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‘Jaiva Bhavanam’ to promote organic farming

They know that vegetables these days are pesticide ridden. But organically grown vegetables are a mirage due to their exorbitant prices, at least for the urban dwellers.

However, the Save Green Agriculture Cooperative Society is all set to prove them wrong.

‘Jaiva Bhavanam’ is a project of the society that plans to make the availability of organic vegetables in urban households a reality.

Save Green will provide all necessary help to create an organic vegetable garden at every household, whether it be a house or an apartment. The garden will be set up in a manner that suits each household.

Salient feature

A salient feature of the project is that the beneficiaries could make their first harvest of fresh organically grown vegetables in just one month.

The plan is to arrange all necessary vegetables in grow bags and water them using the drip irrigation method. Besides setting up the whole garden, the skilled Green Army of Save Green will carry out the application of manures and organic pesticides whenever necessary. Two sacks of organic fertilizers, pesticides and the equipment to apply them will also be provided by Save Green.

“There is a lot of plots in the corporation limits that are just dumping yards now. If the local residents associations manage to clear them, the land could be used for vegetable farming”, said M.P. Rejul Kumar, president of the society.

The society also plans to encourage residents of apartment complexes to use their terrace for group farming. Save Green is organising a mega sale of saplings on the premises of the Office of Deputy Director of Education at Mananchira from September 14 to 17 to encourage people to take up organic farming.

Around 5 lakh saplings of vegetables such as brinjal, green chillies, country chillies, ladies finger, lentils, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, curry leaves, fruit trees like papaya, rambutan, mangosteen, and pulasan will be available at the fair.

Mayor Thottathil Raveendran will inaugurate the ‘Jaiva Bhavanam’ project as well as the fair at 10 a.m. on Friday.

Stick to crop pattern: farmers

The United Farmers Association – Tamil Nadu has strongly favoured adherence to crop pattern matching agro-climatic zones for ensuring sustainable use of river water resources.

Crop pattern is globally accepted one which will rationalise distribution of available surface waters. Negligence of crop pattern by both by the Centre and states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu had led to the present dispute in sharing the waters of River Cauvery, said C. Vaiyapuri, president of the United Farmers Association, a press release here on Saturday. He urged the Cauvery Central Technical Team which is inspecting Mettur Dam on Sunday on the directive of Supreme Court to emphasise crop pattern in its report to the Apex Court. The Committee should also suggest enactment of legislation making adherence of crop pattern mandatory throughout the country to prevent the occurrence of water sharing disputes between different states, he said.

Mr. Vaiyapuri said that Karnataka state has expanded its cultivation area in violation of the principle of crop pattern by raising rain fed crops and the crops that could be grown in irrigated areas. Additional water is being diverted from River Cauvery for the expanded area, which has resulted in deprivation of water to the lower riparian Cauvery basin in Tamil Nadu.

Due to the selfish schemes of the state government the food security has become a big question mark. The government is forced to import edible oil, dal. The Centre too is not acting in the overall interest of the country.

Vanam-Manam: Forest Dept. to rope in Dwera groups



As part of the ongoing Vanam-Manam programme in the State, forest officials are planning to utilise the services of Dwera (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) groups in the district for achieving optimal results in social forestry.

Social Forestry Division officials led by Divisional Forest Officer G. Srinivasulu on Saturday conducted awareness camps, rallies, and plantation of saplings in Irala and Tirupati rural mandals.

Government officials, sarpanches, Dwera groups, teachers, students and pilgrims bound for Tirumala and Kanipakam temples took part in the events.

Speaking to the media, Mr. Srinivasulu said that an action plan was ready to rope in the Dwera groups in large numbers for success of the Vanam-Manam and other social forestry schemes.

He said that each woman member of the SHG should give her name, Aadhaar and contact numbers either to the Forest Department offices or the Mandal Parishad Development Officers and furnish details as to how many plants they could plant and maintain.

“Our field staff would process their requirement and provide the saplings at their doorstep. The Dwera groups have proved their mettle in various constructive activities. Their cooperation and involvement in the social forestry schemes would definitely lead to excellent results. Their services would also be utilised for undertaking awareness camps in schools and rural areas about the importance of nature and wildlife, and their coexistence with mankind,” the DFO said.

The official said that the ‘geo-tagging’ of social forestry schemes would be implemented seriously.

Geo-tagging

“All the stakeholders, including officials, social groups and common people, would be provided a link connected to the Forest Department’s website. They could operate either on behalf of their respective groups or individually. By periodically uploading the latest snaps of the saplings, it would be highly useful for identifying several other vital parameters such as groundwater table, climate and soil conditions. The geo-tagging will also help in monitoring the plantations and their survival aspects,” Mr. Srinivasulu said.

The DFO said that so far 64 lakh plants, including premier varieties of red sanders and teak, were raised, and about 15 lakh plants distributed.

Is chini going to be the next dal?



Inflation worries have clearly receded in most food items — barring sugar, potatoes and chana. Even for the last two, the current high prices may be a temporary phenomenon, as the improved soil and sub-soil moisture conditions from a good monsoon is likely to spur plantings in the ensuing rabi season.

That leaves only sugar, where there is a problem of both tight domestic supplies as well as high international prices. This is unlike in wheat, for which the government's own precarious stocks position is more than offset by low global prices. At about \$205 per tonne, the landed cost of imported wheat in India works out to Rs 1,365 a quintal — below even the minimum support price of Rs 1,525/quintal that was payable to farmers for last year's crop.

In sugar, on the other hand, the 2016-17 season (October-September) has started with estimated carryover stocks of 75 lakh tonnes (lt). With output projections for the new season ranging from 220 lt to 235 lt, and expected consumption of 260 lt, the closing stocks for September 2017 would be anywhere between 35 lt and 50 lt — not very comfortable.

Boost for rabi crops

A good monsoon this year has also improved the prospects of rabi crops. Good progress of the monsoon in the later part of the season and late showers in many areas may help improve the moisture content of the soil that would help the rabi crops. Also, better rains after two years of below normal rains have improved the reservoir levels as well.

A recent CRISIL report states that the reservoir storages are higher by 17 per cent compared to last year which should support the production this season and the next season as well.

The future lies in organic farming

India holds a unique position among 172 countries practising organic agriculture: it has 6,50,000 organic producers, 699 processors, 669 exporters and 7,20,000 hectares under cultivation. But, with merely 0.4 per cent of total agricultural land under organic cultivation, the industry has a long journey ahead.

Last year, the Indian organic export and domestic market grew by 30 and 40 per cent respectively, and will sustain primarily due to an increasing number of affluent and health conscious consumers. As the industry continues to grow, it faces unique challenges. Due to relatively small volumes, the costs of organic food products are relatively high. The cost of cultivation increases as it takes more time and energy to produce than its chemical-intensive counterpart.

Supply-demand mismatch

High demand and low supply has further created an inflationary pressure on organic food products. This supply-demand mismatch can be eased fundamentally by making organic production mainstream with location-specific hybrid production strategies. Specialised farmer training costs, higher processing and inventory holding costs, and increased packaging, logistics and distribution costs add to the price of end products. Nevertheless, investments in achieving operations excellence by companies will facilitate lowering the cost of organic food products.

The absence of organic food products across all segments in the market is a concern. Consumers find little value buying limited organic products at a premium when rest of the foodstuff they consume is non-organic. Prospects are immense on the supply side as currently organically cultivated crop areas represent only a small fraction of the total

acreage of these crops. The good news is that the number of organic food categories has grown to more than 200, including tea, spices, flour, cereals, fruits, vegetables, milk, and honey. In order to sustain consumer trust, maintaining an accurate audit stream, and preventing cross-contamination with conventional goods would be crucial.

Many farmers are apprehensive about adopting organic farming due to the high production cost and the three-year transition period when farmers have to wait before getting their farms certified. This issue was addressed in the US by food manufacturers offering financial incentives to offset the waiting period. Ardent Mills pays farmers more remuneration for crops grown on land undergoing transition and helps them choose rotational crops they can sell to supplement their income. Kashi has created a logo, “Certified Transitional”, to label products made from farms that are undergoing the process of transition.

There has been a contentious debate on the sustainability of organic farming. Though there is lower yield, these farms are more profitable and environmentally friendly, provide several ecosystem services, numerous social benefits and deliver nutritious foods with relatively less pesticide residues compared to conventional farming. Organically managed soils release less carbon dioxide per hectare per year than conventionally managed soils. New studies indicate that using the best management practices in organic systems over a long period of time can produce equal yields, or even outdo those of conventional systems.

More awareness required

There is low awareness at the producer level on the difference between conventional farming and organic farming. At the consumer level there is confusion between natural and organic products and limited understanding of the health benefits of organic food products. In addition, consumers are faced with a plethora of decisions around brands — imported or domestic, product quality, authenticity of claims and certifications. It is critical for companies involved in the organic food business to increase awareness among consumers in non-metro cities. Progressively, people across all income groups should have access to organic food. This can be facilitated by different means such as establishing community-supported agricultural farms or with “grow your own food” programmes. Where penetration is low, smaller sized packs can help encourage trials.

It has been estimated that in the US, the adverse impact of conventional farming on the environment and health costs \$5 billion to \$16.9 billion a year. These costs are actually paid by the consumer in the form of medical bills and decreased quality of life due to pollution. Impact assessment of organic farming compared to conventional farming considering the sustainability framework can help to increase consumer awareness on the true cost of a product.

Many counterfeit organic products are available in the markets, which adversely impact the industry and consumer trust. Therefore, the Government has come up with stringent punishment for selling counterfeit organic produce. Organic farmers are unable to save their crops using traditional methods of pest control. The Government must rope in agricultural scientists and international research institutions to develop organic herbicides.

It will be a while before organic agricultural practices becomes mainstream. Many may argue that attempts made by the Government are inadequate and but positive results are showing up with time. Today, Sikkim is an organic state with 75,000 ha of land under organic cultivation based on an initiative that started in 2003. Meghalaya aims to convert 200,000 ha under organic farming by 2020.

Laudable approach

The courage shown by farmers to convert from conventional to organic is laudable. Kerala has more than 100,000 farmers practising organic farming and 10 cooperatives promoting the sector. The Centre's announcement for allocation of Rs. 1 billion for organic market development and Rs. 3 billion for the participatory guarantee scheme is commendable. Indian farmers are using inputs manufactured from energy-intensive processes and, in some cases, from imported sources resulting in a burden on the exchequer. They could follow organic practices and use available bio-wastes to transit towards a circular economy. Consumers should consume responsibly and stakeholders should prevent wastage along the supply chain. Meanwhile, organic agriculture in India will continue to grow and play a larger part in safely feeding 1.5 billion Indian mouths in 2030.

Organic agriculture is the best insurance policy that India can have for its population with better performance on productivity, environmental impact, economic viability and social well-being.

Focusing only on higher yields at the expense of other sustainability pillars (economics, environment and society) is not the food production system that India needs. What India needs is an integrated system that gives equal importance to all sustainability dimensions across the value chain and thus helps establish a healthy and well-fed society.

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