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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.

Rain boosts samba crop hopes of Delta farmers



Overnight rains, widespread and heavy, drenched several parts of the Delta region on Thursday, raising hopes among the farmers of saving their standing samba paddy crop. The increased discharge from the Mettur dam and prospects of more rains in the days to come have only added to their cheer.

The sky remained overcast since Wednesday morning in the Delta region, threatening to break into showers any time. Later on, it rained heavily in various parts of Thanjavur and Nagapattinam districts while some parts of Tiruvarur experienced mild showers on Wednesday and in the early hours of Thursday. Rain and thunder showers drenched Thanjavur town, Tirukkattupalli, Tiruvaiyaru, Papanasam, Kumbakonam, Vettikkadu, Orathanad and Grand Anicut areas of Thanjavur district and Mayiladuthurai, Sirkali and Tranquebar areas of Nagapattinam district.

In the meantime, samba paddy crop raised on close to nine lakh acres in the Delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam was found withering for want of water in many regions. While 2.60 lakh acres are under samba paddy in Thanjavur district, a total of 3.04 lakh acres are covered by the crop in the neighbouring Tiruvarur district even as Nagapattinam district accounted for 3.36 lakh acres.

“We were expecting Karnataka to comply with the Supreme Court orders and release water. When that did not happen, we thought that the rain Gods will save us. That too did not happen until now. There was not adequate water flowing down the Cauvery for us to irrigate our fields. But Wednesday’s rains have brought a ray of hope. We are hopeful that the rains might continue for some more days even as the regular north-east monsoon sets in,” said Swamimalai S. Vimalnathan, secretary, Cauvery Farmers Protection Association.

In many areas, farmers have paid other ryots who have pumpsets to raise nurseries hoping that eventually rains would supplement the irrigational needs. But that is not to be.

Those crops are around 30 days' old now and are yet to be transplanted, Mr. Vimalnathan pointed out, adding only the timely onset of the north-east monsoon will make that possible.

These initial showers are especially helpful for the germination of seeds in the directly sown fields of Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts.

The ploughed fields had been looking barren all these days after the farmers went in for large-scale direct sowing which the State Government encouraged in a bid to reduce consumption of water, according to Agriculture Department officials.

Market intervention saves onion growers

The market intervention initiative of the Kadapa district administration three weeks ago to procure onions at Rs. 700 a quintal has come as a breather to the distressed onion growers of the district.

Onion crop was raised on 1,760 hectares in Kadapa district this year and in about 20,000 hectares in Kurnool district.

However, the price plummeted to as low as Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 a kg this year, as against Rs. 40 and Rs. 50 per kg. in the corresponding period the previous year, causing concern among onion growers, who incurred hefty losses.

Officials attributed the steep fall in onion prices to large-scale import of onions from Kurnool and Maharashtra and lack of demand in other districts.

The onion growers in Kadapa district were aghast at not being able to sell the onions at a break even price of Rs. 300 a quintal.

In this backdrop, Kadapa Joint Collector Swetha Teotia apprised Commissioner of Marketing Mallikarjuna Rao on the travails of the onion growers in Kadapa district, and sought market intervention by procuring onions at reasonable prices.

Why the Central government should go all out to expand oil palm cultivation

It will increase domestic supplies, lower the edible oil import bill and save foreign exchange



The Indian edible oil sector is the world's fourth-largest after the US, China and Brazil and accounts for around 9 per cent of the world's oilseed production.

An irony of this industry is its heavy dependence on imports. Cooking oil imports are all set to touch a record 15 million tonnes (mt) in the current, 2015-16 Oil Year, ending October. Out of the 15 mt, palm oil imports alone account for 9 mt or 60 per cent.

The reason for palm oil occupying the lion's share of the total consumption is because palm is generally the cheapest commodity vegetable oil and also the cheapest oil to produce and refine globally.

Therefore, focussed palm oil cultivation will undoubtedly play a key role in addressing the domestic shortfall in edible oil consumption and lowering India's edible oil import bill and saving foreign exchange.

Highest-yielding crop

A distinct advantage that palm enjoys is that it is the highest-yielding perennial edible oil crop and needs a fraction of the area used to grow in comparison to other oilseeds. This is indeed potentially attractive in a country like India, where land is increasingly scarce as the population rockets.

On a per-hectare basis, oil palm trees are 6-10 times more efficient at producing oil than temperate oilseed crops such as rapeseed, soyabean, sunflower or ground nut. For example, while a hectare of land can yield 300-400 kg of groundnut oil, nearly 4 tonnes of palm oil can be produced from a hectare of land.

The case for palm oil

P Rethinam, a plantation crop management specialist, in his detailed report titled 'Increasing Vegetable Oil Production through Oil Palm Cultivation in India' observes: "27 million hectares of nine oilseed crops produce about 9 million tonnes of oil per year but 2 million hectares of oil palm could produce 8 million tonnes of crude palm oil, 0.8 million tonnes of palm kernel oil, palm kernel cake, bio mass for bio energy, eco-friendly bio-diesel, etc." There is a big potential to raise the acreage of palm, which is currently cultivated on about 200,000 hectares. According to OPDPA, India has the potential to expand the acreage to 20 lakh hectares, keeping in view the demand. If this is done, the palm oil industry, which provides employment to 20,000 people, can create two lakh additional jobs.

Indian palm oil production is estimated at 1.7 lakh tonnes for 2014-15, up from 0.6 lakh tonnes in 2010-11. Palm oil cultivation has grown from zero to 2,00,000 hectares in the past two decades.

The Central government has been trying, for many years now, to reduce its dependence on imported edible oils by encouraging farmers to take up palm cultivation. In an encouraging move, the current government has announced a package of Rs. 10,000 crore over three years, which is intended to support farmers until the trees begin to yield (it takes three to five years for the palm tree to start yielding fruit).

The government has identified nine States with suitable climatic conditions. In November 2015, the government has also allowed 100 per cent FDI in palm oil plantations, a move the industry believes will boost domestic production, bring in more funds and newer technologies into the sector.

Industry challenges

However, there are several road blocks for India preventing it from successfully expanding on its domestic palm oil cultivation. First and foremost, lack of large land tracts is a major constraint.

The industry wants the government to declare palm oil as a plantation crop to move it out of the Land Ceiling Act. Moreover, the current import duty is not supportive of oil palm farmers and the industry.

Secondly, the Indian edible oil industry has been urging the government to maintain a duty differential of at least 15 per cent on crude and refined oil to protect the interests of refineries. Domestic edible oil refiners are facing a surge of imports of refined oil over the last few months, reducing their capacity utilisation to 30-40 per cent from 55-60 per cent a year ago.

Last month, the Centre lowered the import duty on crude palm oil from 12.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent and on refined oil from 20 per cent to 15 per cent. Hence, there was no change at all in the duty differential and the move is not expected to have any impact on either the industry or farmers.

The government needs to provide a level playing field to the domestic refining industry. Otherwise, Indian edible oil importers will be perpetually fighting a losing battle with cheap rival palm oil from top producers Malaysia and Indonesia.

Conclusion

A focus on palm oil cultivation is key to India's goal of attaining self-sufficiency in vegetable oils over the next decade. The palm oil industry deserves the highest priority and encouragement from the government to meet the internal demand of edible oil, resulting in a strong imprint on savings of foreign exchange, employment generation and boosting India's food security.

The writer is Founder & Managing Director, Ruchi Soya Industries Limited. Views are personal



Surinder Sud: A game changer for small farmers

Induction of medicinal and aromatic plants in cropping systems can be a game changer for small farmers, especially those tilling unirrigated and poor quality lands, as it can supplement their income appreciably. Most of these plants, used for making traditional and prescription drugs, cosmetics and perfumes, do not need expensive cash inputs to grow. Besides, they can withstand stresses like drought, extreme temperatures and even soil salinity and alkalinity. Their inter-cropping with other agricultural and horticultural crops is advisable because these are generally despised by wild animals, ...

Kerala govt to expand organic vegetable cultivation

With the objective of attaining self-sufficiency in terms of vegetables, Kerala government is planning to bring in additional 50,000 hectares of land under organic vegetable cultivation. Addressing a press meet here, state Agriculture Minister V S Sunil Kumar said the LDF government's plan is to expand farming by bringing in people of all sectors.

“The government’s effort is to bring in additional 50,000 hectares of land under organic vegetable cultivation. Our aim is to attain self-sufficiency in terms of vegetables in the next three years,” he said.

As part of the plan, the number of eco-shops selling organic farm products under the agriculture department would be increased, he said.

Retail inflation hits 13-month low as vegetable prices ease



Continuing to decline for the second consecutive month, retail inflation fell to a 13-month low of 4.31 per cent in September, primarily aided by lower food prices especially those of vegetables. Food prices inflation for September stood at 3.88 per cent, the same level as last year but sharply lower than 5.91 per cent recorded last month

This is the first time in this financial year that the overall Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation has fallen below the Reserve Bank of India’s inflation target of 5 per cent by March 2017. The previous low of 3.74 per cent was recorded in August last year.

The CPI-based inflation rate for August 2016 was 5.05 per cent and September 2015 was 4.41 per cent.

Big farm opportunities seen for business in 2030 UN goals

Businesses could earn hundreds of billions of dollars a year by 2030 by investing in better agriculture and food ranging from micro-irrigation of crops to reduced waste, an international study said on Friday.

A commission including chief executives of Unilever and Aviva as well as academics and civil society groups said companies could exploit U.N. plans to end poverty and hunger and protect the planet by 2030.

“Instead of treating it as ‘Oh my God, another huge global problem to worry about’ ... you can break it down into chunks of real business possibility,” Mark Malloch-Brown, chair of the Business and Sustainable Development Commission, told Reuters.