

13.01.2016

THE HINDU

Farmers to get drought compensation by Jan. 25

With the Centre releasing the much-awaited financial assistance to tackle drought in Karnataka, Revenue Minister V. Srinivas Prasad said farmers who suffered crop loss would receive compensation by January 25.

Mr. Prasad told presspersons here on Tuesday that the Centre had released Rs. 1,540.2 crore against the Rs. 2,278.17 crore sought by the State. The compensation would be credited directly into the bank accounts of farmers. Tahsildars and deputy directors of agriculture had been instructed to identify beneficiaries without bank accounts and facilitate opening their accounts in nationalised banks, he said.

While farmers would be compensated for 68 per cent of the crop loss suffered, the other drought relief activities, including providing drinking water and fodder, would also receive a further push, he said.

The Central aid released for drought in the State was the highest ever, claimed Mr. Prasad and recalled that the previous highest was Rs. 1,400 crore released in 2009 during the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's tenure.

In addition to the Rs. 1,540.2 crore, the State government had released Rs. 300 crore. Hence, the total drought relief works in the State would amount to Rs. 1,850 crore, he said, and added that officials had been instructed to spare no efforts in the relief activities.

Additional funds

With the failure of the northeast monsoon creating drought conditions in 12 districts of northern Karnataka, the State government is planning to submit a fresh memorandum seeking an additional Rs. 700 crore from the Centre. Mr. Prasad said he had also sought Rs. 700 crore from the State government to tackle drought.

Water release from Bhavanisagar

CM ORDERS WATER RELEASE

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa has ordered release of water from the Bhavanisagar dam from the even number sluices of the Lower Bhavani Project main canal and extension canals and from the odd number sluices of the Chennasamudram distribution canals.

The order follows requests from the farming community. The water will be released from January 13 and this would benefit about 1,03,500 acres of agricultural lands in Erode, Tirupur and Karur districts

New paddy varieties show good growth in Erode



The CO - 50 rice variety under cultivation on a field at Kattupalayam in Modakurichi Block in Erode district.— PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN

As ADT 50 and CO (R) 50 paddy varieties have shown good growth signs in the district, the Agriculture Department is looking forward to procuring the produce from some of the fields for use as seeds for the next cropping season.

The CO (R) 50, a TNAU-labelled seed variety, is considered a best replacement for IR 20, ADT 38 and CO 43.

The crop of 130 to 135 days duration was released in the year 2010.

The white fine rice paddy variety has been found to be moderately resistant to blast, sheath blight, brown spot, bacterial leaf blight and rice tungro disease, at a field in Kattupalayam in Modakurichi block.

The ADT 50 variety, long duration rice, is a derivative of BPT 5204 x CR1009 released during 2012 by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University for samba season of Tamil Nadu. Tillering is high in the variety and matures in 146 days with a duration range of 144 to 150 days.

At a seed farm at Unjapalayam in Modakurichi block, the variety has depicted resistance to leaf folder. No smut could be witnessed, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Modakurichi Block, Kulandaivelu, said.

Cultivated under SRI, there are 25 to 30 panicles per hill, he said.

The rice is white, medium slender with a 1,000 grain weight of 15.9 grams, reflecting in higher milling yield. According to TNAU, the rice is non-sticky with good volume expansion.

The multipurpose rice is suitable for consumption as meals, making sweets and savouries.

Agriculture Department looking forward to procuring the produce for use as seeds

Solar-powered pumpsets come to the aid of farmers in Vijayapura

Regional Agriculture Research Station has set up one such pumpset



M.S. Shirahatti, professor in Agriculture Engineering, says that the solar-powered system has enabled them to get solar energy free at the Regional Agriculture Research Station in Vijayapura.— PHOTO: RAJENDRA

SINGH HAJERI

With the twin objective of making the optimum use of surface water and effectively tapping solar energy, the University of Agriculture Sciences,

Dharwad, is introducing solar-operated pumpsets for farmers who have availability of surface water.

According to the university, pumpsets with one-kilowatt capacity could supply water to one hectare of land effectively if micro-irrigation methods such as sprinklers or drip irrigation are used.

The Regional Agriculture Research Station in Vijayapura, which comes under the university, has installed one such pumpset at the station to demonstrate its uses to farmers.

“We are drawing water from a farm pond at the station here to irrigate one hectare of land. Before the solar-powered system was set up, we were using a diesel-operated generator which proved expensive.

After installing the solar-powered system, we are paying no money at all as we get solar energy for free,” said M.S. Shirahatti, professor in Agriculture Engineering at the station.

He said that a pumpset will cost around Rs. 1.4 lakh, of which sum the government offers 40 per cent subsidy, banks Rs. 50,000 loan, and the farmer contributes the balance amount.

Elaborating the benefits, Prof. Shirahatti said that the system is best suited to small farmers who have surface water such as a farm pond, shallow open well, canals, and access to a natural water source such as a river course. As it is a common refrain among farmers that they do not get three-phase power supply to irrigate their farms, this system ensures three-phase power supply without any interruption.

“Another advantage is that the usage of micro-irrigation system increases yield by 30 per cent-40 per cent as the water covers evenly the entire crop. It is a one-time investment. Thus, there is no recurring expense,” he said.

Prof. Shirahatti said that the university has been promoting this system during all field visits and at any programme which farmers attend.

Unusual warm weather worries wheat growers



The next 10 days are crucial for the growth of the crop.

Wheat farmers in the country's central and northern States have a reason to worry as the weather department sees the ongoing unusual warm temperature and the dry season to continue for at least next 7 to 10 days — a time critical for this winter crop's growth.

Agriculture experts and farmers told *The Hindu* that if the temperatures did not drop soon and the dry weather conditions continued, wheat yield would be hit adversely.

Rakesh Bains, a farmer in Haryana's Kurukshetra, who has sown wheat in over five acres said if there was no change in weather wheat grain would not develop.

“We are set to suffer another loss it seems. After cotton crop failure and losses due to basmati rice price crash in the last kharif season, we were pinning our hopes on a good harvest from wheat, but it looks like the crop could fail and our miseries will continue,” said Mr. Bains.

Minimum temperatures have been hovering above 2 to 4 degree Celsius above normal at many places in parts of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana during the past few days and are expected to continue to be a little higher than usual for the next few days, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

“It will be mostly dry weather prevailing during the next 7 to 10 days across the northern region and parts of central Indian States,” said B.P Yadav, weather official at IMD.

Yield may be hit

“Currently temperatures are on the higher side and wheat needs cold conditions to thrive. It’s a crucial period for the crop and if temperatures continue to remain high there would be definitely a yield loss,” said P.S Rangi, agriculture expert, adding that rain was also required at this moment.

Pongal O pongal!

The earthen pots are out, there are flowers, sugar cane and turmeric wherever you turn and here is your chance to experiment with the age old recipe of shakkara pongal



A week or so after the New Year is when there is a palpable shift in temperature. The cold of the Tamil month of Margazhi relents signifying the onset of Thaili maasam . This is when a big chunk of South India celebrates the harvest festival. It is a homage to the sun as it begins it’s journey in the northward direction . Rice is cooked outdoors on a wood fire with the pots placed facing the East, where the sun rises. The cooked grains are then flavoured with different kinds of natural sugar before being offered to the Gods. This sweet rice which we refer to simply as “Pongal” is what the festival is named after.

The markets too wear a festive look. Tall, purple poles of sugarcane , the thin sprigs of white dotted poolapoo , fresh turmeric bulbs and leaves ,

newly turned out terracotta pots and seasonal flowers are available at every corner and by-lane. It's a time of the year that I look forward to with much happiness. Not only does it give me the chance to cook outdoors but it also reminds me to be immensely thankful for all that the earth has given us.

This year, the Pongal festival is more meaningful to me as I have had the opportunity to interact with farmers, organic experts and agriculturists; it has made me acutely aware of the need to preserve our farm lands. I understand better now the importance of rice conservation. The overflowing rice as one makes Pongal signifies a prayer for prosperity and plenty, especially for the farmers.

Each household makes many varieties of Pongal. Our family favours the sakkarai pongal made with natural jaggery and the kalkandu saadham made with milk and white sugar candy. This year, I decided to have a pre-pongala experiment with other kinds of organic rice. In addition to the commonly used raw rice, my shopping list also has black sticky rice and red rice. Black sticky rice is very popular in Thailand. It's served with coconut milk and slices of mango which is delicious. Very similar to that is our own kavunarisi. It's used extensively in Chettinad cuisine. Red rice is partially hulled rice. These varieties have a delicious nutty flavour as well as texture. They are high in fibre, nutrients and are a much more complex carbohydrate than white rice. So those are facts to feel good about rather than guilty, when tucking into a bowl of delicious pongal!

The first step to making any pongal is to wash the grains of rice thoroughly, several times. Having decided to stick to cooking in mud pots, I was surprised at how quickly the red and black rice cooked. The mud pots do a fantastic job of retaining the heat long after the fires quiet down to just glowing embers. The black rice cooks to a gluey consistency, yet retains a bite. The colour goes from a solid black to a glossy purplish black. I decided to pair this with the karupatti, the rich black jaggery that is known for its colour and nutrients. The heat turns the jaggery into a molten dark, thick liquid which immediately envelopes the rice, resulting in a velvety, sticky dish of sweet rice. The rice is infused with an aromatic, so I chose to put scrapings of fresh vanilla bean seeds. A final garnish of toasted pecan and walnuts completed my experimental black rice pongal. The white rice pongal is a traditional recipe passed on from my grandmother's home. Golden, creamy and laced with home made ghee, this one is hard to resist. A

generous quantity of milk and powdered sugar candy is added to the cooked rice. Then, fine strands of pure saffron that give it that appetizing hue.

The red rice pongal is garnished like the white kalkandu saadham with fried cashewnuts and raisins. To retain the earthy colour of the rice, a paler jaggery is used for sweetness. This pre-pongali trial of using other unpolished rice varieties made me realize the wealth of dietary options available to us. The mud pots too are very easy to manage on the stove and add much joy to the whole process. The smaller ones are perfect for cooking as little as half a cup of rice and are great for serving from the hob to the table.

In recognizing and choosing other rice grains, we are not only gifting ourselves a more healthy lifestyle but we are also doing our part in preserving the many heirloom rice grains that will help sustain our lands and those that live off it. I am determined to include these high fibre rice grains in my culinary forays. I am eagerly awaiting Pongal morning, to cook them all over again!

Pongal festivities yet to catch up



Farmers wait for customers ahead of Pongal festival at Big Market; (below) workers unload sugarcane for distribution in Muthialpet constituency arranged by a political party in Puducherry on Tuesday.—
Photos: S.S. Kumar

Rains had dampened sugarcane and mud pots sale in Puducherry

The festival of harvest is round the corner but the festivities are yet to catch up in Puducherry.

The incessant rains that lashed in November end and December 2015 have dampened the festival spirit this year.

Sale of sugarcane, earthenware and even clothes has come down drastically when compared to last year.

Farmers coming to Puducherry to sell sugarcane are in for a surprise. There are not many buyers and it has affected their business badly. Farmers from Sirkazhi in Chidambaram are hoping that the sale would increase by Thursday or Friday.

“We reached Puducherry on Monday night. We have not been able to sell sugarcane since morning. If people do not buy, we will suffer huge loss. We have to stay in Puducherry till Saturday and our meals are dependent on the sale of sugarcane. If we do not sell any, we will go hungry,” said Vishwanathan, a farmer from Sirkazhi.

However, political parties are doling out freebies before the pongal celebrations in their constituencies. Each household in Muthialpet received two sugarcane free of cost. Congress State secretary P.M. Saravanan is distributing sugarcane to every household in Muthialpet at his own cost. “We have purchased 25,000 sugarcane to distribute to every household,” he said.

On the other hand, mud pots which were once essential elements in Pongal festival celebration are slowly losing shine. On the day of Pongal, mud pots are used to boil rice with milk outside the house thanking the Sun God. A turmeric plant is usually tied around the pot and sugarcane are offered.

But, these traditional practices are slowly fading away. People no more use mud pots to boil rice and milk. The changing lifestyle and less interest in following traditional practices have led to huge loss for potters.

The pots which were made for Pongal were destroyed during the rains. The government has not compensated them for the losses.

Earthenware are bought from neighbouring villages of Cuddalore, Marakkanam and Villupuram and sold in Puducherry. There are four to five varieties of pots available at the market. Due to rains, the price of the pots has doubled. “The pots which cost Rs. 15 are now sold at Rs. 40. We will

not be able to sell the pots if they are so expensive, says Lakshmi, who sells earthenware at Kosakadai Street.

Seventy-six-year-old Saraswathi, who has been selling pots for the past 45 years, complained that the sales have come down drastically over the past 10 years. “I don’t see any improvement this year,” she says.

Five to six generations of her family have been selling pots at Kosakadai Street.

The Goubert Market always bustling with activity does not reflect the festive mood. The cloth merchants are disappointed.

“Every year, the sale for the festival starts from January 1. This year it is very disappointing. We hope that it would get better by Thursday,” said Ramanathan, a cloth merchant in Goubert Market.

Drought relief: Centre releases Rs. 1,540 cr. for State

Farmers to receive compensation by Jan. 25: Minister

With the Centre releasing the much-awaited financial assistance to tackle drought in Karnataka, Revenue Minister V. Srinivas Prasad said farmers suffering crop loss would receive compensation by January 25.

He said at a press conference here on Tuesday that the Centre had released Rs. 1,540.20 crore against the Rs. 2,278.17 crore sought by the State Government.

While the farmers will be compensated for 68 per cent of the crop loss they had suffered, the other drought relief activities including providing drinking water and fodder will also receive a further push, he said.

The Central aid was the highest ever, claimed Mr. Prasad, recalling that the previous highest was Rs. 1,400 crore released in 2009 during the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s tenure.

In addition to the amount released by the Centre, the State Government had released Rs. 300 crore. Hence, the total drought relief works in the State will amount to Rs. 1,850 crore, he said and added that the officials have been instructed to spare no efforts in the relief activities.

As many as 28 lakh hectares across 136 taluks of the State had suffered drought last year. The Cabinet sub-committee headed by Mr. Prasad, which had been constituted by the State Government, had held nine meetings across all the four divisions of the State before submitting a memorandum to the Centre.

Claiming that Karnataka was the first State to submit a memorandum to the Centre seeking aid for drought after which a Central team arrived in the State and carried out a study, Mr. Prasad said Karnataka had sought relief under the National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF) norms.

Belagavi district had been allocated the highest amount of Rs. 220 crore followed by Kalaburagi and Vijayapura districts, which had been sanctioned Rs. 202 crore and Rs. 113 crore respectively.

Leaving no poor person behind



In this March 20, 2012 file photo, a tribal woman shows her ration card to receive coupons to purchase subsidized rice from a fair price shop under the Public Distribution System in Rayagada, Odisha.

The National Food Security Act is finally making headway in the poorest States. Amplified by reforms in the Public Distribution System, a modicum of nutritional support and economic security to all vulnerable households is now a real possibility.

Dhobargram is a small Santhal village in Bankura district of West Bengal, with 100 households or so. Most of them are poor, or even very poor, by any plausible standard. There are also some relatively well-off households —

they are not rich, but they have things like concrete houses and motorcycles, often thanks to a permanent job in the public sector. Should this small minority of better-off households be excluded from the Public Distribution System (PDS)? Including them costs public money, and they are not at risk of undernourishment. On the other hand, weeding them out is a major headache, as West Bengal and neighbouring states are discovering in the course of implementing the National Food Security Act (NFSA). Also, excluding them creates a small but powerful group of disgruntled people who may be tempted to sabotage the PDS in one way or another. When they are included, there is greater pressure on the system to work.

Improved framework

A house-to-house survey conducted in Dhobargram last month confirmed something we had already noticed: West Bengal's PDS is based on a restrictive, outdated and faulty list of "below poverty line" (BPL) households. Out of 105 households, only 29 had a BPL card or an Antyodaya card (meant for the poorest of the poor). The rest had an APL (above poverty line) card, or no card at all — both ways, they were excluded from the PDS except possibly for kerosene rations. By contrast, 78 per cent of Dhobargram's households are on the new list of NFSA ration cards, which are to be distributed this month. Further, we found that most of the remaining 22 per cent were households that met the official exclusion criteria, such as having a government job or a pucca house with at least three rooms. The new list, based on the Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC), is not only more inclusive than the BPL list, it is also more reliable.

This is just one village (selected at random), but Dhobargram illustrates the major gains that are possible if the NFSA is well implemented in the poorer States. These gains are amplified by PDS reforms, a mandatory adjunct of the Act. The PDS in West Bengal has been one of the worst in the country for a long time. Today, it is undergoing reforms similar to those that have been so successful in Chhattisgarh and were also adopted with good effect by neighbouring States such as Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. Hopefully, they will work in West Bengal too.

None of this is to say that all is well in West Bengal, or even just in Dhobargram. Some poor households in Dhobargram are off the list of ration cards, possibly because the SECC missed them, or because they were formed after 2011, or for some other reason. There are many cases of ration cards with missing household members (this matters since PDS entitlements

are defined in per capita terms under the NFSA). Also, the new list of ration cards includes fewer Antyodaya households than the old list, a problem that has also emerged in other States. It will take skilful revision of the NFSA list to resolve these problems. But at least the NFSA has created a relatively sound framework within which this can be done.

Winds of change

Judging from brief enquiries in Jharkhand and Odisha, which are also in the process of rolling out the NFSA, there are similar developments there. The biggest challenge, responsible for the delayed rollout of NFSA in many States, is to identify eligible households. Even with near-universal coverage (86 per cent in rural Jharkhand and 82 per cent in rural Odisha), this is a daunting task. Jharkhand adopted much the same approach as West Bengal: an initial list of ration cards was prepared from SECC data (by removing better-off households), and later revised based on people's complaints. The main problem with this approach is exclusion errors: there are gaps and mistakes in the SECC data, not always corrected by the complaints process. Odisha followed a different approach, based on self-declaration: ration card applicants had to certify that they met the eligibility criteria, and local functionaries were asked to verify their declarations. The main problem here seems to be inclusion errors: well-off households often get away with claiming that they meet the criteria. The self-declaration approach also requires a reliable administrative machinery — I doubt that it would have worked in Bihar or Jharkhand.

It is too early to tell which of these approaches is preferable. There are also alternatives, such as Madhya Pradesh's pioneering attempt to link the PDS with a database of local residents (the Samagra register) maintained by gram panchayat functionaries. And of course, one can take the view that it is simply not worth taking all this trouble to exclude 10 or 20 per cent of rural households — universalisation is best, at least in the poorer States. What is clear is that we can do much better today than in the old days of "BPL surveys". Among other remarkable improvements is the transparency of the entire process. Even in Jharkhand, the list of NFSA ration cards is available on the Net in a reader-friendly format, with all requisite details. That makes it a lot harder to cheat — gone are the days when the village head dished out BPL cards to his or her friends without any risk of scrutiny.

The effects of PDS reforms have also started showing in the poorer States. Recent surveys in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh point to remarkable

improvements in the last few years. There is no reason why the NFSA latecomers (Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, among others) should fail to bring about similar change. Some of them, notably Odisha, actually initiated the process of PDS reform much before rolling out the NFSA, with very positive results. The laggards have their work cut out.

Looking forward

The picture emerging from recent research is quite different from the impression conveyed by media reports. The latter tend to focus on abuses and irregularities: for instance, the story of a wealthy mayor in Odisha who bagged a ration card, or of someone in Jharkhand who found that 366 ration cards had “inadvertently” been printed in his name. It is certainly part of the media’s job to highlight these anomalies, but the larger picture tends to get lost in the process. There is an urgent need for careful evaluations of the impact of NFSA in different States.

Looking ahead, all eyes are on Uttar Pradesh, one of the last States to implement the NFSA. With a foodgrain allocation of 10 million tonnes or so, and a very restrictive PDS under the old system, Uttar Pradesh has more to gain from the NFSA than any other State. But it is also one of India’s worst-governed States, if not the worst. Tremendous resolve will be required to break the nexus of corrupt middlemen who have milked the PDS in Uttar Pradesh for so many years (mainly under the APL quota, which is all set to be phased out). As election time approaches, it may just happen — that would be a victory of sorts, not only for food security but also for the battle against corruption.

Finally, it is important to remember that the NFSA is not restricted to the PDS. Other critical components include maternity entitlements, brazenly ignored by the Central government ever since the Act came into force. The PDS itself need not be confined to NFSA entitlements: in several States, some households are now eligible for subsidised pulses and edible oil as well. Perhaps for the first time, there are real possibilities of ensuring a modicum of nutritional support and economic security to all vulnerable households.

(Jean Dreze is a Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University.)

SAP not enough: cane growers



Government has fixed it at Rs. 2850 per tonne; farmers want Rs. 3,600.

Terming the State Government's State Advised Price of Rs. 2,850 per tonne too meagre, sugarcane growers have urged Chief Minister Jayalalithaa to review the pricing taking into account the cost of cultivation. They want Rs. 3,600 a tonne. However, a section of growers are happy that the State Government had announced the SAP without succumbing to the pressure tactics of sugar mills.

The Centre had fixed the Fair and Remunerative Price for cane procured during the 2015-16 season at Rs. 2,300 a tonne. The State Government declared an incentive of Rs. 550 including transportation charges of Rs. 100 a tonne, for a total State Advised price of Rs. 2,850.

“Though all public sector and most of the cooperative sector sugar mills had paid money for suppliers last year, private mills had piled up arrears on incentive to farmers for the cane supplied over the past two years. It is close to Rs. 950 crore. Under these circumstances, the Chief Minister has announced the SAP. We wonder whether the growers will get any benefit. We look up to her to ensure that,” says president of the Pettaivaithalai Cane Growers' Association, Tiruchi, K. Anbalagan.

Adverse market conditions have forced the sugar mills to default on payment to suppliers. Though the SAP announcement is welcome, only removal of Value Added Tax on sugar and reduction of VAT on its by products will help mills turn profitable and facilitate payment to farmers. The Chief Minister must help growers in asking the mills to pay the current dues and arrears in one go for the growers to really benefit from her decision,

according to the State technical secretary, Consortium of Indian Farmers' Associations, G. Ajeethan of Namakkal.

Claiming that the cost of cultivation has gone up and the SAP did not meet the demands of growers, general secretary of the Federation of Farmers' Associations in Delta Districts Arupathy P. Kalyanam opines that the thrust of the State Government must be on ensuring that the private sugar mills and some cooperative mills that have defaulted on payments pay the arrears to the growers in one settlement. The State Government must have declared Rs. 3,600 per tonne for the sugarcane purchased from farmers, he adds.

Inquiries in the sugar industry circles indicated that there was a concerted attempt to delay the SAP announcement and even if it were to be done a hiked incentive was sought to be avoided. Ms. Jayalalithaa announced a hiked SAP perhaps with an eye on the Assembly elections, they aver.

Sugar mills want the State Government to waive the five per cent VAT on sugar besides reducing the VAT tariff of 14.5 per cent for molasses and 30 per cent for ethanol. That move will enable the mills to pay the arrears and dues to cane growers, they claim.

Now, their imports from Maharashtra and Karnataka are cheaper crippling the mills here. Also, the TANGEDCO is yet to pay amount for the power purchased from sugar mills with co generation facility.

Good response to first-ever alumni meeting held at RIVER



Students of Adhiparasakthi Agricultural College raise two varieties of rice following the SRI technique in a farm on the college premises.

Office-bearers for the alumni association elected and nearly 80 participated with their families

The Puducherry Government run-Rajiv Gandhi Institute Of Veterinary Education and Research held its first RIVER Alumni Meet which saw 80 alumni and their families participating, with some of them coming from as far as the US, UK and Ethiopia, said the institute in a press release.

This is the first time an alumni meet is being held since the first batch of students graduated in 1999, and was thus a special occasion.

So far, 17 batches of undergraduate students and 8 batches of postgraduate students have earned their degrees here. Participants discussed about ways to give back to the institute and society at large.

Office-bearers for the alumni association were also elected.

Dean B. Ramesh Kumar, in his address, expressed happiness at the large turnout. Participants were entertained by a performance by drummer Trilok Swaminathan.

The meet was also attended by Chairman of Pondicherry Veterinary College Society S. Velmurugan and faculty members.

‘TAKE VENTURE ROUTE TO IMPROVE VILLUPURAM’

Women students were asked to transform Villupuram into a developed district by becoming entrepreneurs during the prize distribution ceremony for an essay competition on ‘Preventive Vigilance as a tool for good governance’ held at the Theivanai Ammal College, Villupuram.

T. Swaminathan, Assistant General Manager, Indian Bank, Villupuram, advised students on preventive and punitive vigilance measures to create a corruption-free society, said a press release.

He emphasised on the need for adopting a humanitarian approach while delivering official duties, citing real life examples.

R. Rajendran, Lead District Manager, Villupuram, explained the need for vigilance and the requisites of good governance.

Mr. Swaminathan distributed the first prize of Rs. 2,000 to S. Arthi, a student of M.A. English, Rs. 1,500 as second prize to R. Arathi, a student of Bachelors of Computer Applications and third prize of Rs.1,000 to K. Iswarya, a student of M.A. English.

SHOWING THE WAY FOR SUCCESS

Extending help to Class XII students before their board examination, the Christ College of Engineering and Technology and Christ Institute of Technology jointly hosted 'Vettrikku Vazhikaati' at Pitchaveeranpet, Puducherry.

The programme, attended by 1,650 school students, was aimed at guiding them to score high marks in the examination.

Cheques for Rs. 25, 000 each were also distributed to select students of the Christ College of Engineering and Technology towards their tuition fees through the Helping Drops initiative by M. Ramadass, former Director of Studies at Pondicherry University.

STUDENTS RAISE CROPS

A total of 114 students of third year B.Sc Agriculture of Adhiparasakthi Agricultural College, Kalavai took up agricultural activities for 105 days as part of their course on crop production.

The course aimed to give practical know-how for students on raising crops and understand the difficulties faced by farmers in cultivating crops.

They adopted System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technique that gives more yield when compared to conventional method. The students raised the mat nursery for rice using banana leaf to raise the crop in the main field of about 0.52 hectares on the college premises.

The students raised two varieties of rice following the SRI technique.

They expect a yield of about 9.600 and 14.400 tonnes/hectare.

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON MICRO ORGANISMS

Over 300 persons, including students and research scholars from various colleges and universities participated in the National level symposium on “Prevalence of multi drug resistance in micro organisms” conducted at Adhiparasakthi College of Arts and Science recently.

The symposium was organised by the Post Graduate and Research Department of Microbiology of the college.

S. Balaji, technical officer-A, National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis, Indian Council of Medical Research, Chennai explained the difficulty in treating multi drug resistant TB and its prevalence and spoke on how TB was the leading killer of HIV patients.

S. Jaganathan, research officer, Department of Tissue Culture Anti Rabies Vaccine, Pasteur Institute of India, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Coonoor and Madhan Sugumar, research associate, Department of Microbiology, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry delivered lectures during the symposium.

A poster presentation competition was also conducted. A. Mohamed Sadiq, principal of the college and T. Paneerselvam, head, Department of Microbiology were present, a press release said.

(Reporting by Annie Philip and Serena Josephine M.)

Retail inflation inches up to 5.61%



The official data further showed that prices of pulses were up 45.92 per cent over those prevailing during the past year. Photo: Reuters

The retail food inflation during the month under review was 6.4 per cent for India as a whole.

Rising for the fifth straight month, retail inflation or CPI quickened to 5.61 per cent in December, mainly on costlier vegetables and cereals, limiting the headroom for the Reserve Bank to lower rate next month.

Food inflation too rose to 6.40 per cent during the month, government data released on Tuesday showed.

Retail inflation measured by the consumer price index (CPI) was at 5.41 per cent in November 2015 and 4.28 per cent in December 2014.

Retail prices of cereals and products moved up by 2.12 per cent in December, from 1.7 per cent in November.

The growth in prices in meat and fish stood out at 6.57 per cent as against 5.34 per cent in November while that of eggs was at 0.97 per cent, from 0.5 per cent in the previous month.

The prices of protein—rich items such as meat, fish and eggs generally go up during the winter as demand spikes.

However, seasonal fruits turned cheaper in December, with inflation print at 0.64 per cent although vegetables prices grew 4.63 per cent.

Pulses continue to pose a big challenge for policymakers as the rate of price growth stood at 45.92 per cent, only marginally down from 46.08 per cent in November.

Retail inflation in the oil and fats category moved up to 7.06 per cent while that of fuel and light, it was 5.45 per cent.

“We are not surprised as this is a very sticky consumer inflation, but is well within the RBI target of 6 per cent.

Once the base effect comes into play, I see a downward trend in CPI and a very strong case for interest rates coming down,” Yes Bank CEO and MD Rana Kapoor told reporters here.

The Reserve Bank keeps track of retail inflation to decide on its bi—monthly monetary policy. The next meet is due on February 2.

The apex bank has been targeting 6 per cent inflation target by January 2016.

hindustantimes

Now, distillation apparatus scam hits agriculture department



Dr HS Thind, former head, Department of Soil, PAU Ludhiana, inspecting the Distillation Unit in Ropar on Tuesday. (Gurminder Singh/HT Photo)

Even as the Punjab agriculture department has been tainted by the cotton pesticide scam, irregularities have surfaced in the purchase of water distillation apparatus installed in laboratories of the department in the 2014-15 financial year.

In all, 48 units of distillation apparatus were purchased at a total cost of Rs 74 lakh for installation in 23 labs across the state. Each lab needs an average of 2 litres of distilled water daily to test farm soil samples. The running cost of each distillation apparatus works out to be Rs 12,000 per year, whereas the distilled water required annually (600 litres) is available for Rs 6,000 in the open market.

One of the labs, located in Rupnagar, is getting a 40-litre can of distilled water free of cost every month from the nearby National Fertiliser Limited

(NFL) plant, an agriculture officer deputed there said on the condition of anonymity.

Punjab additional chief secretary-cum financial commissioner, development, Suresh Kumar confirmed that he had assigned the probe into the matter to secretary, agriculture, KS Pannu.

“We are looking into the matter, let us see what comes out,” Kumar told Hindustan Times.

Pannu has already initiated the inquiry, which led to an inspection of the apparatus that was delivered at all 23 labs within three days in March-end last year, as part of the purchases made in 2014-15 from a single supplier, the HT investigation revealed.

On Tuesday, a one-member “inspection team” comprising Dr HS Thind, a retired scientist of Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, inspected the apparatus installed at the Rupnagar lab.

The HT team found that the distillation apparatus could not distil 10 litres of water per hour as only one of its three key elements was functional.

When asked, staff members said the lab was not equipped with the three-phase power connection that was mandatory to run the apparatus. A closer look revealed that even the normal 240-volt electricity connection could not bear the load of the running apparatus that had to be switched off every 10 minutes.

Dr Thind remained tight-lipped about the probe, saying that this was “an internal and confidential matter of the department.”

The lab at Morinda did not even have a water connection, while the distillation apparatus was kept unused. Last week, a team that inspected the Morinda lab found that the staffers had bought a 30-ft pipe with their own money to draw water from a toilet tap. The sanitary ware of the lab was rusty and non-functional.

Industries dept under scanner

Surprisingly, the distillation apparatus was included in the rate contract list of glassware items such as burettes, beakers and slides by the industries department, the nodal wing for such purchases by all government departments.

Things went in favour of a single supplier of all glassware items and distillation apparatus to different departments as certain officials of the industries department introduced a clause — a mandatory “chemical composition” test report of the glassware to be supplied under the rate contract.

The lone supplier had then procured a “chemical composition” test report from a Panchkula-based laboratory. The same lab later denied any such test conducted by it.

Glassware scam: VB probe in limbo

HT had highlighted the glassware scam in July 2014, exposing the purchase of equipment such as capillary tubes, burettes and micro slides by the health department. The capillary tubes were then procured at a cost of Rs 23 lakh, with the listed rate being Rs 95 per piece against the earlier approved rate of 68 paise in the previous rate contract list of the industries department.

The inquiry was then assigned to special secretary, health, Vikas Garg, who said he had already submitted his probe report to principal secretary health Vini Mahajan. Action is still awaited.

The Punjab vigilance bureau (VB) had registered a complaint for a probe into the purchase of entire glassware on behalf of the industries department in August 2014. Till date, the only reply, dated December 31, 2015, that the complainant has got from the VB is that “a report in this regard is awaited from the industries department”. The VB had responded with the similar reply to the complainant in July 2015 also.

Landless households come down in MP, finds survey



Across the country, the percentage of landless households decreased from 11.3 in 2003 to 7.4 in 2013. (Bharat Bhushan/HT file photo)

The number of landless people in Madhya Pradesh came down by more than 10% in the last two decades, a recent survey of the National Sample Survey Office has found.

The report on “Household ownership and operational holdings in India” also found that the state has the second highest average of land owned by families in the country after Rajasthan.

The percentage of landless families in the state came down from 15.2 in 1992 to 12.05 in 2003, and in 2013, it further declined to 5.56, the survey found.

The downward trend in the state is higher when compared to the national figure. Across the country, the percentage of landless households decreased from 11.3 in 2003 to 7.4 in 2013, the survey shows.

During the same period, the average land owned by a household (in hectares) came down from 1.7 in 1992 to 1.3 in 2003, the report found. In 2013, the average land owned per household in the state was 1.12, the survey has found. The change is low compared to the figure at the national level.

Balram Chaudhary, a farmer from Dhana village in Sagar, said one the main reasons for the trend was that people have left farming and moved to urban areas for jobs.

“My father owned 10 hectares of land, and we are four brothers. One is working in Korba, another in the forest department while the third is in Sagar town. So my family is the only one left farming on the land,” he said.

Bhav Singh Ahirwar, another farmer, said that he and his brother inherited 12.5 acre land.

“My brother works in the horticulture department and has no time for farming. So I am the only one growing crops on the land,” he said.

PS Meena, commissioner agriculture production, told Hindustan Times that two factors have played a key role in the decrease in the number of landless families.

“Since 2006-07, the state government has given land rights to more than 2.3 lakh tribes people in the state under the Forest Rights Act...Between 1998 and 2003, the state government distributed charnoi or common grazing land to landless Dalits and tribes people,” he said.

EXPERTS SCEPTICAL

Experts say the data is misleading. Devinder Sharma, an agriculture expert, said such a reduction in the number of landless families was something that needs to be studied as the trend in the country was that more farmers were becoming landless. “There seems to be some anomaly when you look at it from the national perspective,” he said.

PK Bisen, another expert, said that at a time when agriculture land was being converted for other purposes, the number of landless families should actually have gone up. “This data needs to be studied in detail,” he said.

HOW VARIOUS STATES ARE PLACED

Percentage of landless households in MP and other neighbouring states

State 1992 2003 2013

Madhya Pradesh 15.2 12.05 5.56

Maharashtra 19.6 17.66 12.84

Gujarat 16.3 13.60 12.50

Rajasthan 6.4 5.65 3.89

Uttar Pradesh 4.9 3.82 3.32

India 11.3 10.04 7.41

Average area in hectares owned per household in MP and other states

State 1992 2003 2013

Madhya Pradesh 1.74 1.3 1.1

Maharashtra 1.59 1.02 0.9

Gujarat 1.38 1.01 0.8

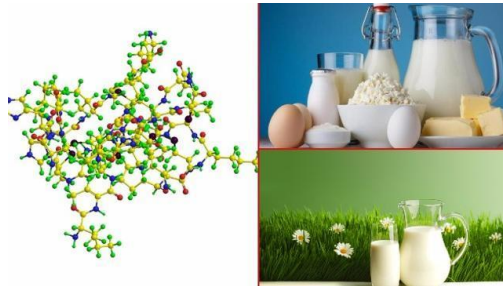
Rajasthan 2.55 2.07 1.48

Uttar Pradesh 0.83 0.61 0.49

India 1.01 0.72 0.59

(Landholdings less than or equal to 0.002 hectares is classified as 'landless' category)

Nisin: A natural food preservative that can kill cancer cells



Nisin, a naturally occurring food preservative that grows on dairy products, delivers a one-two punch to two of medicine's most lethal maladies: cancer and deadly, antibiotic-resistant bacteria. (Shutterstock)

Nisin, a naturally occurring food preservative that grows on dairy products, delivers a one-two punch to two of medicine's most lethal maladies: cancer and deadly, antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Researchers focused on the cancer-killing properties of nisin, a colorless, tasteless powder widely used as a food preservative.

"The application of nisin has advanced beyond its role as a food biopreservative," said researcher Yvonne Kapila, professor at University of Michigan School of Dentistry in the US.

"Current findings and other published data support nisin's potential use to treat antibiotic resistant infections, periodontal disease and cancer," Kapila noted.

The researchers found that feeding rats a "nisin milkshake" killed 70-80 percent of head and neck tumour cells after nine weeks and extended survival.

The mice were given a highly purified nisin dosage of 800 mg/kg. Nisin is typically added to food at the rate of .25 to 37.5 mg/kg. Many foods contain nisin, but nowhere near the 800 mg/kg needed to kill cancer cells.

Several products available to consumers also contain nisin - creams and pharmaceuticals to fight infection and mastitis, and a sanitiser in lactating cows.

Nisin also fights deadly bacteria such as antibiotic-resistant MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*).

“To date, nobody had found bacteria from humans or living animals that is resistant to nisin,” Kapila said.

While promising, the results are small and in mice only, so it is too early to say if nisin will act the same way in humans, Kapila said.

The findings will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

EU’s extension of import ban on veggies upsets India



Centre to step up efforts to persuade European Union to revoke curbs

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 12:

The European Union (EU) has extended the ban on import of four vegetables – bitter melon, eggplant, taro plant (arbi) and snake melon – from

India by another year despite efforts made by the country to put in place stringent quality control and packaging measures.

New Delhi, which had been lobbying with the EU authorities and Parliament for allowing the ban to lapse on December 31, 2015, will now step up efforts for its revocation, a Commerce Ministry official told *BusinessLine*.

“We are disappointed that the EU decided to extend import ban on the four vegetables despite all attempts by our agencies and departments to put in place modern packaging and inspection facilities. We will not let the matter rest and take it up in all possible forums,” the official said.

Packaging norms

Mangoes, which had been in the initial list of banned farm items brought out by the EU in May 2014, but were exempted early last year, continue to find favour with the 28-member bloc with no new restrictions imposed on the fruit.

The items were banned by the EU in May 2014 for a period of 20 months following detection of fruit flies in some consignments.

To assure the EU that such lapses would not take place in the future, New Delhi made it mandatory for exports of all perishable items to the bloc to be routed through pack-houses certified by the Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) under the vigilance of plant protection inspectors.

Rapid alerts

Interestingly, while the inspection teams from the EU that came to check the new systems were satisfied enough to remove the ban on export of mangoes, it continued for vegetables.

“The same inspection and packaging processes are followed for all perishables. If the system is good enough for mangoes, it should also be okay for the veggies,” the official said.

There has been a fall in the number of ‘rapid alerts’ against Indian exports issued by EU members on detection of unsafe consignments after new systems were put in place.

“Maybe the fall in rapid alerts has not been fast enough to satisfy the EU,” the official added.

Retaliating India's ban

Some in the government believe that the continuation of the ban on the export of the four vegetables –which at \$1.9 million annually account for less than 5 per cent of India’s farm exports to the EU – could also be in response to restrictions imposed by India on certain products exported by the bloc such as pork and ham.

“The Commerce Ministry, Apeda and our Embassy in Brussels will continue our dialogue with the EU to persuade it to remove the ban,” the official said.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Kissed by the mist, Nilgiris green teas garner export orders



Premium flavour A view of mist enveloped tea plantation in Billimalai Estate, 10 km from Coonoor PS SUNDAR

COONOOR, JANUARY 12:

Misty tea plantations are a mixed blessing. They not only make for a good sight, but also for some great green teas. But, the incessant mist since the beginning of this year in the Nilgiris has triggered concerns over production shortfall among the growers in the region. However, it has come as a boon for those engaged in manufacturing speciality teas as mist-kissed tea bushes are producing high-quality leaves.

Conducive weather

“This weather has been excellent. The speciality green tea grades now manufactured have come out with exemplary flavour because of the mist impact. Consequently, we have received orders from Japan, Europe, the US and many parts of India for Avataa Twirl, Virgin, White and Long Ding multiple-brewing tea as also Oolong tea manufactured from select bushes in Billimalai Estate, some 10 kilometres from Coonoor. Oolong Lemon tea is connoisseurs’ delight,” Avataa Beverages Production Executive ENR Vejaya Shekara told *BusinessLine*

“What worries us is the low quantity because of high chillness. We have suffered a 20 per cent loss in volume this winter compared to regular seasons. Our production has fallen to 800 kg per week from the normal 1,000 kg. If the bushes get one good shower, that would warm up the leaves and open them up for better blossom increasing production without sacrificing the winter quality,” he said.

Because of their exemplary quality, some such teas had fetched over ₹ 10,000/kg in speciality tea auctions in the past.

Premium prices

“As of now, there has been no change in price because speciality tea auction has not yet been announced. We are offering our winter speciality teas for the same price as in normal season – Avataa Twirl Green Tea ₹ 3,250 a kg, Virgin Green ₹ 3,500, White Tea ₹ 3,750, Long Ding Green Tea ₹ 3,500 and Oolong Tulsi and Cinnamon Tea ₹ 2,500,” Vejaya Shekara added.

These are multiple-brewing green teas and their production during peak winter months from December 2015 to February 2016 elevates them to premium shelves in the global tea market.

“We had not been able to conduct Nilgiri Winter Speciality Tea Auctions last two years as we did not get the usual fiscal support from Tea Board. The Board officials have promised to extend support this year. We are waiting for official confirmation on this”, Mohamed Iqbal, Chairman, Nilgiris Planters’ Association, said.

Export orders

“Connoisseurs have been placing advance orders for our winter speciality teas. We have such orders from Germany, Japan, the US and UAE. Although production has come down by 20 per cent because of harsh winter compared to this time last year, we have been able to cater to our order book,” said D Hegde, Director, The United Nilgiri Tea Estates Co Ltd. “But, speciality teas are a miniscule in the country’s production and exports. Of the 15 lakh kg we manufacture annually, just 1,000 kg falls into speciality tea category. This is the case with almost all manufacturers of such teas. However, 90 per cent of our teas are exported,” he noted.

“The cost of production of speciality teas is almost three times the cost of producing regular teas, mostly because of the extremely low volume. What encourages the manufacturers is the high price they get for such connoisseurs’ teas. Of late, more tea companies are showing interest to manufacture such green teas”, Hegde detailed.

Official data on production and exports of speciality teas are not available but the data for total green tea, including Nilgiri winter speciality tea, is possible to be extracted.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Now, a new variety to replace Samba rice

COIMBATORE, JANUARY 12:

Tamil Nadu Rice Research Institute (TRRI), Aduthurai, is in the process of popularising a new rice culture AD 09367 in the Delta region.

The newly-released cultivar is a cross between BPT 5204 – a medium duration fine grain, released by AP Research Station and improved white Ponni. This new variety, farm scientists’ hope, will help replace the existing popular two decade old Samba variety CR 1009.

V Ravi, Director, TRRI, told *BusinessLine* that efforts were on to popularise the new rice variety which has high tolerance to major pests and diseases, and an yield advantage of 10 per cent over CR 1009.

The new culture, a 155-160 day crop and non-lodging, was tried on 10 farmers' fields last year. It was extended to 80 farmers' fields in the districts of Thiruvarur, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam this year.

According to R Suresh, Assistant Professor, Plant Breeding and Genetics, TRRI, AD 09367 is a medium slender grain, more suited for idli rather than table rice, due to its grain size.

The yield during the initial trial period (between 2009 and 2014) is said to be 7,024 kg/ha. The multi location on-farm trial yield at farmers fields was found to be marginally lower at 6,112 kg/ha.

The plant breeder points out that the station trial yield was 11.2 per cent higher than the ruling CR 1009. The height of the crop is around 120 cm, slightly higher than CR 1009, he said.

Stating that there was a need felt among farmers for a new culture, Ravi said, "the ruling CR 1009 was released more than two decades back and the same, though still grown widely in the delta region, had over the years become susceptible to pests such as Brown Plant Hopper (BPH) and Bacterial (Yield) Blight among others. The yield loss due to such pest attack has been reported at over 60 per cent."

He further explained that CR 1009 was a semi-dry rice variety, suited for cultivation just before the rains in the month of August and ready for harvest around January-February.

Of the total area of around three lakh hectares under Samba rice crop in Delta region, CR 1009 is being raised in the tail-end area of about one lakh hectares, University sources said.

TRRI sources perceive that this area would be replaced with the new rice culture in the next season.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Huge rise in Kharif paddy procurement, says Agri Ministry

'More than adequate' foodgrain stock in Central pool to meet contingencies

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12:

Paddy procurement by Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State agencies till date has jumped to 208.10 lakh million tonne (mt), against 157.41 lakh mt in the same period last year during the Kharif Marketing Season (which began on October 1, 2015), the Agriculture Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

It said as of now, there was “more than adequate” foodgrain stock under Central pool, adding that as on January 1, 2016, there was 237.88 lakh mt of issuable wheat stock and 126.89 lakh mt of rice, which is 50.79 lakh mt more than stocking norms, and “will help in meeting any contingencies arising due to monsoon deficit or natural calamities in the near future.” The Ministry said FCI was stepping up open market sale of wheat at reasonable rates to check inflation and provide supplies to the private flour mills and trade.

Attributing higher Kharif paddy procurement to joint efforts by FCI and State Government Agencies and close monitoring by the Centre, the Ministry said the maximum paddy was procured by Punjab, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.

To ensure that FCI had enough funds to pay to the farmers and State agencies, the Centre said it had given an additional ₹ 10,000 crore in January 2016.

The Centre has already released food subsidy of ₹ 87,000 crore to FCI till date in the current financial year and a ways and means advance of ₹ 20,000 crore, taking the total Central funding of ₹ 1,07,000 crore this fiscal, which is an “all time” record, the Ministry added.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Turmeric pales on heavy arrivals

ERODE, JANUARY 12:

Spot turmeric prices decreased at Erode markets due to heavy arrival. “Arrivals touched 10,000 bags and the price was down by ₹ 200-300 a quintal. Further, as there was no fresh demand from North India, the traders

quoted decreased price,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger variety was sold at ₹ 9,388-10,309 a quintal and the root variety ₹ 8,989-9,537. Of the 4,011 bags offered, 2,120 were sold.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Groundnut oil gains on demand



RAJKOT, JANUARY 12:

Groundnut oil price decreased on the back of low demand from brands and stockists at the higher level. Moreover, limited retail demand also put pressure on the price. Groundnut oil loose decreased by ₹ 10 to ₹ 960-965 per 10 kg, Jamnagar line teliya tin quoted down by ₹ 22 to ₹ 1,387-1,388 per 15 kg. Groundnut oil new tin increased ₹ 10 to ₹ 1635-1640 per 15 kg in Saurashtra while it traded at ₹ 1,680-1,690 per 15 kg in rest of Gujarat. Cotton oil marginally declined on slight fall in demand. Washed cotton oil was traded down by ₹ 2 to ₹ 540-543 per 10 kg and new tin quoted ₹ 990-1010 per 15 kg.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Record imports may hurt palm oil prices in early 2016



January 12, 2016:

India's edible oil import has sharply increased in the recent years due to higher availability of edible oil in world market at lower prices and limited domestic oilseeds crushing.

During the Oil Year 2014-15 (November 2014-October 2015), overall edible oil import has increased by 23.64 per cent or 27.9 lakh tonnes (lt) over the previous year, according to data compiled by Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA).

Due to higher supplies, prices of Crude Palm Oil (CPO) touched a multi-year low of ₹ 352/10 kg during August 2015.

India meets more than 60 per cent of its annual edible oil demand of 17-18 million tonnes (mt) through imports and palm oil makes up about 70 per cent of total vegetable oil imports.

In 2014-15, nearly 9.5 mt of palm products imported from Indonesia and Malaysia, which is nearly two-third of total edible oil imports of 14.4 mt.

In 2014-15, the country imported 20 per cent more palm oil products it imported in previous year. Thus, domestic CPO price trend normally follows the price trend in Bursa Malaysia.

Price movement

After its slide in August 2015, prices gained about 17.3 per cent during September-October 2015 on reports of strong El Nino weather pattern may affect world palm oil production.

However, prices were under pressure during October-November the same year due to supply pressure of kharif oilseed and record import of edible oils in October but soon recovered about 10 per cent in December on reports of drop in palm oil stock. India's current stock of edible oil in various ports and pipeline as on December 1, 2015, according to the latest SEA data, is at 24.30 lt against a monthly requirement of 16 lt.

High stock position

As per latest SEA Circular, India is the largest market for edible oil and it is expected that CPO, RBD palmolein and soyabean oil may further be dumped in the country due to weak physical demand in the world market – China and Europe.

The economic slowdown in China results in lower palm imports. China cut its palm imports from Malaysia by about 45 per cent in December compared to November 2015. Moreover, European countries too slowed down their imports due to seasonal reasons, as palm oil tends to solidify in cold weather.

Moreover, lower crude oil prices and rising competition from soyabean oil is hurting the demand for palm oil in world market for its blending in biodiesel.

Outlook

CPO prices have already factored for the output loss forecast for 2016 as prices have recovered about 20 per cent from their record lows in 2015.

We expect the prices to be range-bound (₹ 400-425 per 10 kg) during first three months of 2016 as the world economy provides a bearish sentiment, as competing oils – especially soyabean oil – is abundantly available in Brazil, Argentina and the US.

Currently, CPO fundamentals looked quite balanced and need further price shock for any bullish outlook.

The writer is Associate Director - Commodities & Currencies Business, Equity Research & Advisory - Angel Broking. Views are personal.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Selling pressure pounds pepper

KOCHI, JANUARY 12:

Spot pepper prices fell on selling pressure of exchange released pepper and reports of 700 tonnes of it becoming available in the coming days. Selected few buyers were covering this material, trade sources told *BusinessLine*. Meanwhile, new pepper arrival continued to stay squeezed. High Range sellers were demanding ₹ 635/kg, while the buyers were at ₹ 625. On the terminal market, 27 tonnes arrived. Spot prices fell by ₹ 400 a quintal to ₹ 62,600 (ungarbled) and ₹ 65,600 (garbled). All the active contracts on the IPSTA remained unchanged. Export prices were at \$10,000 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$10,250 for the US.

(This article was published on January 12, 2016)

Business Standard

Irrigation, rural job schemes to be linked

Decision taken to curb labour crunch; dovetailing would ensure that work done under the PMKSY gets MNREGS pay



The agriculture ministry plans to dovetail its ambitious programme of providing irrigation to each field with the rural employment guarantee scheme to ensure smooth availability of labour.

Officials said discussions have started between the agriculture ministry, which the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchae Yojana (PMKSY) oversees, and the rural development ministry, which looks after the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS).

MNREGS labourers are usually engaged in irrigation projects — one of the main focus of the scheme — but a formal arrangement does not exist, officials said.

Dovetailing the irrigation programme with MNREGS would ensure that work done under the PMKSY gets paid through the job scheme.

Officials said the proposal might also be discussed with state representatives at a conference with the central government, in Sikkim on January 17-18. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the conference. States would play a vital role in implementation of both the schemes. Modi had at a review meeting on the irrigation scheme last year talked about dovetailing both schemes.

The linking would also ensure availability of adequate hands for agrarian work. Rural India had seen a shortage of labourers for agriculture work after the rural job scheme was rolled out with a guarantee of minimum 100 days of paid employment.

RURAL JOB SCHEME UMBRELLA	
660 districts covered	274 mn workers covered
₹151.23* Average wage rate per day per person	38.08* Average days of employment provided per household
₹22,554.43 cr* Wages	
₹31,001.4 cr* Total expenditure	
<small>Note: *So far in 2015-16 Source: MNREGS website</small>	

The PMKSY, launched last year with an allocation of Rs 50,000 crore, would amalgamate three major irrigation programmes of the Centre for holistic development.

The programmes that would be bring under one roof are the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme of the ministry of water resources, Integrated Watershed Management Programme of the ministry of rural development and land resources and the On Farm Water Management component of the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture of the agricultural department.

In the 2015-16 Budget, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had allocated Rs 5,300 crore for the programme.

Out of this, Rs 1,500 crore would be spend by the rural development ministry to develop rainwater harvesting structures, small check-dams and contour buildings under the watershed management programme.

About Rs 2,000 crore would be spend by the water resources ministry for ongoing projects under the accelerated irrigation benefit programme and also for construction of field canals.

Another Rs 1,800 crore would be spend by the department of agriculture for developing water harvesting structures, etc.

According to official data, around 46.34 per cent of India's net sown area of around 140.80 million hectares was under irrigation cover till 2011-12.

In 2000-01, around 40.5 per cent of net sown area was under irrigation, a

rise of around 5.8 percentage points in a decade.

In crops like oilseeds, pulses and coarse cereals, data show that of the total area under cultivation the areas under irrigation were only 26 per cent, 16.2 per cent and 14.4 per cent, respectively.

Dovetailing the same with MNREGS would ensure that work done under the PMKSY would get paid as MNREGS labourers.

Cardamom up by 0.6% on rising spot demand

Speculators enlarged their positions supported by good buying in the spot markets



Cardamom prices today rose by Rs 5.20 or 0.64% to Rs 811 per kg in futures market after speculators enlarged their positions supported by good buying in the spot markets.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in February rose by Rs 5.20 or 0.64% to Rs 811 per kg in a business turnover of 107 lots.

In a similar fashion, spice for delivery in far-month March gained Rs 4.10 or 0.50% to Rs 811.90 per kg in 3 lots.

Market analysts said besides rise in demand in the spot markets, tight supplies from producing regions mainly helped cardamom prices to trade higher at futures trade.

Kandhamal potato growers to get relief for crop loss

BERHAMPUR: Kandhamal district's potato growers, who suffered losses due to wilting of crops during the last kharif, will get compensation. The state government sanctioned a compensation amount of 23,100 per hectare recently.

"The amount will be transferred to the bank account of each beneficiary. The potato growers have been asked to provide their bank account numbers," said deputy director of horticulture (DDH) Sukanta Subudhi.

As many as 497 farmers of around 100 villages in Daringibadi and Tumudibandh blocks had cultivated the tuber on 137 hectares. They had raised potato on an experimental basis under the state government's Mission Potato. The farmers had got input subsidies and technical support from the horticulture directorate.

In a major jolt to the mission, almost entire crops in these two blocks had wilted within a month of the cultivation due to suspected sub-standard seeds, which had been procured from the National Seeds Corporation.

Even though the farmers applied pesticides according to advice of experts, the crops could not be revived. The farmers had demanded compensation.

Father of green revolution MS Swaminathan pitches for field trials of GM crops

NEW DELHI: At the time when many states do not appear to be keen on allowing field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops, eminent agricultural scientist M S Swaminathan has come out with a solution, suggesting that the country's premier research institution - Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) - should organize an "All India Coordinated Project" for the field testing of genetically engineered crops in the farms of Agriculture Universities as it will provide a uniformed method of assessment.

Making a point that the country would not be able to assess the benefits and risks (of GM crops) in a reliable manner unless field testing is permitted, he has also suggested that the government should establish a national bio-safety regulatory authority to look after the entire issue of bio-safety and encourage research in public institutions in the field of molecular biology and genetic engineering.

Referring to a question on permitting scientists to undertake field trials in GM varieties and crops, Swaminathan - father of India's green revolution - told TOI, "The question of permitting scientists to undertake field trials with GM varieties and crops has been a matter of controversy, although field trials are absolutely essential to assess risks and benefits".

"The Maharashtra government has now given permission to seed firms to begin field trials with GM varieties of rice, corn, chickpea and cotton. Probably other states may also take similar action. In this context, the proposal I made 10 years ago that ICAR should organize an All India Coordinated Project for the field testing of GM crop in the farms of Agriculture Universities with appropriate precautions is worthy of implementation. This will provide a uniform method of assessment in farm university-controlled land fields", said the scientist while responding to the TOI's questions through email.

He suggested that the project coordinators of this coordinated project should be a bio-safety expert, so that the field trials can be assessed from the point of view of bio-safety in addition to agricultural utility.

"Sooner this is done, the greater will be the public confidence in the procedures adopted for assessing risks and benefits", said Swaminathan in the backdrop of a complete standstill on the issue of field trials in many states.

Though the central regulator - Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) - had in July, 2014 approved field trials of many transgenic varieties of rice, wheat, maize, sorghum, cotton, brinjal, mustard, potato, sugarcane and chickpea, many states preferred not to give their mandatory nod for the scientific field testing.

As a result, trials of many of the transgenic varieties of the food crops got stuck. After the GEAC's decision, many anti-GM groups including the RSS-

linked Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) had written to the Centre, opposing field trials.

Many states including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, had thereafter denied permission of field trials. While Gujarat had refused to give its nod for field trials of only GM food crops, the other states did not agree for trials of any transgenic variety of seeds. Other naysayers include Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Though Swaminathan made a call for field trials of GM crops, he emphasized that the commercial release would have to be done only "after the necessary bio-safety clearances are given". He said, "For this purpose, we should establish without further delay a National Bio-safety Authority which inspires public, professional, political and media confidence".

Making a strong case for the central regulatory authority, he said, "There is at present no opposition to medical, industrial and environmental biotechnology. Rightly the concerns are around (for) food biotechnology. This is why a Parliament-approved Bio-safety Regulatory Authority has become an urgent need. This is essential for implementing Prime Minister's suggestion for harnessing the benefits of molecular biology and genetic engineering for agricultural progress".

He also pitched for promoting more public sector research so that there can be inclusiveness in access to technology.

"Private companies obviously will produce technologies, where the small farmer will have to buy the seeds every year and where the findings are protected by intellectual property rights. There is a very good expertise in our public sector institutions in the fields of molecular biology and genetic engineering and we should derive full benefit from them", said Swaminathan, the founder chairman of the Chennai-based M S Swaminathan Research Foundation.

At present, the USA has the largest number of GM crops under commercial cultivation. In India, so far only Bt Cotton has been allowed for commercialisation. Bangladesh has, on the other hand, allowed Bt Brinjal also.

Swaminathan, however, also noted that there are other techniques now available which can achieve the same purpose as recombinant DNA technology.

"For example, marker assisted selection can help us to have the desired genetic combination. Similarly the new technique of gene editing is showing promise in the field of medical biotechnology, although there are still doubts about the biosafety aspects in human beings", said Swaminathan - the first recipient of the first World Food Prize.

Soaring temperature may hit wheat, mustard crop, fear farmers

Ajmer/Jaipur: Farmers across the state are apprehensive with soaring temperature in the past two weeks. Unusually, hot weather in winters may impact crops with wheat unlikely to germinate completely and mustard lacking oil content.

Not able to recover from the Kharif crop loss, farmers sown large fields in hope of getting good harvest. However, by mid-January there is no flowering in mustard and wheat. "Situation is not at all looking good. Kharif season was bad because of untimely rain and now weather is not supportive for the Rabi crop too," said Nagendra Singh Khangarot, farmer from Ajmer.

Farmers were happy with the early descending of winters this time and they hoped a good crop of wheat and mustered. "Both wheat and mustered required low temperature for a good quality and winters of Rajasthan are the best season to have a good crop in Rabi," said official of agriculture department. He added that crops like seasonal vegetables are also affected with high temperature.

During the first week of January when the places like Churu remain coldest in the state having a minimum temperature on or below 0.0 degree Celsius, this year the minimum temperature of this district is on and above 5.0 degree Celsius. Since last fortnight the minimum temperature is rallying between 4 to 6 degree high than average,

All hopes are now on the next 15 days with farmer's praying for winters to come in full force.

Krishak Ratna award for farmer into organic farming

RAIPUR: A progressive farmer and Krishak Ratna awardee Ramprakash Kesharwani of village Lakhuri of Janjgir-Champa district has been recognized as the torch bearer for other farmers to take up organic farming. He has cultivated green manure called Dhaincha, which he distributes free of cost to 100 local farmers to promote natural fertilizer for soil fertility.

Besides, his desi produce including 200 varieties of each Indian plum, mangoes and 150 varieties of veggies, oilseeds and pulses are under process of patent from ministry of agriculture.

While sharing his view this humble farmer said, "I grew Dhaincha on once acre land and obtained an yield of 40 quintal. This plant grows around 5 feet tall and being decomposed in soil, naturally improves soils fertility. I am receiving support and guidance of Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Indira Gandhi Agriculture University and agriculture department for promoting my innovative idea."

Kesharwani was recently awarded Dr Khubchand Baghel Krishak Ratna Award by Chhattisgarh government during a three-day fair. Impressed by his contribution, Janjgir-Champa collector OP Choudhary appointed Kesharwani as an advisor and consultant for other farmers.

Belonging to a traditional family, Kesharwani still owns the old model of tractor of the year 1950, which he inherited from his grandfather and is in working condition. Besides this, he has already adopted modern methods of cultivation and owns a number of modern equipments such as tractor, harvester, seed drill, rotawater, dixhero, and others. He also gives away these equipments on rent to other farmers for a reasonable charge.

Kesharwani's passion and sincere efforts have earned him net profit of nearly Rs 15 lakh annually.

Moga farmer milks new yield record

Muktsar: A Holstein Friesian (HF) cow of a dairy farmer from Moga district has created the new national record for the highest milk yield of 66.7 litres a day. Harpreet Singh Hundal's cow surpassed the previous record of 61.8 litres held by cow of Daljit Singh, a resident of Sadarpura village in Ludhiana district.

Hundal runs a dairy farm at village Noorpur Hakima in Moga and gets nearly 2,000 litres milk daily from his 140 cows. By setting the new national record, he won Rs 1.5 lakh in prize. His other cow won the second prize.

A graduate in Humanities, Hundal has been into dairy farming for the last 10 years. "I take special care of the nutrition of cows and purchase special feed for them. Besides, I give them the feed at a proper time and this mantra has succeeded in milking more from my cows," he said. The winning cow eats nearly 15 kg feed daily.

Harpreet said he held record of milking 17,000 litres from a cow in 305 days. "It works to 55.7 litres daily for 10 months at a stretch," he claimed. In the meanwhile, cow of Varinder Mohan Sharma from Morinda won the first prize (39.3 litres) in Jersey breed category.

Neeli Ravi buffalo of Surinder Singh from village Bharu in Muktsar milked 18.4 litres to win the competition.