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THE HINDU

Plan to encourage millet consumption

Comprehensive programme has been taken up in 47 mandals of the State



Samples of millets on display at Jeeva Vaividhya Jaatara organised by Andhra University in Visakhapatnam.— File Photo: C.V. Subrahmanyam

A comprehensive millet revival programme covering 47 mandals in seven districts of the State aims at increasing food and nutritional security by expanding and stabilising the area in five years.

The State Agriculture Department is implementing the programme under the National Food Security Mission.

Targeting 1,000 hectares in each of the mandals, the first three years will concentrate on expansion and the remaining two on consolidation.

Info gathering

“Gathering of basic information, benchmarking survey and capacity building have been taken up in the first year of the project in 2015-16,” programme State coordinator N.D.R.K. Sarma has told *The Hindu*.

The programme aims at increasing the area, production and productivity and household consumption of millets in the tribal mandals of East Godavari and north coastal districts and in the rain-fed mandals of Anantapur, Kurnool, and Chittoor. It will be implemented with a budget of Rs.32 crore.

The area under minor millets – *ragi, korra, sama, ooda, variga, and arika* – is proposed to be increased from the present nearly 1 lakh ha to 1.6 to 2 lakh ha. The present area under major millets -- *jowar and bajra* -- is 2 lakh ha but the consumption has to be increased, says Dr. Sarma.

Even in the areas where millets used to be consumed earlier, it had come down with many shifting to rice. Consumption of millets not only provides food security but also increases nutritional security by 40 per cent, he observes. In the targeted mandals the consumption has to be increased to 2,000 households beginning from 500 to 600 initially, he says.

To restore the place of pride enjoyed by traditional millet-food, food festivals, cooking competitions and recipe contests will be organised and additional recipes and baked items introduced.

Value addition and encouraging entrepreneurship are also a part of the programme. With area expansion, capacity building and value addition, demand is expected to go up. At gram panchayat level de-hullers and pulverizers have to be promoted. For example, though there is a demand for ‘korra’ and ‘sama’ the means of turning grain into rice are not available, Dr. Sarma points out.

To be coordinated in a forum of NGOs, WASSAN is the Lead Technical Agency for the programme and at the district-level, Project Director of Agricultural Technical Management Agency (ATMA) will anchor it.

Giant African snail’s fast spread alarms Kerala

Threat to crops, buildings and health of children is growing, researchers say

The highly invasive and rapidly proliferating Giant African Snails are marching on to more districts of Kerala, the Forest Research Institute of the State has warned. They could decimate standing crop and threaten the health of children, besides devouring calcium from house walls. The snails have grown from small populations to cover 125 locations in recent years, said T.V. Sajeev, scientist, KFRI.

“Considered one of 100 most invasive species in the world, Giant African Snails (*Achatina fulica*) feed on several plants. They destroy almost all crops and can live in a dormant state for 2-3 years. The snails are an intermediate host of the rat lung worm that causes oesinophilic meningitis in children below five years of age,” he said.

These large molluscs living close to humans and adult specimens can be 5-6 inches long and weigh 200-300 gm. A single snail lays about 200-500 eggs and 80 per cent of these survive.

INVADER EXPANDS TERRITORY	
The snail, originally from East Africa, is believed to have reached India in 1857 at Calcutta. It reached Kerala in the 1950s.	
	<p>concentrated in Palakkad and Emakulam districts</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local bodies in the districts are struggling to check it <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For an area of 5 sq. km., panchayats spend Rs. 50,000 per year <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Snails are highly invasive since there are few predators <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The snails, which are in a dormant state during dry season, become active during monsoon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There were multiple introductions of the snail in Kerala due to the import of wood from different countries <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most of the population is 	

“The snail requires large amounts of calcium to maintain its big shell. As the soil in Kerala is poor in calcium content, the species utilise the calcium in compound walls and buildings, thus damaging them,” Dr. Sajeev said.

Eradication drive

Taking note of the health risk and serious impact on agriculture, the KFRI has initiated an eradication drive.

Awareness classes in many districts, grama panchayats and municipalities such as Vadavannur, Eloor and North Paravoor and Muzhuppilangad on eradication are underway, the KFRI team said. The snail is dispersed through timber, ornamental plants, soil and manure. It sometimes hitchhikes on vehicles. In many sites, snail eradication has been successful with the help of local self-governments, the Kudumbasree Mission, the local community and the Health Department.

The snail damages crops including mulberry, betel vine, capsicum, areca, banana, tomato, vanilla, potato, spinach, radish and tomato, researchers writing in the Public Library of Science said.

Perambalur farmers get training in value addition to shallot

Land is likely to be allocated for establishing value-addition hub



Farmers taking a look at the storage racks for shallots during a value-addition training programme at Chettikulam in Perambalur district on Friday.

Plans are afoot to promote a processing centre for small onions in Perambalur, the largest small onion-producing district in the State.

Disclosing this at a training programme on processing and value addition of small onions for farmers here on Friday, C. Anandharamakrishnan, Director, Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology (IICPT), Thanjavur, said the district administration had come forward to provide the land and other basic amenities for establishing the hub where mechanised units on value addition on small onions could be set up.

The IICPT would extend the necessary technological support.

This could help develop Perambalur as a major onion processing centres.

Small onion is cultivated on an area of about 8,000 hectares in the district on an average every year with a production of 65,000 to 70,000 tonnes. Last year, the area under cultivation had touched 8,900 hectares, according to district officials.

The State government, in 2014, opened an onion marketing complex at Chettikulam with cold storage.

About 200 farmers were exposed to various aspects of storing and processing small onions and on making value-added products such as onion paste, dry powder, and pickles during the training programme jointly organised by the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri Business and the IICPT at the Chettikulam Marketing Complex for Onion here.

Dr. Anandharamakrishnan emphasised the need for improving the storage and processing of onions. The IICPT had developed racks with good ventilation for storing small onions instead of the conventional method adopted by farmers. Storing onions in these low-cost structures could help reduce wastage by 20 per cent, he said.

The IICPT had the technology for making various value-added products such as onion paste and pickles which could have shelf life of six months. The onions could be soaked in brine solution and preserved for up to six months. This technology could be used for export purposes, he said.

IICPT faculty members R. Jaganmohan and V.R. Sinija briefed farmers on value addition and storage techniques.

Demonstrations on value-added products and a field demonstration of storing of onions were held as part of the training.

P. Chandran, Joint Director of Agriculture, N. Sarfudeen, Deputy Director (in-charge), Agricultural Marketing, and R. Ramesh, Agricultural Officer (Agricultural Marketing), were present.

Horticulture Dept. plans to promote use of cold storages among farmers

Nurseries were damaged due to unseasonal rain a few months back

The Horticulture Department in the district has plans to encourage vegetable cultivators to use the cold storage facilities established by the Agricultural Marketing Committee at Alukkuzhi, near Gobi, and other places to safeguard them from market vagaries.

The department hopes that tomato farmers in Thalavadi block where 70 to 80 per cent of tomato crop is raised out of an overall average area of 250 hectares at the district level will make optimal use of the facilities.

Tomato being a labour-intensive crop, farmers cultivate it on a small-scale basis, each in just one or two acres.

Hybrid variety

Tomato farmers usually avoid utilising the storage facility since they are in need of money soon after harvest. The vegetable, official sources said, is cultivated over a duration of 120 days, and yield could be harvested from the 50th day onwards. The hybrid variety could be maintained for even a six-month duration, department sources said.



A seller arranges tomatoes at the Sathyamangalam Vegetable Market in Erode district on Friday. —PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN

But, when the price plummets in-between, farmers let the crop to wither since they will not be able to cover even the labour costs. This results in enormous loss to them.

The department's initiative to promote utilisation of cold storage in this backdrop is expected to enable farmers sustain their activities with a sense of certainty, a senior official of Horticulture Department said.

Tomatoes could be stored for a maximum of one month, Chairman of Erode District Agricultural Marketing Committee Kulandaisamy added.

According to the officials, sudden escalation in the cost of tomatoes during summer months is not unusual.

In Erode district, the nurseries were damaged due to unseasonal rain a few months back, creating supply shortage in the current cycle due to considerable decrease in area of cultivation.

The current price of Rs. 50 to Rs. 60 per kg is likely to sustain for at least a couple of weeks in view of the occurrence of auspicious days, officials said.

Farmer wins award



‘Abinavam’ S. Jayaraman

‘Abinavam’ S. Jayaraman, a progressive farmer, has brought laurels to the entire State by winning the ‘innovative farmer award 2016’ of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi.

Radha Mohan Singh, Union Agriculture Minister, handed over the award to Mr. Jayaraman at the valediction of the National Agriculture Fair 2016 titled “Kisan Unity” held in New Delhi recently, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The award was in recognition of Mr. Jayaraman’s yeoman service in promoting integrated farming techniques among the farming community to augment the agriculture produce in the country.

Mr. Jayaraman's name for the award was recommended by the Tamil Nadu Government to the IARI. This is the third award Mr. Jayaraman has won during the current year.

The Tamil Nadu Government selected him for the best farmer award in adopting integrated farming techniques.

The award was presented to him at a function held in Tiruchi in January in the presence of host of State Ministers.

Later, Mr. Jayaraman was also selected for the South Zone level Information Technology Express Award. He received the award from Ravi Shankar Prasad, Union Minister for Communications and Information Technology, at a function held in Bengaluru in March.

An announcement on Mr. Jayaraman receiving the national award was made at the farmers grievances redress meeting held here on Friday and the jam-packed hall gave a standing ovation to him.

V. Sampath, District Collector, N. Elango, Joint Director of Agriculture and heads of the various government departments felicitated Mr. Jayaraman on the occasion.

Mr. Jayaraman, replying to the felicitations, said that he managed to get the awards thanks to the support extended by the officials of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and other government departments and thanked them for the same.

Kharif sowing begins in Ballari

HOPEFUL OF A GOOD YIELD: Women farm workers engaged in land preparation as agricultural operations begin in Seetaram tanda in Hosapete taluk.

After sustaining crop loss during the kharif and rabi seasons due to the failure of rain last year, farmers in Ballari district have taken up sowing with new hopes of getting a better yield during this kharif season in the wake of reports of good monsoon this year on the one hand and the district recording some excess rainfall during the first fortnight of June on the other.

Sources in the Agriculture Department said that as against a normal rainfall of 35.3 mm from June 1 to June 14, the district had received an actual average rainfall of 75.9 mm.

The following is the taluk-wise details of rainfall recorded (figures in bracket indicate normal rainfall in mm): Ballari 80.5 (33.2), Hadagali 78.6 (37.4), Hosapete 92.8 (38.1), Hagari Bommanahalli 67.1 (32.6), Kudligi 66.9 (34.3), Sandur 76.1 (38.8) and Sirguppa 72.5 (35.9).



Official figures indicate that the district had, as on Thursday, recorded a sowing percentage of 10.2 and sowing operations were in progress in various parts of the district in the rain-fed areas. For the kharif season, the sowing target is set at around 3.65 lakh hectares of which around 1.5 lakh hectares is irrigated area.

Paddy, jowar, maize are the major crops among cereals to be cultivated in around 2.08 lakh hectares, tur among pulses in 0.13 lakh hectares, groundnut, sunflower among oil seeds in 0.72 lakh hectares and cotton among commercial crops in 0.70 lakh hectares.

Sowing of jowar, maize, tur, groundnut, sunflower, cotton among other crops has been completed in 0.37 lakh hectares. Sharnappa Mudagal, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* that a dry spell in the beginning of the second fortnight has slightly affected sowing operations but he was hopeful of good progress with the anticipated rainfall during the week.

Meet on ‘revitalising Indian fisheries education’



PATH-FINDING:J.K. Jena, Deputy Director General (Fisheries), ICAR, New Delhi, addressing a consultative meeting at Fisheries College and Research Institute, Thoothukudi on Friday.— Photo: N. Rajesh

The expert consultation on ‘Revitalising Indian fisheries education’ commenced at Fisheries College and Research Institute here on Friday.

The two-day consultative meet, being organised with the objective of making appropriate changes in the curriculum being followed in 22 colleges of fisheries across the country, is attended by students, faculty members, research scholars and experts in the field.

Based on the suggestions being made at the meeting, the recommendations will be submitted to Indian Council for Agriculture and Research (ICAR) for incorporating adequate changes in the curriculum.

Chief guest J.K. Jena, Deputy Director General (Fisheries), ICAR, New Delhi, released the proceedings of the meet in the presence of Vice-Chancellor (in-charge) of Tamil Nadu Fisheries University K. Rathnakumar, former Vice-Chancellor Bhaskaran Manimaran, Vice-Chancellor of TANUVAS R. Prabhakaran, scientist Manoj Kumar of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Thoothukudi, Principal Scientist Jegadish, Joint Director of Department of Fisheries R. Amal Xavier and others.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Jena said fish production in the country would increase from the present 10 million tonnes a year to 16 million tonnes in the next 15 years if the present plans could be translated into action.

Improve technology

To achieve this target, technology for harvesting both marine and inland fishes should be improved.

As environment and marine pollution had resulted in vanishing of certain species of fishes, the curriculum should be updated to face this challenge.

“If we can develop user-friendly and affordable technologies to address this serious issue by making adequate changes in the curriculum, achieving the target of 16 million tonnes of fish production a year would be easier,” Dr. Jena said.

Govt. to spend Rs. 1,200 crore for drought mitigation

The State government has chalked out an action plan for mitigation of drought in the State. The government would implement a long-term comprehensive plan and spend Rs.1200 crore for the drought mitigation. For the first time, the government is implementing action plan at village level, according to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. At a review meeting here on Friday, Mr. Naidu asked the officials to focus on increasing agriculture yield and also decrease the expenditure on farming.

The government has set a target of bringing 9.86 lakh hectare into cultivation this year. The officials need to take steps to ensure that the season was not lost.

Paddy production in State to be doubled

Area under cultivation to be upped to 3 lakh ha: Minister

The government is moving ahead with a comprehensive plan to revive paddy cultivation in the State, Minister for Agriculture V.S. Sunil Kumar has said. Addressing mediapersons here on Friday, he said that the plan was to more than double paddy production in the next five years.

Paddy cultivation has shrunk to just one lakh hectares and the production has been put at five lakh tonnes. “This will be increased to three lakh hectares of paddy land and 10 lakh tonnes of paddy production respectively,” he said.

As part of this initiative, a comprehensive R-Block Revival Project will be implemented soon. This will involve not only the Agriculture Department, but

the Departments of Irrigation, Soil Conservation, Public Works, Power, and so on.

The Minister said that cultivation in Rani Kayal, now lying fallow, would begin in September. The government would also give shape to a project to revitalise Kuttanad and approach the Central government for reviving the Kuttanad project, which according to the Minister, was ruined by the UDF government which limited it as an irrigation project to construct bunds, that too unscientifically for the benefit of contractors.

He said the Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act of 2008 and the databank, which had lost their teeth on accounts of the amendments brought in by the UDF government, would be strengthened. The government hoped to set up local committees to review the situation and take corrective steps in this regard.

Fields to be mapped

The paddy fields lying fallow would be mapped by local agriculture offices. This would be the basis for formulating local-level master plans, he added.

The Minister said the disbursement of arrears of the paddy procured during the last season would commence within 10 days. There had also been plan to enhance the pension amount, he said. “We hope to transform the agriculture offices into agro clinics,” the Minister said.

Only paddy farming at Metran Kayal: Minister

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar has made it clear that the government will not allow any business other than paddy cultivation in the paddy fields, including those lying fallow.

“We shall give all possible support to those who wish to grow paddy in the paddy lands now lying fallow. But we will not allow any business other than paddy cultivation on these lands,” he told mediapersons here after an extensive visit of the controversial Metran Kayal area.

Government to bear cost

Earlier, interacting with paddy cultivators at the Regional Agriculture Research Station (RARS) of Kerala Agricultural University at Kumarakom, Mr. Sunil Kumar assured the farmers that the government was ready to bear the high cost of reviving the Metran Kayal. “Even if someone with one acre wants to start

paddy cultivation, we will have to take up development of basic infrastructure for the entire 400-odd acres. But we are ready to take up this challenge,” he told the farmers.



Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar visiting the Metran Kayal area on Friday. K. Suresh Kurup, MLA, Raju Narayana Swamy, Principal Secretary, Agriculture, and District Collector Swagat Bhandari are present.

He said anyone who wanted to cultivate paddy on the polder was welcome to join the initiative.

Out of the nearly 406 acres of the Metran Kayal polder, 378 acres is held by Rakindo Developers for developing the area as a backwater resort village, with the remaining 28-odd acres remain with local farmers. The UDF government had given the go ahead signal for Rakindo, but had to retract the decision following popular ire.

It was against this backdrop that the Minister visited the area on Friday and made the declaration on the new policy initiative by the LDF government.

“A person named Jeevan had visited me the other day claiming to be speaking for the Rakindo group. He asked whether they would be able to revive the

project as a farm tourism project in which 50 per cent of the land would be used for paddy cultivation and the rest for tourism purpose. He also offered to take up organic farming in the polder,” the Minister said. “We will not allow the project in any other form,” Mr. Sunil Kumar said.

Reacting to a question, the Minister made it clear that the government had no plan to forcibly take over fallow paddy fields from its owners.

Maharashtra government to distribute indigenous seed to farmers

To promote organic farming and curb the use of pesticides, the Maharashtra government will distribute seed of the *desi* cotton variety to farmers in Yavatmal district on Saturday.

The project, being undertaken jointly with the Central Institute for Cotton Research and PK Agriculture University, will cover 100 tribal farmers.

“The seed are of indigenous origin and would ensure better yield at a lesser cost. A seed bank will soon be developed and seed made available to farmers in the open market at low cost,” Kishor Tiwari, Chairman of Vasantrao Naik Sethi Swalamban Mission, said.

He said the scheme would be implemented in 14 districts spread across Vidarbha and Marathwada in a phased manner as a flagship programme of the Maharashtra government.

Project Director and Divisional Agriculture Officer Rahul Satpute said, “As part of an ongoing campaign to stop farmers suicides, tribal people, who are the worst-hit victims of rain-sensitive crops, have come forward to opt for a ‘desi’ solution by replacing Bt cotton seed.”

“Seed produced by tribal people will be collected by the Agriculture Department and later sold in the local market,” he said. — PTI

Copra procurement centres opened

The copra procurement centres have been opened in Alangudi and Aranthangi and there has been a good response from the coconut farmers, said S. Ganesh, District Collector. Presiding over the Farmers’ Grievances Day meeting here on Friday, he said the district had registered 20.42 mm of rainfall so far against the normal rainfall of 34.59 mm in June.

YOGA DAY

The International Yoga Day will be observed on June 21. In a release here on Friday, S. Palanisamy, District Collector, has appealed to the students, yoga institutions, and police personnel to participate.

Poultry farmers asked to control feed wastage

Poultry farmers in the district were asked to raise the curtains to three feet height over the sides of the elevated poultry houses so as to control feed waste that happens due to high wind speed.

A press release from Agromet Field Unit of Veterinary College and Research Institute here and Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai said that the sky will be generally cloudy with chance of scattered rainfall in the next four days.

Maximum and minimum temperature will be 35 degree Celsius (95 degree Fahrenheit) and 24 degree Celsius (75.2 degree Fahrenheit) respectively. Wind speed will be around 11 km per hour, mostly from southwest.

The release said that active southwest monsoon will bring cloudiness and wind along with scattered rainfall over the zone. Hence, the upcoming four days will be favourable for the poultry.

Farmers seek immediate steps to cull wild boars

They are damaging crops such as groundnut, causing huge loss



grievance meet: Farmers raised issues such as removal of encroachments and protection of crops against wild animals with the Collector.-Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

Farmers in Vellore want wild boars to be gunned down to protect their crops from being damaged. They are demanding the Forest Department to take steps immediately to get the State government's nod to cull the wild animal.

A number of farmers have been raising the problems of wild boars causing tremendous damage to crops, especially groundnut, at the monthly farmers' grievance redressal meeting. During the meeting held on Friday, the farmers once again raised the issue and cited the Central government's nod to a few States to cull specific wild animals that were causing menace. Recently, the Centre approved culling of nilgai and wild boar in Bihar and rhesus monkey in Himachal Pradesh.

"The Centre had given the notification to cull nuisance-creating wild animals in States such as Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Even the Madras High Court has allowed shooting of wild boars by a forest department officer in the rank of a ranger. The Tamil Nadu government should implement these orders," R. Subash, a farmer said.

Huge loss

Ekambaram, another farmer said, many farmers have faced huge losses after wild boars damaged crops. "In Ambur forest range alone, there could be at least 5,000 wild boars. We raise crops after so much difficulty, but end up facing loss for our one year of hard work due to these wild animals. The compensation given by the Forest department is very low," he said.

While Raghupathy, another farmer, said farmers in Vellore have been raising this issue for the last 10 years. "But still, no solution has been arrived at. We are unable to raise crops such as groundnut. Is the government not worried about the welfare of farmers here?" he questioned.

The farmers wanted the government to take up measures to shoot down the wild boars.

Many of them wondered if the State government had failed to represent the magnitude of the issue to the Centre.

However, Umesh Suman, district forest officer, said steps are being taken to address the issue. "The census of wild boars was carried out. We also put forward these details during a review meeting. The final decision from the government is yet to come," he said.

Sugar mill arrears

A farmer said the cooperative sugar mills were yet to pay the pending arrears to sugarcane growers for 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

An official replied that all 16 cooperative sugar mills in the State were yet to pay the pending amount to farmers due to paucity of funds. For 2015, Rs. 350 per tonne was pending as payment.

“We informed the Labour Minister about this issue during a review meeting held on June 13. The Minister has assured to take appropriate action. The funds are likely to be provided by the end of June or July,” the official said.

A. C. Venkatesan, another farmer, urged Collector R. Nanthagopal to take steps to remove encroachments from all water bodies in the district and desilt them so that water could be stored when it rained.

Many farmers wanted the State government to waive all loans – both taken from cooperative and nationalised banks - for farmers. They also wanted the Thenpennai-Palar link project to be implemented soon.

“In Ambur forest range alone, there could be at least 5,000 wild boars, which attack crops”

Tomato prices to reduce in coming days

On Friday, the price was around Rs. 80 per kilo

The price of tomatoes has shot up considerably in the past few weeks as high temperatures in April coupled with heavy rains have damaged two consecutive crops leading to a shortage. On Friday, the price per kilo was around Rs. 80.

Added to the failure of crops is the reduction in supply from Nashik in neighbouring Maharashtra.

Suppliers in Nashik are getting better rates there. As a result, supply to Bengaluru has reduced, experts say.

“There was no flowering in April-May. There was crop damage due to high temperatures. Then there were heavy rains, which led to sand being deposited on leaves and further damage to the crops. Now the rains have stabilised and production is improving,” said a senior official with the Horticultural Producers’ Co-operative Marketing and Processing Society (HOPCOMS).

However, there is some relief as stable rain over the past few weeks has led to a small reduction in retail prices.



Rate slide: There is some relief as stable rain over the past few weeks has led to a reduction in retail prices of tomato.

This trend is expected to continue in the coming weeks if the rain does not increase. Retail prices reduced by Rs. 2 on Friday (from Rs. 80 per kilo on Thursday).

Before the spurt in prices, the average retail price was in the range of Rs. 25 to Rs. 35.

Tomato price rise temporary, rates fall in Delhi: Agriculture Secy

Wholesale prices of tomato, which were ruling as high as Rs 60/kg in Azadpur Mandi two days back, on Friday fell by up to Rs 20 per kg to Rs 40/kg.



The wholesale prices of high quality tomato variety ‘Sona’ from Himachal Pradesh fell to Rs 40-50/kg today from Rs 40-60/kg in the last two days.

Rise in tomato prices is a “temporary phenomenon” and rates in the national capital region have started to cool down with increase in supply from Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, a top Agriculture Ministry official said on Friday.

Wholesale prices of tomato, which were ruling as high as Rs 60/kg in Azadpur Mandi two days back, on Friday fell by up to Rs 20 per kg to Rs 40/kg, although retail prices are still ruling at Rs 50-80/kg depending on the quality and locality.

“This is a lean season for tomato. The price rise is a temporary phenomenon and it will phase out soon. In Delhi, there is no issue as tomatoes from hilly areas have started arriving,” Agriculture Secretary Shobhana K Pattanayak said.

Wholesale tomato prices have started cooling down in the national capital on improved supplies, he said, and exuded confidence that prices in other parts would also ease with the arrival of fresh crop.

Tomato Merchants Association President Ashok Kaushik said: “The supply situation in Delhi mandis has started improving with the arrival of over 350 tonnes of tomatoes from Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. The prices as a result have come down by up to Rs 20/kg in the wholesale market.”

The wholesale prices of high quality tomato variety ‘Sona’ from Himachal Pradesh fell to Rs 40-50/kg today from Rs 40-60/kg in the last two days. Prices of tomatoes of Haryana also declined to Rs 20-30/kg today from Rs 40-50/kg in the last two days, he said.

However, the fall in wholesale rates in Delhi are yet to be reflected in the unorganised retail markets, where tomato is continued to be sold by local vegetable vendors at Rs 50-80/kg depending on the quality and locality.

Tomatoes were sold at Rs 58/kg at Mother Dairy’s Safal outlets. Godrej’s Nature Basket was selling at Rs 80/kg and e-portal Bigbasket was offering it at Rs 55/kg.

The tight supply-demand situation owing to some rabi crop damage has flared up tomato prices in both wholesale and retail market in last more than 15 days across the country. Retail prices in other cities like Bengaluru are ruling as high as Rs 80-100/kg.

A senior Consumer Affairs Ministry official had on Thursday said that tomato prices would continue to be under pressure till arrival of fresh crop from September onwards.

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 released in September,” the official had said.

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

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha are the major tomato growing states.

India must transform its food system to feed its urban growth says, report

India should find ways to reduce regulatory complexity and enhance food testing capacity.



India must make public investments to improve on its food system. (File)

India's food system is largely unorganised and highly fragmented, a report by an American think-tank said, underlining that the country must reform government procurement, tariff and tax policies affecting urban food delivery to feed its growing cities.

The prestigious Chicago Council on Global Affairs in its report said that substantial public investments are needed to expand and increase the quality of storage, handling and transportation infrastructure.

It said that India's food system is largely unorganised and highly fragmented, inhibiting large-scale procurement, distribution, and retail sales. Authored by Andrea Durkin, the report 'Investing to Nourish India's Cities' recommended that India should reform government procurement, tariff and tax policies affecting urban food delivery.

It also recommends ways to reduce regulatory complexity and enhance food testing capacity. To improve the supply system, the paper further identifies areas of improvement in transit, warehousing, cold chains, retail and processing that could improve urban food security in India. "The scale of food and nutrition needed to sustain that is hard to fathom—and India's food system is already failing to deliver food security for all," said Alesha Black, director of the Council's Global Food and Agriculture Programme.

"Now imagine when that population doubles in the next 40 years. India has to transform its food system to feed that urban growth," he said. The report argues that the food system in India must transform to feed its growing cities. Increasing urban employment and rising incomes portend significant growth for India's USD 360 billion food market.

Yet substantial public and private investments, as well as key regulatory reforms, are needed to update India's unorganised, fragmented food system, it said. "There is no more fundamental measure of the well-being of a population than its food and nutrition security," Durkin said. "India must make targeted public investments and create a path for the private sector to improve the state of urban nutrition and meet growing demand for food in India's cities," said the report.

Govt studies option of growing pulses in African nations

Production of pulses is estimated to have declined to 17.06 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June) due to drought while domestic demand is around 23-24 million tonnes.

A delegation may visit Mozambique to examine the possibility of growing pulses through contract farming, a senior government official said on Friday.

Government is exploring the feasibility of contract farming of pulses in African countries — Mozambique, Tanzania and Malawi — as it looks for a long-term solution to domestic shortage and high prices.

A delegation may visit Mozambique to examine the possibility of growing pulses through contract farming, a senior government official said on Friday.

“For long-term solutions of the pulses crisis, we are exploring the option of working with Mozambique, Tanzania and Malawi. These countries grow tur and arhar similar to our domestic varieties. So, we are exploring this option,” the official said.

Stating that farming is unorganised in these countries and done at a very small scale, he said the government will explore the option to take land for contract farming with the involvement of private players. The other option could be offtake agreement with these countries.

The official, however, acknowledged absence of sufficient infrastructure in these countries to raise output and facilitate imports, in which case India may have to offer help.

“No decision has been taken so far. It is only at a discussion stage. These countries have no company or trading organisation for exports or to do contract farming,” the official said.

A delegation might visit Mozambique soon to explore these possibilities as well, he said.

Production of pulses is estimated to have declined to 17.06 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June) due to drought while domestic demand is around 23-24 million tonnes.

The country imported about 5.5 million tonnes last fiscal, largely through private trade, but it was not enough to cool the skyrocketing prices, which have gone up to Rs 200 per kg in the retail market.

Delay in arrival of monsoon not to impact soybean crop yield in MP



Madhya Pradesh is the country's top producer of soybean and accounts for 53% production (Representational Image)

A week's delay in arrival of monsoon in Madhya Pradesh will not have any significant impact on soybean crop yield provided there is no long break in monsoon once sowing starts, experts said on Thursday.

Madhya Pradesh is the country's top producer of soybean and accounts for 53% production, according to official data.

Scientist and soybean expert PS Bhatnagar said slight delay in arrival of monsoon would not have any significant impact on soybean yield provided there was no long gap once the monsoon arrives.

With pre-monsoon showers hitting east Madhya Pradesh, farmers are getting ready to sow soybean, paddy and pulses although the onset of monsoon is still a few days away.

“Pre-monsoon activity has begun in east Madhya Pradesh from Bay of Bengal area and onset of monsoon should take place by June 20-21. The progression of

monsoon from Arabian Sea area is still weak and it will take another 8-10 days to arrive in west Madhya Pradesh,” India Meteorological Department’s Bhopal office director Anupam Kashyapi told HT.

The state government has increased the target area under kharif crop – that includes oilseeds, paddy, pulses and maize – this year to 132 lakh hectares from 126 lakh hectares in the previous season. However, area under soybean, which was cultivated on about 59 lakh hectares last year, is expected to fall by more than 5%.

“Soybean cultivation in MP area will come down this kharif season as farmers have been suffering crop damage for the past two to three years. We expect farmers to increase the area under pulses,” agricultural production commissioner PC Meena said.

Solvent Extractors’ Association of India executive director BV Mehta said there would be marginal drop in soybean acreage by about 5-10%.

Soybean farmers are trying to increase per hectare yield of soybean for a better crop size. During the 2015 kharif season, production of soybean was around 69.29 lakh tonnes compared to 87.1 lakh tonnes in 2014.

Soybean prices are up 7% than what they were a year ago. At present, a tonne of soybean is fetching a price of Rs 3,950 while in June last year, the price was `3,700 per quintal. Besides Madhya Pradesh, other soybean producing states are Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

2015-16 tea production, exports at record high: Board

The exports crossed 230 million kilos during the period.

India achieved record production and exports of tea in the last fiscal year, according to the Tea Board.

In a press release issued on Friday, the Board said production grew by three per cent (36 million kg) during the last fiscal to 1,233 m kg, riding on 7 per cent

production growth in Assam, which contributes half of the country's total tea output.



Production increased by a marginal 1.68 per cent in Bengal, and declined by 6.95 per cent in South India, both of which account for one-fourth of the total.

Production declined by a sharp 15.73 per cent in Kerala due to labour unrest.

Nearly one-third of total production was contributed by small growers through bought-leaf factory (BLF) routes. Small growers contributed 53 per cent of production in Tamil Nadu, 40 per cent in Bengal and 27 per cent in Assam.

CTC teas dominate production, contributing 91 per cent of the total. However, production of Orthodox and green teas is rising at a faster rate.

Exports

On the export front, the country breached the 230 m kg mark after 35 years by exporting 232.92 m kg of tea worth 4,493 crore in 2015-16. When compared to 2014-15, export volume and value were both up by 17 per cent.

India exported 231.74 m kg of tea in 1980-81, riding on Russian buying. The previous highs were 242 m kg in 1976-77 and 233.09 m kg in 1956-57.

Russia (48.23 m kg) is still the largest buyer, followed by Iran (22.13 m kg), Pakistan (19.37 m kg), the UAE (16.15 m kg), Germany (10.53 m kg), Bangladesh (9.49 m kg) and Poland (6.14 m kg).

Interestingly, the higher export earnings, notwithstanding the realisation per kg of tea, remained stagnant at 193 compared to the previous fiscal year.

According to the Tea Board, auction price realisation increased 8 per cent over the previous year. This, however, is not indicative of the industry realisation as majority of teas were sold through private contracts until last year.

Last October, the Board made it mandatory for planters and bought-leaf factories to sell 50 per cent of the production through auctions.

During the first two months (April-May) of this fiscal, price realisation of South Indian teas increased to 104 a kg from 81 a kg last year.

Price realisation of North Indian teas has increased marginally from 143 a kg to 148 a kg.

Monsoon revives, but still feeble over Kerala, Karnataka

Over the next two weeks, ending June 30, rainfall is expected to be close to normal on an all-India scale with no large departure

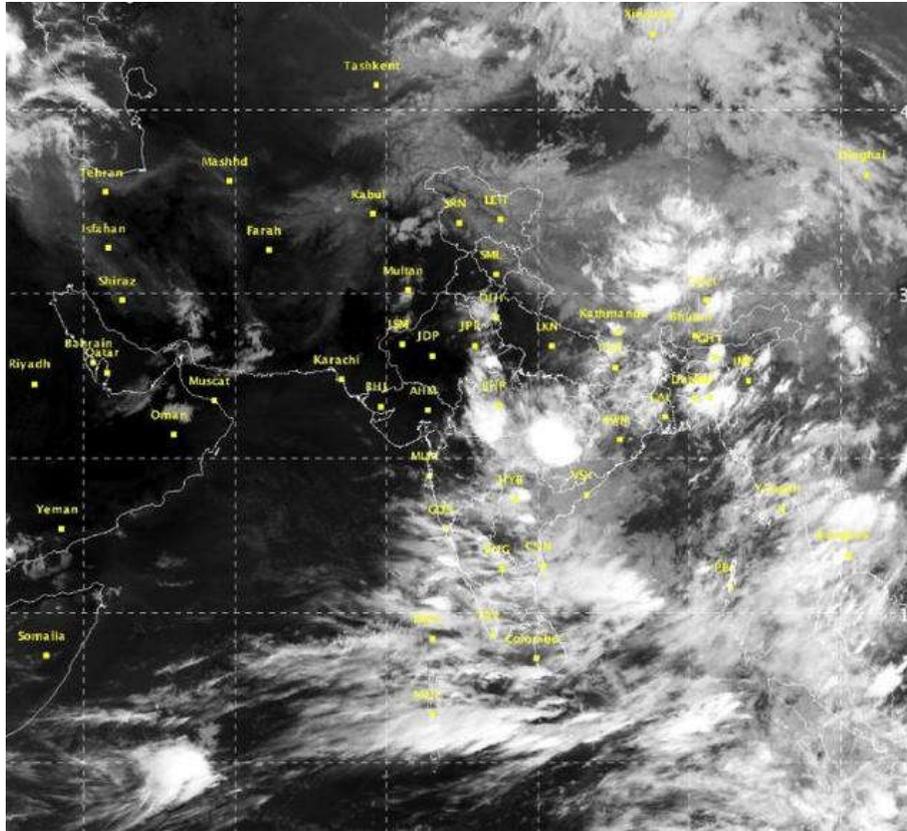
The monsoon has started showing signs of a revival with the offshore trough along the west coast, which sets the thumb rule for intensity and spread of rainfall, showing some life.

It has reappeared as a feeble feature along the Karnataka-Kerala coast, just enough to nudge the rain belt largely over eastern India.

Perfect foil

The persisting cyclonic circulation off North Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Southern Odisha acted as a perfect foil as it re-oriented incoming flows from the Arabian Sea back towards the mainland. The offshore trough and the cyclonic circulation will continue to act in tandem to push the monsoon farther into the farming heartland over central and north-west India, forecasts have suggested.

Over the next two weeks, ending June 30, rainfall is expected to be close to normal on an all-India scale with no large departure, according to an extended forecast put out by the India Met Department, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, and Central Institute for Dryland Agriculture.



However, there will be improvement of rainfall over central India and north-west India during the second week (June 24-30) compared to the first week (June 17-23).

Rainfall over the South Peninsula is expected to be normal to slightly above normal during the next two weeks.

The forecast

According to this forecast, normal or above-normal rainfall is forecast during the next fortnight over Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, western Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, Telangana, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Normal or above normal rainfall is likely to occur in either of the next two

weeks in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Meghalaya, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Saurashtra, Kutch, Konkan, Goa, Vidarbha, and coastal Karnataka.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts maintains that monsoon flows will strengthen from Monday (June 20) onwards.

Import duty on wheat will continue beyond June 30, says Food Minister



The Centre has decided to continue with the 25 per cent duty on import of wheat, to curb the inflow of cheaper cereal from countries like Australia and France.

“The 25 per cent import duty on wheat will be continued further,” Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in a tweet on Friday.

In March, the Centre had extended the 25 per cent import duty till June 30 to curb the cheaper imports mainly during the procurement season, and on expectations of a higher domestic crop size. According to the Agriculture Ministry’s third advance estimate, wheat production during 2015-16 has risen to 94.05 million tonnes from 86.53 million tonnes in the previous year.

However, the trade is sceptical about the Centre’s estimates and has pegged the output between 81-84 million tonnes, as the acreage was lower and the weather was also not favourable for higher production. In an apparent indication of a lower crop, the procurement of wheat by government agencies has also been

lower at 23 million tonnes, as compared to 28 million tones in the year-ago period.

Wheat futures on NCDEX firmed up and gained by over 2 per cent. Wheat prices have risen by about a tenth over the past two months on lower than expected production.

Millers have so far contracted about 5 lakh tonnes of wheat from countries like Australia and France.

Scientists urged to take up farmer-oriented research

Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, has urged the scientists to focus on farmer-oriented research activities to improve the agriculture sector of the country.

He was speaking at an interface meeting with the directors and scientists of the institutes in Kochi under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) here.

“Scientists should always think for the farmer who is the cornerstone of agriculture sector,” he said, adding that long-term planning is required to formulate developmental projects aimed at boosting the production in the country.

The minister lauded the efforts of CMFRI scientists for their contributions in sea cage farming, technology development of the species such as cobia, silver pompano, and orange spotted groupers. The National Brood Bank set up by CMFRI is an important step in increasing the fish production in the country, he added.

A Gopalakrishnan, Director, CMFRI, said that a Mariculture Policy should be formulated to regulate sea cage farming. CMFRI has already transferred the technology of sea cage farming into farmers. Adequate hatcheries and nurseries should also be set up in order to extend the cage farming method into more areas.

Directors and scientists from CIFT, NIPHATT, CIFNET, Fishery Survey of India, Coconut Development Board, Plant Quarantine Information System,

Spices Board, Directorate of Cashew Nut and Cocoa Development, NBFGR and CMFRI attended the meeting.

Odisha-based Milk Mantra targets 1,000-crore revenue in four years

Plans to increase the number of networked dairy farmers

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

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

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

Chasing the target, Milk Mantra recently ramped up its milk-processing capacity from 75,000 litres to 2.5 lakh litres per day, upgradable up to 3 lakh, at its two plants in Odisha. It is also planning to increase the number of networked dairy farmers from the existing 40,000 to 1.5 lakh in the next 3-4 years, Srikumar Misra, founder-Managing Director-CEO, told *BusinessLine*.

A new brand

Misra quit as Director of Mergers and Acquisitions at Tetley, London, after eight years in the job, to establish a dairy business in 2009 in his native Odisha where availability of milk was scarce.

“I was already in the food and beverages segment. While searching for ideas to start a venture, the dairy segment stood out.”

Having witnessed the evolution of the F&B industry across China, South Africa, the UK and Europe, he realised that the organised space in India and the \$50-billion dairy industry was in need of a new brand that was healthy, functional and innovative.

The company introduced its flagship product, Milky Moo, in Odisha in 2012. It became one of the fastest growing consumer brands with a CAGR of 100 per

cent, he said. Now he hopes to make it 10 times bigger, to cater to the market mainly in Eastern India.

Milk Mantra, which has so far raised venture capital funding of about 100 crore (25 crore as debt, the rest being equity), has invested about 60 crore to expand processing capacity at its plants in Bhubaneswar and Sambalpur district in Odisha.

Collection centres

“We are also increasing the number of milk collection centres from 300 to 1,000 and procurement from 1 lakh litres to nearly 4 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.”

Seventy per cent of the company’s revenue comes from toned milk and 30 per cent from other products such as probiotic and plain curd, lassi and butter milk sold under the Milk Moo brand.

Misra said the dairy products business was a \$40-50 billion market in 2009, only \$5 billion of it organised. The market was already growing in double digits and “I could see the opportunity here.”

As part of the “ethical sourcing programme” — also followed by many global companies as a “conscious capitalism business model” — Milk Mantra focuses on transparency in payment and pricing. “Currently, we pay our milk farmers 27 per litre every 10 days. We sell toned milk at 38 per litre.”

Since the farmers connect and deal with the company directly, it ensures 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 start-up 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.

‘Ban syndrome’ grips the commodity market again

Market regulator SEBI’s decision on Thursday to ban chana futures trading on the NCDEX has sparked investor fears that similar action could be taken on other agriculture commodities, if prices spike sharply.

The ban syndrome has re-emerged after a hiatus of four years, when erstwhile regulator Forward Markets Commission banned futures trading in guar seed in 2012, as prices rallied relentlessly.

Late on Thursday, SEBI said the decision to ban chana futures was taken as an “abundant caution”, considering the demand and supply gap as reflected from the price trend and supply constraints in the near-term.

Chana is the only pulse being traded on the exchange platform, while urad and tur were banned a decade ago.

Low delivery ratio

The low ratio between average daily traded volume and actual delivery of the commodity has stoked the regulator’s concern on speculation. The average daily traded chana volume on the NCDEX in June was 25,800 tonnes, while only 120 tonnes were marked for delivery.

In May, the exchange traded 28,277 tonnes daily, while delivery was only 760 tonnes. Similarly in April, the peak arrival month, about 66,940 tonnes were traded and 2,280 tonnes were delivered on the exchange platform.

While analysts argue that the futures market is not for taking delivery of commodities, SEBI is concerned that a market that delivers less than two per cent of the volume traded is sending price signals to spot markets.

Naveen Mathur, Associate Director, Angel Broking, said the ban has hit investors’ sentiments and is likely to have an impact on trading in other agriculture commodities.

Chana prices

Chana prices on the futures market have been rising steadily for the last three months, reflecting the firm trend in the spot market.

The chana futures ban is unlikely to have an impact in the spot market, on the back of strong demand and weak supply due to two consecutive years of low output.

The June Chana contract price has risen by 20 per cent in the last two months, touching 6,900 a quintal on Thursday against 5,745 a quintal in April. In May, it was trading at 6,127 a quintal.

NCDEX's spot polled price reflects the rising price trend. It had risen 22 per cent to 7,000 a quintal on June 16, against the 5,720 recorded in April.

Veeresh Hiremath, Research Analyst, Karvy Comtrade, said the ban would have an impact on trading in other liquid agriculture commodities such as turmeric, sugar, cotton, edible oil and mentha oil.

"I do not think chana prices in the spot market will come down because of the ban on futures trading. This was proved beyond doubt when tur and urad were banned decade ago," he added.

Export duty will make shipments unviable: ISMA

The imposition of 20 per cent export duty on sugar, announced by the Centre recently, will make outbound shipments unviable, the sugar industry has said.

The Centre, however, maintains the move is necessary to check speculative rise in prices.

"With the recent spurt in global prices, sugar exports were just about becoming viable but the 20 per cent export duty, which translates into around \$100 per tonne, will make exports unviable," said Abinash Verma, Director General of Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA).

The decision to impose export duty has come less than a year after the Centre ordered sugar mills to compulsorily export the sweetener to cut down on increasing stock. However, increasing global prices due to shortage of production in Brazil and lower domestic production prompted the Centre to re-consider its decision.

It seems the Centre wants to conserve sugar domestically in view of an expected fall in production in the next 2016-17 sugar season, Verma said.

Domestic sugar production is expected to decline 11 per cent to around 25.2 million tonnes in sugar year 2016, and fall further to around 23-24 million tonne in 2017, according to estimates by ICRA. According to ISMA, the move will ensure that no sugar goes out of the country and domestic prices remain stable at 33-34 per kilogram. Around 1.6 million tonne of sugar has been exported so far in the ongoing sugar year.

Business Standard

Tomato price rise temporary, rates fall in Delhi: Govt

Price of tomato is cooling down as supply from Himachal Pradesh has increased



Rise in tomato prices is a "temporary phenomenon" and rates in the national capital region have started to cool down with increase in supply from Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, a top Agriculture Ministry official said today.

Wholesale prices of tomato, which were ruling as high as Rs 60/kg in Azadpur Mandi two days back, today fell by up to Rs 20 per kg to Rs 40/kg although

retail prices are still ruling at Rs 50-80/kg depending on the quality and locality.

"This is a lean season for tomato. The price rise is a temporary phenomenon and it will faze out soon. In Delhi, there is no issue as tomatoes from hilly areas have started arriving," Agriculture Secretary Shobhana K Pattanayak told PTI.

Wholesale tomato prices have started cooling down in the national capital on improved supplies, he said, and expressed confidence that prices in other parts would also ease with the arrival of fresh crop.

Tomato Merchants Association President Ashok Kaushik said: "The supply situation in Delhi mandis has started improving with the arrival of over 350 tonnes of tomatoes from Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. The prices as a result have come down by up to Rs 20/kg in the wholesale market."

The wholesale prices of high quality tomato variety 'Sona' from Himachal Pradesh fell to Rs 40-50/kg today from Rs 40-60/kg in the last two days. Prices of tomatoes of Haryana also declined to Rs 20-30/kg today from Rs 40-50/kg in the last two days, he said.

However, the fall in wholesale rates in Delhi are yet to be reflected in the unorganised retail markets, where tomato is continued to be sold by local vegetable vendors at Rs 50-80/kg depending on the quality and locality.

Tomatoes were sold at Rs 58/kg at Mother Dairy's Safal outlets. Godrej's Nature Basket was selling at Rs 80/kg and e-portal Bigbasket was offering it at Rs 55/kg.

The tight supply-demand situation owing to some rabi crop damage has flared up tomato prices in both wholesale and retail market in last more than 15 days across the country. Retail prices in other cities like Bengaluru are ruling as high as Rs 80-100/kg.

A senior Consumer Affairs Ministry official had yesterday said that tomato prices would continue to be under pressure till arrival of fresh crop from September onwards.

According to the government's initial calculations, tomato output is estimated to be higher by 4-5% in 2015-16 over the last year. "It looks like the production figures may have to be revised downward when final estimates are released in September," the official had said.

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

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha are the major tomato growing states.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agriculture minister Atul Bora visits Assam agricultural university

Agriculture minister Atul Bora, who visited Assam Agricultural University (AAU) for the first time on Friday, said his department would help the varsity make Assam self-sufficient in seed production.

AAU vice-chancellor Kamal Malla Bujarbaruah said the university could make the state self-sufficient in seed production within three years if the state government provided adequate help. "The government has to ensure convergence of different departments like agriculture, soil conservation, irrigation and PWD for the development of agriculture here," he said. "Moreover, the government must form an agriculture cabinet and a farmers' commission for development of farmers," he added.

Responding to the VC's request, Bora said, "I have accepted AAU's proposal and will try to achieve the goal."

Bora inaugurated a new building of the department of plant pathology and laid the foundation of a boys' hostel on the varsity campus.

Nuffield farming scholars visit punjab agricultural university

As a part of the Global Focus Programme, ten scholars from Nuffield Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, United Kingdom and Canada visited Punjab Agriculture University to have a closer glimpse of Punjab agriculture. The highlights of the visit were the crop museum, soil testing laboratories, department of microbiology and the museum of rural life and social history of Punjab.

While interacting with the scientists of the university, John Keely, Nuffield, Australia scholar and group leader, showed keen interest in the major crops and cropping patterns of Punjab. K.S. Thind, Head, Department of Plant Breeding gave a brief overview of the department mandate and the different varieties generated by PAU. The visit to the soil testing labs was facilitated by Head, Department of soil science, B.S, Brar.

The scholars were shown a presentation on the various research initiatives of the department of microbiology. Parampal Sahota, Head, demonstrated food and water testing for bacterial presence. Method of preparing grape and sugarcane vinegar by fermentation was also explained, which was highly appreciated by the visitors.

Cut in horticulture subsidy hits farmers

The curtailing of Bihar's share of subsidy in various horticulture sectors under the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) has discouraged progressive farmers from shifting to horticulture from conventional agriculture.

Earlier, to encourage farmers to grow abundant quality vegetables in poly houses or green houses to meet the ever-growing demand for vegetables as well as get a better yield and profit, the subsidy was raised to 90% from 50% with the Bihar government contributing the giant's share. Now, in the current subsidy pool of 50%, the central government and the state government contribute on 60-40% ratio. Also, the state has now rechristened the scheme as Chief Minister Horticulture Mission (CMHM), identifying 17 districts while 23 districts fall under the NHM.

The successive three-year drought in Nawada has forced farmers to do a rethink on their conventional method of agriculture. Besides, the state government withdrawing its bonus amount of Rs 300 on every quintal of paddy this year and bringing down the rate of paddy from last year's Rs 1,760 to Rs 1,410 has devastated the farmers. The shrinking area of agricultural land due to increase in family numbers and the unabated migration of labourers to other states has also prompted farmers to take to horticulture. However, reduction in subsidy restrains them from taking the plunge.

Bibhu Vidyarthi, deputy director (administration and evaluation), horticulture, Bihar, said since the NHM was a central government project, why should the state government pay more? He added that many farmers who had availed 90% subsidy by going in for poly/greenhouse method of production had grossly misused the subsidy. "Instead of growing vegetables, the structure was used for

sheltering either buffaloes or cows! Since it was a central government mission, the Centre should share the additional financial burden," Vidyarthi said.

With the weather increasingly becoming unpredictable and risky to conventional crops like paddy or wheat, horticulture seems to be the panacea or the only way out. As against more land but less income, horticulture on the contrary gives more income from less land. Uma Singh, an advocate and farmer from Hisua, expressed disappointment with the slashing of horticulture subsidy. "It's an anti-farmer step," he said.

Both Sunil Kumar, the Nawada district agriculture officer and Ravi Kant Kumar, the horticulture sub-divisional officer (the latter holding the same charge in 3 more districts) said the reduction in subsidy in horticulture was a Centre-state issue and refused to comment further. Further, the state government is yet to release the subsidy allotment figure for 2016-17, they said.

Agri department encourages farmers to go for red gram cultivation in district

With prices of pulses going through the roof, the agriculture department has offered to provide a high-yielding variety of red gram CO (Rg) 7 seeds to farmers to achieve the target cultivation of 3,000 hectares in the district.

The manifold increase of price of tur dal has prompted the agriculture department to encourage the farmers to engage in red gram cultivation in their fields.

Of the total target of 3,000 hectares, the department has planned to set up demonstration plots on 700 hectares under the National Food Security Mission scheme.

Musiri block will be given priority by setting up demonstration plots on 300 hectares. Thottiyam, Thathaiyangarpettai, Mannachanallur and Pullambadi blocks will get demonstration plots on 100 hectares each. Such plots will get special attention from officials.

"The subsidy of Rs 5,000 for every hectare and seeds as well as necessary inputs will be provided for setting up demonstration plots. Farmer can contact the agriculture officers in their blocks," said district collector Dr KS Palanisamy in a statement.

Along with subsidy, the farmers will get 5kg of certified seed, 500ml of liquid bio-fertilizer rhizobium, phosphobacteria, bio-control agents, 2.5kg of trichoderma viride and 5kg of micronutrients mixture from agriculture extension centre. The farmers can also get the reimbursement for weedicide and DAP which they used.

The area of red gram cultivation has seen a gradual increase for the past three years, said personal assistant to collector (agriculture) S Shanthi.

"The scheme has increased the area of cultivation as it offers all technical help to farmers," said Shanthi who assured that CO (Rg) 7 variety red gram has high resistance to the crop disease and requires normal quantity of water. The yield will also be good compared to other varieties, she said.

Those who are unable to take up Kuruvai cultivation may opt for the option. It will also be preferred by farmers in non-delta areas. Usually, the red gram cultivation will commence in September for next 120 days to 130 days.

Though tur dhal is priced high, the farmers can get only half of its amount. The farmers are at the mercy of commission agents to market their produce.

Villagers storm farmers' grievance redress meet with paddy bags

High drama played out at the farmers' grievance redress day meeting conducted by Madurai collector K Veera Raghava Rao on Friday as a group of villagers barged into the meeting hall with bags of paddy and scattered the grain on his table. They complained that paddy procurement centres run by the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation in their villages were not procuring their paddy and alleged malpractices.

After the meeting started, the collector invited Alagu Servai from Panaiyur village to share his experiences about his trip abroad. Alagu Servai was among 100 farmers from the state who were sent to different countries to study agricultural practices. Within a few seconds of his address, a group of women and men from various villages in Chellampatti block stormed the hall. Wailing, the women showed their paddy to the collector asking him what was wrong with it. They had collected paddy seeds from the agriculture department and raised the crop amidst all hardships, but officials at the procurement centre rejected their paddy saying that it was of inferior quality, they claimed.

The collector pacified them and said immediate action would be taken, but at the same time reprimanded them for barging into the meeting hall and causing a commotion. assistant director of agriculture, Chellampatti block, and general manager of the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation were instructed to visit all the procurement centres in the block and carry out inspections. On the sidelines of the meeting, farmers told mediapersons that the TNCSC had opened procurement centres in eight places - Uchapatti, Sokkathevenpatti, Chakkaraiatti, Ayyanarkulam, Vinnakudi, Nattapatti, Kodikulam and Chinnkuravakudi - in Chellampatti block. "We have procured paddy seeds from the government seed farm. How could the yield be of poor quality? Instead, they are procuring paddy from traders," charged Pappammal of Chokkathavanpatti village. The farmers said they had spent a lot of money on cultivation. "The loan sharks are after us for the money. We have no other go but to end our lives," cried V Poonkodi from Uchapatti.

The farmers said more than 10 tonnes of harvested paddy was lying waste in procurement centres. More than 500 acres of paddy farms will be affected due to this attitude of procurement centre officials, they charged. Sources from the farming community said there was large scale corruption in paddy procurement centres, as Rs 35 per sack is collected from farmers. Since there is some issue with collection, farmers are made to run from pillar to post in the name of poor quality, they said.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Government studies option of growing pulses in African nations

A delegation may visit Mozambique to examine the possibility of growing pulses through contract farming, a senior government official said today.

NEW DELHI: Government is exploring the feasibility of contract farming of pulses in African countries -- Mozambique, Tanzania and Malawi -- as it looks for a long-term solution to domestic shortage and high prices.

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The official, however, acknowledged absence of sufficient infrastructure in these countries to raise output and facilitate imports, in which case India may have to offer help.

"No decision has been taken so far. It is only at a discussion stage. These countries have no company or trading organisation for exports or to do contract farming," the official said.

A delegation might visit Mozambique soon to explore these possibilities as well, he said.

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The country imported about 5.5 million tonnes last fiscal, largely through private trade, but it was not enough to cool the skyrocketing prices, which have gone up to Rs 200 per kg in the retail market.

Palm oil planters likely to increase acreage this year



India is aiming to attain self-sufficiency in vegetable oils over the next decade. The commodity is third on India's import bill after oil and gold.

Palm oil planters in the country are hoping to increase acreage this year after the weather office forecast above normal monsoon rains. The total area under Palm cultivation was 1.64 lakh hectares which fell by 50% last year. However, on expectation of good monsoon, the acreage is likely to go up by 40,000 hectares totalling to 2 lakh hectares .

The area under palm oil cultivation had nearly halved in 2015, the second straight year of drought in the country, to about 80,000 hectares. Industry executives told ET that with sufficient rainfall, palm oil planters would not only recover the area lost last year but also add nearly 40,000 hectares in acreage, taking the total to nearly 200,000 hectares.

India is aiming to attain self-sufficiency in vegetable oils over the next decade. The commodity is third on India's import bill after oil and gold.

"The industry plans to add 40,000 hectares under palm oil plantation this year on account of a good monsoon," said Sanjay Goenka, managing director of 3F Oil Palm Agrotech. "With this, we also expect a correction in the profitability of the industry which fell by 25-30% and had impacted the industry's short-term plans." Some edible oil producers like 3F are also looking at firming up investment plans to augment solvent extraction facilities over the next few years.

Goenka, who is also president of Oil Palm Developers and Processors Association (OPDPA), said his company has chalked out a plan to invest nearly Rs 5,000 crore over the next five years or so to reap the benefits of a favourable economic environment, firming up of palm oil prices in the international market, and expectations of a favourable monsoon.

Ruchi Soya, one of the leading players in the edible oil market in the country, expects to double its area under palm oil plantation in the next four years. Its chief operating officer, Satendra Aggarwal, said, "We expect to touch one lakh hectares under palm oil plantation in 3-4 years from the current 55,000 hectares. Sensing good opportunity, we have also put a new crushing plant as an extension of an existing one at Peddapuram, in Andhra Pradesh, with a crushing capacity of 45 tonnes per hour, taking our total capacity here to 90 tonnes an hour."

Ruchi Soya is also looking at additional investments in crushing units over the next five years and is analysing the market scenario, said Aggarwal. The palm oil industry is also upbeat with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to push for self-sufficiency in edible oils. The government plans to spend nearly \$1.5 billion (Rs 10,000 crore) over the next three years to help farmers grow palm oil trees. It is also working on a plan to come up with a minimum support price for farmers along with an oil import policy.

Vinod TP, research analyst at Geofin Comrade, said the government's move will help save foreign exchange, though it may take seven-eight years to materialise, and discourage hedging in the commodities market as prices will stabilise. India is one of the major importers of edible oil after China. It imports 9 million tonnes of palm oil, or three-fourths of its requirement, and spends nearly \$10 billion on it.

The market for edible oil in the country is currently growing at 7-8% annually. However, with China cutting its import due to economic slowdown, palm oil producers like Malaysia and Indonesia are allegedly dumping it in India, resulting in lower profits for domestic firms and forcing some shut downs.

Hybrid seed makers to ramp up R&D spend on new hybrids



Though more players would enter the market, it is not going to have a major impact till the time more crops were brought under the GM ambit said with rating agency ICRA's Pragya Bansal.

HYDERABAD: Indian hybrid seed makers are preparing to increase investments on research to bring in their own hybrids with regulatory protection under domestic laws in the aftermath of a government withdrawal of a notification that capped royalties on genetically modified technologies of global seed giant MonsantoBSE -0.96 %.

Indian seed industry representatives said they were looking to double investments in research and development over the next few years in the backdrop of tussle with Monsanto and the government's support to domestic firms.

They also pin hopes on increasing investments by the government into the state-owned agricultural research institutes like Indian Council of Agricultural Research to come up with better hybrid varieties.

"The investment in research and development (R&D) is likely to double to over 4% of profits over the next 5-10 years from the current level of 2% of profits, given the long breeding cycles of seeds that typically take 5-6 years," said M.

Prabhakar Rao, CMD of India's largest hybrid seed producer Nuziveedu Seeds and head of National Seed Association of India.

Rao said significant investments would go into breeding of cotton with special focus on bio-technology and new trait development over the next few years if the government implements its notification capping the royalty fee to global seed giants.

Apart from capping the royalty fee to technology provider at 10%, the notification, titled Licensing and Formats for GM Technology Agreement Guidelines, allowed eligible seed companies to access Monsanto's technology to incorporate it into their own hybrids or varieties, which was hitherto restricted by Monsanto.

Some industry veterans said the domestic seed manufacturers could not invest on hybrid technologies since the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVRA) Act, 2001 was not enforced so far.

The new notification also provided clarity over the ownership of intellectual property, which remained a contentious issue between the Patent Act and the Indian laws.

"The Indian government's notification would allow more companies to access Monsanto's technology and will spur development of new hybrids by the domestic seed manufacturers and will also increase competition in the market with good quality seeds," said MG Shembeker, Managing Director of Nagpur-based Ankur Seeds and vice president of National Seed Association of India.

Though more players would enter the market, it is not going to have a major impact till the time more crops were brought under the GM ambit said with rating agency ICRA's Pragya Bansal.

Currently, 49 companies access Monsanto's technology but the market is dominated by 8-10 companies like Nuziveedu Seeds and Kaveri Seeds, who together control three-fourths of the market.

Multinational seed giants like Monsanto and Du Pont, who had aided Indian hybrid seed producers for years with their technology, argued that the proposal to cap the royalty would adversely affect the technology providers.

Monsanto threatened to leave the country when the government had initiated steps to fix selling prices and royalty fee of Bt cotton seeds in March this year.

The Indian Seed Industry is the sixth largest in the world in value terms accounting for about 4.5% of global industry preceded by US (27%), China (22%), France (6%), Brazil (6%) and Canada (4.8%).

The domestic seeds industry, currently valued at \$3.2 billion, has grown at a CAGR of 8.4% in volumes terms over FY09 to FY15 (P) to reach 3.5 million tonnes of consumption, according to an ICRA report.

Indian sugar sector hopes better margins to clear a fifth of debt



Spot price refers to the price at which sugar millers sell the produce in the wholesale market.

HYDERABAD: Indian sugar industry expects better profitability this year and clear at least a fifth of its debt of around Rs 10,000 crore in the backdrop of improving domestic sugar realisations for nearly a year and stable cane prices.

Top industry body representatives claim, which was also corroborated by the sectoral analysts, to achieve higher recovery rates that will help them improve margins and clear substantial portion of cane dues.

Of the Rs 51,000 crore odd debt accumulated over the last five years, the industry hopes to clear Rs 10,000-15,000 crore over the next 12 months, said Tarun Sawhney, president of the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA).

"We expect the average price realisations to be better this year that will help in clearing the dues to farmers, bank debt and other repayments towards plant modernisations," Sawhney, who is also the vice chairman and managing director of Triveni Engineering and IndustriesBSE -3.74 %, told ET.

The debt, which rose by Rs 40,000 crore in five years by 2016, in fact stood at Rs 11,000 crore in 2011.

Spot price refers to the price at which sugar millers sell the produce in the wholesale market.

While spot price till July last year was hovering around Rs 22 per kg, much below the cost of production leading to losses for the millers, they reached around Rs 33-34 per kg this year, helping industry gain profits.

The sugar industry's production and sales volumes (including exports) during sugar year 2015-16 (Oct 2015-Sep 2016) are likely to be around 25 million tons and 27 million tons respectively, says rating agency ICRA India's senior vice president Sabyasachi Majumdar.

"Given the prevailing sugar prices, the industry would generate revenues of close to Rs 80,000 crores from sale of sugar alone. And that apart, the industry would also generate substantial revenues from by-product sales," said Majumdar.

"In our opinion the revenues would, apart from meeting current expenses, also generate surpluses to clear off substantial chunk of past cane arrears as well as a proportion of short-term working capital loans availed from banks."

Further, the ICRA analyst said the volume sales would be higher than production, which help not just meeting domestic demand of 25-26 million tons and also help the industry export around 1.6 million tons of sugar.

The Rs 90,000 crore industry is fragmented and largely characterised by presence of larger players with capacity of over 5,000 tons of cane crushed per day. While larger players owe around 70% of loans towards the banks, the smaller players have higher outstanding towards the farmers.

T. Sarita Reddy, ISMA's vice-president and also the executive director of Gayatri SugarsBSE 0.00 %, said, "The industry expects to clear dues towards farmers and banks on better realisations. However, it shouldn't be construed that the industry is reaping undue benefits as prices go up."

Several years of sluggishness amidst low price realisations had led to mounting of debts and subsequent closure of sugar mills, she said.

During the last 5-6 years, only 500 out of 642 sugar mills were functioning. "However, despite expectations of a profitable year, the industry would not go for any expansions," said Sarita.

Coconut Development Board approves 18 projects



Desiccated coconut powder, virgin coconut oil and shell charcoal are the main products for which projects have been approved.

KOCHI: KOCHI: Coconut Development Board (CDB) in its 48th meeting of the project approval committee (PAC) on technology mission on coconut (TMOC) approved 18 projects with an outlay of Rs. 12.76 crore and financial assistance of Rs. 2.75 crore with annual processing capacity of 493 lakh coconuts and 3300 tonnes of shell charcoal.

The projects are spread over southern states and Maharashtra. Desiccated coconut powder, virgin coconut oil and shell charcoal are the main products for which projects have been approved.

Under the sub component processing and product diversification, five projects for desiccated coconut powder for processing 300 lakh nuts per year, three virgin coconut oil units for processing 105 lakh nuts per year, one coconut based food unit with a capacity to process 2 lakh nuts per year, two copra dryer units with processing capacity of 60 lakh coconuts per year, four ball copra

making units with processing capacity of 26 lakh coconuts per year and two shell charcoal units with a capacity for produce 3300 tonnes per year were sanctioned.

CDB institute of technology at Aluva, Kerala has developed four flavours of flavored coconut milk, a ready-to-drink juice in lab scale. For pilot testing of the product, PAC has sanctioned Rs. 52.20 lakh.

The meeting was chaired by Dr A K Singh, chairman of CDB.

Tea export tops 230 million kg for first time in 35 years



The increase was mainly on account of higher quantities bought by Russia, Iran, Germany, Pakistan, Bangladesh, UAE and Poland.

KOLKATA: India exported 232.92 million kg of tea, valued at Rs 4,493.10 crore, in 2015-16, breaching the 230-million kg mark after 35 years.

In 1980-81, the country had exported 231.74 million kg of the commodity. Prior to that, in 1976-77 and 1956-57, tea exports had touched 242.42 million kg and 233.09 million kg, respectively.

It quantity terms, the shipment was 17% higher than a year ago, while in value terms, it was an increase of Rs 669.46 crore, or 17.51%, according to data from the Tea Board.

The increase was mainly on account of higher quantities bought by Russia, Iran, Germany, Pakistan, Bangladesh, UAE and Poland.

The average price realisation and quantity sold at tea auctions in India also registered an increase of 8.05% and 17.82%, respectively, as compared with the previous fiscal.

The quantity of tea sold in north India auction centres increased by 39.31% over 2014-15, with an increase of 3.27% in average price realised. In south India auctions, the quantity increased by 26.22% from a year ago, with an increase of 29.01% in average price realised.

Last year, the Tea Board had introduced a provision that allowed selling of at least 50% of tea produced by registered manufacturers through the auction route.

In 2015-16, the country produced 1,233.14 million kg of tea—the highest so far. As compared with 2014-15, it was up by 35.96 million kg, or 3%.

Officials said the increase in production was mainly due to higher yield in the northern region, where it went up by 52.74 million kg (5.52%). However, south India's production declined by 16.78 million kg (-6.95%) due to adverse climatic conditions and labour issues in Kerala. The all-India production of tea estates increased by 1.62%, while the production of the Bought Leaf Factory (BLF) sector increased by 5.81%, which indicates increase of small tea growers' share in production.

Thus, about 33.85% of the total tea production is being contributed by small growers. Among the major tea growing states, the share of small growers to the production is highest in Tamil Nadu (53.16%) followed by West Bengal (40.4%) and Assam (27.55%).

CTC tea production constitutes 90.93% of the total tea production at 1121.35 million kgs, increasing by 23.19 million kgs, compared to last year. Orthodox production constitutes 7.51% at 92.60 million kgs, increasing by 8.47 million kgs as compared to last year, while green tea production constitutes 1.56% and stood at 19.19 million kgs, increasing by 4.30 million kgs.

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.