

02.01.2016

THE HINDU

Government electrifies 20% more villages

The government has electrified 20 per cent of the villages that were without power at the start of this financial year, according to an analysis by *The Hindu* of the data provided by the Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY).

As of January two, 2016 the DDUGJY had electrified 3,656 or 20 per cent of the 18,452 villages without power at the start of this financial year.

In July last year, the DDUGJY said it aimed to provide round-the-clock power to rural households and adequate electricity to agricultural consumers.

The scheme had an outlay of Rs 76,000 crore out of which the Centre committed to provide a grant of Rs.63,000 crore.

Of the remaining 14,796 villages that still had to get electricity, work had started in only 1,843 (12 per cent) of them.

Out of the 5,522 villages inspected by the DDUGJY officials, 13 per cent had missed the milestones set for them for electrification.

V-C upholds UAS-R report on Bt cotton loss

Fallout of pink bollworm pest attack

Amidst sharp criticisms and objections by farmers' organisations and independent cotton experts to the report submitted by a team of agricultural scientists from University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur (UAS-R) on Bt cotton destruction in pink bollworm pest attack in Raichur district, P.M. Salimath, Vice-Chancellor of the University, firmly upheld the report by categorically stating that the report was objective and in favour of affected farmers. He was responding to the queries on the issue at a press conference in Raichur on Saturday.

“Upon the request by Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, Raichur, our team of experts visited 14 villages in Raichur district where Bt cotton was destroyed by pink bollworm. It found 70-80 per cent destruction in nine villages and around 50 per cent destruction in the remaining five

villages. We have submitted a concise report to the Joint Director mentioning the findings. The report unambiguously stated that the Bt cotton crop was destroyed by pink bollworm despite farmers having taken all precautions and followed recommended cultivation methods. The point naturally goes in favour of farmers and supports them in their claim for compensation from seed companies,” he said.

A team of agriculture scientist from University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, along with experts from UAS-R will revisit destroyed cotton fields shortly and come up with a more comprehensive report.

Asked why the report talked only about the extent of loss and not anything about Bt technology and its feasibility in our climatic conditions, Mr. Salimath said that the technology could not be rejected without proper investigation and research, which was not possible in a short time.

“Nothing is permanent. Technologies develop and collapse after a period of time. Obsolete technologies need new touch to remain relevant. Farmers have reaped rich profits from Bt cotton all these years. Now pink bollworm has posed a new challenge. We need to develop the Bt technology to address the newly cropped up issues of rejecting the technology itself once and for all,” he said.

He denied the allegations that University scientists were ganged up with Bt cotton seed companies. “No scientist or university can join hands with corporate companies to mislead and betray poor farmers. All our efforts are farmer-centric and development-driven.”

Coordination

Mr. Salimath said that, he, in a meeting with Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, had proposed to form a coordination committee of all agricultural and horticultural universities in the State which could address the common agrarian issues with a proper coordination.

“Agriculture universities need to work with proper coordination. The crops and cropping patterns in North Karnataka, including Hyderabad Karnataka, are similar and the issues are also similar. At least, Dharwad and Raichur agriculture universities need to work in coordination to address these common issues with a proper structure. The Agriculture Minister has shown interest and given the green signal for forming such structure,” he said.

Jayalalithaa launches ‘Amma seeds’ scheme for farmers

Implementing an announcement made in the Tamil Nadu Assembly in 2014 for farmers’ welfare, Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa has launched the scheme ‘Amma Seeds’ which is aimed at providing quality seeds, the state government said on Saturday.

In an official release here, the state government said Jayalalithaa had recently launched the scheme by giving away seeds to three farmers here.

She had proposed the scheme in 2014, saying quality, certified ‘Amma Seeds’ would be available through ‘Amma Service Centres’ across the state.

Jayalalithaa, fondly addressed as Amma by her supporters, had earlier launched Amma Canteens providing subsidised food and Amma mineral water, among others.

An official release said the motive of the scheme was to encourage farmers to use certified seeds.

The Tamil Nadu State Seeds Development Agency will act as the nodal body to coordinate seed farms, production units and the farmers, it added.

Further, the release said, she has allocated a sum of Rs. 5.37 crore towards expanding a scheme for urban citizens to grow vegetables at home to Tiruchirappalli and Madurai.

The scheme, which involves providing kits with necessary ingredients to people to try out vegetable farming in urban environment, has been successfully implemented in Chennai and Coimbatore following its launch last year, it said.

Under agriculture department initiatives, she inaugurated a series of buildings including dry and cold storage facilities constructed at an estimated Rs. 28.51 crore, the release added.

‘Enhancing crop productivity vital’

Globally, India lags behind in productivity of most crops and it is of utmost importance that the productivity per hectare is raised urgently to pull out farmers from poverty, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan

Singh said on Friday.

“Productivity and production could not be improved till the quality of land improves. Therefore, improving soil health is one of the most important issues in agriculture especially in irrigated areas where extensive use of urea has resulted in deterioration in soil health,” he told a press conference here.

Improving soil

Centre had been emphasising on improving the health of soil by integrated nutrient management and had announced a programme of collection of soil samples, conduct analysis and issuance of soil health card in a time bound manner.

“Many of our farmers are not able to get the optimal yields from their fields, as they are not aware of the soil conditions. Our goal is to communicate benefits of soil health to the farmers so that they can apply appropriate dosage of fertilisers to increase productivity and profitability,” said Mr. Radha Mohan.

Health cards

He said the government decided to provide soil health cards to 14 crore farmers of the country.

“Five crore farmers will be provided these card in 2015-16 and remaining farmers will be given the cards in 2016-17,” he said pointing out that under the Soil Health Card Scheme Rs. 109 crore have been released till December 2015.

The Minister said the national e-Market will be launched by March 2016 under the National Agriculture Market Scheme (NAM).

“As many as 20 States have expressed interest in linking their markets (mandis). While 200 mandis will be connected by September 2016, another 200 mandis will be connected by March 2017,” he said.

KCR orders 9-hour power supply to agriculture

Decision raises an issue how it will manage both peak and non-peak hour power demand

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Friday asked power utilities to take steps to supply nine-hour supply to agriculture sector during day time from June and uninterrupted supply to other sectors without setting timeframe.

The decision of the government has raised an issue how it will manage both peak and non-peak hour power demand.

The peak hour supply is a challenge because the demand for agriculture overlaps with other sectors, including industrial, commercial and domestic, from 6 AM to 9 PM when there was maximum demand.

The non-peak hour demand management became critical as power was contracted for 24 x 7 supply but only nine hours in day was met. What about supply at night when there was not much demand? Even if the supply was shut down at night, the government was bound to pay for the contracted power, sources said. They added that there were, however, ways to overcome the problem.

Presently, the government resorted to dispersed supply to agriculture for 20 hours in a day by categorising the consumers into groups and supplying them power in different spells. They were divided into two to four groups and given in as many spells depending upon the size of the consumers.

Sources also said one of the ways to overcome the problem of night time management was to promote solar power in a big way.

The officials who met the Chief Minister at Friday's meeting when he asked them to ensure nine-hour power supply for agriculture expressed confidence that 800 MW of solar power would be available in the State by April. An additional 2,000 MW of solar power would be available by the year-end. Telangana State Generation Corporation was working with the objective to get an additional 4,600 MW from all sources by the year-end. The present installed capacity was 4,445 MW, a release said later.

Generation corporation Chairman and Managing Director D. Prabhakar Rao and Director (Projects) Radhakrishna were among those present.

Sources added that nine-hour day time supply was possible with base-load thermal plants alone because generation by hydel and gas stations was not dependable when the contracted load as in Telangana was huge.

The base-load plants operated continuously and maintained a uniform

generation. It required a few hours to either stop or restart generation from the plants. On the contrary, the same was done instantly in hydel stations. Hence, a lot of planning went into operation of the plants.

The man behind the garden city

Much of horticulturist J.H. Krumbiegel's early green nurturing in his native Germany helped him replicate his ideas in Mysuru and Bengaluru. H.P. Sumangala, scientist at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, shares some unknown facets of his personality from her visit to Germany. By RANJANI GOVIND

This year flags off the 150th birth anniversary of the German horticulturist J.H. Krumbiegel whose green intervention in India is said to have helped some of the princely states go greener with aesthetic and functional variety introduced to gardens and horticulture in India. It was not just Mysuru that gained the name 'City of Gardens'. Bengaluru earned the sobriquet 'Garden City' because of his interventions.

It was during the Maharaja's rule that Krumbiegel was recognised and brought over from the Kew Gardens of London to Baroda by the royals there in 1893, but in a few years' time, he stepped on to Karnataka soil and made Bengaluru his home

. When he died here in 1956, Maharaja Jayachamaraja Wadiyar insisted his mortal remains be buried at the Methodist Burial Ground on Langford Road under his favourite African Tulip Tree with a saying "Whatever he touched he adorned." In the beginning of the 1900s India is said to have seen most princely states competing to showcase the best of plants, animals in zoos, and landscapes.

According to garden and urban architecture enthusiasts, only the last two centuries had gradually turned Bengaluru into a land of green as it was predominantly rocky terrain. Britishers had started off with their horticultural experimentations here with samples of plants and seedlings exchanged globally in fair trade as part of their Economic Botany that Krumbiegel was a master at. He continued the trade at Lalbagh which was chosen as the centre for seed research and trading, even as he took over as the Superintendent of Government Gardens in 1908.

Apart from all the green activities of colour parade with regard to flowering trees and plants, tree avenues with landscaping and introducing India to the best of English vegetables, what was Krumbiegel's background that made him extend a potent green persona to the cities he

was associated with?

H.P. Sumangala, Scientist, Ornamental Crops, Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, shares some of Krumbiegel's unknown facets from her first-hand collection of material on the German horticulturist, as part of her Herrenhausen-Research-Fellowship tour in 2014, when she visited Lohmen, Krumbiegel's birthplace, and other parts of Germany.

Excerpts of the interview ...

Your Fellowship took you to Krumbiegel's birthplace. What are Indo-German commonalities and public spaces there that have helped Krumbiegel simulate the designer elements here?

Krumbiegel being the 'garden bridge' between the two countries, we have some remarkable features of European gardens stamped here too.

Avenue plantations and Gundu topu at several places here (trees planted in circular pattern), and one of the oldest garden in Berlin, Sansucci, with terraces and fountains bear similarity with Brindavan Gardens laid out by Krumbiegel, along with the added fountains.

What is the interesting background of Krumbiegel that you have researched and collected?

Gustav Herrman Krumbeigel was born at Lohmen to Fürchtegott Friedrich Krumbiegel and Anna Emilie Wendton December 18, 1865.

Although his father was a restaurateur, Krumbeigel is said to have had an overpowering influence with the visual appeal of the gardens of Pillnitz laid out by landscape architect Peter Joseph Linne.

As a boy he took the gardeners' apprentice at the Royal gardens at Pillnitz where he specialised in landscape and ornamental gardening and later joined the Agricultural and Fruit Department of the Schwerin Royal Garden in the capital of Mecklenburg.

In 1885, Krumbiegel entered the service of a private garden at Hamburg, where in addition to landscape gardening, he specialised in the raising of rare plants until 1887.

Even with the Imperial Botanical Garden at Berlin offering him a job, Krumbiegel's passion for learning more on horticulture made him enrol

at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, in London, while his penchant to have his English improved made him enter Hyde Park too. Kew always remained on top for its comprehensive collection of plants, its well-stocked library of books on botany, horticulture and kindred sciences, its courses that touch upon varied branches of horticulture, and the care and cultivation of the plant kingdom that Krumbiegel was completely exposed to. His horticulture addiction helped him become part of the Kew faculty, while bagging prizes for his essays on the subject. It was just a matter of time before Krumbiegel was made a member of the editorial committee of Kew Guild Journal, and as the sub-foreman of the Propagating Department at Kew he dealt with varied seeds, especially of the economic plants from all parts of the world where they were tested, germinated and distributed to the British Colonies.

As a scientist at IIHR, what according to you were his propagation methodologies that we are benefitting from?

His interests were not confined to gardening alone. They also sought an outlet in architecture and town planning. Fountains, bridges and pavilions were conjured up in elegant taste to complete delightful landscape pictures.

His knowledge of the geography of plant life, of the economic and meteorological value of plants, of the colour scheme in gardening and his practical genius in evolving picturesque effects, soon transformed the personal properties of the Gaekwads at Bombay and Ootacamund.

The Prince of Baroda, Sayyajirao Gaekwad, brought Krumbiegel over in 1893 to take charge of the royal gardens at Baroda and he later got associated with Mysuru, Bengaluru and Udhagamandalam.

Villagers join hands to protect water tank

Residents of Thandukaranpalayam village came together in a distinctive manner on Sunday for a double cause.

They sow 10,000 palmyra nuts, planted 2,000 saplings of various species on five acres around the water tank, and cleaned it to increase its water holding capacity. The water is mainly used for irrigation purposes.

“Uniqueness of the project is that the entire works, including procurement of nuts and saplings, been done as a collective effort of the residents alone. We did not seek any government funds and politicians were not involved,” said K. Sakthivel, Councillor (Independent) of Avinashi Town

Panchayat, and a resident of the area.

The saplings planted included 'aalamaram', 'arasamaram' and plantain.

The palmyra nuts were procured from Tuticorin, and Tirunelveli.

P. Santhanakrishnan, a Tirupur-based farmer who retired as Joint Director of Agriculture, said that raising palmyra around the water tank was a wise decision.

“The fibrous root system of palmyra will be able to prevent soil erosion from the tank bund and thereby, holds the structure intact,” he said.

“A person has come forward to provide tree guards,” said Mr. Sakthivel.

State subsidy for banana crop insurance premium

Banana growers of the district have been advised to insure their crops with State Government's premium subsidy so as to get compensation in case of crop loss due to natural calamity

National Agricultural Insurance Company, a Central Government organisation, has introduced an insurance scheme to bail out banana growers in case of natural calamities. The State Government, on its part, extends a 'helping hand' by offering subsidy for the premium to this insurance scheme.

Under the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme, compensation is calculated based on loss of yield. Firka-level yield assessed from ten experiments in different villages in a firka is compared with the average of last five years.

If the yield is lesser than the average, then the lesser percentage is determined as 'compensation percentage' to the sum insured.

Premium for banana crop has been fixed as 5.50 per cent for this 2015 - 2016 rabi season and hence the State Government offers 55 per cent subsidy to small and marginal farmers and 50 per cent subsidy to other farmers.

If the farmer wants to insure his banana crop for Rs. 1 lakh, the total premium amount is Rs. 5,500.

After deducting the State Government's subsidy, the beneficiary farmer will have to pay Rs. 2,475 in case of small and marginal farmer and Rs.

2,750 in case of other farmers.

A farmer can insure his banana crop up to a maximum of Rs. 2,68,549 for one acre.

“Banana crop insurance is compulsory for farmers, who have availed crop loan from banks and cooperative credit societies and on voluntary basis for non-loanee farmers in notified firkas only,” Deputy Director of Horticulture, Tirunelveli, T.C. Kannan said.

In Tirunelveli District, Tirunelveli, Madhavakurichi, Naranammalpuram, Melapattam, Sivanthipatti, Munnirpallam, Karisalkulam, Pazankottai, Kurukkalpatti, Sernthamangalam, Kadayanallur, Aykudi, Kalluurani, Surandai, Paimpozhi, Ilatthur, Tenkasi, Keezhapavoor, Alangulam, Uthumalai, Senkottai, Vasudevanallur, Venkadampatti, Alvarkuruchi, Mukkudal, Puduppatti, Pappakudi, Cheranmahaevi, Melaseval, Ambasamudram, Singampatti, Kalakkad, Ervadi, Nanguneri, Poolam, Moolaikkaraipatti, Viyanaryanam, Radhapuram, Thisaiyanvilai, Samuugarengapuram, Vallioor, Panagudi, Pazhavur and Levinjipuram firkas have been classified as ‘notified firkas’ for banana crop for the current rabi season.

A non-loanee farmer in a notified firka can pay the premium in commercial banks and cooperative credit societies, in which he holds the account after filling the details in the prescribed application form.

Application forms and more clarifications can be obtained from Block Assistant Director of Horticulture concerned.

“The banana growers should utilize the opportunity and enrol their names before January 15 so that they can get adequate compensation in case of crop loss due to natural calamities,” Mr. Kannan said.

Aspiring business leaders explore new horizons

Students from Jagriti Yatra, (University on wheels) interact with M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman, MSSRF in Chennai on Tuesday. Photo : S. R. Raghunathan

Eureka is an architect from faraway Assam and is now in Chennai as part of Jagriti Yatra, a 15-day ‘entrepreneurial journey across the country.

She is part of the 475-member team that reached M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, mid-way through their 8,000-kilometre journey. Ms. Eureka wants to be exposed to different languages and people in the

country before taking up entrepreneurship.

Rachana Shah, an engineering graduate from Pune, finds the experience of the yatra overwhelming and adventurous. Recalling the experience with other participants while travelling by train for the past four days, visiting Mumbai, Hubli, Bengaluru and Madurai, she says the trip so far has been inspiring.

Scientist M.S. Swaminathan talked to them about the challenges and the role of the youth in taking forward the agricultural revolution. Amit Raj, Executive Director, Jagriti, says the yatra is being undertaken for the eighth year. The participants visit different cities and interact with leaders, in an attempt to become business leaders in the future, he adds.

M.S. Swaminathan spoke to members about role of youth in agricultural revolution

Cane growers plan to meet PM

Will apprise him of their problems

The State Sugarcane Growers' Association has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to implement the Dr. M.S. Swaminathan panel report to ensure that farmers get fair price for their crops.

It also appealed to Mr. Modi to hold discussions with agricultural scientists, officials and also farmers' leaders to evaluate steps to ensure that farmers do not sustain loss so they remain motivated to continue with their occupation.

Association president Kurubur Shanthakumar and general secretary Athahalli Devaraj, general secretary, said farmers would be demoralised if they did not get reasonable price for their crops. This was a major reason for many farmers becoming debt-ridden and taking the extreme step in the State, they said.

Farmers, who sustained losses resorted to distress sale of lands and were migrating to urban areas seeking labour. This will have serious consequences, Mr. Shanthakumar said keeping in mind the food shortage in the coming years and growing requirement of the country. He also reminded the Prime Minister about the promise made in the election manifesto that minimum support price would be given to crops.

There were many restrictions among banks to sanction agricultural loans, Mr. Shanthakumar said. He suggested that the government fix targets for

each bank for providing agricultural loans and to also simplify the process. Then farmers would not go to private financiers seeking loans on higher interests, he said.

The association plans to meet Mr. Modi to submit a memorandum.

Mushrooming of hatcheries blamed for increase in poultries

Mushrooming of hatcheries across the country has led to increase in production of layer birds that led to increase in egg production. However, due to drop in wholesale price of eggs, most of the poultry owners face huge loss every year, R. Nallathambi, president, Tamil Nadu Egg Poultry Farmers Association said here on Sunday.

Addressing the annual general body meeting, he said that poultry farming could only be carried out in the Kongu region and not in other parts of the State. In the past two years, a farmer who has one lakh birds suffered a loss of Rs. 50 lakh every year. This was due to intense competition prevailing among hatcheries which produced more birds than the required one, he added.

Mr. Nallathambi also said that hatcheries refused to hear the problems of poultry farmers and continued to produce more birds.

Fine

He said that a company was fined Rs. 10 lakh for vaccinating birds with fake medicine. "Only because cooperation is prevailing among us, we are able to initiate action against the company," he added.

Mr. Nallathambi urged the Central Government to come forward in supplying rice, wheat, corn that were lying waste in Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns at concessional price to the poultry farmers.

Also, interest rate for the industry should be reduced and should be on a par with the interest rate as given for agriculture, he added.

Namakkal Revenue Divisional Officer M. Kannan was the special guest for the meeting.

NABARD pegs potential credit plan outlay at Rs. 6,698 cr.

The Potential Linked Credit Plan for 2016-17 drawn up by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has projected the credit flow potential for Tiruchi district at Rs. 6,698 crore, an 18 per

cent increase over the current financial year.

The Potential Linked Credit Plan (PLCP) forms the basis for the annual credit plan for the district. Of the plan outlay, the lion's share of 57 per cent is earmarked for agriculture sector, followed by MSME sector with an outlay of 16 per cent, housing at 10 per cent, education at 5 per cent and the rest for other sectors such as export credit, social infrastructure, and renewable energy.

District Collector K.S. Palanisamy released the document at the bankers' meet held here on Thursday. Mr. Palanisamy stressed the need for stepping up credit flow for capital formation both in agriculture and MSME sector.

He exhorted the banks to increase lending to self-help groups and joint liability groups as group financing mode will enable "inclusive growth" aimed by the government. He requested bankers to support activities in animal husbandry sector, which would help bring supplementary income for farmers.

S. Suresh Kumar, Assistant General Manager, NABARD, said the PLCP takes into account the revised guidelines issued by RBI with regard to priority sector lending. Emphasising the importance of term credit to agriculture, an area-based scheme to support sheep or goat rearing and native chicken in potential blocks has been made part of the document.

K. Jeevanandam, Deputy General Manager, Indian Overseas Bank, the lead bank, said banks had been advised to increase lending to the micro-enterprises in line with RBI's guidelines.

S. Prabhakaran, Lead District Manager, advised bankers to go by the PLCP while preparing their bank or branch credit plans.

S. Thyagarajan, Assistant General Manager, Reserve Bank of India, requested banks to increase agri term lending, which will lead to capital formation in agriculture. The first copy of the document was received by K. Jeevanandam, Deputy General Manager, Indian Overseas Bank.

A lion's share of 57 per cent is earmarked for agriculture sector, followed by 16 per cent for MSMEs

Festival of harvest adds to beauty of rural life

Locals taking out a procession of wooden toy of local deity on bullock-cart at Pedana on Friday. —Photo: T. Appala Naidu

The festival of harvest, being celebrated by farmers and people from other walks of life in and around Pedana town in Krishna district, is in full swing displaying the beauty of rural life.

Dressed up like village woman and man, a pair of wooden toys is being paraded on the bullock-carts which play an inimitable role in agriculture operations round-the-year.

Local deity

The 10-day festival, locally known as Pydithalli Jatara, is an integral part of the life of the farmers and the women folk who engaged in cultivation of flowers and vegetables. The festival will conclude on Monday.

“The festival solely celebrated to offer prayers to the local deity to have been blessed with bumper harvest of paddy and other crops, apart from recognising and honouring the contribution of bullocks in the agricultural operations,” local farmers told *The Hindu*. However, tractors outnumbered bullock-carts, signalling silent ban on the animal-drawn vehicle (bullock-cart) in these villages in the district now-a-days.

“The height of celebration depends on the yield of the crops grown in the kharif season. The celebration is otherwise a mode of thanksgiving to the local deity for better harvest,” said Mr. Ganesh, a farmer from Pindivaripalem village. The joint procession of bullock-carts belonging to different villages shows the unity and integrity among the rural folk.

Amid traditional drum beats, the procession of bullock carts reaches the temple of local deity, Pydithalli, and it ends here after the devotees had her darsan.

The British connection

According to the available literature, the British have succeeded in introducing the wooden toys. Until then, a man tied to the bullock-cart was to be paraded as per the existing customs.

The presence of audience from Muslim community in the festival is an epitome of religious harmony in this tiny town, where Kalamkari art

flourishes.

The 10-day festival, locally known as Pydithalli Jatara, is an integral part of life of farmers

Flower power to go on show in Kochi

The 34th Cochin Flower Show, organised by the Ernakulam District Agri-Horticultural Society, will get underway here on January 2.

The flower show will be on till January 10, said a press release here. The highlight of the flower show will be a florally decorated area of 5,000 sq.ft.

The aim of the pavilion is to make people aware of the opportunities in flower cultivation, the release said.

There will be 20,000 flowering plants on show. Of them, 2,000 will be of 100 different varieties of roses. A total of 2,000 pots of anthurium, and several pots of marigold, petunia, dahlia, etc. will be on show.

Bonsais and medicinal plants will be also part of the Cochin Flower Show. Around 2,000 imported flowering plants will be another highlight. The plants have been imported with financial assistance from the Kerala State Horticultural Mission, the press release said.

Competition

A 'Flower King' and 'Flower Queen' competition for children aged between one and 11 years will be held on January 9.

An agri clinic opened by the Department of Agriculture, will function between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., the press release added.

The aim of the pavilion is to make people aware of the opportunities in flower cultivation.

Soil health card scheme: Centre pulls up U.P.

Pulling up the Uttar Pradesh government for its sluggish progress in issuing soil health cards to farmers, the Centre has asked the State to speed up efforts to ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach the farmers in all districts.

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has written a letter to

U.P. chief minister Akhilesh Yadav, asking the State government to monitor the soil health cards scheme at the 'highest level' so that its best results could be realised in the interest of the farmers.

Notably, a performance review of the scheme for various State governments revealed that U.P. has not been performing to its potential. As against a target of 18 lakh samples till 9 December, 2015, only 4.68 lakh samples have been collected across the State and only 22,894 samples analysed.

When the scheme was announced in February 19, 2015, the idea was that soil samples from 47.7 lakh farmers would be collected over a period of three years and soil health cards issued to them after tests. However, on September 10, the Centre decided that this "important task" should be completed in two years instead of three.

Accordingly, the Centre made a request to the U.P. government through letters dated September 14th and 17th to increase the target of issuing soil health cards in 2015-16 from 15.9 lakhs to 18 lakhs. Moreover, the target for U.P. for 2016-17 was raised from 15.9 lakhs to 29.7 lakhs.

"The Centre has been emphasising on improving soil health by integrated nutrient management and had announced a programme to collect soil samples, conduct analyses and issue soil health cards in a time-bound manner," Mr.Singh wrote in the letter.

Fillip to energy efficiency initiative in farm sector

Union Minister for Power Piyush Goyal has agreed to the request of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to support the Rs.7,500-crore scheme of replacing 15 lakh agricultural pump sets free of cost with five-star rated, energy-efficient ones in the State.

A press release issued by the CEO, State Energy Conservation Mission (SECM), A. Chandra Sekhara Reddy, said that in a bid to give a boost to the farming community, the government was contemplating replacing inefficient pump sets, each costing Rs.50,000, free of cost.

The scheme is also a part of the new initiatives in energy efficiency activities in 2016.

Directing the SECM to implement the scheme in a phased manner as a New Year gift, the Chief Minister insisted that the cost of the pump sets was not the criterion.

Secretary, Energy, Investment and Infrastructure, Ajay Jain, during a meeting briefed Mr. Naidu about the ongoing Rajanagaram pilot project, where 2,500 existing pump sets were being replaced with energy efficiency ones.

So far, 150 pump sets have been replaced and the performance results are encouraging.

It is said that farmers are expressing satisfaction over increased discharge of water up to an extent of 15 per cent and pump sets are yielding about 30 per cent energy efficiency gain.

Centre agrees to support State's scheme to replace 15 lakh pump sets free of cost

Tips to improve productivity in sugarcane

An awareness programme on use of distillery effluent in sugarcane fields to step up soil health was held under the joint auspices of the Kothari Sugars and the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University's Agricultural Engineering College at Kumulur near here on Tuesday.

The programme, titled as 'Impact of post-methanated distillery effluent on sugar cane crop yield', was aimed at sensitising sugarcane farmers to the need for using the distillery waste in their fields to bring down the cultivation cost, particularly the expenses on fertiliser, said K. Ramasamy, Dean of the college.

Inaugurating the programme which formed part of the 'Field Day' celebrated on the occasion, he said that the application of treated distillery waste would go a long way in reducing the pH level. The distillery waste was ideally suitable for alkaline and salt-affected soil. The productivity of sugarcane would increase through the distillery waste. He underlined the importance of conducting soil test by the sugarcane farmers.

A. Sagunthalai, a faculty member and T. Sherene Jenitta Rajammal, Assistant Professor, said that a series of research programmes had been conducted in and around Kumulur. The application of distillery effluent was being conducted in coordination with the college.

S.Pushparaj, Assistant General Manager of Kothari Sugars, and Anna Arasu, its Assistant Deputy Head, explained the chemical action in soil by the treated distillery.

KAU to start repository of research papers

The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) Academic Council has decided to start a repository of research papers, books and other publications of faculty members.

The 126th meeting of the council held at the KAU head quarters here also stressed the need to discourage publication of research papers in predatory journals.

The council also decided to select students for MBA (ABM) based on the score in KMAT (Kerala Management Aptitude Test). Hitherto the university was conducting a separate test for MBA (ABM) admission.

Academic regulations

Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran said that UG and PG Academic regulations would be modified in tune with the times. The council decided to equate M.Sc. Wildlife Science of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun, with that of M.Sc. Forestry (Wildlife Science) of the Kerala Agricultural University.

It decided to include B.Tech. (Food Engineering) also as a qualification for admission to M.Tech. (Ag. Engg.) with specialisation in Agricultural Processing and Food Engineering.

Farm festival drawing crowds

Farm produce being exhibited at an agriculture festival organised by the Gandhiji Study Circle at Thodupuzha in Idukki district on Thursday.

Seminars, exhibition, workshops part of the fete

The annual 10-day farm festival organised by Gandhiji Study Circle at Thodupuzha is attracting huge crowds. Farm produce, cattle, farm equipment and value-added products are displayed at the expo. A flower show is also part of it.

The slogan of this year's festival is 'Protection of soil and water.' Seminars led by farm experts and workshops that discuss grassroots issues being faced by the farmers, besides focussing on global developments in the sector have been attracting good audience. Climate change and its effects on agriculture sector, and government policies that affect farmers directly or indirectly are also discussed.

In addition to arts and literary competitions, stage performances, mostly traditional songs and art forms related to sowing and harvesting, are held in the evening.

200-odd stalls

There are over 200 stalls at the festival being held at the Newman's College ground.

The State Animal Protection Department's stall offers an opportunity for dairy farmers to know about cattle shed construction, cattle feed and protection of calves. Models of low-budget cattle shed, poultry and pig sheds are displayed there.

There is also a separate section for different types of incubators to hatch eggs and protect the chicks.

Stalls exhibiting organic farm produce are a huge hit. Huge tapioca and yam weighing over 50 kg, huge banana bunch and newly developed coconut and areca nut varieties are also on display.

Agriculture Department, HortiCorp, Coconut Development Board, Central Cash Crop Research Institute, Fisheries Department, Anert, Kerala Feeds, Spices Board and Suchitwa Mission are among the participants in the fair. Kudumbasree has come up with various food delicacies at a separate counter.

The valedictory function of the festival which started on December 27 will be inaugurated by Governor P. Sathasivam on January 4.

NABARD projects Rs.6,180 cr. for priority sector lending in Medak

This is 21 per cent more than the annual credit plan for 2015-16

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has projected Rs.6,180.70 crore for priority sector lending in Medak district for the year 2016-17.

This is 21 per cent more than the annual credit plan of the district for the year 2015-16.

Collector Ronald Rose has formally released the potential linked credit plan (PLP) for the year 2016-17 prepared by the NABARD for Medak district Wednesday. G. Ramesh Kumar, AGM(DD), NABARD, has estimated the credit potential by interacting with all stakeholders.

The potential estimated for crop loans is Rs.2,936.40 crore which was 47.5 per cent of total projected potential for priority sector lending for the district.

Term loans

The term loans for agriculture and allied activities including dairy, sheep and goat rearing, farm mechanisation, plantation and horticulture, Agri infrastructure, storage godowns and water resource development was estimated at Rs.1,032.44 crore, which was 17 per cent of projected credit flow for priority sector lending and it is about 26 per cent of total projected for agriculture and allied credit.

As much as 64 per cent (Rs.3,968.84 crore) of the total credit plan earmarked for agriculture lending and allied activities lending.

The potential assured under micro, small and medium enterprises is Rs.973.10 crore (16 per cent) while it is Rs.1,238.75 crore (20 per cent) under other priority sector (OPS) including housing , education, renewable energy and social infrastructure.

The plan also focused construction of farm ponds, vegetable cultivation, dairy, recharge of bore wells as part of the water resources development and tank silt application and vermin-compost units under the land development schemes.

Start-ups focus on e-mandis

The organic farming sector is probably the only agricultural sector to be bitten by the e-commerce bug

Organic vegetables or foodgrains are just a click away in the city. But while the city has seen a proliferation of organic food stores, e-mandis offering organic food are the new rage. The organic farming sector is probably the only agricultural sector that has been bitten by the e-commerce start-up bug.

A new start-up Jiva Bhumi offers delivery of organic foodgrains and pulses. Anil Nadig, one of the founders of Jiva Bhumi, said that they had identified six pick-up points in Kengeri, ISRO Layout, Vidyaranyapura, RR Nagar, Malleswaram and RMV Extension. Buyers can pick up their orders from these points.

Jiva Bhumi is a community based agriculture eco-system bridging the farmer and consumer communities with no requirement of certification.

loss compared to weight loss with diet alone. When diets are combined with exercise, weight loss is likely to be sustained for longer. Research has compared individuals on calorie restricted diets and those on calorie restricted diets with moderate to intense exercise. While the results showed the same amount of total weight loss in both the groups, increased physical activity prevented relapse after weight loss. Several studies have shown that those who keep up a higher level of physical activity are more successful in maintaining their reduced body weight.

Exercise also makes you feel wonderfully alive because it triggers the release of endorphins — chemicals in the brain that make you feel generally happier, calmer and clear-headed. Choose some thing that you enjoy doing. It could be the gym, yoga or a sport. Make it a fun thing and make it a part of your time together. Again, remember that a variety of exercises is better than one single one. Aerobic, flexibility through stretches, and muscle strength all are needed.

Plan your diet on a daily basis

Plan your activities and food in advance. Shop smart. Ensure access and availability of appropriate foods.

Choose adequate amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables like amla, citrus fruits, tomatoes, green peppers, green leafy vegetables, kiwi, broccoli, and strawberries to ensure adequate Vitamin C.

Choose whole grains like oats, barley, brown rice and whole wheat; pulses, nuts and seeds, low fat dairy, seafood, lean meats, green leafy vegetables and wheat germ to ensure adequate intake of Vitamin B and zinc.

** Minimise intake of white flour, white rice and sugar.

** Avoid junk food and poor quality fat (hydrogenated, trans-fats).

** Include good quality fat through natural sources like nuts, seeds, fatty fish and cold pressed oils.

** Snack smart on fresh fruits, dry fruits, nuts, seeds, roasted whole grains, soups, salads, and yogurt.

** Drink plenty of fluids and remain well hydrated. Green tea, jasmine tea, camomile tea help calm the mind.

** Take tea, coffee and alcohol in moderation.

Maintain a food diary

The first step to improve your diet is to increase awareness — what you eat, when you eat and how much you eat. This is virtually a ‘reality check’ and there is nothing more powerful than a food diary. A simple objective tool helps you track exactly what you really eat.

Food diary will show you whether you include all the food groups in adequate amounts, the variety of foods you consume, the amount of sugar and undesirable foods and the frequency of intake. After completing your food diary, you can analyse the foods you have listed by comparing them to the five recommendations for healthy eating. So next time you resolve to improve your diet, start by reaching out for a pen and a paper.

Pamper your skin

Clear, glowing skin reflects overall health. This requires a well-balanced fibre-rich diet, plenty of fluids, regular exercise, quitting smoking and avoiding excessive exposure to sun. The important nutrients for skin include proteins, essential fats, vitamin A, E, C, B complex, selenium, zinc and copper. A good combination of plant and animal protein would include soya, low-fat dairy, lean meat and fish. Essential fatty acids (linoleic and alpha-linoleic acid) which are found in seed oils are important in maintaining lustrous skin. Fatty fish, flaxseeds and evening primrose oil provide essential fatty acids needed for skin maintenance.

Foods that must be included on regular basis include fresh vegetable juices, yogurt, turmeric, wheat germ, plant proteins (daals, sprouts, soy), brightly coloured vegetables and fruits, amla, fish, flaxseeds and other seeds, nuts, avocados and plenty of fluids. Holiday regularly

Be it a cruise, hill holidays or beach vacation, a vacation is meant to recharge your energies and refresh you to cope with routine and work pressures. Some checks and balances are all that is needed to avoid gaining extra kilos during your vacation:

** If possible, schedule holiday dinners at normal meal times.

** Watch your drinks: Avoid sweetened beverages, fruit juices, mocktails and cocktails. Diet beverages made with artificial sweeteners can help control calories at celebrations. Count your alcohol, as it can be a major source of hidden calories as well.

** Choose one significant meal for the day and plan the other meals accordingly. Keep them light, with plenty of salads, vegetables and soups.

** If you are very keen on desserts, then take a bite. If you want a full portion, just have a very light meal.

** Carry appropriate snack food to munch like seeds, roasted nuts or whole grains.

Focus on making lifestyle changes, which include eating right, getting plenty of exercise, thinking positively and learning to cope with stress.

Good demand for CTC varieties at Kochi tea auctions

High-priced teas trended lower

KOCHI, JAN 1:

High-priced teas were irregular and lower by ₹ 3 to ₹ 5 at Kochi auctions, even as CTC varieties witnessed a good demand in dust category.

Major blenders' including Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation was active on good liquoring varieties. In sale no 53, the quantity on offer in CTC grades was 10,24,500 kg, which was slightly low compared to last week.

The auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis said that there was active participation from upcountry buyers, while exporters confined to medium and plainer varieties.

With improved arrivals in orthodox grades, the quantity on offer was 15,500 kg. However, the market barely remained steady and a small quantity of orthodox dust was absorbed by exporters.

In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties quoted ₹ 105-107, medium grades fetched ₹ 90-125 while plain stood at ₹ 72-87.

There was a good demand in leaf category with 175,5000 kg was on offer in orthodox grades. A good demand spurred the market of both select best Nilgiri broken and whole leaf firming to dearer. Others were irregular and lower following quality.

In CTC leaf, all varieties were dearer by ₹ 2 to ₹ 3 and sometimes more. The quantity on offer was 64,000 kg.

In dust varieties, Pasuparai FD quoted the best prices of ₹ 162 followed by both Kallayar SFD and Surianalle SRD at ₹ 159 each. Chamraj FOP-sup green tea came to the top in leaf grades quoting ₹ 331 followed by Sutton GFOP at ₹ 271.