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THE HINDU BusinessLine

Kerala venture combines farming, fishing and livestock rearing

Farmers in Kerala's kole lands in Thrissur seem to have struck gold thanks to the agri startups launched by Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) to take safe-to-eat agri and allied products to the doorsteps of consumers.

The venture is unique as it has integrated agri, livestock and fishing sectors in the kole lands — the unique wetlands that meet 40 per cent of Kerala's rice requirement.

The Kole wetlands cover an area of 13,632 hectares spread across Thrissur and Malappuram districts.

"We have recently opened two sales outlets — one in the suburban area of Pullazhi run by Kole Padavu Cooperative Society and the other in Mannuthy operated by the University itself — which generate a daily business of 15,000 each," says TP Sethumadhavan, Director of Entrepreneurship, KVASU.

Wide range of products

The products available in the outlets include rice, vegetables, milk, eggs, broiler chicken and fish, under the brand Kasavu.

The society has also started marketing Kissan Rice (Masoori rice).

The safe-to-eat products are sold below the benchmark price of other organic products in the market, he said.

The idea behind launching agri startups is to provide kole entrepreneurs and farmers an opportunity to fetch better profit margins even at times of distress. “This is a replicable model which can be extended to other appropriate areas across Kerala,” he told *BusinessLine.*

Review fisheries sops: NITI Aayog advisor

Ashok Jain, Advisor to the NITI Aayog, has called for reviewing some subsidies in the marine fisheries sector as a primary step to effectively manage marine resources.

The impact of various types of subsidies should be analysed prior to formulating a sustainable marine ecosystem management, he said at the opening session of a two-day national workshop on inclusive management of marine ecosystems at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute.

The subsidies, which are leading to overfishing or illegal fishing, should be eliminated for the sustainable development of marine fisheries, he added.

Referring to the delay by States in implementing the latest technologies, he said the NITI Aayog would send directions regarding this to the States directly. “India is committed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the UN. We have to look into the possibilities of sustainable marine tourism towards achieving the SDG-14, which is related to ocean resources,” he said.

A Gopalakrishnan, CMFRI Director, stressed on the need to sustainably manage marine resources. Globally, the market value of marine and coastal resources and industries is estimated at $ 3 trillion per year, which is 5 per cent of global GDP.

The workshop is being jointly organised by the NITI Aayog, CMFRI and the WWF-India.

Experts who spoke at the workshop stressed on the need for positive incentives such as green certification to promote sustainable practices in the fisheries sector.

Panel moots action plan for fisheries development

To solve overcapacity in the fishing sector, a panel of experts has drafted a national-level plan for the sustainable development of marine fisheries, with a call for stopping registration of new fishing vessels in Indian waters.

Aimed at implementing the Sustainable Development Goal-14 (SDG) of the United Nations in India, the experts, hailing from the marine fisheries, forests, environment, ocean development, industry, fisheries associations and coastal zone management sectors, also recommended a licencing scheme for fishing gear and boat building yards.

The action plan was formulated at the national workshop on SDG-14 organised by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute and WWF-India.

Formation of marine parks, community reserves and no-take zones is one of the major recommendations in the action plan. It also includes a proposal to declare ecologically sensitive marine hotspots as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

In addition, a demand for imposing the Minimum Legal Size (MLS) restrictions on all the coastal States and UTs uniformly to avoid juvenile fishing has been included in the action plan. Presently, the MLS is notified only in Kerala.

Ocean management

It also includes an urgent call to finalise an Ocean Regulation Management Act to bring uniformity in fishing in Exclusive Economic Zones with common rules and specifications.

To regulate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, a suggestion to monitor vessels and set up a surveillance system in all the coastal states has also been included in the action plan.

HDFC ERGO to implement crop insurance scheme in Andhra Pradesh

All the products under WBCIS are approved by the Department of Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh. File Photo

The scheme offers insurance cover against losses of farmers due to aberrant weather conditions during the crop cycle

HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company Ltd has been authorised by Government of Andhra Pradesh to implement Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBCIS) for loanee and non-loanee farmers.

Those who are cultivating groundnut, sweet lime, tomato, chilles, cotton, oil palm crops in Anantapur, Chittoor, East Godavri, Guntur, Kadapa, Kurnool, Prakasam, West Godavri districts will be covered under the scheme. All the products under (WBCIS) are approved by the Department of Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh.

The scheme offers insurance cover against losses of farmers due to aberrant weather conditions during the crop cycle - sowing to harvesting stage of crop. Farmers can contact their respective banks and HDFC ERGO authorised agents to get the cover.

WBCIS uses adverse weather parameters like rainfall, temperature, frost and humidity to determine the anticipated loss in the yield of crop to compensate cultivators for the deemed loss of crop. The claim amounts will be settled on the basis of data taken from reference weather stations mentioned in the Scheme and managed by Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Compensation for farmers' suicide is no solution for rural indebtedness: apex court

Gives thumbs up to welfare schemes; govt gets one year to show results

The rise in farmers' suicides today evoked sharp reaction from the Supreme Court which said the government's welfare schemes should not remain on paper and compensation was no solution to deal with the problem of rural indebtedness.

Recognising that the burning issue "cannot be dealt overnight", it, however, gave a thumbs up to the welfare schemes and allowed the government's plea for grant of a year's time to show effective results.

At the outset, a Bench of Chief Justice JS Khehar and Justice DY Chandrachud said, "paying compensation is not the solution at all to deal with farmers' suicides" as the key reason for these suicides was indebtedness and their inability to pay back the loans.

It said there was a need to "soften" and "minimise" the bad effects of loans and one of the ways could be to grant insurance cover on their debts.

The Bench also said, "we are of the view that the issue of farmers' suicide cannot be dealt with overnight. It is justified on behalf of the Attorney General to seek time for effective results of various schemes."

Newly-appointed Attorney General KK Venugopal referred to various schemes and said multi-pronged attempts were being made to ameliorate their plight and out of around 12 crore farmers, 5.34 crore farmers have already been covered under various welfare schemes, including the Fasal Bima Yojana.

Venugopal said that almost 30 per cent of farm land has also been covered under the crop insurance scheme and the figure will substantially rise by the end of 2018.

The court, however, said that nobody was saying anything against the policies, but "tell us as to how you are expediting the implementation of your schemes".

GM Mustard not harmful, says expert

Prof Sivanandham

Mustard oil extracted from the seeds of the genetically modified mustard plant is safe to consume, says Prof M Sivanandham, an expert biotechnologist.

The oil you get out of mustard has no connection to the gene, Sivanandham, a former researcher at the New York Medical College, who has taught biotechnology at the Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering, near Chennai.

Recently, India's Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) recommended (to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change) commercialisation of GM mustard—

the first genetically modified food crop to be approved in India. The recommendation made the crop just one more approval away from commercialisation.

Called ‘Dhara Mustard Hybrid 11’, the GM oilseed is expected to boost yield and help reduce India’s dependence on imports of edible oils. The import bill for 2016-17 worked out to $ 11 billion.

Prof Sivanandham made the comment while speaking to Business Line about motivating students to apply principles of biotechnology in various industries. He said that among the research projects going on in the college was one about making glycerol, a by-product of biodiesel production, into cattle-feed.

Recently, the students of the college discovered a genetic way of preserving milk for long hours, which if successfully commercialised would obviate the need for refrigeration. Sivanandham, who said that the idea had still some way to go before it is ready for commercialisation, noted that the aim was to reach it to rural areas where people cannot afford refrigeration to preserve milk.

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

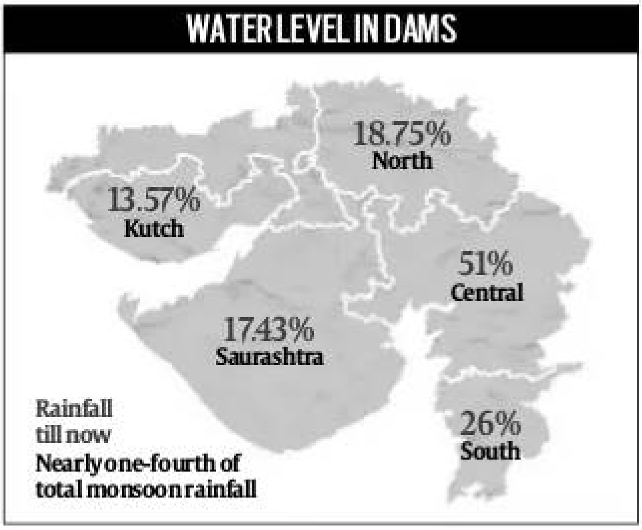
Monsoon Measure: Major Gujarat dams running low with water despite heavy rainfall

According to figures available with Narmada, Water Resources and Water Supply (NWRWS) Department, the average water level in most of the dams in the state stood at 32 per cent of their total storage capacity by Thursday morning.

Despite heavy rainfall in most parts of the state during the last one week, the level of water in major dams has not risen significantly. According to figures available with Narmada, Water Resources and Water Supply (NWRWS) Department, the average water level in most of the dams in the state stood at 32 per cent of their total storage capacity by Thursday morning.

Officials of the State Irrigation Department said that major dams and reservoirs in North Gujarat, where use of groundwater is prohibited for agriculture and industrial use, have 18.75 per cent water of their total capacity. The situation is same in Kutch and Saurashtra where dams have 13.57 per cent and 17.43 per cent water of their total storage capacity, respectively.

The situation is somewhat better in central region where dams and reservoirs are full to 51 per cent of their water capacity. In South Gujarat, it is 26 per cent. The only dams that are about to be totally filled up are Sardar Sarovar dam at Kevadia Colony because of good rains in its catchment areas in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and Machchu-II dam in Morbi district. The Machchu-II dam is, however, a small one with storage capacity of only 88 million cubic metre (MCM) of water.



Officials manning the Kadana, Panam and Karjan dams in Central Gujarat said that the dams had received 61 per cent, 42 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively, of their total capacity.

The situation in other major dams is also not good like Dantiwada in Banskantha district that has received only six per cent of its storage capacity. Hathmati dam in Aravalli district received only two per cent of its storage capacity. Similarly, Bhadar dam in Rajkot district has received only 0.22 per cent and Und-I in Jamnagar is almost empty with 0.20 per cent of its storage capacity.

There are a total of 202 reservoirs — big and small — in the state, with 15 in North Gujarat, 17 in Central Gujarat, 13 in South Gujarat, 20 in Kutch and 137 in Saurashtra.

In Uttar Pradesh varsities, GST to be taught in commerce, management courses

Government has also asked all state universities to hold seminars on GST in co-ordination with Commercial Tax department. Universities, especially agriculture universities, have also been asked to look into the possibility of starting a B.Tech course on Dairy Development.

Vice-Chancellors (V-Cs) of all Uttar Pradesh universities on Thursday approved to introduce a subject on Goods and Services Tax (GST) in commerce as well as management courses. GST was introduced earlier this month, subsuming all other indirect taxes in most goods and services in the country. The decision was made at a meet with Governor Ram Naik, who is also Chancellor to these universities, and Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, also minister for higher education.

“Tax regime has changed. Thus, along with studying cost account, income tax etc, it is necessary for the student to study the new tax as well. The decision was unanimous to introduce GST as a subject in commerce as well as management courses in universities,” said Sharma.

Government has also asked all state universities to hold seminars on GST in co-ordination with Commercial Tax department.

Universities, especially agriculture universities, have also been asked to look into the possibility of starting a B.Tech course on Dairy Development. Each University has also been asked to establish a research seat in the name of Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyaya.

On the pattern of IITs and IIMs, vice-chancellors have also been asked to start a system of uploading lectures online, a day before they are taken up by the concerned teachers in the classrooms. They have been asked to experiment it on pilot basis in any of two departments in their universities.

Fifteen state university vice-chancellors were invited in the meeting to discuss reforms in the higher education. The five broad agendas of the meeting were to discuss improvement in quality of education, administration, examination, infrastructure in state universities and also to look into the possibilities of introducing educational reforms through information technology.

However, one issue, where consensus could not be achieved was over the introduction of “State Level Eligibility Test” (SLET). While most agreed, some expressed apprehension saying that first the existing systems should be strengthened.

“We will take up this issue again before taking a final decision,” said Sharma, adding that it has been decided to ensure 220 days of teaching in a session that should begin from July 10 so that results could be declared by June 15.

Sharma said that universities have been asked to stick to deadlines over announcement of results from the coming session.

When asked whether there was any decision on conducting student union elections, Sharma said that no such decision was taken but whenever they would be conducted it would be according to the recommendations of Lyngdoh Committee.

Informing that as many as 5 lakh students left the secondary board examination, which had started just few days after new Government was formed in the state on March 19, Sharma claimed that it happened due to the new government’s strict stand against copying.

Business Standard

Punjab can go back to 5% farm growth through right mix of policy: ICIER

Paper suggests state should shift to maize cultivation in the upcoming kharif season

Punjab can go back to its glorious past when the state registered a high farm growth rate by following a four-pronged strategy to revive the sector.

According to a paper published by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), the state needs to shift to maize cultivation instead of growing paddy in the upcoming kharif season.

Among the other measures charted out in the paper titled- 'Getting Punjab Agriculture Back on High Growth Path: Sources, Drivers and Policy Lessons'- were suggestions of promoting growth of horticulture in at least 10 per cent of its gross cropped area (GCA), liberalising the land lease market and encouraging sustainable agriculture by shifting to the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system for payments related to power and fertilizer subsidies.

"Encouraging diversification in cultivation during the kharif season by shifting to maize farming for poultry feed (as corn, along with soybean, is the most important ingredient of feed in the poultry industry), silage and starch industries, promoting fruits and vegetables to at least 10 per cent of the GCA, including their protected cultivation through micro-irrigation and other measures, along with an eye on the export markets of the Gulf countries will boost the agriculture in the state," the paper said.

The agricultural sector witnessed high growth rates- almost double the national average - between 1971-72 and 1985-86. This slipped later on and stood at around 3 per cent, which is equivalent to the agricultural growth rate of the country, between 1986-87 and 2004-05.

Thereafter, in the subsequent years, the situation deteriorated further and the state's agriculture grew at only 1.61 per cent per annum, which is less than half the all-India average growth rate of 3.5 per cent from 2005-06 to 2014-15.

The paper which was presented to the state government recently, found that Punjab's strong growth in the early 70s to mid-eighties was largely dependent on better irrigation facilities, improved rural connectivity and an assured market for agricultural produce.

The paper has been written by former Chairman of Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices (CACP), Ashok Gulati and the former agriculture secretary- Shiraz Hussain.

"In order to bring agricultural growth in Punjab back on track, we must look to other sectors that could lead to high agricultural growth in the future. This combination of highest irrigation cover, one of the best road densities in the country, and increasing holding size, places Punjab in a very fortunate situation to get its agriculture back to growing at more than 5 per cent per annum for another decade or more, provided it follows the right mix of policies and incentives," it said.

The paper also calls for developing contract farming in the state and rationalising the tax structure on raw commodities, especially wheat and rice. It also recommends revisiting tax rates approved by the GST Council for processed food under new goods and services tax (GST) regime.

It says that the future of Punjab's agricultural prosperity lies in the high-value sectors of agriculture.

Farm loan waiver: Maharashtra govt to use CM relief fund to finance scheme

After the govt resolution, CM relief fund can be officially used for loan waiver: State official

In a bid to tide over the paucity of funds, the Maharashtra government, which recently announced a Rs 34,022 crore farm loan waiver, has decided to draw money from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to finance the debt write-off.

The state administration issued a government resolution (GR) to this effect on Thursday.

Till now, there were 10 different objectives listed by the government for the use of money from the CM relief fund. But in the GR, it added the 11th objective — financing farmers' loan waiver scheme — to make use of the fund.

The CM relief fund aims at providing immediate relief to the people in distress in the state as well as in the country. It provides monetary help to those affected by major natural calamities like flood, drought, fire accident, etc.

It also provides financial assistance to economically weaker citizens for treatment of some major diseases.

Last year, the chief minister's office had extended Rs 114 crore for the treatment of cancer patients.

"So far, the CM relief fund was used for several relief works such as drought, scarcity of water and fodder and medical support. After the GR, now it can be officially used for loan waiver assistance," a state official said.

The Devendra Fadnavis government had last month announced the "historic" loan waiver of Rs 34,022 crore for farmers and subsequently laid down the eligibility criteria for availing it.

Yesterday, the government expanded the ambit of the loan waiver scheme to include even those farmers who had taken loans after 2008. Earlier, the loan waiver scheme, titled the 'Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Sanman Yojana', covered only those farmers who have the loan outstanding between April 1, 2012 and June 30, 2016.

Farmers in the state had been on a war path from June 1 to press for their various demands. However, they had on June 11 called off the stir after Fadnavis announced the loan waiver.

Sugar output seen higher, govt mulls help for industry

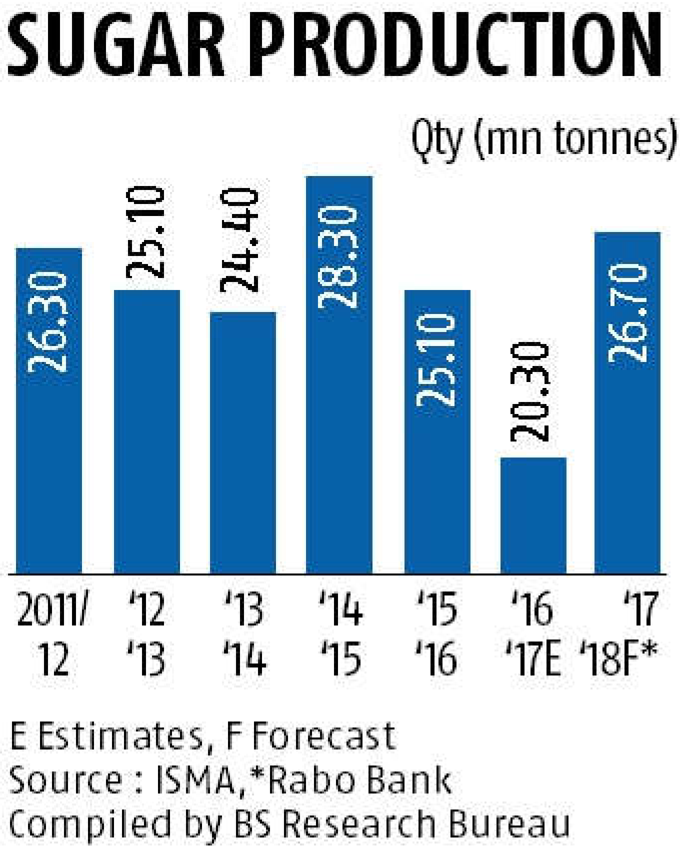
Sugar production in India is estimated to go up 25-30% in the sugar year 2017-18

Sugar production in India is estimated to go up 25-30 per cent in the sugar year 2017-18 (the year begins on October 1), with higher sowing of cane and a 11 per cent increase in the government's recommended minimum price to growers.

However, high production after a year of low output could spoil sugar mills' balance sheets, with a fall in open market prices. The output is estimated to rise from 20.3 million tonnes in the season that ends this September to 26.7 mt in the next one, estimates Rabobank, the Dutch-based financial group. Industry leaders, however, estimate 25-25.5 mt.

As a preventive, the central government is considering steps to protect the industry and farmers' realisations. These include a rise in the import duty from the present 40 per cent, a higher ethanol price for supplying to oil marketing companies (OMCs) and reviewing the goods and services tax rates for ethanol and molasses. The import duty rise could come anytime and be up to 20 per cent higher, to ensure no more than the 500,000 tonnes of permitted import takes place.

Andy Duff, global strategist at Rabobank said, "We see 2017-18 as a year of return to surplus for the global sugar industry, which according to Rabo could be 2.7 mt." Sugar industry representatives have met food ministry officials and also proposed a higher ethanol price by OMCs, for their petrol-blending programme.



A mill representative at the meeting said industry data showed the average ethanol cost of production was Rs 44.8 a litre. However, the price for supplying to OMCs had been fixed at Rs 39; hence, against the tender for procuring 2,800 mn litres, mills offered only 800 mn. The industry has also proposed that the GST on it be cut from the present 18 per cent and that on molasses from the present 28 per cent.

Another proposal it made is to reschedule loan payments by sugar mills, saying a higher production meant a lower price for sugar at a time when the price payable to cane farmers had been raised. Ministry officials are said to have given favourable assurances.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Niti Ayog to discuss agriculture distress in next meet

Pushing agriculture reform to address agrarian distress across the country is on the agenda of a high-level meeting of top bureaucrats from states and UTs been called by Niti Aayog on Monday.

The meet is crucial as the states have shown resistance to implement agriculture reforms critical for preventing spread of farmer unrest in several parts of country.

The meeting, to be addressed by Niti Aayog vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya, will also focus on reviewing state's performance on key development parameters.

The Aayog's CEO Amitabh Kant will make a presentation on "Where do states stand on development parameters" as the Centre is nudging the states to adopt outcome-based monitoring.

Taking cue from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's concept of Team India, the meet aimed at persuading states to adopt the best practices to enable them to become the drivers for transforming India.

Heath sector reforms to meet the goal of universal health coverage and nutrition would be another key issue before the meet to be addressed by top officials of central government, including cabinet secretary P K Sinha.

A day-long session, to be attended by chief secretaries, finance secretaries and planning secretaries of states and UTs will see discussion on the financial position of states post fourteenth finance commission, ranking of state on ease of doing business, effective implementation of DBT and moving India towards less cash society.

However, the focus is set to be on agriculture as Niti aayog member Ramesh Chand will make presentation on the agrarian distress in first session.

The government's think tank feels that the Centre has outlined the roadmap for doubling farmers' income by 2022, but the states are going extremely slow on 'politically sensitive' reforms which are reflected in recent protests by farmers in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and among other states.

The reform measures suggested by the Aayog include setting up of a unified national agriculture market, guaranteed prices for at least half the key crops, changing land lease laws, and creating a mechanism to facilitate easy exit for farmers who want to move out of agriculture.