tabs of SHG members. The members and groups would update all their transactions periodically.

“Banks would be given viewing rights of their activities. Such measure would help banks view the groups’ activities and sanction loans through their branches quickly,” he added.

Digitisation software would be developed in regional languages. Ultimately it would benefit rural members of the SHGs. In 1993, Tamil Nadu had just 500 groups. Now it had 9.5 lakh groups, he said.

NABARD also planned to launch livelihood entrepreneurship development project in Kanyakumari, Pudukottai and Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry in order to generate better livelihood activities of the poor.

A total of 142 farmer producer organisations (FPOs) had started functioning in the State, of which 45 had registered as companies and the remaining were at various stages. '

“Initially, we had planned to set up 162 FPOs in the State. The FPOs will reduce middlemen in marketing and enhance profit margin of the farmers,” Mr. Rao noted. A special fund would be sanctioned by the Centre to each FPO on a par with their capital amount.

Moreover, the Centre would offer Rs. 1 crore credit guarantee to the FPOs. NABARD had funded four FPOs in Salem, Nagapattinam and Tiruvannamalai districts as pilot projects.

Moreover, NABARD had planned to invest Rs. 1.71 lakh crore in priority sector in the next fiscal.

### **Students’ club inaugurated**

The 31st students’ club was inaugurated at Agricultural College and Research Institute (ACRI), Killikulam, on Thursday.

Inaugurating the club, K. Navaram Kumar, District Science Officer, District Science Centre, Tirunelveli, stressed the importance of agriculture in ensuring food for the growing population, and motivated the students to choose agriculture as their career.

V. Subramanian, Dean, ACRI, in his presidential address said that extracurricular activities would help students gain knowledge and skills in decision making, problem solving, goal setting and team-oriented activities.

Participation in cultural activities such as dance and music performances would act as stress buster, he added.

Earlier, V.K. Parthibhan, Staff Advisor, welcomed the gathering.

P. Suganth Kumar, club secretary, listed various students club activities for 2016.

### **Acquaculture exhibition**

A two-day aquaculture exhibition-cum-conference will be conducted at Hotel Ananda Inn in Bhimavaram of West Godavari district. Agriculture Minister Prathipati Pulla Rao will inaugurate the exhibition on Saturday. The expo is being organised by Aqua International, a monthly magazine, for the benefit of aqua farmers. Researchers, entrepreneurs, technical experts and exporters are expected to participate, said exhibition chief executive M.A. Nazeer.

### **Concern over non-availability of water for paddy crop in Melur region**



Collector K. Veera Raghava Rao addressing farmers at the grievance day meeting in Madurai on Friday.— Photo: G. Moorthy

*The meeting witnessed some heated exchanges between farmers and PWD officials.*

Farmers benefitting from Periyar Vaigai irrigation system, mainly those from Melur region, voiced their concern during the grievance day meeting at the Collectorate here on Friday over non-availability of water to harvest their paddy crop in about a month's time.

Single-crop farmers of Melur region said that while they need water for another four or five wettings, officials from Public Works Department (PWD) could assure water for only one or two wettings till the end of this month.

“During the last grievance meeting, PWD officials said that they could provide water for 60 days. Now they say it is not possible,” said N. Palanichamy, State president of Tamil Nadu Sugarcane Farmers’ Association.

The meeting witnessed some heated exchanges between farmers and PWD officials. While officials said that they were doing their best with the available water at combined Periyar credit, the farmers alleged lack of planning and not carrying out maintenance work in canals.

“The primary reason was the delay in releasing water. While combined Periyar credit touched 6,000 mcft in first week of November 2015, water was released only on November 28,” alleged A.N.M. Tirupathi, a farmer from Kulamangalam.

Mr. Palanichami, citing a recent order issued by Madurai Bench of Madras High Court on his petition, said that Rs. 4.15 Crore was allowed to lapse in the last financial year by PWD by not carrying out maintenance work in the canals in tail-end regions surrounding Melur.

Responding to the demands, Collector K. Veera Raghava Rao ordered the PWD officials to host a meeting on Saturday with officials from Agriculture department and farmers’ associations to listen to their area specific demands and arrive at the best possible solution with available water.

A section of farmers also urged that Direct Procurement Centres (DPC) during the harvest be opened at the right time unlike the previous season. Pointing out that there were no restrictions in opening DPCs, Collector assured that adequate DPCs would be opened in the places demanded by the farmers.

### **Make full use of wastewater**

*In many small and medium towns, domestic wastewater is already being put to use by farmers. A look by S. Vishwanath*



Wetlands and lakes can be kept alive and full provided the waste-water let into them is treated adequately

Summer is here and the scenario with the water storage in reservoirs is grim. It will be a tough ask to nurse them through to June when the rains are expected and that too only for drinking water. In such a water-scarce scenario, it is imperative we think of all forms of water, particularly wastewater, and put it to productive use. Sadly the State lacks a meaningful policy on urban water and sanitation management which would have encompassed the reuse of wastewater too. A simple wastewater policy as a guideline document to design projects and draw investments would be a good first step.

Here are some guidelines to consider while preparing such a policy:

It is important to differentiate between industrial wastewater and domestic wastewater. In no case should the two be allowed to be mixed.

Each city and town will have to develop its own strategy for managing wastewater. There could be a broad framework to understand and design schemes but no rigid template.

### **Supplement to fertilizers**

In many small and medium towns, domestic wastewater is already being put to use by farmers who grow all sorts of crops and vegetables with it. They make use of the nutrient component of the wastewater too as a supplement to fertilizers.

By pushing for safer use practice, by changing the crop palate, it may be possible to eliminate the need for wastewater treatment plants in many small towns, especially in arid and semi-arid parts of the State.



There is a strong component of ecosystem needs for treated wastewater. Wetlands and lakes can be kept alive and full provided the treatment is adequate. Fishing too is an activity which can be done in these tanks filled with treated wastewater.

Industrial, construction and other non-potable use of wastewater can have commercial potential especially where the opportunity cost of water is high. A market for wastewater can only be created by regulating groundwater in the surroundings from over-exploitation.

The reuse of wastewater can also be for recharging aquifers firstly by indirect means especially through lake and tank re-fillings and later by direct managed aquifer recharge.

### **Treatment technologies**

Treatment technologies exist which can take wastewater to potable standards. They should be fully used in a scientific fashion by linking it with and blending with freshwater in river and stream flows and in lakes. Once a certain ecological journey has been undertaken by this wastewater, it can be used for potable purpose by overcoming the “yuck” factor.

The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board has come out with advertisements making available treated wastewater at very reasonable prices, which is the first step in putting it to good use.

With a comprehensive policy encompassing eco-system use, it can substitute the use of fresh water, refill lakes, replenish aquifers and bring back into the hydrological cycle a vast quantity of water.

It is time to come together quickly on a wastewater re-use policy. That would be water wisdom.

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### **Farmers urged to go for cash crops**

Calling upon farmers from the Agency and upland areas to come forward to cultivate vegetables and flowers under the shade net and poly house methods, Collector H. Arun Kumar on Friday said that the beneficiaries can begin cultivation by spending just 10 per cent of the project cost, as the government is offering 50 per cent subsidy, while the banks are offering 40 per cent loan.

Inaugurating the training programme on shade net and poly house methods organised by the horticulture department here, Mr. Arun Kumar said that instead of going for paddy, the farmers could opt the crops that had have huge demand in the market.

### **Bankers support**

“A farmer from Peddapuram is already cultivating capsicum by using the shade net and poly house methods. This is time for all the farmers from the Agency and upland areas to commence the cultivation of new crops with due support from the government and from the banks,” he said.

Zilla Parishad chairman Namana Rambabu highlighted the need for switching over to natural farming and recalled the training session conducted by natural farmer, Subhash Palekar, for the farmers from the State.

### **Profitability aspect**

“Farmers can make cultivation profitable by choosing market-oriented crops. Since the government is extending its full support, it is time for farmers to take the right decision,” he said. Scientist from YSR Horticulture University Ravindra Babu, Assistant Directors of Horticulture M. Sarvanand, Srinivasa Rao, Lead District Manager S. Jagannadha Swamy and other officials were present.

***Kakinada Collector H. Arun Kumar inaugurates training programme on shade net and poly house methods***

### **Coffee blossoms kindle planters' hopes**

*Flowers give hints of crop pattern in the harvest season*





Coffee plants in the high range have blossomed after unexpected summer showers a few days ago. The flowers are spread across an expanse at Kattappana in Idukki district.

The hills and valleys of the coffee-grown high range are now covered with a white carpet of flowers. The air is filled with a subtle aroma of coffee flowers that one can experience only once a year.

This flowering season kindles hope for the farmers to the next harvesting season that will begin by December.

Like the Neelakurinji and cherry blossom, the unified flowering season of coffee plants rejuvenates the body and mind like a cup of coffee in the morning. No other cash crop has the unique feature of a unified flowering season as that of blossoming coffee.

The flowers are a signal to the crop pattern of the coming harvesting season.

If the plants are filled with the flowers, farmers say there will be a good crop in the next season.

The rock-bees make it a feast as the flowers are a favourite honey agent for them.

As the coffee plant is less sensitive to the vagaries of climatic changes, it is mostly free of chemical pesticide and fertilizer application. It is the one that provides a predictable crop pattern through the flowering season.

There are different flowering seasons for each variety like Robusta and Arabica. Robusta is the largely grown variety in the district.

### **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.

### **31 species of birds spotted at Otteri Lake**



Waterbirds seen at the Otteri Lake inside Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur —Photo: Special Arrangement

*As many as 7,256 birds counted in a day-long census*

A day-long census of birds that arrived at Otteri Lake in Vandalur was carried out by the Forest Department on Friday.

The census is an annual feature and focusses on the arrival of new birds and the increase in their numbers compared to the previous years, officials said.

A group of department staff and animal keepers at Arignar Anna Zoological Park conducted the survey.

The lake has a water-spread area of 16 acres and is protected with a 635-metre-long bund. The water storage capacity of the lake is about 8.5 crore litres. Due to the rain in November and December last year, the lake was brimming with water and as many as 31 species of 7,256 birds were recorded by the surveyors.

The species spotted include Openbill stork, grey heron, white ibis, little egret, great egret, cattle egret, Indian cormorant, little cormorant, night heron, pond heron, darter, glossy ibis, common moorhen, white-breasted water hen, dabchick or little grebe, spoonbill, spotbill duck, and common coot, officials said.

The Indian cormorant accounted for 3,259 of the birds counted, followed by the little cormorant at 1,756, zoo officials added.

### **Government order on debris management plant soon**



Building debris on the banks of Valankulam Tank in Coimbatore.— File Photo: S. Siva Saravanan

The Coimbatore Corporation's proposal to end the indiscriminate dumping of construction and demolition waste in water bodies and along roads by way of a waste handling plant will get soon State Government sanction.

As and when the proposal gets sanctioned and the waste management plant operational, it is expected to take away 100 tonnes a day off the water bodies and roads.

According to sources, the government will this week pass an order asking the corporation to go ahead and implement the project.

The corporation will then float tenders for the Rs. 9 crore project. Officials in the civic body said that the plant would have the capacity to process 100 tonnes waste a day.

At present, the city generated around 90 tonnes debris.

The Corporation would award the contract for operating the plant to the highest bidder who would also be in charge of the transportation.

The civic body had identified 20 -25 sites across the city from where the contractor would pick up the waste. Members of the public or builders could dump the waste in those sites.

To transport the waste the Corporation would pay the contractor, just as it was doing for solid waste management, the officials said.

The contractor would process the waste and produce hollow blocks, paver blocks or other materials that could be used in construction. The contractor would be in-charge of marketing the products, they added.

### **Fish species, birds under threat as water level in Kolleru lake drops**

*Incidents of hunting make officials wary*



Dead birds seized by Forest Department personnel near Mandavalli in Krishna district.—PHOTO: BY ARRANGEMENT



The decrease in water level in Kolleru lake at Atapaka Bird Sanctuary will result in the death of fish on a large scale and rise in hunting of birds in the lake bed villages, said the Forest Department officials.

With the water levels dipping up to one foot in the 320-acre pond in the lake at Atapaka in Kaikalur mandal, many birds are moving out of the habitat in search of feed. If the same situation continues, the pond will dry up completely during summer, the Wildlife Division authorities of the Forest Department cautioned.

The pond, located between Krishna and West Godavari districts, dried up twice in the last two years and fish worth crores of rupees died due to drop in dissolved oxygen levels in the lake.

Villagers from Komati Lanka and Atapaka caught fish, which was exported to Maharashtra, West Bengal and other States.

“Some hundreds of species of birds are nesting in Atapaka. Colourful birds such as painted storks, grey pelicans, large whistling teals, common teals, black tailed godwits, Northern pintails, Stilts and many water birds roost in the lake and they depend on the fish in Kolleru,” said Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) of Kaikalur Sub-Division, K. Vinod Kumar.

Recently, the Mandavalli base-camp forest officials arrested three persons for hunting birds at Ingilipaka Lanka village. They seized 42 dead birds from their possession. Earlier too, the authorities booked villagers in Kolleru lake bed villages for hunting birds.

### **Meat being sold**

“The hunters sell birds at Kaikalur, Mandavalli, Mudinepalli, Kalidindi, Akiveedu, Undi, Bhimavaram, Gudivada, Eluru, Palacole, Narsapuram, Ganapavaram and other places. They also sell meat at higher price in villages,” said a local P. Raghavamma.

“There was a great demand for bird meat in hotels on the border villages in Krishna and West Godavari districts. Some hotels are famous for Kolleru fish and bird’s meat,” another villager S. Ramakrishna said. Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Eluru Wildlife Division, P. Sivashankar Reddy, said the decrease in water levels in the lake at Atapaka is disturbing the atmosphere in the sanctuary.

He urged the officials concerned to release water from the Krishna to Atapaka to protect fish and birds in the lake.

“When the water level falls in the pond, villagers enter the lake in huge numbers to catch fish. Then birds which get disturbed fly into open lands and villages, and hunters kill them. If there is no water in the lake, birds will scatter and there is no security for them,” the DFO said.

“Due to less feed, birds are flying away in search for food. If we maintain four-foot water in the pond, we can save fish and birds would not be disturbed from the pond. We are representing the matter to higher officials in Forest Department and also the officials of both the districts,” said Mr. Vinod Kumar.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### ‘Govt has done much; it’s up to us to deliver’

Future Group head Kishore Biyani on ease of doing business, and Budget expectations



Expectations are running high that Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will present a Budget for Bharat this time around. Bloomberg TV India caught up with Future Group CEO Kishore Biyani to get a perspective on how he perceives the Budget should be. The amount of work that has gone into attracting FDI is “exemplary” and it all depends on how companies capitalise it, he said.

**All indications are that the Budget may have a massive social sector and rural thrust. We are in fact calling this a Budget for Bharat. What are your views on that?**



I think the government is doing its bit by creating the whole environment in which an entrepreneur can work fearlessly to a certain extent. They are improving the ease of doing business. They want business and economic activity to increase in the country. How we as an entrepreneur can participate in what the government is doing is something which we would be looking forward to.

I expect that the government will announce something in terms of fiscal direction or the strategy on how they want to look at the economy in terms of allocation of resources.

We believe the overall direction is very positive, and it is for entrepreneurs to deliver on that.

**The agriculture sector has been in distress over the past couple of years and that of course is having a ripple effect throughout the economy. What can the Centre do to address this particular issue?**

I think what the government wants is stability in prices. It wants rural incomes to go up. And I think the government is taking all the measures to make these two things happen.

When the rural incomes go up, consumption will rise. They have to see to it that there is no distress anywhere, especially on the rural side of the economy, and sustain that. So I think the government will increase spending, which I think will be helping the overall economy.

We expect that from June onwards the Pay Commission mandate of salary hike will be disbursed.

And that should help the economy in a certain way. So there are many measures which we are expecting from June onwards that will be quite positive for the economy.

**As someone who knows the pulse of the average Indian consumer, what do you think the Centre needs to do to stimulate demand?**

I think overall we are seeing a contraction in economy in the form of resources.

The values of the commodities have come down significantly and India works a lot on self-employed people who are dependent on the value chain of the whole commodity cycle. When commodity prices come

down, the overall percentage of income that a trader or an agent or a commission agent gets reduce substantially.

Secondly, the agriculture growth in some parts of India has not been up to expectation. Once they improve or we recalibrate to a new world of prices, we will see the economy growing.

But overall we are not seeing any contraction on the demand side on many products. We are not seeing consistency in what is required in a very buoyant market but we see a steady market.

But we expect that the market should improve by June to a level much better than today.

### **How will the government promise to reduce corporate tax and phase out exemptions at the same time?**

I think the government has its own way of looking at things and for us it is all about the cost of doing business. And if the cost of doing business is favourable, the business prospers.

### **What more can the government do to attract foreign investments?**

I think India has done a lot in terms of attracting foreign investment. I think the amount of work that has been done in the last one year is exemplary.

Foreign companies are more excited about India than Indians are. And I don't think there has ever been an environment like this. It is all about capitalising on what has been done to make this into reality. And we are seeing a lot of traction happening already.

### **Sugar co-operative federation asks mills to fulfil export obligation**



The National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSF) on Friday asked its members to export the entire quota allocated by the government and not withhold stocks in anticipation of rise in prices in the coming season.

The government has made it mandatory for mills, both private and co-operatives, to export four million tonnes of sugar in the 2015-16 season (October-September) in order to sell surplus stocks in global market and improve cash flow of the millers for making sugarcane payment to farmers.

India has surplus sugar stock on account of bumper production in last five years, depressing local prices.

“Sugar export under the Minimum Indicative Export Quota (MIEQ) scheme is mandatory, failing which the mills shall be deemed to be violating the directives of the government. We would, therefore, urge the member factories to cooperate with the government in its initiative to improve the financial liquidity of the sugar industry through liquidation on surplus stock by way of fulfilment of quota obligations and participation in supply of ethanol to OMCs for blending in petrol as early as possible and take advantage of the production subsidy,” NFCSF said in a statement.

Stating that the market sentiments have improved in the last six months on likely decline in production in 2015-16 season, the Federation said, “In anticipation that sugar prices in the coming season would go up, Indian sugar mills have started holding sugar than to export.”

Many sugar mills are focussing more on domestic sales thereby delaying their export obligation. “More and more sugar exports will help in reducing the sugar stock, which has started depressing the domestic prices. If domestic prices of sugar will improve on compulsory exporting sugar, it would help mills to clear their cane price dues to farmers.”

Mills have so far exported only 0.92 million tonnes (mt) of sugar, it said, adding that “if sugar export does not speed up, industry will not be able to achieve the target of MIEQ and the 2015-16 season will close with higher sugar stock“.

Sugar production in India, the world’s second biggest producer after Brazil, is expected to decline to 26 mt in 2015-16 season against 28.3 mt in the previous year.

However, the total availability this season is pegged at 35.1 mt, which is much higher than the domestic demand of 25.8 mt.

**Reuters adds:** Analyst FO Licht sees a smaller global sugar deficit of 1.5 mt in 2016/17, due in part to a projected increase in EU output, compared with a 6.5-mt-deficit in 2015/16, according to data made available to Reuters on Friday.

Analyst Stefan Uhlenbrock said the 2015/16 deficit forecast of 6.5 mt had been raised from an earlier forecast for a 5.2 mt deficit, due to downward revisions to the crop outlook in Thailand and India.

### **Oil palm industry seeks ₹10,000 crore Budget allocation**



Faced with tough challenge from imports, the oil palm industry has asked the Centre to increase the duty to 45 per cent from the current 12.5 per cent to give a breather to the indigenous industry.

The Oil Palm Developers and Processors Association (OPDPA) said that increase of import duty on palm oil would give a boost to the domestic production, besides helping the country save foreign exchange.



“We need to have an exclusive import policy for the industry to ensure a sustainable pricing level for farmers and the industry,” OPDPA President Sanjay Goenka has said.

In a wish-list sent to Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, he said the Union government should consider allocating ₹10,000 crore for the development of the palm oil industry to promote domestic cultivation.

He also wanted the government to set up a separate Board for the planned development and protection of the industry. “The Board could address issues faced by the industry on a priority basis,” he said.

The association demanded efficient implementation of market intervention scheme (MIS) to bail out the farmers when faced with crop losses incurred due to market fluctuations.

The present scheme attends to their problems only during natural calamities.

It felt that the country could reap the benefits of the recent decision to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) only if the government relaxed the Urban Land Ceiling Act.

He said the country could increase the acreage by allotment of secondary forest land to companies for palm plantations.

### **Special status**

The association wanted the government to consider according a special status to the North-Eastern States, encouraging more farmers to take up palm cultivation.

“They must be given logistic and infrastructure support,” he said. North East States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram amongst others which has fertile and virgin land pools should be given special status with respect to palm oil cultivation.

The special status benefits should include logistic/ infrastructure support to the developers, additional farm amenities to the farmer. This will not only help the growth of oil palm industry but also leads to economic development of the region.

For oil palm manufacturing industries, the association wants the Centre to consider the long gestation nature of the plant and the high capital cost



incurred in setting up a mill. Hence, the government must provide relief to the developers in terms of taxation benefits and mill subsidies.



## Farm solutions

The new digital agri market platform and crop insurance scheme are welcome initiatives



Farm distress resulting from back-to-back monsoon failures and falling price realisations in most crops has arguably posed the biggest challenge, economically and politically, for the [BJP](#)-led Centre. It has prompted initiatives that may not have received official priority in the normal course — which is always the case with agriculture.

On Thursday, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) unveiled the operational guidelines for a new crop insurance scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), at a farmers' rally in Madhya Pradesh. He also announced the creation of a National Agriculture Market (NAM), a digital platform for farmers to sell their produce to buyers anywhere in India, from April 14. Whatever may be the political calculations behind their launch and timing, both are potentially game-changing.

Currently, insurance penetration extends to hardly a fifth of the country's cropped area. This is only to be expected when policy claims cannot cover even half of the value of produce in the event of crop failure. The PMFBY not only keeps the premiums low at 1.5-2 per cent for seasonal and 5 per cent for annual horticultural crops, but also removes any artificial capping of the sums insured that result in low claims being paid to farmers. That makes it more attractive for farmers to take insurance protection.



True, such low premiums and allowing farmers to claim the full value of a crop linked to its normal threshold yields and MSP could entail additional fiscal costs. But subsidy on crop insurance is any day preferable to that on electricity, water or fertiliser. The former encourages farmers to invest in productivity improvements and new technologies; the latter promotes inefficient resource use. Also, with more farmers joining in, the actuarial premiums would come down through increased spreading of risks, thereby helping to contain the government's subsidy burden.

Equally welcome is the move to expand the farmer's universe of buyers beyond traders/ commission agents licensed to operate in the designated mandis of his area. Giving farmers the choice to accept the bids of local traders or those of online buyers can lead to higher price realisations, just as a robust crop insurance system is the best way to deal with weather and disease risks that are intrinsic to agriculture. India's farmers need more such long-term solutions, as opposed to populist loan waivers and distortionary subsidies.

### [How to make healthy strawberry cheesecake, yes really](#)



Why would you take on an endurance-testing vegan and gluten-free diet with all its promise of mystical communion with nature and better health when you can have a gooey chocolate tart from the city's best patisserie? Raveena Taurani, founder and owner of Yogisattva, a one-year-old organisation that has been promoting raw and plant-based food in Mumbai, has the answers. Taurani, who has always been a vegetarian, was introduced to raw and plant-based food at a Ashtanga yoga retreat in Goa and has been hooked since.

She says, "Devoid of any dairy or refined sugars – I gained amazing muscle strength in the span of just two weeks without any additional protein supplement. I had great energy, slept better and overall felt nourished and happy. After that – there was no going back."

Taurani enrolled for a chef training course in Bali to learn vegan, raw and gluten-free cooking.

At Yogisattva's cooking class this weekend, participants can learn how to make a dish for every course right from almond butter and dairy free chai for breakfast to grain-free wraps with organic vegetables for lunch or dinner to vanilla strawberry "no cheese" raw cheesecake for dessert. While "no cheese" cheesecake is a dietary oxymoron, Taurani's recipe promises to deliver on taste.

She adds, "The quality of dairy has largely depleted since our ancestors' generation and the excessive hormones induced in the milk make it a health hazard. It's important to note – that cows get their nutrition from plants, so why don't we remove the middle source and directly go to the plants for our nutrition?" But how sustainable is a raw and plant-based diet? Says Taurani, "For raw food, the challenge is to source good quality organic produce. While I get great quality fruits and vegetables sourced from organic farmers, I often struggle with the quality of vegetable leaves that you would use in a salad. Plant based cooking allows you to experiment with different produce that cannot be eaten raw. Some vegetables such as eggplant, lady's finger and broccoli have to be cooked for their nutrients to become available for the body to absorb."

It helps that Taurani is not a rabid evangelist of vegan and gluten free diets. She says, "Many people are accustomed to think that diets mean only an exclusion of foods – hence, I urge people to think of what you can include rather than exclude. I ask them to focus on making a lifestyle change which is a long term solution opposed to a diet change which is a short term solution." The key is to find a balance as she puts it. The best part of the class is that while Taurani sources a lot of ingredients such as hemp seeds and raw cacao from outside of India, all the cooking she teaches uses ingredients that are easily available in India



**THE TIMES OF INDIA**

[Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture to hold seminar on 'solar rooftop systems](#)

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.