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THE HINDU

14 lakh tonnes of mangoes to fall into State's basket

This year, the produce will be highest compared to last five years: Horticulture Dept.

The king of fruits is all set for a stately arrival from all corners of the State this year, as sufficient rain and humidity have helped in the flowering that would bring in nearly 14 lakh tonnes of produce this season. This is the largest produce in Karnataka in the last five years, and mouth-watering mangoes are expected to hit the markets by the end of April.

"It is a quantum jump of 58 per cent from last year's 8 lakh tonnes of produce," said Shamanur Shivashankarappa, Minister for Horticulture and Agro Marketing, while sharing details on the State's produce.

He was speaking at a meeting organised by the Department of Horticulture and Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation, along with Mango Development Board, on Monday with mango growers of the State.

While Kolar, which has 48,000 hectares under mango orchards, alone is set to contribute about 4.3 lakh metric tonnes this season, it will be followed by Dharwad and Mysuru regions, officials said. The season is expected to commence with the arrival of the Mallika variety in the market followed by Malgova, Rasapuri, Thotapuri, Neelam, Alphonso, and Banganapalli varieties.

No reduction in price?
However, the prices are not expected to come down immediately despite a bumper crop this season.

S.P. Bommanahalli, Director, Horticulture Department, said that to see the immediate effect of the large produce on price seems doubtful. “The prices will depend on transportation from fields, just as a high export market too would not help slash rates here,” he said.

Despite Karnataka having enough stock, processing of mango pulp hasn’t taken off in the State.

“Although Tamil Nadu has much lesser produce, it has 70 mango processing centres. We have to catch up. This is being seriously planned, and we have announced that farmers who are ready to start mango pulp centres will be given Rs. 10 lakh subsidy,” said M. Kamalakshi Rajanna, chairperson, Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation.

Big leap in exports
As far as mango exports that were touching just about 500 tonnes till last year, 2016 is all set to see a big leap as exports is expected on the lines of 5,000 tonnes and above. “We have the greatest demand this year owing to our farmers promising a good stock. Awareness programmes throughout the year helped the leap in produce,” said M. Kamalakshi Rajanna, chairperson, Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation. ” We already have orders from Malaysia, Singapore, and parts of Europe,” she said.

Orders of several thousand tonnes more are expected for exports. “While the mango board is receiving a delegation from the U.S. Horticulture Department, who will be visiting several farms in Karnataka to place orders, a mango exporter from Malaysia is demanding 20,000 tonnes of our 80 varieties this year,” Ms. Kamalakshi said. “We are working on it, and to make things easier, the board has written to the Ministry of Agriculture to sanction the Plant Quarantine Specifications for export purposes.

Mango mela in Malaysia
For the first time ever, 50 farmers will take part in the Karnataka State Mango Mela, organised by the Mango Development Board, to be held in Malaysia in April. “We are happy to be taking farmers, where they will see people buy and enjoy their produce. This is just the beginning, next year all

our activities will be three times higher," said M. Kamalakshi Rajanna, chairperson, Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation.

'Budget could help achieve 4% growth in agriculture sector'

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh on Tuesday said the Union Budget would put the agricultural sector towards path of progress and would help in addressing agriculture distress and achieve 4 per cent growth.

"Budgetary provision of Rs.35,984 crore for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Ministry – 2016-2017 manifests that NDA government is committed to villages, the poor and farmers," Mr. Singh said, addressing a press conference here.

"Governments positive steps coupled with a good monsoon could help agriculture sector grow at 4 per cent in the next fiscal year," he added. He said the government aims to double the income of farmers in the next five years. "We also intend to multiply yield per unit, a better return of the products related to farmers," he said.

Budgetary provision of Rs.35,984 crore for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Ministry – 2016-2017 manifests that NDA government is committed to villages, the poor and farmers

Farmers' e-market platform could be a game changer

The government's decision to create a common e-market platform for farmers will remove inter-state barriers in moving farm produce and could be a game changer, according to analysts.

It has two important pre-requisites —an amendment of the state Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act (APMC) and physical logistic support which is crucial to enable the farmer to move his crop.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced on Monday that a Unified Agricultural Marketing e-platform will be dedicated to the nation on April 14. The amendments to the APMC Act is a prerequisite to joining this platform and Mr. Jaitley said that 12 states have already amended this Act. It empowers state governments to notify the commodities, and designate markets and market areas where the regulated wholesale trade takes place.

Ambarish Dasgupta, president of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry and partner & head management consulting, KPMG, said this would benefit farmers only if states back them with the logistic support necessary to move the goods that they have sold on the unified platform.

Rajiv Singh, secretary general of International Chamber of Commerce said that if implemented well the initiative could benefit farmers and consumers alike by ensuring fair prices.

Krish Iyer, President & CEO Walmart India, was upbeat about these proposals, describing them as "bold and forward looking." This, alongwith the proposal on opening up the agri-marketing sector to foreign capital for marketing food products produced and manufactured in India, would while creating vast employment opportunities, Mr. Iyer said.

Kumar Kandaswami, Partner, Deloitte India said this was a "big game changer."

Palm civet handed over to Vandalur zoo authorities

The palm civet rescued from near Tirupur was handed over to Vandalur zoo authorities on Tuesday.

Forest Department officials on Tuesday handed over the one-month-old male palm civet rescued from near here to the Vandalur zoo authorities for its rehabilitation.

District Forest Officer A. Periasamy told *The Hindu* that the young palm civet was found on the roadside at Padiyur near Tirupur by a milkman on Monday.

"On information, our officials went there and took possession of the palm civet, which is a scheduled animal under Wildlife Protection Act," he said.

The palm civets, an omnivore species, are usually seen in agricultural farms in different parts of the district eating palm flower sap and pulpy fruits.

‘Grow more pulses to better food security’

The total domestic consumption of pulses is expected to exceed 30 million tonnes by the year 2030

H.L. Harish, member of the Board of Regents of University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, has called upon agriculture scientists to take up research on high-yield varieties of pulses to strengthen the food security of the nation. He was speaking after inaugurating an awareness programme on pulses held at the campus of UAHS, here on Tuesday to mark the International Year of Pulses. Pulses like tur, Bengal gram, horse gram, lentils, green gram and cow peas are rich sources of nutrition and form part of the diet in India for many years now. It is necessary to enhance the production of pulses to ensure access to nutritious food for people from all strata of the society, he said.

Though the nation is the largest producer of pulses with a total annual production of around 18 million tonnes, there is a huge gap between the domestic demand and supply owing to which 4.60 million tonnes is being imported every year. It is necessary to be prepared to meet this challenge by increasing the production of pulses, he said. Even farmers in irrigated zones are not keen on taking up cultivation of pulses. They hold the wrong notion that the returns from this are not lucrative.

Agriculture scientist T.K. Siddarame Gowda said that, owing to change in agriculture practices and due to shortage of labour in rural areas, the farmers are displaying an aversion towards the cultivation of pulses. The cultivation of pulsesis necessary for sustainable agriculture as pulses fix atmospheric nitrogen to the soil through root nodules. By taking up cultivation of pulses, the farmers can minimise the use of chemical fertilisers and thereby conserve the fertility of the soil, he added.

Farmers in irrigated zones believe that returns are not lucrative in the cultivation of pulses

Rs. 55.28-lakh subsidy for farm mechanisation

The district has received a subsidy of Rs. 55.28 lakh to enable the agriculturists to buy farm implements.

In a statement, Collector M. Karunakaran said the amount has been allotted to the district under the National Agriculture Development Programme (NADP) and the Farm Mechanisation Programme.

While Rs. 10.08 lakh will be given to Dalit, small, marginal and women farmers as grant under the NADP, farmers from other communities will get Rs. 8.43 lakh for buying farm implements such as tillers, power tillers, power sprayers and ploughing machines.

Under the Farm Mechanisation Programme, Rs. 6.13 lakh will be given as subsidy for Dalit farmers and others will get Rs. 30.64 lakh.

Aspiring farmers may get the applications from the Assistant Executive Engineer, Department of Agricultural Engineering, Tirunelveli (94433 65790), AEE, Cheranmahadevi (94431 53243) and AEE, Tenkasi (94883 78904) and submit the filled-in applications along with the required documents for processing the applications, Dr. Karunakaran said.

Mixed response from trade and industry

'FDI for augmenting food production unacceptable'

The Union Budget presented in Parliament on Monday has evoked mixed response from trade and industry in Salem.

K. Mariappan, vice-president, Tamil Nadu Small and Tiny Industries Association, welcomed the allocation of Rs. 500 crore for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women entrepreneurs under the Stand Up India scheme and also the announcement on setting up of a national hub to provide professional support to SC and ST entrepreneurs. The budget proposal to assist their propagation through 100 per cent deduction of profit for three out of five years for companies set up between April 2016 and March 2019 under the Make-in-India programme would promote employment through start-ups.

However, Mr. Mariappan expressed disappointment that the Finance Minister had not conceded the demand of the trade bodies to increase the turnover for the manufacturing units for coming under the purview of Central Excise net from the present Rs. 1.5 crore to Rs. 5 crore. The trade and industry was demanding exemption from service tax (at present 14.5 per cent) for tiny and micro units. Unfortunately, the Minister had increased the service tax to 15 per cent, he said.

A. Jayaseelan, general secretary, Salem City Chamber of Commerce and Industry, commended the Finance Minister for attempting to satisfy all sections of society. He welcomed the priority accorded for the development of rural and agriculture sector, irrigation schemes, increase in the turnover ceiling from Rs. 1.5 crore to Rs. 2 crore for the micro and small industries for tax relief and allotment of Rs. 500 crore for increasing the pulses production. He said that the decision of the government to procure farm produce through on line and the foreign direct investment for augmenting food production were not acceptable. He also complained that the government had not attached any importance for the production of solar energy and also for merger of rivers.

Budget lacks pro-farmer view: Pawar

The former Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, on Tuesday slammed the budget saying it lacked "pro-farmer" perspective.

"The entire Budget was full of slogans," said Mr. Pawar at a press briefing here. "Without increasing the minimum support price of farmer's yield it is impossible to double their income by year 2022." The NCP leader said the allocation of Rs. 20,900 for the agricultural sector did not resolve farmer's concerns in times of drought since most of it would be spent on crop loans.

On the budget proposals, he said taxing 60 per cent of withdrawals from the Provident Fund and putting a ceiling on employers' contribution would "lead to unrest." Welcoming the government's move of increasing the funding for the MGNREGS, he said the make-work scheme had increased the spending capacity in rural areas and instead of scaling it down the policy should be encouraged.

"'Much has been talked against the MGNREGS, it is good that the government has realised its utility," Mr. Pawar said.

Budget promises are hollow, says farmers' union

The Centre's claims of doubling farmers' income are "hollow" because returns from farming are already in negative, the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan) said while dubbing the Union Budget as "anti-farmer".

"The Centre talks about doubling farmer's income by 2022. This statement is a total fraud because farmers are already in distress in the wake of negative returns. Then how can government double their income," BKU (Ugrahan)general secretary Sukhdev Singh said on Tuesday.

"To give remunerative returns to farmers, the Centre is required to implement Swaminathan Commission report which ensures 50 per cent profit over and above MSP," he said.

He also demanded that the government should stress on reducing the input cost of growers which is possible by containing the profit of corporates, engaged in providing farm inputs.

The Union termed the 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products produced in India as a "trick to takeover" land of small and marginal farmers.

"Foreign companies have big resources and they can takeover the land of growers especially small and marginal ones under the garb of marketing and once they start earning profits, they will throw them out," he alleged.

Mr Singh said that raising credit for farming sector to Rs 9 lakh crore is unlikely to benefit small and marginal growers.

"The actual beneficiaries of bank advances are big, progressive farmers and commission agents who take bulk of loans, depriving small farmers who are in real need," he said. -- PTI

State Advisory Price of cane fixed at Rs. 2,750 per tonne

The government on Monday fixed Rs. 2,750 as State Advisory Price (SAP) per tonne of sugarcane. Chief Minister N. Rangasamy made the announcement after conducting a tripartite meeting with sugarcane growers and the mill management.

Following requests from cane growers, the price for sugarcane has been fixed at Rs.2,750 a tonne. The Government will incur an additional expenditure of Rs.5.40 crores, Mr. Rangasamy said.

Crushing season

The crushing season for 2014-15 will commence on March 4. A decision to this effect was also taken at the tri-partite meeting.

Sugarcane farmers have been asking the government to fix SAP for the past six months. For 2013-14, the Government had fixed the SAP at Rs. 2,700 per tonne. The SAP fixed by the Government for 2014-15 is Rs.100 less than the rate fixed by neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

So far, SAP offered by the Puducherry government has generally been above SAP of neighbouring States, except during 2012-13 when farmers were paid in the name of "advance" for their supply to Cooperative Sugar Mill

Meanwhile, sugarcane farmers have expressed disappointment over the SAP announced by the Government for 2014-15.

"We were expecting to get at least Rs.3,000 a tonne. But the SAP has come as a disappointment. The crushing season which should have normally commenced in November had not yet started as farmers had been left high and dry due to delay in payment of dues," said a spokesperson of the Lingareddypalayam Sugarcane Farmers Association.

The mill management is yet to make payment to the tune of Rs.15 crore to farmers who had supplied cane for the crushing season during 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Many farmers are not able to avail themselves of fresh crop loans as the management has not paid interest to the banks concerned, he said.

More than 18,000 farmers are now left in the lurch with the government yet to fix the State Advisory Price for the crushing season of 2015-16.

Vaccination against FMD begins

Immunisation of cattle against Foot and Mouth Disease was initiated in Erode on Tuesday. -PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN

The Animal Husbandry Department on Tuesday started off immunisation of 3.73 lakh heads of cattle in the district against Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD).

District Collector S. Prabakar initiated the vaccination process at Kandampalayam village near Kanjikovil, in the presence of Regional Zonal Joint Director of Animal Husbandry Department P. Ravichandran, Deputy Director S.C. Chandrasekar and other senior officials.

The Department has formed 118 teams to carry out the vaccination till March 21. The information about the vaccination camps was being taken to farmers and cattle-rearers through different means. The Animal Husbandry Department has taken the support of Aavin, Forest Department and local bodies for sourcing the requisite manpower for the task.

Dr. Ravichandran said calves over four months and pregnant cows would also be covered. There will be no impact on milk yield or birth due to the vaccination, he explained.

Wood processing unit to come up at Sirsi

A wood processing unit will be launched at the industrial estate on Banavasi Road at Sirsi on Wednesday.

"Chemically processed dry bamboo poles or areca poles could be used for the cultivation of pepper as monoculture. Pepper is now being cultivated along with arecanut or other supporting plants," Ravi Bhat of the unit said on Tuesday.

It would be inaugurated by Swarnawalli seer Gangadharendra Saraswati Swami at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday.

Scientist M.N. Venugopal, progressive farmer K.M. Hegde Bairumbe, and Karnataka Spice Board general manager H.R. Naik will be present, said a press release.

Ministers will tour drought-hit districts: Maharashtra govt to HC

The State government on Tuesday informed the Bombay High Court that one state minister and one guardian minister will together take a three-day tour of drought-hit districts from March 4, to check how effectively schemes for the welfare of farmers are being implemented and then submit a report to the Chief Minister.

Government pleader AB Vagyani said leaders from Amravati, Aurangabad and Nagpur have monitored the drought hit areas to check the water situation, and a cell has been established at the divisional level to monitor state run welfare schemes for farmers.

A division bench of Justice Naresh Patil and Justice AA Sayed was hearing a *suo motu petition*on the rise in farmer suicides and the State's response measures.

The court noted that the implementation of schemes should have an impact, and said, "You are practically at war and you should manage the disaster."

The judges went on to say there are places where there is no source of water and questioned how the government planned to tackle this.

The court asked if railway transport could be used to distribute water in areas like Latur and Osmanabad, where there are few sources of water.

The court also said that even water tankers don't have any source of water and that ground water is also drying up and asked if the State had done any study on the matter.

The court has asked the Additional Solicitor General, Anil Singh, to inform the court on the number of schemes so far drawn up and implemented by the

Central government, and for the new schemes and policies started for the welfare of farmers in the latest budget.

The court has told the ASG to get all the details and submit a status report in the next hearing.

The court ordered the State to give appropriate instructions to Municipal Councils and Commissioners, and the local bodies of chief engineer’s offices to come up and create plans and probable solutions to save water till June and adjourned the matter till March 17.

You are practically at war and you should manage the disaster

Court to State

Thrust on organic farming in Union Budget hailed

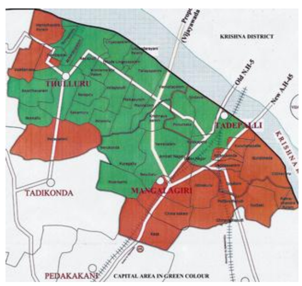
Krishnaprasad of Sahaja Samruddha, an NGO, says organic farming has evolved out of respect for natureand environment.

The Union Budget’s announcement on Monday on production of organic manure has been welcomed by those espousing organic farming, which has a sizeable following and support in the Mysuru region. Krishnaprasad of Sahaja Samruddha, an NGO promoting organic farming and conservation of indigenous variety of paddy and millet, told *The Hindu* that the measure would help stimulate organic farming, which was vital for preserving the crop diversity of the country.

“The present focus on chemical farming and increase in yield at any cost has resulted in reckless use of insecticides and chemical pesticides … its negative effects are being felt. Hence, the thrust on organic farming is welcome,” Mr. Krishnaprasad said. The budget presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the Parliament on Monday announced that five lakh farm ponds and dug wells in rain fed areas and 10 lakh compost pits for production of organic manure would be taken up under the MGNREGA. It also announced the promotion of organic farming through Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana and Organic Value Chain Development in North East Region.

Mr. Krishnaprasad said that organic farming has evolved out of respect for nature and environment. However, he expressed concern that when taken up by the Government, there would be a target-oriented approach to implement the project, diluting the essence. The Sahaja Samruddha also expressed dismay that millet was not accorded priority, whereas the UPA government had allocated Rs.300 crore for the crop. “Millet can be cultivated as a dry land crop, has high nutrition value and is an indigenous crop…it has not received due attention,” he added.

Groundwater in capital region highly contaminated: study



The groundwater map of the capital region Amaravati.— Photo: T. Vijaya Kumar

: The new capital region Amaravati may have abundant groundwater resources, but a study by the Department of Geology, Andhra University and Civil Engineering Department of Malineni Perumallu Engineering College, Guntur, has revealed that concentrations of Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) exceed the maximum permissible limits in most of the villages.

The team of students, K. Praveen, B. Ankaiah and K. Sasikumar have conducted the study under the research guidance of Professor of Geology, AU, Nandipati Subba Rao,and Professor of Civil Engineering Department, Malineni Perumallu Engineering College, A. Subramanyam.

The team studied 28 groundwater samples, which were collected from the deep wells (depth of 40 to 60 m) in the first week of January, and analysed them in the labs at the Panchayat Raj Department and at Lam.

The team analysed Total Hardness (TH), Calcium (Ca), Magnesium (Mg), Sodium and Nitrate and found that the TDS has exceeded maximum permissible limit of 2,000 mg/l, TH- 600 mg/l, and Nitrogen 45 mg/l prescribed by BIS.

The concentration of TDS is high (more than 3,000 mg/l) in a few locations (Ananthavaram, Abbarajupalem, Mandadam and Nulakapeta) and also concentration of nitrates, exceeding 10 mg/l in the water, has indicated a man-made pollution.

Indiscriminate application

of fertilizers

Indiscriminate application of chemical fertilizers for higher crop yields may be the main source of nitrates (more than 10 mg/L) in 17 groundwater samples of the study area, the study said.

Higher content of Sodium, Calcium and Nitrogen in ground can cause gastrointestinal irritation, scale formation on water supply systems, high blood pressure, salty taste, sour taste and blue baby diseases etc, the study said.

However, the groundwater quality was potable (TDS less than the maximum permissible limit of 2,000 mg/l) in some locations like, Nekkalu, Boruplalem, Lingayapalem, Udandarayanipalem, Modugulankapalem, Velagapadu, Tallayapalem, Venkatayapalem, Krishnayapalem, Yerrabalem, Dolesnagar, Undavalli, and Bethapudi.

Keeping the increase of water consumption with respect to the rapid growth population in the near future of the capital area, the study recommended for fixing a number of piezometers for understanding the seasonal increase and drop in water levels, regulating sand mining, and constructing a number of rainwater harvesting structures to augment groundwater resources.

Hope of rise in price may lead to more jaggery inventory in Anakapalle

With good arrivals in February and expectation that they will peak in March, the jaggery market at Anakapalle, the second largest in the country, is gearing up to build stocks.

In 2013-14 season, between December and March, the market received 27 lakh lumps, five lakh less than the previous two years. And, under the impact of Hudhud in 2014-15, the stocks fell to 21 lakh lumps, and the total arrivals for the year were only 27 lakh lumps.

By the end of this February, the arrivals stand at 19 lakh, one lakh more than last year, according to market sources.

But the market suffered a setback with only four lakh lumps in last March as against the normal eight to nine lakh.

Drought in Maharashtra

"However, with timely rain this year and no other affecting factor that could cause any disturbance, we expect the arrivals to pick up," says noted trader Korukonda Butchiraju of Anakapalle.

A major factor that is influencing building the inventory is the poor state of sugarcane crop in Maharashtra with less sowing area owing to drought conditions, he says. As a result, the price of sugar has shot up by about Rs.1,000 a quintal compared to last year.

With proportionate increase in jaggery price too, the medium to top quality that is generally in the range of Rs.2,300 to Rs.2,600 is expected to go up to Rs.3,000 to Rs.3,300.

But building up stocks of 1,500 truck loads last year, traders incurred loss and initially it appeared that they would bring down the inventory to 1,000 to 1,200 truck-loads this year. But in view of the sugar situation and prospect of rise in prices, the stocks may finally surpass 1,500 truck-loads, Mr. Butchiraju analyses.

The jaggery season at Anakapalle, with a turnover of Rs.125 crore, starts from October-November and stock arrivals begin in January peaking between February and April. Traders offload the stocks from June/July.

Warming early, Srinagar's tulips rush into bloom

The Tulip Garden in Srinagar is a major attraction for tourists in Spring. File Photo: Nissar Ahmad

Day temperatures hover around 20 degrees Celsius in February for the first time in 76 years — a good 10 degrees above normal.

For the first time since 2007, Kashmir's major tourist attraction, the Tulip Garden, with 10 lakh bulbs spread over 20 acres, is witnessing early budding and blooming, forcing the State Floriculture to advance the official opening the garden.

"Yes, if there is early blooming, it's going to be thrown open soon," Floriculture Department Director Talat Pervez told *The Hindu*.

Situated at an altitude of 5,600 feet, the Tulip Garden, curated by former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad at the foothills of Zabarwan in Srinagar, came as a shot in the arm for the Tourism Department in 2008. It attracted 12 lakh footfalls in 2012 and is fast emerging as a major spring season attraction for tourists across the country.

However, with day temperatures this year hovering around 20 degrees Celsius in February for the first time in 76 years — a good 10 degrees above normal — the garden is witnessing fast budding.

"Around 1000 bulbs are at an advanced budding stage already. Most bulbs may flower by the second week of March if the weather stays as warm ," said Imran Ahmad, Assistant Floriculture Officer.

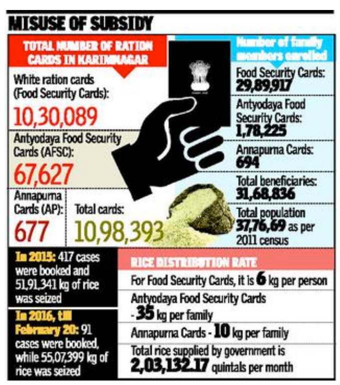
Mr. Ahmad said the garden recorded early blooming in 2008 when it was thrown open around March 25. “However, for the past three years, the garden has been opened only around April 1. In the recent past, Netherlands too saw a delayed blooming by a month. The flowering is subject to weather and this year it may advance in the Valley by around 10-15 days,” he said.

With its origin in Persia, the tulip has travelled a long way to add colour and charm to the Valley. Kashmir’s tulip garden, compared to Holland’s Keukenhof, hosts more than 70 varieties of different colours, which bloom in the last week of March. The blooming extends till May.

Last year, despite rumours of floods, around 1.2 lakh tourists visited the garden during the blooming season. The footfall was around 1.6 lakh in 2014. Crafts and food festivals are organised during the tulip season, creating a festive atmosphere.

Beneficiaries sell Re.1-kg rice in open market

The rice is bought by small-time traders who sell it to hotels, millers and export to Maharashtra



The State Government has launched the ambitious Re.1-a-kg rice scheme for the white ration card (food security card) holders to remove hunger and provide some relief to people living below the poverty line.

Ironically, the Re.1-a- kg rice supplied by the Civil Supplies Department to white ration card holders is sold by the beneficiaries to earn an extra buck in the open market. Incidentally, there are small-time traders, who move in various parts of the district collecting Re.1-a-kg rice from the beneficiaries at the rate ranging from Rs.8 per kilogram to Rs.10 per kilogram.

In turn, the small-time traders sell rice to hotels, eatery joints, rice millers and even export them to the neighbouring Maharashtra at the rate of Rs.12 to Rs.16 per kilogram. The welfare scheme launched by the State Government has come in handy to beneficiaries and small-time traders to make a living at the cost of the State exchequer.

Incidentally, Karimnagar district, which is also native of Minister for Civil Supplies Etala Rajender, tops in the State with highest number of food security cards. The district has a whopping 10,98,393 food security cards - including AAY and Annapurna cards. Every month, the government supplies 2,03,132.17 quintals of rice to ration cardholders.

As per the 2011 census statistics, the district population is 37,76,269 but the units (family members) enrolled in various food security cards include a whopping 31,68,836 persons.

"Are citizens of the entire Karimnagar district poor and living below the poverty line?," questions Confederation of All Telangana Consumer Organisations (CATCO) chairman N Srinivas.

Alleging that majority of ration card holders are selling the rice supplied by the fair price shops at a premium, he demanded that the government should weed out all the bogus cards on a war-footing and save public money. He charged that even the government employees are in possession of white ration cards to avail benefits of Arogyasri, fee reimbursement and other government welfare schemes.

Officials of the Civil Supplies Department said that the beneficiaries of ration cards are also resorting to exchange of rice for wheat and other essential commodities. They said that they have been conducting raids and registering cases against illegal transportation of rice supplied, but in vain.

Vermin compost plant begins production

Coimbatore Corporation has begun vermin compost production at its plant in Vellalore. In the last 20 days, the corporation has produced close to 50 tonnes waste. The compost production comes after the civic body spent Rs. 4 crore to refurbish the plant that it took over from Ramky Infrastructure Limited.

According to corporation sources, the civic body has been processing about 80 tonnes of organic waste a day.

Fifth State Finance Commission Chairman S. Krishnan at the vermin compost plant in Coimbatore on Tuesday.– Photo: S. Siva Saravanan

It collects the waste from restaurants, eateries and markets to transports it to the vermin compost plant for processing.

At the plant, shreds the organic waste and transfers it to the windrow platform and lets the formation of windrows for three weeks. It aerates the waste spraying inoculums, transfers the semi-digested material to tanks where worms feed on the waste to produce vermin compost.

The sources say that the corporation ought to get 10 per cent of the organic waste as vermin compost but it has been getting only 5 per cent as the quality of organic waste has to be good, without inorganic waste.

The corporation is working on it by talking to restaurant owners and market vendors.

On Tuesday, S. Krishnan, Chairman, Fifth State Finance Commission; G. Prakash, Director, Municipal Administration; Prashant M. Wadnere; District Collector Archana Patnaik; and others visited the vermin compost plant.

Corporation Commissioner K. Vijayakarthikeyan told them that it was the biggest vermin compost plant by a municipal body in the State.

As part of the waste processing facility, the sources said that the corporation had installed a bio-methanation plant to generate power.

The plant will take in three tonnes food waste a day to generate 240 units power.

At present the corporation is using the power to light street lamps in the Vellalore yard and run the machines at the vermin compost plant.

The corporation has invested Rs. 1,70 crore for the purpose.

Centre gives push to organic farming even as Punjab lags

The current certified area under organic farming in Punjab is a negligible 2,000 acres only and nowhere near the target of 3,000 acres set for the end of March 2016, as per data available from PAICL.

Farmers sell organic produce directly to customers in Ludhiana. Gurmeet Singh

The union budget has proposed increasing the area under organic farming in the country to five lakh acres in next three years. However, Punjab does not appear to be geared up to take full advantage of the government's initiatives in this regard, given the dismal progress it has made till date.

The current certified area under organic farming in Punjab is a negligible 2,000 acres only and nowhere near the target of 3,000 acres set for the end of March 2016, as per data available from Punjab Agro Industries Corporation Limited (PAICL).

Punjab's laidback approach in organic farming, which can bring substantially higher dividends to farmers for their crop, can be gauged from the fact that a much smaller state, Sikkim, which recently declared itself fully organic state, has more than 1.85 lakh acres of area under organic farming.

With no scheme of its own till now, the Punjab government depends on 'Paramparagat Krishi Vighyan Yojna', which was launched by the union government last year to promote organic farming with a budget of Rs 300 crore.

Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal had announced in May 2015 that an organic farming Board, solely dedicated to promote chemical free farming in state, would be setup. However, the announcement has remained only on paper and no progress has been made in this regard. Even Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) Ludhiana, which is one of the 20 research centers across India under network project on organic farming of Indian Agricultural and Research Center (ICAR), New Delhi, falls short of expectations in the field of organic farming. It has been a party of the network project since 2004 but has failed to bring out any substantial research since the last 12 years.

PAICL officials, however, claim that since past one year, when the state 'officially' started promoting organic farming, it has achieved a lot. "We have a separate organic farming cell with 12-15 employees and 5,000 organic farmers are in touch with us. We have tied up with a German firm to get certification of organic farms for farmers. We are clustering them under Paramgararat Krishi Yojana of the center. We procured 400 tons of organic wheat 400 tons and 250 tons of rice for the first time this year and also helped farmers in marketing them," said KS Pannu, Managing Director, PAICL.

Pannu also said that work on the composition of advisory board announced by CM is also under progress.

CS Aulakh, a senior agronomist from PAU and author of a book, 'Organic Farming: Prospects and Constraints in Punjab', said that the biggest constraint is the non-availability of the organic manure for the farmers required for the procedure.

"It takes minimum three years for a farm to be completely organic. But we have insufficient organic manure which comes from animal and agriculture waste. Farmers would need to keep more animals if we want organic manure to provide similar amount of nutrients to the crop as it gets through chemical laden fertilizers. Another constraint is lack of response from market. Farmers do not adopt organic farming when produce is not sold. There is no organized markets for organic products," said Aulakh.

Umendra Dutt, Director, Kheti Viraasat Mission and member of national task force on organic farming said Punjab stands way behind when it comes to organic farming. "There has been no clear-cut policy to promote organic farming in Punjab, either from state department or PunjabAgro. PAU is still conducting research on the lines of green revolution which led to degradation of Punjab's soil and overuse of water and fertilizers. Punjab which was pioneer in every agricultural aspect stands the most backward in organic farming," he concluded.

It is only due to the efforts of NGOs, individuals and farmers groups that a few Kisan Huts (shops that directly sell organic fruit and vegetables, without involving middlemen) were started in districts like Hoshiarpur, Mansa, Ludhiana without any support from the government. Farmers allege officials ask for bribes when approached for certification for their organic farms. "Most organic farmers have not got certification. It is because bribes are demanded openly. This is the reason why there are no accurate number on how much area is under organic cultivation in Punjab. It is the lack of trust and communication between Punjab Agro and farmers," said Harnek Singh, a farmer.

Despite the lack of state patronage, the concept of organic farming is being given a boost by self motivated individuals who are making the maximum of what is on offer. According to Joga Singh, project officer, Skill Training Center, Guru Nanak Dev Polytechnic College, who recently hosted a direct selling fair for farmers said, "There is a scheme called Community Development Through Polytechnics (CDTP) offered by HRD Ministry to promote organic farmers and help them in selling their produce directly to the customers. I decided to use this scheme and host farmers. We offered them free of cost platform to sell their products and response was overwhelming. Such schemes need to be optimized well to help farmers," he says.

Hype and reality

The budget recognises the crisis in rural India, but allocations do not match the talk

The good news is that the NDA government — after spending more than a year in denial — finally seems to have woken up to the ongoing agrarian crisis and the worsening financial conditions of cultivators.

In India now, there appears to be an inverse relationship between the time finance ministers spend talking about a particular issue in their budget speeches and the amount of money they actually allocate to deal with it. This was true of former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram's budget speeches, but incumbent FM Arun Jaitley seems to have gone even further in his florid prose and self-congratulatory tone when declaring measures that ultimately amount to very little.

Consider agriculture. The good news is that the NDA government — after spending more than a year in denial — finally seems to have woken up to the ongoing agrarian crisis and the worsening financial conditions of cultivators. So there was much talk of many measures (most of them simply renaming earlier and existing schemes and programmes) that would be directed at the farming community. But in terms of actual spending, the finance minister essentially resorted to a sleight of hand rather than real increases in allocations. Thus, while the documents show a significant increase in the ministry of agriculture's allocation from Rs 22,959 crore to Rs 44,486 crore, a significant chunk of that (Rs 15,000 crore) is because the interest subsidy for loans given to farmers, which was earlier under the ministry of finance, has simply been moved to the ministry of agriculture. If that is subtracted (as it should be) the increase is much less impressive, as the total spending only increases from 0.17 per cent of the GDP to 0.19 per cent — so minor as to have little impact on the actual conditions of farmers. Similarly, the MGNREGA, which until very recently was unloved and much derided by PM Narendra Modi, has now been rehabilitated to the point that Jaitley declared he was providing the highest allocation ever to this programme, at Rs 38,500 crore. But this proud claim ignores three important facts. First, the MGNREGA is by law a demand-driven scheme, so the government is duty-bound to provide whatever funds are necessary according to the demand for work. Announcing a higher allocation makes it appear that this is the largesse of the minister and the government, which is the opposite of what the law states. Second, the government has been miserly and tardy in providing the funds to the state governments as required, so that at present there are more than 14 states in deficit, to whom the government owes several thousand crore. If this is taken into account, the actual amount of the allocation is much less. Third, even this declared amount falls well short of levels achieved earlier under the UPA, amounting to only 0.25 per cent of the GDP compared to 0.59 per cent of the GDP in 2009-10.

Other social spending has fared even worse. The BJP's electoral manifesto had declared the goal of health for all, but the extremely limited attempt at health insurance for BPL families and senior citizens comes nowhere near that. Indeed, total health spending continues to stagnate, such that the budget of the ministry of health and family welfare will remain at the embarrassingly low figure of 0.24 per cent of the GDP. This implies even lower levels of spending for the National Health Mission, and hardly any increase in funds available to the systems of public hospitals across the country.

Meanwhile, women and the young continue to be not just neglected but even pushed aside. The ICDS has taken a hit, with the allocation for the coming fiscal year actually lower (at only Rs 14,000 crore) than the Rs 15,394 crore that would be spent this year. How this crucial system will survive when anganwadi workers and helpers across the country are suffering from late payment and even non-payment of their pathetically small remuneration, is anybody's guess.

The Centre's answer would be that now states have more money because of the Finance Commission's award, and so they can take up the slack. But here too, the Centre has proved adept at clawing back some of this by creating more cesses and surcharges that do not have to be shared with the states, rather than increasing tax rates. Already in the current year, the share of states has declined from the projected 36.3 per cent of tax revenues to 34.8 per cent. The proposed budget also introduces a variety of cess and surcharges, all of which will be retained by the Centre.

It could also be argued that these limits on spending are necessary to maintain "fiscal discipline". But, in fact, the economy is actually not doing as well as the hype suggests. The rural economy is down, investment rates have been falling, and employment, especially in formal jobs, is simply not picking up. The massive windfall gains to the Indian economy coming from low oil prices appear to have been wasted as the people still have to suffer high food inflation, even as wholesale prices fall.

Clearly, there is need for measures to increase domestic demand by improving wage incomes and possibilities of employment. More real spending on agriculture, on social sectors and on employment schemes can do this directly — and indirectly through very large multiplier effects. Putting more money on roads and railways (which is in itself desirable as long as it is not frittered away on high-speed rail links and other trophy projects) is not an effective substitute, and will not generate the much-promised and desperately needed employment. Sadly for all of us, the government has yet to learn this.

The writer is professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

Union Budget 2016-17: Coal cess doubled to fund ministries, green drives

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley Monday increased the cess on coal production from Rs 200 per tonne to Rs 400 per tonne.

This was the third time the cess was doubled, since being introduced as Rs 50 per tonne in the 2010 budget. (Express Photo by Tashi Tobgyal)

A move that began as a minor levy on production of coal six years ago has become an important source of revenue for the government now, financing entire budget of some ministries and supporting clean and green activities.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley Monday increased the cess on coal production from Rs 200 per tonne to Rs 400 per tonne. He also said the Clean Energy Cess would be renamed as Clean Environment Cess.

This was the third time the cess was doubled, since being introduced as Rs 50 per tonne in the 2010 budget. When it was doubled from Rs 100 per tonne to Rs 200 per tonne last year, it was estimated that it would contribute about Rs 13,000 crore to National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF) every year. With the value of this fund going up further with the latest hike, the entire budget allocation for Ministry of New and Renewable Energy for this year — Rs 5,000 crore — is proposed to come from NCEF. Half the plan outlay for Environment Ministry, about Rs 1,000 crore, is also proposed to be met through this fund.

At the end of last year, the NCEF, which gets contributions from some other sources besides this cess on coal, had almost

Rs 17,000 crore in its kitty. India produces coal in excess of 600 million tonnes a year. It imports about 150 million tonnes every year to meet its demand. The cess applies to imported coal as well.

‘FDI will boost food processing industry’

The budget announcement of allowing 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products made in India will double the processing industry for fruits and vegetables, Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal told reporters on Tuesday.

hindustantimes

Budget 2016: Doubling farm income easier said than done

Even if farm GDP grows at the current targeted level of 4%, achieving a 100% increase in farmers' income (or double) is impossible. For this, farm GDP actually has to grow at 15% annually for the next five years. (HT Flie Photo)

The Modi government's promise of doubling farmers' income in a little over about five years will require a dramatic improvement in yields, technologies, good price for farm produce, irrigation expansion — and some magic — economists say.

Actually, it all depends on what finance minister Arun Jaitley meant when, in his budget speech, he said: "The government will, therefore, reorient its interventions in the farm and non-farm sectors to double the income of the farmers by 2022."

If Jaitley meant a "nominal rise" — a term economists use for income not adjusted for inflation — then it is possible and has happened before, economist Abhijit Sen said.

If the increase is to be "real" — or income that is adjusted for inflation — then it's "a lot of fluff", Sen said.

This is because growth in income is always benchmarked against rise in prices as inflation shrinks purchasing power.

To begin with, the first challenge is to make farm GDP, a measure of total farm income, grow at a targeted 4%. Currently, the sector is growing at 1.1%.

Even if farm GDP grows at the current targeted level of 4%, achieving a 100% increase in farmers' income (or double) is impossible. For this, farm GDP actually has to grow at 15% annually for the next five years.

"The point is the budget has been determined by two parameters. One, it sticks to the fiscal limit and two, making operational the pay commission's recommendations. Therefore, you have very little to play with," Sen said.
Former prime minister Manmohan Singh said the government's plan to double the farmers' income in the next five years was an "impossible" dream.

Analysts said the real long-term healing touch could come from the budget's focus on expanding irrigation facilities.

At the all-India level, only 46.9% of 141 million hectares of total cropped area has irrigation cover, while farmers in the rest are heavily exposed to weather shocks.

In his budget speech, Jaitley announced adding 28.5 lakh hectares to the country's irrigation network under a more "effective" Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana.

Additionally, 23 of 89 irrigation projects under a separate scheme are targeted to be finished before March 31, 2017, he said.

Together, this can boost agriculture productivity in many critical areas.

"However, a lot depends on how states implement these programmes," said YK Alagh, former agriculture minister and economist.

On the face of it, allocation to the agriculture ministry went up by nearly 127% to Rs 35,983 crore from the previous year's Rs 15,809 crore.

However, a big reason for this jump is the shifting of the government's share of interest payments for farm loans to the agriculture ministry's budget from the finance ministry.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

'Higher allocation for farm sector will help alleviate rural distress'

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh

Unified electronic agri-market would ensure farmers get better price, says Farm Minister

The increased budgetary allocations for the agriculture sector in 2016-17 would help in alleviating the prevailing rural distress and trigger growth in the farm sector, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said on Tuesday.

Addressing reporters, Singh said the Narendra Modi government, ever since it assumed power, has been focussing on reducing the input costs through various initiatives, while trying to boost productivity and maximise the returns through different schemes for the farmers, besides raising the minimum support prices.

Higher allocations

Now, with higher budgetary allocations, the implementation of schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), creation of national agriculture market and organic value chain, the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Bima Yojana will gain momentum, he added.

Two years of consecutive drought has aggravated agrarian distress with a decline in farm sector growth impacting foodgrain output and hurting rural incomes.

Focus on irrigation

Singh said PMKSY will be implemented in mission mode and 28.5 lakh hectares will be brought under irrigation, for which ₹5,717 crore has been earmarked for next financial year.

Expediting implementation of 89 irrigation projects that have been lying incomplete for a long time, will help expand irrigation to 80.6 lakh hectares, he added.

Higher allocation to projects, such as MGNREGA would result in creation of five lakh farm ponds in rain-fed areas.

The Centre, including the States, has spent close to ₹1 lakh crore on various irrigation projects this year, Singh said.

Kisan Kalyan cess

On Monday, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley gave a major thrust to the agriculture sector in the Budget by almost doubling allocation to ₹44,485 crore and raising credit target to a record ₹9 lakh crore.

Also to fund the various agriculture schemes, the government has levied a Kisan Kalyan cess at 0.5 per cent on all taxable services from June.

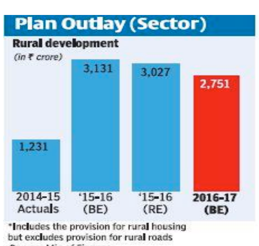
e-platform for agri

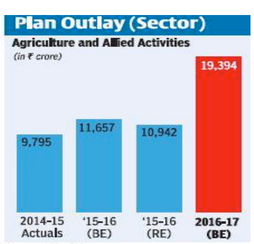
Singh said the launch of unified electronic agri-market on April 14 would also help in ensuring that farmers get better price in the market.

Reforms have been made in the APMC Act in 12 States, excluding Punjab.

The government expects to cover 200 markets by September 2016 and another 200 markets by March 2017 under the National Agriculture Market.

“We are targeting to cover 585 APMCs by March 2018,” he added.





Chana in bear grip

Bearish sentiment prevailed in chana on weak demand in pulses, even as arrival of new chana in local mandis is on the rise. Chana (kanta) ruled at ₹4,400-4,425 a quintal, while chana (desi) quoted at ₹4,250. Chana dal traded low on weak demand with chana dal (average) being quoted at ₹5,150-₹5,250, chana dal (medium) ruled at ₹5,350-₹5,450, while chana dal (bold) quoted at ₹5,500-5,650 a quintal. Amid arrival of 32,000-33,000 bags in mandis across Madhya Pradesh, dollar chana ruled at ₹5,800-₹6,000. In container, dollar chana ruled stable on subdued export demand with new dollar chana (42/44 count) being quoted at ₹6,825-50, 44/46 count at ₹6,600-25, 58/60 count at ₹6,025-50, while dollar chana 60/62 count was at ₹5,925-50 a quintal.

Cotton oil slips on weak offtake

Washed cotton oil moved down at wholesale market on weak demand from stockists followed by slow buying in retail market. Limited demand held the groundnut oil price at previous level. Washed cotton oil decreased by ₹8 to ₹560-563 per 10 kg. About 20-25 tankers of cotton oil were traded in Saurashtra's mills. Cotton oil new tin traded flat at ₹990-1,010 per 15 kg. According to traders, price of groundnut oil and cotton oil may decline in coming days on lower demand. Groundnut oil loose stood at ₹895-900 per 10 kg. Jamnagar line teliya tin was quoted at ₹1,390-1,391 per 15 kg and groundnut oil new tin remained unchanged at ₹1,585-1,590 per 15 kg in Saurashtra. It traded at ₹1,630-1,635 per 15 kg in rest of Gujarat. About 2 tankers of groundnut oil were traded here.

Cardamom continues to lose flavour

Small cardamom prices continued to decline last week on supply and demand mismatch at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Arrivals continued to stay on the higher side, while the demand has shrunk, market sources said.

A bumper crop this year has filled the inventories in the consuming centres throughout the country and as a result no buyers were seen active in the market, they said.

Exporters were also slow last week. They have bought an estimated 60 tonnes, export sources said.

Everybody is reportedly releasing their produce and as a result, prices slipped by ₹10-15 a kg. Arrival of inferior quality material also aided the price decline, they said. Supply of exportable grade 7mm and above cardamom continued to remain squeezed.

According to PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, intensive cultivation of cardamom in Kerala's Idukki district in recent years has raised the output of the commodity, of late, without a corresponding growth in consumption. This phenomenon has built up a mismatch in demand and supply with the latter outstripping the former, he pointed out.

Total arrivals last week stood at 673 tonnes from 11 auctions as against 722 tonnes from 12 auctions the previous week.

The individual auction average was vacillating between ₹520 and ₹560 a kg.

At the auction today in Cardamom Planters' Association, Santhanpara, arrivals were at 55.5 tonnes against 56.4 tonnes the last Monday. Of this, 53.9 tonnes were traded today. The auction average was at ₹525.75/kg.

Total arrivals during the season up to February 27 were at around 21,975 tonnes and sales were at 21,187 tonnes. The individual auction average as on February 27 stood at ₹607.72/kg.

Prices of graded varieties (₹/kg): 8mm bold good green colour 870-920; 7-8 mm 690-700; 6-7 mm 560-580; below 6 mm: 500. Good bulk was being traded at ₹530-560.

E-platform for agriculture gets a thumbs up

Shilpa Divekar Nirula CEO, Monsanto India Region

The Budget has rightly focused on the growth of agriculture, farmers and development of rural India. By acknowledging the contribution of farmers towards food security and emphasising the need for income security, the Budget has surely given the much needed impetus to rural India where agriculture is a mainstay. Irrigation and crop insurance are two of the key inputs that will help improve farm productivity in India. The attempt to bring 28.5 lakh hectares under the 'Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana', a dedicated irrigation fund under the "Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana" are admirable first steps. The United Agricultural Marketing ePlatform which aims to connect 585 agri mandis by March 2018 and will allow farmers to sell their produce at any mandi of their choice is an innovative step towards helping farmers realise fair and market determined prices for their produce thereby improving their incomes.

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MK Dhanuka MD, Dhanuka Agritech

Doubling the farmers' income in five years will have an encouraging impact on the financial conditions of farmers. Further, launching of e-platform for marketing is a welcome step as farmers will be able to get the right price for their crop. Allocation of ₹9 lakh crore for agriculture loan to farmers and ₹87,000 crore to rural sector will increase the rural demand. The government's thrust for growth of agriculture and rural sector development including implementation of schemes like soil health card, crop insurance and irrigation facilities will motivate farmer to continue his interest in agriculture.

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Rs. Khanna Chairman, Kwality Limited

There are many reasons to cheer. First is the government's initiative towards ensuring that farmer income doubles, second is the much required connectivity from farm to market, third is the 100% electricity by 2018 and most important, the much needed investment in animal husbandry, livestock breeding and cattle. In a nutshell, the road ahead looks positive and even good news for the already booming dairy sector. The government's announcement of ₹850 crore on animal husbandry, cattle and livestock breeding will bring in relief for the farmers. This will help increase milk production and our target of achieving a 20 per cent year-on-year growth.

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Shivendra Bajaj Executive Director, Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises, Agriculture Group (ABLE-AG)

The Finance Minister's focus on agriculture will enhance expenditure on the rural and agriculture sectors. The soil health card scheme, Fasal Bima Yojana and common e-market platform will help in improving the agriculture sector. However, it is disappointing to see no encouragement for agri-biotech research by public or private institutions for augmenting the agriculture sector. We further believe that for transforming the Indian agriculture, counter the ill-effects of climate change, improve livelihoods and address food requirements of the nation technological intervention is of utmost importance.

Fisheries sector missed out in Budget

The fisheries and aquaculture sector has raised concern for not including it in incentives and investments in line with agriculture proposals in the Budget.

Fisheries and aquaculture is an important sector for food production in the country as it provides nutritional security to nation's food basket, contributes to agro exports and provides employment to 14 million people, Kamlesh Gupta, Chairman and Managing Director, West Coast Group, said.

The Centre should note that aquaculture too faces challenges similar to agriculture – be it the climate, quantity and quality of harvest or price that is often determined by market forces.

Today, fisheries or aquaculture do not enjoy benefits of agriculture, even though the sectors come under the purview of Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF), under the auspice of Ministry of Agriculture. This needs to be corrected, he added.

Farm activists doubt 'higher' Budget allocation to agriculture

Farm sector organisations and activists on Tuesday said by claiming increased allocation for the farm sector in this year's Budget, the Narednra Modi government was pulling off a "PR stunt".

The amount allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare for its three departments appears to be ₹45,035 crore compared with ₹24,910 crore in 2015-16.

This is just 1.9 per cent of India's Budget, they said in a joint statement, adding that the increase was "mainly because of the inclusion of interest subvention fund of ₹15,000 crore in this Ministry this year, up from ₹12,000 crore."

This is plain jugglery with numbers, they said, adding that out of a total budget of around ₹36,000 crore for Department for Agriculture and Cooperation, crop insurance outlays of ₹5,500 crore, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana of ₹5,400 crore, Krishi Unnati Yojana of ₹6,949 crore along with interest subvention adds up to ₹32,850 crore.

Kavitha Kuruganti, Convenor, Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture, said: "A worrisome aspect is that disaster relief fund outlays have been kept very low. Farmers themselves have been asking for ₹10,000/acre."

Kiran Vissa of Rythu Swarajya Vedika said: “There are no allocations for ensuring remunerative prices to farmers in terms of higher MSPs or Market Intervention Scheme or Market Stabilisation Fund. The Price Stabilization Fund is being used only to benefit consumers, not producers.”

Weak futures drag cooking oils

Edible oils prices remained under pressure on back of weak futures amid appreciating rupee. Sources said stockists came forward with fresh orders taking advantage of lower prices with cautious mood. Vikram global commodities quoted Malaysian super palmolein at ₹558. Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹538, super palmolein ₹557 and soyabean refined oil ₹620. Ruchi’s rates: palmolein ₹530, soyabean refined oil ₹611, sunflower refined oil ₹765. In Saurashtra-Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin declined by ₹10 to ₹1,430 and loose (10 kg) at ₹910. BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 930 (940), soya ref. 610 (610), sunflower exp. ref. 680 (685), sunflower ref. 760 (760), rapeseed ref. oil 770 (780), rapeseed exp. ref. 740 (750), cottonseed ref. oil 600 (602) and palmolein 525 (528).

Business Standard

Fertile ground for farmers: Sumant Sinha

The power sector also has had its fair share of incentives, though not all are specifically spelt out in the Budget

The Union Budget is rural-centric.

Given two consecutive bad monsoons, the finance minister's focus on this segment was much needed. With total allocation for agriculture and farmer welfare at Rs 35,984 crore, this Budget will bring smiles on faces across rural India. Infrastructure is another point of focus for the government. Given the total outlay for infrastructure pegged at Rs 2.21 lakh crore, we can expect employment generation to take place at the ground level. This would also be significant in increasing consumer demand, which in turn will benefit the industry.

With regard to taxation, the Budget does not have a lot for large corporates. Rather, it has addressed issues that concern the common man, especially salaried individuals. But then again, the corporate tax has been lowered for corporates with a turnover of Rs 5 crore or less.

This move explicates the idea of promoting a start-up friendly economy. This is completely in line with the

Startup India programme that the government has launched. Not just that, this move will also encourage entrepreneurship and skill development across the nation.

The power sector also has had its fair share of incentives, though not all are specifically spelt out in the Budget. There are two vital announcements for the power industry. One, is the increase in cess on coal, which will encourage use of renewables. And two, the 100 per cent rural electrification goal by 2018 will definitely drive the sector forward.

Sumant Sinha

Chairman & CEO, ReNew Power

Great boost for agriculture, but tepid for infrastructure: Hemant Kanoria

Defence sector, which is supposed to be an integral part of the 'Make in India' programme, was almost entirely overlooked in the budget

This is the first budget in decades which has rightly given an 'implementation' based thrust to agriculture and rural segments. I think the specifics covered are practical and will surely yield results. It is not only about vision, but would actually act as a booster for the economy, covering the largest segment of our country’s population. However, I have not been enthused with the announcements pertaining to infrastructure, not because it has been neglected, but it does not have the specificity for implementation, unlike agriculture.

This budget has not only substantially enhanced the outlay for agriculture, it is also replete with many well thought through measures that address almost each and every aspect in the entire agri value chain right from irrigation to credit enhancement to procurement of agri-produce to market access or usage of digital platform to reach out to larger sections of the rural population. Add to that, the outlay allocated for building rural infrastructure. I feel this would provide considerable fillip to demand generation at the rural level and would also open up entrepreneurship opportunities. The rural sector will also largely benefit from the social sector schemes. The move to open up marketing of food products produced and manufactured in India to 100 percent FDI deserves special mention.

Focus has also been given to entrepreneurship encouragement, development, financing and support. These have been requests that we have been making to the government since quite some time. It is heartening to see the response and its manifestation in the budget document. We have to develop millions of entrepreneurs in our country to create opportunities for the youth.

The infrastructure sector, which is the backbone of the economy, has been addressed, but the announcements will take a long time for implementation. The proposals to introduce a Bill on resolution of disputes, to form new guidelines for renegotiation of PPP concession agreements and to have a new credit rating system for infrastructure projects are steps in the right direction, but an immediate time-frame for implementation should have been articulated. PPP in infrastructure must be put back on track and we have already lost precious time. Low-cost housing is likely to get a boost from the measures announced. Reforms in FDI policy for Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) and enabling a sponsor of an ARC to hold up to 100 percent stake in ARC is a welcome move as this is one area where we need more specialist players.

I welcome Finance Minister’s decision to restrict categorisation of budget expenditure as revenue and capital expenditures and move away from Plan and Non-plan expenditures. This will assist in portraying a clearer picture of which of the expenditure items are productive and which are not.

However, the issues on 'ease of doing business' and 'tax simplification and streamlining' seem to have escaped the notice of the Finance Minister in the milieu of issues. The corporate sector will not have much to rejoice for. The additional Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT) beyond a certain amount of dividend, trebling of Securities Transaction Tax (STT) for options, the introduction of new cesses in certain categories are some of the steps which are unlikely to go down well.

Determination of residency of foreign company on the basis of Place of Effective Management (POEM) stands deferred by one year while General Anti Avoidance Rules (GAAR) is to be made effective from FY18. When we need foreign investment, these steps may not be sending out the right signal to international investors, especially when the issue of Retrospective Taxation has already created quite a controversy. Allowing NBFCs to be eligible for deduction of up to 5 percent of their income in respect of provision for bad and doubtful debts is a positive move, although it is still not at par with banks.

I was quite surprised that the defence sector was almost entirely overlooked. When this sector is supposed to be an integral part of the 'Make in India' programme, I was expecting certain measures to be announced in this budget aimed at stimulating domestic production of defence equipment.

Punjab and Haryana may not gain from the thrust on agriculture in Union Budget

The projection of doubling the farm income by 2020 cannot be achieved here since the two states have a high yield of 10-12 tonne per acre

The euphoria over the thrust towards the agriculture in the Union Budget presented by the Union Finance Minister is missing in Punjab and Haryana. The states may not gain much from the announcements made in the budget statement.

The projection of doubling the farm income by 2020 cannot be achieved here since the two states have a high yield of 10-12 tonne per acre. According to the economists, the average yield here is comparable to the yield in the international farming and cannot be increased substantially.Thus raising the income to this extent may not be plausible.

Talking to *Buisness Standard*, Manpreet Badal, and former Finance Minister of Punjab said that doubling the income in six years means to achieve a 15% year-on-year growth in agriculture. "This cannot be achieved in a short span of time. There is a need to wean away the people from agriculture to other sectors and arm them with skillsets in Punjab," Badal said.

Punjab has already refused to accept the Crop Insurance Scheme of the Centre as the state wants a lower premium rate for the farmers. Punjab is also not ready to knock down the trade barrier for the Unified Agriculture Marketing Scheme that envisages a common e-market platform for 585 regulated wholesale markets. The budget has allocated Rs 15,000 cr towards the interest subvention, to ease out the debt repayment of the farmers in the drought hit areas.

The states of Punjab and Haryana fall under irrigated areas and the farmers here would not be eligible for this relaxation on the borrowing from institutional sector. Farmers have welcomed the 0.5% Krishi Kalyan cess which is proposed to be used for financing initiatives for improvement of agriculture and welfare of farmers. Punjab is hoping to get Rs 7,200 cr for revamping its canal network for four major projects. The Finance Minister has allocated 17,000 cr for irrigation projects under Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Program scheme.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Farmers seek patent seed varieties

Nashik: Farmers from North Maharashtra, especially Nashik, have demanded that the government must supply patent varieties of seeds to boost their yield.

They felt that instead of tempting them with 0.5% cess, the Union government should have given the required boost in energy and irrigation sectors. Nashik region has been reeling under water scarcity with 1,633 villages being declared drought-hit.

"In small countries like Israel and Peru, the government has made patent varieties of seeds available to the farmers. We should also get patent varieties," said Kailas Bhosle, chairman of Central Science Committee of Maharashtra Rajya Draksha Bagayatdar Sangh.

"These countries sell better grapes due to the use of patent varieties. Patent variety seeds should also be given for pomegranates. They have made some good provisions for farmers but basic things have been ignored," he said.

There were 85 suicides by farmers in 2015 (of which 27 were rejected). This year, till date there has been eight incidents. There are total 54 tankers in the district and 191 villages have are being supplied water through tankers.

Ramnath Porje, a farmer, said the government had made provisions for irrigation, drought and had also attempted to prevent farmer suicides but there was a lot more to be done. The government could do provide patent varieties of seeds. "Until this is implemented. we cannot say the budget is in our favour," said Shivraj Dhonde, another farmer.

Ashwini Kulkarni, working for rural development with Pragati Abhiyan, said, "Allocations under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are welcome and the ATMs for post offices will help villagers withdraw money easily. Forty percent of the country is reeling under drought and there is no provision for watershed development and the untied funds under the 14the financial commission have also not been mentioned. It is good that they have realised small farmers are dependent on MNREGA for irrigation. Some measures like 100% FDI for marketing of food processing and soil health cards are very welcome."

Giridhar Patil, expert in agro economy, said, "About 65% of the country's population is dependent on agriculture. They are not paying attention to important points. The market committee rules should be scrapped. No new technology for agriculture has been announced."

Ensure farmers benefit from crop insurance: Modi

PM Narendra Modi on Tuesday urged BJP MPs to ensure that all farmers got the benefit of the new Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana while travelling in their constituencies. Speaking at a meeting of the parliamentary party, BJP chief Amit Shah praised the government for a "pro-farmer and pro-village" Budget. Parliamentary affairs minister Venkaiah Naidu said some sections of the opposition were indulging in a disinformation campaign.

Rain, hailstorms damage rabi crops on 40k hectares

Pune: Untimely rain and hailstorms over the last four days have damaged rabi crops like gram, wheat, grapes, mangoes and vegetables on around 40,000 hectares of land in various parts of the state.

Most of the damage was reported from the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. While the weather department has predicted even more rain in coming days, the state agriculture department has initiated steps to assess the quantum and severity of the crop damage.

The areas that have been worst-hit include Amravati, Yavatmal, Wardha and some pockets of Marathwada. Agriculture department officials said ready-to-harvest fields of wheat and gram, which are among the main winter crops, have been damaged in some places. Grapes and mangoes among the horticulture crops have been affected. However, the mango orchards in the Konkan region have been spared so far.

Local officials accompanied by revenue officials are visiting farms to assess the crop losses. The field visits will be followed by panchanamas.

Besides Vidarbha and Marathwada, many parts of western Maharashtra including Kolhapur, Satara and Sangli received heavy spells of rain over the last four days, wreaking havoc in jowar fields and banana and pomegranate farms.

In Jat tehsil in Sangli, mangoes and grapes were damaged on 20 acres of land. Tehsildar Abhijeet Patil told TOI that Jat received as much as 30mm rainfall in barely a couple of hours. B R Sawant of Banali village in the tehsil said the entire flowering of his mango crop over 7.5 acres was affected due to the heavy rain. "All the plants were of the kesar variety," he said.

Rural parts of Pune also received rainfall on Monday and preliminary estimates have it that crops were damaged on about 4,000 hectares of land. According to sources, this is the third consecutive year that the state has received untimely rain and hailstorms leading to crop losses.

Meanwhile, two more deaths due to lightning were reported from Nashik district on Tuesday. A 17-year-old girl, Sheetal Halde, who was working in the fields in Kalwan taluka, and a 12-year-old boy, Shaikh Aboozar Shaikh

Hasan, in Malegaon died on the spot after being struck by lightning. On Monday, 14-year-old Shaikh Irfan Shaikh Feroz was similarly killed in Malegaon.

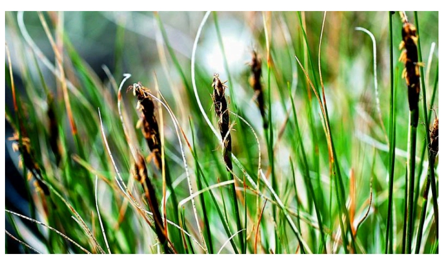
Heavy rains were reported in Ozar, about 20km from Nashik, and Nashik Road and Deolali Camp, resulting in waterlogging on roads. Power supply was disrupted for more than two hours. The ongoing Jain symposium at the Mangi Tungi hills, around 120km from Nashik, was called off on Tuesday due to waterlogging. Jalgaon and Dhule also witnessed heavy rainfall on the day.

Shrinivas Aundhkar, director of the Mahatma Gandhi Mission, Centre for Astronomy and Space Technology, Nanded, said, "The hailstorms are a result of very cold waves of western disturbances flowing over central India. The moisture from the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea have accentuated the hailstorm activity."

DECCAN Chronicle

Tibetan plants can signal arrival of monsoon: Study

Research undertaken by Chinese and German researchers concluded that alpine meadow plants such as Kobresia are rainfall-sensitive.



According the study alpine meadow plants unfold their leaves regardless of changes in temperature, as they are more sensitive to rainfall. (Photo: Via web)

Beijing: Tibetan alpine meadow plants are sensitive to rainfall and can forecast the arrival of Indian monsoon, according to a first-of-its-kind study which focused on vegetation regreening on Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

The research undertaken by Chinese and German researchers concluded that alpine meadow plants such as Kobresia are rainfall-sensitive and can be used to forecast monsoon, Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) said.

Researchers from CAS carried out observations for more than two decades at five scientific stations on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, focusing on vegetation regreening that happens when plants unfold their leaves.

“I read an article about glacier change focused on the same location where my observation team was, and found that the timing of the Indian monsoon from 2001 to 2012 nearly coincided with the vegetation regreening process,” said Luo Tianxiang, researcher from the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research of the CAS.

Luo later contacted the author of the article, a German scientist Thomas Molg, and they jointly published the study on vegetation regreening, which showed that certain plants possess weather-forecasting abilities.

The study showed that such plants unfold their leaves regardless of changes in temperature, as they are more sensitive to rainfall, dispelling the previously believed theory that temperature was the main cause of vegetation regreening at high altitudes.

“These plants fold their leaves to protect themselves from dry conditions and cold, and unfold to get the rain they need to grow. It is as if they have a biological clock for changes in rainfall,” Luo was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

The article about the discovery,” Leaf unfolding of Tibetan alpine meadows captures the arrival of monsoon rainfall,” was published in British journal Scientific Reports.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Budget 2016: Agriculture may grow 4% in FY17, says Radha Mohan Singh

The Budget has also earmarked Rs 38,500 crore for the rural job guarantee scheme. Singh said the funds raised though the cess will be used to fund various farm initiatives.

NEW DELHI: Agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh expects the country to achieve 4% growth in the farm sector next fiscal year, helped by the Budget boost and on early predictions of a favourable monsoon. "I am told by scientists and officials that this year the monsoon is looking good.

It should not be a drought year, which is good news for farmers and the agrarian sector," he said. The various welfare and infrastructure development schemes announced by the government will help achieve the growth target, he said. The Budget presented on Monday has allocated Rs 35,984 crore for the agriculture sector and farmers' welfare, with major thrust on irrigation programmes. Funds will be mobilised by levying a Krishi Kalyan Cess on all taxable services and a Krishi Kalyan surcharge on domestic undisclosed income.

The Budget has also earmarked Rs 38,500 crore for the rural job guarantee scheme. Singh said the funds raised though the cess will be used to fund various farm initiatives.

Performance of the agriculture sector has been patchy in recent years - it grew 1.5% in 2012-13 and 4.2% in 2013-14, but then shrank 0.2% in 2014-15. Estimates for 2015-16 suggest a 1.1% expansion. The uncertainties in growth are explained by the fact that 60% of agriculture in India is rain dependent and there have been two consecutive years of less than normal rainfall.

This year, the government plans to bring every block affected by drought and natural calamities under the Deen Dayal Antyodaya Mission.

Under this, self-help groups will be formed by the government and they will be provided training in various disciplines, Singh said.

Cluster privileges team will be constituted under the rural employment scheme which will ensure water conservation and management of natural resources, the minister said.

Government to procure 15,000 tons onion for buffer stock

The procurement of onions would begin from next month, a top official in the Consumer Affairs Ministry official said.

NEW DELHI: The government will buy 15,000 tonnes of onion from farmers to create a buffer stock to be utilised for market intervention in the event of price rise during a lean season.

The procurement of onions would begin from next month, a top official in the Consumer Affairs Ministry official said.

Last year, the retail price of onion had skyrocketed to about Rs 80-90 per kg. The sharp rise in prices had forced the government to boost supply in the market by purchasing onions from domestic as well as overseas market.

"We have decided to buy 15,000 tonnes of onion from next month from Lasalgaon in Maharashtra," Consumer Affairs Secretary C Viswanath told reporters.

He said nodal agencies Nafed and SFAC will do the procurement of onion. The stock would be kept at Lasalgoan. "The government will intervene in the market if there is any price rise in any parts of the country," he added.

The Price Stabilisation Fund would be utilised for this purpose.

Last year, the government had procured 8,000 tonnes of onion but it was done after the retail prices had gone through the roof.

This time, the Consumer Affairs Ministry has been asked to prepare timely import plans for pulses and onions. It has also been asked to intervene in the market on time so that consumers are not affected by price rise.

Onion production is estimated to be increase to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, Minister of State for Agriculture Mohanbhai Kundariya said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha today.

In view of fall in onion prices, the government has removed the minimum export price of onion on December 24, 2015, he added.

"Despite drought during the current year and excessive rains in southern states, onion production during the current 2015-16 agriculture year is expected to be higher as compared to the previous year," Kundariya said.

At present, retail price of onion is ruling at Rs 20 per kg in the national capital. Normally, prices flare up during August-September period.

High value First Flush tea production may go down as low as to 30%

After gross negative deviation from normal winter rainfall, very low humidity and rising temperature are making tea planters in Darjeeling and Sub Himalayan region apprehensive of upto 70 per cent downfall in production.

SILIGURI: After gross negative deviation from normal winter rainfall, very low humidity and rising temperature are making tea planters in Darjeeling and Sub Himalayan region apprehensive of upto 70 per cent downfall in production volume of high valued post winter first batch tea, known as 'First Flush.'

After wintertime no plucking and bush maintenance phase, fresh batch of high quality healthy leaf, known as first flush, starts coming in heavy quantity from end February to continue till March end.

Volumewise, this first flush contributes 20 per cent to total 300 million kg total output of Terai, Doars and Darjeeling tea belt. But its valuewise contribution is over 35 per cent making it too important for the planters.

"First flush demands adequate winter time rainfall and conducive post winter weather parameter. As both are missing this time, production volume may go as low as 30 per cent," said highly worried Mr K. K. Mintri, veteran planter and Chairman of Terai Indian Planters' Association.

The same was echoed by Mr B. G. Chakroborty, President of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Grower's Association (CISTA). The Confederation has over 10,000 member tea farmers in this region.

As per Indian meteorological record, Darjeeling hilly region or Terai and Dooars in foothills recorded 60-90 per cent less than normal rainfall during 1st January to 24th February. December was also almost completely dry. Following that, the humidity figure has gone down at a very low level of below 45 per cent.

According senior Tea Scientist D. Bargohain, too dry soil and air badly affect both quality and quantity of first flush. As an additional crisis, both minimum and maximum temperature have started climbing over 5 degree above normal level.

"This is increasing pest proliferation at high rate. Looper or Red Spider are few of these pests to cause irreversible damage to not only first flush but bushes too. But we cannot use strong synthetic pesticides because of regulations. The new approved pesticide compounds are highly expensive." said Mr Mintri.

"With extra irrigation and pesticide demand, maintenance cost of garden is going significantly. Overall the situation putting the whole labour intensive industry under a major crisis," he added.

Budget 2016: FM Arun Jaitley announces slew of measures to end rural distress

Farmers are expected to gain from investment in irrigation, agri-markets, dairies and a more transparent procurement of grain by official agencies, but experts said it may take time for these steps to end rural distress that has risen after the monsoon failed in the past two years.

Companies in the sector were upbeat about growth of output as well as rural demand, although farmers were circumspect after FM Arun Jaitley announced measures to help farmers double their incomes in the next five years.

The series of steps in the Budget, along with crop insurance schemes already announced and the high probability of good monsoon this year, are expected to help farmers ahead of crucial assembly elections, analysts said.

Kwality chairman RS Khanna found many reasons to cheer. "First is the government's initiative towards doubling farmer income, second is the much-required connectivity from farm to market, third is the 100% electricity by 2018 and most important, the investment in animal husbandry, livestock breeding and cattle," he said.

Dhanuka Agritech managing director MK Dhanuka said the sector will gain from 28.5 lakh hectares to be brought under irrigation and 23 projects to be completed by March 2017. "The launch of e-platform for marketing will enable the farmer to get the right price for his crop," he said.

However, farmers wanted more clarity. "The government has finally realised the extent of rural distress, but this ruralcentric budget should not be expected to end the distress soon," said Ajay Vir Jakhar, chairman of Bharat Krishak Samaj, a farmers' association.

Air Deccan founder captain GR Gopinath, who is now involved in farming, said bolder steps could have been taken. "Fertiliser subsidy should have been transferred through direct transfer to farmers holding 5 acres and less, and fertiliser subsidies to corporates and cooperatives should be eliminated," he said.

Some experts said farmers, who had seen three crops damaged by bad weather, needed immediate relief. "Over the next one month, farmers will not get any benefit when they start harvesting crop or when they go for planting operation of summer crops," said Sudhir Panwar, president of the Kisan Jagriti Manch.

The decentralisation of the procurement policy of grains, online purchases by the Food Corporation of India and procurement of pulses with enhanced allocation were welcome steps, said Sukhpal Singh, a professor at the Centre for Management in Agriculture at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

Food analyst Devender Sharma asked why farmers should wait for five years to double their income. "At present, average income of a farmer in 17 states is just Rs 1,700 per month. Why can't we give him an economic bailout?" he asked.