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THE HINDU

Foodgrains production up by 2 lakh tonnes

Despite country facing back to back droughts in the last two years and deficient rainfall, the foodgrain production in the ongoing crop season (2015-16) is seen at 252.23 million tonnes, up by around 0.21 million tonnes, compared to last year.

Data released by the Agriculture Ministry on Monday said that total foodgrains production during 2015-16, estimated at 252.23 million tonnes, is higher by 0.21 million tonnes over the foodgrain production of 252.02 million tonnes during 2014-15.

Wheat output is likely to touch 94.04 million tonnes this season, which is seen 7.51 million tonnes higher than the previous years (2014-15) production of 86.53 million tonnes, showed the 3rd advance estimate data of the Ministry.

Rice output during 2015-16 is estimated at 103.36 million tonnes, which 2.12 million tonnes less in comparison to the 105.48 million tonnes of 2014-15.

Country's Pulses production is seen at 17.06 million tonnes during 2015-16, marginally lower than the previous year's production of 17.15 million tonnes.

Oilseeds are likely to see a drop of 1.6 million tonnes over the previous year's production as its output during 2015-16 is estimated at 25.9 million tonnes.

Total production of coarse cereals is estimated at 37.78 million tonnes which is lower by 5.08 million tonnes than last year.

Data shows Sugarcane production is estimated at 346.72 million tones this season, which is 15.61 million tonnes less than the previous season. The Cotton output estimated at 30.52 million bales (of 170 kg each), is seen down 4.28 million bales than last year's production of 34.805 million bales during.

Direct Benefit Scheme launched

Farmers start crop season, sow rice seeds as part of Akshaya Tritiya rituals



A new BEGINNING: Farmers offering prayers and sowing paddy on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya at Balakati near Bhubaneswar on Monday.-
Photo: Lingaraj Panda

Akshaya Tritiya festival was celebrated in Odisha on Monday with farmers starting a new crop season by sowing rice seeds as political parties joined the celebrations to woo farmers who had been hit by drought in the recent past.

As farmers in all parts of the State started the day with the sowing ritual in their fields, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launched the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme for them. The first beneficiary of the scheme was Ramesh

Rout, a farmer from Laxminarayanpur, and the subsidy money for seeds was deposited in his bank account.

Mr. Patnaik also sowed seeds and ploughed land in Laxminarayanpur gram panchayat in Pipili area near Bhubaneswar.

Even though farmers have been agitating and demanding various measures, including compensation for the families of over 200 farmers who committed suicide due to drought and debt burden, Mr. Patnaik spoke about the measures his government had initiated for their benefit.

Politics over farmers issue dominated celebration of the festival as the Opposition Congress and BJP too organised Akshaya Tritiya celebrations to express their solidarity with the farmers of the State.

Around the time Mr. Patnaik sowed the rice seeds, Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president also performed the ritual in a village near the Capital city. Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh and Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan did the same in a village near Cuttack to show their party's concern for farmers.

On the other hand, the Chandan Yatra of Lord Jagannath and construction of the chariots of the three deities began in Puri on the occasion. The Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath is to be held in July.

Fix MSP, Odisha milk producers urge Centre

The Odisha Milk Farmers' Association (OMFA) on Monday sought intervention of Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Radha Mohan Singh to ensure milk farmers get minimum support price for their produce.

The OMFA drew attention of Mr. Singh in the wake of the Odisha State Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation (OMFED) recently reducing procurement.

“Fourteen per cent of the State population depend on dairy for their livelihood. OMFED, the State-level nodal agency for its procurement and marketing, has recently made the matters worse.

OMFED, which was collecting around 6 lakhs litres of milk per day at an average price of Rs.26 per litre, has reduced its procurement by 31 per cent,” said Rabi Behera, president of Samajwadi Party and OMFA chairman.

“Odisha is reeling under severe drought. Farmers of 28 districts have lost their major crops. The alternative source of livelihood for these farmers is milk. But the decision has jeopardised their survival strategy,” Mr. Behera said.

On May 6, OMFA had organised a protest by pouring milks in front of Odisha Legislative Assembly.

“OMFED should be directed to purchase and procure all milk from the farmers. The Centre should convene a meeting of the State Agriculture Ministers to fix minimum support price (MSP) of milk at Rs. 30 per litre,” demanded OMFA secretary Narayan Dalua.

Besides, they urged the Union Minister to take steps so that dairy, poultry and fish farmers avail interest-free loans.

“At present, banks are charging 12 per cent annual interest from these categories of farmers. This hampers self employment opportunities for the jobless rural youths,” Mr. Behera said.

OMFA demanded secretaries of each of the 3,649 Primary Milk Co-operative Societies be given daily wage of Rs.200. The association insisted on insurance coverage for milk farmers, cows and buffalos.

NDA govt's farm schemes start yielding results, says Minister

Stating that it was one of the top initiatives of the present NDA government at the Centre for agriculture, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh here on Monday claimed that the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana has started delivering results across the country.

Participating in the Akshaya Tritiya (ritual to begin Kharif crop) celebrations here on the day, Mr. Singh said the Central government programmes like Parampara Krishi Vikas Yojna, Soil Health Card Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna, e-NAM (National Agricultural Market), Gram Uday Se Bharat Uday and Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav on agriculture have started fructifying.

“The infusion of modern technologies in agriculture has undoubtedly rescued several innocent lives from the claws of hunger.

The farm scientists are trying to make farming more profitable and with the adaptation of scientific method, lives of millions of farmers are saved,” Mr. Singh said at a function organised at the National Rice Research Institute (NRRI) here on the occasion.

Elaborating on the irrigation programme that has an outlay of Rs.50,000 crore over five years, the Union Minister said the government at the Centre is committed for providing assured irrigation cover to every farm (Har Khet Ko Pani) and maximising water efficiency (More Crop Per Drop).

Mr. Singh along with his Cabinet colleague Dharmendra Pradhan also participated in the traditional function of Akshaya Tritiya by sowing the first seeds on a prepared farmland at nearby Kandarpur village. Hundreds of BJP activists, led by the local leader Dillip Mallick, assisted the two Union Ministers to perform the rituals.

Besides Mr. Pradhan, the area Lok Sabha member Bhartruhari Mahatab, ICAR Director-General T. Mohapatra and NRRI acting director A. K. Naik also spoke on the occasion.

State keen on making Chittoor a horticulture hub: Minister

'A marketing app was made available for tomato growers, says Bojjala



Minister Bojjala Gopalakrishna Reddy distributing loan waiver certificate to a horticulture farmer in Madanapalle on Monday. —Photo: By Arrangement

Minister for Forests Bojjala Gopalakrishna Reddy on Monday said that the State government was committed to making Chittoor district as a horticulture hub by virtue of its congenial climate to grow superior varieties of fruit and vegetables.

Addressing a press conference at Madanapalle, Mr. Reddy said that though the Chadrababu Naidu government did not make any promise of waiving crop loans for the farmers of horticulture, about Rs. 107 crore was distributed to about 50,000 farmers of the sector in Chittoor district alone.

Remunerative price

The Minister said that for the purpose of the tomato growers, a marketing app was made available which would enable them to sell their produce at

remunerative price just by touch of their mobile. This would be brought into wider use all over the State soon.

He criticised YSR Congress president Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy for spreading falsehood against the welfare schemes of the TDP government.

Special status

He said that the Opposition leader was going to Delhi in the name of fighting for special status, but he was utilising the opportunity to see that the criminal cases against him were dropped.

Replying to a question, Mr. Gopalakrishna Reddy said that the TDP would welcome any functionary of any political party intending to support the vision of Mr. Chandrababu Naidu. Earlier, he distributed loan waiver certificates to the beneficiaries of the horticulture sector at the local agriculture market yard.

Tamballapalle MLA Shankar Yadav, Madanapalle MLA Desai Tippa Reddy, TDP district president and MLC Gownivari Srinivasulu, and District Collector Siddarth Jain took part in the event.

A marketing app was made available for tomato growers, says Bojjala Gopalakrishna Reddy

IT solution for farmers' woes

A group of five computer professionals from different parts of Tamil Nadu are now on a mission to implement an Information Technology-based comprehensive farming solution in Tamil Nadu.

They had successfully implemented it in Andhra Pradesh.

With elections around the corner, the group members are meeting the farmers' groups in the State.

The aim is to explain how the Information and Communication Technology-based Agriculture focused Integrated Rural Development mooted under the forum of Mission-IT Rural can improve yield and marketing avenues so that the farmers could in turn pressurise the political parties/candidates to get an assurance of implementing the same when they come to power.



During a visit to Palladam to meet farmers' groups/forums, the team leader R. Thiruchelvam explained to *The Hindu* how the project was implemented on a pilot basis at Pulivendula block in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh a few years ago.

These professionals themselves met the entire project expenses.

“Under the project, we first opened information and process management centres at all the 11 villages under the block.

Base data of farmers were obtained and computerised the requisite information needed for specific crops so as to generate solutions to the farmers depending on the season, soil and water availability,” he said.

The data collected on sowing helped farmers against raising same crops all over the block to avoid any glut in the market.

Similarly, the information of pest breakouts helped take preventive measures.

According to Mr. Thiruchelvam, the project resulted in yield increase by up to 20 per cent.

Mosambi and pomegranate harvested from there were exported for first time.

“Success helped us entering into an agreement with Andhra Pradesh Government to expand the scheme to other blocks though it did not take place later due to political changes.”

The idea of IT solution was germinated in the minds of Mr. Thiruchelvam, Utham Kumar, S. Jayakumar, S. Vijay and G. Venkatesh after seeing farmers’ hardships due to price crashes and poor marketing possibilities.

Farmers apprehend threat to food security

Farmers in the region apprehend that India’s support for Trade Facilitation Agreement under the aegis of World Trade Organisation would throttle agricultural sector and food security.

As a TFA signatory, India will have to do away with subsidies for farm sector and distribution of essentials through public distribution system with effect from January 1, 2017.

The government’s acceptance of the condition that it will not procure agricultural produce from the farmers beyond the date was deplorable. It will pave way for profiteering by private entities, K.V. Ponnaiyan, president of Tamil Nadu Swadeshi Farmers’ Association said.

The Association will mobilise public support against acceptance of TFA by the Central Government, Mr. Ponnaiyan said.

Major role for PACS during kharif

They will take the responsibility of all activities from seed supply to grain purchases after harvest

After two consecutive years of drought, the farming community is eagerly waiting for a good monsoon this year with kharif season round the corner.

Farmers are waiting for the onset of monsoon and are hopeful of abundant rainfall this season.

The district administration on its part has geared up to meet the requirements of farmers on time for kharif.

The administration had launched a special campaign and held 'Mana Telangana-Mana Vyavasayam' meetings to enlighten the farming community on the kharif crops involving agriculture and allied departments besides the IKP and the Markfed.

The meetings held from April 25 to May 5 evoked overwhelming response from farmers in the district.

Involvement of PACS

This year the strategy is that Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies have to be put in the forefront entrusting them with all supply side responsibilities.

There are about 145 Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies in the district.

These Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies have been asked to take the responsibility of all activities from seed supply to grain purchases after the harvest.

Responsibility of collection of details regarding soils, crops to be planted in them, supply of seed, fertilizers and pesticides was given to the PACS.

The administration appealed to the farmers not to sow cotton and other crops which are not profitable and go in for those which would fetch them good remuneration.

Purchase centres

Above all, this time a unique decision of the Government is that it wants to use the cooperative societies to open grain purchase centres and ensure profitable price to farmers.

The idea behind it is to avoid the role of middlemen and farmers going to markets to sell away the produce.

To supervise the seed and fertilizer distribution one agriculture officer and one cooperative officer would be posted at each Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies till the sowing activity is over.

Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, who belongs to this district, made it clear that over 3 lakh tonnes of fertilizer was kept ready for distribution and appealed to the farmers not to worry over the availability.

Remunerative prices

In a way, as regards the functioning of societies the administration is happy because majority of the A-Grade societies of the State are in the district.

Government needs to focus its attention on the issue of farmers losing remunerable price for their soya crop as it is being sold in Maharashtra. Farmers in the district sow the crop in over 1.25 lakh acres and the government should ensure that they get remunerative price for their produce.

Cooperative societies to open grain purchase centres

Tobacco Board doubles loan amount for ryots

At a time when the FCV Tobacco farmers have been facing problems aplenty due to low prices, the Tobacco Board has provided relief by doubling the amount given as loans to farmers under Tobacco Grower Welfare Fund, said Board secretary C.S.S. Patnaik.

The interest-free loan for marriage of daughters was doubled from Rs.25,000, education loan from Rs.25,000 to Rs.50,000, interest-free loans for repairing the damaged barns (complete) and fire accidents were also doubled to Rs. 50,000.

The Tobacco Board created Tobacco Board's Growers Welfare Fund Scheme in 2009-10 to provide loans to registered tobacco growers.

So far, financial relief in terms of grants (natural death/accidental) was sanctioned to 6, 868 beneficiaries for an amount of Rs.17.86 crore since inception of the scheme.

Interest-free loans to the tune of Rs.4.82 crore were provided to 3,112 farmers.

Egg prices go up despite flu scare

Notwithstanding the bird flu scare gripping the State, the wholesale price of eggs has increased from Rs. 402 to Rs. 417 for 100 eggs in Mysuru.

“The demand for eggs in the market is high due to a dip in the production during the heat wave in summer.

So, we have increased the prices from Monday,” said Satish Babu, Chairman of Mysuru Zone's National Egg Co-ordination Committee (NECC).

Mr. Babu also ruled out the possibility of the bird flu scare having an impact on the demand for poultry products.

“The suspected bird flu case is confined only to one private farm in Bidar’s Humnabad district.



High demand:Poultry farms in Mysuru are finding it difficult to meet the market demand.— Photo: M.A. Sriram

We are not anticipating any dip in the consumption of poultry products and a consequent decline in prices,” he said.

On the contrary, Mr. Babu said the egg laying poultry farms in Mysuru are finding it difficult to meet the market demand, which has been fuelled by elections in neighbouring Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Poultry farms in Mysuru also supply eggs to mid-day meal schemes in parts of Tamil Nadu and witness a steep decline in demand during summer when schools close, but the elections have more than made up for the annual dip this year.

Besides, the unprecedented heat in the ensuing summer season has also led to a decline in production of more than two lakh eggs per day, Mr Babu added.

The cost of feed had also gone up in the last few months, leaving the poultry farmers with no option but to increase the prices.

“A quintal of jowar now costs Rs. 1,550 to Rs. 1,660 against last year’s Rs 1,250. Similarly, soya costs Rs. 44,000 for a ton as against Rs. 37,000 last year,” Mr Babu said.

During the last week of April this year, the price of eggs had fallen to Rs. 315 for 100 eggs before quickly recovering in the first week of May to cross Rs. 400 for 100 eggs.

In the last week of April 2016, the price of eggs had fallen to Rs. 315 for 100 eggs

Average production

Poultry farms in Mysuru: (egg layers) 55

Average eggs laid per day: 26 lakh

Eggs laid per day during summer: 24 lakh

Source: NECC

Surveillance of poultry farms heightened

The surveillance of poultry farms across Mysuru district has been heightened in the wake of a suspected outbreak of bird flu in a village in Humnabad in Bidar.

“Though we carry out inspections of the poultry farms routinely in the normal course, we have heightened the surveillance in the wake of the developments in Bidar.

We have also alerted the poultry farmers to bring to our notice any suspicious deaths of birds,” Deputy Director of Animal Husbandry, Mysuru

district, Prasad Murthy told *The Hindu*. “Our veterinarians and the rest of the staff are well-trained to handle any eventuality,” he added.

There are an estimated 100 poultry farms including broilers and egg layers in Mysuru district. The bird population is estimated to be around 30 lakh, he said.

To a question, he said there has been no ban on transport of poultry products to neighbouring states like Kerala or Tamil Nadu.



CM honours farmers’ cooperative that sells solar power to discom

The cooperative that holds the distinction of being the world’s “first solar irrigation cooperative” was felicitated for providing its members “smart income” from energy sales to a local discom.



The cooperative was formed by six farmers of Dhundi. Archive

Dhundi Saur Urja Utpadak Sahakari Mandali, a newly-formed solar pump cooperative in Kheda district, was Monday given a certificate of appreciation by Chief Minister Anandiben Patel for selling surplus power produced in their farms to the electricity grid.

The Chief Minister was in Anand to inaugurate the 12th edition of Krishi Mahotsav.

The cooperative that holds the distinction of being the world's "first solar irrigation cooperative" was felicitated for providing its members "smart income" from energy sales to a local discom.

The solar cooperative was formed in mid-February by bringing together six vegetable farmers in Dhundi.

Each farmer installed a solar irrigation pump in their fields by contributing a partial amount, with International Water Management Institute (IWMI) pitching in the rest.

The solar pumps were connected to the power grid of Madhya Gujarat Vij Company Limited (MGVCL), and a 25-year power purchase agreement was signed recently allowing the farmers to sell back the surplus energy at a rate of Rs 4.63 per kWh equivalent of solar energy.

Speaking at the occasion, Tushaar Shah of IWMI said, "We are excited that the government is recognising the potential of the solar irrigation cooperative model and supporting us.

This concept will not only benefit the farmers by supplementing their incomes, but will also benefit the environment by incentivising farmers to conserve groundwater and instead sell the surplus power generated.

If we solarise India's 20 million grid-connected electric pumps that farmers currently use to pump groundwater, it would save the country around Rs 60,000 – Rs 70,000 crores of farm power subsidy as well."

“Once full benefits of the Dhundi pattern of solar irrigation are recognised, we expect that the government and discoms will be willing to replicate it and offer farmers a more remunerative price for their surplus energy sales,” said Shah.

The current installed capacity of the Dhundi solar cooperative is 56.4 kW and the IWMI team plans to expand it to 100 kWp over the next few months.

The idea of Solar Pump Irrigators’ Cooperative Enterprise (SPICE) was developed by the IWMI-Tata Water Policy Research Program (ITP), a partnership between the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and the Tata Trusts with support from the CGIAR’s Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).

Last year, IWMI had successfully piloted a single farmer SPaRC (Solar Power as Remunerative Crop) model in Anand district in which a farmer’s solar irrigation pump was connected to the electricity grid, presenting him with the choice to sell the surplus power generated when the fields are not being irrigated.

Maharashtra: I-T seeks Rs 1,200 cr in taxes from sugar mills

Sources said for the last 20 years, I-T officers have been raising the issue of unpaid taxes by mills who have paid over and above the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) to growers.

The department has zeroed in on 15 mills, raising tax demands of more than Rs 25 crore and cumulative tax demands of more than Rs 1,100 crore.

Along with unpaid cane growers, now Income-Tax officers have come knocking at the doors of cooperative sugar mills in the state. The I-T department says 22 cooperative mills owe it more than Rs 1,200 crore in unpaid taxes.

Sources said for the last 20 years, I-T officers have been raising the issue of unpaid taxes by mills who have paid over and above the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) to growers.



“The Income-Tax department feels payments over and above the FRP constitute profit on income and is distributed among the members. Tax demands are raised on such payments,” said an industry insider.

The department has zeroed in on 15 mills, raising tax demands of more than Rs 25 crore and cumulative tax demands of more than Rs 1,100 crore. Of the 15 mills, three mills have tax demands of more than Rs 100 crore while two have tax demands of over Rs 90 crore.

Three mills have unpaid tax demands of more than Rs 70 crore and rest of the mills have unpaid tax demands in the range of Rs 50-20 crore. There are seven mills whose tax demands are between Rs 3 crore and Rs 25 crore.

Interestingly, almost 90 per cent of the mills are from the sugar-belt of Western Maharashtra. Most mills are from the districts of Satara, Sangli, Ahmednagar, Solapur and Pune.

Jayprakash Dandegaonkar, vice-president of the Maharashtra Sugar Cooperative Factories Federation, questioned the I-T department’s tax demands.

“Cooperative mills are examples of successful partnerships among farmers. Payment over FRP can hardly be constructed as profit from income,” he said. In 2007-08, the cooperative mills had filed a case against the I-T department over the issue.

Dandegaonkar said the millers had engaged eminent lawyer Harish Salve to argue their case.

“However, Salve had to leave for London so through the intervention of former Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, we have asked former Union Finance Minister P Chidambaram to argue our case.

The case will come up before a three-judge bench hopefully soon,” he said. Dandegaonkar said the millers led by Pawar had met both the prime minister and the Union finance minister to discuss the issue.

“If the Supreme Court upholds the decision of the I-T department, then the cooperative mills would be in deep financial distress,” he said.

Pune: District to plant 18 lakh saplings

The state government will have planted 1.50 lakh saplings for the mahotsav and various revenue divisions will plant 50 lakh more.

Pune district has undertaken a special drive to plant 18 lakh saplings on July 1. The state government as part of the Van Mahotsav has pledged to plant two crore saplings.

The state government will have planted 1.50 lakh saplings for the mahotsav and various revenue divisions will plant 50 lakh more.

Each of the collectors of the district were asked to ready an action plan towards planting the saplings.

The meeting was undertaken by the Pune district collector in the presence of Pune Zilla Parishad CEO Daulat Desai and deputy CEO Yashwant Shitole.

As per the action plan, under the state environment department it was expected to plant four lakh saplings but considering the geographical area of the district it was decided to plant at least six times of the present target.

The meeting also noted that under the Jal Yukta Shivar Abhiyan last year, eight lakh saplings had been planted. Van Mahotsav is the annual tree planting festival carried out in July.

During this festival, thousands of trees are planted all over India. In 1950, it was started by KM Munshi, the union minister for agriculture and food. It was started to create awareness among people for the conservation of forests and planting of new trees.

hindustantimes

Farmlands flattened for PM's mega event



Eight helipads, each costing at least Rs 8 lakh are being constructed on agriculture land in Ninora village for Vichar Mahakumbh - a three-day event organised by state government. (Shankar Mourya/HT Photo)

Agricultural land was flattened, irrigation lines damaged, and electric poles and trees uprooted to make way for the 'Vichar Mahakumbh' extravaganza in Ninora, a hamlet 10 km from Ujjain, to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The state issued notices to 62 farmers in October 2015 and acquired 550 bigha farmlands for the event to be held from May 12.

For the three-day event, which will host religious gurus and public intellectuals, the state government has erected three centrally air-conditioned auditoriums with 3,000 capacity each over 18 acres, lavish cottages and as many as eight helipads.

"We were told that temporary structures would be built on the land in view of Simhastha, but now they have erected huge auditoriums, halls, guesthouses and helipads on our land," said 67-year-old Ramnath Yogi, a farmer.

He said the administration paid Rs 4,000 per bigha as compensation for the land, but the crop loss the farmers would face for at least a year after the event was not taken into consideration.

The government denied the allegation. "In the other parts where the Simhastha mela authority has acquired land for vehicular parking or other purposes, the land owner will be paid Rs 240 per bigha. We had included crop compensation and land rent and are paying Rs 4,000 per bigha to farmers in Ninora," said a district administration official.


Each helipad, 30 metres in diameter and constructed with solid concrete and bitumen, will cost around Rs 8 lakh, said a public works department official requesting anonymity.

“Ujjain, barely 10 km away, has a helipad, and Indore, 50 km away, has an airport,” said a Ninora villager. Though officials promised to return the land in the same condition it was acquired, farmers are sceptical.

“Our lands have been compressed by at least one foot, irrigation lines and bore wells have been damaged, electric poles and trees were felled,” said another farmer. “After such heavy constructions, the land will take at least one year to rejuvenate.”

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Foodgrains production flat at 252.23 million tonnes in 2015-16

FOOD OUTPUT		2015-16*	2014-15#
	Rice	103.36	105.48
	Wheat	94.04	86.53
	Coarse cereals	37.78	42.86
	Total food grains	252.23	252.02
	Pulses	17.06	17.15
	Oilseeds	25.9	27.5
	Cotton**	30.5	34.8
	Sugarcane	346.72	362.33

* Third advance estimates
 ** (in million bales of 170 kg each)
 # Final estimate

Wheat output seen 9 per cent higher at 94 million tonnes

Foodgrain production in India during 2015-16 was almost stagnant at an estimated 252.23 million tonnes, compared to previous year’s production of 252.02 million tonnes, as drought and un-seasonal rains affected crops in several States across the country.

Rice, pulses, jowar and maize, all suffered a decline, while wheat was higher than last year, according to the third advance estimates brought out by the Agriculture Ministry.

Rice production during 2015-16 is estimated at 103.36 million tonnes, lower by 2.12 million tonnes than its production of 105.48 million tonnes during the previous year, while wheat output is being estimated at 94.04 million tonnes, higher by 7.51 million tonnes.

Target set by Centre

Compared to the target of 264 million tonnes fixed by the Centre for the year, foodgrain production at the current estimated level will be around 4.5 per cent lower, the official release showed.

The lower output was largely on account of deficiency in rainfall, which stood at 12 per cent during the year. In 2014-15, the rainfall deficiency stood at 14 per cent.

The Government has pegged pulses output at 17.06 million tonnes, with gram production at 7.48 million tonnes and tur at 2.6 million tonnes.

Production of sugarcane, estimated at 346.72 million tonnes, is lower by 15.61 million tonnes than its production during 2014-15. Cotton, estimated at 30.52 million bales (of 170 kg each) is also lower by 4.28 million bales.

Jute output, estimated at 9.92 million bales (of 180 kg each) is lower by 0.70 million bales than production during the previous year.

Production of oilseeds, at 25.9 million tonnes in 2015-16, posted a decline compared to 27.5 million tonnes in the previous year.

Output of rapeseed mustard is pegged at 6.85 million tonnes and groundnut at 6.89 million tonnes. Soyabean production during 2015-16 is estimated at 8.92 million tonnes.

Palm oil futures consolidate, rise



Crude palm is seen at a processing plant in Indonesia. (file photo)

Malaysian palm oil futures on BMD were higher on Monday, supported by improved demand and forecasts that stockpiles will drop on falling production, ahead of a data release from the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB).

Markets are relying on the festive season to drive higher palm oil demand. Celebration of Ramadan, which starts in early June, is a month-long event of fasting and feasting that spurs higher palm oil demand.

Palm oil rose in the last week, posting its sharpest jump in nearly five months on Wednesday as market participants covered short positions after four sessions of losses.

CPO active month July futures moved in line with our expectations. As mentioned earlier, we still view the downward correction as a healthy one within a larger bullish trend.

And despite this price correction, the overall trend remains neutral to bullish, with a good chance of prices moving back towards 2,800 MYR/tonne levels.

Strong resistance will be seen initially at 2,695-2,700 MYR/tonne levels now. A daily close above 2,700 MYR/tonne could pave the way for 2,775-2,800 MYR/tonne levels.

However, failure to cross 2,695-2,700 MYR/tonne levels could dent confidence and then, prices could hover in a broad range before moving higher again.

Favoured view expects prices to hold support in the 2,550-70 MYR/tonne range and then gradually edge higher towards 2,650-75 MYR/tonne levels where it run into strong resistances going forward.

Only an unexpected fall below 2,580 MYR/tonne could hint at weakness again, which could potentially test 2,460-65 MYR/tonne levels, which we do not favour.

We will now reassess the wave counts, as prices have crossed over above 2,370-2,400 MYR/tonne. A possible new impulse looks to have started again. One of our targets at 1,850 MYR/tonne was met.

The current move could push higher towards 2,645 MYR/tonne initially and then correct lower in a pattern towards 2,310 MYR/tonne, or even lower to 2,250 MYR/tonne, before subsequently rising towards a medium to long-term target at 2,900 MYR/ton, which could bring this current impulse to an end.

Any dips could prove to be opportunity to participate in the upcoming uptrend. RSI is in the neutral zone indicating that it is neither overbought nor oversold.

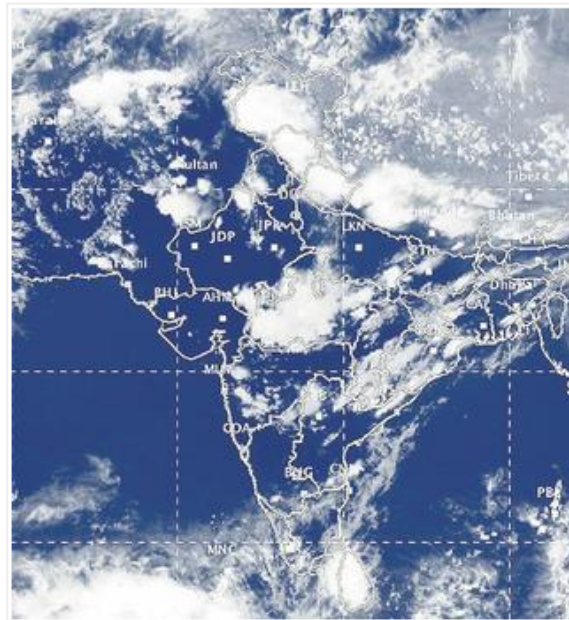
As mentioned in the earlier update, averages in MACD have gone below the zero line of the indicator, hinting at a bearish reversal in trend. But, crossovers tend to happen in a correction and again a bullish crossover can

materialise. Only a crossover above the zero line could hint at a bullish reversal in trend.

Therefore, look for palm oil futures to consolidate and rise higher again. Supports are at MYR 2,620; 2,570; and 2,550 Resistances are at MYR 2,685; 2,720; and 2,760.

The writer is the Director of Commtrendz Research. There is risk of loss in trading.

Global models predict storm in southern Arabian Sea next week



Global weather models suspect a storm may be evolving over the Maldives-Lakshadweep region in a week's time, which could affect the timely onset of the Indian monsoon.

Storms forming during mid-May or later have the effect of unsettling the build-up phase of the monsoon, which normally hits Kerala on June 1.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts says that by May 16, a preparatory low-pressure area would have moved in closer to Sri

Lanka and Kanyakumari. Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology agrees, saying a 'low' is likely to form over South Arabian Sea (Maldives-Lakshadweep) by mid-May.

Strengthening southward

As if on cue, on Monday the India Met Department located a rudimentary form of the 'low' (trough) lying over Maldives-Lakshadweep.

According to the European agency's forecast, this may strengthen and move towards Sri Lanka and Kanyakumari by May 17 and slide along the Kerala coast to reach Mangaluru by May 19.

What lends credence to this scenario is the expected arrival of Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) wave over the West Indian Ocean/South Arabian Sea during May 11 and May 17.

MJO wave arriving

The US Climate Prediction Centre sees the MJO wave intensifying rainfall activity over Sri Lanka and surrounding seas.

An MJO wave passes from West to East high in the atmosphere, but has a strong influence over ground weather in terms of its capacity to set up cloudiness, storminess and rainfall.

The wave also supports the mechanics of storm formation by adding clouds and moisture around a low-pressure area and driving it up in strength.

Meanwhile, the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology has indicated that the South Bay of Bengal (around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands) too may throw up a low-pressure area during May 11-17.

Heading east

This 'low' is likely to travel in an east-northeast direction towards southern Myanmar.

India Met Department has said that no part of the country will witness heat wave conditions until May 16, up to when forecasts are available.

In fact, heavy rain or thunderstorms/squalls have been forecast for many parts of North-West India, East India and Peninsular India during this period.

The US National Centres for Environmental Prediction says two-thirds of the country (save Rajasthan, Gujarat and West Madhya Pradesh) may get thundershowers between May 9 and 17.

In the following week, thundershowers will be mostly confined to the South Peninsula and the East, as more parts of West and North-West India dry up.

Parliamentary panel for re-plantation of rubber



Raising concerns over the decline in natural rubber production, the Parliamentary panel has called upon the Finance Ministry to allocate adequate funds to carry out re-plantations optimally.

The limited budget outlay should not affect re-plantation activities and any constraint would affect rubber output, the Action Taken Report (ATR) on the rubber industry, submitted to the Rajya Sabha by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce, said.

The committee, headed by Chandan Mitra, noted that inadequate allocation of funds to the Rubber Board would have a cascading effect on the activities and functioning of crucial departments like production, research and extension.

There has been a decline in the subsidy level in percentage terms, while the approved development cost on one hectare of rubber plantation has registered a substantial jump from the 11 {+t} {+h} to the 12 {+t} {+h} plan.

Existing rates are comparatively very low and not even 20 per cent of the amount provided in other rubber producing countries.

The report hinted that subsidy would help motivate growers to undertake re-plantation, who are otherwise reluctant to cut trees in view of the long gestation period of 6-7 years.

The panel suggested the Centre to consider incentivising exports by including rubber under Videsh Krishi Grama Udyog Yojana scheme.

Citing the case of imports, the committee urged the Centre to ensure rubber imports are need-based and its quantum is determined on the basis of the gap between domestic production and consumption.

To meet the demand of the industry, it asked the Rubber Board to prepare a blue print on short-term, medium-term and long-term action, to improve production.

According to the committee, the shift from sheet rubber to block rubber will adversely affect small, marginal and tribal farmers, especially since processing of sheet rubber does not require sophisticated machinery. Sheet rubber always helps farmers fetch a high farm gate price.

Cardamom slips marginally

Small cardamom prices, which have remained firmer during the past four weeks, have slipped marginally over the weekend and Monday, at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Summer rains from Friday to Sunday last week, in almost all the growing regions, are said to have changed market sentiments slightly to bearish, and that in turn has aided the dip in the prices, PC Punnoose, General Manager of CPMC told *BusinessLine*.

Prices on Monday slipped and that were in ₹/Kg: 8mm bold good colour 1,100-1,115; 7- 8mm 800; 6mm -7mm 660 below 6 mm: 590.

Tea up on supply crunch

Following lower supplies, average tea prices rose to a nine-week high of ₹97.22 a kg at Sale No: 18 of the Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions.

Vigneshwar Speciality Broken Orange Pekoe Small, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, topped the CTC market when Nisha Enterprises bought it for ₹291 a kg. Vigneshwar Speciality's Broken Pekoe (₹281), Hittakkal Speciality's Broken Pekoe (₹265) and Broken Orange Pekoe Small (₹250), auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, were the other grades to fetch over ₹200/kg.

Bird flu hits poultry industry in Karnataka

The re-surfacing of bird flu or avian influenza (H5N1) in Bidar district of Karnataka has triggered concerns among poultry farm owners in the State and neighbouring Telangana.

Confirming the outbreak at a poultry farm in Molakera village of Humanabad taluk in Bidar, the Karnataka government, as a precautionary

measure, ordered culling of the 1.4 lakh birds at the farm, expected to start on Tuesday morning.

The poultry industry has taken sufficient measures to deal with the situation. “We are quite prepared for any eventuality,” said HN Nagabhushan, Secretary of Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders Association.

The industry fears the outbreak could hurt consumption over the next couple of weeks.

In Telangana, Poultry associations have begun sending messages to their members, asking them to take precautionary measures. “We have been sending SMSes to poultry farmers, indicating dos-and-don’ts.

We have asked farmers not to allow outsiders to handle the birds.

We have asked them to disinfect the vehicles when they enter the premises,” Subba Raju, Vice-President of the National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC) and a poultry player himself, told *BusinessLine*.

The reports of bird flu have sent shivers down the spine of farmers, who witnessed some worst bouts in the last five years that caused extensive damage to the industry.

Cotton flat on limited buying

Cotton remained unchanged on weak demand from local mills. Moreover, after a price rise over the past two weeks, buying from exporters also decreased. Traders said that as prices went up over the past couple of weeks, overall demand declined, which kept prices steady on Monday. In the current situation, cotton prices may decline in near future.

Gujarat Sankar-6 cotton traded at ₹34,500-35,000 per candy of 356 kg.

About 20,000 bales of cotton arrived in Gujarat and 450,000 bales arrived in India. Kapas or raw cotton was traded flat on limited demand from ginners.

Kapas quoted at ₹960-1,010 per 20 kg and gin delivery of kapas stood at ₹1,020-1,045 per 20 kg. Cotton seed traded at ₹470-515 per 20 kg.

Business Standard

Wheat output up despite drought

The southwest monsoon in 2015 was almost 14 per cent less than normal, the fourth case of consecutive drought years in a century



Wheat production in the 2015-16 crop season, ending in June, is expected to be 94.04 million tonnes, almost 7.51 mt more than the same period last year, despite back-to-back droughts, according to the agriculture ministry's third advance estimates.

The Centre plans to purchase a little over 28 mt of wheat from farmers in 2016-17 but might not be able to do that, due to higher than expected

purchases by private traders. Purchase could be around 25 mt, say some experts.

“The rains which happened twice during the season in March has indeed turned out to be beneficial for the wheat crop and there has been no report of damage to the crop,” R K Gupta, acting head of the Directorate of Wheat Research, Karnal, had recently told this newspaper.

The third advance estimates, issued on Monday, says overall foodgrain production in 2015-16 should be 252.23 mt, marginally more than the total production of 2014-15, estimated at 252.02 mt, “despite setback due to deficient rain and shortage of water in reservoirs”.

The southwest monsoon in 2015 was almost 14 per cent less than normal, the fourth case of consecutive drought years in a century.

Output of pulses in 2015-16 is estimated to be 17.06 mt, marginally less than the 17.15 mt of 2014-15. The drop in kharif production this year due to drought seems to have been compensated by improvement in the rabi harvest.

Oilseeds production in 2015-16 is estimated to be 25.89 mt, down from 27.51 mt in 2014-15, mainly due to less production of soybeans during the kharif season. Sugarcane production is projected at 346.72 mt, down from 362.33 mt in 2014-15.

BEATING THE DROUGHTS			
Farm production according to third advanced estimates in million tonnes			
	2014-15	2015-16	%chg
Wheat	86.53	94.04	8.67
Pulses	17.15	17.06	-0.52
Foodgrain	252.02	252.23	0.08
Mustard	6.28	6.85	9.07
Oilseeds	27.51	25.89	-5.85
Cotton*	34.80	30.52	-12.29
Sugarcane	362.33	346.72	-4.30



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agriculture policy targets bumper income

Gujarat chief minister Anandiben Patel on Monday said that the new comprehensive Agricultural Business Policy-2016 envisions not doubling of agricultural income in the state, but aims to increase it four times that of current levels.

While launching the 12th edition of the state-wide Krishi Mahotsav from Anand and releasing the new Krishi Business Policy-2016, the CM attributed the almost threefold rise in the yields of groundnut, bajri, wheat, banana and rai from 900 to 2,700 kg/ha in the state due to efforts taken during the Krishi Mahotsav.

The government plans to give one lakh new electricity connections during Krishi Mahotsav.

Speaking about the new agri-business policy, Patel said the new policy will throw open the doors of global trade to farmers and youth of the state via modern farming, food-processing and establishing value-chains from farm to global commodities markets.

Even as the state's farmers are linked to extension centres of agricultural universities for latest lab-2-farm inputs, she said that focus would be on incentives to increase yield, increase storage capacity, value-addition and maintaining quality, and prudent land use.

Patel raised the slogan of 'Samridhh Kisan - Sukhi Kisan', meaning 'Prosperous Farmer; Happy Farmer'.

She said the present government is pro-farmer and the focus is on organic farming, setting up a new organic farming university to impart related education, training and research.

Other areas of concern are preventing adulteration in fertilizers and milk, providing land at concessional rates to APMC and Milk Huts, improving cattle breed and producing neem-coated fertilizer.

At Anand, the CM's programmes also included distributing the Rs1.87-lakh Sardar Patel Agriculture Research district-level award to five farmers, Rs.2.25 lakh to seven progressive farmers of Kheda and Anand districts, the Rs4.40-lakh agriculture department awards to five farmers, Rs1.90-lakh under Mission Mangalam, Rs50,000 to Sakhi Mandalis, citation to the secretary of the world's first solar-powered co-operative society, Pravinbhai Parmar.

Gujarat government declared new agriculture policy

Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel today said that income from agriculture has to be not just doubled but quadrupled as per the new comprehensive Agricultural Business Policy-2016.

Launching the 12th edition of statewide Krishi Mahotsav from Anand in central Gujarat, she said the new policy entails opening the doors of global trade for farmers and youth of the state via modern farming, food-processing and establishing value-chain from farm to global commodities markets.

Even as the state's farmers are linked to extension centres of agricultural universities for latest lab-2-farm inputs, she said that stress would be on incentives to increase yield, increase storage capacity, value-addition and maintain quality, prudent land use.

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She said the present government is pro-farmer and the stress is on organic farming, setting up a new organic farming university to impart related education, training and research.

The other areas of concern are adulteration in fertilizers and milk, land at concessional rates to APMC and Milk Huts, and improving cattle breed and produce neem-coated fertilizers.

The government plans to give one lakh new electricity connection during Krishi Mahotsav, loan at one per cent interest, allocation of Rs.10-crore for drip irrigation, Rs.100-crore to check damage to crop by pigs.

She attributed almost three time rise in the yield of groundnut, bajri, wheat, banana and rai from 900 to 2,700 kg/ha due to efforts during the Krishi Mahotsav.

The Chief Minister's other programmes at Anand included distributing Rs.1.87-lakh Sardar Patel Agriculture Research district-level award to five farmers and Rs.2.25-lakh to seven progressive farmers of Kheda and Anand districts, Rs.4.40-lakh agriculture department awards to five, Rs.1.90-lakh under Mission Mangalam, Rs.50,000 to Sakhi Mandalis, citation to world's first solar-powered co-operative society secretary Pravinbhai Parmar, and releasing the new Krishi Business Policy-2016.

KCA's Agriculture Students Complete Quarantine Training

The students of Khalsa College's Agriculture Department successfully completed one month training on 'Role of Plant Quarantine in Bio-security' at Regional Plant Quarantine Station (RPQS) .

During the training, they learnt about different aspects including entomological, pathological and socio-economical aspects of plant quarantine through lectures and practical.

Principal, KCA, Dr.Mehal Singh informed media persons here on Monday that the students also visited Integrated Check Post (ICP) Attari and were acquainted with the role played by the ICP in preventing the entry of quarantine pests into the India from Pakistan and other countries.

"The quarantine is a new field of studies and research and it is emerging as major concern to our bio-security.

Thus the familiarization of students with the new subject was utmost important", said Dr.Randeep Kaur Bal, head of the department.

She said Dr. DC Rajak, Joint Director, RPQS, Amritsar during his address emphasised on the functions and importance of quarantines present across the entry points of India and also the value of training in future of the student. The students she said received certificates for the training.

Prof Randeep Singh, Incharge, Crop Protection Division of the Agriculture department along with Prof Amandeep Singh and Dr. Kapila Mahajan were also present during the training sessions. Eom

Patnaik launches DBT scheme for farmers

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik today launched the 'Direct Benefit Transfer' scheme for farmers and promised digging of at least one lakh borewells to enhance irrigation facilities in the state.

Patnaik said this while addressing a meeting marking the celebration of the Akshya Trutiya festival at Laxminarayanpur village near Pipili. The day is also observed as the 'Krushak Divas'.

The first beneficiary of the DBT scheme was Ramesh Rout of Laxminarayanpur area.

The seeds subsidy amount was deposited in Rout's bank account, an official said.

Under the DBT scheme, the farmers would get themselves registered online to purchase seeds and get the subsidy amount in their bank accounts directly, Patnaik said.

Optimistic about a good rainfall as per the prediction of the IMD, Patnaik said a number of steps were being taken up keeping the natural calamities into consideration.

'China to help farmers grow vegetables'

After their slugfest in and outside the Punjab assembly over investments and achievements, the SAD and Congress are bickering over deputy chief minister Sukhbir Badal's ongoing China trip.

The Punjab government on Monday announced that Shanghai Municipal Agriculture Commission will partner with it for transfer of technology and to help Punjab farmers grow Chinese vegetables to give a boost to the state's diversification drive.

However, Capt Amarinder Singh, who is too on a visit to United States, made a sarcastic jibe at Sukhbir, saying, "He has gone to explore his personal investment options and opportunities there."

Earlier, the Punjab government said Shanghai Agriculture Commission vice-chairman Feng Zhioyong "expressed satisfaction with the measures being taken by the Punjab government to attract industry and said there was a huge scope for investment in the food processing sector".

During his visit to a milk plant in Shanghai, Sukhbir said that Punjab will use Chinese expertise to rejuvenate the Verka brand. The plant, which is one

of the biggest in China, is one of the biggest producers of ultra heat treated milk.

Union minister: Central funds for farmers not utilized by Odisha

Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh on Monday criticised the state government for its alleged failure in utilising funds provided by Centre for benefit of farmers in the state.

Addressing a gathering after participating in the Akshaya Tiritiya celebrations at Kandarpur near Cuttack, Singh said funds made available to Odisha by Centre are not being used properly in agriculture sector.

He also said the Centre has provided Rs 200 crore to Odisha for irrigation and water projects but the funds are lying unutilized.

Taking a dig at the BJD-led government for tardy utilisation of funds, Singh alleged that Centre sanctions schemes for farmers but proper implementation of these depends on the states.

"If the state government fails to implement the schemes then how will farmers get benefit from them?" asked Singh.

The Union minister also targeted the state over the recent protest by the milk farmers.

"In states like Gujarat where farmers produce five times more milk than Odisha are enjoying profits. But poor milk farmers in Odisha are forced to stage protest by pouring milk on roads.

This reflects the concern of the state government for farmers," said Singh. Later, the Union minister also attended a programme organised at National Rice Research Institute (NRRI) to celebrate Akshaya Tiritiya.

Speaking at the function, Singh praised the works of NRRI in agriculture sector and urged the scientists to continue the good work for the benefit of the farmers.

"A lot of things need to be done for the development of farmers in the country and our government is dedicatedly trying to make things better for the farmers' community," said Singh.

He also alleged that during Congress-led UPA regime not much was done for benefit of farmers.

Drought and bird flu double whammy for poultry farmers

The state's poultry farmers, who are already reeling under severe drought, are staring at a bleak future as chicken sales dropped after the outbreak of bird flu.

A day after the government sounded high alert following the detection of bird flu at a poultry farm in Bidar district, poultry products reported 20-25 per cent dip in sales.

The industry, which suffered heavily when the virus hit the country eight years ago, is worried how this news would pan out in the coming days.

"It's quite common for us to experience bird losses in the summer due to high temperature and contaminated water. But the outbreak of bird flu has delivered a big blow, especially for farmers who have invested lakhs of rupees," said Gopal Gowda, poultry and dairy farmer in Rajankunte off Bengaluru.

Though there were reports of bird flu deaths in Bidar, he said the fear among consumers after the government sounded an alert brought down the sales.

KS Ashok Kumar, president of the Karnataka Poultry Farmers' and Breeders' Association, said every time there's bird flu scare, the poultry industry is

generally the target though the other free-flying birds, mainly migratory ones, are a bigger threat than chickens in the organized sector.

After the bird flu scare a few years ago, most of the organized poultry sectors had taken up bio-security measures to ward off straying animals that could cause infection by entering the farms.

The virus to poultry birds in Bidar could have spread after they came in contact with migratory birds as the farm is located on the national highway there, Kumar pointed out.

Individual members of the association, however, are worried. "The word will spread fast and could lead to fall in demand," a member said.

Karnataka has about nine crore poultry birds in the organized sector that produces three crore eggs a day, supplying to different parts of the country.

There are reports of a surge in demand for red meat and pork.

Riazuddin, a mutton seller, said: "Business on Monday generally is dismal but for a change, we had good sales."

AP farmers, fishermen take to Whatsapp for info

: Farmers and fishermen across AP have taken to Whatsapp to get weather updates and market information with the Reliance Foundation Information Services (RFIS) providing data to nearly 3,000 of them across 2,000 villages.

S Senthil Kumaran, programme leader of RFIS, said his organisation was set up in 2012 and sends information through SMSs, voice messages, and tele and video conferences to farmers and fishermen.

"We have sent more than 10,000 advisories in 2015-16 through messages and Whatsapp to our 3.2 lakh service users. Of this, 3,000 farmers have access to Whatsapp and are using the app to get information," Senthil said.

The trend in the rural areas to make use of this facility increased with the advent of smartphones, he added.

RFIS provides information on potential fishing zones, weather forecast to fishermen in coastal villages, government schemes, high wave alert, insurance, tips for effective handling of GPS and other fishing equipment, hygienic handling of fish and various modern and sustainable fishing technologies to the fishermen fraternity.

To farmers, RFIS provides information on crop cultivation practices, crop rotation, inter cropping, nursery management, seed availability, seed spacing, soil testing, time of sowing, drip irrigation, market information, weed management, sowing techniques, weather information like rain.

Similarly, shepherds get information on delayed breeding, diarrhoea, disease management, mastitis care, treating infertility, care of pregnant animal, shelter and environment management, vaccination information, artificial insemination, clean milk production, country chicken management, supplement food, tackling flies and heat, foot and mouth disease care, feed management, digestion problem and de-worming.

A Venkateswarlu, a fisherman from East Godavari, said the information provided by the foundation is valid as it is authenticated by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services.

"Ever since we started accessing information from RFIS, we have not suffered losses. We call up the RFIS toll free number - 1800 419 8800 - to know the weather forecast and which location we should go for a good catch.

It saves us both time and money on fuel. We receive the information through SMSs and Whatsapp," Venkateswarlu added.

V Venkateswara Rao, joint director of department of animal husbandry, Visakhapatnam district, said, "RFIS also helps government departments like us to facilitate live interaction with beneficiaries.

It acts as a mediator between experts and farmers to clarify the doubts for better understanding about their profession," he said.

Bird flu scare hits poultry farmers reeling under drought

The state's poultry farmers who are already reeling under the twin blows of drought and acute water scarcity are now affected by the outbreak of bird flu.

A day after Karnataka government sounded high alert following the detection of bird flu at a poultry farm in Bidar district, poultry products, usually the second best choice when it comes to proteins, reported a drop in sales of 20-25 per cent.

The poultry industry, which suffered heavily when the virus hit the country some eight years ago, is worried how this news would pan out in the coming days.

"It is quite common for us to experience bird losses in the summer due to high temperatures and contaminated water.

But the outbreak of bird flu has delivered a big blow especially for farmers who have invested in lakhs," said Gopal Gowda, a poultry and dairy farmer based in Rajankunte off Bengaluru.

Though there were reports of bird flu deaths in Bidar, he said the fear among consumers after government sounded high alert brought down the sales.

K S Ashok Kumar, president of the Karnataka Poultry Farmers' and Breeders' Association, said, every time when there is a bird flu scare, the poultry industry is generally the target though the other free flying birds mainly migratory fauna that fly close to our homes are the bigger threat than the chickens in the organised sector.

After the bird flu scare a few years ago, he said, most of the organised poultry sector have taken up bio-security measures as a preventive measure to ward off straying animals into the farms that can cause the infection to enter and spread.

Kumar said the virus to poultry birds in Bidar could have spread after they came in contact with migratory birds as the poultry farm is located on the national highway there.

Individual members of the association, however, are worried. "The word will spread fast and could lead to fall in demand," an association member said. Karnataka has about nine crore poultry birds in the organized sector that produces about three crore eggs a day, supplying to different parts of the country.

Meanwhile, there are reports of surge in demand for red meat and pork. Riazuddin, a mutton seller, said, "The business on Monday generally is dismal but for a change, we had good business".

Culling on Tuesday

Kalaburagi: With a fresh outbreak of bird flu being reported in Bidar, the mass culling of more than 1.5 lakh chicken will be undertaken on Tuesday morning.

After the death of some 8,000 chicken recently, birds samples were sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Disease Laboratory in Bhopal which confirmed that the sent ones are positive for H5 strain of Avian Influenza.

"It was decided to immediately commence the culling of birds and destruction of eggs and feed material among other things so as to control further spread of the disease without loss of time," said animal husbandry department officials.

On Monday, a team of officials arrived to Bidar from Bengaluru and held discussions with local leaders. They directed the district administration not to sell the eggs in the taluk and dig huge pits to bury the birds. About 50 teams comprising one doctor and four his assistants have been formed to destroy the infected poultry.

Haryana to bring more land under horticulture crops

Haryana government today said it has targeted to bring at least one-fourth of the total 36 lakh hectares of cultivable land under horticultural crops within the next 10 years.

This is aimed to increase income of farmers by making them break out of the wheat-paddy cycle.

Stating this here today, Agriculture Minister O P Dhankar, said this had been done in deference to the demands of the people of Delhi and of the National Capital Region (NCR).

A meeting in this regard would be held with the Union Agriculture Minister, Radha Mohan Singh, on May 11.

The Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar would also be present at the meeting which would be attended by senior officers of Agriculture, Cooperation, Animal Husbandry and Horticulture Departments and the Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board.

He said peri-urban agriculture, to be promoted on the pattern of Beijing in China, would help in meeting the demand for milk and milk products, vegetables, fruits, flowers and poultry products in the NCR.

Other food products could be brought in from other states but it would be inconvenient and expensive to bring daily necessities from other states, he said.

Dhankar said since peri-urban agriculture involved higher capital investment as compared to the traditional agriculture, the state would seek financial assistance from National Capital Region Planning Board and the Union Ministry of Agriculture.

It necessitates setting up of a planned system of poly houses, steady market, crop management and distribution system.

e-Mandi would also be linked to peri-urban agriculture, he said.

Presently, only 4.9 lakh hectares of total cultivable land in Haryana is covered under horticultural crops.

Target has been set to double the land under horticulture in the next 10 years.

All departments have been asked to set yearly targets and work out schemes. Micro and drip irrigation system would be promoted, he added.

The Agriculture Department aims at increasing its reach in the Delhi and NCR markets through peri-urban agriculture.

Presently, Delhi depends on West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Maharashtra for fruits and vegetables and Andhra Pradesh for poultry products.

Special emphasis is being laid on the production of mushroom in Sonapat district.

A Special Purpose Vehicle has been set up for international fruit and vegetable market being set up in Ganaur for which a detailed project report is being prepared, he added. CHS MKJ

HC asks Punjab, Haryana to clarify on purchasing crops at MSP

Punjab and Haryana high court on Monday asked Haryana government to clarify if it would purchase entire stock of bajra (pearl millet) and sunflower instead of the 25% it buys normally.

HC also asked Punjab government to clarify the minimum support price (MSP) for sunflower seeds and maize.

A division bench headed by Justice S S Saron made these queries during the hearing of a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), pleading that the MSP of agricultural produce had been fixed much below the actual cost of production and even that had not been given to farmers.

The PIL has also sought directions to implement the MSP policy.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

States not informing Centre of pulses requirement: Ram Vilas Paswan



The minister pointed out that private importers who purchase pulses from abroad keep the stock at ports and bring it to the open market only when the demand hikes.

NEW DELHI: State governments which blame the Centre for not providing sufficient stock of pulses have failed to inform the central government of their requirements so far, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in the Lok Sabha today.

Responding to supplementaries during Question Hour on shortage of pulses, he said the Centre has repeatedly asked the state governments to give in writing their demands, but "states which blame the Government of India have not forwarded their demands."

Paswan said that out of the 22 essential commodities, only the prices of pulses have gone up. This, he said, is mainly due to the gap between demand and local production. Hoarding is the second reason for the shortage of pulses in the market.

In his written response, the Minister said in pulses, the prices of tur, urad and

chana dal have increased. Besides, the prices of potato and sugar have also gone up.

The minister pointed out that private importers who purchase pulses from abroad keep the stock at ports and bring it to the open market only when the demand hikes.

He said while agencies like Customs are investigating such malpractices, the state governments too have been empowered to take action as they are primarily responsible to check hoarding.

He said it is up to the state governments to either sell or auction foodgrains seized from hoarders and blackmarketeers.

The minister said there is no official assessment of direct impact of water shortage on prices, but it adversely affects the sown area and productivity of crops.

Sugar output may fall by 4% in 2016-17, but no need to import

Asked about the need to imports in next season, Sawhney said: "We have more than enough sugar sugar in the country. We don't want any import of sugar in the country."

NEW DELHI: India's sugar production is likely to fall by 4 per cent to about 24 million tonnes in the next marketing year starting October due to lower cane output, but there will not be any need to import as the country has sufficient stock, according to industry body ISMA.

Sugar production of India, the world's second largest producer after Brazil, is likely to fall at about 25 million tonnes in the ongoing 2015-16 marketing year (October- September) from 28.3 million tonnes in the previous year.



"Based on the sugarcane planting area, sugar production is expected at at least 24 million tonnes in the next season," Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) President Tarun Sawhney told reporters here today on the sidelines of an event.

He said the production in Maharashtra and Karnataka is expected to fall due to lower cane plantation in the two drought-affected states, but the same would be compensated by the Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu millers to some extent.

Asked about the need to imports in next season, Sawhney said: "We have more than enough sugar sugar in the country. We don't want any import of sugar in the country."

The association wants the sugar import duty to continue at 40 per cent, he added.

The closing stock at the end of the season would be around 7-7.5 million tonnes, taking the total sugar availability to over 31 million tonnes in the 2016-17 season, he said, while pegging the domestic demand at 26 million

tonnes.

"Sugar stock at the end of 2016-17 season which is September next year would be around 5 million tonnes, which is sufficient for 2-3 months consumption," Sawhney explained.

On rising retail prices of sugar, ISMA President said that the trade margins have increased and same should not be more than Rs 6 per kg.

Sawhney said the mills would be comfortable with Rs 36 per kg ex-mill price of sugar, which means retail price of Rs 42 per kg. The average ex-mill price of sugar is currently at Rs 33 per kg.

Recently, the Centre had said that there would not be sugar shortage in the country in the 2016-17 season despite lower domestic output, as the total availability at 30-31 million tonnes would be suffice to meet the demand.

"...notwithstanding any shortfall in sugar production during 2016-17 sugar season (estimated 23-24 million tonnes), the total availability in India (30-31 million tonnes) would be sufficient to meet the domestic consumption," the Food Ministry had said in a statement.

As the sugar prices crossed Rs 40 per kg in the retail markets, the Centre has empowered state governments to impose stockholding limits on sugar traders.

India's foodgrain production increases marginally to 252.23 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year



Production of rice, coarse cereals,pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton and jute was lower due to erratic rainfall during the 2015 monsoon season.

NEW DELHI: India's foodgrain production increased marginally to 252.23 million tonnes in the 2015-16 crop year, as per the third advance estimates, despite setback due to deficient rainfall and shortage of water in reservoirs.

Production of rice, coarse cereals,pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane ,cotton and jute was lower due to erratic rainfall during the 2015 monsoon season.

"As per the 3 rd advance estimates for 2015-16 total foodgrains production in the country has been higher than that in the last year.

Total foodgrains production during 2015-16, estimated at 252.23 million tonnes, has been higher by 0.21 million tonnes over the production of 252.02 million tonnes during 2014-15," the ministry said in a release.

Rice production during 2015-16 is estimated at 103.36 million tonnes, which is lower by 2.12 million tonnes than its production of 105.48 million tonnes during 2014-15.

Production of wheat estimated at 94.04 million tonnes is higher by 7.51 million tonnes than the production of 86.53 million tonnes of wheat during 2014-15. Total production of coarse cereals is estimated at 37.78 million tonnes which is lower by 5.08 million tonnes as compared to their production of 42.86 million tonnes during 2014-15.

Output of pulses is estimated at 17.06 million tonnes during 2015-16, marginally lower than the previous year's production of 17.15 million tonnes.

With a decline of 1.6 million tonnes over the previous year's production's total oilseeds production in the country during 2015-16 is estimated at 25.9 million tonnes.

Production of sugarcane estimated at 346.72 million tonnes, is lower by 15.61 million tonnes than its production during 2014-15.

Production of Cotton estimated at 30.52 million bales (of 170 kg each) is also lower by 4.28 million bales than its production of 34.805 million bales during 2014-15.

Production of jute is estimated at 9.92 million bales (of 180 kg each) which is lower by 0.70 million bales than its production of 10.62 million bales during 2014-15.

Shanghai Municipal Agriculture Commission to partner Punjab



The Shanghai Municipal Agriculture Commission will partner the Punjab government to transfer technology as well as help farmers in the state grow Chinese vegetables to give a boost to the state's diversification drive

CHANDIGARH: The Shanghai Municipal Agriculture Commission will partner the Punjab government to transfer technology as well as help farmers in the state grow Chinese vegetables to give a boost to the state's diversification drive.

This assurance was given by Shanghai Agriculture Commission Vice Chairman Feng Zhioyong during an interaction at its headquarters.

Zhioyong said the commission had already visited Punjab and would identify areas of mutual interest for sharing of best practices.

He expressed satisfaction with the measures being taken by the Punjab government to attract industry and said there was a huge scope for investment in the food processing sector.

Punjab's deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal suggested that the Chinese expertise could rejuvenate the Verka brand and also help in

producing ultra heat treated or UHT milk in Punjab which could be marketed successfully during the summer months when there is a shortage in supply.

Badal, following the meeting with officials of the agriculture commission, also visited the state-owned Bright milk plant in Shanghai. The plant, one of the biggest in China, is one of the biggest producers of UHT milk.

Business delegate Bhavdeep Sardana of Sukhjit Starch suggested that Punjab could use Chinese agriculture technology in soya bean processing to catapult its agriculture sector to the next level. He said Punjab farmers could also grow vegetables used in Chinese cuisine.

In a meeting with Badal, a large number of high-end bicycle and electric cycle manufacturers pledged their support to the proposed Cycle Valley in Ludhiana. Badal, along with Hero Cycles chairman Pankaj Munjal, discussed the exact nature of investment which could flow into the Cycle Valley as well as the quantum of investment. Several companies said they were looking at investments of \$5-10 million dollars in the initial stages.

Munjal, while discussing the business model of the new integrated cycle park, said the company was in the process of tying up with Chinese manufacturers of high-end cycles for different segments. There is an immense demand for lifestyle cycles including mountain cycles.

"We in Hero have increased production of mountain cycles from zero to two lakh in two years," he said.

Promax's general manager Johny Lin. Promax said that he was in advanced talks with Hero group to set up a facility in Ludhiana.

Besides this, Jonson Ju of Shenzhen New Canghai Machinery Co Ltd said his company was not only manufacturing bicycles but also trading worldwide in cycle parts. "We would like to have a presence in the Cycle Valley also," he said.

The others who met the deputy CM included Brian Tang of Sate Lite, the largest manufacturers of reflectors and Kent Lee of Hangzhou Joy Kie Ind and Trad Co Ltd.