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THE HINDU

Technology for making jackfruit powder developed

Only fruit's rind needs to be removed, no use of artificial substance

In an effort to explore the full potential of jackfruit, which still remains under-exploited as a food crop in the country, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) attached to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research has developed a unique technology, enabling the common man to produce whole jackfruit powder.

C.P. Robert, senior scientist and head of the KVK centre run by the Christian Agency for Rural Development (CARD) at Thelliyoor near Thiruvalla, told *The Hindu* that popularisation of the new technology, which itself was a simple and smart process, would ensure no wastage of jackfruit in Kerala.

“We have developed a smart way of tapping the potential of jackfruit which could make every Kerala household a hub for processing jackfruit. Our attempt is to ensure that no jackfruit is wasted in the State so that an estimated loss of this indigenous fruit to the tune of Rs.15,000 crore could be added to the State's coffers, besides enriching the health of every rural household,” Dr. Robert said.

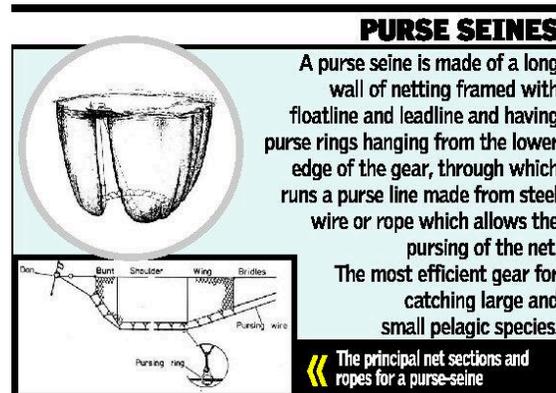
Simple tech

The KVK has made the technology simple for common man.

The whole jackfruit powder could be used as a raw material for developing health drinks and food products for patients, children and elderly people.

The process of making jackfruit powder involved dehydration of the raw jack, after removing its rind portion, and no artificial food additives or preservatives were used in the process, said Rincy K. Abraham, subject matter specialist, KVK.

Move on juvenile fish may face challenges



The assurance given by the union Agriculture Ministry on regulating juvenile fish catch has been welcomed by traditional fishers but experts feel that it is likely to run into stiff resistance from the Commerce Ministry and the aquaculture industry. A section of fishermen feels that the proposed nationwide regulation on the use of purse seine nets would be difficult as it could cut off the supply of raw material for fish meal plants catering to the needs of aquaculture farms exporting shrimp.

Last week, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh had assured a delegation of traditional fishers that the Centre would direct all coastal States to curb pair trawling and regulate the use of purse seine nets that scoop up large quantities of juvenile fish, resulting in rapid depletion of stocks.

Early this year, the Maharashtra government had decided not to issue fresh licence for purse seine fishing in the state as it was found to have an adverse impact on the breeding cycle of several species. It is this regulation that the Centre proposes to implement in all coastal States, says T.Peter, secretary, National Fishworkers Forum. Regulating the use of purse seine or ring seine nets is a complex issue, says Joseph Xavier Kalappurackal, general secretary, All Kerala Fishing Boat Operators Association.

Last July, in a bid to curb the catch of juvenile fish, the Kerala government had notified the Minimum Legal Size (MLS) for eight fish, four crustacean, and two molluscan stocks. With enforcement officials launching a heavy crackdown on boats docking at harbours in Kerala, vessels operating from fish landing harbours in Kerala have relocated to Muttom in Tamil Nadu. Much of the juvenile fish catch is accidental, according to fishermen.

Scientists stress the need for comprehensive legislation and an inter state mechanism for fisheries management across the country. “A co management system with the active participation of fishers is the solution,” says a scientist involved in policy formulation.

Experts call for scientific fisheries management

‘Unregulated fishing threatening livelihoods’

A workshop on good practices in seafood traceability in Asia to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing cautioned that illegal fish products were threatening the livelihood, food security and long-term growth of seafood industry in Asia.

Quoting a recent Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report, the experts pointed out that the IUU fishing could account for up to 26 million tonnes a year. It also amounted to more than 15 per cent of the world’s total annual capture fisheries output, according to the report.

56,000 farmers in Mysuru trade online



While 1.6 million farmers across Karnataka have enrolled for online trading, the authorities have launched a drive to expand the network.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

The unified marketing platform helps farmers get a better remunerative price

More than 56,000 farmers in Mysuru district are availing the benefits of online trading in agricultural commodities facilitated by the online unified marketing platform established by the government by networking APMCs across the State.

The unified marketing platform has created a single virtual market by networking 103 of 156 APMCs in the State and widened the reach for farmers, who look for remunerative price for their produce.

While 1.6 million farmers across Karnataka have enrolled for online trading, the authorities have launched a drive to expand the network.

Srinivas Reddy, Assistant Director, Department of Agricultural Marketing, told *The Hindu* that the concept was a fallout of the Agricultural Marketing Reforms 2013, and leverages software and information technology to the fullest to make agricultural marketing a transparent affair.

The farmers get a better remunerative price, while the scourge of middlemen and brokers, who corner the bulk of the profits, is completely eliminated, said Mr. Reddy. All 156 APMCs in the State will be integrated in due course, and the registered traders, who can bid online, has surpassed 80,000 so far, he added.

“A direct benefit is that the market for the farmers produce has widened and a trader from Bidar can now make purchase online the produce in Mysuru and the amount is credited to the farmer’s account within 24 hours,” he said. As a result, between 2014 and 2016, the value of online transaction in agricultural commodities surpassed Rs. 19,106 crore in the State and these figures are set to increase manifold.

In Mysuru district, the Mysuru APMC yard and the Santhe Sargur APMC are networked under the unified platform and over 2,500 traders bid online in the district alone.

Before the introduction of the concept, the farmers used to bring their agricultural produce to the local APMC and were at the mercy of the limited number of merchants and traders. “But with online trading, farmers get the

best quote as their produce is graded and the certificate authenticating the grade is posted online,” Mr. Reddy said.

The authorities are also fine-tuning logistics to provide for transportation complete with details of vehicles or agencies, besides loading and unloading charges.

Karnataka model

The virtual trade in agricultural commodities does not require that farmers be proficient in computer or have broadband facilities. All they need is transport the produce to the market, where it is graded and rates are quoted by merchants from across the State online. The farmers only have to register their mobile numbers and the bidder’s rate is messaged to them. If the farmers find it remunerative, they can confirm over phone.

Benefits include a broader market, more competitive price, elimination of middlemen, and transparency. In view of its benefits, the concept is being replicated across the country and branded as the ‘Karnataka Model’, said Srinivas Reddy, Assistant Director, Department of Agricultural Marketing, Mysuru.

Concern over excessive use of fertilizer

Telangana State Cooperative Bank (TSCOB) chairman K. Ravinder Rao has expressed concern over excessive usage of fertilizer and urea by farmers. The excessive use of fertilizer is damaging the fertility of the soil, and also the toxins are getting stuck to the food grains and effecting the exports of farm produces, he said.

Presiding over the regional cooperative conference of Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) of North Telangana districts in Karimnagar on Tuesday, he called upon them to use fertilizer judiciously. Informing farmers to accord priority to water management, he said that they should also go in for drip and sprinkler irrigation system for more yield.

Lauding the performance of IFFCO, he said that the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) should aim high and increase the sales of IFFCO products.

New insurance scheme to cover 50% of farmers, says Jaitley

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) will reduce the distress of farmers in the country as it will grant insurance cover to 50 per cent of them, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said.

“We have had crop insurance schemes in the past also. There has been a considerable debate about the effectiveness of those schemes. To be fair, they met with a modest level of success,” Mr. Jaitley said at an event at NABARD.

“But that can't be the level of our ambition, particularly because agriculture is one sector which is absolutely critical to the Indian economy,” he said.

If India were to develop and get rid of poverty, the agriculture sector needs to grow at a faster pace. “The last two crop seasons have been adversely affected on account of inadequate monsoons. We need to put a veil of some security around the farmers,” Mr. Jaitley said.

Anjali Chib Duggal, Secretary, Financial Services, said under the new scheme, the government was planning to impose penalties for delays in settlement of farmers' claims.

Under the scheme, farmers will pay a lower premium for more coverage, while compensation will be higher in the event of any crop failure or damage. The scheme will be rolled out on a “mission mode” from April to cover kharif or summer crop from this year itself, according to the government.

Ms. Duggal said that the scheme was drafted after much consultation with all stakeholders. She felt that the scheme should percolate to the ground level and aim at bringing a large number of farmers under insurance.

The country, which has seen two successive droughts, is hoping for a better monsoon this year. Mr. Jaitley said that the systems would be on test, if there was another drought.

Steps taken to prevent forest fire, give water for animals

As summer gradually scaling to its peak, the forest officials have come up with steps to prevent the possibilities of forest fires caused by human interventions, and to keep wild animals away from straying into 17 human habitations in the district.

To avert any triggering of forest fires from cigarette butts thrown carelessly by people passing in vehicles, the forest officials have now created 'fire lines' by removing vegetations for a width of 6m on road sides in Anamalai Tiger Reserve areas coming under Udumalpet and Amaravathi forest ranges.

"The 'fire lines' have been created along roads connecting Udumalpet with Chinnar, Mavadappu with Kurumalai and Chinnar with Manjampatty, for a total length of 100 km. These 'fire lines' will help avoid any dry plants from catching fire which could eventually spread deep into the forests," said District Forest Officer A. Periasamy.

For ensuring adequate water inside the forests itself, the officials have now repaired two check dams, and impounded water over an expanse of 1.5 acre each and 15 ft deep.

Ten artificially created troughs inside the forests in Udumalpet and Amaravathi ranges have been cleaned now to periodically fill with fresh water.

"We will be filling four of the troughs with water drawn from solar-power operated borewells. The remaining six troughs will be filled by forest officials with water taken through tractors," said Mr. Periasamy.

Forest officials said that animals which were found consuming agriculture crops in many areas actually come out for water.

"When they see the crops, they tend to eat them. So providing enough water sources can prevent man-animal conflicts," they said.

Agri sector has to grow fastest to eradicate poverty: Jaitley

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Tuesday laid bare the priority of the government, saying agriculture will have to grow “fastest” for the country to get rid of poverty and push the overall GDP expansion.

“If India is to grow and get rid of poverty, the agriculture sector has to grow the fastest... agriculture is critical to the economy,” Mr. Jaitley said at a seminar on the recently-announced Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) at Nabard here.

With two successive bad monsoons, the finance minister said a poor rainfall this year will put the “system to test“.

PMFBY, he said, will be rolled out in a “mission mode” from April to cover kharif or summer crop from this year itself.

The scheme has the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and “end the scar of farmer suicides” affecting parts of the country.

Tomato growers suffer loss due to sudden price crash



Bhimareddy Rampurahalli with his tomato crop at his field in Hattikuni village in Yadgir district.

Tomato growers in Yadgir district have suffered a loss owing to sudden price crash. Switching over from traditional farming methods to hi-tech

methods, with hopes of better returns, many small and marginal farmers have taken up shade net cultivation in the district.

But, many are reportedly suffering loss due to several reasons, including sudden price crash in the open market.

Bhimareddy Rampurahalli (46) of Hattikuni village in Yadgir taluk is one among them. He planted around 5,500 tomato saplings in one acre of land under shade net cultivation in January 2016 and also got a bumper yield. After seeing the yield, he hoped for a better price. But his hopes were dashed as the price crashed suddenly in the open market. The price of tomato fell to Rs. 5 per kg from Rs. 25 per kg in a month. Meanwhile, buyers offered Rs. 100-Rs. 120 per bag (weighing 20 kg).

Unhappy with this, Bhimareddy Rampurahalli, who was left with no option, has sold around 1,000 kg since the first week of March at cheap price. Bhimareddy Rampurahalli invested around Rs. 34 lakh, including on developing the land and installing nets using hi-tech methods. He drilled an extra borewell to meet the water needs of the crop. He also set up a transformer to avoid interruption in power supply. “I made all-out efforts to cultivate the crop with modern techniques. But, even after I got a good yield, the price crash is causing concern,” Bhimareddy Rampurahalli told *The Hindu* .

He has lost hopes of getting even half the money he invested from the remaining tomato crop.

Bhimareddy Rampurahalli also said that the government has not released the subsidy amount of Rs. 17 lakh as per norms, despite reminders sent to the officials.

Satish Kumar, Deputy Director of Horticulture, said that there was no scheme to help farmers who suffer loss owing to price crash of crops taken up under shade net cultivation.

Paddy procurement

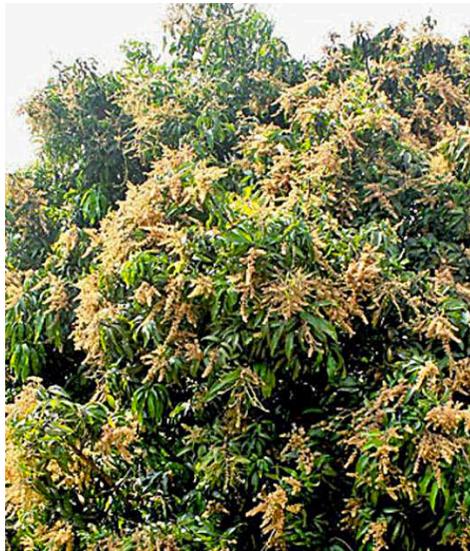
District magistrates told to initiate more centres

The Commissioner of Civil Supplies has informed that orders have been issued to all district magistrates to initiate as many paddy procurement

centres as possible with provision of basic amenities to the farmers and also ensure online payment within 48 hours from April 1 onwards.

All the transport vehicles would be equipped with GPS systems on all stage one and stage two procurement vehicles from April 1 onwards. Reviewing the procurement for Rabi with all the depot managers of the Civil Supplies Corporation here on Tuesday, the Commissioner pointed out that the pilot scheme to provide online payment system was started during the kharif across the State and 10 per cent of the farmers benefited, a press release said.

Mango hub goes the organic way



Mango trees in full bloom at Muthalamada in Palakkad. The Ashrayam Rural Development Society has started an initiative to make value-added products from organically cultivated mangoes.—Photo: K. K. Mustafah

Value-added mango products to hit market soon

: In a welcome initiative to shrug off the dubious legacy of Kerala's mango capital Muthalamada as a toxic hub where orchards indiscriminately spray high-end pesticides on fruits, a grassroots-level initiative is now taking place with women of the panchayat getting training in processing and making value-added products using organically cultivated mangoes. Half-a-dozen such mango-based products would hit the Kerala markets on the occasion of Vishu, the harvest festival.

“We began the initiative in Pothanpadam village by training 20 women to make pickle using both fresh mangoes and dried mangoes. They are also trained to make mango pulp, mango jam, ready-to-consume mango drinks and mango-based confectionaries. The Muthalamada Mango Farmers Association (MGFA) and leading traders in the panchayats will ensure supply of the organically grown mangoes and sale of the finished products. The products would be made available across the State in a fortnight,” said S. Guruvayurappan of Ashrayam Rural Development Society, which has taken up the initiative.

Talking to *The Hindu*, he said the aim of his organisation was to gradually transform Muthalamada into a fully-organic mango destination.

The mango season has just started in Muthalamada and over 300 mango growers are now marketing fully organically cultivated mangoes.

“The new initiative to make mango-based products has secured the support of even farmers and traders. Farmers lost many export orders in the recent past owing to the heavy use of pesticides and chemicals. We have also approached the State government seeking establishment of a mango research centre in Muthalamada with reputed scientists at the helm to guide us further in the organic way,” said Arumugan Pathichira, a social activist in the panchayats.

“Ashrayam is now providing training to mango farmers to develop enzymes using vegetable and fruit wastes. Mixing 3 kg of vegetable or fruit waste with 1 kg of black jaggery and 10 litres of water and keeping the mix for next 90 days would create enzyme for a normal plantation. Apart from being a killer of pests, it would also help growth of quality mangoes,” said Mr. Guruvayurappan, who is also an expert in bio-fertilizers.

Aswaraopeta has huge potential for apiculture

The enormous potential for promotion of apiculture (beekeeping) as a means to provide alternative income to farmers is waiting to be tapped in Aswaraopeta, the horticultural hub of Telangana.

Aswaraopeta and its surrounding mandals including Dammampeta in Khammam district account for the lion’s share of horticultural crops in the entire Telangana State.

Oil palm plantations are mainly concentrated in Aswaraopeta and Dammapeta mandals. The total area under the oil palm cultivation is 30,000 acres in the district. Coconut plantations are spread in over 2,000 acres in the two mandals.

Aswaraopeta mandal encompasses a sprawling coconut seed garden, horticulture research station, and around 200 private horticulture nurseries. The mandal consisting of nurseries of diverse range of horticulture crops including coconut, oil palm, mango, and cashew is considered most suitable for beekeeping.

Availability of flower bearing plants that bloom almost throughout the year and abundant nectar to support beekeeping activity on a commercial scale make Aswaraopeta mandal the ideal place for taking up the agro-based income generation activity, notes Prabhakar, an oil palm grower of Aswaraopeta.

Beekeeping has lot of financial potential as it helps produce a wide range of bee products including honey, jelly, wax and pollen which are in huge demand in the market.

The drastic decline in honey collection in Bhadrachalam Agency has necessitated the need for promotion of apiculture to meet the burgeoning demand for honey in the open market, he points out.

Apart from honey production, beekeeping activity also aids cross pollination thereby helping in maximising the horticultural crop yield, says R Srinivasa Rao, Deputy Director, Horticulture Department, Khammam.

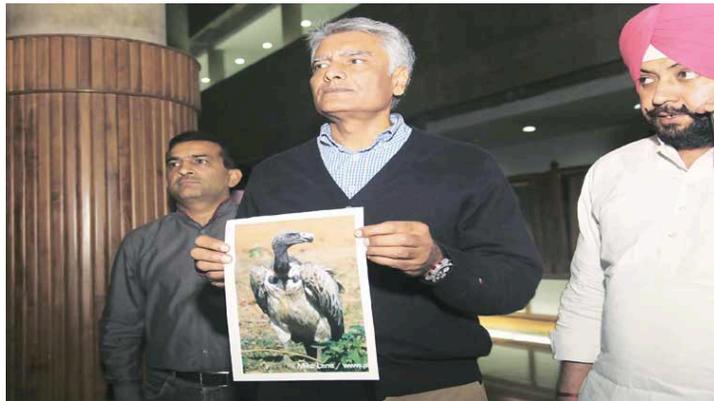
A proposal to provide training to some field level functionaries and horticulture farmers of the mandal on scientific methods of beekeeping at a reputed institute in the neighbouring State is under consideration, he says.

Fruit cultivation

Karnataka Farmers' Resource Centre, Bagalkot, will conduct a three-day training programme on growing fruits like mango, banana, papaya and sapota in April. Those who are interested should register names by April 12. Call 9482630790 for details.

Punjab passes Bill on settlement of agri loans

As per the proposed legislation, on and from the commencement of the Act, no Civil Court shall entertain any new suit filed for the recovery of any debt covered under the Act.



Punjab Congress leader Sunil Jakhar carries a poster of a vulture, likening the Punjab government to the bird, at Punjab Vidhan Sabha Tuesday. Jaipal Singh

Punjab Assembly Tuesday passed “The Punjab Settlement of Agricultural Indebtedness Bill, 2016”, which stipulates that the interest payable on debt shall be calculated at such rate as may be notified by the government. This would be in consonance with the interest rates charged by banks on yearly basis.

The bill, aimed at providing “fair and expeditious settlement of agriculturists’ debt-related disputes”, also stipulates that the pledged property of the debtor who has repaid to the creditor double or more than double the principal amount or pays any amount which makes the total repayment equal to double the principal amount shall stand released and debt deemed to be discharged.

As per the proposed legislation, on and from the commencement of the Act, no Civil Court shall entertain any new suit filed for the recovery of any debt

covered under the Act. Also, any suit pending before a civil court, once the Act is in place, in respect of any such debt shall be transferred by that court to the Forum having jurisdiction in the matter.

Opposition Congress, however, slammed the government on the proposed bill after it was introduced by Agriculture Minister Tota Singh. Stating that it belied their expectations, Leader of Opposition Charanjit Singh Channi said the government should have made a provision to ensure that private money lenders charge interest at the rates banks gave the loans.

“If bank gives loan at, for example, 9 per cent interest rates, arhtiya (commission agent/private money lender) can charge a maximum of 10 per cent interest,” Channi said, seeking a provision to regulate the interest at which private lenders gave loans to the farmers. He said the focus should have been to pull the farmers out of the debt trap.

Channi said the SAD-BJP combine government should take up the matter with the Centre to seek debt waiver for Punjab to give relief to the farmers. Congress legislator Jagmohan Singh Kang, too, raised the issue and said he “appeals to (Chief Minister Parkash Singh) Badal sahib that let’s go to (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi together (to seek debt waiver)”.

He also said, “The last UPA government had waived off Rs 40,000 crore debt.” Congress leader Sunil Jakhar said the issue at hand was how to save farmers from (committing) suicides.

He added what was needed to be ensured was that farmers do not feel the need of taking loan. Jakhar said farmers faced vagaries of weather and all odds, but had to contend with whatever Minimum Support Price was given to them for their produce. Jakhar took exception to the “more than double recovery” clause and equated the bill with a “defunct One Time Settlement scheme”, which he said was brought “last year too”.

He also questioned the government on encouraging farmers to go fo maize cultivation. He said while farmers went on to sow maize, its MSP came down from Rs 1550 to Rs 1150 “by one stroke of pen” due to the Centre’s decision to do away with 40 percent import duty on maize. Jakhar said the proposed bill was nothing more than “patch work or Band Aid” as far as farmer woes were concerned.

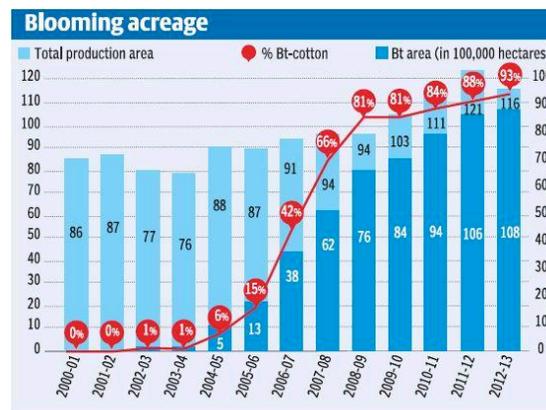
Jakhar also alleged irregularities in the distribution of Rs 640 crore compensation for cotton crop damaged by whitefly, saying many farmers were not paid the compensation.

Defending the proposed bill, Agriculture Minister Tota Singh said a committee of four comprising him, Akali leaders Adaish Partap Singh Kairon and Bikram Singh Majithia and BJP leader Madan Mohan Mittal deliberated on the issue for four months before the bill draft was finalised. Kairon too dismissed the Congress charge that it was a “One Time Settlement” scheme.

Kairon said government had brought the bill for fair and expeditious settlement of debt-related disputes of farmers with lenders.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Bt cotton: how it flowered and is losing lustre now



The story of Bt cotton in India is full of twists and turns. Those with Monsanto and those opposing it have been at loggerheads ever since the GM seed was introduced by the multinational, through Mahyco, in 2002.

“The first two years of Bt cottonseed had not been encouraging. It didn’t take off as the initial hybrids that used the Bollgard-I (or BGI) technology were old. The results were not very great,” Ram Koundinya, who has been a staunch supporter of the GM seed, told *BusinessLine*.

Once deployed in a variety of hybrids in subsequent years, it never looked back. Bt cotton spread like wildfire and every cotton growing area quickly adopted the BGI seed. There was hardly a farmer who had not used the new-generation seed.

“Adoption reached its peak in 2007-08, and from a net importer of cotton in 2002, the country emerged as an exporter of the fibre by 2008-09. This was possible because of the adoption of biotechnology,” says Ram Koundinya, Managing Director, Advanta India Ltd, who is associated with the Association of Biotech Led Enterprises-Agriculture Group (ABLE-AG).

Acreage jumps

Cotton cultivation increased from 45,000 hectares in 2002-03 to an estimated 80 lakh hectares in 2008, owing to the adoption of Bt cotton.

While a section of scientists embraced the technology, some other scientists and NGOs launched a spirited attack on Monsanto and Mahyco Monsanto (which sub-licensed the seed to Indian firms), blaming the technology for the acute agrarian crisis in cotton-growing States such as Maharashtra and Telangana.

“Bt cotton is all false claims and lack of liabilities. Cattle death in Warangal, pink bollworm resistance in several States and contamination of genetic diversity all show how science fails us when driven by greedy business interests,” says GV Ramanjaneyulu, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) and a bitter critic of GM cottonseed.

On the other hand, ABLE-AG, an association of biotech-led seed firms, has been arguing that Bt cotton has changed the fortunes of farmers by significantly reducing input costs.

The Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) had carried out a study on the economic impact of Bt cotton about seven years ago.

It said yields had gone up and cost of production had come down after farmers shifted to Bt cotton. According to the study, yields went up by 32 per cent in 2004-05 for Bt cotton vis-à-vis non-Bt cotton.

The study found that the cost of production had come down to ₹1,563/quintal in 2006-07 from ₹2,012 a couple of years earlier.

The worm strikes back

Call it negligence or lack of interest by seed companies, almost all of the Bt cotton area went without refugia (cultivation of non-cotton or non-Bt crops around the main crop), which led to the worm developing resistance to the technology, resulting in huge losses to farmers.

Monsanto quickly launched BG-II to win back the confidence of farmers. However, no lessons were learnt from the bitter experience, and farmers lacked awareness about the importance of sowing refugia crops.

BG-II, too, fell prey to the virulent pink bollworm, leaving farmers with virtually no defence.

Legal, regulatory issues

Scores of legal cases are pending in different High Courts, with Monsanto and Mahyco Monsanto on one side and farmers' unions and State governments on the other fighting over the quantum of royalty to be paid to the seed firms. The most recent one is Mahyco Monsanto's plea in the Delhi High Court challenging the Centre's Cottonseed Price Control Order.

The 15-year-old journey of Bt cotton is beset with endless regulatory and legal issues, too. Regulator GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee under the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests) has also been at the receiving end of criticism from GM technology detractors.

They allege that permissions are shrouded in secrecy, denying the public the right to know what is happening on the GM front.

While several State governments and farmers' unions have waged pitched battles against Monsanto on the quantum of royalty, the BG-II licensee firms want a higher share from the profits as their hybrids were at the heart of the Bt success.

NSAI argument

The National Seed Association of India (NSAI) has argued that the government must have a pipeline of technologies in place to avert such situations. Monsanto restricts seed licensees from using other technologies.

“The seed firms were forced not to try other alternative technologies, leading to monopoly. It also led to the faster development of resistance by the worm.

The government should encourage alternative technologies,” says NSAI President M Prabhakara Rao.

Mahindra forays into dairy biz with Saboro brand

In a bid to tap the domestic milk market, which is pegged at ₹4 lakh crore, the agri-business division of Mahindra & Mahindra launched its branded milk – Saboro – in Indore on Tuesday.

The company’s plant in Dewas (near Indore, Madhya Pradesh) has a processing capacity of 10,000 litres of milk per day.

Ashok Sharma, President and Chief Executive, Agri and Africa & South Asia Operations, Mahindra & Mahindra, said the group’s entry into milk processing and marketing is part of a larger strategy to offer products in all the stages of the agriculture value chain, from farm equipment to the consumers’ kitchens.

Observing that the domestic milk market has many unorganised players, Sharma said an established name such as Mahindra & Mahindra can bring in quality to the customers.

In Madhya Pradesh, there is a lot of space for Saboro to grow and establish its footprint, “First we will get the milk business right in Madhya Pradesh and then look at other geographies,” he said.

The company, under the Saboro brand, will offer pouch milk in four variants – Double Toned, Full Cream, Protein Rich and Cream Rich. The brand Saboro is derived from the Spanish word Sabor which means Taste.

Sharma said that the company has put in place an advanced milk collection supply chain in around 70 villages near Indore where it works directly with farmers. The supply chain is tuned to reduce the bacteriological load in the milk so that it maintains its freshness and taste.

Prices drop at Coonoor tea auction



When prices dropped to an average of ₹92.08 a kg at Sale No: 11 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions from previous week's ₹94.73, the absorption increased to 84 per cent of the offer from previous week's 74 per cent resulting in a sale of 10.39 lakh kg against 9.07 lakh kg in the previous week. Vigneshwar Speciality Red Dust topped the Dust sale and the entire CTC market at ₹216 a kg. Homedale Estate's Broken Pekoe topped the Leaf auctions at ₹199/kg. In the orthodox tea market, Kodanad topped at ₹251. Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging ₹62-70 per kg for plain leaf grades and ₹120-160 for brighter liquoring sorts. They ranged ₹82-87 for plain dusts and ₹130-170 for brighter liquoring dusts.

New crop insurance scheme will cover 50% of farmers: Jaitley



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, along with Nabard Chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, at a seminar on Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in Mumbai on Tuesday PAUL NORONHA

The newly-launched Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) will bring about 50 per cent of India's farmers in the crop insurance net and help reduce the prevailing distress in the agriculture sector, according to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

PMFBY is distinct from all earlier schemes in the sense that it not only takes the number of insured farmers to a higher level (from 20 per cent earlier to the estimated 50 per cent now), but it will also provide more insurance coverage to farmers, assuring them complete safety, Jaitley said at a seminar on the PMFBY organised by the Department of Financial Services at the the Nabard (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) headquarters here.

In this new scheme, farmers will pay less for more coverage and the compensation will be much more in the event of any crop failure or destruction.

“Since the last two years, we have been facing deficit monsoons. While we hope for better monsoons this year, with this new scheme in place, we will be better equipped to safeguard the farming community,” Jaitley said.

He observed that the revamped insurance schemes that have been launched have the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and would be rolled out in a “mission mode” from April 1 to cover kharif crops.

Though the country had crop insurance schemes in the past, they were partially successful as they were mainly linked to crop loans, Jaitley pointed out. Uttarakhand became the first state to adopt PMFBY as insurance companies bid for premiums lower than the stipulated 2 per cent.

Penalty for settlement delays

The government is also looking at imposing penalties for delay in settlement of farmers' claims under the new crop insurance plan, said Financial Services Secretary Anjuly Chib Duggal.

In the Union Budget, the Centre has made an allocation of ₹5,500 crore for the crop insurance programme under which farmers will have to pay 1.5 per cent of the premium for the sum insured for rabi crops and 2 per cent of the premium for kharif crops.

Delay in settling farmers' crop insurance claims could attract penalties



The government is looking at imposing penalties for delaying farmers' settlement claims under the new crop insurance plan, Financial Services Secretary Anjuly Chib Duggal said on Tuesday.

The government in January launched a crop damage insurance plan to give a shield to millions of farmers who suffer when their crops fail.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is banking on the insurance plan to woo rural India, a key to his ambition to win a number of state elections in the next two years.

Kerala food safety body makes brand registration mandatory for coconut oils

The Kerala Food Safety Authorities have initiated action against adulterated coconut oils by making the branding registration mandatory.

An order to this effect passed by Food Safety Commissioner TV Anupama sought registration of coconut oil brands within a month falling which the production, procurement, distribution and sales of such oils will be made punishable under Food Safety Law.

The decision comes in the wake of lab results of Coconut Development Board and Food Safety Department finding adulteration on several coconut oil brands sold in the State. Despite the authorities banning many brands, it

returned to the market later in different packages by merely changing the name of the product as well as company.

By making mandatory the inclusion of brand name in the license, the Food Safety authority with this new order is expected to curb adulteration to a certain extent. Earlier licenses were issued to manufacturing companies. As many as 15 brands have been identified as adulterated coconut oils.

Welcoming the move, Thalath Mahmood, President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association said that COMA had taken several steps to alert the authorities on the presence of low quality oils and its impact on the business of several leading brands in the domestic market. Meanwhile, the coconut oil market remained steady this week at ₹7,600 per quintal in Kerala and ₹7,000 in Tamil Nadu. Copra prices remained flat at ₹5,250 a quintal in Kerala and ₹5,000 in Tamil Nadu.

FAO convenes workshop on IUU fishing

The FAO convened workshop on IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing has emphasized the need to combat illegal fishing and strengthen the seafood traceability in Asia.

Seafood products are among the most widely traded food commodities in the world, with estimates for 2015 placing the value of international fish trade at \$130 billion. But illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) – estimated between \$10 - 23 billion annually – is undermining the industry.

IUU fishing, which includes operating without authorisation, harvesting protected species, using outlawed fishing gear and violating quota limits, could account for up to 26 million tonnes a year, or more than 15 per cent, of the world's total annual capture fisheries output, speakers at the workshop said.

The capacity building workshop was organized jointly by FAO, INFOFISH and the Centre with financial support from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on 'National and regional good practices in seafood traceability in Asia to combat IUU fishing'.

It brings together international experts from 15 Asian countries to address the challenges and opportunities for international and intra-regional trade in sustainably-sourced and labeled seafood products. The participating countries are Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

FAO, workshop, IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing, illegal fishing, sea food traceability in Asia

Tea Board invites bids for Duncans' gardens

The Tea Board of India has invited bids to run six tea estates – Birpara, Garganda, Lankapara, Tulsipara, Huntapara and Dumchipara – that it had acquired from the Kolkata-based Duncans Industries. All the six gardens are located in West Bengal.

The seventh tea estate of Demdima has already been put on the blocks by the Tea Board. It has received a “number of offers” and these are now being reviewed.

In January this year, the Tea Board took over these seven gardens out of 12 following which Duncans moved court seeking a stay on the acquisition. Earlier this month, the petition was dismissed with the Calcutta High Court justifying the Centre's takeover bid.

The fate of three more estates (Kilcott, Nagasuree and Bagracott) and two project gardens (Madarihat and Terai Land) is undecided. According to local reports, all 12 gardens are virtually closed without any notification.

Angry locals recently wrested control of the 250-hectare Madarihat project, where Duncan had acquired farming rights in compromise of the Land Ceiling Act, with the promise of jobs to erstwhile landholder.

Notice of auction

The notice, issued on Monday, invited ‘Expression of Interest’ (EoI) for taking over management from interested tea companies-firms, cooperative societies to “run the gardens in a successful manner as per the provisions of various acts and rules applicable to the tea plantations”.

The last date for submission of bids is April 12 and all responses would be opened on the same day. The Board will also host a bidders' meeting on March 28.

The Tea Board maintained that Duncans have failed to comply with the obligations under the Tea Act, 1953 and also the relevant provisions in terms of timely payment of workers dues regarding Provident Fund, Gratuity, ration and other fringe benefits/obligatory dues, etc. The notice further adds that the company had also defaulted on electricity bills and medical facilities are being provided in the gardens by the State government, "as a stop gap arrangement".

"In view of the above facts, Tea Board is desirous of finding out a new entrepreneur who can run the estate as per provisions of the Tea Act, 1953, and the Plantation Labour Act, 1951," it adds.

Past dues

Interestingly, the Tea Board maintained that the new owner will not have to clear the dues; and will have control over the garden initially for five years. The tenure can be extended later.

The notice also mentions that a monitoring committee with representatives of the Tea Board, State government and the previous owner (Duncans) will be formed. This committee will "regularly inspect the tea estates" and submit reports to the Centre.

Moreover, the new investor will not be able to retrench any worker "in a non-managerial position" without consulting the monitoring committee. If he has to leave the garden, he has to give a two-month notice to the committee.

Bulk buys heat up groundnut oil

Groundnut oil moved up on the back of fresh demand from stockists and local brands. Moreover, good demand in other edible oils also supported the groundnut oil price to increase.

Traders said that as market will be closed for next four days, stockists and domestic brands were buying heavily aiding the price rise. Groundnut oil

was up ₹20 to ₹985-990 per 10 kg. Jamnagar line telia tin increased by ₹40 to ₹1,534-35 per 15 kg. About 10-12 tankers of groundnut oil were traded in Saurashtra.



At the retail market, groundnut oil new tin was up ₹30 to ₹1,675-80 per 15 kg in Saurashtra and it was traded at ₹1,720-30 per 15 kg in rest of Gujarat. Cotton oil traded up ₹10 to ₹590-593 per 10 kg and cotton oil new tin gained ₹20 to ₹1,020-40 per 15 kg. About 40 tankers of cotton oil were traded here.

Business Standard

Agriculture sector has to grow fastest to eradicate poverty: Arun Jaitley

Finance Minister said poor rainfall this year will put the 'system to test'



Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley speaks during a seminar on Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Unified Package Insurance Scheme, in Mumbai. Photo: Kamlesh Pednekar

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today laid bare the priority of the government, saying agriculture will have to grow "fastest" for the country to get rid of poverty and push the overall GDP expansion.

"If India is to grow and get rid of poverty, the agriculture sector has to grow the fastest. Agriculture is critical to the economy," Jaitley said at a seminar on the recently-announced Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) at Nabard here.

With two successive bad monsoons, the finance minister said a poor rainfall this year will put the "system to test".

PMFBY, he said, will be rolled out in a "mission mode" from April to cover kharif or summer crop from this year itself.

The scheme has the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and "end the scar of farmer suicides" affecting parts of the country.

Irdai wants public sector general insurers in crop insurance scheme

The state-owned insurers have about 300,000 agents that sell insurance products in rural and urban areas

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) will take up the matter of non-inclusion of public general insurance companies in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. At present, they are not part of the scheme.

Nilesh Sathe, Member-Life, IRDAI said that they will take up the issue with the government. These state-owned insurers have about 300,000 agents that sell insurance products in rural and urban areas.

G Srinivasan, chairman and managing director of New India Assurance said that the scheme will be successful only if they are made part of the scheme. "Our branch network and people on ground are very high. This can make a big difference to the scheme in rural areas. We are hopeful that we would be made part of the scheme," he added. Public sector non-life insurers have more than 9,000 offices across the country.

The government is planning to spend Rs 5,500 crore for the crop insurance scheme that was announced earlier. In his budget speech finance minister Arun Jaitley said that the farmers will pay a nominal premium for the coverage.

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana has been approved by the cabinet in January. Here, there will be a uniform premium of 2 per cent to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5 per cent for all Rabi crops. In case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium to be paid by farmers will be only 5 per cent. The balance premium will be paid by the government.

Here, there is no upper limit on government subsidy and even if balance premium is 90 per cent, it will be borne by the government. Insurance executives said that the Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS) had high premium rate due to which farmers could not afford it. It is anticipated that there would be clusters that would be formed of districts to implement the scheme. Senior insurance officials said that how the clusters are classified will define how the premiums will be fixed.

Apart from this, Regional Rural Banks also raised the issue of providing coverage to crop damage due to attacks by wild animals. Several cases of crop damage have been reported due to attacks on the farm land by elephants, which have destroyed the crops. However, ministry officials said that they will look into this issue.

The use of technology has been mandated in the PM Crop Insurance Scheme unlike the other schemes prior to this. The idea was to have one scheme that had the best features of all previous schemes incorporated into it, with weakness removed.

PMFBY will have actuarial yield-based scheme with provision for upfront premium subsidy to be released to insurers. The sum insured will be same for both loanee and non-loanee farmers. Also, there would be no capping and there will be full claim amount paid against the sum insured. This scheme will also cover localised risks like inundation and post harvest losses.

New crop insurance to give farmers more for less, says Jaitley

Jaitley says a veil of some of security around farmer needs to be put, especially due to the inadequate monsoons faced in the past two crop seasons



The crop insurance scheme, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), will enable farmers get more for less, said Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at an event in Mumbai on Tuesday.

The government had launched the PMFBY and the Unified Package Insurance Scheme for farmers.

“The main difference between the old crop insurance scheme and the new one is that farmers are going to pay less. There has been a considerable debate on the crop insurance schemes. The older schemes were linked to loans. They met with modest success,” said Jaitley. He said farmers need security, especially now, with two back-to-back bad crop seasons.

Under the new schemes, the risks covered would be larger and the compensation paid higher, and thus, these would be attractive to farmers. “For the past two years, we have had deficit monsoons. We hope for a better monsoon this year. But with the new scheme in place, we shall be better equipped to safeguard farmers,” said Jaitley.

The government is looking to cover half the farmers in the country in the

first phase of the scheme. At present, only 20 per cent cultivators are covered by crop insurance. A detailed protocol for assessment of losses after harvest and payment of claims, prevented sowing and localised risks will be followed.

“For the insurance and reinsurance companies, the idea of low-cost accident and life insurance is that 50 per cent of agricultural community can also benefit for it, which will add to the overall numbers. Numerically, it will be of great significance ,” he added.

The government is planning to spend Rs 5,500 crore for the crop insurance scheme that was announced earlier. In his Budget speech, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the farmers would pay a nominal premium for the coverage. PMFBY was approved by the Cabinet in January. Here, there will be a uniform premium of 2 per cent to be paid by farmers for all kharif crops and 1.5 per cent for all rabi crops. In case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium to be paid by farmers will be only 5 per cent. The balance will be paid by the government. For a premium of Rs 5,145 a year, farmers will be able to avail of minimum insurance cover for their crop, tractors, pump-sets, self and accidents under the Unified Package Insurance scheme being readied along with the PMFBY.

This package of seven products will be first tried in 45 districts. Expansion will be decided after the response. PMFBY has officially already been launched for the entire country.

The Centre and state governments plan to subsidise up to 90 per cent of the premium a farmer has to pay under the new scheme. The seven insurance components apart from PMFBY in the united package are fire insurance; a personal accident coverage of Rs 2 lakh under the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana; agriculture pump-set insurance; agriculture tractor insurance provided by a third party; life insurance through the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, and student safety insurance.

Jaitley launches crop insurance schemes

The farmers' premium would be 2% for Kharif food grain and oilseeds, it would be 1.5% for Rabi crops, and in the event of a crop failure, the farmers would be paid more



Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley with NABARD Chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala during a seminar on Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Unified Package Insurance Scheme, in Mumbai (pic: Kamlesh Pednekar)

Terming agriculture as "absolutely critical to the country's economy", Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Tuesday launched the "Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana" and "Unified Package Insurance Scheme" here.

He said the revamped insurance schemes now launched have the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and would be rolled out in a "mission mode" from April 1 to cover Kharif crops.

Though the country had crop insurance schemes in the past, they were partially successful as they were mainly linked to crop loans, Jaitley pointed out.

"This is a crop insurance scheme with a difference, and the difference is absolutely critical to the Indian farmer," he said.

Since it was dependent on large volumes, the new scheme could cover much larger risks at a very low premium, he said.

While the farmers' premium would be 2 percent for Kharif food grain and oilseeds, it would be 1.5 percent for Rabi crops, and in the event of a crop failure, the farmers would be paid more.

The government plans to cover 50 percent of the farmers in the country, mostly those dependent on rain-fed agriculture, and this would be a significant step to making India an "insured and pensioned society", Jaitley said.

Noting that agriculture will have to grow faster for the country to get rid of poverty and push the overall GDP, Jaitley said after two successive monsoons, poor rainfall this year (2016) could put the systems to test.

In such an eventuality, the successful implementation of the new crop insurance schemes could prove to be a game-changer and the entire Indian banking, insurance and financial system would be mobilized to ensure its success, Jaitley assured.

The new scheme proved for a change in criteria to determine crop losses by providing local-level assessment for calamities like hailstorms, etc and simple technologies like phones and remote sensors would be used for making quick estimates and early settlement of claims.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agriculture has to grow fastest to eradicate poverty, Arun Jaitley says

Union finance minister Arun Jaitley on Tuesday laid bare the priority of the government, saying agriculture will have to grow "fastest" for the country to get rid of poverty and push the overall GDP expansion.

"If India is to grow and get rid of poverty, the agriculture sector has to grow the fastest ... agriculture is critical to the economy," Jaitley said at a seminar on the recently-announced Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) at Nabard here.

With two successive bad monsoons, the finance minister said a poor rainfall this year will put the "system to test".

PMFBY, he said, will be rolled out in a "mission mode" from April to cover kharif or summer crop from this year itself.

The scheme has the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and "end the scar of farmer suicides" affecting parts of the country.

Low premium crop insurance will help reduce farm distress: Jaitley

Union finance minister Aurn Jaitley on Tuesday launched the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and the Unified Package Insurance Scheme in Mumbai. Following up his focus on the agriculture sector in the Budget presented by him in Parliament, Jaitley said "agriculture will have to grow faster for the country to get rid of poverty and push the overall GDP expansion". He said agriculture was absolutely critical to the economy.

Stating that the revamped insurance schemes being launched by the government have the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector, Jaitley said that they would be rolled out in a 'mission mode' from April 1, 2016 to cover Kharif crops. Jaitley, said though the country had crop insurance schemes in the past, those were mainly linked to the crop loans and therefore met with a modest level of success.

"This is a crop insurance scheme with a difference, and the difference is absolutely critical to the Indian farmer" Jaitley said. He added that since the new scheme was dependent on large volume, it would cover much larger risks at a very low premium. The farmers premium would be 2% for Kharif foodgrains and oilseeds crops and 1.5% for rabi crops. In the event of a crop failure a farmer will be paid more. The finance minister said the government aims to cover 50 percent of the farmers, mostly those depending upon rain-fed agriculture.

Jaitley said with two successive deficit monsoons behind us, a poor rainfall this year would put the systems to test. He asserted that in that event, the successful implementation of the new crop insurance scheme could become a game changer. He said the entire strength of the Indian banking, insurance and financial system would be mobilized to ensure its success.

The finance minister said "the scheme has the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and end the scar of farmer suicides affecting parts of our country" He also said it was a significant step towards making India an 'insured and pensioned society".

The new crop insurance scheme also provides for a change in criteria to determine crop losses by providing local level assessment for calamities like hailstorms etc. Simple technology through phones and remote sensors would be used for quick estimation and early settlement of claims.

Earlier, Arun Jaitley launched the NABARD Agri Credit Monitoring portal, which will help financial institutions to monitor the status of agricultural loans given to farmers. He also unveiled Roadmap of E-Shakti Expansion Programme of digitization of Self-Help Groups.

Anjuly Chibb Duggal, secretary, Department of Financial Services said the new crop insurance scheme had been drafted with intense consultations with concerned stakeholders. She further urged that the schemes should percolate to the ground level by bringing large mass of farmers in the insurance net. She also said that the government may impose penalty if there were delays in settling crop insurance schemes. Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, Chairman, NABARD expressed his bank's solidarity with all stakeholders in covering 50% of the farming community in India.

Small and marginal farmers in Pilibhit embrace corporate farming for mushroom cultivation

For the first time in the district the marginal and small farmers have synergized in the form of a private limited company for the production of mushroom, beginning from October this year. This company has been formed under an ambitious project of the central government known as PODF (Producers' Organization Development and Upliftment Corpus Fund). The district of Pilibhit had been assigned the target of forming one company under this project. The inception of this project in Pilibhit is expected to bring about a preening change in the lifestyle of small and marginal farmers.

NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) has focused its priority to promote the production and marketing of Mushroom in district Pilibhit at the initial stage of the project. Giving a brief on the

reason of opting Mushroom cultivation, the district development manager of NABARD, AK Rawat told TOI, "Mushroom cultivation does not require any typical or unaffordable infrastructure as well as the inputs. The wood logs, thatches and mud which are needed for the structuring of production houses for mushroom, are easily available with village people. The availability of straw and the cow-dung used for making the beds for mushroom cultivation is also in abundance in villages."

When asked on how farmers would be benefited in growing the particular crop, he said, "As mushroom does not require field cultivation and can be managed even by the village women, the farmers can double their crops as well as their functional energy."

According to sources, the farmers' company has been registered with the Registrar of Companies under the company registration act in the name of Leeward Golden Mushroom Producers Company Limited and this has five directors and five members. NABARD would provide interest free financial assistance to the company to the tune of 5.06 lac for a period of three years. Moreover, cultivators would also undergo training GP Pant Agriculture University in Pantnager (Uttarakhand), informed sources.

When asked about the benefits of forming the company, Rawat said, "Farmers will function under the expert supervision of NABARD and will be provided with the best training in the sphere of advanced techniques of mushroom cultivation. As the company will be free to also buy mushroom from the non-member farmers, they will also be attracted to increase the volume of their production as the non-member farmers will have definite and secured point of selling their crop in the form of this company. In due course of time, this chain will protect the farmers of Pilibhit from risk factors of marketing and this will pave the way for farmers to launch value addition projects for their crop."

Parkash Singh Badal seeks NITI Aayog's support for farm sector schemes



Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal today sought NITI Aayog's support for helping farmers in the state by introducing special schemes.

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal today sought NITI Aayog's support for helping farmers in the state by introducing special schemes.

Interacting with a delegation comprising NITI Aayog Member Ramesh Chand and Advisor Jitender Kumar, who called on him at his residence today, Badal underscored the need for formulating special schemes to promote crop diversification and agro-industry, a statement said.

He said the farming community in the state was facing a severe crisis and though the state government was making all efforts to resolve the situation, NITI Aayog could play a proactive role with the help of the Centre.

The chief minister also asked the delegation to expedite the approval for the renovation of Upper Bari Doaba Canal (UBDC), which was pending with the Centre.

The delegation assured Badal of all help in helping the state's agriculture sector.

FM Arun Jaitley launches Fasal Bima Yojana



The revamped schemes would help farmers insure their crops against natural calamities in an efficient way because insurance companies will reverse bid for higher sum insured and lower premium.

MUMBAI: Union finance minister Arun Jaitley on Tuesday launched the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Unified Package Insurance Scheme in Mumbai.

The revamped schemes would help farmers insure their crops against natural calamities in an efficient way because insurance companies will reverse bid for higher sum insured and lower premium.

Uttarakhand became the first state to adopt this scheme as insurance companies bid for a 2% premium.

Both schemes would target crop insurance as well as accidental insurance for farmers, insurance for tractors as well as farm equipments.

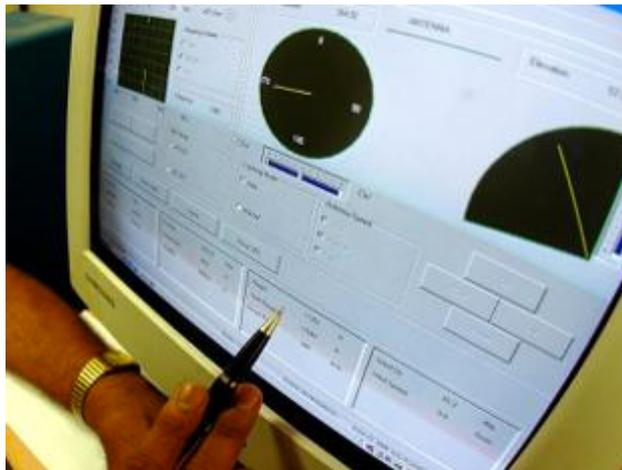
With the country having suffered two back to back poor monsoons the FM launched this programme saying that its success should remove the blot on the government that it has done nothing to protect the livelihood of the farmers.

"This scheme would enable the farmer to pay less and in the event of crop failure will allow him to get paid more. This scheme will give volumes hence would require lesser amount as premium from farmers," said Jaitley.

Launching the scheme the minister said that with 50% of the farmers being targetted for coverage under the scheme.

He also added that these schemes are a part of the government's efforts to convert India into an insured and pensioned society.

2014 was 5th warmest year since 1901: TERI report



Rainfall activity over the country was below normal in 2014, which was also the fifth warmest year on record since 1901, a report by policy research body TERI today said.

NEW DELHI: Rainfall activity over the country was below normal in 2014, which was also the fifth warmest year on record since 1901, a report by policy research body TERI today said.

"Particulate matter concentration exceeded the prescribed limit in 83 per cent of the monitored locations in 2012. The annual mean temperature of India during 2014 was $+0.53^{\circ}\text{C}$ above the 1961-90 average. The year 2014 was the fifth warmest year on record since 1901.

"Rainfall activity over the country was below normal (88 per cent of long period average) during 2014. An enormous challenge lies before central and state governments to monitor the sustainable development goals and climate action plans in terms of data for environment," according to the 13th edition of TERI Energy and Environment Data Diary and Yearbook (TEDDY)

2015-16.

The report, released by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), also said the Indian solar photovoltaic (SPV) market has witnessed "significant" growth and nearly 80 per cent of manufacturing components in solar thermal technology have been domestic.

States such as Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala have announced their policies on grid-connected SPV rooftop, it said.

At a function to release the report, Secretary in Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas K D Tripathi said energy security and environmental sustainability are two key dimensions that need consideration by policymakers and industry alike.

"Sustained review of all the relevant data and analysis is imperative for informed policy making. TEDDY 2015-16 provides all the necessary inputs for the same. I hope it will be useful to those interested in energy and environment sectors," Tripathi said.

TERI Director General Ajay Mathur said the report compiles information and knowledge on energy and environment in India, enabling one to develop and validate trends that can be the building blocks for policy recommendations.

West Bengal tea industry demands insurance cover against drought

SILIGURI: Pushed to the brink due to unprecedented low rainfall, Tea Industry in northern West Bengal tea belt is demanding immediate introduction of insurance coverage against drought condition.

"The weather situation at TeraiBSE -1.73 % region in the west Bank of Teesta river has gone beyond acceptable limit this time," said Mr. K. K. Mintri, Chairman of Terai Indian Planters Association (TIPA). The region hosts around 80 organized gardens with combined annual production volume of around 50 million kg processed tea. Beside this, "There are over 25,000 small plantations producing around 70 mkg. With limited loss bearing capacity, they are in even worse situation," said Mr. B. G. Chakroborty,

Secretary of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Associations (CISTA).



Tea industry in northern West Bengal tea belt is demanding immediate introduction of insurance coverage against draught condition.

"Due to over 80% deficient rainfall since October '15 in Terai, we apprehend near 70% downfall in First Flush production. This post winter high quality and high price First Flush crop contributes 35% to our annual gross," said Mr. Mintri.

Despite few isolated drops of rain, situation in the other high tea yielding region Dooars is also not any better than Terai- informed planters from the region. Terai, Dooars put together contributes over 25% to national yield of around 1200mkg. "Proper insurance coverage against drought for tea only can save us at this stage," said TIPA Vice Chairman Mr. M. Bansal. "Interestingly, weather condition based insurance schemes are there for coffee or rubber, but not for Tea," added Mr. Chakroborty.

When asked on this earlier, former Director, Indian Tea Board(ITB), Mr. G. Boriah, said, "Discussion was initiated with Agriculture Insurance Company of India Limited to design weather based crop insurance scheme for tea. Meteorology department was also requested to provide long duration weather data for every tea producing regions for that."

But, "We are yet to find any such scheme at ground level," said Mr. Bansal. When contacted, an ITB official said on condition of anonymity, "A proposal on this has been sent to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry long back. But we are yet to find any visible response on that."

Tea output eases to 1,127.7 million kg in April-January



The lower output has been mainly due to unfavourable weather conditions. Besides, wage-related issues also hit tea producers, a source said.

NEW DELHI: India's tea production has marginally declined to 1,127.7 million kg in April-January of the current fiscal.

The tea output during the first 10 months of the last fiscal stood at 1,137.2 million kg, according to the Tea Board data.

The lower output has been mainly due to unfavourable weather conditions. Besides, wage-related issues also hit tea producers, a source said.

India is the world's second-biggest tea producer and one of the largest consumers too.

The country exports CTC (crush-tear-curl) grade tea to countries like Egypt, the UK, and other traditional varieties to Iraq, Iran and Russia.

The exports of the beverage have surged 11 per cent to Rs 3,597.4 crore in the first 10 months of the ongoing fiscal, from Rs 3,240.90 crore in the year-ago period.

In terms of quantity, total tea exported in the period under review rose to 186.63 million kg as against 164.88 million kg a year earlier.

The tea sector has been facing other issues as well, including migration of laborers to other industries.

Tea plucking in India mainly starts between July and October.

Agriculture sector has to grow fastest to eradicate poverty: Arun Jaitley



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today laid bare the priority of the government, saying agriculture will have to grow "fastest" for the country to get rid of poverty.

MUMBAI: Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today laid bare the priority of the government, saying agriculture will have to grow "fastest" for the country to get rid of poverty and push the overall GDP expansion.

"If India is to grow and get rid of poverty, the agriculture sector has to grow the fastest... agriculture is critical to the economy," Jaitley said at a seminar on the recently-announced Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) at Nabard here.

With two successive bad monsoons, the Finance Minister said a poor rainfall this year will put the "system to test".

PMFBY, he said, will be rolled out in a "mission mode" from April to cover kharif or summer crop from this year itself.

The scheme has the potential to reduce distress in the farm sector and "end the scar of farmer suicides" affecting parts of the country.