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THE HINDU

NABARD conducts financial literacy programme in village

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) organised Financial Literacy Awareness (FLA) and water management programmes in the district in coordination with banks, insurance companies and non-governmental organisations.

The programme was organised as part of the NABARD's 35th Foundation Day celebrations on Tuesday. The awareness programmes are being organised in Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

The financial literacy and water conservation programmes were conducted at Theriruveli in Mudukulathur Block, S. Mathiazhagan, Assistant General Manager, NABARD, said.

150 SHGs present

The programme was attended by more than 150 self-help groups and farmer club members, he said.

K.S. Suresh Babu, Lead Bank Manager, T. Senthamizhselvi, Managing Director, Ramanathapuram District Central Cooperative Bank, S. Nagarajan, Assistant Engineer, Agriculture Engineering Department, and Branch Managers of Pandyan Grama Bank and Indian Overseas Bank addressed the programmes.

S. Ramachandran, Financial Literacy Counsellor, IOB, and Mr Suresh Babu stressed the importance of regular savings, investments and insurance, while Mr. Nagarajan educated the participants on water management and efficient and judicious use of water with specific focus on drip and sprinkler irrigation.

Mr. Mathiazhagan, who outlined the objectives of the programme, said that the aim of the programme was to educate people from poor and vulnerable sections of the society so that they could make use of financial services products and social security schemes of the Centre.

Material in Tamil

Material in Tamil on various aspects of financial inclusion, including the recently launched social security schemes, were distributed to the people. The officials also enlightened the farmers about the new crop insurance scheme.

Experts rushed to whitefly-hit cotton areas

After whitefly was spotted recently on the cotton crop in Punjab, where the pest had done extensive damage to the crop last year, the Union Agriculture Ministry on Wednesday constituted a team of five experts to assess the situation.

“A few areas in Fazilka, Mansa and Bathinda districts are facing the whitefly menace. Hence, a team is being sent to Punjab,” said a statement from the Ministry.

The team, headed by S.N. Sushil, Plant Protection Adviser at the Directorate of Plant Protection, Faridabad, will visit the affected areas within two days.

The pest caused extensive damage to Bt. cotton varieties last year in Punjab and Haryana, bringing the production down by nearly 40 per cent. Bt. cotton accounted for over 98 per cent of the cotton sown last year in both States. The rest was the indigenous varieties.

Vegetable cultivation project launched

Minister for Agriculture V. S Sunil Kumar on Wednesday launched a comprehensive programme to increase production of pesticide-free vegetables by involving various government departments, institutions and school children.

The Minister inaugurated the programme by handing over kits containing saplings of varied vegetables to students of St Mary’s Higher Secondary School, Pattom, here. The Agriculture Department plans to provide 50 lakh kits to schoolchildren across the State before Onam. The department will also provide grow bags to children and public at an affordable prize under the scheme.

In his inaugural address, the Minister said the government had decided to double the prize money for students and educational institutions adopting the best agriculture practices to increase the yield.

School syllabus

To kindle farming interest in children, the State government had decided to introduce agriculture part of the school syllabus from the next academic year, he added.



GREEN REVOLUTION: Minister for Agriculture V.S. Sunil Kumar inaugurating a comprehensive vegetable cultivation programme organised by the Agriculture Department in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday. —Photo: C. Ratheesh Kumar

He urged educational institutions to organise functions to felicitate former students who excelled in the agriculture field.

“Taking the present generation back to farming is the only solution for environmental degradation, addressing drought and growing health issues. Increasing farm productivity is the only viable answer to the three pressing problems people confront,” he said.

The State cannot progress until it tackles depletion in farm sector. “Food security can only assure the overall development of people and the society at large. The State government will take all steps to increase agriculture productivity,” he said

The government would partner with the Local Self Government Department, Irrigation, Cooperative Societies and Education Department to carry forward its agenda, he added.

K Muraleedharan, MLA, in his address said need of the hour was to inculcate a sense of pride in taking up farming. Farming should be given its place of pride in the society so that more people are tempted to agriculture activity, he said.

Deputy Mayor Rakhi Ravikumar and officials from the Agriculture Department attended the function.

24 districts get more than 100% rainfall in 2 weeks

As many as 24 districts in the State have received more than 100 per cent rainfall in the last two weeks, resulting in an increase in areas planted with kharif crops.

Till July 11, 70 per cent of the sowing had been completed and the target of 95 per cent set by the Agriculture Ministry would be met this week if the good rainfall continued, said newly-appointed Minister Pandurang Fundkar, after chairing a meeting of officials on Wednesday.

Another nine districts — Nashik, Nandurbar, Kohlapur, Latur, Osmanabad, Beed, Nagpur, Gondia and Buldhana — have received rainfall between 75 per cent and 100 per cent, while two tehsils in Solapur have got less than 25 per cent rain. Solapur is likely to receive more rain in August, according to officials.

The maximum sowing of rice has been completed in Chandrapur, Gondia, and Bhandara and in the Konkan division.

Training in pest management

A free training programme on ‘Integrated pest and disease management in turmeric’ will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra here on July 15.

A press release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, said that the training will focus on identification of diseases, managing pest in the crop, use of pesticides and also measures for improving productivity. Also, training would also be on safe storage of the turmeric after harvesting.

Farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programme. For registration visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 and 266650, the release added.

Water released for 'kar' paddy cultivation

Collector M. Karunakaran on Wednesday released water from Adavinainar dam for 'kar' paddy cultivation to be taken up on 2,147 acres in western Tirunelveli.

He said the 25 cusecs of water to be released from Adavinainar dam till October 25 would benefit 315 acres under Mettukaal channel and old ayacut, 243 acres under new ayacut, 131 acres under karisal channel, 196 acres under Paimpozhil channel, 171 acres under Vallaakulam channel, 137 acres under Ilaththur channel, 325 acres under Nainagaram channel, 319 acres under Kilaankaadu channel, 14 acres under Pungan channel, 274 acres under Kambili channel and 18 acres under Vadakarai channel.

The water release will benefit farmers of Vadakarai Keezhpidaagai, Paimpozhil, Kuththukkalvalasai, Achchanputhur, Nainagaram, Aayikudi, Vadakarai Melpidaagai, Ilaththur, Kodikurichi, Neduvayal and Kilaankaadu.

“If the catchment areas of the dam experience good rainfall in the days to come, the quantum of discharge from the reservoir will be increased. If not, water will be released on turn basis so that farmers should use the water judiciously,” he said.

Tenkasi MP Vasanthi Murugesan, and Chairman of Shencottai Municipality A. Mohanakrishnan were present.

Punjab again under whitefly attack, agriculture department on its toes

Cotton crop on 12,000 acres affected in Abohar, experts say situation can be controlled.



A cotton crop affected by whitefly in a field in Muktsar. (Source: Express Photo by Gurmeet Singh)

Punjab, for the second year in a row, is grappling to contain white flies from destroying their cotton crops. The most affected block as of now is Fazilka district's Khuian Sarwar where out of 23,000 acres of land dedicated to cotton, 11, 500 acres is under the whitefly attack. Similarly, in Abohar area, around 12,000 acres of cotton block is under attack.

Already on its toes, senior officials of the Agricultural department have been visiting the cotton belt and other areas daily. Besides them, officials from the state government are making the rounds after Chief Additional Secretary NS Kalsi paid a visit to Abohar a few days back.

With monsoon in progress, the farmers have been asked to stay away from using pesticides and wait and watch as heavy showers help in controlling pests.

Notably, due to the fear of white fly attack, around 42 per cent fall was witnessed in cotton area this year.

Around 4.36 lakh hectares area was under cotton last year, which is reduced to 2.56 lakh hectares, a fall of 1.80 lakh hectare area this year.

“Whiteflies are not dwindling at all. The only way out is to avoid the Bt. cotton varieties, which have become prone to white fly attack.

Farmers are advised to go for non- Bt and Desi cotton varieties to save their crops,” said Vinod Jyani who had sown 5 acres of non Bt Desi cotton variety.

When enquired about the white fly attack on cotton crops this year, Director of state Agriculture Department, Dr JS Bain said,

“We are conducting regular checks of the crop.

Around 500 scouts have also been appointed to keep a tight watch on the crop this year.

He however said that the cotton experts have claimed that whitefly attack is controllable and has recommended certain pesticides.

Punjab: Central team to visit state to inspect whitefly attack

The five-member team will visit Abohar in Fazilka district of Punjab where several villages have come under the grip of whitefly pest attack.



A Central team, led by Plant Protection Advisor, will visit Punjab on July 14 to inspect cotton crop which has been attacked by whitefly pest.

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The five-member team will visit Abohar in Fazilka district of Punjab where several villages have come under the grip of whitefly pest attack, an official said.

The team will comprise Plant Protection Advisor S N Sushil, Assistant Plant Protection Advisor B S Phogat (under the Directorate of Plant Protection, Quarantine & Storage) and one representative each of the Central Integrated Pest Management Centre, Jalandhar, Punjab Agricultural University and Punjab Agriculture department, official said.

“The team will visit the affected villages where whitefly has attacked cotton crop and prepare a report which will be submitted to the Central government for further action,” he said.

Whitefly pest has again attacked cotton crop in Punjab, posing threat to the Kharif crop.

The attack of whitefly on cotton crop which is now on flowering stage has been visible in about 15 villages of Khuian Sarwar block of Abohar in Fazilka district.

With farm experts trying their best to prevent any damage to crop, growers have been advised to spray recommended chemicals to save the crop from whitefly which attacks cotton leaves.

Notably, whitefly pest attack had caused widespread damage to Bt cotton varieties in Punjab and Haryana last year.

In Punjab, 1.36 lakh hectares out of total 4.50 lakh hectares of cotton acreage was ravaged by whitefly attack last season and the output had dropped by 40 per cent due to large scale pest attack.

This time the whitefly attack was spotted on cotton crop which was planted near orchards in Abohar which is known for Kinnow fruit.

Cotton area in Punjab saw one of biggest decline in current season as crop area under this Kharif crop shrunk to 2.56 lakh hectares as against 4.50 lakh hectares last season.

With whitefly again being spotted, Punjab Congress had even attacked SAD-BJPcombine led state government while accusing it of having failed in preventing pest attack on the crop.

Cropping Patterns: Non-Bt desi cotton makes comeback in North-West India

A total of 72,280 hectares area has come this year under desi non-Bt varieties and hybrids in the largely irrigated cotton belt of North-West India.



Farmer Vinod Jani at his field in Fazilka, Punjab planted with non-Bt desi cotton.

Farmers in Punjab, Haryana and northern Rajasthan have more than trebled their area planted to non-Bt desi cotton varieties and hybrids this year.

This has happened even as total cotton acreage in this belt has shrunk, thanks to the widespread damage from whitefly pest attacks last year, making farmers less inclined to sow the fibre crop.

A total of 72,280 hectares area has come this year under desi non-Bt varieties and hybrids in the largely irrigated cotton belt of North-West India.

That includes 36,932 hectares in Haryana, 21,924 hectares in Sri Ganganagar and Hanumangarh districts of North Rajasthan, and 13,424 hectares in Punjab. Last year, an estimated 9,000 hectares was sown under desi cottons in Haryana, 9,000-10,000 hectares in Rajasthan and a mere 4,000 hectares in Punjab.

“The desi varieties/hybrids are less susceptible to whitefly (a deadly sap-sucking insect pest) and resistant to cotton leaf-curl virus (that causes stunting of the plants).

Although they aren't resistant to bollworm pests unlike the Bt cotton hybrids, farmers in this region are currently more bothered about whitefly and leaf-curl virus," notes Dilip Monga, head of the Central Institute for Cotton Research's (CICR) regional station at Sirsa, Haryana.

Desi cottons are mainly from the indigenous *Gossypium arboreum* species. The bulk of the cotton grown in India today comprises Bt hybrids based on the "American" *Gossypium hirsutum* species.

Although the latter produce fibre with longer staple length, more tensile strength and fineness — making them better suited for use in modern spinning mills — the coarse lint from desi cottons has better absorptive capacity. As a result, it finds use for surgical purposes and also for making mattresses, quilts, denims and stuffed toys.

Ramanpreet Singh, a farmer from Panniwala Mahla in Abohar tehsil of Punjab's Fazilka district, grew Bt cotton on 50 acres last year.

But this time, he has cut down his total cotton area to 30 acres, out of which a third is under RG-8, a non-Bt desi variety developed by the Agricultural Research Station at Sri Ganganagar "After last year's whitefly attacks, a new trend is visible in our area, wherein many growers are now

interested in planting the desi varieties," he points out.

His fellow-villager Baldev Singh's lament is over the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) doing very little to develop more non-Bt cotton varieties.

"We became dependent on Bt hybrids because its seeds were the only ones easily available. It was a rat race and everyone was planting only Bt," says this 32-acre farmer, whose entire Bt cotton crop on 8 acres last year was ravaged by whitefly.

This year, he has devoted only 3 acres to cotton and the whole of it to RG-8: "I am waiting for the results. If the yields are good, I may increase the area further next year".

Manphool Benipal from Ban Sudhar in Haryana's Sirsa district is another farmer who has sown a desi variety, CICR-1, in two out of his five-acre land. Last year, he had suffered losses from planting Bt cotton on his entire holding.

According to Ram Pal, an agricultural development officer with the Haryana government, in the four villages of Ban Sudhar, Jhorar Nali, Chamal and Kelnian — all in Sirsa tehsil — about 125 hectares have been brought under non-Bt varieties this year:

“This is a real comeback because for the past many years, not a single farmer was growing non-Bt cotton in this area”.

Vinod Jyani, a large landowner from Katehra village in Fazilka, has been cultivating non-Bt cotton in the last couple of years. This time, too, he has sown Vihani-161, a desi variety from Rajasthan, on five acres and RG-8 on one acre.

“Unlike others who grew Bt cotton, my crop did not suffer any whitefly damage last year.

The only problem with the desi cottons is that their boll size is less compared to that from Bt American hybrids. So, they require twice the labour for picking,” he observes.

Many farmers who are trying out desi varieties this time aren't sure about yields either. Shivkaran Singh from Chak 5-O Lakhian village in Sri Ganganagar's Karanpur tehsil has planted RG-8 in seven out of his 14 acres under cotton this year, as opposed to Bt hybrids in all the 14 acres in 2015.

“My average yield from Bt cotton is 10 quintals-plus per acre. I don't know what these will be from the desi non-Bt varieties,” remarks this farmer who has an MBA and was working earlier with IBM.

CICR's Monga believes that the desi cottons can give 10-12 quintals per acre in irrigated conditions, if there are no pest and diseases.

Being less prone to whitefly attacks is certainly an advantage in today's circumstances.

“We want to increase the share of desi varieties/hybrids in the total area under cotton in this region to 25 per cent in next couple of years”, he adds.

“We did a lot of promotion for desi cotton this year, including through sowing of varieties such as FDR-124, LDR-949 and LD-327 on some 500 demonstration plots.

But there was an issue of availability of seeds”, admits Paramjit Singh, director of PAU's regional research station at Bathinda.

The Haryana Agricultural University even issued an advisory to farmers to sow desi varieties in place of Bt hybrids.

It led to a significant increase in area under non-Bt desi varieties in all the five cotton-belt districts of the state:

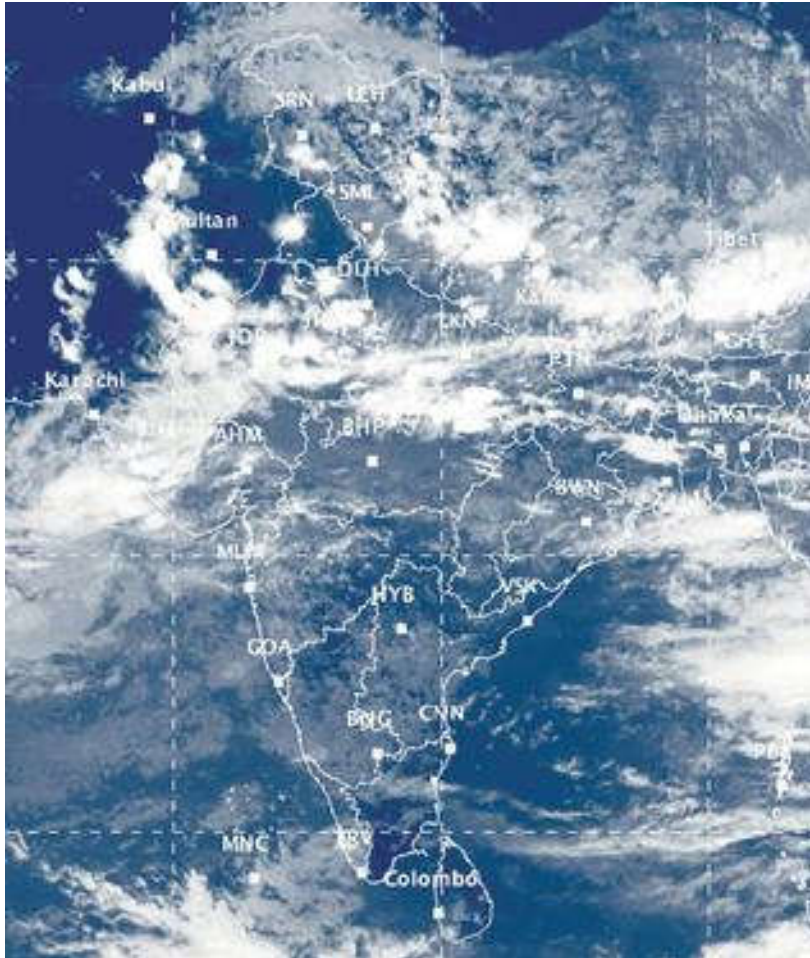
Sirsa, Fatehabad, Jind, Hisar and Bhiwani. But again, a common complain voiced by farmers was non-availability of seeds in the university or authorised stores.

The overall cotton area in Punjab has reduced from 4.50 lakh hectares (lh) in 2015 to 2.56 lh this year,

while similarly falling from 6.30 lh to 4.98 lh in Haryana and rising marginally from 3.49 lh to 3.51 lh in Rajasthan.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Monsoon covers entire country, poised to take a breather



The South-West monsoon has completed coverage of the entire country ahead of the scheduled timeline of July 15, the India Met Department announced on Wednesday.

The 24-hour period up to Wednesday morning saw heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places over Madhya Maharashtra while it was heavy over Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Gangetic West Bengal.

Systems weaken

Wednesday also saw the two main supporting systems — a low-pressure area over North-West Madhya Pradesh and the offshore trough along the West Coast — weaken one after the other.

This is considered a precursor to the weak phase that the monsoon is likely entering over the next couple of days. The Met has already indicated that the 'axis' of the monsoon would migrate to the foothills of the Himalayas during this phase.

During the active phase of the monsoon, the axis is centred along a North-West to South-East alignment linking Rajasthan with the Bay of Bengal and laid out across the plains of North India.

Monsoon systems (low-pressure areas and others) originating in the Bay move in over land through a corridor (trough) built around the axis, spreading rain over Central and North-West India.

Movement of the axis towards the foothills of the Himalayas will take the belt of heavy rain to that region, covering Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and North-East India.

Global weather models, too, have been alluding to the emerging weak phase. The US Climate Prediction says that July 13 to 19 would witness a 'break' in the monsoon over South Asia.

In the week that follows (July 20 to 26), the 'break' phase should shift northward over South Asia and expand over South-East Asia, with some 'moisture recharge' over southern India.

In other words, the US agency is indicating that the dry phase in the monsoon will alternate between southern and northern parts of the country during the next two weeks.

The second week will witness a limited revival of the monsoon over South India, thanks to the movement of a helpful Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) wave across the Indian Ocean, even as North India dries up.

Spot rubber finishes flat



Spot rubber continued to rule unchanged on Wednesday. RSS 4 finished flat at 140 a kg, according to traders and the Rubber Board.

The grade was quoted steady at 137 by dealers. July futures closed at 139 (139.06), August at 136.08 (135.94), September at 129.55 (129.35) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) firmed up to 108.23 (108.23) at Bangkok.

July futures improved to ¥171.6 (109.87) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (/kg): RSS-4: 140 (140); RSS-5: 136 (136); Ungraded: 110 (110); ISNR 20: 118 (118) and Latex (60% drc): 96 (96).

Govt to import 2 mt of urea to meet kharif demand



To meet the demand for fertiliser in the ongoing kharif season, the government has contracted 2 million tonnes of urea import for delivery by the month-end.

India is dependent on urea imports as domestic output is lower than the demand. Overseas purchase is being done via three state trading enterprises — STC, MMTC and IPL.

“Our urea requirement is 2.5 million tonnes for this kharif season. We have finalised imports for 2 million tonnes of urea which will reach Indian ports by the end of this month,” a senior Fertiliser Ministry official told PTI.

The third import tender has been floated to procure the balance 5,00,000 tonnes of urea, the official said.

Till last week, farmers had sown kharif crops such as paddy and pulses in 40.6 million hectare. Though the acreage was down compared to the year-ago period, good rains in most parts have boosted planting operations.

Once the kharif season is over, the government will assess the urea requirement for the rabi (winter) season after discussing with the states and then place tenders for imports.

Normally, the urea requirement is around 3.5 million tonnes for the rabi season beginning October.

Stating that country's total urea imports could come down this year, the official said, "overall, urea import is estimated to be around 7 million tonnes in the 2016-17 fiscal, much lower than 8.5 million tonnes in the last year."

The imports are expected to be lower on a likely increase in domestic output of the fertiliser this year and if the demand remains at last year's level of 31 mt, the official added.

Much of the urea imports are procured from the open market. India also has an offtake agreement with Oman-based fertiliser firm OMIFCO, which is a joint venture between domestic cooperatives IFFCO, Kribhco and Oman Oil company SAOC.


Last month, Fertiliser Minister Ananth Kumar had said the domestic urea output could touch a new record at 25.5 mt in 2016-17 fiscal, up by 1 mt from the last year.

Urea is a controlled fertiliser and sold at a fixed selling price of Rs. 5,360 per tonne. The difference between cost of production and selling price is paid as subsidy to manufacturers.

CAB estimates cotton output to drop 12% on lower acreage

Particulars	CAB Meeting	
	Feb 2, '16	July 13, '16
Opening Stock	52	66
Production	352	338
Import	11	15
Supply	415	419
Mill consumption	300	298
Non-mill Consumption	10	10
Export	70	68
Demand	380	376
Closing Stock	35	43

(in lakh bales)



The Cotton Advisory Board has lowered crop production estimate by 12 per cent to 338 lakh bales (lb) in 2015-16 cotton season against 386 lb recorded in the same period last year with farmers shifting to other remunerative crops.

The area under cotton has dipped seven per cent to 119 lakh hectares (lh) against 128 lh registered in the same period last year, as per the third CAB meeting held in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Given the widespread pest attack on Bt cotton crops, the yield per hectare has dipped to 482 kgs from 511 kgs.

Dr Kavita Gupta, Textile Commissioner, Ministry of Textile said some of the farmers in Punjab region have adopted desi variety of cotton resulting in the areas under desi cotton going up to 10 per cent this year against seven per cent last year.

“The large scale speculation is driving up cotton prices with China declaring that it has already offloaded huge stocks, but India has enough inventories to meet the demand,” she said.

In fact, Gupta added, cotton prices in the domestic market are expected to come down with rising imports. International cotton prices will also come under pressure as fresh cotton supply starts from October, she said.

India’s cotton imports have already touched 15 lb (14 lb) and may hit 18 lakh bales in next three months, Gupta said.

The Cotton Corporation of India has bought 8.3 lakh bales to support Minimum Support Price and has sold the entire quantity, said Gupta.

Production in the central zone including Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh is expected to fall 11 per cent to 187 lb from 211 lb registered last year while it has dipped 30 per cent to 37 lb in the northern zone (Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan).

While the output in Telangana has gone up substantially to 59 lb (50 lb), the sharp fall in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu has dragged the overall output in southern region to 108 lb (117 lb).

The total cotton supply is estimated lower by three per cent to 419 lb (433 lb). Exports are seen higher at 68 lb (58 lb) even as domestic mill consumption dropping to 274 lb (278 lb) leading to higher demand of 376 lb (367 lb). The closing stock is expected to be lower at 43 lb (66 lb).

Tea production wilts amidst dry spell



India is heading for a decline in tea production this calendar compared to 2015.

“The Tea Board has just now announced the production for May and it is as much as 22.13 million kg (mkg) less than May 2015. The output has fallen to 99.56 mkg from 121.69 mkg in May 2015. This is a decline of 18.19 per cent,” Rajesh Gupta, compiler of annual ‘Global Tea Digest’, told *BusinessLine*.

“This year, May was a dry month in both the North and South. North India lost 10.86 mkg, producing 84.73 mkg. South India lost 11.27 mkg and produced 14.83 mkg. Collectively, India produced 98.56 mkg against 121.69 mkg in May 2015,” a Tea Board source said.

“May is generally a ‘rush peak cropping month but this year it was among the driest months of the recent years,” Ramesh Bhojarajan, President, The Nilgiri Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturers’ Association, said.

“Prolonged dry weather affected plantation activities. (Powerful) wind caused evaporation on soil. This reduced the moisture content and in turn retarded the

harvest. The arrival of green leaf for processing in our factories was so low that we could operate the factories only for four days a week and that too in a single shift,” he noted.

Tea companies producing speciality tea were affected more. “Huge wind caused withering of the tender leaves. This reduced the availability of leaves rich in juice required for manufacture of multiple brewing speciality teas,” said ENR Vejaya Shekara, Production Executive, Avataa Speciality Tea Bluegate Beverages.

“Our compilation shows that India’s production in the five months of the current calendar dropped to 272.55 mkg from 281.75 mkg in Jan-May 2015. This fall of 9.20 mkg marked a decline of 3.27 per cent,” Gupta said.

Assam topped the country’s production table with the cumulative output for the five months totalling 121.51 mkg (up 13.20 mkg). West Bengal lost a marginal 0.18 mkg to reach 68.91 mkg.

Due to adverse weather, South Indian production dropped by as much as 22.11 mkg to total 76.62 mkg. Tamil Nadu lost 15.83 mkg and fell to 52.34 mkg and Kerala 5.60 mkg to drop to 22.34 mkg.

“As of now, indications are that India’s production in the current calendar will be around 1,200 mkg against 1,209 mkg produced in 2015,” Bhojarajan added.

Edible oils slip on bearish cues



Edible oils market ruled weak on back of eased demand amid higher selling pressure.

On the BCE, groundnut and sunflower oil declined by 10 and 5 per 10 kg each.

Rapeseed and cotton oil ruled steady. Liberty was quoting palmolein for 540, super palmolein 570, soyabean refined 630. Ruchi's rates: soyabean refined 621. Allana traded palmolein for 543, soya refined oil 628, sunflower refined oil 735.

At Rajkot, groundnut oil *Telia* tin declined to 2,100 (2,110) and loose (10 kg) was steady at 1,350. BCE spot rates (/10 kg):

groundnut oil 1,360 (1,370), soya ref. 620 (620), sunflower exp. ref. 650 (655), sunflower ref. 720 (725), rapeseed ref. 910 (910), rapeseed exp. ref. 880 (880), cottonseed ref. 708 (708) and palmolein 532 (532).

Weak buying pounds pulses



Barring masur, majority of pulses and pulse seeds in Indore mandis declined on weak buying support and demand at higher rate.

Chana prices fell by 200 a quintal, chana (kanta) declined to 8,550-8,600. Similarly, chana (desi) declined to 8,500. Tur (Maharashtra) declined by 100 to 9,000 a quintal, while tur (Madhya Pradesh) ruled at 8,100-8,200. Tur dal (sawa no) fetched 12,000-200, tur dal (full) at 12,500-13,400, while tur marka was at 13,200-600. Moong (bold) declined to 5,400-5,800. Moong (medium) ruled stable at 5,200. Moong dal (medium) went for 6,200-6,500, moong dal (bold) at 6,900-7,300, while moong mongar quoted at 6,800-7,000.

Central team to assess whitefly damage to cotton crop in Punjab

The Agriculture Ministry is sending a five-member team to Punjab within two days to assess damage to cotton crop by whitefly pest, following reports of 15 villages being affected.

The Central team, led by SN Sushil, Plant Protection Advisor, Directorate of Plant Protection, Quarantine & Storage, Faridabad, would visit areas where cotton crops have been affected by whitefly. “A few pockets of Fazilka, Mansa and Bathinda districts are facing whitefly menace,” an official statement read.

After the visit, the team will make an assessment and will submit the report thereon, the release added.

According to reports, whitefly pest has attacked cotton crop in Punjab, posing a threat to kharif crop. A Punjab Agriculture Department official told PTI, “whitefly has attacked cotton crop in several fields of about 15 villages of Khuian Sarwar block in Abohar.”

Last season, the whitefly attack had damaged Bt cotton varieties in Punjab and Haryana, with 1.36 lakh hectares out of total 4.50 lakh hectares of cotton acreage affected in the former, plunging output by 40 per cent.

With Assembly elections due next year, the issue has taken a political colour with the Opposition hitting out at the Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP combine for its “failure” to prevent the pest attack by making available the right insecticides.

Business Standard

Maharashtra vegetable prices skyrocket

Supply disruptions fuel price rise as wholesalers go on an indefinite strike

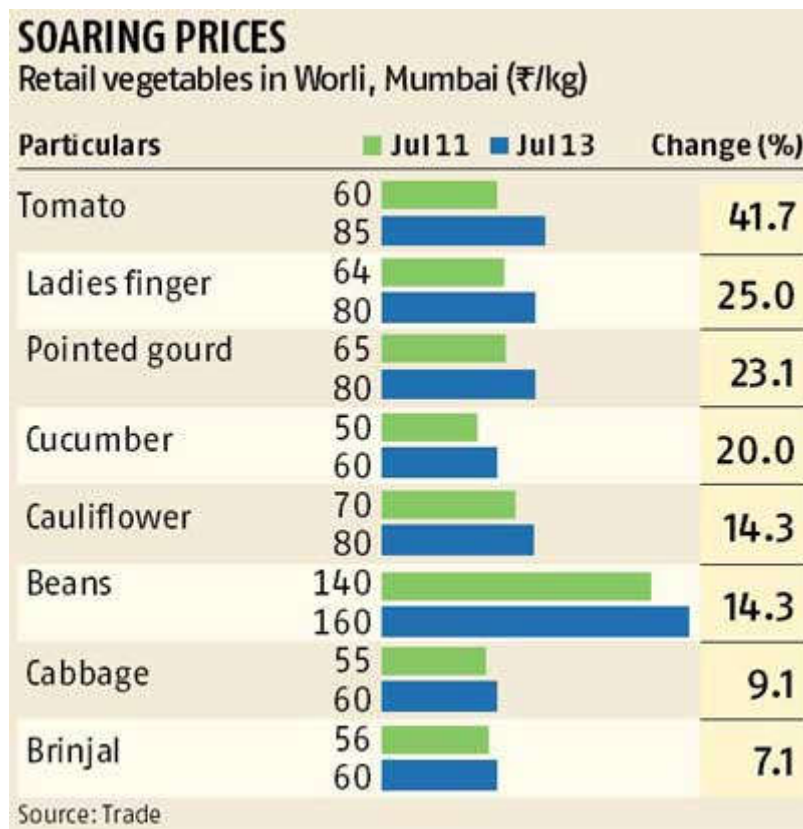


Prices of vegetables and fruits have skyrocketed in the last two days in Mumbai and its suburbs on supply disruptions following an indefinite strike by wholesalers in nearby mandis against the Maharashtra government's proposed move to cut their trade commissions.

Retail prices of vegetables have jumped by up to 40 per cent since wholesalers decided to go on strike on Tuesday. After hitting Rs 100 a kg, tomato slumped to Rs 60 on government intervention but the price bounced back to Rs 85 a kg due on lack of supply.

With an overall weight of 1.74 in the wholesale price index (WPI) and 6.04 in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rising vegetables prices may push food inflation.

Ahead of a move to delist fruits and vegetables from the Agricultural Produce Markets Committee (APMC), the Maharashtra government has registered over 700 farmersproducers companies (FPCs) in the last few months for smooth distribution of fruits and vegetables in the state.



FPCs procure fruits and vegetables directly from farmers and distribute them among themselves for retailing. But they cannot meet the entire supply of around 3,000 tonnes of green vegetables for Mumbai and its suburbs. Supply has remained deficient by at least 50 per cent, resulting in the price rise.

“Direct selling will benefit farmers and consumers,” said Shri Ram Gadhave, president of the Vegetables Grower Association of India. Farmers receive an estimated 35-40 per cent of the price of vegetables paid by consumers.

Vegetable wholesalers are protesting against the government's proposal to restrict them from collecting eight per cent commission from farmers.

“We pay farmers upfront and buy in bulk without any security. We also help farmers with their livelihood or medical expenses. A commission of eight per cent is the only source of income from our investment, we cannot simply do charity,” said Sanjay Bhujbal, a vegetable vendor at the Vashi APMC.

A little away from the city in the northern suburbs, vegetables are 15-30 per cent costlier. Apple sells for Rs 160-200 a kg, a rise of nearly 20 per cent in two days.

Vegetable prices started firming up early this year on low production in a drought year. Vegetable prices rose 60 per cent in New Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai.

The Maharashtra government convened a meeting of wholesalers, which remained inconclusive. It has decided to discuss the issue again on Thursday.

Pulses and oilseed area rising in AP and Telangana as Kharif progresses

Unlike in the previous years, both the states have received normal to excess rainfall from June till July 12



Pulses, oil seeds and maize are among the top crops that are leading the ongoing Kharif sowings in both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, even though there is still a couple of more weeks left for the sowing of irrigated dry (ID) crops during the current season.

In Telangana, pulses and soybean have already crossed the normal acreage under these crops as some portion of cotton area was being shifted to these and other alternate crops, according to the officials.

Telangana government had actively campaigned against cotton farming, which now accounts for 32% of the total gross cropped area of 53.2 lakh hectare. Owing to its drought resistant characteristics, cotton crop was favoured by the farmers in Telangana.

The Paddy plantation, which stretches up to the first week of August in Telangana and beyond the first week of August in AP owing to the delayed water release under canal irrigation, are yet to pick up pace.

AP and Telangana have a normal cropped area of 40.96 lakh hectares and 43.44 lakh hectares, respectively, in the Kharif season. So far, sowing operations were completed in 33% and 51% of the normal area in AP and Telangana, respectively, according to the data updated by the respective agriculture departments on Wednesday.

Unlike in the previous years, both the states have received normal to excess rainfall from June till July 12.

Paddy is the largest crop in AP with a normal cropped area of 16.03 lakh hectares in the Kharif season, though paddy plantation takes place at the fag end of the season. "Sowing in over 60% of the area under the ID crops have already been completed in the state, while paddy operations have not yet picked up momentum," a senior official of the AP agriculture department told *Business Standard*.

In Telangana, paddy is the second-largest crop with a normal cropped area of 9.86 lakh hectares, while cotton occupies the largest area of 17.09 lakh hectares in the Kharif season. Telangana is among the top 3-4 cotton growing states in India.

Coming to pulses, with the completion of sowing in 4.22 lakh hectares, pulses area stood at 104% of its normal cropped area in Telangana as on Wednesday. Of this, red gram (tur dal) is sown in 2.71 lakh hectares. In AP, sowing in about 65% of 2.53 lakh-hectare normal cropped area of pulses has been completed.

Groundnut is the second-largest crop in AP, with a normal cropped area of 9.30 lakh hectares in the Kharif season. So far, sowing of groundnut crop was completed in 5.88 lakh hectares, almost double the area compared to the sowing of the crop during the same period last year, indicating a likely increase of the crop during the season.

In Telangana, soybean was sown in 2.70 lakh hectares as against the normal cropped area of 2 lakh hectares. Maize is the other major crop in Telangana, which was already sown in 3.67 lakh hectares as compared to the normal cropped area of 4.91 lakh hectares.

However, paddy plantation is complete in only 8% and 13% of the total cropped area under paddy in Telangana and AP, respectively.

Despite the drought conditions, Telanana and AP produced 68 lakh tonnes and 64 lakh tonnes of foodgrains, respectively, during the last year. Area under foodgrains was 19.86 lakh hectares and 19.48 lakh hectares in AP and Telangana.

While paddy production accounted for 57.18 lakh tonnes of the total foodgrain production in AP, in Telangana the production of paddy, maize and pulses stood at 39.74 lakh tonnes, 23.94 lakh tonnes and 3.38 lakh tonnes, respectively, in 2015-16.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Govt to distribute seedlings to 50 lakh student farmers



Plants actually wage war with each other to outgrow and absorb sunlight.

Thiruvananthapuram: A group of 120 'student farmers' cultivate vegetables like ladies finger, bitter gourd, ginger, yam and much more on the campus of the St Mary's School, Pattom here.

Taking forward the government decision to make farming an integral part of the state school curriculum and invoke the young minds to take an interest in farming, agriculture minister V S Sunil Kumar launched a state-wide school vegetable cultivation programme on Wednesday at St Mary's. A half-acre plot and two 20-cent plots in the campus have been demarcated for the programme.

The idea is to form farming clubs in schools across the state and engage children in farming activities, so that they develop an affinity towards agriculture. Under the programme the government will distribute over 50 lakh seedlings to over 50 lakh students in the state, encouraging them to actively

participate in the initiative. "We already have an active farming club in the school and students from classes VIII, IX and X participate in the cultivation activities. With the new government initiative in place, we expect to broaden the activities of the club," said Reji Lukose, the coordinator of the farming club at the school.

"Farming or agriculture is not to be confined under a single department. Agricultural department is attempting to integrate its activities with that of several other departments to achieve this objective. You can all grow up to become, doctors, engineers or politicians but you can all be farmers too alongside. To ensure healthy food, we need to revive the farming culture," said V S Sunil Kumar. Cultivation of vegetables can be carried out even in small spaces, like on rooftops or backyards and technical assistance needed to execute such programmes will be provided by the department of agriculture," he said.

The minister also declared that the first day of the Malayalam month, Chingam, will be celebrated as Farmer's Day across schools and farmers of the concerned locality shall be felicitated at the school on that day. The government has also decided to double the amount given as cash awards to the best student, teacher and school promoting farming activities, the minister added.

Water to be released from Mullaperiyar after months, many farmers to benefit



Mullaperiyar dam.

After a delay of almost one-and-a-half months, the state government has announced the release of water from Mullaperiyar dam for irrigation of kuruvai crop in Cumbum valley in Theni district, starting from Thursday.

In a statement, chief minister, J Jayalalithaa announced that she had received petitions from farmers in the region to release water for the first crop areas of Cumbum valley. Based on their demand, water will be released for a period of 120 days from Mullaperiyar dam for the irrigation of first crop areas in the valley and drinking water needs of Madurai and Theni districts.

As much as 14,707 acres of paddy will be irrigated in Theni, Uthamapalayam and Bodinayakkanur blocks of the district, the statement said.

Farmers in the valley were becoming anxious as water release was delaying due to lack of rainfall. According to district agricultural officials, the farmers had raised nurseries and keeping all agricultural inputs ready to commence cultivation. They were only waiting for the chief minister's announcement which they welcomed joyfully.

Though South West monsoon began in the Western Ghats from June 1, rainfall in catchment areas of Mullaperiyar was not adequate and water level did not go up for nearly a month. Only in the first week of July, water level started crossing the 112 feet mark as the monsoon rains started catching up.

According to public works department officials, 300 cusecs of water will be released from Mullaperiyar dam in which 100 cusecs will be meant for drinking water.

On Wednesday morning, water level in Mullaperiyar dam was 118.70 feet with an inflow of 1,561 cusecs. The storage level was 2,393 mcft and 100 cusecs of water is being released as of now. Vaigai dam level is still around 28 feet with as little inflow of two cusecs. The storage level is 297 mcft while 60 cusecs is being released for the drinking water needs of Madurai city.

Wholesalers get even with farmers



The tussle between the state government and fruits and vegetable wholesalers ended on Wednesday with the government agreeing to delist wholesale of fruits and vegetables from the ambit of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC).

The state representatives met with the wholesalers' association leaders, including those from Pune, in Mumbai to take the decision. As a result, the market is now open for wholesalers as it was opened for the farmers after a recent notification.

The wholesalers have now called off their strike. Unloading and sale of vegetables at the city's wholesale market would resume from Thursday.

Shivlal Bhosale of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Market Yard Adate Association said, "The ministry officials have agreed to delist wholesale of fruits and vegetables from the APMC. This means we will also be free to sell in the open market. Instead of paying cess and other costs, we shall be paying service tax on transactions. A notification to this effect will be issued on August 6."

Bhosale said the traders are happy with the government's decision.

Close to 1,000 wholesalers and traders of Pune APMC had gone on an indefinite strike from Monday to protest against the government order allowing farmers to sell their produce directly in the open market.

The APMC said it was waiting for the government's fresh directives. Dilip Khaire, the APMC administrator, said, "We have come to know that the strike has been withdrawn. We hope the work at APMC will resume on Thursday."

Khaire said he was yet to receive the details of Wednesday's meeting and directives from the government on the latest developments pertaining to how to impose the cess and other fees.

Sources said that delisting would minimize the role of APMCs in supply and sale of vegetables and fruits. Sources said most APMCs are dominated by NCP and Congress leaders.

The BJP-led government now has an upper hand to bring down the dominance of NCP-Congress combine by allowing direct sale of commodities without the role of APMCs and wholesalers. In the long run, the step could also lead to abolition of APMCs, a source said.

Market experts said they were unsure if delisting of vegetables and fruits would benefit farmers and end-users.

"How farmers' interest will remain intact if there is no regulation over traders. In fact, the government needs to work on price control mechanism and ensure that a farmer gets a reasonable price to produce and traders do not escalate prices of farm produce," an expert said.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Increasing pace of kharif sowing gives relief, as retail inflation increases in June



Good kharif sowing is essential to cool down the retail inflation, which increased 5.77 per cent in June against 5.76 per cent in May, mainly driven by food prices.

PUNE: Sowing of kharif crops has gathered pace across the country amid good rainfall in July that has made up for the delayed onset of monsoon, raising hopes of higher growth in businesses dependent on the farm sector and lower dependence on imports for commodities such as cotton, maize and soyabean.

Good kharif sowing is essential to cool down the retail inflation, which increased 5.77 per cent in June against 5.76 per cent in May, mainly driven by food prices.

Key crops such as cotton, pulses and soyabean are entering the last stage of sowing for the current season, people familiar with the matter said. The actual sowing figures, especially of cotton, are likely to be higher than the official figures as the pace of sowing has quickened, they said.

"Cotton sowing in the top cotton producing states of Gujarat and Maharashtra is going on briskly as spread of rainfall has been good for sowing," said Keshav Kranthi, director at the Central Cotton Research Institute in Nagpur.

The domestic prices of ginned cotton increased significantly to about Rs 122 per kg in April from Rs 90-92 a year ago.

Nonetheless, the total area under cotton cultivation is expected to decline to 105 lakh hectares from 118 lakh hectares last year mainly due to lower returns on the fibre crop and high prices of pulses. On July 8, the total area was 19.9 lakh hectares less than that last year.

In second largest producer Maharashtra, area under cotton on July 11 was 11.27 per cent less than that a year ago.

Experts said the increase in prices could drive farmers towards cotton in the days to come.

The spurt in cotton prices is beyond expectations and points to a severe shortage of cotton in the domestic markets, said Anil Gupta, vice president-corporate sector ratings at ICRA. Slower cotton sowing and decline in cotton sown area, apart from cotton stocking by intermediaries, could have led to this sharp rise in prices, he said.

"However, the recent increase in cotton prices can motivate the farmers further and the cotton sowing area can improve in the coming months," Gupta said.

Cotton and soyabean farmers from Maharashtra have substantially increased area under pulses, with highest increase of more than 35 per cent in area under tur.

The total area under sugarcane crop is 2.1 lakh hectares more than that last year. However, farmers, especially from the drought-hit Marathwada region are still waiting for good rains and increase in reservoir levels as well as the ground water levels before taking a call on planting of the water guzzling plant.

"Rainfall in Marathwada has not been satisfactory yet. Sugarcane farmers will wait for the reservoirs to fill up before planting sugarcane," said BB Thombare, chairman of Natural Sugar and Allied Industries.

Some pockets of cotton crop in north India, especially Punjab and Haryana, have been infested with white fly. However, according to the Central Cotton Research Institute scientists, who are currently touring fields in the affected areas, the situation is not alarming. "The infestation can be treated as the crop is 70 to 90 days old," said Kranthi.

Nabard awards record Rs 1696.24 cr loan to Himachal Pradesh in 2015-16



As many as 170 infrastructural projects relating to roads, bridges, polyhouses, flood protection were given loan assistance of Rs 644.92 crore.

SHIMLA: Development bank Nabard extended the highest loan assistance of Rs 1,696.24 crore to Himachal Pradesh in 2015-16 for various activities including crop loan and investment.

As many as 170 infrastructural projects relating to roads, bridges, polyhouses, flood protection were given loan assistance of Rs 644.92 crore, and Rs 500 crore were disbursed to the state government during 2015-16, Nabard CGM Deepak Kumar said at a function here today.

The projects supported by NABARD included modernisation and upgradation of three existing cold storages of HPMC, to 'Controlled Atmosphere' cold stores, Rs 100 crore disbursed to HPSCB (HP state Cooperative Bank) for financing short term multipurpose activities, besides a loan of Rs 1.14 crore for diversification of their business portfolio/ activities.

He informed that a Rs 20 crore project 'Sustainable Livelihoods of Agriculture-Dependent Rural Communities in Drought Prone Districts of Himachal Pradesh through Climate Smart Solutions' under National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) has been sanctioned to Himachal Government and is under implementation in Sirmaur district.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh asks banks to ensure timely, easy crop loans



The government has set an agricultural credit target for banks at Rs 9 lakh crore for the current fiscal, up from Rs 8.5 lakh crore in 2015-16.

NEW DELHI: Stating that there should not be any delays in disbursement of crop loans, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh today asked banks to take measures to ease the approval process to provide loans on time to farmers.

He also asked the banks to provide "hassle-free" loan facility by standardising documents required and connecting it with Jhan Dhan, Aadhar and mobile banking.

The government has set an agricultural credit target for banks at Rs 9 lakh crore for the current fiscal, up from Rs 8.5 lakh crore in 2015-16.

It is also providing short-term loan of up to Rs 3 lakh for a period of one year at a subsidised interest rate of 7 per cent under its scheme. And additional subvention of 3 per cent is given for those farmers who repay on time.

"There should not be delay in disbursement of crop loan to farmers. Banks should fasten the approval process so that farmers get ride of private moneylenders," Singh said in his valedictory speech at a NABARD event here.

Asserting that farmers should not get hassled up in bank process, the minister said, "Agriculture credit should be made available easily and timely, for which I request banks to standardise all documents required for sanctioning of loans."

He also asked the banks to connect crop loan with Jhan Dhan, Aadhar and mobile e-banking platform and ensure crop loans are sanctioned in a time-bound manner.

On doubling farmers' income by 2022, Singh said most of them were "surprised" when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced this target and were also "sceptical" if this could be achieved in five years period.

"It is difficult, but not impossible to achieve. If we try and work together, this is achievable.... some think that increasing farmers income means raising the minimum support price (MSP), but MSP is one aspect," he added.

Besides MSP, the Modi government is looking at addressing fundamental issues like raising productivity not only of land, but water, fertiliser and all other inputs used in agriculture, he said, adding all schemes are announced keeping these issue in mind.

Farmers' income will increase when the cost of production comes down and productivity improves. The government is not only focusing on agriculture, but also allied activities like diary, poultry and fishery to boost farmers' income, the minister said said.