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Four irradiation projects to preserve fruits & vegetables approved: Badal

Various food products irradiated since 2015 (in tonnes)			
Product	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 (till June)
Onion	115.25	361.8	—
Garlic	15.81	—	—
Dehydrated onion powder	51.8	640.2	26
Mangoes	329	567	544.5
Pomegranate	—	—	5.99
Ayurvedic raw materials	166.6	364.19	50.6

To tide over shortages and the resultant price rise, the Centre has approved four irradiation projects under the integrated cold chain scheme to preserve fruits & vegetables, including onions, potatoes and tomatoes. The approved projects are in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka and Rajasthan.

Furnishing this information to the Lok Sabha in a written reply, Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal said a total grant of ₹ 23.29 crore had been approved for these projects with a total project cost of ₹ 68.54 crore.

Allaying fears over possible harmful toxic residue in the produce due to irradiation, the Minister informed the House that: “Food can be irradiated only in a food irradiation plant ... authorised by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board and licensed by the competent Government Authority. The license to carry out food irradiation ... is given only after ascertaining the safety and security of the installation, its suitability to ensure proper process control, and availability of licensed operators and qualified staff,” she said.

Badal added that the Board of Radiation & Isotope Technology (BRIT) was providing consultancy services for establishment of such plants and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India was regulating the safety aspects of irradiated food products.

Encouraging enterprise

Badal said the cold chain scheme was “primarily private sector driven” and proposals under this scheme are invited through Expression of Interest.

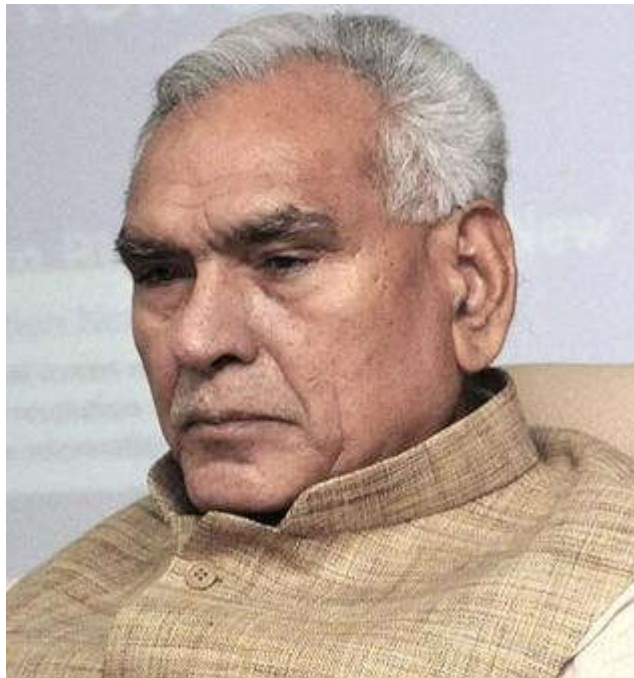
“The entrepreneurs/promoters are free to set up an irradiation facility as per their business model and financial capability throughout the country,” she added.

With regard to the ongoing farmers’ agitation in Madhya Pradesh, the Minister, in another written reply, that so far no agency from the State had submitted a plan to set up an radiation processing plant to prolong the shelf life of perishable products.

She said that earlier, two Indore-based companies, Raghuvansh Agrofarms Ltd and Avantee Mega Food Park Pvt Ltd, had signed MoUs with BRIT for setting up gamma radiation processing plants.

(This article was published on July 18, 2017)

No specific case of plastic rice, sugar, eggs detected: Govt



CR Chaudhary, MoS, Consumer Affairs

Random sampling, testing of products done in States where cases were reported: Minister

Allaying consumer fears and belying media reports, the government on Tuesday informed Parliament that no specific case of presence of plastic rice, sugar and eggs has been detected in the country.

CR Chaudhary, Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, told the Lok Sabha in a written reply that the government was aware of reports of rice and sugar being made of plastic.

“The matter has been taken up with the State governments of Kerala and Gujarat on the basis of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) alert. The concerned State

governments have confirmed that no incidence of plastic rice has been reported in the respective States,” he informed the House.

The Minister said random sampling and testing of food products, including rice and sugar, was done by the officials of Food Safety Departments of respective States/UTs to check compliance of the standards laid down under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, Rules and Regulations.

“No specific case of presence of plastic rice and sugar has been detected in the country,” he said, adding that under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, one can approach consumer fora for redressal in case of defective products and deficiency in service.

In reply to another question, Sudershan Bhagat, Minister of State for Agriculture, said that reports of plastic eggs had come to the notice of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) through various platforms.

“Consequently, FSSAI has asked Commissioners of Food Safety of all States / Union Territories to ensure that there is no production / distribution of fake/artificial eggs and urged them to take up strict enforcement activities,’ adding that “no specific instance of presence of fake eggs in any part of the country has been received.”

(This article was published on July 18, 2017)

Why the eNAM platform hasn't taken off despite all the fanfare



Hurdles: The delay in setting up grading and assaying at mandis has also hampered the progress of eNAM - Photo: Kamal Narang

Most States have not amended APMC Acts; existing mandis lack infrastructure

BL RESEARCH BUREAU:

The eNAM portal, launched by the Centre in April 2016, has 45.4 lakh farmers and 417 mandis across the country registered with it.

This number is disappointing, given that there are more than 13 crore farmers in India.

eNAM, which was envisioned as a unified national electronics agriculture market, faces multiple hurdles.

To implement it, each State has to first amend its APMC Act to make a provision for electronic auction as a mode of price discovery, allow a single licence across the State and have market fees levied at a single point.

Currently, only 13 States have enacted the necessary amendments.

Government data show that the six States with the most mandis under eNAM are Uttar Pradesh – 66; Madhya Pradesh – 58; Haryana: 54; Maharashtra – 54; Telangana – 44 and Gujarat – 40.

No equipment

But the platform is not fully functional in any State. There are no scientific sorting/grading facilities or quality testing machines. Lack of internet connectivity is another issue impeding progress.

“In Maharashtra, the infrastructure is in the development stage, internet connectivity and computers are being provided slowly. And testing labs are yet to be set up both in Gujarat and Maharashtra,” said Nagarjuna Fertiliser & Chemicals’ eNAM co-ordinator for the two States.

The company had won the contract for design, development and maintenance of the eNAM application.

The Maha Farmers Producer Company, the federation of FPCs in Maharashtra, was unable to trade on the eNAM platform in Latur, one of the largest markets for pulses in the country.

“We wanted to see if we could trade on eNAM as the online system will ensure fair auctioning and there will be transparency in bidding, but after speaking to officials from the mandi and eNAM, we discovered that the system is not functioning in the mandi in Latur...,” said Yogesh Thorat, Managing Director of Maha FPC.

In Maharashtra, sources say that online bidding for the eNAM platform has been done only in five markets — Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Sangli, Akola, and Daund.

The picture is similar in Telangana, where about 44 markets have moved under eNAM. There is no grading/assaying infrastructure in most mandis, but computer systems and printers are in place.

Tardy progress

This writer visited Nizamabad, a turmeric belt in Telangana, which recently won the award for best eNAM mandi from the government. But, even here, the market remains isolated, with traders from outside the APMC not being able to buy farmers' produce from the mandi and buyers having to physically inspect quality of turmeric.

In UP, Haryana and Rajasthan, too, there are no fully functional online mandis. In Haryana, the procurement of assaying equipment has started, while in Rajasthan, it has been done for mustard alone, said a source with Nagarjuna Fertilisers and Chemicals.

In UP, old equipment is being used, which may not be able to grade the produce on all parameters under eNAM.

Delay in implementation

So, why is the progress under eNAM so slow? State agricultural departments have been finding it difficult to convince all stakeholders — farmers, traders and commission agents — to move to the online platform. While traders fear the taxman, farmers fear lower prices if the produce is assayed.

Lack of technical expertise at the State Agricultural Departments has also delayed the setting up of grading/assaying facilities, say officials from the mandis.

“It requires someone with technical expertise to assess the kind of equipment needed for the crops in the mandi, but currently, no one seems to have a clue,” said an official from the National Institute for Agriculture Marketing, Jaipur.

(This article was published on July 18, 2017)



Maharashtra government approves group farming to double production by 2022

Financial aid of Rs 1 crore to be given to each group along with guidance on crop pattern and scientific farming



Individual farmers with small land holding not exceeding 5 acres find it extremely difficult to adopt technology or machines as it multiplies overall investment expenses. In Photo, Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis (File photo)

The Maharashtra cabinet on Tuesday gave its approval for promoting group farming as a model to double farm production by 2022. The enforcement of the scheme with budgetary allocations has been approved for 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Every year, 200 farmers would be shortlisted for group farming with financial incentives up to Rs 1 crore to each group. According to the group farming policy, it would be mandatory for at least ten farmers to come together with a cumulative land holding of 100 acres. To make group farming a success, there would be guidance on the crop pattern and technique of farming. Technology would be adopted to promote scientific farming.

CM Devendra Fadnavis, who has mooted the group farming model as part of the larger agriculture reforms, believes it would be a significant step to make agriculture economically affordable and sustainable specially among the small and marginal farmers.

The decision to provide Rs 1 crore incentive for group farming on 100 acres of land, it is believed, would help bring down investment expenditure and double the yield. Another reason for promoting group farming was shrinking landholding in the agriculture sector. The agriculture land holding records states, "An average land holding of 4.28 hectares in year 1970-71 declined to 1.44 hectares in the year 2010-11." In some places, it has been reduced to just 11 to 15 gunthas.

The biggest advantage of group farming would be to help individual farmers to collectively shoulder the investment expenditure. Since farming would be on 100 acres, it would enable them to make maximum use of machines and technology at a reasonable cost. Individual farmers with small land holding not exceeding 5 acres find it extremely difficult to adopt technology or machines as it multiplies overall investment expenses.

Soon desi cow's milk will be sold through medical stores: Warns Rajasthan minister

Prabhu Lal Saini also offered a solution to those rearing cows.



The milk available in the market is of exotic and crossbred cows such as Jersey and Holstein and not of indigenous breeds such as Rathi, Tharparkar, and Gir, the minister said. (HT Photo)

A Rajasthan minister has sounded an ominous warning: if immediate steps were not taken to increase the production of milk of indigenous cows, the day is not far away when it would be sold through medical stores.

“Health conscious people prefer to drink cow’s milk. However, the milk available in the market is of exotic and crossbred cows such as Jersey and Holstein and not of indigenous breeds such as Rathi, Tharparkar, and Gir. The milk of indigenous cows is rich in A2 beta casein protein, while that of crossbred cows has A1 beta casein protein, which is not as healthy as A2,” Prabhu Lal Saini, state minister for agriculture and animal husbandry, said.

“The demand for indigenous cow’s milk is more because of its qualities, but the supply is very less. If cow milk production is not increased, then a day will come soon when it will be sold in bottles in medical stores,” the minister said.

This is not the first time when Saini has extolled the virtues of the indigenous breeds over foreign-bred cows. “The source of α -amino acids in indigenous cow’s milk, which is also found in mother’s milk, is extremely beneficial in preventing cancer, curing high blood pressure, helping in digestion, and also for diabetes patients,” he had earlier said.

The minister also offered a solution to those rearing cows. To increase milk production, farmers need to pay attention to improving the breed, timely treatment of the bovines and ensuring them proper feed, he said.

“Farmers need to pay attention towards rearing indigenous breeds of cow along with agriculture, so that their income increases,” Saini said, adding “cattle rearing will play an important role in fulfilling the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister Vasundhara Raje to double the income of farmers by 2020.”

The minister said that the animal husbandry department is informing farmers on rearing indigenous cow breeds.

Rajasthan is home to 1.16 crore indigenous cows as per 19th livestock census 2012. According to Rajasthan Cooperative Dairy Federation (RCDF) sources total milk production in state in 2015-16 was 4.55 crore litres per day, of which 50 per cent is marketable surplus, while the rest is kept for personal use by farmers. It means, 2.27 crore litres of milk reaches market every day of which RCDF purchases 11-12%. Of the total milk produced per day, 40% (1.82 crore litres) is cow’s milk. The major cow milk belt is Bikaner, Ganganagar, Jodhpur and Hanumangarh.

Tackling wheat blast: Bengal government bans wheat cultivation within 5 km of B’desh border

Wheat blast had affected crop in Nadia and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal earlier this year and the state administration is on the alert because in 2016 the fungus destroyed crop spread over 20,000 hectares in Bangladesh.



Wheat being destroyed in Nadia district in 2016 after the wheat blast fungus infected the crop.(Suvankar Chakraborty)

The Mamata Banerjee government has issued an order banning wheat cultivation within five km from the Bangladesh border. The direction has been prompted by an advice from the Centre to avoid the deadly wheat blast disease, the fungus of which travelled to some bordering villages earlier this year and posed the threat of spreading throughout the country.

The fungus has become the latest menace after fake currency notes and infiltrators that enter India through the Bangladesh border.

Bangladesh has a 4,096-km border with India of which 2,217 km is with West Bengal.

“We are in constant talks with agriculture scientists for this purpose. But unless a lasting solution is available, banning wheat cultivation is the only option,” West Bengal agriculture minister, Purnendu Bose, told HT.

Wheat blast is a deadly virus that devastated the wheat production of Brazil for the first time in 1985. In 2016, the fungus entered Asia for the first time, creating havoc in Bangladesh where crops of over 20,000 hectares in six districts had to be burnt. Subsequently, it travelled to the West Bengal districts of Murshidabad and Nadia. Experts said cattle straying into India from Bangladesh can be a carrier of the fungus.



A farmer helplessly stares at his crop after setting the field on fire in Nadia district. (Suvankar Chakraborty)

Alarmed that it may find its way into the wheat bowl of north India, the state government tried to tackle it on a war footing and ordered burning of wheat crops in March this year.

The agreement to ban cultivation was reached at a meeting between the officials of the Union agriculture ministry and Bengal agriculture department in New Delhi on June 27, following which the state government issued the order on July 15.

The minister said that about 800 hectares of land in Murshidabad and Nadia districts will come under the ban. “The crop on this land in the two districts had to be burnt to control the spread of the disease. The state government also paid compensation to the wheat farmers following the loss,” he said.

During 2016- 17, the state government paid around Rs 4 crore to the wheat farmers to compensate for their loss. “The government paid a total compensation of about Rs 4.10 crore. The rate was Rs 1,625 per quintal, which is the minimum support price of wheat,” said a state agriculture official.

Bose also said the government is now trying to trying to decide which crops can be cultivated as an alternative to wheat in these areas.

Field reports show little threat of whitefly to cotton in Bathinda: Govt

Punjab Agricultural University vice-chancellor discussed progress of cotton crop and ways to safeguard it against white fly and other diseases with the agriculture officers.



Experts from Haryana and Rajasthan too shared their experiences and added that no pest attack has been reported in their states.(HT File/ Representative image)

District chief agriculture officer Gurditta Singh Sidhu has said weekly reports from cotton fields has shown that white fly pest attack on cotton was lower than what could be considered to be worrisome. He added the crop was also expected to be better than last year.

“A district-level pest surveillance team has been conducting survey of fields for the pest and issuing advisories. Due to medium rainfall, there is little threat of whitefly,” he said at the fourth meeting of Inter-State Consultative and Monitoring Committee for cotton on Tuesday. Bathinda has 140 acres of cotton cultivation, with the largest area in Talwandi Sabo.

At the meeting, Punjab Agricultural University vice-chancellor Dr Baldev Singh Dhillon discussed progress of cotton crop and ways to safeguard it against white fly and other diseases with the agriculture officers.

Joint director with the agriculture department Dr Sukhdev Singh Sidhu also stated that the white fly pest attack was lower. “This year, we expect good yield from cotton crop,” he added.

Mansa chief agriculture officer also said that no white fly attack had been reported in his district. “ Stagnant water did hit the crop in low-lying areas,” he added.

Experts from Haryana and Rajasthan too shared their experiences and added that no pest attack has been reported in their states.

Experts from PAU, Ludhiana; Haryana, Rajasthan and the chief agriculture officers of Mansa, Muktsar, Faridkot, Bathinda, Barnala, Sangrur and Fazilka participated in the meeting. Beside them, block agriculture officers and district administrative official were also present.

Drip irrigation must for water-guzzling sugarcane in Maharashtra

Mumbai city news: Drip irrigation is expected to increase production of sugarcane even as it conserves water



Maharashtra is the largest sugar producing state in the country, with farmers relying on this cash crop to bring in assured dividends.

In a bid to tackle the ongoing agrarian discontent, the state cabinet took major decisions on Tuesday, including giving its nod to proposals minimising the cost of production, raising productivity and ensuring fair procurement prices for agriculture produce.

The cabinet cleared a decision to make drip irrigation mandatory for the water-guzzling sugarcane crop after 2019 and promote group farming by offering a subsidy to participating farmers.

Maharashtra is the largest sugar producing state in the country, with farmers relying on this cash crop to bring in assured dividends. Drip irrigation is expected to increase production of sugarcane even as it conserves water.

The state government has chalked a scheme with the investment of Rs200 crore to promote group farming. The government will extend the subsidy of Rs1 crore each to the farmer producer company formed under Maharashtra Cooperative Societies Act, 1960, by at least 20 farmers with the cluster of a minimum land of 100 acres. The government has kept the target of funding about 200 such companies. The state cabinet in its decision taken on Tuesday also decided to promote animal husbandry, fisheries and sericulture to make the group farming viable. The state government has made a budgetary allocation of Rs45 crore for immediate release of the funds for the companies.

“By encouraging the group farming we are aiming to maximise the use of mechanisation by providing them ample funding for modern machinery and equipment. This will help them maximise productivity and reduce the cost of production. Once productivity is increased, the farmers can get a higher rate for their produce. We will also help the companies set up food

processing units, enable them to export the products and set up mechanism for effective marketing,” said agriculture minister Pandurang Fundkar.

The decision was taken in the backdrop of the decline in the land holding per household to 1.44 hectares in 2010-11 from 4.28 hectares in 1970-71.

The state government has announced it will make it compulsory to shift the sugarcane on drip irrigation after 2019 by launching an interest subvention scheme. The government aims to bring 3.05 lakh hectare sugarcane crop under drip irrigation in next two years in addition to the current cover of 2.25 lakh hectares. Maharashtra farmers grow sugarcane crop on 9.42 lakh hectares across the state. The government will assist the conversion with the loan of Rs 85,400 a hectare at the interest of 2% to be borne by the farmers. The remaining part of the interest rate (7.25%) will be borne by state government (4%) and sugar factories (1.25%) for the loan with the tenure of 5 years. The total estimated loan to be disbursed in two years for the scheme is Rs 2,604 crore.

The state government had made it compulsory in June 2015 for sugar factories in the catchment areas of eight dams (including Tembhu, Mujla, Bhima, Kanholi Nala) to switch to drip irrigation from flood irrigation till June 2019. Based on the success of the directives, the government has decided to make it mandatory for all the sugar factories to implement the drip irrigation for sugarcane crop after June 2019.

“It will be the responsibility of the sugar factories to switch to the drip irrigation. The interest subvention scheme not only enable the farmers to switch to drip will also help them in raising production per hectare,” Fundkar said.

The minister said the new scheme will replace the existing subsidy scheme which cost government about Rs350 crore a year.