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THE HINDU

Farm produce to get safe-to-eat tag

Programme to ensure supply of products for consumers

TOWARDS FOOD SAFETY

➔ Certification based on pesticide residue analysis

➔ Test results to be made available online

➔ Logistics, funds and manpower pose challenges



The State government has taken the first step towards food safety certification of domestic farm produce under an ambitious programme to ensure the supply of safe-to-eat products for consumers and minimise the health hazards posed by constant exposure to pesticide residue in vegetables and fruits.

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sivakumar on Thursday distributed safe-to-eat certificates to four farmers who supplied vegetables to the outlet. As many as 13 samples collected from the eco-shop were analysed at the Pesticide Residue Research and Analysis Laboratory at the College of Agriculture, Vellayani. “All the samples tested negative for the three major groups of pesticides, namely organochlorine, organophosphate and synthetic pyrethroid,” says Dr. Thomas Biju Mathew, principal investigator of the KAU’s Safe- to- Eat project. “It

represents the first step towards the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to detect pesticide contamination at source.” The Kerala Agricultural University has plans to make the results available online, in a bid to extend the certification process to eco-shops across the State.

Daunting task

However, officials point out that a wider roll-out of the certification was beset with challenges. “For one, the logistics of collecting samples and transferring them to the laboratory is a daunting task. Getting the testing done before the product is put up for sale is no less important,” says an official. “Setting up a network of laboratories in the State is even more of a challenge.”

The KAU laboratory at Vellayani is the only one in the State equipped with a state-of-the-art Liquid Chromatograph Mass Spectrometer (LCMS) that could detect even minute traces of pesticide residue. “It takes a dedicated team of qualified and experienced personnel to run and maintain the equipment costing about Rs.2 crore. Establishing a network of such laboratories is easier said than done, considering the requirement of funds and manpower,” says a scientist.

Horticulture being promoted as good alternative in Tiruvarur

1,000 ha to be brought under horticulture and vegetable crops



Collector M. Mathivanan along with other officials inspecting a vegetable farm in Tiruvarur district on Wednesday.— PHOTO: DIPR

There is a lot of potential for raising horticulture crops profitably in Tiruvarur district. Vegetable crops cultivation has picked up and micro irrigation techniques have come in handy for those farmers, District Collector M. Mathivanan said here on Wednesday.

The Collector along with the Joint Director of Agriculture Mayilvahanan and Deputy Director of Horticulture Suresh Kumar inspected integrated vegetable farms in Melanagai and Keezhanagai villages in Tiruvarur district on Wednesday and sought to know from the growers the market potential for vegetables.

The Collector said there were plans to raise horticulture crops on over 1,000 hectares in Tiruvarur district this year. Emphasis would be on improving the micro irrigation potential in the district. Banana, mango, guava, and jack fruit were raised on more than 400 hectares while on another 400 hectares, vegetables were being raised.

On 20 hectares of land, jasmine was being raised while green chillies and capsicum too were grown. Besides, bamboo and casuarinas were grown in Tiruvarur district, Mr. Mathivanan said, pitching for propagation of the benefits of micro irrigation techniques among the horticulture farmers. Agriculture with micro irrigation techniques was the best way to conserve water, he said.

There was immense potential for horticulture crops in Tiruvarur, Mannargudi, Nidamangalam, Valangaiman, and Kudavasal areas of the district. Union and State governments had many schemes going in the district to encourage horticulture, he said.

The Collector said that marketing facilities for the vegetables being grown in the district were aplenty. The Department of Horticulture would extend all facilities to those who take up vegetable cultivation, he added.

Agri staff get a warm reception

With travel bags slung around their shoulders, travel-weary employees of the Commissionerate of Agriculture reached the office premises on Thursday night and were welcomed with flowers, a cup of hot tea and snacks. About 80 personnel of various ranks and administrative staff arrived at the makeshift

Agriculture Commissionerate offices at Chuttugunta from Hyderabad in two buses. Commissioner Dhanunjaya Reddy was at hand to receive them.

A team of officers led by Joint Director, Agriculture, V.D. Krupa Das welcomed the staff, who reached the town at about 7 pm.

The offices of Commissioner, Agriculture would be formally opened by Minister P. Pulla Rao on Saturday.

For most of the employees, it was a mixed feeling to leave Hyderabad, a cosmopolitan city where they had built their careers and houses.

“I felt nostalgic after bidding goodbye to my colleagues in Hyderabad where I have lived for 33 years. But I also feel happy that I am coming to my native place, Tenali, where most of my relatives live. We hope that our capital will be better than Hyderabad. While we are happy with most of the provisions like 30 per cent HRA and five-day week, we are a bit upset about lack of clarity on division of corpus of the cooperative society. Most of us have taken loans up to Rs.3 lakh from the society and the entire corpus of Rs.3 crore is now with Telangana,” said Ravi Kumar, Deputy Director, Crop Insurance.

In all, 80 personnel of various ranks and administrative staff arrive at offices at Chuttugunta

Finger millet may be promoted as alternative crop

The duration of the crop is 125 days and it can be raised in rain-fed region

The Agriculture Department has taken up an experiment for introducing “ragi” (finger millet) as a viable and assured alternative to paddy farmers, particularly “kuruvai” cultivators, so that they can switch over to a more profitable crop with assured return.

The department has raised Co 15 variety on the State Seed Farm in Tirukadaiyur as the crop can be raised with limited irrigation facility in two spells (pattam) either between June and July or between October and November.

The duration of the crop is 125 days and it can be raised as a rain-fed crop. This is the first time that the Agriculture Department has raised the crop at its Government Seed Farm at Tirukadaiyur, said S. Palanisamy, District Collector.



VIABLE ALTERNATIVE:S. Palanisamy, Nagapattinam Collector, interacting with officials about the advantages of cultivating finger millet at the Seed Farm at Tirukadaiyur.— PHOTO: M. SRINATH

Minimum practice

Addressing the media after visiting the farm on Tuesday, he said the crop needed minimum cultivation practice.

Even summer showers would be quite sufficient for cultivation.

Based on its success at the Seed Farm, the department would recommend it to the farmers from the next season.

The experiment, he said, had twin advantages. It aimed at implementing the State government's programme to popularise minor millets among farmers.

J. Sekar, Joint Director of Agriculture, said the yield was expected to be around 3.4 tonnes per hectare.

There have been complaints from farmers in rain-fed areas or the tail-end belts of the Cauvery that they do not have adequate water for raising 'kuruvai' and hence the department evolved this strategy for their rescue, he added.

Farmers would be trained on raising the crop with adequate spacing and the type of fertilisers to be utilised during the cultivation period.

Survey of crop damage initiated in Kanniyakumari

The district administration has initiated a survey of damages to banana, rubber and other crops due to strong wind.

After receiving a compiled survey report from the officials, it would be sent to the government for getting compensation for the affected farmers, Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan, said here on Thursday.

Addressing the monthly grievance day meeting at the collectorate, Mr. Chavan said that the work on damaged shutters of the Suchindram Pond would be taken up on priority by the Water Resources Organisation of the PWD as per the availability of funds. The low lying overhead power line in Palkulam area in Thengampudur village was set right by commissioning two more electrical posts in between the existing posts.

It was also informed at the meeting that the encroachment in Survey No. 660 in Kumarapuram village, Thovalai taluk would be evicted soon.

Research on finding new hybrids in traditional paddy varieties would be given priority by the district administration.

Farmers who intend to cultivate pepper as an intercrop in coconut groves can approach the Assistant Directors concerned of Horticulture department to get subsidy. They have to submit photocopies of their ration card, two passport size photographs, land tax receipt and patta, officials said.

It was also informed at the meeting that 4,811 tonnes of fertilizer had been kept ready for distribution to farmers with the TANFED, Cooperative societies, producers and private dealers.

District Revenue Officer S. Elango, Joint Director of Agriculture Chandrasenan Nair, Personal Assistant to Collector Nizamuddin, Executive Engineer (WRO) S.K. Subramanian and respective Tahsildhars participated.

Seminar

The Department of Horticulture will conduct a seminar on banana cultivation, and cold storage utility on June 25 and 26 at the Agricultural Marketing Complex in Alukuzhi near Gobi where the new cold storage has been established.

District Collector S. Prabakar will inaugurate the seminar. Environment Minister K.C. Karuppannan; V. Sathyabama, MP; K.A. Sengottaiyan, MLA; will be present.

Centre developing portable soil testing device: Union Minister

‘Without State government’s help, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana will not be a success’



Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh during a visit to agricultural college in Vijayapura on Thursday.— Photo: Rajendra Singh Hajeri

Asserting that farmers too had the right to innovations and technology, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said that with the help of scientists, his Ministry was developing a portable soil testing device which would come handy for the farmers.

Speaking at a kharif awareness programme, organised by the Vijayapura Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Agriculture Culture College here on Thursday, the Minister hoped that such a machine would be devised within a year.

Claiming that the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the Union Government's crop insurance scheme was a game changer in crop insurance sector, he said that new policy would provide higher compensation with lower rate of premium.

"The Union Government has come up with this scheme that will bring radical change in the lives of farmers, however without the cooperation of the State government, the success will be a farce," he said.

Mentioning that the manufacture of neem-coated urea was another significant move in curbing illegality in the black-marketing of urea, the Minister said that after it was introduced, the illegal supply of urea to chemical companies has stopped completely.

"Besides this, compared to normal urea, the farmers need 20 per less urea if its coated with Neem, which only save the money of farmers", he said.

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has accused the Congress government of giving less compensation to the land losers of the Almatti basin.

Addressing presspersons here on Thursday, he said that during his meeting with the farmers at Almatti, the farmers sought higher compensation for losing land after the increase in the dam's height.

"The farmers said that the amount of compensation is offered to them is meagre, and I also felt that the Congress government here should have given higher compensation to the land losers," he said.

Mr. Singh claimed that the Modi government has increased the amount under Calamity Relief Fund to Rs. 1,527 crore for next five years for Karnataka. In the past, the State government has received only Rs. 667 crore in five years, he said.

He said that the funds have been augmented after making amendment by the Union Government in the policy.

Admitting that the Congress government in Karnataka has doing well in collecting the soil sample for testing for preparing soil health card, however the Minister alleged that the same speed was not maintained in issuing soil health cards.

“I am happy that the government has done better in collecting sample, but when it comes to issuing of cards, it is very slow. I hope that the government will pick up pace in coming days and issue soil health cards to farmers without further delay,” he said.

On the long pending demand of the grape and pomegranate framers of the State who are seeking loan waiver from for incurring loss to natural calamity in last three successive years, Mr. Singh categorically asserted that the Union Government had no such scheme to waive off loan.

“All we can do is to offer loan with three per cent interest rate to help them tide over the situation but can’t waive off the loan,” he said.

16 per cent of targeted area sown

Following good rain across the district, farmers, who began sowing early this month, have completed 16 per cent of the targeted 2,69,192 hectares for the kharif season.

According to available records, the district has received 187.3 mm of rain against an average of 562 mm from January to June 17 this year.

Sources in the Agriculture Department have said that farmers had already completed 40,905 hectares in the district.

In Shahapur taluk, 13,636 hectares of the target of 1,02,722 have been covered; in Surpur, 11,425 hectares out of the 88,220 target have been covered and 15,844 hectares out of the target 78,250 had been covered in Yadgir taluk respectively.

The district farmers are sowing green gram, which was considered as short term cash crop. Farmers have completed sowing green gram in 24,100 hectares out of

the targeted 45,600 hectares. Similarly, red gram has been sown on 15,766 hectares out of the targeted 85,000 hectares.

Yadgir district has received 187.3 mm

of rainfall from January to

June 17 this year

Saving native cow breeds

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has said that while 14 States opened 'Gokul Gram' to save native cattle breeds and manufacture byproducts of cow urine and dung, Karnataka has not submitted any such proposal.

"The Union government is committed to protect the native breed of cow, for which extensive programme has been launched across the country," he said.

200 agri eco-shops to be set up

The government has plans to open 200 eco-shops in the State to sell organic farm produce and provide technical assistance for farmers, Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar announced here on Thursday.

Opening the first eco- shop set up at the Krishi Bhavan at Kudappanakunnu here, he said an extensive market network linking outlets of the Agriculture Department and Kerala Agricultural University would be set up. The eco-shops would procure vegetables from famer clusters in the locality.

The Minister said the wholesale agricultural market at Anayara here had been served notice to stop the procurement of vegetables from other States within one month. Mr. Sunil Kumar stressed the need for farmers in the State to adopt good agricultural practices.

K. Muraleedharan, MLA, presided. Director of Agriculture Ashok Kumar Thekkan and Mayor V.K. Prasanth were among those present.

ICAR meeting on June 24, 25

The ICAR-National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (ICAR-NAARM) will be hosting the XXIII Meeting of the ICAR Regional Committee-II (RCMII) from June 24 to 25 at its campus in Hyderabad. The RCMII is held once in two years.

The meeting will discuss and review the current status of agricultural research, agricultural education and extension in West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The Committee provides a forum for liaison and coordination among the institutes of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, State Agricultural Universities and State Departments of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries.

The participants include Secretary, Department of Agricultural Research and Education and Director-General, ICAR, Members of the ICAR Governing Body/Society.

Paddy transplantation gains momentum

Special package spurs farmers to take up kuruvai cultivation on 8,500 acres of land



A farmer sowing kuruvai paddy to raise mat nursery at Anbil near Tiruchi on Thursday.— PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Cultivation of paddy during the kuruvai season, spearheaded by the State government's special package scheme, aimed at supporting farmers to take up paddy cultivation by using pump sets due to poor storage in the Mettur reservoir, has gained momentum in Tiruchi district.

As per the package, the Agriculture Department plans to bring 8,500 acres of land under paddy cultivation in Tiruchi district. Paddy will be raised on 1,500 acres through mechanised transplantation by raising mat and tray nurseries. Farmers will get a subsidy of Rs. 4,000 an acre. The amount will be credited to bank accounts of beneficiaries. Similarly, 5 kg of paddy micronutrient mixture estimated at Rs. 170 would be given to cover 1,500 acres of fields with alkaline and saline soil. Farmers will be given 10 kg of zinc sulphate estimated at Rs. 400 an acre free to cover 4,000 acres of land.

The department, which is the nodal agency to implement the package, has formed three teams headed by Agricultural Officers to monitor implementation. It has so far brought 661 acres of land under Kuruvai cultivation through mechanised transplantation.

R. Chandrasekaran, Joint Director of Agriculture, who inspected the progress of paddy transplantation at Sengarayur near Anbil said farmers, who had pump set and filter point irrigation sources, had shown enormous interest in bringing as many acres as possible under paddy cultivation.

Lalgudi block would derive the maximum benefit of kuruvai package as it had good groundwater sources. The paddy transplantation would be completed within 15 days.

Stating that mat nursery had become a driving force to take up paddy cultivation, he said many farmers had come forward to raise mat and tray nursery because of less overhead charges and also the minimum quantity of seeds required.

A.R. Periakaruppan, Deputy Director, Agriculture, said mat and tray nurseries could be raised in 15 days as against 30 days under conventional method. Moreover, the seedlings were found to be suitable for machine transplantation to increase productivity.

Mr. Chandrasekaran said to reduce the conveyance loss of irrigation water, black HDPE pipes of 90 mm diameter and 6 meters length would be provided to 50 farmers at full subsidy under the Kuruvai special package scheme.

‘Include sugarcane, mulberry in crop insurance scheme’

The Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers’ Association has urged the Centre to include sugarcane and mulberry in the list of crops covered under the new crop insurance scheme.

The association has decided to hold a State-level convention of farmers in Mysuru on July 5 in support of the demand, according to association president Kurubur Shanthakumar.

Alleging that the present fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane was about Rs. 700 lesser when compared with the production cost, he warned that sugarcane growers would declare a crop holiday if the FRP was not revised.

Taking exception to sugar factories not paying the arrears towards growers though there was a steep hike in sugar price, he urged the government to take steps to ensure that farmers got their dues.

The sugar mills were yet to clear dues of Rs. 300 crore for 2013–14, Rs. 110 crore for 2014–15 and Rs. 1,500 crore for 2015–16, Mr. Shanthakumar said here.

Rain brings down temperature



Rain in the morning hours of Thursday slowed down normal life in Erode.—
PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN

Overnight drizzle brought down the temperature substantially and slowed down normal life in the morning hours.

The roads had relatively lesser traffic, and people were seen wearing warm clothing and holding umbrellas. There were intermittent drizzles during the course of the day, just enough to wet the surface of the soil.

Farmers anticipate more rainfall during the current spell since they are not certain about adequacy of water in the Bhavani Sagar reservoir that feeds three major ayacuts: Lower Bhavani Project, Kalingarayan and Thadapalli-Arakankottai, altogether accounting for over 2.5 lakh acres. The water level of the dam on Thursday was 41.35 ft compared to 74.62 ft the same time last year.

The current storage is just 2.6 tmc compared to 13 tmc last year when the inflow at the same time was as much as 17,832 cusecs compared to only 155 cusecs on Thursday. Bhavani Sagar Dam received only 1.2 mm rainfall for a duration of 24 hours ending 8 a.m. on Thursday. Elsewhere, Chennimalai received the highest rainfall of 20 mm.

Salem

The water level in the Mettur Dam stood at 42.28 ft on Thursday against its full level of 120 ft. The inflow of water into the dam was 1,628 cusecs and the discharge from the dam for drinking purpose in the delta region was 1,200 cusecs.

Various parts of Salem district experienced widespread intermittent showers on Wednesday evening.

Farmers seek water release from July 1

The Kalingarayan Pasana Sabai has urged the State Government to release water from July 1 onwards in the Kalingarayan canal. The final phase of renovation works are presently being carried out at the anicut on a war-footing. The Government had sanctioned Rs. 7.81 crore for strengthening of the anicut.

Commending the government for strengthening the anicut, president of Kalingarayan Pasana Sabai V.M. Velayutham said water has to be released at the earliest since the standing crops of banana and sugarcane on 6,500 acres has to be saved from withering.

Mr. Velayutham also urged the Public Works Department to clean the canal wherever required and pave way for starting turmeric cultivation during June-July.

The Sabai reiterated its demand for concrete-lining the canal from the ninth mile to 15th mile to safeguard the water body from untreated industrial pollutants. A demand was raised at the monthly meeting of the Sabai earlier this month for eviction of encroachments along the embankments of the canal and laying of motorable roads on both sides to the entire stretch of 90 km from Kalingarayanpalayam to Avudayamparai.

Temperature to favour poultry

With day temperature likely to remain cloudy with chance of isolated rainfall in the next two days, it will favour poultry.

A press release from Agromet Field Unit of Veterinary College and Research Institute and Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, said that active southwest monsoon brings elevated wind speed and cloudiness that will favour poultry. Due to high demand for feed raw materials, especially shortage of maize, care should be taken to purchase quality materials, the release added. Poultry farmers were asked to increase energy content of feed.

Weather-based crop insurance

Weather-based crop insurance scheme has been implemented from this monsoon in Uttara Kannada district, according to report on Thursday.

The crops that will be covered under this scheme are pepper, areca nut, plantain, ginger, and mango. The loss will be estimated by the diseases to the crops owing to change in weather conditions based on reports of the local rain gauge centres and meteorological stations.

Universal Sompo General Insurance Company will be in-charge of Uttara Kannada district.

ARRESTED UNDER POCSO

The Mundgod police have arrested Megharaj Balchandra Rathod (29) of Temyanakoppa village in Mundgod taluk under the Protection of Children from

Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) on charges of sexually harassing a girl of the same village on Wednesday.

The Hindu BusinessLine

Pan-India tea sale takes off after initial glitch

The long-awaited pan-India tea auction had a good start at 8.30 am on Thursday. Brokers had to adjust to trading on the new platform, and the server seemed to fail at around 10.15 am, but trade sources said that the Coonoor auction centre did fairly well, with close to 95 per cent of the catalogued teas sold within the first two hours.

The quantity on offer the Coonoor Tea Trade Association stood at 11.22 lakh kg.

The Kochi auction centre faced a backlash with more than 50 per cent of the volumes on offer left unsold in the first two hours and the situation worse in Siliguri, as less than 20 per cent of the catalogued quantities were said to have been taken up.

Tepid participation

Sources said that the buyers' participation was less in Kochi. Not more than 5-6 buyers seem to have logged in at the start. Lack of buyer participation coupled with a higher tax structure (particularly from buyers operating for upcountry markets) appears to have kept them off.

Trade sources in Coonoor said they did not encounter any major issue, but admitted that their counterparts in some of the centres in the North found the platform 'not very user-friendly.'

New mechanism

Unlike the past, in the pan-India E-Auction platform, seven boxes (each representing one auction centre) appear on the screen (monitor). When a buyer chooses to view or bid in any of the centres, he/she will have to minimise the screen and click on the box (representing the auction centre) he wants to trade on.

“Though there are individual boxes for each of the centres, it is not useful when in operation because when the session is active, bidders hardly get 1-2 minutes to bid and close the sale. It is like occupying the hot seat when the session is on and active,” a source told *BusinessLine*.

A cross-section of buyers observed that it would be difficult to operate at two centres simultaneously, leave alone seven. They felt that the Tea Board could have imparted hands-on training, and the roll-out could have been in a phased manner, instead of getting all the seven centres on board at the same time.

To a query on the price, the source said, “in Coonoor, there was a cautious correction as the volumes were huge”.

Trade sources said that Guwahati and Siliguri were de-linked, when the session commenced.

The Coonoor auction centre witnessed a good response, with all the offerings sold at close at 5.30 pm, whereas the sale at the Kochi auction centre could not be concluded on Thursday.

It is being carried over for tomorrow (Friday), when the Coimbatore centre will also join.

India's tea output up 8%



Despite lower production in the South, the country's overall tea output in the first four months of the current calendar has increased by 8.08 per cent over the same month last year due to a significant rise in the North.

“The Tea Board has now released the data for April and our compilation shows that India produced 172.99 million kg (mkg) till April compared to 160.06 mkg in January-April 2015,” Rajesh Gupta, compiler of annual ‘Global Tea Digest’, told *BusinessLine*.

This gain of 12.93 mkg marks a growth of 8.08 per cent.

North Indian production has risen by 23.77 mkg to reach 111.20 mkg. Assam tops the country's production table at 66.21 mkg – up by 17.75 mkg over the same period last year. West Bengal's production has increased by 5.71 mkg to reach 41.81 mkg. Here, Darjeeling lost marginally by 0.27 mkg to produce 1.22 mkg.

On the contrary, South India's production has fallen by 10.84 mkg to 61.79 mkg. Here, Tamil Nadu lost 7.25 mkg to produce 42.78 mkg while Kerala, dipped 3.29 mkg to produce 17.38 mkg.

Sowing begins in Gujarat; farmers turn to cotton, tur

According to farmers, among pulses, tur provided good returns as compared to other crops. So far, tur acreage stands at around 15,200 ha against 19,200 ha last year

The South-West monsoon hit Gujarat on Wednesday with several parts of the State receiving showers.

Sowing activity has already started with over 2,74,000 hectares covered till June 20 as against 13,44,900 hectares during the same period last year.

Cotton acreage

Among the major crops sown in the kharif season (July to September) include cotton, groundnut and tur, besides others.

So far, cotton has been sown on 175,500 hectares against 762,900 hectares reported last year. The groundnut area stood at 38,400 ha (370,900 ha).

Sluggish start

With the delayed onset of the monsoon, overall sowing started on a sluggish note.

Normally the monsoon hits the State around June 15.

According to farmer sources, among pulses, tur provided good returns as compared to other crops.

So far, acreage of tur stands at around 15,200 ha against 19,200 ha last year.

Groundnut gains

“There won’t be much impact on sowing due to the delayed monsoon. But farmers are more likely to take up groundnut,” said a farmer from Rajkot district.

State Agriculture Department data revealed that sowing was sluggish in grains and oilseeds, with 0.44 per cent and 1.66 per cent of the normal sowing area being covered, respectively.

The State has received total rainfall of 7.27 mm as of June 23. Out of the 248 taluks, 140 have received rains.

Storage levels

The water storage conditions at state reservoirs had almost bottomed out. As on June 22, the State reservoirs were left with average live storage of 8.79 per cent.

The most vulnerable condition was seen at Saurashtra, where the average live storage stood at 3.44 per cent of the gross storage capacity.

However, with rains hitting the State this week, the State’s water levels are set to improve.

It’s an organic Onam this year in Kerala

The CPI (M) has launched an Onam-specific organic-vegetable cultivation initiative in Kerala’s Ernakulam district which it plans to promote across the State in the future.

The initiative — named ‘Organic vegetables for Onam feast’ — aims to make ‘non-toxic, uncontaminated vegetables’ available to a significant number of homes in Ernakulam district. It will be implemented in around 1,000 acres under 45 gram panchayats ruled by the CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front in the district.

“We want to keep the pesticide-laden vegetables coming outside the State off the dining table at least during the Onam festival,” P Rajeeve, former MP and district secretary of the CPI(M), told *BusinessLine*. He flagged off the initiative on Tuesday at Kanjoor where organic vegetables would be raised on 12 acres, which until recently had been used for making earthen bricks. The farm, to be managed by a farmers’ cooperative society and sponsored by the gram panchayat, will raise vegetables that are used to prepare the customary Onam feast.

Demand for organic farming has leapfrogged in Kerala over the past five years, mainly due to the scare over ‘toxic, pesticide-laden vegetables and fruits’ being imported from Tamil Nadu and other neighbouring States. Kerala imports most of its vegetables from other States as farmlands have shrunk and agriculture has turned uneconomic in the State. The demand for organic vegetables and other foods has also been propelled by an increased awareness of healthy food and healthy eating. The incidence of a host of lifestyle diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol as well as cancer, heart ailments and kidney diseases are alarmingly high in Kerala.

Chemical-contaminated food is blamed for most of these diseases. Organic farming, particularly of vegetables, is considered a major preventive step by the government, health experts and socio-cultural organisations. The result is the mushrooming of tiny plots of vegetable farms across the State. In urban and semi-urban areas, middle-class families raise vegetables on house terraces and in tiny garden plots.

The CPI (M) and its affiliated organisations actively promote the organic vegetable cultivation in kitchen gardens and homesteads. It also encourages self-help groups and NGOs engaged in organic farming — mainly as a way to widen its popularity base, though. Senior party leader Thomas Isacc, who is the current Finance Minister, is a strong campaigner of the organic revolution.

Rajive pointed out that it was during the last Vishu festival that the party had started actively promoting vegetable cultivation. By the Onam festival, the movement had caught on. Currently, he noted, there were a dozen permanent organic vegetable stalls supported by the party in Ernakulam district alone. This helped check the price escalation during Onam.

Now that the CPI (M) is in power, the organic vegetable revolution is likely to get a big boost.

Cooking oils stay unchanged

Edible oils market ruled flat on slack demand.

Barring palmolein,

which lost 1 per 10 kg, other edible oils remained unchanged on the BCE.

Local refineries kept their rates unchanged on thin demand.

Ruchi's rates:

palmolein 563, soyabean refined oil 630.

Allana traded palmolein for 563, soya refined oil 635 and sunflower refined oil at 740.

At Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin was up at 2,010 (2,000) and loose (10 kg) at 1,280 (1,275).

BCE spot rates (/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,290 (1,290), soya ref.

628 (628), sunflower exp. ref. 655 (655),

sunflower ref. 730 (730), rapeseed ref. 880 (880),

rapeseed exp. ref. 850 (850),

cottonseed ref. 675 (675) and

palmolein 553 (554).

Pan-India tea auction halts as server fails two hours into trade



The long-awaited pan-India tea auction got off to a good start at 8.30 this morning. Even as the brokers were getting adjusted to trade on the new platform, the server appears to have failed at around 10.30, two hours into the trade.

Coonoor seems to have done fairly well at the start, with close to 95 per cent of the catalogued teas sold within the first two hours.

The Coonoor Tea Trade Association had a catalogued volume of 11.22 lakh kg for the first pan-India auction.

At the Kochi auction centre more than 50 per cent of the volume on offer was left unsold in the first two hours.

The situation was worse in Siliguri, where less than 20 per cent of the catalogued quantities were taken up.

Sources say that buyers' participation was less in Kochi. Hardly five-six buyers seemed to have logged in at the start. Lack of buyer participation coupled with a higher tax structure (particularly for buyers operating for upcountry markets) appears to have kept them off.

Trade sources in Coonoor said they did not encounter any major issue, but admitted that their counterparts in some centres in the North found the platform "not very user-friendly".

Unlike in the past, in the pan-India e-auction platform, seven boxes (each representing an auction centre) appear on the screen (monitor). When a buyer chooses to view or bid in any of the centres, he/ she has to minimise the screen and click on the box (representing the auction centre) he/ she wants to trade on.

"Though there are individual boxes for each of the centres, they are not useful in operation because bidders hardly get 1 to 2 minutes to bid and close the sale. It is like occupying the hot seat when the session is on and active," the source told *BusinessLine*.

A cross-section of buyers observed that it would be difficult to operate at two centres simultaneously, leave alone seven.

They felt that the board could have imparted hands-on training, and the roll-out could have been done in a phased manner, instead of getting all the seven centres on board at the same time.

To a query on prices, the source said "in Coonoor there was a cautious correction as the volumes were huge. It was on expected lines though," he added.

The break after two hours of trading seems to have give the buyers some respite.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Food Corporation of India to raise Rs 20,000 crore short-term loan



The Corporation is raising the loan because its subsidy arrears have touched Rs 58,650 crore, as on March 31, a source said.

NEW DELHI: State-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) has invited bids from the scheduled banks for raising short-term loan of Rs 20,000 crore to meet the cost of procurement.

The Corporation is raising the loan because its subsidy arrears have touched Rs 58,650 crore, as on March 31, a source said.

"FCI intends to raise short-term loan of Rs 20,000 crore with greenshoe option (the borrowing through STL will not exceed Rs 30,000 crore at any point of time) from scheduled banks for one month/three months maturity," the company said in a tender document.

The last date for submission of bids is July 1.

The government had earlier said that to bring down the subsidy arrears in this fiscal, it may consider additional food subsidy over and above the budgetary provision, if required.

The bulk of the subsidy is paid to FCI for buying foodgrains at support price and running the public distribution system (PDS).

The PDS operation cost has risen sharply in the past few years due to increase in the minimum support price (MSP) of grains as well as high storage costs.

The FCI also has a cash credit limit of Rs 54,495 crore with a consortium of 67 banks.

The government has earmarked Rs 1,34,834.61 crore as food subsidy for 2016-17, out of which about Rs 1.03 lakh crore is for FCI.

In the 2015-16 period, the government had initially allocated Rs 97,000 crore to FCI, which was later increased to Rs 1,12,000 crore at the revised estimate stage.

In the current fiscal, the Centre has released Rs 25,834 crore as food subsidy to the corporation and another Rs 10,000 crore as a wage and means advance.

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Tea auction throughout the whole country has gone under dead lock



The reaction recorded came as a protest against few clauses in the new Pan Country Tea Auction system introduced by Indian Tea Board(ITB).

All the tea auction centers in India witnessed an unprecedented situation today when almost all the buyers refrained from lifting any stock with a warning to continue this in forthcoming auctions too. It was on protest against few clauses in the new Pan Country Tea Auction system introduced by Indian Tea Board(ITB).

"We did not ask to stop auction. But practically none of us bought anything at any of the seven auction centers in the whole country. This will continue until ITB amends the system," said Ankit Lochan, Secretary, Siliguri Tea Traders Association.

"At Siliguri Tea Auction Centre(STAC), only 3% of total stock brought on floor today could be sold today. All other centers also had similar kind of dismal," said Lochan. Out of over 1200 million kg national annual production, around 550 mkg made tea is sold through around 50 auctions in each of 7 centers. STAC, an important one, alone sales around 3.5 mkg worth around Rs 50 crore per auction.

Interestingly, sellers and brokers, the major sufferers of the situation, have also held Indian Tea Board responsible for the situation.

"The new system is going to ruin whole trade chain," said K K Mintri, Chairman of Terai India Planters Association. "We appreciate the new system. But incidentally, registered tea brokers have become one of the worst victims of situation," said S Misra, DGM, Percon India Pvt Ltd. a leading tea brokerage firm.

As per existing system, sellers receive ad-hock payments from brokers against the stock left under broker's control before auction. This is utilized by seller to meet up production expenses including workers payment. But, under new system, payments are to be made directly by buyers to sellers only after auction.

Naturally, brokers have lost their control and stopped this ad-hock payment putting sellers at all tiers including small growers, factories or set gardens under financial deadlock. "The situation may force many of us to go for even closer," said Mintri.

According to Indian Tea Board(ITB) Chairman S Sarangi, under new system, any buyer from anywhere can participate in electronic auction of any center under single registration and uniform rules.

"We appreciate the policy. But many modalities incorporated in it are extremely detrimental to the interest of whole trade chain. These could have been discussed with stake holders before finalization," said Lochan. And same was the view of almost all.