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Youngsters take up organic farming



The group of youngsters at Pattikkara, near Kecheri in Thrissur, who started organic cultivation of paddy.– PHOTO: K.K. NAJEEB

They take 10 acres of fallow land on lease for paddy cultivation

Nine youngsters of Pattikkara near Kecheri here have set a model worth emulating by starting organic cultivation of paddy in 10 acres of traditional rice field that remained unutilised for over 20 years.

According to P.H. Afzal, a member of the team, it was newspaper reports on organic cultivation efforts elsewhere that prompted him and his friends to take the land on lease and initiate organic farming.

Initial works have already begun and the group expects a yield of at least 40,000 kg during harvesting. They preferred to cultivate four varieties of rice. The popular variety Jyothi is growing in six acres while two acres will grow the local variety, Kodiyan. One acre is devoted to another local variety, Punkar, and another acre for Rakthashali, a rare rice variety with medicinal value. The whole yield of Rakthasali will be converted into seeds, for expanding cultivation in more areas.

Besides cow dung, the group applies dried fish and decayed vegetables as manure.

‘Organic tag to boost Sikkim’s cardamom exports’



Organically-grown large cardamom may be priced higher than its fertiliser-fed counterpart but the former has burgeoning premium-class consumers abroad

The global demand for large cardamom grown in India is expected to rise with Sikkim, which produces a chunk of this highly-valued spice, being declared an organic-farming state, according to Spices Board.

“Organically-grown large cardamom may be priced higher than its fertiliser-fed counterpart but the former has burgeoning premium-class consumers abroad whose number are increasing of late,” said A. Jayathilak, Chairman, Spices Board.

“Discerning users are willing to pay the extra money,” Mr. Jaythilak emphasised. He said organically-raised large cardamom was another initiative under the present government’s Make in India mission which aims to make the country a global hub of indigenously-developed products.

India exported 665 tonnes of large cardamom in 2014-15. In the first half of the current fiscal, the powerful flavouring spice, endemic to a certain section of the Himalayan terrain, has earned the country Rs. 2,011.50 lakh in the international market, statistics show. Sikkim, which grows large cardamom in 17,000 hectares of land, produces 4,000 metric tonnes (90 per cent of the country’s production) of the spice annually. The Spices Board had designed the ‘Organic Sikkim’ logo that was released on January 18.

“Our message to farmers is this: ‘You become exporters’. It is simple but strong,” Mr. Jayathilak said. Spices Board has a team of 50-odd employees working in Sikkim to not just sustain organic farming but empower the growers to earn more from their produce in the coming years.

“The work of our personnel is multi-disciplinary. We do not just marketing but research, spread of information, linkages between farmers and mediations to resolve issues,” he said. The cultivation of large cardamom will receive impetus in six months from now as the Spices Board is set to unveil an e-platform for its famed fortnightly auction in Sikkim’s traditional spice market of Singtam. This is in accordance with the Digital India campaign, Mr. Jayathilak said.

“The idea is to cut down on middlemen. This will ease the post-harvest flow in the trade of the crop,” he said.

‘Natural farming is the best agricultural practice’

Natural farming is the only agricultural practice that has no side effects. It is the best practice for farmers, soil and environment as well, says Subhash Palekar, crusader of zero-budget natural farming. He has been chosen for Padma Shri Award.

“Under natural farming, farmers need not invest on fertiliser and pesticide, as they come from the farmyard manure prepared from dung and urine of cows. Similarly, the produce can be sold at a higher price, as it is free of chemicals,” he points out.

Mr. Palekar, who is in the city to conduct an eight-day State-level training programme on natural farming, he has been flooded with calls on his mobile phone ever since the Centre announced the Padma Shri Award for him. “This honour goes to all farmers, who believed in me and switched over to natural farming from chemical and organic farming,” he says.

Observing that both chemical and organic farming methods have deleterious impact on the environment in one way or the other, Mr. Palekar underscores the need for minimising emission of greenhouse gases.

“Natural farming can do this successfully. Emission of hazardous gases is zero in this practice. If a majority of farmers switch over to natural farming, the country can successfully reduce the emissions,” he points out.

Farm subsidy

Referring to the economic policy, Mr. Palekar says the Centre is extending subsidies to the tune of Rs. 80,000 crore to agriculture, which

is 14 per cent of the national budget. “Most of this amount is being spent on chemical fertilisers and pesticides. By application of chemical fertilisers, not only are we wasting money, but also causing damage to the soil health,” he says.

Mr. Palekar wants the governments to encourage farmers to buy cattle, especially native breeds that produce manure for cultivation, besides setting up markets for farmers to sell farm produces.

“Farmers who switch over to natural farming can reap in the benefits from the very first year. As the soil health improves with every passing year, they will get more and more returns, both in terms of quality and quantity,” he explains.

In natural farming, farmers need not invest on fertiliser and pesticide and the produces fetch at a higher price as they is free of chemicals

- Subhash Palekar, crusader of zero-budget natural farming

Will go all out to promote natural farming: CM



CM N. Chandrababu Naidu having a word with Padma awardee Subhash Palekar at the training programme being conducted on natural farming in Kakinada on Tuesday. —PHOTO: S. RAMBABU

Andhra Pradesh is going to become a role model in the country with regard to implementing natural farming and the government is going to support the practice on all possible fronts, including establishing a mechanism to certify the crops and extending financial support to the tune of Rs.10,000 per animal on purchase of each native breed cow, according to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. “Natural farming will not only bringing down the input cost on agriculture but also offers a better price to the farmers on their produce. By encouraging this practice, we can achieve great results,” Mr. Naidu said while addressing the

farmers, who were undergoing an eight-day training programme on natural farming arranged by the Department of Agriculture here on Tuesday. Congratulating Subhash Palekar, the man behind natural farming, who was heading the training classes, on being conferred with Padmashri, Mr. Naidu sought his support in encouraging farmers to adopt natural farming in each and every village. “We request Mr. Palekar to spend at least 10 days in a month in Andhra Pradesh and visit all the districts to encourage natural farming. The government will extend its full support to him,” he said.

Mr. Palekar said that AP was the first State to conduct training programme and farmers here were progressive and enthusiastic. Home Minister N. Chinarajappa, Agriculture Minister P. Pulla Rao, elected representatives and officials were present.

Natural farming will not only bringing down the input cost but also offers better price to the farmers on their produce

N. Chandrababu Naidu

Chief Minister

Villagers spot burning object fall from sky



Residents of Bethaveppampattu in Vaniyambadi kept officials on their toes on Tuesday after they claimed to have seen a mysterious burning object fall from the sky on an agricultural field.

The object, according to villagers, fell with an explosion-like sound and left behind a huge cloud of smoke.

On being informed by the Vaniyambadi Tahsildar, a team of six personnel from the Fire and Rescue Services rushed to the spot and found that the object had created a three-foot-deep pit measuring about two metres wide on the field.

“We retrieved a stone from the pit. It weighed about 200 gm. Villagers were scared to come near the pit. The pit was filled with water as it was an agricultural field. We handed over the stone to the tahsildar,” said Syed Noorullah, station officer, Vaniyambadi Fire and Rescue Services. Villagers had informed the revenue officials of the incident at 1.45 p.m. T. Bakiya Lakshmi, Vaniyambadi Tahsildar, rushed to the spot.

Noise and smoke

“Villagers claimed that the sound was heard for nearly two km and that smoke rose to the height of a palm tree. But it seemed like a hard stone and was in the size of the fist. We handed over the stone to ‘Q’ branch police,” she said.

A weeding machine that may help reduce dependence on farm labour



Progressive farmer Ramalingayya Matpathi exhibiting his new weeding equipment at a press conference in Kalaburagi.

Ramalingayya Matpathi, a progressive farmer, has made a breakthrough in agriculture by simplifying the weeding method through an innovative and simple-to-operate hand-held weed removing equipment.

After hard work and testing for two years in different agriculture fields and his own agriculture field at V.K. Salagar in Aland taluk in Kalaburgi district, Ramalingayya Matpathi was able to perfect this simple-looking manually-operated weeding equipment.

Displaying the functioning of the equipment to presspersons here on Monday, Ramalingayya Matpathi said that he had submitted the design for patent at the Patent Office in Chennai.

According to the website of the Patent Office, the proposal submitted by the farmer for patent for his weeding machine is “awaiting examination” and the patent is yet to be given to the product.

The weeding equipment is assembled with the help of locally available iron rods, cutting blades that can be adjusted according to the weed in the field and space between crops.

Ramalingayya Matpathi said that he had priced the machine at an affordable Rs. 5,000.

He said that he was ready to sell the design to any entrepreneur for larger production. He said that weeds continued to be a major problem for farmers and nearly 40 per cent of the yield is lost due to weeds.

He said that the cost-effective manually operated weeding machine is best suited to small and marginal farmers for used in three to five acres of land. Farmers can stop depending on farm labour for weeding by introducing this equipment in their agriculture field. According to Ramalingayya Matpathi, a single person can operate and clean weed in about two acres of land in a day.

College of Agriculture to celebrate silver jubilee

The silver jubilee of College of Agriculture, Shivamogga, would be celebrated on January 28, said C. Vasudevappa, Vice

Chancellor of University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga. The UAHS, Shivamogga, has planned to conduct seminars and awareness programmes for farmers throughout the year to mark the silver jubilee. The works related to upgrading the infrastructure of the college have been taken up to commemorate the occasion, he told press persons here on Monday. The programme will commence on the college premises at 2.30 p.m. Ashok Dalwai, Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation will inaugurate the programme. As part of the plan to upgrade the infrastructure of the college, the work of construction of a new administration block, additional separate hostels for boys and girls and indoor stadium has commenced.

The U.N. has decided to observe the year 2016 as the ‘International Year of Pulses,’ he said and added that the UAHS, Shivamogga, has also developed demonstration plots at the college and cultivated various varieties of pulses in a scientific manner. Farmers would be invited to visit these plots shortly, he said.

Agricultural development is top priority: Murmu



Jharkhand Governor Draupadi Murmu taking salute during Republic Day function at Morabadi Grounds in Ranchi on Tuesday.

Jharkhand Governor Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said development of agriculture was the top priority for her government though industrial progress was also necessary.

Unfurling the National Flag during her 67th Republic Day address, Ms. Murmu said development of agriculture was the State's priority.

Industrial development was also necessary to make the State prosperous, she said adding, the government was focused to provide a balanced, inclusive and environment-friendly development.

All possible efforts were being taken to develop education, health and finding solutions to unemployment, she said.

“...Efforts are on for setting up ITI and two development centres each in 10 Naxal-affected districts of Chatra, Hazaribagh, Bokaro, Palamau, Latehar, Garhwa, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Lohardaga and Gumla,” she said.

To make the State investment-friendly, she said labour laws were being simplified and the State had already put in place Jharkhand Industrial Park Act 2015, Food Processing Industry Act, 2015 and Jharkhand Feed Processing Industry Act, 2015.

These efforts, she said, resulted in the World Bank ranking Jharkhand third among the three States in the country in the category of ‘Ease of Doing Business’

For women self-sustenance in villages, the government is providing cows with 90 per cent grant, she said.

The government has already completed 810 of the 1,110 km road network target for 2015-16, she said.

The Governor said a total of Rs one crore would be given under the 'Chief Minister Panchayat Encouragement Prize Scheme' to encourage Swacch Bharat Mission, eradication of superstitions like witchcraft and abstaining from alcohol to the best Panchayat/Panchayat Samiti/district.
PTI

Cold weather to help standing wheat and mustard crop: govt

The current cold wave in northern and central India will help the standing wheat and mustard crops, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said on Monday.

Sowing of rabi (winter) crops like wheat began from October and is almost coming to an end. Rabi crops have been under pressure due to dry winter following two consecutive drought years, raising concerns over production levels.

"The drop in temperature in the last few days has given a breather to farmers. The cold weather will help standing wheat and mustard crops," Mr Singh said.

Asked about the wheat crop prospects, Karnal-based Directorate of Wheat Research head Indu Sharma said: "At this point of time, cool temperature is very beneficial for the crop, both early and late sown varieties."

However, the wheat crop prospects would depend on the temperature next two months. "If the temperature does not rise above normal after February, there will not be any set back on production," she said. Wheat sowing has been completed in most states, though some bit been sown in the sugarcane belt, she added.

On mustard crop, the Solvent Extractors Association president Pravin Lunkad said: "In last few days, the cold weather condition has picked up, which is good for standing wheat and mustard crop."

"This year, flowering in mustard is higher by 10-15 per cent than the previous year. However, much would depend on climatic conditions during February-end and March," he said in a statement.

As per the latest data, area sown to wheat - the main rabi crop - remained down by 4.46 per cent at 291.97 lakh hectare as on January 22 of the rabi season as compared with 305.60 lakh hectare in the year—ago period. - PTI

Sowing of rabi crops like wheat began from October and is almost coming to an end

New model to make farming viable

State to help farmers from selection of crops to marketing of produce

The State government is working on a new model to make agriculture more viable. The government plans to bring 25 to 30 types of crops under the proposed new model and support the farmers from selection of crop to marketing the produce. The new plans would be implemented in kharif season, from March, according to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the Chief Minister said that the government held parleys with many multi national companies and nations at the Davos summit. It was decided to launch new vision of agriculture (NVA) involving private companies, and make use of best practices across the world.

Subsequently, the government was working on the model. The government would support the farmers from harvesting to post-harvesting and in marketing their produce, he said.

The Chief Minister, however, did not lucidly state whether paddy would be included in the list of 25 to 30 types of crops. He merely said, “We are working on it. Fisheries and other sectors that are suitable would be included in the list.”

Mr. Naidu said the government would continue to give subsidies. The government was contemplating creating an inventory of farm equipment available across the State. Thereafter, an equipment bank would be created. It would help in easy access to modern equipment by the farmers. For instance, harvesting seasons are different in West Godavari and Nellore. The same harvesting machines could be used in both the districts. It would help in modernisation and increasing the efficiency, he said.

“It’s farmers’ farming”

When asked whether it was corporate farming, he said, “It is not corporate farming, but farmers’ farming. It is linking the agriculture with the corporate sector.”

Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnudu and I&PR Minister Palle Raghunatha Reddy were present.

Thrust on modernisation

- *25 to 30 types of crops proposed under the new model*
- *New plans to be implemented from kharif season*
- *Government to continue to give subsidies*
- *Equipment bank to be created in State*
- *New vision of agriculture, involving private companies, on the anvil*

Farmers gain from various training programmes

There is notable acceptance by farmers to the training programmes in crop management imparted by the Agriculture Department in the district.

The Department has formed ‘farmer interest groups’ for delivering the benefit of training programmes imparted through Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA).

Forty farmers including 15 women from Kagam, Kulavilaku, Elumathur, Avalpoondurai villages benefitted from one such training programme on integrated crop management training in oilseeds and sugarcane.

Rabi crop

Against the backdrop of the recent release of water under second turn in the Lower Bhavani Project canal, spot training in cultivation methods and pest management for gingelly and groundnut for ensuing rabi crop was imparted by ATMA Block Technology Manager - Modakurichi Block, Gomathy, and Assistant Professor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University A.P. Vigneshwari.

Farmers in the region, said Kulandaivelu, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Modakurichi Block, were looking forward to deriving optimal utility of the water release for sugarcane crop.

The cultivators took part in a seminar at Sakthi Sugars Ltd., at Poondurai where they were oriented on the benefits accruing from trash mulching by way of enhancing soil fertility.

The farmers learnt about sustainable sugar initiative and crop residue management. They were advised to desist from burning the trash in sugarcane fields after harvest, and instead avail themselves of the utility of the subsidy offered by the Agriculture Department for trash mulching under National Agriculture Development Programme, Mr. Kulandaivelu said, adding that the scheme to shred trash and decompose it for soil fertility benefits 100 to 200 cane farmers in each block.

The cost per hectare is Rs. 5,500 of which subsidy of Rs. 2,500 is directly transferred to the bank account of the farmer, Mr. Kulandaivelu said, presiding over the programme.

The Senior General Manager of Sakthi Sugars Limited, Modakurichi Unit, Thiruvengadam also addressed the farmers.

A presentation on sustainable sugarcane initiative was made by the cane manager of the Sugar Unit Nallasamy.

Farmers told to adopt scientific and cost-effective methods



Ashok M. Pattan, Ramdurg MLA and Congress government Chief Whip, and other officials at the annual flower show in Belagavi city on Monday.

It is time that farmers, particularly with small and marginal holdings, think rationally by adopting cost-effective and scientific methods of

farming instead of landing into debt, said Ashok M. Pattan, Ramdurg MLA and Congress government Chief Whip.

Inaugurating the three-day annual flower show at Hume Park on Club Road on Monday, he said farmers needed to be cautious while taking up agricultural operations by adopting the government's subsidised schemes. They should use the benefits provided by the government to increase productivity.

Pointing out the lack of knowledge of modern and cost-effective agricultural methods, he said a large number of small and marginal farmers had turned bankrupt and ended their lives under the duress of debt.

This could be prevented if the farmers are provided timely advise by officials of the Agriculture and Horticulture Departments. He advised the officials to launch massive awareness and publicity campaigns by circulating pamphlets on scientific farming methods, centres of market, use of proper quantity of fertilizers and pesticides.

Harnessing technology, reaping rewards

Santaram Kadam is an ordinary-looking man who is often seen in Bidari village of Jamkhandi taluk riding on his motorcycle.

However, he is not merely a wealthy farmer but one passionate about adopting modern technology in his farm to increase agriculture output.

This craze for automation and mechanisation in the field of agriculture has prompted Santaram Kadam to spend unusually large sums of money in his grape and pomegranate farm.

Santaram Kadam's 25-acre farm has two machines imported from Israel for supplying water/fertilizer through drip irrigation system and tractor-driver pesticide spraying machine.

"I have spent Rs. 14 lakh on the first machine and I paid Rs. 23 lakh for the second one," he said, while showing his hi-tech machines installed in his farmhouse.

Elaborating on the advantages of the first machine, he said that the computer-operated machine does the job of at least five workers.

"All one has to do is to set the time and the quantity of water/fertilizer to be supplied. The rest is done by the machine itself. The machine switches

on at the set time and shuts off automatically after supplying the fixed quantity water/fertilizer,” he said.

He said that because of this machine, the output has increased by 40 per cent as it supplies water uniformly and only what is needed for each plant.

“It also reduces wastage by at least 40 per cent, which turns out to be additional profit for farmers. Though I supply water to only 40 acres of land, the machine can cover 100 acres of land easily,” he said.

The second machine, Santaram Kadam said, is used to spray pesticides.

“This machine uses only 40 litres of water for spraying pesticide in an acre of land in only 30 minutes. The traditional method requires at least 300 litres of water and takes at least two hours to cover an acre of land,” he said.

Admitting that it is not possible for every farmer to spend this much money, he, however, believes that if the government offered at least 50 per cent subsidy on such machines, many farmers would adopt mechanisation in their farms.

Crop management

A large number of farmers participated in a training programme on integrated crop management in paddy held in Sandaipet village at Kadayampatti block recently.

The programme was organised by Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA).

Season selection, variety selection, seed treatment and sowing procedures were explained with demonstration.

A. Nazar, Assistant Director of Agriculture, who presided over this training programme, said that the objective was doubling the yield and tripling the income.

M. Muniraju and G. Rathinasamy, imparted specialised training to the farmers. K. Rajendran, Block Technology Manager, S. Ganajothimurugan, Assistant Agricultural Officer, spoke.

Help of banks sought in cracking agriculture department scam

In a move to hasten the investigation, the police officials have approached the banks seeking their cooperation in cracking the scam in the agriculture department where more than Rs. 3.2 crore funds were diverted to some unknown accounts across the country.

Mr. Anjaneyulu, Circle Inspector, Sangareddy, has sought original copies of cheques issued by Mr. Manikyam, the prime accused in the scam, from both - State Bank of Hyderabad, Sangareddy branch Andhra Pradesh Grameen Vikas Bank (APGVB), Shantinagar Branch,- under section 91 of CRPC. The bankers were expected to hand over the cheques to the police after getting formal approval from their head offices. Police are expected to send these cheques along with original signatures of Mr. B. Hukya Naik, Joint Director, Agriculture, whose sign was allegedly forged for these transactions.

Though officials of the agriculture were not happy over reports appearing in a section of press over not taking action against Mr. Manikyam long back though he was reportedly accused in the scam of Rs. 6 lakh, they were failing to explain the reasons for not taking action against him. "Though the amount was recovered from him there was no official record. On the other hand, it forces to take action against some officials in the department," said an officer in the department.

B. Prakash, Chief Manager, APGVB, Shanti Nagar, informed *The Hindu* that they are cooperating with the bankers and the details would be handed over to the police at the earliest. He said that they have followed the laid systems in clearing the cheques issued by the agriculture department and have not deviated from any procedure. He has clarified that there were no instructions from the department not to release cheques issued in the name of individuals and the signature of the issuing authority was checked properly.

Mr. Ramana Reddy, Lead Bank Manager, said that signatures should be partially readable but that was not being followed by any official and banks are never insisting on that. "Signatures of many officials are easy to forge and it may be risky. There need to be awareness in this regard," said Mr. Ramana Reddy.

We have followed the rules and regulations in clearing the cheques issued by the agriculture department and have not deviated from any procedure B. Prakash, Chief Manager, APGVB, Shanti Nagar.

Use technology for sustainable agriculture, says Icrisat official

Director General of ICRISAT, David J. Bergvinson, on Monday underscored the significance of deploying technology tools in agriculture.

“Mechanisation can address just one of the many risks... to mitigate most of the risks faced by agriculture today, technology adoption is imperative,” he told a workshop on ‘Sustainable agriculture – harnessing technologies, harvesting prosperity’ organised here by FICCI.

Counting remote sensing, drones/UAV, big data and analytics, digital soil maps, mobile money/digital wallets and plant sensors among technologies that could be disruptive in the sphere of agriculture, he called for more investments by government in the research.

Seed fest from Thursday

The Wayanad Seed Fest, a community seed festival to assess the seed diversity in Wayanad district, will be held at Puthurvayal here on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

The festival, being organised by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in association with the Kerala State Biodiversity Board and Seed, an organisation of traditional rice framers in the district, will take place at the Community Agro-Biodiversity Centre of the foundation. Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan will inaugurate the fest on Thursday. ‘Seed, soil and food: rights and responsibilities’ is the slogan of the three-day fest. — Staff Reporter

“Spiders are also farmer’s friend”

There are 8 kinds of spiders that eat small insects and help to improve soil health



Various kinds of spiders along with dragon flies and beetles kept on display at the grievance redressal meeting last week.

Earthworms are known to be a farmer's best friend in improving soil health. But the worms are not alone as there are a number of insects and spiders that help farmers in their own way.

Last week, farmers taking part in the monthly grievance redressal meeting were welcomed to the conference hall by various kinds of spiders and insects that were displayed in jars.

Presentation

There was a five-minute presentation on these spiders and insects that were useful for farmers.

“Earthworms are not the only best friends of farmers. Various kinds of spiders, beetles and dragon fly could also be the farmers' friends as they eat small insects that are found in fields like that of paddy crops,” G. Ramakrishnan, PA to Collector (Agriculture) told the farmers during the presentation.

There are eight kinds of spiders that help the farmers by eating the small insects.

This included Long Jawed spider, wolf spider and dwarf spider. Coccinellid beetle, ground beetle, dragon fly and damsel fly are other friends of farmers, he added.

Photographs of the spiders, beetles and dragon fly were shown in the presentation.

M. Pandiyan, professor and head, Krishi Vigyan Kendra and Agricultural Research Station, Virinjipuram said these insects and spiders were “bio-agents” that eat the insects causing harm to crops.

“They are an eco-friendly means of getting rid of insects that cause harm to crops. They are found on all kinds of agricultural fields. Many farmers are unaware of the benefits of the spiders and insects and kill them by spraying chemicals,” he said.

Mr. Ramakrishnan added that this was actually a vast subject, and they gave only an introduction to the farmers at the meeting.

“This presentation follows the Collector's instruction to provide some kind of useful information to farmers during the meeting. We wanted to highlight some thing close to nature and to them,” he explained.

In fact, he along with other staff spent nearly two hours on a paddy field in Arcot to get samples of the insects and spiders a day before the meeting. “We had taken nets to catch the insects in order to display them for the farmers,” he noted.

‘Certified seed potatoes yield better’

The yield in potato farms, where certified seeds were sown, is better, compared to the fields where non-certified seeds were sown, said B. Suma, Deputy Director of Horticulture, here on Monday. Earlier, the department had procured certified seed potatoes and distributed them among 63 select farmers in the district.

Speaking to presspersons here, Ms. Suma said that certified seed potatoes were sown in 63 farms, where irrigation facility was available. “Owing to excess rainfall, the crop was washed away in three of those farms. In the remaining 60 farms, the yield has been good. For every bag of seed potatoes, the yield was six to seven bags. However, in fields where non-certified seed potatoes were sown, the yield was around three to four bags,” he said.

A. Manju, Minister for Sericulture, Animal Husbandry, and in-charge of Hassan district, announced recently that the district administration had decided to procure a large quantity of certified seed potatoes this year for distribution among potato growers. All these years, farmers were getting only non-certified seed potatoes from Punjab, he said.

A beautiful pea green dal

The plebeian thuvar dal is quite something else when it is green and fresh



We are all familiar with pigeon pea lentils or thuvar dal as it is better known. But, how many of us actually give a thought to the pigeon-pea plant? I know I haven't. I just buy my regular supply of dal from the

stores and that's about it. A few days ago my sister-in-law, Ramya, pointed out a tall shrub.

The pods resembled the familiar country beans but the size and variegated stripes did not.

I was actually looking at the the Thuvarai. Ramya plucked one deep green pod and popped it open to reveal round pale green pea like kernels. I tasted it and knew straight away that this was going to find it's way to my table. My everyday dry lentil just got elevated to a fresh produce status.

In it's tender state the thuvarai is sweet and juicy.

I'm a big fan of all beans and legumes. My store room shelves hold large glass bottles of all kinds of *payiru* , my freezer has boxes of sprouted beans and my lunch menu always features one of these on a daily basis.

I was thrilled to add one more variety to my list. Not only are these high in protein but adapt themselves beautifully into a variety of cooking styles and recipes. They can be made into a gravy, a semi-masala side dish or even fried to be served as a snack.

The plant resembles a dry , sparse ,sort of unruly shrub. The kind that would grow in more arid regions. And it takes about six months to start bearing fruit.

The thuvarai plant plays a big role in soil rejuvenation. It is a drought tolerant crop which accounts for it's woody, twisted look. It actually does not take too well to overwatering or excessive rainfall. There are a group of bacteria that form a symbiosis with the legumes and help in the production of nitrogen in the soil. Dry farm lands grow a mix of oil-seeds, pulses and legumes because these enrich the soil. It is recommended to plant this thuvarai, when the soil is damp, well before the flowering season, when it has the time to go through a cycle of growth.

The leaves that shed from the plant make good mulch that improves the soil. It is a good idea to use it as a border plant for a vegetable patch. Not only does it condition the soil but acts as a barrier against wind.

Ramya cooked me a delicious thuvarai curry. The seeds, went perfectly with the South Indian flavours of onion, garlic, curry leaf and tomato. We had it for lunch with millets, then for dinner with dosai and again for

breakfast with idli. It was a big hit with the family and I went thuvurai picking the very next day.

Bengal tea industry sees ray of hope in Minister's visit



West Bengal is India's second largest tea-growing State with a 20 per cent share of the country's cultivated area and contributes about 24 per cent of the total crop

The state has made global headlines with reports of 'starvation deaths' in the gardens in North Bengal

The West Bengal tea industry has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. The state, which has in its fold the famed Darjeeling brand, has since last year, made international headlines with reports of 'starvation deaths' in the gardens in North Bengal. Similar reports have resurfaced this year.

However, although the term starvation death has been disputed, there is no denying the fact that there is distress in some of the tea-gardens in the state. Importantly, the entire industry is at a precipice.

This provides the backdrop to Union Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's visit last week. She visited a closed garden as well as a garden belonging to a major corporate group and met all the stakeholders during her short stay. It is her positive approach towards the problems being faced by the West Bengal tea sector, which has cheered the industry.

Talks with a cross-section of the industry revealed, that the minister has accepted the need to examine Plantation Labour Act and the possibility of

asking workers to accept a minimum wage structure that encompasses the benefits now being extended, to the workers under the PLA.

“The industry is in a precarious state,” said A. N. Singh a former Chairman of the Indian Tea Association and the Managing Director of Goodricke, which owns some 12 gardens in West Bengal and 10 in Assam.

“The rising demand for high quality teas in the export and the domestic market has led to a situation of declining demand for Dooars teas, whose quality has been affected by climate-change,” he said. “Big blenders now rarely bid for these teas at the auctions. The minister has looked at the entire issue of the West Bengal industry in holistic manner.”

It would be relevant here to examine the construct of the West Bengal industry.

West Bengal is India’s second largest tea-growing state with a 20 per cent share of country’s tea cultivated area, contributing about 24 per cent of the total India tea crop. There are 377 gardens of which 87 are in Darjeeling and the rest in Dooars (Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district) and Terai (Darjeeling plains and Uttar Dinajpur). It is the 188 Dooars gardens, which are facing problems the most. There are a total 2.64 lakh workers directly involved with the industry.

As per latest statistics between January and October 2015 production in West Bengal is lower at 274 million kgs compared to a year ago figure, with the gardens in Dooars accounting for a major part of the drop.

The issue of high-costs is plaguing the organised industry throughout the tea producing regions in Assam, West Bengal and the South. The small growers are mostly out of this as they are not governed by PLA.

“The industry flagged the issue of high costs and low prices before the minister. Climate-change is affecting tea industry badly and we sought interventions from the Centre,” said Arijit Raha Secretary General, ITA.

The industry is also keen to see some changes on the PLA front. The Plantation Labour Act was enacted in 1951 to ensure workers’ welfare measures, which normally falls within the realms of the State. This included housing facility, cheap power, firewood, subsidised food grains and medical facilities.

A 2009 report on the Competitiveness of The Indian Tea Industry, prepared by a Union Commerce Ministry panel said that while the industry has failed to keep up with global trends in the tea industry, there was also need to review many of the provisions of the PLA, which may have lost their relevance.

The committee, which had representation from the government and the industry, said that statutory social welfare measures, as mandated in this Act adds to garden-costs and reduces the Indian industry's competitiveness. It also recommended that as in Sri Lanka, India may consider the dovetailing of various government schemes with the benefits being provided by PLA.

It has long been felt that schemes like social security schemes like Indira Awas Yojana, Targeted PDS schemes, National Health Schemes and Prime Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana could all be dovetailed with the schemes being implemented under the PLA by the industry.

"We face huge pressures on account of housing, subsidised electricity and ration costs" Mr Raha said adding that 80 per cent of the costs are fixed in nature.

The industry will now face an additional cost on account of irrigation as climate-change is affecting rainfall patterns. The cost of production for manufacture of 1 kg of tea for an estate governed by PLA is around Rs 170 per kg. However auction prices at an average of Rs 126, has led to cash losses in the large number of gardens in West Bengal.

There is at present no minimum wage for tea industry in West Bengal and while the Minister stressed the need for this, the industry felt that minimum wage should take into consideration the in-kind benefits being provided to the workers. Industry has estimated that the current daily wage rate of Rs 122.5 works out to an employment cost of Rs 225 if the benefits are monetised.

While for the industry the situation is one of revival the stakes are no less for the governments at the state and the Centre, given the fact that there is a sizeable electorate among the tea workers and elections are knocking on the door in the country's tea-belt.

The issue of high costs is plaguing the organised industry in tea producing regions of Assam, West Bengal and the South

IN A NUTSHELL

Although the term starvation death has been disputed, there is no denying the fact that there is distress in some of the tea-gardens in the State. Importantly, the entire industry is at a precipice.

The rising demand for high quality teas in the export and the domestic market has led to a situation of declining demand for Dooars teas, whose quality has been affected by climate-change

As per latest statistics between January and October 2015 production in West Bengal is lower at 274 million kgs compared to a year ago figure, with the gardens in Dooars accounting for a major part of the drop.

The industry is also keen to see some changes on the PLA front. The Plantation Labour Act was enacted in 1951 to ensure workers' welfare measures which normally falls within the realms of the State.

Tobacco farmers to be urged to adopt 'next best option'



Tobacco Board officials admit that it will be an uphill task to convince farmers, particularly after the average price of tobacco went up this year. -FILE PHOTO: MA SRIRAM

ALTERNATIVE CROPS			
☐ Dryland areas — cotton, maize, green chillies		☐ Irrigated belt — ginger	
TOBACCO IN KARNATAKA			
☐ Farmers holding tobacco cultivation licences	☐ Unauthorised tobacco growers	☐ Area under tobacco cultivation	☐ Authorised crop size for 2015-16
43,000	20,000	75,000 hectares	100 million kg
☐ Anticipated yield 2015-16	☐ Average price 2014-15	☐ Average price 2015-16	
80 million kg	Rs. 107.49 a kg	Rs. 134.57 (as on January 22, 2016)	

With the 2020 deadline to reduce tobacco cultivation in India fast approaching, as per its commitment to World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the Tobacco Board

officials have decided to encourage farmers to opt for crops that are the “next best option” to tobacco.

Armed with findings of the Central Tobacco Research Institute’s (CTRI) Station at Hunsur, the officials will hold hobli-level meetings with tobacco farmers to convince them to reduce the area of cultivation and grow the crops such as cotton, maize and green chillies in dryland areas and ginger in irrigated belts.

While cotton will be promoted in tobacco growing areas of H.D. Kote, maize will be advocated to tobacco farmers in Hunsur and Periyapatna. Similarly, green chillies will be promoted in other rain-fed areas. In the irrigated belt of K.R. Nagar taluk, farmers will be encouraged to grow ginger.

Though marigold was also an option in H.D. Kote area, it was found to be “unremunerative” to lure tobacco farmers.

No single alternative

“We will discourage farmers from growing any tobacco crop in irrigated areas. Tobacco grown in irrigated areas is considered a saline variety that does not command a good price in the market,” a Tobacco Board official told *The Hindu* .

Though there is not a single alternative crop to tobacco, which continues to be the most remunerative crop for the famers in the belt, the Board that is under pressure to reduce the area under tobacco cultivation will be promoting the “next best option”.

However, the Board officials admit that it would be an uphill task to convince farmers particularly after the average price of tobacco went up this year. “Against the average price of Rs. 107.49 a kg last year (2014-15), the average price this year was Rs. 134.57 a kg,” an official said. The tobacco auction, which began in October last year, is expected to continue till February this year.

Growers unsure

Meanwhile, President of Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) Tobacco Growers’ Federation of Karnataka Javare Gowda told this correspondent that there was no alternative to tobacco crop.

Dismissing cotton as an alternative, Mr. Gowda said many farmers, who shifted to ginger, had “burnt their hands”. “Farmers to tried alternatives have lost their money,” he said. Also, there was a well established system for cultivation and marketing of tobacco that no other crop offered.

Farmers asked to improve pulses production

Role of credit support for improving agriculture economy stressed



Farmers at the agri exhibition held at Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Sandhiyur in Salem district on Saturday.

To showcase the rabi season agriculture and horticulture related technologies and pulses production strategies for the benefit of the farmers and stakeholders, an exhibition and seminar was conducted at Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Sandhiyur here on Saturday.

The pre-rabi campaign-cum-seminar on Agriculture and Horticulture Technologies for the district was attended by progressive farmers, farmers’ club leaders and agriculture entrepreneurs where farm implements and other products were on display.

N. Sriram, Programme Coordinator, explained the importance of the campaign for improving production and thereby increasing the income level of farmers in the season. He said that the United Nations has declared 2016 year as International Year of Pulses mainly to improve the production and productivity of the pulses crops and to ensure nutrient security among the people through pulses based food.

C. Rajendran, Joint Director of Agriculture (in-charge), emphasised the need and approaches for improving the pulses crops production so that

the productivity is doubled and income level of the farmers gets increased.

Deputy Director of Agricultural Marketing, Salem, Sugumar said that converting the group into farmers' producers' organisation for bringing in more value addition of products would benefit all.

NABARD District Development Manager Bhama Bhuvaneshwari emphasised the importance of farmers' clubs and farmers' producers' organisations for improving the agriculture production, productivity and income of the rural farming community. "Farmers should have the professional skills, especially for planning and adoption of hi-tech agricultural technologies for improving the income," she said.

A. Udayakumar, Lead Bank Manager, Salem, explained the role of credit support for improving the agriculture economy and farmers' income and asked them to develop proper agri business plan.

Demonstrations on various farm implements, pest and diseases management practices, mango crop technologies, sustainable sugarcane initiatives and practices exclusively for rabi season were presented by the KVK scientists. More than 260 farmers from all the 20 blocks of the district participated.

Farmers warned of blast disease



Scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendra and Agricultural Research Station, Virinjipuram visiting a paddy field affected by blast disease.-Photo : Special Arrangement

The disease affecting standing paddy is spreading fast in the district

Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Virinjipuram has warned farmers of blast disease – a fungal disease - affecting standing paddy crops in the district. The misty weather in Vellore district has turned conducive for the fungal growth, leading to sporadic attacks in various parts of the district.

M. Pandiyan, professor and head, Agricultural Research Station (ARS) and KVK, Virinjipuram said the rice blast disease was spreading fast in several parts of the district. There was good growth of paddy crops following rains.

“We visited a few affected fields after farmers started to approach us. The fungal attack has been occurring in the last two weeks. It has been attacking short duration paddy crops of 105 to 110 days,” he said. A number of paddy fields in parts of Anaicut, Latheri and Virinjipuram were affected by blast disease.

Day time temperature below 28 degree Celsius and cloudy weather, and night time temperature of 19 degree Celsius was conducive for the fungus growth, he said, adding, “The present misty weather in the district is conducive for the fungus growth. One variety of rice – CO 51 – has been found resistant to the disease attack, while it is sporadically seen in rice varieties such as ADT 36 and ADT 43.”

KVK has issued advisory to farmers to reduce or even stop use of urea as it will pave way to fast fungal growth. “Spots in the shape of eyes on the crops are the symptoms of the disease. It will affect all parts of the crops leaving burnt-like symptoms. We are advising farmers on appropriate use of fungicide in proportion to their field area to control the fungal attack,” he added.

During the farmers’ grievance redressal day last week, the scientists advised farmers not to go by the suggestions of shop keepers for use of fungicide. Farmers were asked to bring samples of the affected crops to KVK and ARS for appropriate advice on control measures.

‘Joint venture aqua food park will boost shrimp exports’

Construction of the project will be completed in six months

Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park directors Cherukuwada Sri Ranganadha Raju and Uddaraju Kasi Viswanadha Raju explaining benefits of the food park to the media at Bhimavaram on Tuesday.

The Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park which was coming up at Tundurru village in West Godavari district with international standards will boost

up shrimp exports from Andhra Pradesh, said project directors Cherukwada Sri Ranganadha Raju and Uddaraju Kasi Viswanadha Raju.



The 16,000-tonne capacity (processing per year) project is joint venture of Government of India (GoI) and the Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park, they said.

Speaking to the newsmen here on Tuesday, Mr. Ranganadha Raju said some leaders are trying to provoke the locals and stop construction of the project by creating rumours on releasing pollution. But, the project was started only after taking permission from Tundurru Panchayat, Irrigation, Revenue, Electricity and the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB).

The management had conducted grama sabhas twice and collected the opinion of the locals in setting up the project and there was no resentment. Land acquisition was done by paying Rs 10 to Rs. 15 lakh per acre and many locals were involved in the construction. But, some leaders created trouble at the site on January 22 in which three policemen and a few villagers were injured, the director.

Assuring to take up development works under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Mr. Viswanadha Raju said roads, schools, health centres, bus shelters, drinking water and other facilities would be improved in Tundurru, Jonnalagaruvu and Kamsalipeta villages, once the park become operational.

“It is not correct that Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park will create air and water pollution. We are setting up the project with international standards and the stocks would be exported to Thailan, Vietnam, Japan, US and other countries ,” Mr. Viswanadha Raju explained.

Government of India, which sanctioned the project, has set a time bound for completing the plant. As the workforce was available in big number in Tundurru and the neighbouring villages, we have selected the village for

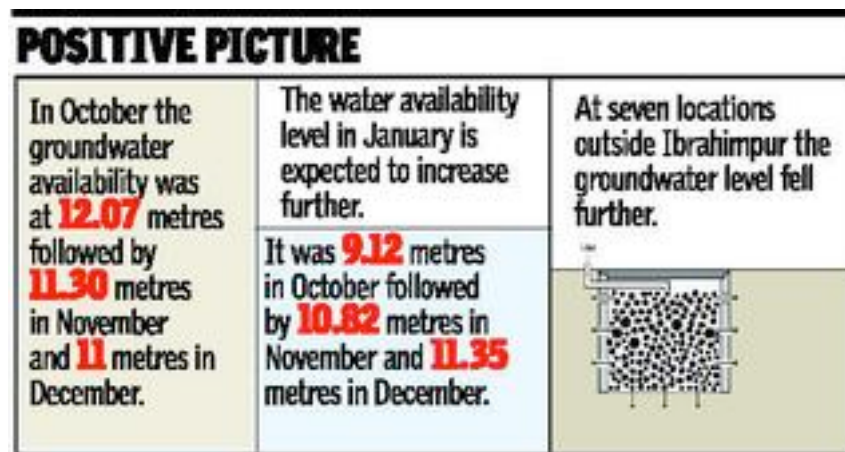
setting up the food park. The food park has five directors including two officials from GoI, the director said.

“We are ready to clarify the doubts, if any, to the villagers and explain the advantages of the food park to them. But, we urge the locals not to create hurdles as we got permission from the government and the court order for taking up construction.

Once the project is completed, we can procure stocks from some thousands of farmers in East and West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and other districts,” the directors said.

Soak pits increase groundwater level

Collector D Ronald Rose initiated the programme at Ibrahimpur village



The construction of soak pits, an initiative taken up by Collector D Ronald Rose, at Ibrahimpur village in Siddipet mandal of Medak district is showing excellent results. The ground water levels have increased in the village and also across the district in comparison with other villages. This was despite lack of rains and all mandals in the district declared drought affected.

The groundwater department has conducted an impact study for the months of October, November and December 2015 selecting three locations in the village and seven locations outside the village. During the month of October the ground water availability was at 12.07 metres level followed by 11.30 metres in November and 11 metres in the month of December. It was expected that the water availability levels in the month of January was expected to increase further.

Similarly, at seven locations outside the village the ground water levels fell down further. It was 9.12 metres in the month October followed by 10.82 metres in the month of November and 11.35 metres in December.

The situation was more or less same across the district where ground water levels were falling drastically due to lack of rains for the past two years. At many places the farmers discontinued farming due to fell down of ground water levels and water yield as well.

Impressed with the results of Ibrahimpur, the district administration has decided replicate the experiment across the district. The authorities wrote to the State level officials seeking permission to link this programme to NREGS and sanctioning funds in this regard. The works would commence once the funds were sanctioned.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

11 Cos object NSAI's support for cotton seed price regulation

As many as 11 seed companies, including Monsanto, Mahyco, Syngenta and domestic firm Rasi Seeds, have questioned industry body NSAI's support for cotton seed price regulation.

The Agriculture Ministry on December 7 had issued Cotton Seeds Price (Control) Order to fix a uniform maximum retail price (MRP) on all cotton seeds, including the genetically modified versions, from March.

It also decided to fix and regulate the seed value and licensee fee, including royalty or trait value.

In three different letters to the National Seeds Association of India (NSAI), the companies said the body's support for price regulation will have wide ramifications.

“It is apparent that the actions, which have significant and wide-ranging ramifications for all its members, have been taken pursuant to deliberations amongst a small group of dominant member companies that have chosen to prioritise their short-term commercial interests over the interests of the larger group members,” one letter said.

The companies also said the NSAI actively sought nationwide regulation of cotton seed prices.

“We also understand that the NSAI has sought to defend the Cotton Seed Price Control Order in the court despite having in the past challenged other price regulations before various courts.

“We urge NSAI to refrain from pursuing such action presently and consult and obtain concurrence of all its member companies,” it added.

Shriram Bioseeds, Pioneer, Dow, Namdhari Seeds, Sungro Seeds and Bayer Crop Science are among the companies which have sought details of all NSAI proceedings from June 15.

The Centre’s order comes at a time when there is a tussle between the Mahyco-Monsanto Biotech (India) Pvt Ltd (MMBL) and seed companies over payment of royalty for using Bollgard technology in hybrid cotton seeds.

MMBL on December 19 had filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court challenging certain provisions of the order that seeks to regulate licensing of cotton seed technology.

Bt cotton is the only GM crop allowed for commercial cultivation in the country. Over the last decade, Bt cotton technology has been adopted over 95 per cent of the cotton growing area, making India its second largest producer.

Award for UAS Dharwad

The University of Agricultural of Sciences, Dharwad (UASD) has been adjudged the ‘Best Farm varsity of the country’. Among the 72 agricultural universities in the country, UASD has emerged as the best.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi which conducts all-India post graduate entrance examination for agriculture across the country, said this year 42 students of UASD cleared the examination and secured the first-place.

DP Biradar, Vice-Chancellor, UASD, received the award from Radhamohan Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, at NASC complex PUSA, New Delhi.

Agri supermarkets in Kerala

The Kochi-based South Indian Fertilisers, engaged in organic fertiliser production, will start Kissan Kendras and Agri supermarkets across Kerala. Kissan Kendras will provide all information on agriculture and make available organic fertilisers, different varieties of seeds, organic pesticides, garden tools, grow bags and all agriculture equipments under

one roof, said Sunil Kumar, Managing Director, South Indian Fertilisers. The company has also plans to sell organic rice through Kissan Kendras. Apart from promoting organic farming, he said farming guidance will be given to people for using latest technology and poly house. Kissan Kendra also aims at producing pesticide free vegetables. Our Bureau

Climate change takes the zing out of coffee



Climate change is proving to be a threat to coffee production. Higher temperatures, long droughts punctuated by intense rainfall, resilient pests and plant diseases – all of which are associated with climate change – have dramatically reduced the supply of coffee in recent years, noted speakers and scientists at the India International Coffee Festival.

Coffee price impact

Speakers spoke of how climate change could drive up coffee prices in the near term. Most land suitable for Arabica production would be reduced by 50 per cent by 2050.

They noted that climate change effects on the coffee market resulted in less abundant crops, reduction in green coffee quality, market price volatility and less profitable investments. This is despite the fact that the demand for coffee has been growing globally.

India's coffee woes

Higher temperatures, and water scarcity, or even excessive rain, have turned out to be regular phenomena in most coffee-producing regions of the world.

“In India, one has to deal with temperature increase. There is more unpredictable rain, and reduction and skewed distribution of rainfall. We also have to deal with increased pest and disease infestation – leaf rust, the white stem borer and coffee berry borer – which is proving to be a problem,” said Mario Cerutti, Partner at Lavazza, an Italian coffee brand.

A long-term increase in the number of extreme and unseasonal rainfall events has contributed to lower crop yields that are threatening the livelihood of coffee growers. For example, between 2002 and 2011, Indian coffee production declined by nearly 30 percent.

Additionally, global warming has expanded the habitat and thus the range and damage of the coffee berry borer, a grazing predator of coffee plants. This pest is placing additional stresses on all coffee crops, as is coffee rust, a devastating fungus that previously did not survive the cool mountain weather.

Livelihood matters

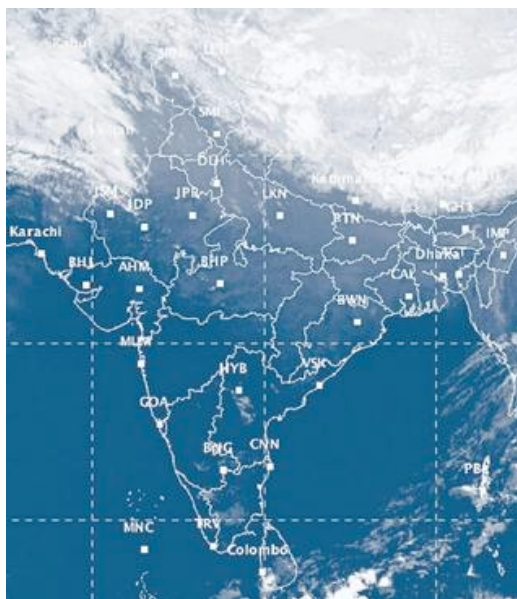
Stating that the livelihood of around 100 million people worldwide depend on coffee, Cerutti said it is a key commodity in more than 70 developing countries. He pointed out that if climate change was not addressed, the coffee sector and the livelihoods of all stakeholders would stand compromised.

He added that some of the new techniques introduced by young coffee growers and the importance of a sustainable approach would benefit local communities.

However, Brazil, the world’s biggest coffee grower, responsible for about 40 percent of global production, caused the most froth amongst international market traders, as was evidenced at the meet.

The South American country’s south-eastern State of Minas Gerais, which produces about 25 per cent of the country’s coffee crop, has experienced precipitation that was about 10 percent of normal and temperatures well above average.

Cold wave in North may relent a bit but fog threat stays



Dense to very dense fog, cold wave, and cold day conditions have panned out over disparate areas over the northern half of the country during the 24 hours ending Monday morning.

Republic Day morning in Delhi on Tuesday is expected to see dense fog but comparably warmer conditions under the gaze of a western disturbance parked over Afghanistan and neighbourhood.

Dense fog

Dense to very dense fog descended on Northwest India right from Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, North Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh during the morning hours on Monday.

Towards the East, the fog cover was seen extended from Bihar and North-West Madhya Pradesh to the hills of West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya and the rest of the Northeastern States.

Visibility was reduced to 25 metres at Patiala, Ambala, Churu, Agra, Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Purnea, Baghdogra, Cooch Behar, and Malda.

Severe cold

Cold wave (5- to 7 deg below normal) conditions were concentrated to parts of Central India and adjoining East India in interior Odisha, East Uttar Pradesh, East Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha during this period.

Cold day to severe cold day conditions (marked by cloudless skies which allow the Arctic cold to sit over ground) prevailed over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, North Rajasthan and parts of West Bengal.

But these are set to improve a bit on Tuesday morning, with the western disturbance expectedly moving in from its perch to lend its warming touch (thanks to lower pressure) to the region.

No sign of rain

During the 24 hours ending Monday morning, the lowest minimum (night) temperature of 2.4 deg Celsius in the plains was recorded at Amritsar in Punjab and Najibabad in West Uttar Pradesh.

There are still no signs of any significant rain happening anywhere in the plains during this week except as snow over the hills of Jammu and Kashmir and adjoining region.

Mounting deficit

The overall rain situation over the region during the first 20 days of the year has seen a deficit mounting to as high as 55 per cent.

Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand in North and East India and South Interior Karnataka, Rayalaseema and Lakshadweep represented the lone regions to witness any rain during this period.

According to the US Centre for Climate Prediction, the week ending January 30 is likely to see some rain materialise over Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, North Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Demand for large cardamom to rise: Spices Board

With the Prime Minister Narendra Modi declaring Sikkim as India's first organic farming State, the country is all set to find more demand for its large cardamom in the international market.

According to Spices Board, Sikkim produces a chunk of value-added cardamom and this organically grown spice may find its market especially in the growing premium class consumers whose number is increasing of late.

A Jayathilak, Chairman, Spices Board, said that organically raised large cardamom was an initiative under the Centre's Make in India programme

and it would be priced higher than its fertiliser-fed counterpart. “Discerning users are willing to pay the extra money,” he said.



India exported 665 tonnes of large cardamom in 2014-15. In the first half of the current fiscal, the powerful flavouring spice, endemic to a certain section of the Himalayan terrain, has earned the country ₹2,011.50 lakh in the international market. Sikkim, which grows large cardamom on 17,000 hectares, produces 4,000 tonnes (90 per cent of the country’s production) annually.

Jayathilak, who was in Gangtok last week to attend the function declaring Sikkim as first organic farming State, said that Spices Board has a team of 50-odd employees working in the north-eastern State to not just sustain organic farming but also empower the growers to earn more from their produce in the coming years.

Large-cardamom cultivation will get further boost in the six months from now as Spices Board is set to launch an e-platform for its famed fortnightly auction in Sikkim’s traditional spice market of Singtam.

The Singtam auctions (on from 2010) have already had an impact in the national prices of large cardamom, with farmers getting six time more prices than what prevailed five years ago, he added.

Coonoor tea prices edge up on higher offtake

As much as 90 per cent of the 9.35 lakh kg on offer at Sale No: 3 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auction was sold despite average prices rising by about ₹2 a kg from last week’s ₹95.14 to ₹97.05 due to increased demand.

Pekoe Dust grade of Vigneshwar Speciality, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, topped the Dust auction and the entire CTC market when

Leybros Agro Products and Co bought it for ₹251/kg. Darmona Estate's Super Red Dust, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, followed it when Jay Kay Enterprises bought it for ₹240.

Homedale Estate's Red Dust (₹228) and Pekoe Dust (₹220), both auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, were the other two Dust grades in the high-price bracket. Homedale Estate's Broken Pekoe, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, grade topped the Leaf auctions fetching ₹211.

In the orthodox tea market, Kairbetta topped at ₹256/kg followed by Kodanad ₹252, Havukal ₹240 and Chamraj ₹239.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging ₹68-75 per kg for plain leaf grades and ₹110-170 for brighter liquoring sorts. They ranged ₹79-86 for plain dusts and ₹120-190 for brighter liquoring dusts.

Business Standard

Unified insurance package for farmers to cover life, accident, tractor & pump sets

To be launched on a pilot basis in 45 districts; will be scaled up later depending on response



For a premium of Rs 5,145 a year, farmers will be able to avail of bare minimum [insurance](#) cover for their crop, tractors, pump-sets, self and accidents under a united package, which is being rolled out along with the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme).

The pilot for the united package, which comprises seven products, including the crop insurance scheme, will be first held in 45 districts and could be later scaled up depending on the response.

The Fasal Bima Yojana, on the other hand, has been launched for the entire country.

"Under the united package, any farmer who wants to avail the huge subsidy given under the new crop insurance scheme has to compulsorily go for any three components out of a total package of seven products. This would guarantee his full financial security," said a senior government official.

The Centre and state governments plan to subsidise up to 90% of the total premium a farmer has to pay under the new crop insurance scheme.

The seven insurance components apart from Fasal Bima Yojana in the united package are fire insurance; personal accident coverage of Rs 2 lakh under the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana; [agriculture](#) pump-set insurance; agriculture tractor insurance provided by a third party; life insurance through Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana; and student safety insurance.

The entire package will be offered by the state-run Agriculture Insurance Company, or any other general insurance company.

Drones, smart phones and other gadgets for crop cutting exercise will also be on a pilot basis in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

Officials said a bare minimum annual insurance premium of Rs 5,145 has been calculated presuming an average holding of 1.5 hectares and a tentative insurance cover of Rs 20,000 a hectare.

The accidental coverage and the life coverage will be as provided by the already existing Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana.

That apart, officials said the existing weather-based crop insurance scheme (WBCIS), which was launched by the United Progressive Alliance government, would also be in circulation and is not being withdrawn.

The only difference is that henceforth, premium under WBCIS would have to be at par with the Fasal Bima Yojana, which is 1.5% for all rabi crops and 2% flat for all kharif crops.

"It is up-to the state governments, where they want WBCIS or opt for the new Fasal Bima Yojana," the official explained.

Plan Highlights

- Centre launches a unified insurance package for farmers alongside crop insurance scheme
- The [unified package](#) would be rolled out on a pilot basis in 45 districts of the country
- In the unified package, those farmers who opt for new crop insurance scheme will have to mandatorily take three or more other products that include life insurance under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, accidental insurance under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, fire insurance, tractor insurance etc.
- The total annual premium of the package is estimated to be Rs 5,145 a year assuming crop insurance is for 1.5 hectares and sum insured is Rs 20,000 per hectare.
- The ongoing weather-based crop insurance scheme is not being discontinued. It is up to the states to opt either for WBCIS or new crop insurance scheme.