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## **Agriculture research station at Karunya University**

Karunya University will soon establish an agriculture research station with support from Israel.

### **Semi-arid zones**

According to a release from the institution, the model agriculture research station will look at problems in semi-arid zones in India and it would seek the assistance of Professor Avri Bar Zur, the former Agricultural Attache, the Embassy of Israel, India.

### **Precision farming**

Dr. Zur spoke on the importance of precision farming for food crops and its impact on the livelihood of farmers.

He also spoke about poly-houses and sensors for enhancing the yield and productivity of crops. He then shared his experience in establishing the Centre of Excellence in Agriculture in Karnal, Haryana.

### **List of crops**

The University and he finalised the list of crops to be taken up for research in the station and identified the technology to be used.

M. J. Xavier, Vice Chancellor, was present at the meeting held to discuss the establishment of research station. Tamil Nadu Agricultural University experts were also present at the meeting.

## Change is in the air in vegetable cultivation by Manjapra bank



*Aeroponics, soil-less cultivation technology sourced from Israel, being tried out*

Taking a cue from its success in increasing the acreage under conventional cultivation, the Manjapra Service Cooperative Bank is preparing to adopt “aeroponics” or soil-less cultivation to save space and provide a big push to vegetable production.

T. D. Paulose, president of the bank, said that the bank had prepared a 1,000-sq.ft. plot for the pilot phase of the aeroponics venture, which involved using vertical space.

Aeroponics does not need soil as a medium and relies on water sprays to convey nutrients to the plants. It differs from hydroponics where water is used to convey nutrients to the plants.

Mr. Paulose said that he expected the new model to be a success, considering that the method had been tried out places such as Bangalore. The system was adopted mostly from Israel, where availability of cultivable land is a serious issue. At the same time, aeroponics would have to be adapted to suit the local conditions and its cost reduced to make it viable for large-scale applications.

When a 10 sq.ft. vertical space is used, the aeroponics model is capable of compressing an acre of cultivation to seven cents, claimed Mr. Paulose. However, the Manjapra model would use only 5 sq.ft. of vertical space for the experimental farm, he said.

### **Food production**

If the new technology could be adopted for wider application by the bank, it would take the safe-to-eat vegetables programme a step forward. Besides enlisting nearly 2,000 farmers engaged in conventional cultivation of vegetables and banana, the bank has also 80 fish farmers and 106 poultry farmers under its fold.

Their businesses have been set up with the help of the bank.

The poultry egg production programme has hit a roadblock with egg prices falling recently, he said.

The bank's poultry sector produces up to 5,000 eggs per day. The number of vegetable farmers is also set to increase in the coming months.

### **Jaiva Jeevitham reaps a bounty**

The sale of locally cultivated safe-to-eat vegetables, pokkali rice and value-added products from it, and coconut oil under the aegis of the district unit of the CPI(M) saw a total turnover of more than Rs.2 crore over a period of 10 days in the run up to Thiruvonam.

The vegetables came from over 700 acres under various local committees of the CPI (M), said M. M. Abbas of 'Jaiva Jeevitham' programme, which was initiated two years ago with an aim of producing safe-to-eat vegetables and fruits.

### **Price cut**

He said there were 250 outlets that sold the vegetables and other produce.

The farmers got about 90 per cent of the price as these shops were mostly run by farmers' groups. Increased availability of safe-to-eat vegetables was one of the key features of the Onam market this year. This resulted in about 30 per cent price cut compared to the previous year. Around three tonnes of safe-to-eat rice was also sold through the various outlets ahead of Onam.

According to organisers, the sale and demand for pokkali rice was encouraging for farmers, who have been abandoning its cultivation because of the rising cost.

### **Farmers gear up for samba cultivation**



*Water from Mettur dam is likely to reach the delta region by month-end*

With Chief Minister Jayalalithaa announcing the release of water for irrigation from September 20, farmers in the district are gearing up to prepare their fields for samba cultivation.

Water from Mettur dam is likely to reach here in the last week of the month and agricultural operations are expected to begin in the canal-irrigated areas by the first week of October. Farmers in some parts of the district have started readying their fields for samba cultivation. Normally about 34,900 hectares are canal-irrigated in the delta areas of the district. Samba cultivation in the non-delta areas of the district depends on the monsoon.

“We have about 10 to 15 days for preparing the fields for cultivation in the canal-irrigated areas. Some farmers have already begun or are gearing up to do so. We expect cultivation to begin by first week of October,” said N.Veerasekaran, coordinator, Ayyan Vaical Pasanatharar Sangam. Given the shortage of water, the Public Works Department should ensure adequate supply in all canals, he said.

The Agriculture Department is also bracing up to ensure adequate availability of fertilizers and other inputs. The Department has begun implementing the samba special package announced by the Chief Minister. The district has been allotted Rs.1.03 crore under the package. Under the scheme, farmers interested in taking up mechanised direct sowing during the samba season would be provided a subsidy of Rs.600 an acre and it will be extended for 100 acres. Farmers are being given Rs.500 an acre for ploughing fields. The subsidy will be extended for about 1,000 acres in the district.

Farmers would also get grants for seeds, herbicide and application of zinc sulphate. A back-ended subsidy of Rs.2,000 an acre is to be given for transplantation through machines. About 3,600 acres would be covered in the district under mechanised transplantation, officials said.

Direct sowing has begun in places such as Maruthur near Lalgudi with Joint Director of Agriculture R. Chandrasekaran inaugurating it earlier this week. About 50 acres would be covered in the village under direct sowing.

The Agriculture Department would seek to promote medium-duration varieties and adequate stocks of quality seeds have been moved to the Agricultural Extension Centres. This year, the department would not distribute much of Andhra Ponni variety seeds as blast disease was reported widely in the crop last year.

Officials said the district had stocks to the tune of 6,611 tonnes of urea, 4,537 tonnes of DAP, 4,909 tonnes of potash and 12,045 tonnes of complex fertilizer. The fertilizers have been moved to the primary agricultural cooperative societies and private dealers.

### **Punjab heading for record paddy production**

Punjab, one of the country’s leading paddy producer is all set for a record crop this kharif season as the State expects to harvest 186 lakh tonnes of paddy on increased acreage and conducive weather conditions.

The Punjab Agriculture Department’s first advance estimate has pegged its paddy (basmati and non-basmati rice varieties) production at a record high of 186 lakh tonnes for the 2016-17 kharif season, nearly 10 lakh tonnes more than last year’s 176 lakh MT.

“We are expecting the paddy production to touch 186 lakh tonnes this year, which would be an all- time high output in Punjab. Last year, despite the shortfall in rains the State had



a record paddy output at 176 lakh tonnes..but this year it's going to be even better," Jasbir Singh Bains, Director, PAD, told *The Hindu*.

"This year farmers have grown paddy in more area than last year. Besides the weather conditions have been favourable till now. This is likely to boost the crop yield this season," he said.

Farmers in Punjab have sown paddy in nearly 30.10 lakh hectares against the 29.75 lakh hectares last year. The State has paddy yield close to 6,000 kg per hectare, according to the Economic Survey 2015-16.

### **Polls in sight**

With the Assembly elections nearing, the State government is also gearing up to start purchase of paddy from local farmers. It had recently announced that government procurement would begin by October 1.

Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal in a recent review meeting directed the officials to ensure that the lifting of paddy gets going on the first day itself.

"I would closely monitor the whole process personally. Daily reports regarding the progress in procurement and status update on the lifting should be sent to my office," he said in a statement.

### **Food production in TN crosses 1.23 cr. tonnes, says Minister**

Food production in the State has crossed 1.23 crore tonnes in 2015-16 registering a 63 per cent increase when compared to 75.95 lakh tonnes in 2010-11, said Finance Minister O. Paneerselvam.

Handing over agriculture loan waiver orders to small and tiny farmers at a function here on Sunday, he said that such a massive shift in food production was owing to the effective implementation of various farmers' schemes, making latest technologies available to farmers and awareness of good agriculture practices. Implementation of farmer- oriented policies and plans of the State government were behind this grand success, he said.

After assuming power, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa had issued order waiving farmers' loans, including crop loans and long-term farm loans, to the tune of Rs.5,780 crore . Waiver orders were being distributed to all eligible farmers in the State. A total of 16.93 lakh farmers will benefit through the loan waiver scheme.

In Theni district alone, loans to the tune of Rs.84.96 crore were waived. Around 12,450 small and tiny farmers, including 4,288 farmers in Andipatti, 4,677 in Bodi, 1,210 in Cumbum and 2,275 in Periyakulam, will benefit, Mr. Paneerselvam said.

Later, the Minister distributed cheques for Rs.1.45 lakh to 19 village poverty eradication committees. Collector N. Venkatachalam was present.

***‘Such a shift in food production was owing to effective implementation of various farmers’ schemes’***

### **Institute displays new food products**



New food products developed by the Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology (IICPT), Thanjavur, such as ‘quinoa nankhatai,’ vermicelli from traditional rice, millet idli and dosa mix and choco rice flakes were released during an Open Day session at the institute here on Saturday.

A. Annadurai, Collector, inaugurated the event in the presence of C. Anandharamakrishnan, Director, IICPT. V. Chelladurai, General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, inaugurated the industry pavilion. The institute demonstrated new food processing technologies and machinery and showcased novel food products to the visitors on the occasion.

The Open Day session was organised on the theme, ‘Safe food for healthier nation.’ Successful entrepreneurs incubated by IICPT exhibited their products and shared their success stories. Students of IICPT performed cultural events to raise awareness of food safety.

## **MLC objects to Centre leaving arecanut growers in the lurch**

*Under PMKSY, farmers are given assistance for drip irrigation for effective utilisation of water*

Ivan D'Souza, MLC, has objected to the Union Agriculture Ministry's decision to keep out small and medium growers of arecanut from subsidy given under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).

Talking to reporters here on Saturday, Mr. D'Souza said while arecanut growers are reeling for want of support price, it was wrong on the part of the Union government to keep the growers out of subsidy to be granted under PMKSY for the year 2016-17.

Mr. D'Souza said it was an irony that the Union government had excluded only arecanut while allowing subsidy for other commercial crops namely rubber, coffee and tea.

### **Shivamogga leading**

Mr. D'Souza said that arecanut was being grown in 2.59 lakh hectares in 24 districts in the State. Shivamogga leads the list with 48,187 hectares followed by 36,980 hectares in Chikkamagaluru and 34,977 hectares in Dakshina Kannada. These growers have been demanding support price.

Mr. D'Souza said the decision of the Union government will have grave impact on small and medium farmers cultivating arecanut, who are eligible for subsidy under the PMKSY.

He claimed that 80 per cent of arecanut growers were small and medium farmers.

Under PMKSY, farmers are given assistance for having drip irrigation and other measures for effective utilisation of water in a field.

Mr. D'Souza said he does not have the number of arecanut growers in the State who have made use of assistance under PMKSY so far.

He said he would write a letter to the Union Agriculture Ministry seeking inclusion of arecanut growers in PMKSY.

He would also take a delegation of arecanut growers to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



## **Farmer spots grenade on his land**



An Army-made hand grenade was found on an agricultural land near Naganathi in Vellore district on Sunday.

According to police, Thanji, son of Natesan, an ex-serviceman, had spotted the grenade on his land. "Following rains, the grenade, which was buried, became visible. The land owner informed the police," a police officer said.

Police attached to Vellore taluk station along with the Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad recovered the grenade. "The grenade is a 1979 make. The squad recovered it," he added.

P. Pakalavan, Superintendent of Police, Vellore, said the grenade was issued by the Army factory. "It could have been buried here for six months to one year as it is completely rusted. We will defuse the grenade although its shelf life would have been over by now," he said.

### **Report sent to Army**

He added that the grenade contained information such as date of manufacture.

"We will send a report to the Army about this grenade. We need to get details such as origin and the unit where it was made to see how it came here," he said.

“There are a number of service and ex-servicemen in this area. We will conduct an inquiry with them,” the SP said.

### **‘Organic products to be branded’**

Minister for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda has said that there is a plan to introduce organic products as branded items. He was inaugurating an organic fair here on Saturday.

‘The government has been giving grants for ‘Savayava Krishi Yojane’ and we are encouraging setting up of organic unions by the farmers,” he said. - Correspondent

### **Heritage Foods bags Golden Peacock**

Heritage Foods, a fast-growing private sector enterprise in the dairy, agriculture, retail and bakery space, has bagged the ‘Golden Peacock Award for Excellence in Corporate Governance’ for the year 2016.

The Award, instituted by the Golden Peacock Awards Secretariat, Institute of Directors (IOD), will be presented at a function in London to be held at the Millennium Hotel London Mayfair on October 18. The function is a part of IOD India’s ‘16th London Global Convention on Corporate Governance & Sustainability’ and Global Business Meet that will witness a distinguished gathering of business leaders.

Cabinet Minister and Secretary of State for International Development, UK , Priti Patel will be the Chief Guest. A letter from the Awards Secretariat Director-General, Vivek Agnihotri to the company’s Managing Director N. Bhuvaneswari said Heritage Foods was declared winner of a ‘Special Commendation’ for the said award, based on the submission of its self-appraisal report. Selection was done by the Awards Jury under the Chairmanship of Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, former CJ of the Supreme Court.

### **Rs. 14.37-lakh subsidy for buying farm equipment**

The State government has allocated Rs. 14.37 lakh as subsidy to farmers for buying farm equipment in Kanniyakumari district.

A release issued by Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan said that the Chief Minister had announced on the floor of the assembly that the State government has allocated Rs. 31.06 crore as subsidy to farmers for buying various farm equipment through the Agriculture Engineering department.

Small, marginal, Adi Dravidar, Tribals and women farmers would be given a 50 per cent subsidy and for others it would be 40 per cent or the maximum rate fixed by the government whichever is lower.

Farmers can buy the equipment from the dealers approved by the Agricultural Engineering department.

Intending farmers can obtain the application form from the office of the Executive Engineer (Agricultural Engineering) in Nagercoil or from the concerned office of the Assistant Executive Engineer. The filled in applications should be submitted along with two copies of passport size photos, photocopy of Aadhar Card, Chitta Adangal, layout of the land, certificate of small and marginal farmer, community certificate, registration certificate if the equipment had to be attached with tractor.

For further details farmers can contact the office of the Assistant Executive Engineer, Agricultural Engineering, 833, Industrial Estate, Konam, Nagercoil 629004, Tel: 04652 260681 and Assistant Executive Engineer, Agricultural Engineering, 22/31A Mettukkadam, near Mosque, Thuckalay, Pincode 629175, the release added.

### **Toor dal growers in Vijayapura expecting bumper harvest this year**



The rainfall in the last few days in the district is likely to offer a bumper yield for toor dal growers.

The growers were worried this time as lack of rainfall was leading to moisture stress.

### **Moisture**

“The good spell of rain not only promises a good harvest, but will also help the rabi crop as the water, after percolating deep into the soil, retains moisture for long. In the rabi season, jowar and Bengal gram are the prominent crops,” said sources in the Agriculture Department.

According to officials, the district received around 80 mm of rain in last few days and more rain is expected in coming days. The growers had incurred losses last year due to drought.

### **Recovering losses**

“ Last year, the growers incurred losses owing to a prolonged dry spell. This year, with adequate rain, we expect to recover last year’s losses,” Ashok Managuli, a grower from Bijjaragi village.

Meanwhile, officials said that this year, growers had cultivated toor dal on over 3.5 lakh hectares.

The district is in the second spot after Kalaburagi in cultivating toor dal.

“If this trend continues, Vijayapura may surpass Kalaburagi and become the largest cultivator of toor dal in the State,” the officials said.

### **Farmers demand changes in crop insurance scheme**

The Tamil Nadu Farmers’ Association (non-partisan) has urged the Central Government to bring about changes in the crop insurance scheme.

The Association’s leaders, who addressed reporters here on Saturday, said that nationalised banks while disbursing crop loans took away the premium at five per cent of the loan amount.

The Government too contributed towards farmers’ loan but at the time of submitting claims, the insurance companies said that only if crop in the entire village/firka was damaged would they compensate the loss. This was a unique business model where at the time of providing the insurance cover, it was for a farmer but when it came to compensation for loss, it was collective loss. The Government must bring about a change and also let farmers decide if they wanted insurance cover or not. The Association also wanted the State Government to act against errant officers.

## Tribal crops find a haven



### *Hamlet in Chinnar sanctuary sets aside space to cultivate traditional variants*

This little known tribal settlement inside the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary has turned into a treasure trove of traditionally grown crop varieties of tribespeople, which are fast disappearing in the influx of hybrid seed varieties. Now, Thoppicheera, an endemic species of spinach, is a highly priced vegetable in the exclusive tribes' market at Marayur.

Thayannankudy has an area marked for cultivating traditional crops which were facing threat. Ragi, locally known as keppa, was their staple food and there were vegetable and crop varieties exclusively cultivated by the tribespeople. To protect these varieties, a seed farm was created here under the initiative of the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. The tribespeople of Thayannankudy are maintaining the seed farm.



Chandran kaani, the tribal chieftain, told *The Hindu* that with the advent of outside seed varieties, the many traditional crop varieties were lost. Through this initiative, those seed varieties could be protected for future cultivation.

### **Crops cultivated**

The crop varieties at the farm include thoppicheera, pachamutti cheera (spinach varieties) sirukeppa, neelakanni,(ragi varieties), vellavaraku (kodo millet), malapoondur (garlic) maize, coriander and pumpkin.

He said that when the forest officials convened a meeting for protection of traditional seed varieties through the model farm, the tribal settlements deep in the forest responded. A woman brought a three-year-old seed variety from the last stock of it in the settlement. This variety too is grown in the seed farm, said Mr. Chandran kaani. Tribespeople abandoned traditionally grown seeds primarily because the crops were small though highly resistant to pest attack and climatic changes (Thayannankudy is in the rainshadow area). However, the new crop variants decayed and dried easily, forcing many farmers to abandon cultivation.

### **Much support**

Munnar wildlife warden G. Prasad said they got immense support from the tribespeople in the endeavour to save endemic crops.

“Our aim was to supply the seed to the tribespeople on condition that they would return the same quantity when harvested. This would be a cyclical process to protect the traditional crop varieties,” he said.

Arya Gopinath, a sociologist in Munnar forest division, said malnutrition was found a major issue among tribespeople and the change in their food habit from ragi to ration rice had an impact on their health.

The endemic crop varieties are highly pest-resistant and protein-rich. They need to be protected for the tribes’ healthy living. The remedy is to make the tribespeople self-dependent in food production through protecting the traditional seeds, she said.



## ATC

### FARMERS BENEFITED

A total of 63,974 small and marginal farmers in the district who had taken crop loans totalling Rs. 278.81 crore, benefited under the waiver scheme announced by the State government.

Vellamandi N. Natarajan, Minister for Tourism, gave away the certificates to the beneficiaries on the waiver.

K. S. Palanisamy, District Collector, presided over the function. K.C. Ravichandran, Joint Registrar of Cooperative Societies, spoke.

### **Farmers concerned after arecanut is kept out of PMKSY purview**



At a time when arecanut growers are reeling owing to slump in the price of the produce and decline in the yield due to drought, the Union government's decision to keep arecanut out of the purview of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) has come as a bolt from the blue.

The crop is grown in around 50,000 hectares in the district.

The price of a kilo of arecanut, which was Rs. 900 in August 2014, has come down to Rs. 260 now.

The crop in more than 600 hectares was damaged last year owing to moisture stress caused by drought.

K.T. Gangadhar, working president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, has slammed the decision taken by the Centre to keep arecanut out of the purview of PMKSY.

In wake of the slump in the price, the growers had urged the Union government to announce a minimum support price for the produce.

Water storage in the Bhadra, the Tunga, the Anjanapura and the Ambligolla reservoirs in the district is at an expected level this year owing to sluggish monsoon.

### **Expecting help**

The arecanut growers in the district were expecting financial assistance from the government through PMKSY and other schemes to make proper utilisation of surface and ground water and thereby save their crops. He demanded that the Centre roll back the decision.

Mr. Gangadhar said that the Centre has extended a stepmotherly treatment towards arecanut growers for many years.

The recommendations of Gorakh Singh panel to waive loans borrowed by arecanut growers, in financial distress due to crop loss caused by yellow leaf disease and other pest and fungal infections, have not been implemented yet, he said.

B.A. Ramesh Hegde, president of the Zilla Adike Belegarara Sangha, an organisation of arecanut growers, said that more than 1.10 lakh tonnes of arecanut have been imported this year so far owing to which the price of local produce has declined.

The arecanut growers from Karnataka had requested Union Minister for Commerce Nirmala Sitharaman to impose restrictions on the import of arecanut, but no action has been taken in this regard so far.

Mr. Hegde said that there is a rain deficit of around 35 per cent in the district this year.

Under PMKSY, funding is provided to adopt precision-irrigation technologies, avoid reduction in water wastage and for watershed development works.

### **Likely to increase**

The cases of decline in the yield and damage due to moisture stress is likely to increase in the summer.

As drought is prevailing in the district for the second consecutive year, government programmes like PMKSY are necessary to save the arecanut plantations, he said.

The sangh will stage protests if the Centre fails to roll back the decision on PMKSY, he added.

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### ***in a nutshell***

- ☐ ***Crop in more than 600 hectares was damaged last year owing to moisture stress***
- ☐ ***Price also declined after more than 1.10 lakh tonnes of arecanut were imported***
- ☐ ***Farmers had urged Centre to announce minimum support price***
- ☐ ***'Sangh will stage protests if the Centre fails to roll back decision on PMKSY'***

### **Organic manure to be sold free of cost**

Organic manure produced from the micro compost yards in the city will be distributed to interested farmers free of cost, G. Prakash, Commissioner of Municipal Administration, said here on Saturday.

Inspecting the functioning of micro compost yard at Pokkollai near Ariyamangalam on Saturday, where the Tiruchi Corporation has set up its first solid waste management unit in the city to manage the waste being collected in the neighbouring localities, Mr. Prakash said that the project, which was taken up on a pilot basis at Pokkalai, had been extended to Ambedkar Nagar in Srirangam and Birds' road in Cantonment.

The units had already started producing organic manure from the biodegradable waste. Instructions had been given to the officials to make available the manure to farmers at free of cost.

### **Support to farmers**

Advertisements would be made to inform the farmers. A board would be displayed outside the units, where organic manure was produced. It was aimed at supporting the cause of farmers, who wanted to adapt organic farming.

Later, accompanied by the Tiruchi Corporation Commissioner N. Ravichandran, Mr. Prakash inspected the functioning of community kitchen at Viragupettai.

He interacted with the beneficiaries, who prefer to cook in the kitchen with the biogas supplied by the Corporation.

Mr. Prakash also visited Thiruvalluvar street in Srirangam, where underground drainage pipe was established at a cost of Rs.44 lakh.

### **A slow recovery for small enterprises**



*It has been an uphill task for aquaculture farmers and manufacturers of flyash brick, salt*

After the floods levelled almost everything they had, salt pan owners in Kelambakkam and flyash brick manufacturers and aquaculture farmers in Tiruvallur and Kancheepuram districts have learnt that they have to fight their own battles. And, that they cannot depend on doles from governments and have to take their own precautionary measures.

“Our machinery was marooned in water and raw materials, including lime and cement, got washed away. Many units stood without work for months together. But all that we got was a rebate in interest for the loans taken for repairs. Nobody opted for that. Around 40 of the 65-odd units are still functioning at half their capacity,” said a flyash brick manufacturer.

“The Central government uses flyash bricks in all its constructions. The works in IIT-Madras are standing examples of that. Similarly, if the PWD also decides to use these bricks, we will get more orders and even units that have closed down can resume operation,” said V. Sathyanarayanan, State Coordinator, Tamil Nadu Flyash Bricks and Blocks Manufacturers Association.

Salt manufacturers want more openings beneath the Kelambakkam- Kovalam road that was washed away last year. “Only two pipes have been laid at that spot. More such facilities will allow faster discharge of water from Vandalur and the Okkiyam Maduvu, and prevent flooding in our lands and elsewhere too. One development after the floods is



that the Muttukadu estuary is not being allowed to silt up,” said K. Mariappan, President, Covelong Salt Manufacturers and Merchants Association.

### **‘Not much help’**

Small farmers, who run aquaculture units, also did not get much help from the government. Sivagnanam, a farmer, said his loss was not compensated in any manner. “Though officials sympathised with us, they told us there was no way they could help us since we don’t come under agriculture or fisheries. We sat through the floods watching the fish and shrimp being washed away, unable to do anything,” he said.



### **MahaRain app to give 1 crore farmers rainfall data, help them plan crop cycle**



MahaRain — the App developed in-house by the state agriculture department, is all set to provide over one crore farmers the rainfall data.

The App, which is to be published soon on the Google Play Store, gives the farmer access to information on rainfall at the touch of a finger allowing them chalk out their cropping

cycle. This is one of the many steps which the department has taken to ensure better planning and better data is generated from the fields, officials said.

While the agriculture department maintains circle level data of rainfall on its website, its dissemination to the grassroot level has not happened.

Uday Deshmukh, Chief Statistician of the Agriculture Department, said the App will allow farmers to access the data seamlessly. The department has more than 2,000 rain gauges which allows for rain measurement across the state. While various players do provide this data over subscribed SMSes, the App will make the process easier and more accessible.

Meanwhile, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), the flagship program of the central government, has promoted further use of technology in agriculture. Now, agriculture officers will use GPS technology to conduct surveys and prepare reports about the health and position of crops.

One of the most critical exercises of an agriculture officer is to determine the crop yield. These reports are used both by insurance companies as well as government agencies for planning and settling of insurance claims.

As PMFBY is an insurance policy against crop losses, information regarding crop health and expected yield rise of great importance. Instead of the traditional method of relying on visual inspection to determine the yield, the agriculture department has decided to use GPS technology and an App to feed data into the central server in Pune.

Deshmukh said the App can be operated both offline and online. "It will allow the agriculture officer to Geo tag a field. Also, as the App would be on the smartphone of the officer, a picture can be taken of the field conditions which will be tagged through GPS. This data would then be uploaded to the centre server," he said.

Once collated, this data would be analysed to give the expected yield of the crop for the season. Other than insurance claims, this data can be used for deriving various policy related interventions later on.

Deshmukh said that master trainers training for all the 34 districts have been trained and a similar training will be held on September 19 also. At present, this App is being used to collect information about the ongoing harvest of black gram and green gram.



## Maharashtra govt plans agro-industries push in all districts of Marathwada



The state government is working towards holistic development of all the eight districts of backward Marathwada to create infrastructure for growth of agriculture and industries. “To begin with, the region’s foremost challenge is to tackle drought. All the eight districts have faced drought in the last two years,” said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Saturday during his visit to Aurangabad.

The flagship Jalyukta Shivar project, undertaken aggressively in Marathwada, has helped provide some relief to the farmers.

While announcing that the second phase of Jalyukta Shivar would be pushed on a war-footing in the eight districts, Fadnavis said, “Apart from agriculture, there is huge potential for industrial growth in the districts that will open up greater employment opportunities.”

Marathwada comprises the eight districts of Aurangabad, Beed, Nanded, Latur, Osmanabad, Parbhani and Hingoli. Among the worst drought-hit districts were Latur, Osmanabad, Beed and Parbhani.

The region, which has lagged behind in industrial development, is being given special concessions and opened up to sectors that can generate employment. The region, which has sizeable cotton cultivation, is being provided with textile-related industrial units.

While initiating measures for tackling drought, the government has already banned new sugar mills in the region. Farm experts are being roped in to guide farmers look for alternative crop patterns with less investments and higher returns.

This year, the government has promoted “tur” cultivation, which has huge demand across the country and outside. Inter-cropping and horticulture too are being pushed to help

farmers. In addition, the government has taken up dairy development in Marathwada, which can be an alternative source of livelihood especially when crop fails due to poor rains.

The government believes water conservation projects in the next two years would help build infrastructure that could make agriculture more lucrative. Farm ponds and wells can serve as water storage facilities and help farmers cultivate at least one crop in hard times.

### **Egypt to send team to Russia as trade tensions increase**



Egypt will send a team to Russia at the end of September to discuss a ban placed on Egyptian agricultural exports, the Ministry of Trade said in a statement on Saturday, a move that comes amid growing tensions over Egypt's wheat restrictions.

Russia said on Friday it would temporarily suspend imports of fruit and vegetables from Egypt starting Sept. 22. The announcement came shortly after Cairo formally rejected a Russian wheat shipment due to finding trace levels of the common grains fungus ergot. Russia said last week it was seeking talks with Egypt, its top wheat buyer, over Cairo's failure to approve any Russian wheat shipments since tightening its regulations on ergot last month.

Egypt reinstated a zero tolerance policy on ergot and applied it retroactively to all outstanding contracts, a move that has infuriated traders who boycotted the state's grain tender on Friday in protest. Ergot is a common grains fungus that can cause hallucinations when consumed in large amounts but which is considered harmless in low quantities. Most countries permit shipments with up to 0.05 percent.

Moscow has a history of using threats and limiting imports in trade disputes, but Cairo's policy over the ergot fungus has created a headache for all of Egypt's wheat suppliers, who say guaranteeing zero ergot in shipments is impossible.

Russia is one of Egypt's top export markets for fruit. The North African country sold some \$350 million in agricultural commodities last year to Russia, including 400,000 tonnes of oranges, or 30 percent of its total orange exports, the trade ministry statement said. Egypt's prime minister held an urgent meeting on Saturday with the ministers of supply, agriculture, health, and trade, to discuss the outstanding wheat shipments affected by the new ergot policy, a cabinet statement said. Traders said they expected a decision this week that may allow stranded wheat shipments contracted for under the country's old ergot regulations to be shipped to Egypt.

**hindustantimes**

### **Arhtiyas must charge only 11.8% on loans to farmers in Punjab**



To regulate non-institutional loans to farmers by commission agents (arhtiyas), the Punjab government has notified a “fluctuating” rate of interest of 11.8%.

This is to make the Punjab Settlement of Agricultural Indebtedness Act passed in May functional. Farmers wonder how they will come to know when the rate goes up or down, while arhtiyas say the rate is far too less than that of banks.

The government has linked the interest to the State Bank of India (SBI) base rate of 9.3% and offered commission agents 2.5% over and above it for running expenses. It has clarified in the September 6 notification that rate will change with the SBI figure but the fluctuation won't be notified, meaning the farmers and the arhtiyas will have to find it out themselves.

"This interest rate won't cover our day-to-day expenses," said Arhtiya association president Ravinder Singh Cheema. "We will meet shortly to decide the next action." Of Punjab's Rs 36,000-crore farm debt, about Rs 12,000 crore is non-institutional — given by 25,000 of 30,000 arhtiyas who have licence from Punjab State Agricultural Marketing Board (mandi board).

Balbir Singh Rajewal of the Bharati Kisan Union (Rajewal) accepted the new rate but said: "How will they (the government) make sure the commission agents don't charge us more than 11.8%? For as of now, arhtiyas charge farmers more than 36%."

"The additional 2.5% we have given to the arhtiyas for overheads is what Nabard (the National bank of Agriculture and Rural Development) offers to the state co-operative banks," said a top officer behind fixing of the rate. "Arhtiyas can charge farmers any amount but if the debt goes bad, the settlement will be based on the official rate. Banks charge farmers compound interest, while the arhtiyas charge them simple interest."

The five divisional forums — in Patiala, Jalandhar, Ferozpur, Faridkot and Rupnagar — look into debt settlement. "These will function better when a rate of interest has been fixed" said an agriculture department officer. Repeated crop failure, stagnant productivity, shrinking income, and piling debt have forced many farmers to commit suicide, and arhtiyas are accused of being main culprits, so the state government was under pressure to bring in a law to deal with it. The bill was proposed in 2001 and 2006, and took another 10 years to become an Act.



## **GEAC sub-panel has experts to study GM crop safety, says MoEF**



Environmentalists have accused govt of lack of transparency and conflict of interest

### **New Delhi, September 18:**

The Environment Ministry has allayed concerns cited by environmentalists that the GEAC sub-committee that studied the bio-safety of GM (genetically modified) mustard did not have any 'health expert' on board.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the Ministry clarified that the panel "had experts in subjects relevant to safety evaluation of GE (genetically-engineered) crops.

"The GEAC in its 126th meeting held on January 4, 2016, constituted a sub-committee with expert scientists in specific subjects relevant to safety evaluation of Genetically Engineered (GE) Crops.

The sub-committee also consists of a health expert, Dr B. Sesikeran, who is an MD in pathology and former Director, National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and is currently serving as Chairman, Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM)," said the statement.

### **New gen hybrids**

It said the assessment of food and environmental safety (AFES) for environmental release of GE Mustard (*Brassica juncea*) hybrid DMH-11 and use of parental events (Varuna bn3.6 and EH2 modbs2.99) for development of new generation hybrids has been placed

on the website on September 5, 2016, for comments by stakeholders and general public for 30 days.

The clarification comes in the backdrop of environmentalists accusing the government of lack of transparency and ‘conflict of interest’, among other things.

The GEAC “violated its own decision that the RARM (risk assessment and risk management) and full bio-safety dossier would be reviewed first in the GEAC.

It did not discuss the document but is inviting public comments on a ‘proposal on authorisation of environmental release’ of GM mustard,” the Coalition for GM-free Food said.

The coalition also questioned the constitution of the sub-committee given that it had three members with close links to the GM industry -- K Veluthambi, Chair of Sub-Committee and Co-Chair of GEAC, who was a GM crop developer; SR Rao, Adviser, DBT, who is on the Golden Rice Humanitarian Board funded by Syngenta, and B Sesikeran, who is a Board Member of International Life Sciences Institute funded by Bayer, Monsanto and others.

## **Millets should be in PDS, says lobby**

### **Hyderabad, September 18:**

Millet Network of India (MINI), an umbrella organisation of activists, scientists and non-governmental organisations, has demanded the Union government implement the National Food Security 2013 and include millets in public distribution system (PDS).

MINI Convener PV Sathesh has said that the network has launched a national campaign this week to bring pressure on the government to achieve their demands.

“The month-long campaign would highlight the importance of bringing millets into the PDS. The campaign will conclude on October 15, the World Food Day. The campaign will be conducted at village, block, State and national level to create a mass awareness and momentum from the communities in fighting for the cause of millets,” he said.

“Sorghum bread or Jowar roti is the most desired staple diet of the Deccan region in South India. Millet crops accounts for two-third of country’s cultivated landscape and they support 40 per cent of the country’s population. About 44 per cent of the food grains produced are millets,” he said.

“Despite the advantages and suitability to country’s agro-climatic conditions, millets have not attracted enough attention by governments,” he said.



## **Monsoon shortfall**



### **September 18, 2016:**

The south-west monsoon (June-to-September) is likely to end below average this year, against the IMD's prediction of above-normal rainfall as the La Nina weather pattern hasn't played out. The cumulative rainfall from June 1 to September 15 is 5 per cent below average for India as a whole, with the East and North-east showing the highest deficit of 14 per cent.

### **CPI eases, but WPI moves up**

Consumer price inflation eased to 5.05 per cent in August, a five-month low from 6.07 per cent in July. The food inflation moderating to 5.9 per cent, from 8.4 per cent a month earlier brought the CPI lower. Vegetable costs rose 1 per cent in August compared with 14 per cent in July; pulses rose 22 per cent versus 27.5 per cent. Sugar and spices inflation remained above 8 per cent for the fifth consecutive month, limiting the fall in food inflation. However, on the contrary, wholesale price index inflation inched up in August to 3.74 per cent (from 3.5 per cent in July) led by higher prices of manufactured products (2.42 per cent) and fuel (1.62 per cent). Food inflation, however, was lower at 8.23 per cent compared to 11.82 per cent in July.

### **A price check on essentials**

If retail prices of essential commodities do not come down, the Centre may invoke the Essential Commodities Act and impose a limit on maximum retail price (MRP) of 22 essential commodities. Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said last week at a press conference that the Act may soon be invoked if packaged essential prices do not come under control. In a notification issued on September 7, the Food Ministry modified the legal metrology (packaged commodities) rules that enable governments to fix retail

prices. According to the modification, if the retail sale price of any essential commodity is “fixed and notified by the competent authority under the Essential Commodities Act, the same shall apply”.

## **Make banking services available to small farmers, unorganised sector: RBI**

### **MUMBAI, SEPT 19:**

Reserve Bank of India wants financial intermediaries such as banks and non-banking finance companies to focus on a '3x3x3' matrix so that small and marginal farmers, micro and small institutions, and low-income earners in the unorganised sector are financially included.

Speaking at a BRICS workshop on financial inclusion, organised by the Indian Banks' Association, S S Mundra, Deputy Governor, said the credit absorption capacity of small and marginal farmers needs to be enhanced.

Currently, farmers' land holdings are fragmented and there should be some mechanism towards consolidation so that their credit absorption capacity goes up.

Since micro and small enterprises (MSE) have little or no credit history, financial intermediaries have to make efforts to initiate people into the formal credit system, said Mundra.

When it comes to low salary earners in the unorganised sector, the Deputy Governor felt that their skills need to be scaled up so that their earning capacity increases.

As small and marginal farmers generate adequate surplus, they need to be educated on investments.

Given that the MSEs generate low surplus, there is a need for greater financial literacy and awareness for this group.

The third group -- low salary earners in the unorganised sector -- generates no surplus. they have to be aided by basic savings accounts, basic term insurance and small savings for investments.

The third matrix -- banks, NBFCs, MFIs, small finance banks and payment banks -- have to ensure that people are using the services available to them.

## **Sugar prices likely to remain firm for next three quarters**

Prices remain high after soaring to Rs. 36,000 a tonne in Aug on fears of a fall in world output



### **Mumbai, September 18:**

Sugar prices are expected to remain firm for the next three quarters despite the storage limit imposed earlier this month on sugar mills and traders.

Prices of the sweetener have been on the rise for the last six months due to expectations of a sharp fall in output — both in domestic and international markets next season.

Domestic sugar prices rose 14 per cent in August to Rs. 36,000 a tonne against Rs. 31,500 recorded in March, largely supported by low inventory at the dealer level.

The Central government, which was till recently was incentivising debt-ridden sugar mills to export and bring down their inventory, levied an export duty of 20 per cent in June. Despite the soft loan and export subsidy extended to sugar mills, the cane arrears to be paid to farmers still remain at elevated levels.

### **Little effect**

Sabyasachi Majumdar, Senior Vice-President, ICRA, said the measures imposed by the government had failed to bring down domestic sugar prices.

“Given the tight stock position, sugar prices are expected to remain firm in the near-term in spite of these measures,” he said. However, he added that the government measures may dampen prospects of a further significant price rise.

ICRA expects domestic sugar production to decline 8 per cent to 23.2 million tonnes in the next sugar season, largely due to lower cane availability in major growing regions such as Maharashtra and Karnataka on account of a poor monsoon.

The extent of the cane price increase, especially in the State Advised Price (SAP), is likely to have a significant bearing on the margins of sugar mills. The mills in Maharashtra and Karnataka are likely to benefit from the rising sugar prices and the stagnant cane costs. However, cane pricing will be crucial for mills in poll-bound Uttar Pradesh.

### **Decline in availability**

“With the Fair and Remunerative Price of cane for the next sugar season fixed at last year’s level and sugar prices on the higher side, the profitability of sugar mills based in Maharashtra and Karnataka is likely to improve. However, the extent of increase in profitability could be moderated with the decline in cane availability in these regions,” said Majumdar.

The Uttar Pradesh government maintained the SAP at Rs. 280 a quintal last season, for the fourth year in a row.

However, with the substantial rise in sugar prices, and elections round the corner, any sharp increase in the SAP could hit realisations of sugar mills in the State, Majumdar added.

## **Business Standard**

### **Commodity picks- 19 September 2016**

#### **Chilli**

The price of Chilli in Guntur is currently trading at Rs 12,277 a quintal. The demand is weak and arrivals from Madhya Pradesh are expected to commence from October. The crop is in good condition and production is expected to be higher than last year's. This could put pressure over prices, which might trade towards Rs 12,000 a quintal in the coming days.



### Jeera

The price of Jeera in Unjha is trading at Rs 18,450 per quintal. The price is expected to trade higher, towards Rs 18,500 in the coming week, following lower availability in the domestic market and festive demand. However, price gains would be capped by cheaper imports.



### Prerana Desai,

Vice-president (research), Edelweiss agri services and credit, Edelweiss Agri Value Chain