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THE HINDU

‘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.

Farmers raising 'Andhra Ponni'

As the discharge of water from the Mettur Dam started reaching their fields, farmers in parts of the district have started raising paddy in their fields.

Pinning their hopes on timely onset of north east monsoon, paddy farmers of Lalgudi and nearby villages have opted for 'Andhra Ponni' variety. "Though it is a long term crop, it has an assured market," say the farmers of Mela Valadi who raised the nurseries on two acres.

According to official sources, about 86,362 acres is the normal area under 'samba' and 'thaladi' cultivation. It included 24,703 acres being irrigated through the Peruvalai Vaikkal and Ayyan Vaikkal, both in Lalgudi block. "The availability of water has raised the hope of farmers to some extent. The farming activity, however, will pick up in course of time, the source said adding that about 30 per cent of 24,703 acres had been brought under cultivation so far in Lalgudi block.

The Agriculture Department has drafted an action plan to monitor the growth of paddy. Meanwhile, the Public Works Department has introduced turn system for judicious use of irrigation water in the district. "Careful introdution of turn system will benefit farmers without any wastage," the source said.

World Egg Day on October 14

World Egg Day would be celebrated on October 14. The International Egg Commission has proclaimed the second Friday in October every year as World Egg Day.

The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, has decided to conduct a programme at National Agriculture Science Complex in New Delhi on October 14. – Staff Reporter

Two-day farm mela at Brahmavar in Udupi

A two-day 'krishi mela' (agricultural fair) sponsored by the government will begin at Brahmavar in Udupi district from October 15.

It would have seminars, interaction, exhibition and demonstration of farm machineries.

There would be a seminar on 'cultivation of plantation crops' on the first day. It would be followed by seminars on 'use of modern farm implements in agriculture' and 'profitable integrated farming systems' on the second day. Scientists from the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, progressive farmers and scientists from other government agencies would speak on the themes. There would be interactive sessions, according to a release from Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station, Brahmavar.

According to the release, about 100 stakeholders are expected to put up their stalls to showcase farm technologies and machineries.

The objective of the mela is to expose farmers to the latest trends in agriculture.

The mela would showcase high yielding rice varieties and value added farm products. There would be a sale of decorative plants.

Also, a demonstration on cashew grafting and soil and water management in cashew gardens, organic manure compost and vermi compost, nutrient management in coconut and arecanut gardens will be part of the mela.

Minister for Youth Empowerment and Sports Pramod Madhwaraj will be inaugurating the event. V. Vasudevappa, Vice-Chancellor, UAHS, Shivamogga, will preside over the inaugural session.

On the occasion, integrated farming systems within the Brahmavar station would be inaugurated. The website of the station would also be launched.

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.

Water level in Hemavati reservoir drops

With the water level in Hemavati reservoir at Gorur in Hassan taluk receding, the outflow has also reduced.

Water release from the Left Bank Canal has been stopped. As a result, farmers dependent on the canals have suffered. The Left Bank takes water to parts of Tumakuru and Mandya, besides Hassan.

Losing hope

The left bank canal provides water for nearly 5.79 lakh acres of agriculture land. As the outflow through this canal has been stopped, farmers are losing hope of a good return on their crop.

The inflow to the reservoir this year has been less compared to previous years. The least amount of inflow was recorded this year since 2011. The cumulative inflow this monsoon was 33,425 mcft and the outflow so far has been 29,666 mcft.

As on Wednesday, the water available in the reservoir was 6.682 tmcft. Of this, live storage is only 2.310 tmcft. The reservoir has to fulfil the drinking water needs of towns and villages in Hassan taluk. The water level in the reservoir stands at 2,871.39 ft against the capacity of 2,922 ft. The inflow as recorded at 6 a.m. on Wednesday was at the rate of 806 cusecs and the total outflow was at the rate of 1,979 cusecs.

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

As part of the ongoing Vanam-Manam programme in the State, forest officials are planning to utilise the services of Dwcra (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, Dwcra 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 Dwcra 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 Dwcra 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 viral 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.

Wildlife photography exhibition

In connection with Wildlife Week celebrations, the Malabar Natural History Society (MNHS) will conduct an exhibition of Kerala wildlife photography at the Lalithakala Akademi Art Gallery in Kozhikode from October 1 to 5.

Twenty-five photographers will participate in the curated show of contemporary wildlife photography that focuses on threatened species from various habitats spread across the State.

The exhibition is being organised by MNHS in association with Calicut Bird Club and Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department (Social Forestry-Extension wing). The show will be inaugurated by E. Pradeep Kumar, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Northern Region), at 4.30 p.m. on Saturday.

Social Forestry's garbage clean-up tomorrow

The Social Forestry wing of the Forest Department will spearhead a community environment care initiative as part of the Eco-Steward programme on October 2.

The programme is being organised in tandem with Gandhi Jayanti and Wildlife Week. The initiative, from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. on Sunday, intends to involve at least a member of each household in keeping public places free of garbage.

Neighbourhood groups and other voluntary organisations will gather in each locality for the clean-up drive. The Assistant Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry, will coordinate

the efforts in each district and facilitate participation of interested institutions. In all eco-tourism sites, Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) or Eco-Development Committees (EDC) will carry out the endeavour. Details can be obtained by contacting Sajeesh Kumar, Assistant Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry, at 9447979156.

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Punjab to witness 35 per cent less basmati rice production this year

Owing to a poor rate fixed for the basmati crop last two years, the farmers this year has decided to curtail the area to a significant level. The decision means that there will be around 35 per cent less production of the basmati crop in Punjab.

Farmers have demanded that government must fix a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for basmati on the lines of paddy crops as it will save significant underground water and bring more foreign exchange to the country.

Though there is a possibility that less production may hit the export this yea, however exporters said that last year's stocks are available which will be carried forward. "There should be some fixed system and for every Rs 100 crores purchase of basmati Rs 10 crore must be kept for the welfare of farmers to provide them farm implements free of cost

through a lottery system as it will encourage them to grow more basmati," said Vijay Setia, former president and current governing body member of All India Export Association Area.

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.

Nutrient paradox

Sales of fertilisers have dipped, despite Krishi Bhawan's claim of a record kharif harvest this year on the back of a decent monsoon and also a decline in retail prices of decontrolled phosphatic, potassic and other complex nutrients. This could be a reflection of two things. The first is that the agriculture ministry's production estimates are themselves exaggerated. That possibility is, however, discounted by the fact that kharif acreages have gone up significantly over last year; the fact of a production increase is undeniable, even if the extent of it as per the official numbers can be questioned. It leaves a second possibility — of farmers actually applying less fertiliser. But even that may not be as straightforward. If farmers and dealers had stocks from the previous year's purchases — which couldn't get used because of drought — that pipeline material may well have got consumed this time. In other words, even if sales of fertiliser firms have fallen, farmers' consumption needn't have. As of now, we don't have data for the latter.

But even assuming farmers have, indeed, cut back on consumption — for lack of money or access to credit owing to consecutive drought years — this can only be a temporary phenomenon. Sooner rather than later, they are bound to purchase more nutrients without which sustaining, leave alone improving, crop yields isn't possible. From a policy perspective, what matters is how to boost fertiliser usage efficiency by farmers that is both in their own interest and long-term soil health. The last one year has seen a crash in international prices of fertilisers. Much of it has to do with China turning from an importer to an exporter of urea and di-ammonium phosphate. China is, in fact, India's biggest supplier of these two key nutrients today. That, in combination with new capacities coming up in Saudi Arabia, Africa and North America, has made the global fertiliser market into one for buyers.

The government should seize this moment to decontrol fertilisers as it has already done in petro-products. Just as for LPG cylinders, let there be a fixed nutrient-based subsidy on every fertiliser, including urea, which is transferred directly to farmers' bank accounts after the purchase is made at market prices. Farmers will, then, buy the fertiliser that isn't the cheapest — subsidy should be only incidental to making such choices — but the best suited for their soils or crops. And let companies compete in offering such customised products.

Mandi reforms: How to make the National Agriculture Market matter to farmers

The journey of the ambitious National Agriculture Market, the pan-India electronic marketplace for agri commodities (also called e-NAM), seems uninspiring so far despite all the best intentions of the current government at the Centre. Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April, the portal was meant to be a game changer in moving towards creation of a seamless, unified national market for all agricultural produce. However, six months into its first year, the roll out continues to meet stiff resistance or indifference from major states.

According to the agriculture ministry, 250 mandis (regulated produce markets) have already been linked to the e-NAM platform. But the fact is that during the last rabi marketing season, a mere 79 mandis were active. Major states like Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan (both run by BJP-led administrations) allowed the portal to trade in just one

crop in one mandi each, while Punjab, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu (the first two again NDA-ruled) simply refused to join the initiative.
The total turnover on e-NAM has been just around Rs 421 crore to date, perhaps not even 1 per cent of all trades taking place in these mandis over this period. While the number of commodities tradable has also been expanded to 50, it remains to be seen how much of transactions happen online through the platform during the current kharif marketing season in all the mandis claimed to have got linked.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Sowing seeds of growth

The 2016 monsoon season has broughtgood rainfall after two years of scanty rains. This will boost agriculture, and the GDP,at a time of poor global growth

The rain god has finally shown some mercy! After two years of below normal rainfall, India has received 853.9 mm of rainfall (as on September 28) as against the long period average of 879.6 mm during this south-west monsoon season during June-September.

That is, the 2016 monsoon season has ended with rainfall at 97 per cent of LPA; this qualifies as a normal monsoon. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) classifies the rainfall as follows. If the actual rainfall received during the monsoon season is greater than 10 per cent of the long period average (LPA), it is classified as "above normal". If the actual rainfall is less than (-10) per cent of the LPA it is "below normal" and any rainfall that falls between (-10) and (+10) per cent of the LPA is termed as normal monsoon.

In 2015, monsoon rain was 14 per cent below the LPA and in 2014 it was short by 12 per cent. According to the IMD, it was the first time in 115 years that the country received below normal rainfall in the south-west monsoon season for two consecutive years. Also, 2015 was the worst monsoon since 2009.

So a normal monsoon, with rains just 3 per cent below average, is a big boost to the country at a time when the global economy is struggling to grow. Among the 36 divisions, only 12 regions or 33 per cent have recorded a deficient rainfall while the rest of the 24 regions have recorded normal or excess rainfall this year. This is much better compared to last year when about 47 per cent or 17 regions recorded deficient rainfall.

The IMD's classification for categorising regions based on the amount of rainfall is different. The IMD classifies regions which receive 20 per cent or more rain than the average as having received "excess" rains. A region is said to have received "normal" monsoon rains in a season if the actual rainfall is between (-19) per cent and (+19) per cent of the average received in the period. If the deviation ranges from (-20) per cent to -59 per cent, then the rainfall is "deficient" while "scanty" regions are the ones that receive rains anywhere between (-60) per cent and (-99) per cent of the average rainfall. Gujarat (-20 per cent), Kerala (-33 per cent) and Punjab (-28 per cent) are some of the major regions with huge deficits this year.

Weak beginning

The IMD had initially forecast an "above normal" monsoon this year. In June, the IMD had predicted that this year's south-west monsoon would end with rain that would be 106 per cent of LPA.

The monsoon this year actually started off on a very weak note with rainfall less than 20 per cent of the average rainfall in the first week of June and the shortage rose to 25 per cent by mid-June, thereby raising the spectre of a third consecutive year of weak rains. However, as the monsoon progressed, the country's overall rainfall remained in excess

between 1 and 4 per cent between July and August. But then again, the rainfall slackened and recorded a 5 per cent shortage in the middle of September before finally ending 3 per cent below average for the entire season.

In India, there is a greater focus on the south-west monsoon as these rains contribute more than 75 per cent to the total rainfall in the country. Also, over 50 per cent of the country's agriculture is dependent on rains rather than irrigated water. The Indian agri sector contributes about 16 per cent of the country's total GDP. So a good monsoon is imperative for the economy's well-being.

The kharif crop is completely dependent on the rains received from the south-west monsoon. Kharif crops are also known as summer crops or monsoon crops which are sown at the beginning of the monsoon and harvested towards the end of the season between October and November. Let us see how the better monsoon this year after two years of scanty rains will bolster the kharif output this year.

Four major categories of crops are cultivated during the kharif season which include cereals, pulses, oilseeds and commercial crops. Important cereals include rice, maize, bajra and jowar. Tur, urad and moong dal are important among the pulses. Under oilseeds, groundnut, soyabean and castor seed are the important crops while cotton and sugarcane are key commercial crops.

Cotton

Among kharif crops, cotton has seen a sharp cut in the area under cultivation this year.

According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, cotton acreage is down 11.7 per cent to 102.79 lakh hectare from 116.41 lakh hectare last year. Gujarat, Maharastra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana and Karnataka are the major producers of this crop.

Damages due to the recent heavy rainfall in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have already raised the concern of crop damage. Andhra Pradesh and Telengana contribute over 20 per cent of India's total cotton production.

Telangana has received excess rainfall this year; 20 per cent more than the average and Andhra Pradesh has received 10 per cent more than the average. This makes it difficult for the country to reach the 36 million bales production target fixed by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Cotton Association of India has forecast an output of 33.6 million bales for this year.

The price of cotton, which has fallen sharply over the last couple of months from around Rs. 24,000 per bale to around Rs. 20,000 per bale, may bounce back again in the coming months due to lower production.

Sugarcane

Sugarcane has also seen a drop in the area under cultivation this year. Uttar Pradesh, the largest producing State, has received rainfall that is 14 per cent below average.

Among the other major producers, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have also received 14 per cent and 21 per cent less rains, respectively, than the average while in Maharastra there is 16 per cent more rainfall.

Less rain in the major producing States may affect the output this season. Though the government data shows an 8 per cent increase in acreage, according to the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), cane acreage is down 5 per cent this year to 49.99 lakh hectares.

It has also forecast production to fall about 7 per cent to 233.7 lakh tonnes in the current sugar season (2016-17) from about 251 lakh tonnes in 2015-16.

So according to the ISMA data, it is highly unlikely that the government's production target of 355 lakh tonnes will be met. Sugar prices, which have come down from the high of Rs. 3,900 per quintal in July to around Rs. 3,500 per quintal, may remain stable or reverse higher again if the production forecast is revised lower, going forward.

Pulses

The sharp rise in the price of pulses in the past year, which was one of the major causes that drove food inflation higher, seems to have attracted farmers to pulses this year. The three major pulses, tur, urad and moong have seen a sharp rise in the area under cultivation this year.

The government's move to increase the minimum support price (MSP) for these pulses and also later deciding to give an additional Rs. 425 per quintal bonus each for these crops may have also attractedfarmers. The MSP for tur, moong and urad dal, including the bonus for the year 2016-17, stands at Rs. 5,050, Rs. 5,225 and Rs. 5,000 per quintal, respectively, up from Rs. 4,425, Rs. 4,650 and Rs. 4,425 per quintal, respectively, in 2015-16.

The area covered under tur dal stands at 52.81 lakh hectares, up 40 per cent from 37.66 lakh hectares last year. Similarly, the area covered under urad and moong dal has also surged 25 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively, to 35.68 lakh hectares and 34.11 lakh hectares, respectively. Maharashtra is the leader in tur production, followed by Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Among them, except Karnataka, the other States have received more rainfall than the average.

Maharastra has got 16 per cent more than the average rainfall for the season while the rainfall in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh stands at 18 per cent and 10 per cent higher than the average rainfall for the season.

Karnataka, though categorised under the regions with normal rainfall, has received 14 per cent less rain than the average. So, there is a strong likelihood of a sharp rise in tur output which, in turn, may ease the prices.

Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are the major producers of moong dal. Rajasthan, the top producing region, is one of the three regions in the country which have received excess rainfall, 28 per cent more than the average. The other two producers Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh have received normal rainfall. There is a threat of damage to crops in Rajasthan due to excess rainfall, which may affect the output. If the quantum of damage caused is high, then moong dal prices may not come down sharply.

Coming to urad dal, Uttar Pradesh is the leading producer in the country and it has received 14 per cent less rainfall than the average.

However, the other leading producers Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have received normal rainfall. So, with increased acreage, the output may remain at a higher level which may keep the price under check.

Oil seeds

Among the major oilseeds, only groundnut has seen an increase in acreage. Others like soyabean and castorseed have seen a dip in the area under cultivation compared to the previous year.

Similar to pulses, the government has increased the MSP and has also added a Rs. 100 bonus per quintal for groundnut and soyabean.

A sharp 28 per cent extra land accounting for 46.96 lakh hectares has been covered under groundnut cultivation this year. Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are the top producers of groundnut. Excess rain in the growing areas in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the last couple of months may affect output.

On the other hand, soyabean has seen the acreage come down by 1.3 per cent whereas the area under castorseed cultivation has been slashed to a greater extent of about 24 per cent.

The area covered under soyabean has dropped from 116.29 lakh hectares last year to 114.78 lakh hectares, according to the Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA). Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are the top soyabean producers and both States have received good rainfall.

However, in addition to the lower acreage, excess rain in specifically the regions in Maharashtra where it is cultivated, has caused damage to the crops. This has the possibility to reduce the earlier expectation of a bumper crop this year. Soyabean prices have been crashing since April from a high around Rs. 4,300 per quintal. Prices have tumbled about 25 per cent to the current levels of Rs. 3,200 per quintal.

Once the crop damage is assessed and if the loss is more, then this downtrend in soyabean price may come to an end and a reversal is possible, going forward.

The sharp volatility and a strong plunge since 2014 in castorseed prices had made farmers shift to other crops. According to data from SOPA, the area covered under castor seed has come down from 10.97 lakh hectares in 2015 to 8.35 lakh hectares this year.

Castorseed prices had crashed 27 per cent from around Rs. 4,200 per quintal in November 2015 to aboutRs. 3,050 in March 2016. The prices have, however, recovered from this low to around Rs. 3,750 per quintal now. The sharp reduction in acreage this year may prevent prices from falling and may help them move higher.

Cereals

Among kharif crops, cereals account for about 55 per cent of the total crops. Among them rice is the major crop accounting for about 67 per cent of the total cereals output. Rice acreage this year has risen 4 per cent to 388.9 lakh hectares from 379 lakh hectares last year.

West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab are the top rice producers in the country.

Punjab has recorded deficient rainfall this season; 28 per cent lower than average. Poor rains and dry spell in the State are expected to affect the crop, which is evident from some reports of pest attacks. In addition, the heavy rains in Andhra Pradesh last month have caused big damage to cereals like jowar and maize as well. Andhra Pradesh is one of the leading producers of maize. This year, the overall area covered under maize has increased 9 per cent to 84.26 lakh hectares from 77.16 lakh hectares last year.

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.

The writer is Kuwait market leader for EY's Climate Change and Sustainability Services (CCaSS) practice. The views are personal

Poor buying pounds pulses

INDORE, OCTOBER 12:
Barring chana, all pulse seeds and pulses in Indore mandis were quoted lower on sluggish demand.

Chana (kanta) rallied further to ☐10,000-10,200 a quintal (up ☐200), while chana (desi) rose to ☐9,800. Chana dal (average) rose to ☐12,000, chana dal (medium) to ☐12,500, while chana dal (bold) rose to ☐13,000 a quintal.

The sluggish trend continued in tur on slack demand and favourable crop report with tur (Maharashtra) declining to ☐6,500-6,600, while tur (Madhya Pradesh) ruled at ☐6,000. Tur dal fetched ☐9,500-10,500.

Moong (bold) declined to ☐4,500- 4,800 a quintal, while moong (medium) ruled at ☐4,000-4,300 a quintal. Moong dal traded between ☐6,000-6,400 a quintal.

Urad (bold) declined to ☐6,500-6,700, while urad (medium) quoted at ☐6,000.

The decline in urad also dragged its dal with its prices ranging between ☐8,500-11,500 a quintal.

Small cardamom gains aroma on good demand

KOCHI, OCTOBER 11:
Small cardamom market after showing a steady to slightly firmer trend for a couple of weeks has shown an upsurge on Tuesday at the auction held in Kerala.

The auction average at the auction conducted by South Indian Green Cardamom Company Limited today has soared to ☐1,065 a kg from ☐1,004.05 a kg last Tuesday.

Except for this auction, last week the individual auction average remained between ☐989 and ☐ 949 a kg.

Total arrivals today stood at 84.5 tonnes and almost the entire quantity was sold out.

Stockists have entered the market. They and exporters were actively covering and that in turn has aided the price rise today, Ranganathan, a dealer in Bodinayakannur, told *Business Line.*

The dry spell, prevailing in the growing regions of Idukki district, where 75 per cent of the cardamom is grown, is signalling of a further drop in the crop, said PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC. Decline in the north-east monsoon which is expected in the coming days would result in severe water shortage in the growing areas, he said.

This phenomenon has also prompted the stockists and others to cover now, he said adding Diwali buying is also under way and it is expected to stay for two - three days.

Harvesting is in full swing now in all the estates and according to the trade in Bodinayakannur 75 per cent of the capsules arrived was from the new crop and that was fetching good price while the remaining 25 per cent from the previous crop was fetching comparatively low price.

Unlike in the normal season only three round of picking is likely to take place this season as the harvesting has started after a three-month delay, they said.

Exporters were active last week. They were estimated to have bought around 80 tonnes of exportable grade capsules at prices ☐1,050-1,100 a kg, they said.

Good colour current bulk was being traded at ☐1,050-1,060 a kg.

Arrivals at the auctions last week dropped to 625 tonnes from 635 tonnes the previous week.

The individual auction average was by and large steady last week and was vacillating between ☐949 and ☐1,004 a kg as against ☐935 and ☐1,014 a kg the previous week.

Total arrivals during the season from August 1 up to October 8 were at 4,767 tonnes and sales were at 4,418 tonnes.

The individual auction average for the season as on October 1 stood at ☐37.59 a kg. Last week auction average was at ☐969.15 as against ☐961.80 a kg the previous week.

Prices on Monday in the local market, Bodinayakannur moved up and they were in ☐/Kg: 8mm bold good colour 1,250 -1,275 ; 7- 8mm 1,100; 6mm -7mm 925 and below 6 mm: 560.

Weather conditions continued to remain unfavourable as the region was not receiving the usual rainfall, growers in Idukki said.

Cotton wilts on rising arrival

RAJKOT, OCTOBER 11:
Cotton prices declined on Monday as supply of new crop increased from producing belt. Moreover, slow demand from domestic mills also pressurised the prices of the fibre . Gujarat Sankar-6 cotton was down by ☐300 to ☐45,000-46,000 per candy of 356 kg. New cotton was traded at ☐43,000-43,500 per candy. About 48,000 bales (of 170 kg) arrived in India. According to traders, cotton prices may decline further during this week on slow demand. *Kapas* or raw cotton too decreased as ginning demand was weak. It lost ☐20 to ☐950-1,130 per 20 kg and cottonseed stood at ☐521-560 per 20 kg.

Icrisat develops new method for watershed management

Hyderabad, September 30:
The International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat) has claimed that a new watershed management method developed by it will lead to a paradigm shift in water conservation programmes across the country.

Using this method, a village in Bellary could capture an additional 18,500 cubic metres over a period of three years.

Suhas P Wani, Director of Icrisat Development Centre (IDC), said the approach helped the groundwater level rise by 1.5-2 metres. “With soil test-based fertiliser application, the overuse of fertilisers was reduced, which meant a lower cost of cultivation — by 10-15 per cent,” he said.

Icrisat has taken up the initiative with the help of JSW group, an arm of the OP Jindal group. Some of the interventions included building soil and water conservation structures; improved variety of sorghum seeds, green gram (moong bean), pearl millet, pigeonpea and groundnut; soil analysis and micronutrient applications; avenue plantation (to improve green cover and to trap the dust) and agro-forestry.

The initiative covered 7,000 hectares with over 2,000 households in which 1,200 belonged to the farming community. A total of 3,500 farmers benefited from the interventions.

“The yield of groundnut and maize increased by 19 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively. And many new livelihood options led to an increase in the income of households by Rs. 1,500- Rs. 2,500 a month,” Wani said.