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Subsidy for drip irrigation

The Department of Horticulture has proposed to bring 140 hectares of cultivable area under drip irrigation during 2016-17 by offering a subsidy of Rs. 96.32 lakh to farmers, Collector S. Natarajan has said.

In a press release here on Wednesday, he said the district administration has decided to offer drip irrigation facilities with 100 per cent subsidy for small and marginal farmers and 75 per cent subsidy for other farmers. The Centre offered 35 to 45 per cent subsidy for drip irrigation under the Pradan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) and the rest subsidy would be borne by the State government.

A maximum subsidy of Rs. 1 lakh would be given per hectare of land. A total of 300 farmers would be benefited under the scheme this year. Farmers who were engaged in the cultivation of vegetables, chillies, cotton and coconut could be benefited from the scheme. They would be able to save water by 40 to 60 per cent by resorting to drip irrigation, he said.

Interested farmers could visit the block-level horticulture offices or Agriculture Extension Centres to get more details.

Sweet lime growers upbeat in Prakasam



It is sweet gains for sweet lime (*bathaya kaayaluin* Telugu) cultivators in Prakasam district as it fetches a remunerative price of Rs. 30,000 per tonne.

The enterprising farmers from this drought-prone district have gone as far as New Delhi to get a premium price for the crop in the market characterised by fluctuating fortunes.

The district has been considered best suited for cultivating *Citrus limetta* in view of the soil condition.

“When we have a good crop, the market crashes. When the price of *bathaya kaayalu* shoots up, particularly during summer, productivity suffers,” explains a group of farmers while loading the fruit into a lorry hired to make the best of market conditions in north India.

“As advised by the Horticulture Department, we have delayed the harvest by two months by cutting water supply to the fields in June and July when the market condition was lacklustre due to good Southwest Monsoon,” the farmers say.

The market price of the fruit dipped to a low of Rs. 10,000 per tonne in June after touching a high of Rs.40,000 in April this year.

The price went up again to Rs.30,000 per tonne in the first week of September.

Uninterrupted power hailed

“Thanks to uninterrupted power supply ensured by the government, we have a good crop this year,” says a farmer, Md. Razool, from Chandrasekarapuram while overseeing the harvesting of the crop.

“This year, I am sure of reaping at least 10 tonnes of the fruit,” says another farmer, Venkateswarulu, while hailing the 24-hour power supply.

“Erratic power supply is a thing of the past,” says another farmer Srinivasa Rao, who installed drippers given on subsidy basis by the State government. He also went for ‘panta sanjeevani’ (farm ponds).

According to Horticulture Assistant Director-II P. Jenamma, sweet lime is cultivated in 20,000 acres each in Yerragondapalem, Kanigiri, and Markapur mandals in the district.

After spending Rs.50,000 per acre for four years, the farmers incur another Rs.12,000 per acre for maintenance in the subsequent years.

The farmers in the district had been forced to uproot the withering sweet lime trees in about 2,750 acres two years ago as they were clueless on saving their crops in the wake of a prolonged dry spell.

They diversified into other horticultural crops growing papaya in 1,500 acres and pomegranate in 1,250 acres as they require less water for cultivation, says Addanki Horticulture Officer Naveen.

Food processing unit sought

The government should ensure adequate institutional credit and insurance cover, besides facilitating setting up of a food processing unit in the district itself for value addition, says Prakasam district Rythu Sangham secretary D. Gopinath.

All set for second phase of wetting groundnut crop

The district administration will commence the second phase of wetting the groundnut crop in 65,000 hectares spread over 49 mandals on Wednesday. It finished the first phase on Saturday last.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Joint Director (Agriculture) M. Vijay Kumar said that the second phase was very crucial for the survival of the groundnut crop sown in July.

“We are using 1,091 rain guns and 664 sprinklers round the clock,” he said.

Mr. Vijay Kumar said that operation of rain guns was a success because the field staff had supplied gypsum to farmers while distributing seed to them before June.

“Gypsum helps the crops retain moisture for 10 days in case of failure of rains. Now, we are expecting the crop to suffer a loss of about 30 per cent, which is minimal compared to the regular drought conditions. The rain guns have helped the crops recover from the dry spell, high temperature and winds being experienced since July last week,” Mr. Vijay Kumar said. He said that the second phase of wetting would play a vital role in making the peg penetration factor smooth, besides aiding in second flowering.

Timely and adequate monsoons cannot end the woes of farmers



Groundwater reserves in India are a vital resource that support livelihood for around 53 million Indians and provide drinking water to around 80% of the rural population . It is vital for the country's food and drinking water security. Yet, recent trends show significant depletion in the aquifers. Many areas of India have experienced more than a 12 metre decline in water-tables since 1980. Satellite based assessments indicate that Punjab, Haryana, and parts of Gujarat are witnessing rapidly falling water-tables.

The government has declared 15% of the administrative blocks as over-extracted. Already, areas in arid India are supplied with drinking water via trains, increasing groundwater depletion in other parts.

Research shows that lack of access to groundwater for irrigation increases poverty and conflict over water in rural settings.

The lack of direct pricing for water, riparian rights that allow anyone owning land to extract limitless sub-surface water, and power subsidies have often been deemed as the main factors that are fueling this rapid decline of the water table.

However, another important channel that can influence the depletion or over-extraction of groundwater -- the institutional policy of promoting agriculture export zones (AEZs) --- has received scant attention.

Improvement in the terms of trade for agricultural products, resulting in higher prices of agricultural commodities, can increase the incentives to extract more water, which is an essential intermediate input used in the production of export crops.

An International Growth Center research project shows that between 2001 and 2006, the water-table fell by 0.5 metres due to these AEZs, but in the overexploited areas such as Punjab and Haryana, the water-table fell by more than 1.6 metres, which is economically a very large decline.

There are two other important takeaway findings of this study. First, the welfare of small farmers in these overexploited regions is falling. The mean per capita expenditure has fallen around 61% between 1999 and 2009 for small farmers in the overexploited regions after the setting up of AEZs. However, there is no change in the welfare of marginal or large farmers. The study finds that there is an increase in well failure for small farmers in over-exploited regions but large farmers are able to deepen their wells. Hence, the accrued benefits of the AEZs are being invested in deepening private wells by large farmers.

Second, the social cost of water lost in the over-exploited areas due to AEZs is significant. In the absence of direct pricing of groundwater, the study calculates how much it would cost to desalinise the amount of water depleted in the over-exploited areas. Under different scenarios of capacity, the monetised value of depleted groundwater net of imported water in agricultural commodities could be at least as high as \$0.3 billion dollars in 1991 dollar terms.

This is a conservative estimate since it does not include the cost of energy required to pump saline water. This study finds that using trade promotion as a lever to increase agricultural productivity can be counter-productive in the long run if commensurate institutional reforms that ascribe property rights to groundwater or a direct price to it are not concurrently designed.

Mere supply side efforts to harvest rainwater are not adequate to address this issue. Even in good rainfall years, more groundwater is being extracted than is being replenished in over-exploited areas. Timely and adequate monsoons alone cannot end the woes of the Indian farmers.

Sheetal Sekhri is associate professor at the University of Virginia. The views expressed are personal.



Nabard to provide funds to Centre for irrigation projects

Rs. 6,000 cr to be raised soon: Chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, Chairman, NABARD
New Delhi, September 7:

For the first time, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) will provide funds to the Centre for irrigation projects. Till date, Nabard was providing assistance only for roads.

The bank will, in the next fifteen days, raise about Rs. 6,000 crore (through private placement) and then pass it on to the Centre for funding irrigation projects under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, Chairman, said.

The bonds will have a tenor of 15 years and carry average cost of 6 per cent for the government. A memorandum of agreement has been signed between Nabard and the Water Resources Ministry — in the presence of Union Water Resources Minister Uma Bharti — for providing Central assistance to 99 prioritised irrigation projects under PMKSY.

Nabard will make available the entire estimated Rs. 77,000 crore for PMKSY over the next four years, Bhanwala told *BusinessLine*.

Elaborating on the plans for the fund mop-up this fiscal, Bhanwala said that Nabard will raise the funds in several tranches under two types of bonds.

Repayment liability

One type will be in which the Centre will take the liability for repayment, and the other in which Nabard will bear the obligation to repay the bonds.

Of the targeted funds mop-up of close to Rs. 20,000 crore this fiscal, the Water Resources Ministry will bring in Rs. 1,500 crore (budgetary allocation), the bonds for which Centre will take the repayment obligation will amount to about Rs. 6,000 crore, and the balance amount of about Rs. 12,000-13,000 crore will be directly raised by Nabard under its own books.

Lawrencedale Agro to tie up with States to boost horticulture

Coimbatore, September 7:

Lawrencedale Agro Processing is planning to align with the State governments for the development of small land-hold horticulture farmers.

“The Centre is taking key steps for development of horticulture belts through the public-private partnership (PPP) route and we are keen to work with the State governments towards strengthening this. We are working closely with the Department of Horticulture in Tamil Nadu, have inked a strategic pact with the Andhra Pradesh government to engage more closely with the horticultural farmers in that region, besides engaging closely with a few more states,” Palat Vijayaraghavan, Chief Executive, Lawrencedale Agro Processing, said.

Better quality produce

As part of its move to expand, the fresh produce supply chain major has started investing substantial sums to strengthen its farmers services division to enhance the quality of the farm produce, he said and pointed out that farmers by and large took to conventional cultivation practices and cultivated traditional varieties of vegetables.

“In the current scenario, customers preferences and consumption pattern is changing fast with changing lifestyles. This change coupled with the growing need to fulfil customer requirements offers huge potential to grow such vegetables that exist in our villages. It needs to be harnessed properly by providing market support and through technical intervention”

“We will extend expertise in crop cultivation – right from soil testing to seed selection, soil enrichment to input advise up to post-harvest management. We will walk with the farmer in the entire life-cycle up to harvest, including forward market-linkages,” the CEO said, adding “this support would enhance the quality of the farm produce coming to the retail outlets.”

Ginger loses pungency on higher output

Kochi, September 7:

A sharp rise in production of fresh ginger in South India has pulled prices down this year.

The area under the crop has increased more than ten-fold and as a result the output has also risen, PV Eliyas, a Wayanad-based trader and grower of ginger in Karnataka told *BusinessLine*.

Increase in acreage

Good returns in recent years from the crop have motivated farmers to take up ginger cultivation in Karnataka and that, in turn, has raised the area from around 15,000 acres a decade ago to 1.5 lakh acres at present, he said.

Besides, good farm management practices and irrigation facilities, of late, have increased productivity per acre by 25 per cent, he said.

Meanwhile, the demand has also increased significantly, outstripping the production, he said. As a result, the price of fresh ginger was at Rs. 1,000 per 60-kg bag. However, old ginger (vegetable) was being traded at Rs. 2,200 per bag against Rs. 3,400 a couple of years ago.

Exports up

Export of ginger from the country in the April-June 2016 period increased by 40 per cent in volume to 5,800 tonnes valued at Rs. 62.70 crore from 3,911 tonnes valued at Rs. 70.25 crore in the corresponding period last year. However, there is a drop of 11 per cent in value. The decline in the unit value is attributed to the rise in exports.

According to growers in Kerala and Karnataka, for cultivating ginger on one acre, an investment of around Rs. 3.5 lakh is needed.

All the input costs have increased significantly and the yield per acre worked out to 300 bags or 18 tonnes, he claimed.

Meanwhile, Kochi traders said non-remunerative prices had led to the gradual disappearance of cultivation of the well-known high quality 'Cochin Ginger' (that has a distinctive, lemon-like flavour) popular in international spice markets.

India is the largest producer of ginger in the world, with an estimated 7,99,860 tonnes from an area of 1,53,450 ha in 2015-16, according to official statistics.

However, in terms of area, Nigeria and China are on top.

The main overseas markets of the commodity are Australia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, UAE, Morocco, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, the UK and the US.

It is estimated that annually, around 1.8 million tonnes of ginger is produced all over the world. India and China contribute almost 50 per cent of world ginger production.