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THE HINDU

43 species identified in fish count at Vembanad



A survey of fish species in Vembanad, conducted by Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment here, has recorded the presence of 43 species of freshwater fish and five species of shell fish in the backwaters and riverine areas. The study was the ninth in the series of annual surveys held by the non-governmental organisation.

Forty-five species of freshwater fish and five species of shell fish were found in the survey last year.

The fish varieties traced in the new survey were among about 70 species found in different surveys organised earlier.

Increase in acidity levels in water had led to a decline in fish count, especially in the Chithira, Marthandam and Methran Kayal areas, T.D. Jojo, project coordinator, told *The Hindu* .

The pH value of water was 4 to 5 in areas which recorded lower fish count. Pesticide content from agricultural fields reaching the backwaters resulted in an increase in acidity levels, adversely affecting the breeding of fish, he said.

Shell-fish breeding

The opening of the Thanneermukkam bund in April had facilitated breeding of shell fish in nearby areas. A decrease in summer rain this year also contributed to breeding of clam in areas such as Muhamma and Kainakari.

The survey was conducted at 15 locations by a team consisting of members of the NGO and researchers from the College of Fisheries. About 100 volunteers took part in the programme. The services of expert fishermen were also utilised.

The fish count project was flagged off on Sunday at the Kaippuram jetty. A session held at Pulimoottil Convention Centre in the evening was inaugurated by district panchayat president G. Venugopal.

An orientation programme held for the survey team prior to the programme was inaugurated by S. Mahesh, Deputy Director of Fisheries.

Machines help in renewing interest in paddy cultivation in DK

Shortage of labour had pushed many to give up paddy cultivation or switch over to other crops

It was about four years ago, recalls Ganesh Niduvannaya, a progressive farmer at Punchappady village near Puttur, a bank employee in his village decided to discontinue paddy cultivation on his five acre land. It was due to acute shortage of labour.

Moreover as the employee had been posted in Bengaluru, he was finding it difficult to manage the cultivation in his native village. A farm labourer, who took interest, convinced the employee to hire the paddy transplanter from Mr. Niduvannaya and continue the cultivation. It was done. The harvesting was also done using a machine hired.

Area under paddy cultivation in Dakshina Kannada

YEAR	IN HECTARES
2013-14	31,600
2014-15	29,942
2015-16	28,029

(In kharif season)

TRANSPLANTATION

MECHANISED	CONVENTIONAL
5 labourers	40 labourers
Cost: Rs. 1,800 – Rs. 2,000	Rs. 6,000
More tillers	Fewer tillers
16-day-old saplings can be transplanted	Only 25-day- old saplings can be transplanted
More yield	Less yield

(SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE)

Since then, the employee changed his mind and continues to grow paddy. “If not for machines, the five acre land would be growing some commercial crop now or remained abandoned,” Mr. Niduvannaya told *The Hindu*.

He said that about eight paddy growers in Puttur taluk who he knew and who had decided to drop paddy cultivation due to the labour factor are continuing the cultivation now. They are spread in Kadaba, Mardala, Kudmar and Panaje villages.



“About 30 acres of paddy under cultivation in those villages thus now have been saved. Thanks to the machines,” he said.

“Paddy cultivation had reached coma stage. Paddy transplanters and combined harvesters (which separates paddy from husk or straw) came like energy boosters,” he said.

Mr. Niduvannaya himself cultivated and harvested paddy on about seven acres using machines.

H. Kempe Gowda, Joint Director, Agriculture, Dakshina Kannada, said paddy transplanters and harvesters have saved paddy fields from extinction in Dakshina Kannada.

Mr. Gowda said that Kodipu Krushi Trust at Surathkal has taken up a mission of rejuvenating paddy cultivation in abandoned lands. It cultivated

paddy on a 10 acre abandoned land under Surathkal hobli last year. It has plans to cover paddy in 50 acres in the same hobli this kharif season.

Now those who have decided to abandon paddy cultivation are renewing their interest due to availability of machines. The department was also encouraging mechanised cultivation and harvesting.

The area under paddy cultivation in Dakshina Kannada dropped from 31,600 hectares during 2013-14 to 28,029 hectares in 2015-16.

“Now the challenge is to save the existing area under cultivation,” he said.

Six more farm machinery renting out centres

The government has sanctioned six more custom hire centres from where farmers can hire farm equipment in Dakshina Kannada.

This is in addition to five such centres already functioning in the district, according to H. Kempe Gowda, Joint Director, Agriculture, Dakshina Kannada. VST Tillers Tractors Ltd. would manage the six new centres. They have been temporarily proposed at Moodbidri and Surathkal; Sullia; Kadaba; Kokkada and Vitla. But a committee of Dakshina Kannada would take a final call on opening these centres at the places proposed, he said. They would be opened during this kharif season, he said.

Shree Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project, an NGO, manages the existing five centres. They are at Panja in Sullia taluk; Uppinangady in Puttur taluk; Panemangaluru in Bantwal taluk; Gurupura in Mangaluru taluk and Kuvettu in Belthangady taluk.

The centres had combined paddy harvesters, paddy-transplanting machines, power tillers, tractors, paddy threshers, mist blowers and the like. They have 26 types of farm equipment, he said.

GM seeds key to food security: Javadekar

Panel set up by Environment Ministry to take a call on GM mustard



Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has said the use of genetically modified (GM) technology for seeds is important for improving agricultural productivity and food security. He said 18 field trials, testing various kinds of GM seeds, were under way but the government would take a considered view on releasing genetically modified mustard.

GM mustard, likely to be the first food-related transgenic crop and developed as part of a research collaboration involving scientists at Delhi University, sits at an inflexion point with critics alleging that such technologies are unfit for human consumption and proponents arguing that such technology is critical for India's future.

‘Productivity low’

“India’s agricultural productivity is among the lowest [among nations] ... science and technology has to be encouraged for this,” Mr. Javadekar said at a press event organised to mark two years of the National Democratic Alliance regime.

The Environment Ministry had constituted a Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee comprising biotechnologists, ecologists and sociologists to take a call on GM mustard.

Tackling polluters

Mr. Javadekar said the government was mooting a new Bill to impose strict fines and even jail terms for those violating industrial pollution norms. A senior official in the Ministry told *The Hindu* that the Civil Penalties Bill was in the process of being reviewed after a round of comments and would soon be presented to the Cabinet for approval.

The Bill would also have a provision to impose heavy penalties on government agencies, local bodies and state-run institutions.

5 municipalities sued

Last week, Mr. Javadekar said his Ministry — which had a system of electronically monitoring industrial units along the Ganga and noting those that exceeded prescribed norms — had sued five municipalities in Uttar Pradesh in the National Green Tribunal for not implementing sewage treatment measures.

Committee of biotechnologists and ecologists to take a call on

GM mustard

Birds and conservation

As the country's foremost institution of ornithology and natural history, SACON has played a crucial role in conservation and awareness. The director talks on its silver jubilee



On the lookout A child tries hard to locate a bird

The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History (SACON), Coimbatore, located at a 55-acre campus at Anaikatti in the foothills of the Nilgiri Biosphere, is the vision of India's birdman Dr. Salim Ali. He wanted to have an institute to study nature primarily through birds, as there was no significant data on Indian birds.

SACON was established on June 5, 1990, four years after his death. It was initiated by the Bombay Natural History Society and the Ministry of Environment, Government of India. This year it celebrates its 25th anniversary.

The institute has created hundreds of young bird watchers and nature lovers in the schools in Coimbatore through Salim Ali Naturalist Forum. The Children's Ecology Congress is a special annual event unique to SACON.

Dr. K. Sankar — who worked with Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun, (1986-2016) as Scientist and Senior Professor — is its current director. He is known for his work with Asiatic elephants, deer, primates and tigers. He has also coordinated the tiger census in southern India. In this interview, Dr. Sankar shares his thoughts on the plans ahead for SACON. Excerpts:

What are the plans for the silver jubilee year?

We are having SACON's first-ever alumni meet since its inception. We are expecting 80 people. Some did their dissertations with us, or PhDs, others worked as research fellows.

We will explore possibilities of SACON collaborating with alumni who are now working with the Government of India, the forest department, NGOs and universities. They can help us, especially in conservation work, individually or extend programmes and support us through their organisations.

As part of the silver jubilee celebrations, we also have an Annual Research Seminar on May 25.

What are the upcoming research projects?

We are planning to assess the status, distribution and conservation importance of peafowl, our national bird. There have been only a few isolated studies.

In many places, farmers do not like peafowl, as they are a menace to their crops. We are planning to conduct a study in Tamil Nadu first and then subsequently across the country to assess population, status, and distribution. We will have workshops, bring in partners to conduct a conservation census and then come up with possible recommendations for mitigating problems associated with peafowl in select areas.

Tell us about the project on the endangered Saras Cranes?

We are planning a country-wide status, distribution and population estimation of Saras Cranes. The first data was collected 20 years ago; the last assessment was done 10 years ago. This is the third cycle.

It is the need of the hour, as the population is going down. The Saras cranes nest in fields. We want to study the habitat and find out if use of environmental contaminants, especially the pesticides and herbicides, cause a toll on the population.

When the birds try to hatch, the eggs break or collapse. We are going to include this component to try to find out reasons for their reproductive rate failure.

Tell us about SACON's role in spreading awareness on conservation among the general public?

Wildlife enthusiasts have benefited from our training programmes on ornithology and natural history.

Several colleges, schools, and NGOs in and around Coimbatore have closely associated with SACON and have been a part of bird watching trips, and nature awareness programmes.

People are aware of conservation issues. NGOs are vocal now and are involved in conservation in a big way. It is no longer so easy to cut a tree in the name of road-widening programme or development.

MILESTONES

Seminal Publications: Bird-Dispersed Plants for Afforestation, Wetlands of India and Atlas of Wetlands. More than 800 research papers have been published in national and international peer-reviewed journals and technical reports.

Research/Projects: The Ornithology Division has undertaken ecological studies and status surveys on rare, endemic, and threatened birds of the Western Ghats and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Conservation plans for threatened birds including Lesser Florican, Narcondam Hornbill, and Andaman Teal, have been developed.

The findings by landscape ecology division on plant-bird interactions in the Western and Eastern Ghats carried out with the collaboration of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department is used in the restoration of degraded forest ecosystems.

The ecotoxicology division has assessed the impact of environmental contaminants on wetlands of 14 states and 44 rivers in Kerala using fish as an indicator.

The conservation ecology division has worked on the conservation of the Edible-nest swiftlet, the endemic Narcondam Hornbill and Andaman Serpent eagle. Delisting of the Edible-nest Swiftlet from Schedule-I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, is one initiative.

SACON has completed 250 projects successfully. Research programmes have covered Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the Western Ghats

Extension and outreach: The Nature Education division inculcates love for Nature and conservation among the younger generation through its annual Sálím Ali Memorial Lecture delivered by eminent personalities. As a member of the International Association for Exchange of Students for Technical Experience it has hosted students from Brazil, Germany, Taiwan, Cambodia, Philippines and Vietnam.

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Farmer earns Re 1 after selling one tonne of onions

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According to Devidas Parbhane, 48, the fall in onion prices is already taking a toll and like him, several others have got a 'raw deal' despite a bumper crop this season.

“Every day, we are hearing news about farmer suicides from drought-hit regions. However, with onion prices touching new lows, farmers like me may be meeting the same fate,” said Parbhane, the sole bread-earner for his family of five.

Parbhane explains the math: he has two acres of farm land in which he grew onions by spending Rs 80,000.

“On May 10, I sent 952 kg of onions in 18 gunny bags through a truck to the Pune-based Agriculture Produce Market Committee and received Rs 16 per 10 kg. So, per one kg, it works to one rupee and sixty paise,” said Parbhane.

“The total onion was sold for Rs 1,523.2. Out of the earnings, the middlemen took away Rs 91.35 as commission, labour charges were Rs 59 and Rs 18.55, and Rs 33.30 was paid against miscellaneous charges. Rs 1,320 was paid to the truck driver, who transported the produce to APMC.”

He claimed that after all the deductions, he is taking home only Re 1. He was informed that the prices of onion had plunged drastically that particular day. “I was expecting at least Rs 3 per kg. However, I was disappointed after receiving such a deal,” the farmer said.

“For four months, I took care of my produce and watered the onions at the time of load-shedding. Forget the profit, I am unable to recover even my expenditure on growing onions.” There were no comments on the farmer’s claim from APMC.

Local media reports quoted the trader who bought the onion as saying that produce was of smaller size and inferior quality. Meanwhile, a delegation of onion traders and APMC members from Lasalgaon in Nashik has met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis seeking his intervention on the issue of plummeting prices of onions.

Gujarat renames food processing mission, likely to fetch Rs 10,000-cr investment

Under the new policy, Gujarat had identified agro and food processing Industries as among the thrust industries of the policy.

Gujarat received an investment of Rs 3,000 crore in three years under the National Mission on Food Processing (NMFP) since 2012, which has been delinked by Centre last March. Buoyed by industry demand, this scheme has been continued as the 'CM Mission for Food Processing' under the recently launched Comprehensive Agro Business Policy (2016-21) and is expected to fetch a minimum investment of Rs 10,000 crore in Gujarat in the next five years.

After the Union government discontinued its budgetary support of 75 per cent share under the NMFP Scheme last year, states like Jharkhand, Odisha, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat are among those continuing the scheme. Under the new policy, Gujarat had identified agro and food processing Industries as among the thrust industries of the policy.

“Despite the NMFP being delinked last year, in three years of the scheme we had received investment of Rs 3,000 crore. In three years if we are fetching this amount, then it should be continued and demand of industry was also there to do so. We have taken some peculiar aspects of that (scheme) and added some additional benefits to it. Based on a rough estimate, we are expecting a minimum investment of Rs 10,000 crore in next five years under the 'CM Mission for Food Processing' under the new policy,” said KS Randhawa, MD of Gujarat Agro Industries Corporation Ltd, on the sidelines of the CII roadshow to announce the 'CII Agro Tech 2016' on Monday.

As per government officials, 50 per cent of employment in Gujarat is generated from the agriculture sector, while there are 6.3 lakhs small-marginal & micro industries which give employment to 38.51 lakh people.

Speaking about the new policy unveiled by CM Anandiben Patel on May 9, Randhawa said, “We have taken inputs of food processing from countries like Brazil and the Netherlands on how they have evolved it... The food sector at present is growing better than the normal industry — the agro food processing sector is (having) more than seven per cent growth and it is increasing; but the potential is much more. Gujarat has had a agro-business policy since 2000, it has not been improved or changed and now this has been addressed.”

GM technology: Compulsory licensing rules withdrawn after outcry from crop research majors

The Indian Express has learnt that the decision to put on hold the latest notification came after intervention at the “highest level”



Minister of Agriculture Radha Mohan Singh (PTI Photo by Manvender Vashist)

The Centre has effectively rolled back a notification issued only last week, requiring genetic modification (GM) crop technology developers to license

their proprietary traits on demand and not charge any royalty exceeding 10 per cent of the maximum sale price of seeds.

“We have decided to withdraw the notification and put it as a draft on our ministry’s website for inviting public feedback before finalisation”, the Union Agriculture Minister, Radha Mohan Singh told The Indian Express.

“This is not a roll-back. It’s just that the earlier notification is now being put in public domain to receive wider suggestions,” he added.

The notification, dated May 18, had said that the licensor of an approved GM technology – for instance, Monsanto’s Bollgard-II Bt cotton – “shall not refuse grant on a license” to any eligible seed company wanting to incorporate it into its own hybrids or varieties.

The notification, titled Licensing and Formats for GM Technology Agreement Guidelines, further mandated the technology developer to award the license for its trait “within 30 days of receipt of a request from [the] licensee”. In the event of not meeting the obligation, “the licensee is deemed to have obtained the licence ... as per FRAND (fair, reasonable and non-discriminative) mechanism”.

The guidelines also had provisions for fixing of royalty (“trait fee”) payable by licensees. In the case of GM cotton, the trait fee for any newly commercialised trait – that could include Monsanto’s next-generation Bollgard-III Bt technology – was capped at 10 per cent of maximum sale price.

The latter is already now being fixed by the Centre under a separate Cotton Seeds Price (Control) Order that was issued by the Agriculture Ministry on December 7.

Both the December 7 order and the May 18 notification have come under attack from the Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises-Agriculture Focus Group, which represents crop research majors like Monsanto,

Mahyco, Syngenta, DuPont Pioneer, Bayer BioScience, BASF and Advanta. The executive director of the lobby arm, Shivendra Bajaj, said that the latest guidelines were tantamount to unrestricted compulsory licensing, “as the innovator has no choice but to part with his technology, without even having a say on whom to give the license”.

Syngenta’s chief operating officer Davor Pisk told NDTV in an interview that the new licensing guidelines would hinder new farming technology coming into India (<http://bit.ly/1sxysEq>). Share prices of Monsanto India, on Monday, closed 8.6 per cent lower than its corresponding level for Friday.

The Indian Express has learnt that the decision to put on hold the latest notification came after intervention at the “highest level”.

The timing and the wrong signals being sent to investors – more so, especially after the unveiling of a National Intellectual Property Rights policy barely 10 days back – apparently played a part in what is effectively a roll-back.

Pune markets in chaos as prices of tomatoes shoot up, onions dip

The price of tomatoes in markets across the city has crossed the Rs 50 per kg mark with traders pointing to further escalation in the days to come.



The Pimpalgaon wholesale market has not seen a single crate of the produce arriving at the market since April 11.

THIS SUMMER, consumers and vegetable growers have both been affected for different reasons. While the consumers have been hit by the sudden surge in price of tomatoes in the last few days, the onion prices have plummeted across the wholesale markets, putting onion growers in a fix.

The price of tomatoes in markets across the city has crossed the Rs 50 per kg mark with traders pointing to further escalation in the days to come. The Pimpalgaon wholesale market has not seen a single crate of the produce arriving at the market since April 11. Pune's Market has seen the arrival of 2,480 quintals of tomatoes on May 23 with the highest price of the produce going at Rs 2,500 per quintal. Last year, during the same period, 1,167 quintals of tomatoes had arrived in the market but the highest price fetched by the produce was Rs 1,160 per quintal.

According to Shriram Gadve, president of Vegetable Growers Association of India (VGAI), the price rise is a result of the ongoing drought conditions and the crop loss suffered by farmers earlier this year.

“Maharashtra has around 2 lakh hectare of tomato growing area but the drought has reduced the area to half. Only farmers who have managed to install drip irrigation in their fields had cultivated tomato but that also has failed due to scarcity of water,” he said. Pune Nashik, Ahmednagar, Dhule Satara, Sangli and parts of Marathwada are the main tomato growing areas of the state. It might be recalled around 75 per cent of the tomato growing areas in Maharashtra is under drip irrigation but due to steep decline in the ground water table the farmers were not able to water their crop.

Gadve also said that the ongoing heat wave earlier in the months April and May destroyed the tomato flowers, which resulted in loss of produce also. “Chances of the retail prices of tomato breaching Rs 100 per kg are not slim as there is a dearth of produce,” he said. Meanwhile, onion farmers across

the state are ‘in tears’ with prices crashing well below the acceptable limit in the wholesale markets. In a reverse trend, the onion prices have crashed although there was a slow arrival of the produce. Monday saw the arrival of 10,500 quintals of onion at the Lasalgaon market in Nashik with the modal price of the bulb hovering at Rs 7.50 per kg. Lasalgaon’s market had seen arrival of 8,239 quintals of onions with the price hovering at Rs 11.50 on May 23, 2015. Gadve said the lowering of the price was a result of glut in the domestic market and the government needs to boost up exports to solve the problem. “Export subsidies should be introduced otherwise the farmers will not be able to realise the prices,” he said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Low commodity prices, poor offtake depress farm exports

Falling exports			(figures in \$ million)
Commodity	April-March		Growth %
	2015	2016	
Buffalo Meat	4,781.18	4,068.66	-14.90
Rice (Basmati)	4,516.28	3,477.35	-23.00
Rice (non-Basmati)	3,336.84	2,307.81	-30.84
Cashew	909.26	768.07	-15.53
Groundnut	760.37	614.94	-19.13
Sesame Seeds	777.27	459.65	-40.48
Dairy Products	355.83	257.58	-27.61

Source: Commerce Ministry

Shipments down 20%; Centre exploring new markets to offset demand fall in traditional ones

Exports of a wide range of farm products such as rice, wheat, guar gum, vegetables, dairy items and sesame seeds fell sharply in 2015-16 as agriculture shipments declined by a whopping 19.56 per cent to \$24.24 billion compared to a 15.57 per cent overall decrease in goods exports.

Worried about the decline in farm income, policy makers are exploring new markets to offset demand fall in traditional destinations.

Low global prices

But, for most items, where export fall has been due to dampened global prices, things are likely to improve only when prices harden.

“We are categorising items on the basis of the reason for decline and planning action accordingly. We are also in touch with all our Embassies and High Commissions on how to improve agriculture exports in specific countries,” a Commerce Ministry official told BusinessLine.

For products such as bovine meat, dairy, spices and tea, where the export fall is mostly due to saturation and fall in demand in traditional markets, the Commerce Ministry has stepped up efforts to tap new markets through bilateral engagement and road-shows, the official said.

For instance, exports of bovine meat fell 15 per cent in 2015-16 to \$ 4.06 billion as China clamped down on imports through Vietnam.

Tapping new geographies

To offset the fall this year, New Delhi has warmed up to Indonesia, which is a big market for bovine meat presently monopolised by Australia.

“We held bilateral meetings and organised road-shows in the country. It seems to have paid off as a top Indonesian official recently stated that the country would import meat from India,” the official said.

The Commerce Ministry has also planned road-shows in different parts of China later this year to help build public opinion in favour of importing bovine meat from India.

“We know that our efforts to tap new markets will be productive as we have already tasted success with tea. When we realised that demand for tea had become static, we focussed on expanding to Iran, Russia and Iran by organising buyer-seller meets. It has paid off and tea exports have now started growing,” the official said.

Russia has also recently agreed to buy dairy products from India, a development that could push up dairy exports which fell 28 per cent to \$181 million in 2015-16.

Global repercussions

But, for items such as guar gum, wheat and rice, where earnings are low because of falling global prices, there is not much option for the government other than wait for prices to harden for at least a few commodities this year.

“In case of rice and guar gum, we have shipped more quantities last year, but the export realisation is low because prices have fallen sharply. Hopefully prices would firm up this year as some countries, such as Brazil, are expected to face drought,” the official said.

Centre invites stakeholder comments on Bt cotton guidelines

Five days after notifying the guidelines for Bt cotton technology which placed a cap on royalty for new genetically modified (GM) traits, the Union government has invited comments and suggestions of stakeholders on the matter.

The guidelines, notified by the Agriculture Ministry on May 18, capped the royalty for new GM traits at 10 per cent of the maximum sale price of the Bt cottonseeds – a move that could affect Monsanto’s India operations.

“The notification regarding guideline for Bt cotton technology issued on May 18, 2016, will be put in the public domain for the period of 90 days, in the same form for comments and suggestions of all stakeholders,” a release issued by the Agriculture Ministry on Monday stated. As per the notified guidelines, after the initial five years, royalty would reduce by 10 per cent of initial value every year. If the GM technology loses its efficacy, the technology provider would not be eligible for any royalty.

The guidelines also prescribed a new format for sub-licensing agreements that all seed technology providers would have to sign with the seed companies. If such an agreement is not signed within next 30 days, all old agreements would be considered invalid, the notification said.

Sugar stays flat in routine trade



Sugar prices on the Vashi market ruled flat with minor changes on routine demand, supply and volumes. Arrivals were about 58-60 truck loads and local dispatches were at 60-62 loads. The Bombay Sugar Merchants

Association's spot rates: S-grade ₹3,575-3,662 (3,582-3,662) and M-grade ₹3,662-3,772 (3,656-3,772). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹3,550-3,620 (3,550-3,620) and M-grade ₹3,600-3,720 (3,600-3,720). *Our Correspondent*

Sluggish offtake pounds soyabean



Despite strong global cues, both soya oil and soyabean traded lower in Indore mandis on sluggish demand with soya refined at ₹630-32, while soya solvent declined to ₹595-600 (down ₹5 from last week). According to traders here, strong buying support and demand in palm oil, has dragged demand in soya oil, leading to fall in its prices. Soyabean also traded lower at ₹4,000-50 a quintal on weak physical demand, while plant deliveries were quoted at ₹4,100. Soyameal on the spot traded at ₹36,000 a quintal.

Business Standard

Farmer earns Re 1 after selling one tonne of onions

Devidas Parbhane said with onion prices touching new lows, farmers like me may be meeting the same fate as other farmers who committed suicide



Sacks of onions being carried on a cart by labourers, in Kolkata. Photo: PTI

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According to Devidas Parbhane, 48, the fall in onion prices is already taking a toll and like him, several others have got a 'raw deal' despite a bumper crop this season.

"Every day, we are hearing news about farmer suicides from drought-hit regions. However, with onion prices touching new lows, farmers like me

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Meanwhile, a delegation of onion traders and APMC members from Lasalgaon in Nashik has met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis seeking his intervention on the issue of plummeting prices of onions.

UAE tightens norms for import of veggies from India

UAE said fruits and vegetables coming from India showed high levels of pesticide residues exceeding permitted limits



Customers buy vegetables from a stall at a market in Ahmedabad

Amid quality concerns, the UAE has tightened norms for import of chili peppers, mango and cucumber from India from this month onwards.

The Arab nation has now made it mandatory for Indian exporters to furnish a pesticide residue analysis report for each consignment of shipment of these products.

In a latest circular, the agri-export promotion body Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has advised exporters to "strongly adhere to the import requirement of the UAE and not make any shipments without violating the stipulated conditions."

In a recent communication, the UAE has informed that "fruits and vegetables coming from India showed high levels of pesticide residues exceeding the permitted limits of in accordance with international standards adopted by Codex Alimentarius Commission."

"In light of this, it has been decided by the UAE that for the sake of the health and safety of consumers, it will not allow the shipment of chili peppers, mango and cucumber without accompanying a residue analysis report with each consignment with effect from May 1," APEDA said in the circular.

In the 2015-16 fiscal, India had exported 2,62,158 tonnes of fresh vegetables and 48,591 tonnes of fruits to the UAE, as per the APEDA data.

Soybean area falls as farmers switch to pulses

Prices of soybeans have dropped 10% in the past two years, while the prices of pulses have nearly tripled over the same period



Indian farmers are set to reduce the area given over to soybeans by up to 10 per cent this year in response to falling prices, pushing up likely imports of edible oils such as palm oil and soyoil.

Soybean is the main summer-sown oilseed crop for the world's biggest importer of edible oil, but prices have dropped 10 per cent in the past two years, while the prices of pulses such as red gram have nearly tripled over the same period.

Lower soybean output will force the country to increase imports of edible oils, supporting their prices. It could also limit India's soymeal exports, given prices for its Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)-free produce are already above international prices.

The further price rise due to lower supply could even make imports of soymeal viable for local consumers.

“In the last two-three years soybeans have given lower returns than competing crops like pulses,” said K N Rahiman, chief research officer at Ruchi Soya, the country's biggest edible oil refiner.

“This year, since pulses prices are ruling near record high levels, farmers will be inclined to shift towards pulses. We could see five to 10 percent reduction in soybean area.”

Farmers planted 11.7 million hectares with soybean in 2015-16. A 10 per cent reduction would cut acreage to around 10.5 million hectares in the 2016-17 marketing year starting July.

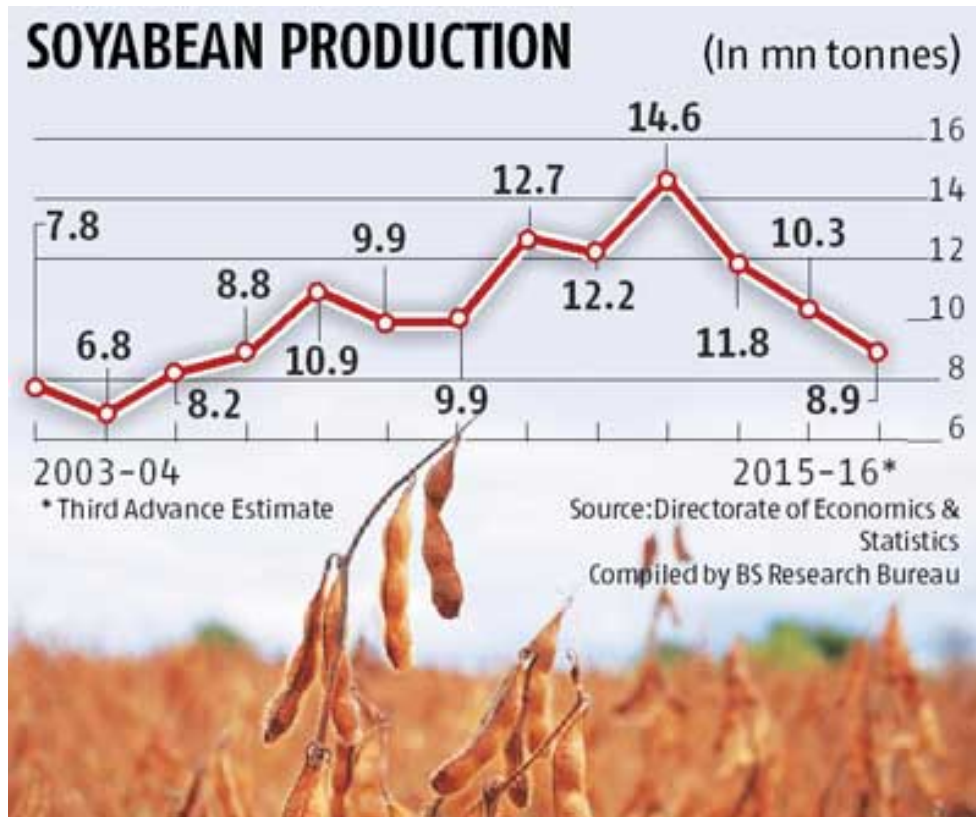
Most Indian farmers begin cultivating soybean and pulses, which are rain-fed crops, in June after the arrival of the monsoon, and they are sown mainly in the states of Madhya Pradesh in central India, Maharashtra in the west, Rajasthan in the north-west, and Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in the south.

Dinesh Garg, a farmer from Morena in Madhya Pradesh, plants soybean during summer, but this year he has decided instead to cultivate red gram, better known locally as tuar.

"Soybean is not remunerative due to lower prices. This year I am more

interested in growing tuar," said Garg, who cultivated soybean on 5 hectares of land last year.

Soybean production plunged 20 per cent in 2015-16 to its lowest in more than a decade after drought and pests hit output.



India exports soymeal mainly to Asian buyers, but the drop in production has forced it to import soymeal and soybean in small quantities for the first time in many years.

Since the country imports most of its edible oil, limited soybean supply means imports will go up in 2016-17, said Faiyaz Hudani, associate vice-president, research, at Kotak Commodity Services Ltd.

“Even though oilseed production is stagnant, edible oil consumption has been rising steadily due to growth in population and rising prosperity,” Hudani said.

India imports mainly palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, while it brings in soyoil from Argentina and Brazil.

Poultry farmers see some respite

Intense summer and drought in many states push up prices of eggs, broilers



Poultry farmers, under losses for two years due to over- production, are likely to see some margin recovery this season. The intense summer and drought in around 10 states have pushed up prices of both eggs and broilers.

Average wholesale prices for May so far have touched Rs 375 per 100 eggs from Rs 293 for 100 eggs in April. Last year in May, prices were around Rs 290 per 100 eggs. This year around mid-May, it had peaked to Rs 440 for 100 eggs in Hyderabad.

Farmers were estimated in the past two to three years to have lost Rs 60-75 per bird annually. However, Harish Garware, executive committee member, Poultry India, notes they might recover some of the losses this season as the production across India has dipped. Usually, summer sees a production drop of five to 10 per cent; this year, with the heat and drought, there is a 25-30 per cent drop. The drought has hit water supply for the birds and the latter's mortality rate has risen in recent months, pushing up prices for broilers and eggs.



Sanjeev Chintawar, business manager for the National Egg Coordination Committee, said maize costs Rs 17 a kg and soyabean Rs 41 a kg. This represents an year on year rise of 20 per cent in feed cost. This rising cost over two years made smaller poultry units unsustainable; the larger ones cut production. It is estimated that 10-15 per cent of units across India have shut down. In the Pune and Nashik area of Maharashtra, it costs Rs 3.50- Rs 3.75

to produce one egg but average realisation per egg at the farmgate is Rs 3-3.25 per egg.

The situation is better in some states. Uttar Pradesh is one; the government there has, since 2013, also been helping the sector. A significant number of poultry entrepreneurs from the Barwala-Derabassi-Lalru cluster in Punjab/Haryana, largest poultry cluster in the north, are apparently migrating to UP.

Darshan Kumar Singla, president of the Haryana Poultry Farmers Association, recently set up a poultry farm of 100,000 birds at Najibabad, Bijnor district, and plans to phase out operations at his Barwala unit. "UP is the biggest market for eggs produced in Haryana. As we are getting a concessional loan, power and proximity to the market, we can increase our margins. Land cost in UP is far lower than in Haryana and so it is viable to wind up our operations at loss-making units there and invest in UP," he said.

In the south, the situation is grim. The largest poultry cluster of India is at Namakkal in Tamil Nadu. Here, 15-20 farms have closed in the past two years and the number of birds has reduced from 50 million to 45 million, says D Chandrasekharan, professor at the local Veterinary College and Research Institute.

India consumes about 195 million eggs per day and the national per capita availability is about 65 a year, from 42 a year around 2008. Egg consumption in the country has been steadily rising, at an average of five to six per cent a year. However, the poultry industry (estimated at Rs 67,000 crore, of which eggs are Rs 25,000 crore), which employs roughly 25 million people, says after 2010, there has been a huge rise in production capacity as well. And, so, prices, had remained more or less stable.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

India's soybean area seen falling as farmers switch to pulses



"Soybean is not remunerative due to lower prices. This year I am more interested in growing tuar," said Garg, a farmer.

MUMBAI: Indian farmers are set to reduce the area given over to soybeans by up to 10 per cent this year in response to falling prices, pushing up likely imports of edible oils such as palm oil and soyoil.

Soybean is the main summer-sown oilseed crop for the world's biggest importer of edible oil, but prices have dropped 10 per cent in the past two years, while the prices of pulses such as red gram have nearly tripled over the same period.

Lower soybean output will force the country to increase imports of edible oils, supporting their prices. It could also limit India's soy meal exports, given prices for its GMO-free produce are already above international prices.

The further price rise due to lower supply could even make imports of soy meal viable for local consumers.

"In the last two-three years soybeans have given lower returns than competing crops like pulses," said K N Rahiman, chief research officer at Ruchi Soya, the country's biggest edible oil refiner.

"This year, since pulses prices are ruling near record high levels, farmers will be inclined to shift towards pulses. We could see 5 to 10 per cent reduction in soybean area," he added.

Farmers planted 11.63 million hectares with soybean in 2015/16. A 10 per cent reduction would cut acreage to around 10.5 million hectares in the 2016/17 marketing year starting July.

Most Indian farmers begin cultivating soybean and pulses, which are rain-fed crops, in June after the arrival of the monsoon rains, and they are sown mainly in the states of Madhya Pradesh in central India, Maharashtra in the west, Rajasthan in the north-west, and Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in the south.

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India exports soymeal mainly to Asian buyers, but the drop in production has forced it to import soy meal and soybean in small quantities for the first time in many years.

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India imports mainly palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, while it brings in soy oil from Argentina and Brazil.

Biotechnology firms upset with Bt Cotton royalty rates order



The notification, meant to help farmers distressed by two droughts, also empowers an official body to decide if a particular technology is no longer effective enough to deserve any royalty at all.

NEW DELHI: Biotechnology firms are crying foul against a government order that aims to help farmers by restricting royalty rates on Bt Cotton and

increase competition by forcing companies like Monsanto to grant licences to all eligible seed makers who seek the technology.

The notification, meant to help farmers distressed by two droughts, also empowers an official body to decide if a particular technology is no longer effective enough to deserve any royalty at all, dealing a severe blow to international firms which dominate the market. Cotton seeds account for about 40% of India's Rs 10,000 crore seeds market.

Monsanto India's shares fell 8.5% on Monday because of investor concerns over the notification. Syngenta International's Chief Operating Officer Davor Pisk said such a rule would force his company to review its priorities for developing GM products in India, although he remains bullish about other products.

He also said compulsory licensing had an ethical argument only for life-saving drugs that were unaffordable. "If we start to extend that into other industries then I think there's a risk to undermine the whole basis of the intellectual property law, which in the long run would undermine the incentives for innovation and science-based research," he said.

The notification escalates the raging dispute between the Centre and biotechnology companies including Monsanto over price controls recently imposed on cotton seeds. Officials say controls on prices were imposed after farmers and seed manufacturers complained that they were being exploited by alleged monopolistic and exploitative practices by Monsanto. The us firm strongly denies this.

Global companies accuse the government of creating an uncertain business climate with arbitrary anti-innovation steps, two weeks before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US, where he is due to address a joint session of the US Congress. Market leader Monsanto and the industry executives said the notification would crush innovation and eventually hurt farmers.

"We strongly oppose the recent gazette notification ... as it a huge blow to the innovators in agri-biotech industry. It clearly indicates the intention of the government to disregard research & innovation and thereby not protecting IP in the sector," said Shivendra Bajaj, executive director, Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises-Agriculture Focus Group (ABLEAG), whose members include Syngeneta, Monsanto, Dow Agri-Sciences and Bayer BioScience.

"This order creates an environment of policy unpredictability and arbitrariness of decision making, which is contrary to the recently launched IPR policy. Such a decision will further create an environment of uncertainty and disincentive to technology developers for bringing new technologies into India, which will ultimately harm the farmers as new technologies come slow to them.," he said.

The new order immediately cancels all licensing agreements and mandates grant of new licenses on terms, which biotechnology firms say are heavily tilted against them. Royalties would be restricted to 10% of the price of cotton seeds for five years.

Re 1: That's what farmers get for a kg of onion

Many other farmers, who had to pay to the adatiya (middleman), had to incur transportation and other charges that were more than the total price of the onions.

PUNE: Devidas Parmane, a farmer from Vadgaon Rasai village near PUNE sold 952 kg of onion in Pune Agricultural Price Market Committee on May 10 for Rs 1.60 a kg. After deducting the market charges and transportation cost, he received a net payment of Rs 1 per kg. Parmane was lucky to be able to get this price for his produce.

Many other farmers, who had to pay to the adatiya (middleman), had to incur transportation and other charges that were more than the total price of the onions.

This explains why farmers have been staging agitations across the state under the banners of various farmer organisations.



Wholesale onion prices have crashed to Rs 3-7 kg in onion-growing states such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka, while the minimum price has plunged to Rs 1 per kg.

Parmane's payment receipt shows that the total cost of his 952 kg of onions was about Rs 1,522. The expenditure he incurred on account of the middleman's commission was Rs 91.35, labour charges were Rs 59, weighing charges Rs 33.30, loading charges Rs 18.5 and transportation cost Rs 1,320 , which included Rs 600 for the packaging bags.

"The onions we bought from Parmane was of very small size. We had to sell it to the shepherds at Rs 1-2 per kg," said Sudhir Jadhav, partner at Pallavi Trading Company, which bought Parmane's onions. "But now, we have advised farmers not to get such onions to the market. Instead they can feed it to the animals or compost it to make fertiliser," he said.

Increased production coupled with decline in exports has pulled onion prices below cost of production. According to the Maharashtra State Agricultural

Marketing Board, India's total onion production in 2015-16 is expected to be 5-7% higher than in the previous year, while onion production in Maharashtra is expected to be up 15-20%.

Of the total onion production in the country, about 20% goes for exports. Maharashtra's share in the total onion exports is 70-80%. However, exports declined from 15 lakh tonnes in 2012-13 to 6.5 lakh tonnes in 2015-16. Exporters said they lost their traditional markets due to high prices in the domestic market in 2014-15.