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THE HINDU

Rs. 3,100 crore released for cross loss compensation

The government has released Rs. 3,100 crore as compensation for crop loss and to settle crop insurance claims for 2015-16, and the amount will be transferred to farmers' accounts by next week.

“Over 6.25 lakh farmers will benefit with this move of the government,” said Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda on Thursday.

Addressing presspersons, Mr. Krishna Byre Gowda said the government was implementing the Karnataka Raitha Suraksha Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (KPMFBY) from the present financial year by modifying a few norms in the crop insurance programme and has earmarked Rs. 675 crore for the purpose in the budget.

While the earlier scheme was benefitting only 10 to 12 per cent of the farming community in the State, with implementation of the KPMFBY the percentage of beneficiaries will double. “The target is to help a minimum of 15 lakh farmers and to have multiple crop insurance policies by the farmers,” the Minister said.

Delayed monsoon may affect kharif operations in Godavari delta

Ten days of our schedule will be disturbed, say farmers



Ten days of our schedule will be disturbed, say farmers.

The farmers of the Godavari delta are anxiously awaiting the first spell of the Southwest monsoon as they have to go for nurseries and sowings in this kharif season. The forecast of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) also indicates that the monsoon will be delayed for four more days and the dry spell will end around 20th of this month.

“We generally receive the first spell from 1 June but the IMD says it will take another four days to get rains. So, 10 days of our schedule will be disturbed,” said Satyanarayana, Rangarao of Munikoodali of Seethanagaram mandal. As per the Kharif schedule, the farmers of the Godavari and Krishna delta will go for nurseries between the first and second week of June and after the onset of monsoon they go for sowings in the last week.

This year the area of kharif in East Godavari is 2.33 hectares and the agriculture department has already kept different varieties of paddy seeds ready. “This year our department kept flood resistant common varieties in Swarna, BPT and Marteru (MTU) ready for farmers and even started distribution in some areas like Peddapuram and Rajamahendravaram Revenue divisions,” said K.S.V. Prasad, Joint Director of Agriculture.

The government is offering Rs. 5 subsidy per kg on a 30-kg bag of seeds of rain and pest resistant varieties including on RP Bio-226, MTU-1061, BPT-5204 and MTU-1001.

However, farmers of the Konaseema area are apprehensive of kharif as they had experienced several cyclones since 2010 in November and December — Laila, Neelam, Helen, Leher and Hudhud. “We had very bad experiences in the past in November as cyclones hit our area and we lost production and did not get compensation for our crop loss,” said Kumaraswami of the Konaseema Farmers’ Association.

If everything goes fine and the monsoon sets by 20th, the farmers will go for sowings in many mandals in both the Godavari districts. As per last year, farmers need 73 tonnes of seed in East Godavari and the Agriculture department has only 45 tonnes. “It is not at all a problem and farmers are already having the

seed with them procured through seed village programme,” said the Joint Director.

Copra procurement centres opened

As many as eight copra procurement centres have been opened in Coimbatore District under the Pollachi, Sulur, and Coimbatore agriculture producers’ co-operative societies.

According to an official press release, Deputy Speaker Pollachi V. Jayaraman on Wednesday opened eight copra procurement centres in the district.

The Government has opened 43 such centres across the State.

The copra will be purchased from the farmers at the centres for six months, the release added.

About 10 districts, including Coimbatore, Tirupur, Salem, Thanjavur, and Kanyakumari, in the State have 10 lakh hectares under coconut farming and of this two lakh hectare is in Coimbatore District.

Agricultural Extension Centres to be opened

At nine taluks, each at a cost of Rs. 1.50 crore

Integrated Agricultural Extension Centres will be set up at nine taluks in Tiruvarur district at a cost of Rs. 1.50 crore each, Collector M. Mathivanan said.

In a release issued after an inspection of the progress of the construction of an integrated agricultural extension centre at Muthupettai on Wednesday, he said Chief Minister Jayalalithaa had ordered the establishment of the centres to provide various agriculture and allied services to farmers under one roof. The district had been allocated Rs. 13.50 crore for the establishment of the centres.

Services of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Agricultural Engineering Department could be availed at the centres. Training halls for farmers would form part of the centres.

Earlier, Mr. Mathivanan inspected the implementation of the components of the kuruvai special package at Muthupettai union. Green manure seeds would be

supplied free of cost to farmers and ploughing subsidy of Rs. 500 an acre would be extended to them, he said.

Mechanical transplantation would be taken up in about 38,000 acres in the district under the package. Micro nutrients would be distributed at full subsidy to farmers to cover an area of about 12,000 acres and zinc sulphate to cover an area of about 30,000 acres. Two hundred fifty units of HDPE pipes would be distributed among farmers in the district under the package, Mr.Mathivanan added.

‘Fix MSP with 50 p.c. profit for all crops’

Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee’s Kisan and Khet Mazdoor Congress unit has urged the Union government to fix a minimum support price (MSP) that will ensure a profit of 50 per cent over the actual cost of production for all crops.

Addressing presspersons here on Wednesday, State president of the unit Sachin Miga said that the unit would urge the Union government to take steps to announce the MSP as recommended in the report of farm scientist M.S. Swaminathan.

Mr. Miga said that the BJP had, in its election manifesto, given the assurance that it would implement the Dr. Swaminathan committee recommendations, including the one concerning the MSP. “However, now in an affidavit submitted by the Under Secretary of the Union Agriculture Department to the Supreme Court, the government has said that if MSP is announced considering a 50 per cent profit over the cost of production, the market will lose its way. This clearly shows the dual standards of the Union government,” he said.

He alleged that instead of protecting the interests of the farmers, the Union government was following an unscientific MSP policy detrimental to farmers. “It is just giving false assurances of doubling farmers’ income,” he said.

Mr. Miga urged the Union government to make clear its stand with regard to farmers, implement the Right to Remunerative Prices Act and give statutory powers to the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACAP) to ensure income security to farmers.

He said that instead of helping farmers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was helping industrialists and had increased the MSP by only 4.18 per cent for the financial year 2016-17.

Mr. Miga said that the unit's office-bearers were touring various districts of the State to create awareness among farmers and would soon launch an agitation to press for their demands.

KPCC office-bearers Rajashekhar Menasinakai and Babajan Mudhol were present.

Pesticide safety plan on the anvil

Agricultural officers to carry out inspections at pesticide outlets



The government is embarking on a programme to control the use of chemical pesticides by farmers and introduce certification for safe-to-eat crops.

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar, who held a high-level meeting with officials in the department, said agricultural officers would be directed to carry out regular inspections at wholesale and retail pesticide outlets and prosecute traders found guilty of selling banned pesticides.

Field trials banned

Pesticide manufacturing companies would be prohibited from conducting field demonstrations and advertising their products. The quality control division in the Agriculture Department would be equipped to crack down on illegal sale of chemical pesticides and discourage indiscriminate use of hazardous pesticides.

“Agricultural officers will be asked to inspect pesticide outlets twice every month and take stock of each category of pesticide. Traders will be required to maintain bills and registers for stocks and sales and exhibit the stock position,” Mr. Kumar said.

Laboratories

The meeting decided to crack down on the unauthorised use of crop-specific pesticides.

It also resolved to open pesticide residue analysis laboratories in all districts to keep a constant tab on the use of pesticides.

The Minister said the government would soon issue a circular to all Krishi Bhavans prescribing measures for pesticide safety. An orientation programme would be organised for agricultural officers to equip them for the task.

The department would also initiate a certification programme for safe-to-eat crops.

However, officials point out that the failure to prescribe safety standards for the use of pesticides on various crops would make a mockery of the periodic monitoring of vegetables, fruits and food products for pesticide residue. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has not prescribed the Maximum Residue Level (MRL) of pesticides prescribed for various crops.

The MRL is fixed on the basis of a rigorous evaluation test of each pesticide approved by the Central Insecticide Board. It is an indicator of the correct use of

pesticides and ensures compliance with legal requirements for low residues on unprocessed food. Officials say the delay in fixing MRL had led to the continued use of unapproved pesticides by farmers for over two decades, impacting on public health.

To understand the health hazards caused by pesticide residue, it is absolutely essential to have MRL values for various pesticide-commodity combinations.

Farm ponds help not only save crops but also ensure a good yield



Lakshmidamma, president, Sirguppa Taluk Panchayat, Sharnappa Mudgal (left), Joint Director of Agriculture, among others, offering bagina at a farm pond that was filled with rainwater at Raravi village in Sirguppa taluk.

Farmers cultivating dryland and solely dependent on rain are happy as they are now in a position to protect their crop from the vagaries of monsoon and get a good yield, thanks to the Krishi hondas (farm ponds) dug in their fields as part of the Krishi Bhagya scheme of the government.

Almost all the 7,500 farm ponds dug during 2015-16 are filled with water (50 per cent of them are filled to the brim) after a couple of spells of good pre-monsoon showers which has instilled confidence among farmers of getting an assured yield.

Raju, a farmer from K. Veerapur in Ballari taluk, who was among the many early birds to take advantage of the scheme, was able to harvest around seven quintals of tur per acre in about six acres of land with the help of water augmented in the pond dug in mid-2015.

“Getting the cost of cultivation back, leave alone profit, was a major worry for me all these years when monsoon rain was the only source of water. Protecting the crop from withering due to failure of timely rain posed a bigger challenge. But after the pond was dug, protecting the crop, by watering it with the help of sprinklers operated with diesel generator sets (provided by the government under the scheme) two or three times when the standing crop is in a critical stage, not only saved the crop but also ensured a good harvest,” he told *The Hindu* .

Happy with what he could get, he has plans to take up inter-cropping during the kharif season by cultivating tur, chilli, brinjal and tomato in his land with the help of water accumulated in the pond.

“I have also requested the Agriculture Department to provide drip irrigation system instead of sprinklers which not only helps utilise water optimally but also enables cover more area,” he said.

Sharnappa Mudgal, Joint Director of Agriculture, said that the purpose of Krishi Bhagya has been served to a great extent. “My appeal to farmers is to take advantage of government schemes and get a good yield,” he said.

Paddy farming to be taken up in fallow lands

Curbs on conversion of paddy fields

The Wayanad district administration is preparing to revive paddy cultivation in the district.

District Collector Kesavendrakumar has directed village officers and agriculture officers to submit details of paddy fields that have been remaining fallow for the past three years. “We are planning to identify paddy fields which have been kept fallow for the past three years and begin paddy cultivation on such lands with the assistance of Padasekhara Samitis, Kudumbasree units and self-help groups of youths under the supervision of grama panchayats,” Mr. Kesavendrakumar told *The Hindu* .

Conversion of paddy fields for commercial purpose had increased considerably in the district and such practice could not be allowed, Mr. Kesavendrakumar said. However, applications for land conversion to construct houses for poor people would be considered, he said.

Income limit

A meeting of village officers and agriculture officers held here recently to discuss the issue urged the government to set norms to prevent the sale of paddy fields below 25 cents and fix income limit for applicants seeking conversion of paddy fields.

The sharp decline in paddy cultivation had led to depletion in groundwater level and increasing drought-like situation during summer in the district, Mr. Kesavendrakumar said.

According to data available with the Agriculture Department, nearly 28,000 hectares of land had been under paddy cultivation in the district in 1980s but it declined to 12,500 hectares by 2014.

Traditional varieties

“Many a time low return from paddy cultivation compelled farmers to keep their land fallow but the situation could be overcome by cultivating traditional rice varieties such as Gandhakasala, Jeerakasala, Thondi and Adukkann varieties by following organic method of cultivation and marketing it under a brand name,” he said.

A meeting of the representatives of local bodies would be convened soon to discuss the issue further, Mr. Kesavendrakumar said.

Govt. urged to prevent sale of paddy fields below 25 cents

Land under paddy

cultivation declined to 12,500 hectares by 2014

Agriculture Dept. moots proposal to build four warehouses



Maiden meet:(Right) ZP president Nayeema Sultana, vice-president G. Nataraj, and CEOP.A. Gopal at a general meeting of newly-elected members in Mysuru on Thursday.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

The Agriculture Department has proposed to construct four warehouses on the premises of the Raitha Samparka Kendras (RSK) in different taluks of the district to store seeds, fertilizers and insecticides to be distributed to farmers.

The department has proposed to construct the warehouses in Antharasanthe in H.D. Kote, Chuchanakatte in K.R. Nagar taluk, Rawanadurga in Periyapatna, and Bilikere in Nanjangud taluk. The approximate cost of each warehouse will be Rs. 10 lakh and they will be built in RSKs housed in government buildings.

At the maiden zilla panchayat meeting here on Thursday, M. Mahanteshappa, Joint Director of Agriculture Department, said that warehouses were essential to preserve agriculture inputs.

He pointed out that seeds and fertilizers were being stored in RSKs with great difficulty and the risk factor in preserving them was high.

President of the zilla panchayat Nayeema Sultana said she would examine the proposal and give consent after discussing it with other House members.

Other departments too explained their proposals for the year and placed their action plan for approval.

Earlier, Pushpa Amaranath, former ZP president, questioned the propriety of approving the action plan of different departments in the meeting. She said that as per the custom practiced since years, standing committees should discuss the action plan and give its consent. Then the House should approve it.

She noted that standing committees were not formed and said that it would be a hasty decision to approve the action plan of the departments without being examined thoroughly.

Basappa, Deputy Director of Public Instruction, said the department would take up a special enrolment drive for school dropouts in order to bring them to mainstream.

Basavaraj, District Health Officer, said the department was making efforts to reduce infant mortality.

230 cr. saplings to be planted within 3 years: Minister

With this, forest area of State will go up from 23 per cent to 33 per cent, says Jogu Ramanna

Forest and BC Welfare Minister Jogu Ramanna on Thursday said the State government is making efforts for afforestation by planting 230 crore saplings within three years.

As per the plan unveiled by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, 120 crore saplings would be planted in those areas where there was no forest, 100 crores in forest areas, and 10 crore saplings in towns and cities. This was the third flagship programme of the government after Mission Kakatiya and Mission Bhageeratha, Mr. Ramanna said.

With this, the forest area would increase from the existing 23 per cent of the geographical area to the mandatory 33 per cent.

This would also reverse the degradation environmental, making Telangana an ecologically balanced State, he added.



Green drive: Forest Minister Jogu Ramanna and Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy observing the forest nursery at Kamalapur village on Thursday.– Photo: K.V. RAMANA

After observing nurseries at Anthampally in Biknur mandal and Kamalapur in Dichpally mandal along with Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, he said that plants would be supplied in accordance to the demand of the Haritha Rakshana committees. Immediately after the onset of monsoon, saplings would be planted, he said, appealing to people to take part in this ambitious programme irrespective of caste and creed.

Mr. Ramanna said that an amount of Rs. 156 crore was to come from the Centre, and Rs. 56 crore was already remitted to the account of the Forest Department. If everyone plants 11 saplings and protects them, the State would turn lush green.

Mr. Reddy said that the idea was to plant 3.35 crore saplings in the district. Prevailing drought conditions emphasised the need of promoting afforestation for getting bountiful rainfall to drive away famine. He attributed ecological imbalance to deforestation.

MLA V.G. Goud, MLA Bajireddy Govardhan, principal chief conservator of forests P.K. Sharma, CCF A.K. Sinha, PCCF Sunil Kumar Gupta and Collector Yogitha Rana were also present.

1,000 agri extension officers will be recruited: Pocharam



TO FARMERS' AID: Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy at a meeting on agriculture at Collector's office at Sangareddy on Thursday.- PHOTO: Mohd Arif

No agriculture officer will be spared if he/she fails to extend services to farmers on time, said Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy. The Minister said that about 1,000 agriculture extension officers would be appointed shortly across the State to improve services for the farmers.

“What message does it send if we fail to extend services to the farming community even after having this big an establishment? the Minister asked agriculture officers here on Thursday.

He has asked the officials to be available for / approachable by farmers during the season. Informing that sufficient quantity of seeds and fertilizers were kept ready in the State, he has asked the officials to ensure that they reached the farmers on time.

Participating in a review meeting held here on Thursday, Mr. Srinivas Reddy said that these seeds would be made available at the cooperative societies. “Farmers should not suffer due to lack of seeds when about 900 cooperatives were functioning in the State. Government has been supplying seeds like red gram, green gram and soyabean at subsidised cost,” he said adding that sealing on the supply of seeds was removed and farmers could get seeds depending on the extent of land. District Collector D. Ronald Rose said that licences were issued to cooperative societies for selling seeds and fertilizers.

Cooperative Department Registrar Veerabrahmaiah, Seeds Corporation Managing Director Murali, MLA Chinta Prabhakar and others were present.

State fisheries office inaugurated

The Fisheries Department State office building was inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister N Rajappa and Agriculture Minister Prathipati Pulla Rao in Poranki here on Thursday.

Addressing a gathering the Agriculture Minister said that the state office was being opened here so that the department was within the reach of the aquaculture farmers. He said that NTR Fish Farmers’ training and Research Centre would be established soon for the benefit of aqua farmers.

The Deputy CM said that focus should be given to increasing exports. He said modern labs were needed to monitor the quality of fish seed. He said farmers should be provided small refrigerators that worked on solar power. He recalled that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu appreciated the fact that the Fisheries department had moved to the new State.

Farm pond concept gaining currency in Andhra Pradesh

Large-scale implementation of the farm pond concept is set to become a major boon for the farmers of Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts of Andhra Pradesh, as a majority of the region is rain-fed.

The farmers, who used to face water crisis during drought, are now happy with the digging of farm ponds in every corner of the region. The farm ponds help in storing rainwater and gradually raise the groundwater level in surrounding areas.

The required moisture for the fields is available throughout the year. Although farmers were aware of the concept, many were unable to implement the idea given the cost of digging ponds.



Cause to cheer:A view of a newly constructed farm pond in Vizianagaram district.— Photo: Special Arrangement

Money sanctioned

The State government has now sanctioned between Rs.64,000 and Rs. 3.4 lakh for both wages and material for the construction of farm ponds of various sizes.

The farmers who have meagre area for the cultivation were asked to join hands with others since a pond is sanctioned for five acres of land.

Giving utmost priority to water harvesting methods, the government has constituted mandal-level resource committees with MPDO as chairman and Assistant Engineer of the Water Resources Department as nodal officer to determine the number of ponds required and their location.

The mandal committee will prepare a plan on ‘Neeru-Chettu’, MGNREGA and farm ponds construction. Under the ‘Panta-Kunta’ programme, two to five small farm ponds will be dug in every village to ensure water storage for long periods.

Focus on tribal areas

With the directive from Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Vizianagaram District Collector M.M. Nayak is monitoring the progress on a day-to-day basis as the government has set a target of 70,000 farm ponds in the district. “So far, we have completed 33,000 farm ponds in Vizianagaram district. We concentrated on tribal areas such as Kurupam, Gummalakshampuram and other areas where there is no irrigation facility for thousands of acres,” he said.

They will help store rainwater and raise the groundwater level, helping farmers tackle drought

Peasants’ organisation puts demands before govt



Peasants’ organisation Odisha Krushak Sabha (OKS) has come up with a series of demands before the government that were discussed during a conference of farmer representatives of the organisation from Ganjam, the home district of Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

During the conference held in Berhampur on Thursday, the dire state of peasants in home district of the CM was highlighted to show the real condition of agriculture in Odisha. State president of OKS Abhiram Behera said governments at the Centre as well in the State seem to be more interested in protection of the interests of corporate houses rather than that of poor peasants.

While elaborating on the demands of the OKS, he criticised the land bank scheme of the government which will include the land which would be taken away from illegal encroachers of government land. “The land in this land bank is to be utilised for infrastructure development like roads as well as for industrial purpose. But OKS demands the land reacquired from illegal encroachers to be distributed among landless farmers.

The OKS wanted procurement price of paddy to be increased to Rs.3,000 per quintal. As per the organisation, last year the procurement price of paddy was Rs.1,410 which has been hiked to Rs.1,470 this year.

This low price is not providing much profit to the paddy growers, who are incurring losses, said Mr Behera. OKS activists have demanded that the total paddy produced in the State to be procured through the mandis opened up by State government. For which they proposed establishment of mandis and rest sheds for farmers in every panchayat of the State.

A major demand of OKS was identification and recognition of share croppers in the State and provision of all benefits meant for farmers to them. According to Mr. Behera, last month the State government had directed selection of 25 land owning farmers and 25 contractual farmers from 105 selected tehsils to take their opinion regarding recognition of share croppers.

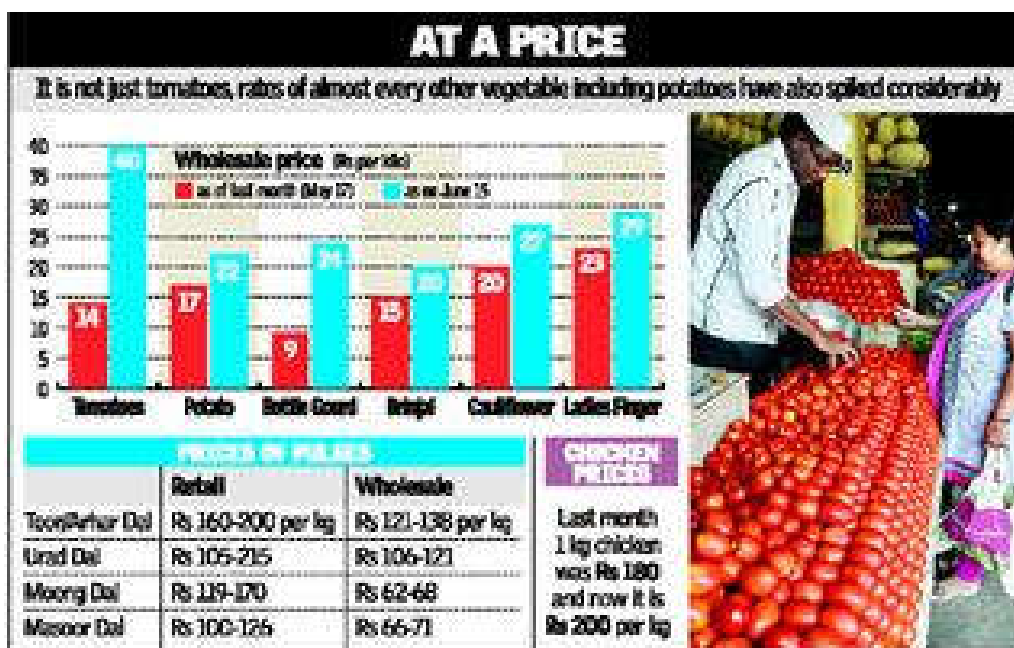
“We feel through this method the real small share croppers who are worst sufferers would not be able to provide their opinion and only the farmers involved in contract farming under companies and big land lords would be taken into account. We demand the opinion of real small share croppers to be collected through gramsabha and peasant organisations to be included in the share cropper identification process,” Mr. Behera said. OKS activists wanted every farmer in the State, including share croppers, to be provided identity cards for recognition and provision of zero interest loans up to one lakh rupees to farmers, where government should provide the guarantee to the financing agency.

OKS alleged that more than 200 farmers had committed suicide due to crop loss and debt burden in the State during the BJD rule. It demanded Rs.10 lakh compensation for families of each of these deceased peasants. Pension scheme for farmers over 60 years of age was also among the demands.

There was demand for establishment of cold storage in every block of the State, but OKS wanted them to be set up by government or cooperative bodies. Ganjam district secretary of OKS P.Harikrushna Reddy and president Gopal Panigrahy alleged that even in CM's home district farmers were languishing due to lack of irrigation facility. They demanded major efforts to enhance irrigation network in all areas of the district.

Now tomato rates reach a new high

After pulses, cost of poultry items such as chicken has risen by at least Rs.20 in just 15 days



Not only pulses, but prices of vegetables and poultry items have also skyrocketed this month.

Even as onion prices continue to remain low owing to surplus production, rates of another kitchen essential, tomato, have hit an all time high with some retailers selling it for Rs.80 per kg in the Capital.

The cost of chicken has also increased by at least Rs.20 in just about 15 days.

Rain check

Until last month, tomatoes were available for Rs.14 per kg at the Azadpur wholesale market, which has now climbed up to Rs.40 per kg.

In the retail market, the item is being sold anywhere between Rs. 50 and Rs. 80, depending on the quality.

According to Ashok Kaushik, President of Azadpur Tomato Merchant's Association, the primary reason is 'rain'.

"Unseasonal rains over one-and-a-half-month ago, followed by extreme hot weather conditions, had spoilt some of the produce.

"Now, when stocks are clearing out and farmers have to grow fresh crops, there is rain. The demand is much more compared to the supply," he said.

Delhi gets tomatoes from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

With supplies thinning from other States, the Capital is currently procuring all its tomatoes from Himachal Pradesh, primarily from Solan district.

Unlike potato and onion, there is short shelf-life of tomato. The absence of adequate cold storage facilities in the supply chain has aggravated the problem.

Vegetable prices

It is not just tomatoes, rates of almost every other vegetable including potatoes have also spiked considerably.

In just a month's time, wholesale cost of potatoes has shot up by Rs.5, bottle gourd by Rs.15 and cauliflower by Rs.7, to name a few. However, in a high-level meeting convened by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Wednesday for containing the surge in prices of food items, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said that the rise in tomato and potato prices was "seasonal".

In pulses, tur or arhar daal (split red gram) and chana daal (split Bengal gram) have witnessed the highest surge in prices with an increase of over Rs. 10-15 in the wholesale market.

"Cost wise arhar daal is the most expensive. In wholesale market, it is being sold at an average of Rs.130 per kg and in retail it's between Rs 160 and Rs. 200.

High demand

“Chana daal is always high in demand because it is used for making flour too. But, following two successive droughts, the demand-supply gap is now widening,” said Sanjay Singhal, former general secretary of Delhi Grain Merchants Association and a pulse trader in Chandni Chowk’s Naya Bazar market.

Meanwhile, the Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution on Wednesday flagged off mobile vans for selling pulses at reasonable prices in the Capital.

These mobile vans run by the National Cooperative Consumer Federation of India will sell pulses mainly tur and urad at Rs. 120 per kg in various parts of Delhi. Outlets of Kendriya Bhandar and Safal are already selling pulses in Delhi and the NCR at these rates.

In just a month, wholesale cost of potatoes has shot up by Rs.5 and bottle gourd by Rs.15

KAPC to rejig crop insurance scheme

Aim is to extend reach as only 13 p.c. farmers are covered

STRENGTHENING THE SCHEME	
⇒ Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission wants to increase crop insurance coverage from 13 per cent to 50 per cent	having insurance agents for crop insurance scheme
⇒ It is also examining the possibility of covering losses owing to attack by wild animals	⇒ Will attempt to cover tenant and non-loanee farmers under the scheme
⇒ Efforts on to provide an option of combining crop insurance with regular life insurance	⇒ ISEC and Centre for Multi Disciplinary Research to study on strengthening the scheme
⇒ KAPC to consider	⇒ KAPC to recommend to government on modifying scheme based on inputs from the study

The Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission (KAPC) is exploring the possibility of expanding the scope of crop insurance scheme as well as strengthening it to get more farmers under coverage to ensure adequate protection against crop loss.

This is being done as only 13 per cent of the 78 lakh farming families in the State have opted for the scheme despite efforts by authorities to bring more farmers under insurance coverage.

According to KAPC chairman T.N. Prakash Kammaradi, farmers are showing a lukewarm response towards the existing crop insurance scheme as they are not completely confident about it. Of course, the statistics too support such concerns: only 32 per cent of those under the scheme have benefitted, says a study by the commission.

At present, farmers who have enrolled themselves are those who have taken loans as the banks insist on insurance. But, a majority of them do not have access to loans and only a small portion of such farmers have enrolled in the scheme, Dr. Kammaradi said. Another area of concern is that nearly 30 per cent of farmers are cultivating lands that are on tenancy and the present scheme does not cover tenant farmers.

Following this, the commission has decided to get the scheme reworked to suit the State's specific needs. "Though the crop insurance scheme has been brought out by the Centre, the State can alter it as agriculture is a State subject. Also, it is the State that implements the crop insurance scheme," Dr. Kammaradi said. The commission has asked the Agricultural Development and Rural Transformation Centre of the ISEC and Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Research to come out with a study on strengthening the scheme. The institutes have been given six months to submit their report to the commission.

The KAPC wants to ensure that at least 50 per cent of farmers are covered. Also, it is looking at a group insurance scheme, and a package that combines crop insurance with regular life insurance.

Training in fish culture techniques

A free one-day training programme on 'seabass fish culture techniques' will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra on Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on Mohanur Road on June 20.

A press release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, said that the training would deal with types of seabass fish, its food habits, creating the necessary space for rearing and maintaining it. Also, water management and use of technology in the rearing would be dealt during the programme.

Farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programme. For registration, one can visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 and 266650 by June 19.

Training programme

A free one-day training programme on 'Integrated nutrient management in cucurbitaceous vegetable cultivation' will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra on the Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on Mohanur Road on June 21.

A press release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, said that the training would deal with the types of cucurbitaceous vegetables including cucumber, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, sponge gourd, snake gourd, ash gourd, pumpkin and squash. The training would focus on insecticide resistance and management, rectification of nutritional deficiencies, weed and pest management and irrigation methods. Farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programme.

For registration, one can visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 and 266650 by June 20.

1.3 lakh acres will be irrigated by 2017: Harish Rao

Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao has promised to ensure irrigation of about 1.3 lakh acres in Chinnakodur mandal of Medak district by the end of 2017.

Participating in various programmes in the constituency on Thursday, the Minister said that a sub-station of 132/11 KV would be established in each mandal and power would be supplied to farmers.

He said that 13 sub-stations were additionally sanctioned for Chinnakodur mandal to meet the requirement of the farmers.

Stating that Rs. 70 crore was sanctioned for improving power supply in the district, the Minister said that a person can get power connection by paying Rs. 125 instead of Rs. 750 that was paid in the past.

“We kept the required seeds and fertilizers ready for farmers. Similarly, Rs. 200 crore was allocated for supply of sprinklers, drip and other material with a subsidy,” said Mr. Harish Rao, adding that the farmers should use these facilities provided by the government.

This farmer has very a valuable advice to share

“Don't grow cotton, think short-term crops like vegetables instead”



Smart farming:N. Narasiah watering plants on his farm at Kallem village in Warangal district on Thursday.— Photo: M. Murali

Like a mother spoon feeds her children, this farmer wets his saplings drop by drop. N. Narasiah of Kallem village in this mandal reaped rich harvest growing vegetables through drip irrigation method after having vexed huge losses in cotton cultivation.

“I have been growing vegetables since the past five years. Last season, I got a profit of Rs. 2 lakh from tomatoes,” he told *The Hindu* during his recent visit to his fields.

Having tasted small success with drip irrigation and growing vegetables, he has now taken up cultivation on his 12-acre land. He grows tomatoes, brinjal, bitter gourd, and tobacco, among others.

According to him, paddy and cotton crops required more water, and due to seasonal failure, he could not reap good harvests. The ground water was very low and he had to dig three borewells, which now yield water for about two to three hours a day. He alternately draws water to wet his fields. “Things are little better as we now have power supply. In the past, electricity was a problem too,” Mr. Narasaiah said.

In addition to low rainfall, extreme heat wave dealt a blow to farmers who opted for paddy and cotton crops in these rocky mandals. The crops withered away and along with it the hopes of farmers.

Mr. Narasaiah advised fellow farmers to utilise every drop of water using drip irrigation and growing short-term crops like vegetables. “Vegetables give regular and steady income for about three to four months. If we grow two or three varieties, we can see some money,” Mr. Narasaiah explained.

According to him, through drip irrigation, he could save water and increase productivity by about 50 per cent. Digging up farm ponds and trenches across the field would also help retain water when it rained, he said.

“We now have support of the government under the MNREGA scheme to dig farm ponds. There is no need for farmer to invest money,” he said.

This June, tomato prices to remain high

Other than Pune, districts of Satara, Nashik, Ahmednagr, Sangli, Kolhapur and neighboring Karnataka also send tomatoes to the Pune market.



On Thursday, just 750 quintals of tomato had arrived in the market as compared to the 1,050 quintals which had arrived in the market on June 16, 2015.

The present surge in prices of tomatoes will continue unabated for a month or so, said traders.

A dip in arrival of tomatoes in the wholesale market has seen retail prices of the commodity touching the Rs 100 mark at various parts of the city.

Lack of rains in the tomato-growing areas of Maharashtra and the dip in arrival from neighbouring districts have affected the arrival of the commodity in the Pune marketyard.

On Thursday, just 750 quintals of tomato had arrived in the market as compared to the 1,050 quintals which had arrived in the market on June 16, 2015.

Needless to say, this fall in supply has pushed up the wholesale price to Rs 55 per kg as compared to Rs 14 per last year on the same day.

Vilas Bhujbal, commission agent at the Pune market, said drought coupled with failure of pre-monsoons showers has dwindled the arrival of tomatoes.

Other than Pune, districts of Satara, Nashik, Ahmednagr, Sangli, Kolhapur and neighboring Karnataka also send tomatoes to the Pune market.

Pre-monsoon showers have been almost absent in all these areas leading to failure of crops.

“There are hardly any chance of a price reduction soon. Even after the rains start, it will be a month since the next crop of tomato gets ready and feed the market,” he said.

Meanwhile, the upward movement of tomato prices has caused constrains in Pune.

Mamata Heble, a resident of Aundh, said the retail price of tomatoes in her area has touched Rs 100.

“People who are on a special diet which requires them to consume tomatoes are really facing the pinch.

Others have eased out tomato from their plate,” she said.

Ujjwala Kulkarni, a resident of Talegaon, said the price has reached Rs 80 per kg in her area.

“Such high prices have compelled us to drop tomatoes from traditional preparations like amti,” she said.

Pulses race to Rs 200/kg; govt orders crackdown on hoarders



As pulses continued to soar to touch up to Rs 200 per kg, intelligence agencies were today asked to crack down on cartels. (File Photo)

As pulses continued to soar to touch up to Rs 200 per kg, intelligence agencies were today asked to crack down on cartels, while futures trade was curbed to check speculation and buffer stock was hiked over 5-times to 8 lakh tonnes to boost supply in a multi-pronged approach.

Efforts were also beefed up to sell larger quantities of pulses at highly-subsidised rates through government agencies and outlets, but any favourable results were hardly visible in the retail and wholesale markets.

Urad dal was selling at as high as Rs 196 per kg, while chana was also seen moving closer to Rs 100 per kg level. Tur dal continued to rule high at Rs 166 per kg, while moong and masur were being sold at Rs 125 and Rs 105 per kg, respectively, as per the latest government data.

In some high-end markets in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, the prices of pulses were even higher.

Taking forward the decisions taken at a high-profile meeting chaired by finance minister Arun Jaitley on Wednesday, the Food Ministry decided to enhance the buffer stock of pulses from 1.5 lakh tonnes to 8 lakh tonnes.

Markets regulator Sebi joined hands by banning any fresh futures market position in chana, the only commodity among pulses where such trading was allowed.

At the outlets of the government agencies, further stocks were added to sell pulses at subsidised rates, including at Rs Rs 60 per kg for chana (gram) dal and 120 per kg for urad and tur dal.

Concerned over rising prices, Consumer Affairs Secretary Hem Pande held a meeting with the officials of Department of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), the Income Tax, the Enforcement Directorate and Intelligence Bureau (IB).

He also interacted with state government officials of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi via video conferencing and asked them to be alert to check hoarders.

“I have asked all of them to pull up their socks and ensure that no artificial rise in pulses’ prices take place,” Pande told reporters after the meeting.

Enforcement agencies have also been directed to check cartelisation and hoarding of pulses, he added.

Govt moves to rein in rising food prices

The government announced on Wednesday a raft of measures to rein in food prices, including selling subsidised pulses from mobile vans, stepping up imports and limiting stockholding by big retailers.

Soaring food prices, especially of pulses, veggies and dairy products, have fed wider inflation, driven up mainly by shrinking supplies after two years of back-to-back droughts in top farm states.

Although the meteorological department has predicted bountiful rains this year, rising prices can turn into a political worry for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s

government going into a string of crucial state elections over the next few months.

Wednesday's decisions came after a meeting of finance minister Arun Jaitley and his colleagues from the food, farm and parliamentary affairs ministries.

"Our department was told to procure more pulses for buffer stock," food minister Ram Vilas Paswan told reporters.

"State governments have been urged to take the pulses from the buffer stock and sell them at not more than Rs120 per kg to ensure availability of pulses at reasonable prices," he said.

At the meeting it was decided that central retail shops such as Kendriya Bhandar and Safal will sell tur and arhar dal at Rs120 per kg. Paswan also flagged off the first mobile vans for subsidised sale of the lentils in Delhi.

In recent weeks, prices of tur and arhar dal touched Rs170 per kg, tomato sold at Rs80-100 per kg and potato, sugar and wheat prices were also on the rise.

Pulses are a key source of protein in India, which has been struggling to increase its output to meet local demand. In 201516 crop year, production is estimated to be 17.06 million tonnes while the demand is pegged at 23.5 million tonnes.

"We see a demand and supply gap of at least 7 million tonnes for pulses," a government source told Hindustan Times after the meeting. The source said the government planned to meet the shortfall by releasing a buffer stock of 1.5 lakh tonnes and stepping up imports of the commodity from Myanmar and Africa.

The Centre has also decided to send a team immediately to these pulses-growing regions to explore government-to-government imports, the source said. Earlier this month, the government increased the minimum support price (MSP) for pulses in the hope of boosting output.

But although India is the largest producer of the commodity, its output has failed to keep pace with demand, partly because of lower yields, poor storage infrastructure and smaller irrigation cover.

Paswan sought to shift some blame to states for the rising prices, saying they were also responsible for keeping the rates of essential commodities under control. “In a federal structure, states have equal responsibility in controlling prices,” he said.

Government agencies had also been asked to crack down on hoarders and keep an eye on inventories of private importers.

But experts point out how governments react only when inflation sky-rockets, leaving long-term reforms in the farm sector only on paper.

“Long-term measures like improved irrigation and increased investment in agriculture is needed. Not publicised meetings of ministers and tweets. The past two years have been about Make in India and bullet trains.

Where does agriculture figure in this?” asked noted agricultural economist Dr Ashok Gulati.

Former agriculture secretary Siraj Hussain said: “While the government should be lauded for creating a buffer stock of pulses but increased imports will not bring down prices. Most of the imports are done by private agencies. Of the 4.5-5 million tonnes of pulses imported, the government’s share is only about 10,000 tonnes”.

A food shock just before monsoon

The increase in retail prices, particularly those of food, in May has taken place just when the government hiked by a hefty amount the minimum support prices (MSPs) of kharif pulses and oilseeds.

The retail food inflation rate has been 7.55% in May, as against 6.40% in April but 4.80% in May last year. And since experience has shown that an increase in MSPs does not necessarily translate into an expansion in acreage, inflationary tendencies in the farm sector are bound to get a boost by the hike.

Pulses prices were controlled last year after arhar or tur dal’s retail rates went at more than 200 a kg in some regions, while the countrywide average price of lentil was around 160 a kg, more than double of the 75 a kg in 2014.

Prices of tomatoes and onion, after having stabilised, are soaring again. That farm growth in 2015-16 is expected to be just 1.1% makes the food story all the more depressing but not surprising because 2015 was a year of bad rains. And it is no coincidence that the whole price index also increased 0.79% in May, after having risen 0.34% in April, following 17 months of contraction.

Price rise in the farm sector is a function of either weak supply or high demand. In India, it is predominantly the former.

The agriculture ministry had estimated wheat production in the country at more than 94 million tonnes in 2015-16. However, procurement has been just about 23 million tonnes and is likely to fall short by 5 million tonnes. The ministry, in one of its advance estimates, has calculated that pulses production would be 17.06 million tonnes, the lowest in about five years.

The Indian Sugar Mills Association has put sugar output at 25 million tones, a substantial drop over the previous year (the sugar year is October-September).

It has also been observed that news of such shortfalls causes an anticipatory rise in prices, as has been happening now. And though this year is expected to have good rain, the summer arrivals will not take place before August-September.

Much hope rests on the government's projection that agricultural output in 2016-17 will be 270 million tonnes.

It needs no stressing that food inflation is the most emotive of all kinds of inflation. And that is why the RBI has not been able to cut lending rates as much as India Inc might have wished it to.

In fact RBI governor Raghuram Rajan has given enough hint that he has restricted manoeuvrability in this matter because any cut in rates would infuse more money into the economy, pushing the inflation rate up. So the ball is now in the court of the government, which has to have all contingency measures ready in case the monsoon doesn't prove to be as bountiful as expected.

As vegetables feed inflation fire, govt lays out counter-measures

The government announced on Wednesday a raft of measures to rein in food prices, including selling subsidised pulses from mobile vans, stepping up imports and limiting stockholding by big retailers.

Soaring food prices, especially of pulses, veggies and dairy products, have fed wider inflation, driven up mainly by shrinking supplies after two years of back-to-back droughts in top farm states.

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government planned to meet the shortfall by releasing a buffer stock of 1.5 lakh tonnes and stepping up imports of the commodity from Myanmar and Africa.

The Centre has also decided to send a team immediately to these pulses-growing regions to explore government-to-government imports, the source said. Earlier this month, the government increased the minimum support price (MSP) for pulses in the hope of boosting output. But although India is the largest producer of the commodity, its output has failed to keep pace with demand, partly because of lower yields, poor storage infrastructure and smaller irrigation cover.

Paswan sought to shift some blame to states for the rising prices, saying they were also responsible for keeping the rates of essential commodities under control. “In a federal structure, states have equal responsibility in controlling prices,” he said.

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Most of the imports are done by private agencies. Of the 4.5-5 million tonnes of pulses imported, the government’s share is only about 10,000 tonnes”.

Pulses prices near Rs. 200/kg; govt to up buffer stock



Prices of pulses inched close to Rs. 200/kg today even as the Centre has decided to increase the buffer stock by over five times to 8 lakh tonnes for retail sale at a highly subsidised rate of Rs. 120/kg.

It is yet to be seen however whether procuring more pulses for the buffer stock would help in curbing price rise at a time when not many states have evinced interest in lifting the pulses for retail distribution at a cheaper rate.

As per the data maintained by the Consumer Affairs Ministry, maximum retail price of Urad is ruling at Rs. 196/kg, Tur at Rs. 166/kg, Moong at Rs. 120/kg, Masoor at Rs. 105/kg and gram at Rs. 93/kg today.

“In a significant decision, the government has decided to enhance the buffer stock of pulses from 1.5 lakh tonnes to 8 lakh tonnes,” the Food Ministry said in a release issued late night yesterday.

The decision, which is in line with the recommendation of an inter-panel set up by the ministry, was taken yesterday in a high-level meeting headed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

The initial target was to create a buffer stock of 1.5 lakh tonnes of pulses this year. So far, 1.15 lakh tonnes have been purchased for this purpose and the same is being offloaded to states for retail distribution at a cheaper rate.

The buffer stock is being created by procuring pulses directly from farmers at market prices using the Price Stabilisation Fund. The stock is being released to states for retail distribution at a subsidised rate of Rs. 120 per kg.

Though the Centre is pressing states to take un-milled pulses from the buffer stock at Rs. 66/kg and process it and sell in retail markets at Rs. 120/kg not many states have shown interest.

So far, over 10,000 tonnes has been released to States such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu for retail distribution even as Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan has been saying that the states too have equal responsibility in controlling prices and should take effective steps.

The buffer stock is being created through domestic procurement as well as through imports in order to address the deficit of 7.6 million tonnes of pulses.

Production of pulses is estimated to have declined to 17.06 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June) due to two consecutive years of drought, while the demand for it stands at 23.5 million tonnes.

Monsoon set to revive; enter Andhra, Odisha, Maharashtra this weekend

Normally, by June 10, the Arabian Sea arm of the monsoon should have covered most of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh while the Bay of Bengal arm should have reached East Uttar Pradesh.

A cyclonic circulation in the Bay of Bengal followed by a low-pressure area is expected to play a crucial role in the revival of the monsoon later this week.

The India Met Department had put out a watch for the cyclonic circulation forming in the Bay of Bengal, which has since materialised.

‘Low’ to follow

Importantly, a low-pressure area may pop up close to the Tamil Nadu-Andhra Pradesh coasts by June 25, according to the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts.

Together, the cyclonic circulation and the ‘low’ could help revive the monsoon, which is in a recess after a delayed onset over Kerala on June 8.

In fact, projections by the Met as well as by international models suggest the monsoon driving itself to a peak during the last 10 days of June.

Over the next two to three days, India Met expects the monsoon to advance into the entire Konkan and Goa (including Mumbai) region; parts of South Chhattisgarh, Madhya Maharashtra and Marathwada; remaining parts of North Interior Karnataka, Rayalaseema, and Coastal Andhra Pradesh; parts of Telangana, Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar.

Spurt in rain

Seasonal rains are expected to propagate along the West Coast towards Mumbai and South Gujarat, while they will push west from the Bay of Bengal into Central India and parts of North-West India.

Meanwhile, India Met points to the possibility of a fresh spurt in rainfall off the Chennai coast from June 22, in what appears to support the outlook of the European Centre.

This would come on the heels of the current cyclonic circulation sending an active rain-head into the rest of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra.

According to initial readings, the ‘low’ is likely to travel in a north-northwest direction into Rayalaseema, Madhya Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Monsoon milestones

Heavy to very heavy rain should be triggered during this phase over Kerala with exceptionally heavy rain over Central and adjoining North Kerala.

Normally, by June 10, the Arabian Sea arm of the monsoon should have covered most of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh while the Bay of Bengal arm should have reached East Uttar Pradesh.

Both these milestones are now expected to be achieved during the incoming busy phase of the monsoon, and will be late by at least a week in the western regions (Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh).

Given the delay in the onset over the Kerala coast, this was only to be expected, although the initial burst had made it appear as if the monsoon would make up for lost time.

On Thursday, the monsoon's northern limit was stuck along Karwar on the West Coast, Gadag and Ongole in the southern peninsula.

Tomato prices to remain high for next two months

Tomato prices which have soared to Rs. 80-100 per kg in retail markets across the country are likely to remain elevated for at least next two months as fresh crop is expected to hit markets only by August-end.

Normally, prices of tomato firm up in the off-season of June-September every year, but the sharp increase in rates this time was mainly due to the damage caused to the rabi crop because of a severe drought in southern states.

In the last 15 days, the rates have gone through the roof and the key vegetable is being sold at Rs. 80-100 per kg by local vegetable vendors depending on the quality and locality.

For instance, in the national capital, tomato is being sold at Rs. 58 a kg at Mother Dairy's Safal outlets and Rs. 80 at Godrej's Nature Basket.

Online portal Bigbasket is selling tomato at Rs. 55 in Delhi, Rs. 70 in Kolkata, Rs. 78 in Bangalore and Rs. 79 in Chennai. “Prices have gone up because of tight supply from the major growing states of the South where the rabi crop has been damaged during the flowering stage because of the severe drought,” a senior Consumer Affairs Ministry official said.



“The fresh tomato crop is expected to arrive only in September and till then prices are expected to remain under pressure.”

According to the government’s initial calculations, tomato output is estimated to be higher by 4-5 per cent in 2015-16 over the last year. “It looks like the production figures may have to be revised downward when final estimates are to be released in September,” the official added.

As per the latest government estimate, the country’s tomato output is pegged at 18.28 million tonnes in the 2015-16 crop year (July-June) as against 16.38 million tonnes in the previous year.

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha are the major tomato growing states. Yesterday, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had said the rise in tomato prices was a “seasonal factor” and the commodity cannot be procured using the Price Stabilisation Fund due to short-shelf life of the key vegetable.

The government is procuring pulses and onion to create a buffer stock to be used for controlling prices by boosting supply in the open market at a cheaper rate.

20% export duty on sugar

The government today imposed 20 per cent customs duty on sugar exports to boost domestic supply and check prices which are ruling high at 40/kg. The move comes at a time when prices have surged sharply in various commodities including tomato, wheat and pulses.

“To keep the domestic prices of sugar under check, the government has decided to impose export duty of 20 per cent on the export of raw sugar, white or refined sugar,” the Finance Ministry said in a release.

A decision has been notified by the Central Board of Excise and Customs, it said. The duty has been imposed to restrict exports following sharp rise in global prices.

‘Mangroves vital for marine ecosystem’

It is essential to declare mangroves reserve forests in view of their enormous importance in maintaining the marine ecosystem, according to experts.

They expressed the opinion at a two-day seminar on mangrove conservation, which concluded here on Thursday. It was organised by the Centre for Mangroves and Coastal Ecology.

K Kathiresan of the Centre of Advanced Study in Marine Biology at the Annamalai University said mangroves are ecologically significant and economically important for preserving coastal biodiversity, protecting the coastlines and for increasing fish catch. India has a total area of 4,740 sq km under mangroves, with more than 4,000 species, and “what is required is the restoration of ecosystem services of mangrove areas, with community participation, financial support and strong political will.”

P Balakiran, District Collector of Kannur in Kerala, narrated his efforts and travails in getting 600 acres of mangrove area notified and emphasised the need for declaring mangrove areas as reserve forests to protect them. Many lands under mangroves were in private possession and they should also be bought and conserved, he added. He said he had bought 1,200 acres from private owners in Kannur district at 2 lakh per acre to conserve mangroves.

R Ramasubramanian and V Selvam of the Swaminathan Research Foundation spoke of their efforts in mangrove restoration in Andhra Pradesh near Kakinada and Machilipatnam.

Milk Mantra eyes Rs. 1,000 cr revenues in 4 years

With its “ethical sourcing programme”, it may emerge as the private sector’s Amul-in-the-making in eastern India.

Milk Mantra, India’s first venture capital funded startup in agri-food sector, plans to increase its revenues by eight times in the next four years, from Rs. 122 crore in 2015-16 to Rs. 1,000 crore by 2020-21.

Given that, in 2011-12, the company’s revenues were just Rs.4.5 crore, the exponential growth tells a story.

Ramping up

Chasing the target, Milk Mantra has ramped up its milk processing capacity recently from 75,000 litres to 2.5 litres per day, upgradable up to 3 lakh litres daily, at its two plants in Odisha, and increasing the number of networked milk farmers from the existing 40,000 to 1.5 lakh in the next three to four years, Srikumar Misra, Founder-Managing Director-CEO, told *BusinessLine*.

Misra quit as Director of Mergers and Acquisitions at Tata Tea/Tetley, London, after eight years in the job to establish a milk business in 2009 in his native Odisha where availability of milk was scarce. “I was already into food and beverages (f&b) segment. While I was looking for ideas to start a venture, the dairy segment stood out.” Having witnessed the evolution of f&b industry

across China, South Africa, UK and Europe, he realized that the organized space in India and the \$50 billion industry was waiting for a new dairy brand that was healthy, functional and innovative.

The company introduced its flagship product, Milky Moo, to Odisha in 2012. It became one of the fastest consumer brands globally with a CAGR of 100%, he said, adding now he hopes to make it 10 times bigger, to cater to the market mainly in eastern India.

Funding

Milk Mantra, which had so far raised venture capital funding to the tune of nearly Rs. 100 crore (Rs. 25 crore as debt, the rest being equity), has invested about Rs. 60 crore for processing capacity expansion at its plants in Bhubaneswar and Sambhalpur districts in Odisha. “We are also increasing the number of milk collection centres from 300 to 1,000 and procurement from one lakh litres to nearly four lakh litres of milk per day as we are focusing on increasing productivity and output by three times. If necessary, we will invest more in capex.”

The company’s 70% revenue comes from toned milk and 30 per cent from other products like probiotic and plain curd, lassi and butter milk sold under the Milk Moo brand.

Misra said in 2009, the dairy products business was a \$40-50 billion market, only \$5 billion of it organised. In eastern India, it was just 10%, compared with the national average of 25%. The market was already growing in double digits and “I could see the opportunity here.”

As part of ‘ethical sourcing programme’, also followed by many global companies as a ‘conscious capitalism business model’, Milk Mantra focused on transparency in payment and pricing. “Our vehicles collect milk from collection centres. Currently, we pay our milk farmers at the rate of Rs. 27 per litre every 10 days. We sell toned milk at a price of Rs. 38 per litre.” Since the farmers connect and deal with the company directly, it ensured elimination of middlemen. And through tie-ups with banks and financial institutions, farmers are encouraged to buy more cattle. Cattle feed companies, similarly, provide

quality feed to increase productivity. Unlike Amul's agent-cooperative model, Milk Mantra owns and manages the entire sourcing segment.

In November 2015, the startup launched MooShake, a dairy-based health beverage blended with curcumin (a turmeric extract), which Misra wants to promote as an immunity booster. Developed in-house, MooShake has a shelf-life of 180 days.

Business Standard

Tomato prices to remain high for next two months

The fresh tomato crop is expected to arrive only in September and till then prices are expected to remain under pressure



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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Triple whammy as dal, tomato & potato prices surge together



The cause for consumers' tears, this summer, is not the price of onions.

It's the triple whammy of a huge increase in the cost of tomatoes, potatoes, arhar dal and urad dal - all staple foods. It hasn't helped that the government's efforts to build stocks of dals, has been either absent or ineffective.

Arhar dal now costs as much as Rs 170/kg. Urad dal is selling for as high as Rs 196/kg. Tomatoes are going for Rs 100 a kg. And potato prices are up to almost Rs 20/kg.

Dal production has been hit due to last year's drought, almost doubling its prices. Higher-than-expected heat has destroyed some tomato crop, which

may have constricted its supply, pushing And a blight that swept across potato fields in Bengal, has hit the tuber's supply.

The situation is so bad that vegetable price inflation rose 2.21 percent to 12.94%. That then badly hit the Wholesale Price Index, pushing it to 0.79% in May, its highest level in 19 months. And with no change in the already high inflation in the price of dals - at 35.56 percent - food inflation on the whole spiked to 7.88% in May from 4.23% a month earlier.

The government's target is to procure 1.5 lakh tonnes of dals - or pulses - for buffer stock creation and so far, 1.15 lakh tonnes have been purchased during the kharif and rabi seasons, food minister Ram Vilas Paswan said. He added that rabi crop procurement is still going on, he added.

India imported 5.5 million tonnes of pulses last year. The country's pulses production is estimated to be 17.06 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), while the demand is pegged at 23.5 million tonnes.

In the last two years, arhar dal prices have doubled and the cost of urad has increased by around 120%. Even the price of chana dal, which is produced in large quantities and is usually unaffected by inflation, has risen 85% in this period, in Delhi.

The case of the two staple vegetables - potatoes and tomatoes - is slightly different. Both are shorter duration crops. But both have seen prices surge.

Tomatoes are ripe for harvesting 60-70 days after transplanting while potatoes take 75-120 days to mature. The tomatoes that are coming to the market now were planted around March. While there were some unusually high temperatures in that period, the crop destruction was not staggering.

Winter rain in the larger producing states was not unduly distressing, either. In any case, tomato farming isn't completely dependent on rain. So the agriculture ministry's second advanced estimates for horticultural crops pegged the tomato crop for 2015-16 at 18.2 million metric tonne, up from the previous year's 16.4 million metric tonne.

And still, tomato prices have gone through the roof. Although the government says that prices are not so high, data published by the department of consumer affairs and the National Horticulture Board show that in most cities, prices have increased by 100-200% between April and June this year. A comparison of prices between June 2014 and June 2016 shows that in most cities, tomato prices have increased phenomenally.

The potato economy is different from the tomato one, in that it's not based just on supply and demand. A portion of each year's harvest of potatoes goes into cold storages across the country and comes out for the market later. Potato production was estimated to dip this year to about 46 million tonnes from the previous year's 48 million tonnes. The blight in Bengal destroyed some potato crop, pushing its price up.

State agriculture department turns focus on production of pulses

Pulses enhance soil fertility, require less water and have a huge potential in the Indian market because of its low production. But it is yet to be popular in Jharkhand.

This is because the state farmers are apprehensive about cultivating pulse in place of the traditional paddy.

To clear this bottleneck, the department of agriculture and experts are jointly focusing on improving the production of pulses ahead of the kharif season this year.

Director of state agriculture department Jata Shankar Choudhary said that there has been a marked improvement in pulse production since the launch of National Food Security Mission (NFSM) in which pulse is a major component. "As against three lakh hectare land under pulse cultivation in state, the area has doubled to six lakh hectare in the last two years," he said.

He added that this qualified the state for winning the Krishi Karman award twice. Choudhary said that it was because of the farmers' reluctance to opt for

any new crop, that the department and agriculture extension centres are still trying hard to popularize pulse cultivation.

About 77% area of pulses in Jharkhand is available in 15 districts namely Gumla, Palamu, Simdega, Garhwa, Latehar, Ranchi, West Singhbhum, Seraikela, Dumka, Giridih, Lohardaga, Hazribagh, Pakur, Chatra and Sahebganj. All these 15 districts of Jharkhand have been included under NFSM-Pulses in which special support including subsidy on high yielding varieties of seeds are given to the farmers.

Agriculture secretary, Nitin Madan Kulkarni said that in the 1st phase of NFSM, the government thrust on pulses has been in Palamu, Garhwa, Chatra, Simdega and Lohardaga districts.

He has asked district development managers (DDMs) of National Agriculture Bank for Rural Development and State Agriculture Management and Extension Training Institute (SAMETI) to organize town hall meetings in all the districts.

In this meetings, progressive farmers will be invited to indicate the quantity of pulse seeds (and arhar seeds in particular) available with them for distribution during the ensuing season. "The government will provide details of government schemes and support to the farmer club members," he said.

At the national level, Jharkhand ranks seventh in pigeon pea (arhar), eighth in urad and 12th in moong daal production whereas it is yet to catch up with the top ten states in the production of chickpea (chana) and lentils (masoor).

25 Rajasthan mandis to join national agriculture market by September

Twenty-five agriculture markets (mandis) in Rajasthan will join the National Agriculture Market (NAM) by September this year. At present only one mandi, Ramjang mandi in Kota for black gram (chana) is included under the ambitious scheme of online trade of agriculture produce across the country.

National Agriculture Market (NAM) is a pan India electronic trading portal which networks the existing agriculture produce marketing committee (APMC) mandis to create a unified market for agriculture commodities.

NAM portal provides a single window service for all APMC related information and services. This includes commodity arrivals and prices, buy and sell, trade offers, provision to sell, respond to trade offers among other services.

Agriculture minister Prabhulal Saini said agriculture marketing is at present administered by the states as per their regulations under which the state is divided into several market areas and each of which is administered by a separate Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC).

He said this fragmentation of markets even within the state hinders free flow of agri-commodities from one market area to another. And multiple handling of agri-product and multiple levels of mandi charges end up escalating the prices for the consumers without commensurate benefit to the farmer.

He said NAM addresses these challenges by creating unified market through online trading platform, both at the state and national level. It promotes uniformity, streamlining of procedures across the integrated markets, removes information asymmetry between buyers and sellers and promotes real time price discovery, based on actual demand and supply.

It also promotes transparency in auction process and access to a nationwide access for the farmer with prices commensurate with quality of his produce. The system also ensures online payment. NAM is being implemented in 585 regulated wholesale markets in states desirous of joining the e-platform. According to the plan 400 mandis will be integrated by March 2017 and the remaining 185 by March 2018.

15K carnation saplings given to farmers in Ooty

In a bid to supply carnation flower saplings at subsidized rate, around 15,000 carnation flower saplings were distributed to farmers by the horticulture department in Ooty, on Thursday, under the National Agriculture Development Programme (NADP) scheme.

The department had imported 5,000 carnation plants, of different colours, from Italy two months ago and is in the process of developing and distributing about 3 lakh of the saplings to farmers under the NADP scheme.

Earlier, Nilgiris farmers had requested the horticulture department to provide them with good quality carnation flower saplings. Hence, the state government,

with the assistance of NADP, sanctioned 1.4 crore to develop and distribute the saplings.

"We are selling the plants for 6 a piece, whereas private distributors sell them at 10 a piece," said Mani. Tnn

Three day training course in vegetable crops held at PAU

A three-day training course on "Latest Production, Protection and Post-Harvest Techniques for Fruit and Vegetable Crops" concluded at the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU). The horticulture development officers, district extension specialists and scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendras attended the course, held under the guidance of R.S. Sidhu, Director of Extension Education.

The fruit science experts highlighted the current scenario and future prospects of fruit cultivation in Punjab. Besides, they educated the trainees about management practices, high density planting and crop regulation in citrus; nursery production in fruit crops; and latest production technologies of mango, guava, litchi, pomegranate, phalsa, sapota, loquat, etc. In addition, experts informed about harvesting, post-harvest handling and marketing of citrus fruits; scope of banana in Punjab; processing and preservation of seasonal fruits and vegetables for value addition; technology for sugar based fruit and vegetable products; and management practices for control of insects-pests and diseases in fruit crops.

The vegetable science experts highlighted the scope of vegetable cultivation in Punjab; and dwelt on healthy nursery production and cultivation of vegetables under low tunnels; technology for hybrid seed production, processing and storage of vegetable seeds. Apart from this, they shed light on production and post-harvest techniques in onion, brinjal, cauliflower, tomato, chili and bell pepper; and production and post-harvest handling of potato, muskmelon, pea, garlic, okra and bottle gourd. The course was coordinated by the experts namely T.S. Riar and Kulvir Kaur whereas it was technically coordinated by J.S. Brar and Ruma Devi.

Upbeat cotton crop forecast for Maha if sowing by June 25

The Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR) has suggested sowing cotton before June 25 or latest by June-end in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana, as part of its seasonal forecast every year. The advisory is based on the prediction of monsoon onset and daily rainfall distribution patterns for 54 major cotton growing districts in eleven states.

These 54 districts spread over Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, MP, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, AP, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu cover 90% of the cotton grown in the country.

Keshav Kranthi, CICR director, said that the forecast is based on four major web sources of rainfall prediction. The IMD provides a 5-day advance weather forecast, while Skymet and Timeanddate provide 15-day forecast, and Accuweather gives a 90-day advance forecast.

CICR scientists prepare consensus maps and provide advisories to cotton farmers. A comprehensive advisory for each state is provided before the season commences, based on the 90-day forecast. This advisory recommends suitable varieties of appropriate duration to match the rainfall distribution patterns, the probable diseases and insect pests that get aggravated due to adverse weather, and specific agronomic practices to tide over extreme weather.

A set of guidelines called 'Cotton health management guidelines 2016' are issued on the institute website www.cicr.org.in at the beginning of the season. In addition, the institute issues a district-wise weekly advisory every Wednesday in English and eight local languages, based on inputs from four weather sites. These advisories are also summarized and sent as free voice mail messages every week to 2,35,000 cotton farmers across the country in the local languages.

This year, the main cotton growing districts of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan are likely to face a prolonged dry period after June. Hot conditions coupled with dust accumulation on the crop aggravates whitefly problem. Indiscriminate use

of chemicals and mixtures, especially on a crop in drought-like conditions, can result in whitefly outbreaks.

Cotton area fell short by 30% this year in north India due to the severe whitefly problem in Punjab last year, which was reported to have caused damage worth Rs4,800 crores despite chemical insecticide usage of Rs150 crores. Consequently, Punjab paid Rs650 crores compensation to farmers last year. Apart from some parts of Punjab and Haryana, the whitefly problem may be severe in Rajasthan this year due to late sowing and bad weather.

Rains are likely to start by June 19-20 in MP, Maharashtra and Telangana. Rainfall distribution is predicted to be very good all through the season until mid-September, except for a 10-day dry period in mid-July in MP and Maharashtra, and intermittent dry weeks in Telangana. Cotton production in the three states is expected to be good, if sowed before June 25, or at least before the end of June. Timely sowed crop would be able to withstand the dry phase, whereas late sowed crop would face severe moisture stress in July.

In Gujarat, rains are expected to start from June 20-21. For most of the period in July, the state is unlikely to receive rains. If the prediction turns out to be correct, rain-fed cotton in Gujarat, especially late sowed crop will be under stress during July and after third week of August if monsoon recedes as predicted for many districts, resulting in decline in yields in rain-fed regions.

Rainfall distribution in AP is predicted to be erratic throughout the season. Rain-fed cotton may come under severe stress in the main cotton growing district of Guntur.

Good rains are predicted in Karnataka in the last week of June and early July. Timely sowing before the end of June with short duration varieties is strongly recommended in rain-fed regions, because of the predictions indicating early withdrawal of monsoon by the third week of August.

Overall monsoon could be especially good for Maharashtra and Telangana, where 90 to 95% cotton is cultivated under rain-fed conditions. Entire north India is under irrigation, and moisture stress can be avoided, despite poor rains.

But, the hot conditions with dust on cotton may cause whitefly problems. Cotton crop in rest of the rain-fed regions in states, other than Orissa, is likely to be under moisture stress during the peak boll formation phase if moisture conservation methods are not adopted. If predictions turn true, cotton yields are unlikely to exceed the levels obtained during the previous five years.

ON THE COTTON TRAIL

* Sowing should be done before June 25 or by end of June in Maharashtra, MP and Telangana

* Gujarat unlikely to get any rains in July, and hence yields could decline substantially

* Andhra Pradesh to get erratic rainfall throughout the season, leading to severe water stress and yield

* Karnataka should go for short duration varieties, as monsoon will withdraw here by August-end

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Triple whammy as dal, tomato & potato prices surge together

The case of the two everyday vegetables — potatoes and tomatoes — is slightly different. Both are shorter duration crops. But both have seen prices surge.

Sometimes it's pricey onions driving consumers to tears, at other times, potatoes or pulses. But this summer is different. A triple whammy of scorching tomato and potato prices, alongside pulses — arhar and urad — has wrecked family budgets.

In the last two years, arhar prices have doubled while those of urad have increased by around 120%. Even gram (chana dal), which is produced in large quantities and doesn't usually go ballistic, has climbed 85% in this period in Delhi.



Although it was clear by January that production of pulses was going to be hit because of last year's drought, government efforts to build stocks were either absent or ineffective. TOI had pointed out then that if imports were not catalysed, a sharp supply squeeze was imminent. ‘

The case of the two everyday vegetables — potatoes and tomatoes — is slightly different. Both are shorter duration crops. But both have seen prices surge.

Tomatoes are ripe for harvesting 60-70 days after transplanting while potatoes take 75-120 days to mature. The tomatoes coming to the market now were planted around March. While there were some unusually high temperatures in that period, the crop destruction was not staggering. Winter rains in the bigger producing states were not unduly distressing.

In any case, tomato farming is not completely dependent on rains. As a result, the agriculture ministry's second advanced estimates for horticultural crops had pegged the tomato crop for 2015-16 at 18.2 million metric tonne, up from the previous year's 16.4 million metric tonne.

Yet, prices of tomatoes have gone through the roof. Although the government says that in several parts of the country the prices are not so high, data put out by the department of consumer affairs and the National Horticulture Board shows that in most cities, prices have increased by 100-200% between April and June this year. A comparison of prices between June 2014 and June 2016 shows that in most cities, tomato prices have increased phenomenally.

Potato production was estimated to dip this year to about 46 million tonne from the previous year's 48 million tonne.

But the potato economy is different: a portion of each year's harvest goes into cold storages across the country and comes out for the market later. So, it is not simply a matter of supply and demand. One factor that has put the squeeze on potato supply this year is the blight that swept across potato fields in Bengal. This may have contributed to a rise in prices.

Government clears import of maize to cut pressure



State-run PEC has floated a tender to import 50,000 tonnes of non-genetically modified maize under advance licence for the domestic starch industry.

PUNE: State-run PEC has floated a tender to import 50,000 tonnes of non-genetically modified maize under advance licence for the domestic starch industry. After India's retail inflation increased to 5.76% in May from 5.47% in the previous month, mainly on account of costly food items, the central

government cleared the import of pulses on Wednesday. This was followed by the decision to import maize, which is also an important feed ingredient, especially in poultry, where prices have remained firm since January.

Traders said imported maize may not help reduce the demand and supply gap in the domestic market, but it will reduce some pressure on supplies since prices have gone up 15-20% in the past three months. "The price of maize has increased from Rs 14.50 per kg in April to about Rs 17 per kg now while starch prices have remained stable as there is recession in the industries that use starch," said an official of a listed starch company, requesting not to be identified ..

As per the third advance estimate of the government, India is expected to have produced 21.02 million tonnes of maize in 2015-16, 7.5% less than the third advance estimate for the previous fiscal. The final maize production in 2014-15 was 23.67 million tonnes.

Some traders said that they expected the government to allow total import of 1 lakh tonnes of maize under advance licence.

Over 50 nations shell out \$585 billion on farmers in 2013-15



The report further said, "Relatively little of the support provided addresses directly the recognised opportunities and challenges that confront the sector."

NEW DELHI: More than 50 countries, including the US and China together, spent annually about \$585 billion on farmers in the last three years and most of it was market price support, a latest report said today.

For OECD countries as a whole, farm support has roughly halved in intensity over the past 30 years and now amounts to 17 per cent of gross farm receipts, it said.

"Together, the countries covered in this report provided an annual average of \$585 billion of support to their agricultural producers directly in 2013-15, and an additional \$87 billion on general services supporting the sector," said Paris-based think-tank OECD in its report 'Agriculture Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2016'.

On average, for the 50 countries covered, 68 per cent of support to farmers was provided in the form of market price support and payments based on output or on input use without constraints, it said.

It also cautioned that these steps distort production decisions and can significantly alter markets and trade.

The report further said, "Relatively little of the support provided addresses directly the recognised opportunities and challenges that confront the sector."

The report covered OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries and a range of emerging economies that account for the majority of global agricultural value added.

As per the report, the average support levels in the emerging economies have increased from very low or even negative levels to approach the average level of OECD countries.

Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Ukraine, the United States, and Vietnam have support levels below - in some cases well below - the OECD average.

The farm support levels in the European Union (as a whole), the Russian Federation and Turkey are roughly at that average while China is just slightly higher. The support levels in Indonesia are much higher, but still well below the

highest levels of support provided by Iceland, Japan, Korea, Norway and Switzerland, the report added.

OECD recommended that countries should put in more efforts in refocusing agricultural policies to address long-term needs for improving productivity and sustainability performance of agriculture to help it face multiple challenges ahead.

It also suggested that governments need to implement more ambitious policies to address the global challenges facing agriculture, notably a shift away from direct support to farmers towards greater assistance for innovation systems that will improve productivity and sustainability.

India is one of the many non-member economies with which OECD has working relationships, in addition to its member countries.

Pulses price close to Rs 200/kg; government to up buffer stock



The buffer stock is being created by procuring pulses directly from farmers at market prices using the Price Stabilisation Fund.

NEW DELHI: Prices of pulses inched close to Rs 200/kg today even as the Centre has decided to increase the buffer stock by over five times to 8 lakh tonnes for retail sale at a highly subsidised rate of Rs 120/kg.

It is yet to be seen however whether procuring more pulses for the buffer stock would help in curbing price rise at a time when not many states have evinced interest in lifting the pulses for retail distribution at a cheaper rate.

As per the data maintained by the Consumer Affairs Ministry, maximum retail price of urad is ruling at Rs 196/kg, tur at Rs 166/kg, Moong at Rs 120/kg, Masoor at Rs 105/kg and gram at Rs 93/kg today.

"In a significant decision, the government has decided to enhance the buffer stock of pulses from 1.5 lakh tonnes to 8 lakh tonnes," the Food Ministry said in a release issued late night yesterday.

The decision, which is in line with the recommendation of an inter-panel set up by the ministry, was taken yesterday in a high-level meeting headed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

The initial target was to create a buffer stock of 1.5 lakh tonnes of pulses this year. So far, 1.15 lakh tonnes has been purchased for this purpose and the same is being offloaded to states for retail distribution at a cheaper rate.

The buffer stock is being created by procuring pulses directly from farmers at market prices using the Price Stabilisation Fund. The stock is being released to states for retail distribution at a subsidised rate of Rs 120 per kg.

Though the Centre is pressing states to take un-milled pulses from the buffer stock at Rs 66/kg and process it and sell in retail markets at Rs 120/kg, but not many states have shown interest.

So far, over 10,000 tonnes has been released to states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu for retail distribution even as Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan has been saying that the states too have equal responsibility in controlling prices and should take effective steps.

The buffer stock is being created through domestic procurement as well as through imports in order to address the deficit of 7.6 million tonnes of pulses.

Production of pulses is estimated to have declined to 17.06 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June) due to two consecutive years of drought, while the demand for it stands at 23.5 million tonnes.