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THE HINDU

Average price of tea up at Coimbatore auctions

The average price of tea sold in Coimbatore auctions during the first eight months of this year has seen 30 per cent increase in value.

According to U.V. Saraf, chairman of Tea Trade Association of Coimbatore, the average price of tea sold at the auction centre here till August this year went up to Rs. 97.91 compared to Rs. 76.02 last year.

Competition

With e-auction, more buyers will take part and this will create competition for quality tea and ensure fair price realisation, he said.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the association held here recently, he said that tea production in the country increased by 36 million kg in 2015-16 compared to the previous year. The increase was mainly in north India.

Production

While 1,233 million kg was produced in the country in 2015-16, it was 1,197 million kg the previous year. While production of tea went up by 52 million kg in north India, it declined by 16 million kg in the south.

In the first seven months of 2016, tea production in north India has gone up by 19 million kg from 422 million kg to 441 million kg.

However, in the south, production reduced by 21 million kg to 121 million kg from 142 million kg.

All India tea production has also declined by about two million kg in the first seven months of this year.

“Unless rainfall improves in the tea growing areas in the south this year, south India’s tea production will see further drop,” he said.

Erratic rainfall and extended periods of drought was affecting tea production in the south, he said.

‘Remove tea’

On the Goods and Services Tax, he said the Central Government should remove tea from the list of taxable items. If total exemption was not possible, it should remove tea from GST at first point of sale, which is at the auction centres, he said.

Odisha agri students participate in ‘Polam Pilustondi’

Polam Pilustondi’ was conducted in Katheru rural mandal on Tuesday by the Agriculture Department in which agriculture students from Odisha participated. The team led by Rajamahendravaram rural mandal agriculture officer K. Srinivas visited the agriculture field of Bikkina Sambasiva Rao where MTU 1156 variety paddy was sown.

Speaking to farmers of the village, Mr. Srinivas said vermi compost manufacturing units were going to be distributed to farmers on subsidy to the tune of Rs. 20,000 under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. He asked officials to give suggestions to farmers and motivate them to obtain good yield with low investment. He called upon farmers to dig soaking pits to conserve rain water. Stating that 1156 variety paddy seeds would give good yield, he told farmers to sow this variety in the rabi season.

Agriculture officer Venumadhava Rao and MPEOs M Chandrasekhar, N.D Srinivas and students from the Odisha Agricultural University were present

Agriculture department requests funds for Krishi Bhagya scheme



Govt. will grant one tractor-mounted sprayer each to all custom hire centres: Krishna Byregowda

Krishna Byregowda, Minister for Agriculture, has said that considering the success of the ambitious Krishi Bhagya scheme, his ministry has asked the Union government to grant funds for the project.

He was speaking to mediapersons after inspecting the demonstration of new tractor-mounted sprayer given to farmers by the government on a rental basis under the Custom Hire Centre scheme here on Tuesday.

Claiming that Krishi Bhagya was one of the best comprehensive schemes introduced for dry land farmers, he said that the State government had conveyed the matter to the Union government, and has received positive response from the latter.

The Minister said that under the custom hire centre, the government has decided to grant one such tractor-mounted sprayer to all centres of the State. “At present, the State has 175 centres. This year, the government plans to add 300 more centres for the benefit of farmers. These farmers can hire modern agricultural machines on a nominal rent thereby saving both their time and money,” he said.

Mr. Byregowda said that at a time when the cost of cultivation was increasing due to heavy labour costs, the government renting machinery to farmers would reduce the cost of cultivation by at least 30 per cent.

On the sharp fall in onion prices that has caused great worry among farmers, Mr. Byregowda said that though the matter pertained to the Horticulture Department, he had asked the concerned Minister to look into it.

To a question on increasing the minimum support price (MSP) for jowar, Mr. Byregowda said that while the Union government was giving Rs. 1600/quintal MSP, the State government was adding Rs. 500 which made the MSP Rs. 2100/quintal.

“Meanwhile, the government is also giving an impetus to introducing high-yielding varieties of jowar seeds. The research is under way to cultivate seeds that could increase the production by at least 20 per cent.

Apprehensions over sustainability of water release from Mettur till Feb

While the release of water from the Mettur dam for irrigation, despite the water level being below 90 feet, has been hailed by a cross-section of farmers, some are wondering if the government would be able to sustain it for the entire crop season that would last till February 2017.

C. Vaiyapuri, president of the United Farmers Association-Tamil Nadu, said the State government has ordered the release of water expecting increased inflow following Supreme Court’s strict directive to Karnataka and also good rainfall during the north east monsoon period ahead. The government had no other option than opening the dam after a delay of more than three months, he said.

Water was released from Mettur dam in September 2012 when the dam had only 84.15 feet water. The official machinery and the farmers were confident then as both the Krishnaraja Sagar and Kabini reservoirs were fast nearing their full capacity and were still receiving copious inflow. The farmers hailed it an optimistic move and they were proved right.

However, the Karnataka government has now been repeatedly saying that both the dams were not having adequate water. The Tamil Nadu government has to pin all its hopes on the north east monsoon for saving the Samba crop.

Again in 2012, the government had announced the release of water three weeks ahead, which gave ample time for preparatory works such as raising nursery and making arrangements for financial resources, etc.

Now, the Chief Minister has made announcement on the release of water only five days in advance, leaving no time for the farmers to get ready for the season.

Water released from Mettur for farming

DROP BY DROP	
A brief history of the Mettur dam	
Survey period for construction of dam: 1834 to 1924	Capacity of reservoir: 93,470 tmcft
Construction period: 1924 to 1934	Irrigation facility to benefit: 16.4 lakh hectares in 12 districts
Cost of construction: Rs. 4.80 crore	Maximum inflow: 4.56 lakh cusecs in 1924
Length of the dam: 5,300 feet	Maximum storage capacity: 123 feet
Catchment area: 16,300 sq. miles	Water first released for irrigation on June 12, 1934
Water spread area: 59.29 sq. miles	Customary water release period: June 12–Jan. 28
Maximum discharge: 2.84 lakh cusecs in 1961	Water released before June 12: 11 times
	Water released on customary date of June 12: 15 times
	Release of water deferred: 57 times



Water being released from the Stanley Reservoir on Tuesday. — PHOTO: LAKSHMI NARAYAN

Water released for irrigation in Delta region

At the stroke of 8.03 a.m. on Tuesday, the sluices of Stanley Reservoir in Mettur were opened for samba cultivation in the delta districts, putting an end to the uncertainty that prevailed among farmers of the State for the past four months.

Initially 2,000 cusecs was discharged from the dam. It was stepped up to 12,000 cusecs by evening. The water is expected to reach the Grand Anicut on Friday. This is the 83rd year that water is being released from the Stanley Reservoir, popularly known as Mettur dam.

Though it is customary to release water on June 12 every year, the water release was postponed this year owing to poor storage. The State government decided to release water only after Karnataka government released water from the Krishnaraja Sagar and Kabini reservoirs on September 6 on the direction of the Supreme Court.

Water level in the dam stood at 87.68 feet against its full level of 120 feet. The storage level was 50.039 tmc against the full capacity of 93.47 tmc. The dam received an inflow of 10,092 cusecs. This is only the fourth time in the last three decades that water is being released when the level is below 90 feet — in 2012 (when water level was 84.15 feet), 2003 (72.52 feet) and 1996 (52.13 feet).

Ministers Edappadi K. Palaniswami (PWD, State Highways and Minor Ports), P. Thangamani (Electricity, Prohibition and Excise), V. Saroja (Social Welfare), K.C. Karuppannan (Environment) and M. R. Vijayabhaskar (Transport) participated in a function to release the water from the dam.

The Ministers and farmers showered flowers on the water as it gushed out of the sluices. Mr. Palaniswami told reporters that water release will help in raising samba crop on about 12 lakh acres in the districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Tiruchi, Pudukottai, Karur, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Cuddalore, Salem, Namakkal and Erode.

During the last crop season, farmers of even the tail-end areas were successful in raising the crop, he said, urging them to use the available water to the optimum extent and also extend cooperation to the PWD officials for following turn system.

PWD sources said that Mettur dam should have realised 120.666 tmc of water from June 1.

However, it managed to realise only about 50 tmc so far owing to the failure of monsoon in the catchment areas of the Cauvery in Karnataka .

Though farmers are happy about the release of water for irrigation, they demanded the State's share of water to be obtained from Karnataka.

According to sources, water was not released on the customary date for 57 times, including this season. Water was released on the scheduled date only on 15 occasions.

At least on 11 occasions, water was released in advance owing to comfortable position. Last year, water was released from the dam on August 9 when water level stood at 96 feet and the dam was closed on February 25 this year.

Govt. told to solve farmers' problems

C.H. Vijayshankar, State president of BJP Raith Morcha and former Minister, has warned of more agitations if State government failed to take concrete steps to solve the agrarian crises, including the establishment of red gram procurement centres, release crop loss compensation, and uninterrupted power supply to farm pumpsets, before December end.

He was addressing a press conference in Yadgir after attending the executive committee meeting of the Morcha.

Mr. Vijayshankar said that farmers of dry land areas in the State were faced with heavy crop losses and many of them had been driven to suicide owing to the shortage of rain. However, the government had failed to help farmers by not releasing crop loss compensation amount in an effective manner.

KMF adopts varsity's technology, develops new low-cost fodder

Using technology developed by the Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries Sciences University (KVAFSU), the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) has introduced a variety of low-cost fodder that has a high nutrient value.

The new fodder formula was developed by senior scientists of the university after over 25 years of research and field trials. It was focused on providing instant energy to cattle, and to help raise the solid non-fat content of milk, including its protein percentage.

Small farmers

KMF's new brand of fodder is called 'Gold Feed' and is based on the technology developed by the university for by large farmers and dairy farmers with higher cattle heads. It is advising small farmers to prepare fodder at home, using farm waste and grains, based on formulae suggested by KVAFSU. This has proved to be an instant success. It has reduced the cost of fodder by up to 40 per cent, while increasing the quantity by 10-20 per cent.

"We started the project with the twin aims of improving the quantity and quality of milk yield in milch animals, by tweaking traditional feeding practices. Feedback from KMF users has revealed that we have achieved considerable success," says Chandrapal Singh, nutrition scientist and registrar of KVAFSU. Dr. Singh and fellow scientist Krishna Murthy have been working on creating new fodder varieties for over 35 years.

According to Dr. Singh, the milk yield in cows and buffaloes fed on this variety of fodder has increased by 1-2 litres per day, and pushed up the protein content from 0.4 to 0.6 points.

"Indian studies in the past have proven that hiking the protein content by 0.1 points is a considerable achievement. An average five point increase is seen as above the ordinary," Dr Singh said. "We have been getting these results in university farms for 15 years, but with KMF adopting them, we have been proved right in dairy farms and even household farms," he added.

Poor yield

While India has the highest number of cattle in the world, it remains among the countries with the least per capita yield. While milch animals in western countries yield between 30-130 litres of milk per day, Indian cows and buffaloes yield only 2-10 litres per day.

The national average for India has remained at 2.8 litres per day for decades now. The data on quality is even more depressing. "We are among the lowest quality milk

producers in the world. There is need for additional research in quality improvement,” Dr Singh said.

Ingredients

The KVAFSU formula includes grains, wheat bran, urea, salt and minerals. It eliminates the need for using costly ingredients such as groundnuts or cotton seeds. “We have proved that low-cost grains like ground maize can be used for up to 70 per cent of the mixture,” Dr. Singh said.

Farmers who have just one animal can increase the productivity by feeding one kilogram of a protein-rich grain like maize per day, according to studies.

Training offered

“The University is willing to train farmers in backyard fodder making. Currently, four different fodder related projects are on at the university,” says Vice-Chancellor C. Renuka Prasad.

These include enriching ordinary crop waste by urea processing, preparing a mixture of grain and crop waste, about growing splinter-free cactus plants, and mixing sugarcane waste, grain and black jaggery to make farmyard fodder.

Some of these are techniques are perfected and being introduced to farmers through extension activities, Dr. Prasad added.

Crop loan still eludes a majority of tenant farmers

The State government has introduced issue of Certificate of Cultivation (CoC) this kharif season to tenant farmers in an effort to improve the grant of crop loans from banks to them. The loans were given on the basis of loan eligibility cards (LEC) in the last season.

The CoC simultaneously deals with extending three benefits to the farmer -- crop loan, insurance and input subsidy.

In the long run, the State government wants to ensure loans to the cultivator irrespective of whether he is owner or tenant. Towards this end, Agriculture Department officials are instructed to record details of cultivated land with crops, survey numbers and GPS coordinates.

The idea is to upload the data and provide access to the bank officials concerned so that when the farmer goes to the bank, loans can be sanctioned on the basis of the data. However, this is still in a very initial stage, say sources.

Still a long way

Of the 4.5 lakh farmers in the district, an estimated 30,000 to 35,000 are tenant farmers. The exact number of tenant farmers is not available.

In 2015-16, though around 10,000 LECs were issued, 2,143 tenants were given a loan of Rs.3.78 crore.

Against this, the 15,000 target for 2016-17 appears to be stiff.

This year so far 10,243 LECs were issued or renewed and 9,000 CoCs were issued, according to sources in the Agriculture Department.

But bankers encounter several problems. In many cases the owner of the land would have availed himself of the loan facility and with loan on the land outstanding bank officials cannot advance credit again, says Visakhapatnam Lead District Manager D. Sarat Babu. Besides default rate is high among tenant farmers.

CoC better document

"The mandal agriculture officer goes to the field, records the names of the owner, tenant farmer, crop, area sown, extent etc in the 13-column CoC. In some case the owner may be giving only a part of the land for cultivation," he says.

The LEC contains mainly the name of the tenant farmer and survey number.

Government to allow harvest of neera



State Cabinet decides to amend Karnataka Excise Act, 1965

With the sharp fall in prices of coconut, the state government has decided to allow harvest of neera, the sweet sap tapped from the coconut tree, by amending the Karnataka Excise Act, 1965.

The State Cabinet meeting presided by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday decided to allow coconut growers to tap neera, which is considered a health drink on account of its high nutritive and medicinal value.

In his 2015-16 Budget, Mr. Siddaramiah said amendments would be made to the Excise Act to permit members of Coconut Growers' Federation to harvest neera in limited quantities.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T.B. Jayachandra told reporters here that the decision "will help increase the income of coconut growers significantly." Various products, such as chocolate, syrup, cookies, cakes etc. could be manufactured using neera, he said.

Kerala had come out with a policy to encourage production of neera through coconut producers' society. The Minister said thousands of coconut farmers in the state, who have been severely affected by pest attacks and drought in the recent years, have been demanding that the government allow tapping of neera.

Freshly tapped neera, if not stored under controlled temperature or consumed within a couple of hours, turns into toddy with about four per cent alcohol on account of fermentation. And the sale of toddy comes within the ambit of the excise laws.

It was decided to amend the excise laws to help growers take up promotion of neera and its value added products. The state had come up with a draft Neera Policy in 2007; but it remained largely on paper.

The government would restrict tapping of neera to some organisations and to some per cent of the trees in the state. The decision would also create job for neera tappers and also help farmers earn additional income.

Delta farmers jubilant over SC fiat to Centre

Cauvery delta farmers have welcomed the Supreme Court order to the Centre on constituting the Cauvery Management Board within four weeks saying that the new body could turn a catalyst in improving the relations between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The farmers also hailed the sustained legal battle waged by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa saying her persistent efforts have paid off.

“I am a happy man today. Though a lot of time has already been lost with both the UPA and NDA governments paying scant respect to the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal order on constituting the Cauvery Management Board, the Supreme Court’s directive to the Centre on Tuesday to form the Cauvery Management Board within four weeks has laid emphasis on the Centre to act,” said a jubilant general secretary of the Tamil Nadu Cauvery Delta Farmers’ Welfare Association Mannargudi S. Ranganathan. The UPA and NDA regimes were least interested in protecting the rights of the Cauvery delta farmers and it was only the sustained legal battle waged by Ms. Jayalalithaa that has secured this order, said Mr. Ranganathan. “With this, a 125-year-old tussle has seemingly come to an end,” he added.

Welcoming the Supreme Court order on constituting the Board, the State general secretary of the CPI(M) affiliated Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam K. Balakrishnan observed that the Centre must not do anything to subvert the order and immediately take sincere efforts to form the Board and display its neutrality in the dispute.

The coordinator of the All Farmers Coordination Committee P.R. Pandian too welcomed the court order and urged the Prime Minister to constitute the Board without any further delay.

They are also happy with the sustained legal battle waged

by the Chief Minister over the years

Water from Kothaiyar dam to be released today

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa has ordered the release of water from Kothaiyar dam in Kanniyakumari district from Wednesday.

In a statement, she said the order to release of water followed representations from farmers.

The release of water from the Kothaiyar dam would benefit about 17,000 acres of lands in Radhapuram taluk of Tirunelveli district, the statement said.

“Soil health, vital factor for enhancing productivity”



The Agriculture Department will intensify implementation of soil health awareness campaign across Karaikal district in particular and the Union territory in general, said R. Kamalakannan, Minister for Agriculture here on Tuesday.

Inaugurating the ‘One Thousand Soil Health Card’ scheme introduced by the Department, he said that soil health was a very important factor for enhancing productivity. He said another 100 cards would be issued to the farmers in course of time within this financial year. Next year, another 3,000 cards would be issued to the farmers.

He appealed to the farmers to ascertain properly the deficiency in their soil for stepping up productivity. He also said that the 'karuvel' trees in the district would be removed this year, as part of measures to protect the groundwater table.

Collector P. Parthiban was present.

N. Ramamurthy, Director of Agriculture, spoke on the advantages of the card.

Agents up in arms against e-trading of farm produce

As the Haryana government is gearing up to start buying produce from farmers online from October 1, commission agents say digital procurement is “impractical” and would only add to the problems of traders and farmers. The agents will go on strike on September 22 in all grain markets.

“We are not against new technology, but the government is launching e-procurement without preparations. It would lead to chaos, hitting commission agents as well as farmers,” Ashok Gupta, co-ordinator of the Haryana Pradesh Arthiya Sangarash Smiti, told *The Hindu*. The agents, he said, would have to invest in computers and the qualified staff to manage the records.

He claimed that the pilot e-trading project started in the Karnal and Shahbad markets was not successful.

On the other hand, the government says e-procurement will make the system transparent and prevent theft of market fee, benefiting farmers as well as the agents. Payments to farmers would be credited to their bank accounts.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Karan Dev Kamboj said recently that to start with, all agents would be connected to the government’s server. Thereafter, farmers would be linked through the agents. This year, farmers would be given the option of selling their produce through the agents.

They would have to give their consent for getting the money from the agents or receiving it directly in their bank accounts.

“For the success of this system, all agents would have to upload the names of farmers and their addresses and telephone numbers on the server. The government will start paddy procurement from October 1,” Mr. Kamboj said.

Horticulture dept in Gurgaon to lease out land for organic farming



With growing awareness about the harmful effects of pesticides in vegetables and fruits, the demand for organic products has grown in Gurgaon over the last few years. With this in mind, the horticulture department is launching an organic farming unit near Garethpur Bass village area on October 2, where residents can grow organic vegetables on a patch of land that they can get on lease from the horticulture department.

Pure, unadulterated vegetables are rarely found in a city of concrete. However, the city residents have come up with a WhatsApp group, created last week, to discuss the process and challenges of organic farming in the city.

Rajeev Ahuja, a member of the organic farming WhatsApp group said, “Knowing more about the food we eat is important. This programme is solving the problem as we now know how the vegetables and fruits we are consuming are being grown.”

Another member of the group, Parul Suneja of Sector 52, said, “We share thoughts and articles about organic products in the group. Residents discuss their problems related to growing vegetables and we share ideas to deal with the issues. People participate and feel connected with nature and earth.”

As the idea of organic farming is taking hold of city residents, around 60 of them have already approached the horticulture department about organic farming. “Till now, 35

people have enrolled for membership of the plots and we have started the first phase on five acres of land which will be formally inaugurated on October 2. The second phase of the project will start on October 10,” Deen Mohammad Khan, district horticulture officer, said.

The programme is currently running on a membership basis at a charge of Rs. 3,879 per month per unit, which is 600 square yards. Keeping in mind the urban lifestyle, workers are also provided by the department to look after the maintenance and security of the crops.

A refundable security fee of Rs. 5,000 per unit is also charged from the residents. “People can lease up to a maximum of two plots. As vegetables are grown seasonally, each unit will be leased for six months,” Khan said.

The yield per unit will be sufficient for one family, the department claimed. “Residents will be able to produce 2,500 kg of potato or 1,500 kg of onions in one season from each unit. Though the yield of organic vegetables is less, they are healthy and residents can be sure of the quality of the vegetables as well,” Khan said.

Under the programme, a delivery van will also collect fresh vegetables and deliver them to residents, horticulture officials said.



Global tea convention opens in Ooty today

Kochi, September 21:

More than 500 delegates, including some from overseas, have gathered at Ooty to participate in the India International Tea Convention (IITC 2016), which will kick off on Thursday.

The three-day convention, with the theme ‘Lets team up for sustainability’, will discuss sustainability issues in the tea sector and provide a networking platform between sellers and buyers both nationally and internationally.

It will be jointly hosted by the United Planters’ Association of South India (Upasi), the Tea Board and the Consultative Committee of Plantations with the Indian Tea Exporters Association, South India Tea Exporters Association and Federation of All India Tea Traders Association.

The inaugural session will be chaired by Rita Teotia, Union Commerce Secretary. The valedictory function on September 24 will be chaired by Musdhalifah Machmud, Deputy

minister for Food and Agriculture, and Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs, Indonesia.

N Dharmaraj, Upasi President, said that the credibility of the tea industry, of late, is being questioned despite its huge commitment to employment, rural infrastructure and product safety issues. All of these have put enormous pressure on the financial sustainability of the industry.

Mixed trend

In India, during the current year, the North reported higher production of 12.9 million kg (mkg), while South Indian production was lower by 22.1 mkg. However, consumption has also been growing at 2.5 per cent, thanks to the increasing awareness on the health benefits of tea.

According to Dharmaraj, the meet is expected to enhance the level of understanding of stakeholders such as producers, brokers, traders, packers and the government on several issues being faced by the sector. It is expected to facilitate policy formulation both at the industry and governmental levels.

Representatives of certifying bodies working in the tea sector, such as the Rain Forest Alliance, Solidaridad and Trustea will present papers and have discussions on product safety issues.

There are two sessions dealing with export markets and a session on the domestic markets attended by leading tea packers and trade representatives.

The last day will have sessions on 'New Frontiers in Tea Marketing' dealing with new delivery models, tea extracts, tea and health and the impact of climate change on future tea production.

Arecanut sector seeks policy interventions from Centre

Mangaluru, September 21:

A delegation of representatives from the arecanut sector has sought policy interventions from the Centre on various problems being faced by growers in the country.

The delegation, led by the President of the Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative (Campco) Ltd, SR Satishchandra, recently met Central ministers representing the Agriculture, Health and Commerce ministries, in New Delhi, in this regard.

In a memorandum to Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, the Campco President said that the recurrent pronouncements to ban some value-added arecanut products and import of arecanut have put the livelihoods of millions of farmers and workers in jeopardy.

He urged the Ministry to come out with policy interventions to protect the interests of arecanut growers in the country.

The annual global production of arecanut is 8.67 lakh tonnes, grown over 7.29 lakh hectares. Of this, the share of India is around 7.02 lakh tonnes, from 4.42 lakh hectares.

Satishchandra said that though self-sufficient in arecanut production, the country imported 67,824 tonnes from various countries in 2015-16.

India to host BRICS agriculture meet

New Delhi, September 21:

The two-day conference, beginning on September 22, will include a ministerial meeting to be attended by the Agriculture Ministers of all the five countries.

“The areas of cooperation include creating basic agricultural information exchange system, strategy for ensuring access to food for the most vulnerable population, reducing negative impact of climate change on food security and adaptation of agriculture to climatic changes, enhancing agricultural technology cooperation and innovation, trade and investment promotion,” an official release said.

Detailed discussions will also be held on the BRICS Agricultural Research Centre, which is likely to be set up in India.

The proposed centre is expected to work on agricultural science, policy research and development extension, technology transfer, training and capacity building and scientific information sharing.

Turmeric arrivals on the wane



ERODE, SEPTEMBER 21:

The arrival of turmeric for sale is decreasing every day. “Many farmers are not bringing their produce for sale for want of higher price and Cauvery issue. Only 1,000-1,500 bags of medium variety turmeric are offered for sale daily. So the traders are quoting decreased price,” said RKV Ravishankar, a trader. On Wednesday, 1,500 bags arrived for sale and only 65 per cent stocks were sold. The price of the spice in North Indian markets is lesser than that of Erode and many traders prefer to buy in North India. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹7,299-8,648 a quintal; the root variety ₹6,322-7,655. Of the arrival of 467 bags, 352 were sold.

DCB Bank provides ‘customised loan repayment facility to farmers’

Reaching out to the unbanked populace in rural pockets has been DCB Bank’s mantra. The bank has, according to Narendranath Mishra, Head - Agri and Inclusive Banking, at least one-fourth of its new branches in unbanked locations across the country. The bank, according to Mishra, also conducts financial literacy programmes in catchment areas, offers small-ticket housing and business loans (for amounts as low as Rs. 2 lakh) and also micro-finance loans through business correspondents. Excerpts from an interview:

What is the size of your agri-lending portfolio?

Agri and inclusive banking account for roughly 17 per cent of our total advances. We offer various products to farmers such as farm equipment loans (which essentially could be a tractor/harvester loan), kisan credit card, loan for hi-tech agriculture, etc., at cost-effective rates

Your suggestions for crop protection...

Crop protection is exceedingly important. Paddy and sugarcane, for instance, are water-intensive crops. They also absorb maximum nutrients from the soil.

If farmers can be sensitised about alternate crops — say, between cereals, pulses and oilseeds — depending on the geography, soil condition and water table, it would go a long way in helping them take the right decision in the subsequent crop cycle.

Farmers should be sensitised about taking crop insurance. The Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme will benefit farmers greatly, even if they don't avail themselves of a loan.

Do you provide customised loans based on cropping pattern?

We provide customised loan repayment facility for farming and agriculture requirements, provide loans based on cost of cultivation of crop and the repayment schedule is aligned to the cash flow of the crop harvest.

The repayment can be annual or half-yearly. The customer can choose to pay higher EMI (equated monthly instalment) in the beginning and lower EMI towards the second half of the loan repayment tenure.

Farmers, especially those who take to vegetable farming, prefer the monthly EMI payment. We take a customer-centric approach

Do you foresee any change in the borrowing pattern, especially with prediction of good monsoon this year.

It can spur the demand for crop, tractor and farm equipment loans compared to the previous year.

Sequoia Capital to lead next round of funding for Wingreens Farms

The gourmet food start-up plans to raise \$8 million as part of Series A round

Mumbai, September 20:

Sequoia Capital-backed Wingreens Farms is planning to raise \$8 million as part of Series A round to expand its food portfolio and markets.

Having raised a seed capital of \$2 million from Sequoia Capital last year, the five-year-old food start-up, which started the fresh-dips category in India, expects to diversify into pasta sauces, international pickles and beverages, with plans to expand its presence and distribution to new markets such as Goa, Kolkata and Hyderabad.

Anju Srivastava, founder and Managing Director, Wingreens Farms, said: “Sequoia Capital will lead our next round (Series A) where we want to go in for a fund raising of \$7-8 million. Apart from expansion and new products, we also need the funds for marketing and innovation as we want to grow and become a health-oriented company.”

With a turnover of Rs. 30 crore, the Gurgaon-based company is yet to break even.

It has been investing in building its distribution network through its warehouses and cold chain in markets such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

It currently reaches out to 600 stores and is also tapping into general trade outlets.

New players

With an average selling price of Rs. 200, Wingreen fresh dips has bagged 95 per cent of the category, the company claims. However, start-up brands such as Chef’s Basket are also entering the space, making fresh dips almost a Rs. 50-crore category.

“A few local and in-store brands are into the fresh-dips category today, but they comprise less than 10 per cent of the category. We are going to be the first national brand and have 90 per cent share in the category,” she added.

With a central kitchen in Gurgaon, Wingreens has only women workers, and has developed backward integration with farmers across North India.

It makes fresh dips with flavours such as garlic, peri peri, chipotle and rosemary hummus, and expects to move into new categories such as baked chips, salsa and pasta sauces.

Farm-to-retail

Positioning itself as a farm-to-retail company, Wingreens is already engaging with farmers on a rental model to grow herbs for its products.

“We already have farm experience since we have grown tomatoes for retailers such as Wal-Mart in the past. We have rented almost 4 acres of land from farmers, and together we grow our herbs. For farm-based technology, we have tied up with companies such as Jain Irrigation.”

MNCs are also entering the fresh dips category. Pepsico has acquired a brand by the name of Sabra Hummus, but is yet to launch it in India.