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‘Be aware of water print of food you consume’



Farm scientists suggest need to go in for sustainable diet

Did you know that it takes 4,000 to 5,000 litres of water to grow a kg of rice? Agricultural scientists want consumers to drive the initiative to make agriculture a ‘climate smart activity’ by being aware of the “water print” of the food they consume, and make suitable changes to their diet to suit water availability in farmlands that feed them.

“Water print” refers to the amount of water required to grow different crops or livestock.

ICRISAT Director-General David Bergvinson made a strong pitch at the Agricultural Science Congress here to create awareness among consumers about water print and the need to persuade people to move towards a diversified diet.

“A diversified diet should not only provide balanced nutrition, but also contribute to sustainable use of water besides throwing up remunerative opportunities to farmers,” he told *The Hindu*. He was speaking on the sidelines of the science congress which is deliberating on making agriculture climate smart.

‘Smart food’

Describing this diet as “smart food”, Dr. Bergvinson said involving consumers in the process of turning farming into a climate smart activity is a must as their preferences determine the market demand. He said there was an imbalance in India with respect to its population and water resources as the country has only 4% of the world’s fresh water resources though it is home to 17% of the world’s population.

Citing an example, Dr. Bergvinson observed that a State like Karnataka could popularise millets such as ragi, which are not only nutritious but also consume less water — in the range of 500 litre for kg of produce. But, there was a dire need to incentivise farmers who grow smart food by ensuring that they get remunerative prices, he said. Information and Communication Technology tools will have to be adopted to create awareness among farmers and consumers, he noted, while observing that the IT hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Mumbai had to play a major role regarding convergence of IT with agriculture. India can provide a model linking Aadhaar with sophisticated remote sensing data and marketing information, he said.

Climate change may increase pest menace

Climate change is expected to increase pests, leading to increased use of pesticide as well as more pesticide residue in food.

J. Padmaja, scientist from the Food and Drug Toxicology Research Centre, observed that increase in carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere owing to climate change was paving the way for increase in pest population. New varieties of pests were also expected to surface, she pointed out.

In fact, the cotton bollworm, which devastated large tracts of cotton crop, was a result of the increase in carbon dioxide level, she noted. Similarly, the population of nematodes, the harmful bacteria in the soil, especially those affecting banana crop was expected to increase, she warned.

This is going to be a testing situation for farmers as the increase in temperature would tire them, making it difficult to toil in the field, she said.

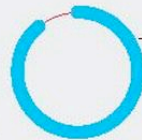
Per capita edible oil consumption very high in India

Healthy Living

India is the world's largest producer of castor



FILE PHOTO



It contributes 89% of the world's castor production – 19.48 lakh tonnes

- Castor cultivated on 11.05 lakh hectares in 2014-2015
- 17.33 lakh tonne of castor produced
- Average yield is 1,568 kg per hectare (2014-2015)

The present average 19 kg is extremely unhealthy, says official

The Additional Commissioner of Agriculture and Cooperation, Government of India, Anupam Barik, stressed on the need to bring down the per capita edible oil consumption in the country, as the present average 19 kilograms is extremely unhealthy.

Speaking at the national castor kisan mela at the ICAR-India Institute of Oilseeds Research (IIOR) here on Friday, he said the general health indicators of the people would improve to a large extent if the per capita consumption was brought down to 12 kg.

Mr. Barik assured to include castor in various schemes of the Union government to support farmers cultivating the crop.

Explaining the scenario of castor crop cultivation in the country, director of ICAR-IIOR A. Vishnuvardhan Reddy highlighted its prospects and problems. The latest technologies such as newly-developed castor hybrids (DCH-519 and DCH-177), drip irrigation, best management practices, and innovative extension activities taken

up by the institute would help the farmers double their income from castor cultivation in the near future.

Ideal crop

Stating that castor was an ideal crop for areas with low rainfall and low soil fertility, director of the National Institute of Agricultural Extension (MANAGE) V. Usha Rani urged the government to support castor farmers with incentive-oriented initiatives, which include minimum support price and subsidies for adoption of drip irrigation, among others.

Vice-Chancellor of Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University V. Praveen Rao advised castor farmers to take up agriculture in the spirit of the business and apply pesticides and fertilisers judiciously. He emphasises the need for massive soil and water testing for better results.

Mr. Rao also favoured institutional intervention in analysing the cost of cultivation of castor vis-a-vis other competing crops. The director of Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI), Zone 5, Y.G. Prasad, and former project director at IIOR Ranga Rao spoke at the event, which was attended by about 1,000 castor farmers from across India.