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Horticulture Dept. promotes protected cultivation

'Quality of vegetables increased because of high moisture content'



Rich yield:Rose being cultivated under controlled condition at a farm in Karamadai block. —

COIMBATORE: Horticulture Department has brought 41,000 square metre under protected cultivation in the district.

M. Thangaraju, Deputy Director, Horticulture, Coimbatore, said under poly green houses farmers cultivated vegetables like tomato, gourds, capsicum and flowers to increase yield. The increase was around 25 per cent.

In controlled conditions, the quality of vegetables increased because of high moisture content, he said. "The farmers managed to get higher price as well."

Under the Centre-funded National Horticulture Mission the Department gives Rs. 3.25 lakh as subsidy for every 1,000 sq.m. under controlled cultivation. The programme has been under implementation since 2006-07.

The department has also done well in promoting cocoa cultivation.

In the last financial year it had brought 1,100 hectare under cocoa, which is inter-cropped with coconut. The department had spent Rs. 57.17 lakh for the purpose.

A farmer gets Rs. 11,250 for a hectare and he can avail of the subsidy for not more than four hectares. Saplings are supplied by Cadbury India Ltd., which also buys the cocoa beans. The Deputy Director said the average harvest was 500 kg a hectare and the company paid Rs. 172 a kg.

Under the National Horticulture Mission, the department has also promoted amla and mango cultivation in 96 and 204 hectare respectively under the 'Establishments of New Gardens' scheme. Under the scheme to increase area under non-perennial fruits, the department has encouraged farmers to take up banana cultivation on 1,400 hectare. The subsidy given for the purpose: Rs. 1.05 crore.

Under the loose flowers promotion scheme, it had given Rs. 16.08 lakh to promote marigold and jasmine cultivation on 140 hectare. Similarly, chilli and turmeric cultivation has been promoted on 370 hectare at Rs. 41.59 lakh.

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Otteri urban forest to be refurbished

CHENNAI: The Chennai Corporation will refurbish the Otteri urban forest and herbal park at a cost of Rs.1 crore, said Mayor M.Subramanian. Inspecting the herbal park on Sunday, Mr. Subramanian said that the renovated urban forest would be thrown open to public in November 2010 and be one of the spots for entertainment and walking in north Chennai.

The herbal park would have 5,500 sq metre pathway in an area of 10.39 acre. More than 4,000 trees and shrubs belonging to tropical dry evergreen forest are being grown by the Corporation.

The trees and shrubs grown in the park are indigenous species of the coromandel coast and have medicinal properties. The trees and shrubs have thick dark green foliage throughout the year. Around 300 indigenous species of the Coromandel Coast are used medicinally.

The Chennai Corporation is raising the trees on a land that was once a garbage dump in Otteri. Neem, peepal, lemon, jamun, Indian gooseberry and other tropical dry evergreen trees are grown here. Vilvam, magizham, arali, adathoda, nochi, vengai, thoothuvalai and nithyakalyani are the Tamil names of some of the species in the herbal park.

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Cardamom growers happy, odds notwithstanding

Owing to sharp cut in production in competitor Guatemala

DINDIGUL: Despite a sharp slump in production, acute labour shortage and irrigation water crisis, cardamom growers have heaved a sigh of relief owing to a steep rise in prices of cardamom.

Prices of cardamom have been hovering between Rs.900 to Rs.1,100 a kg this season. Its prices were pegged at Rs.650 last year. Average prices of cardamom this season is Rs.980. On the other hand, production of cardamom this year slumped to 10,000 tonnes when compared to Rs.12,000 tonnes last year.

At present, cardamom is cultivated in 33,000 hectares on Western Ghats bordering Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

A sharp cut in production of cardamom in Guatemala is the main reason for great demand for Indian cardamom in international as well as domestic markets. Climate change, labour problem and natural calamities in Guatemala and economic recession in the US, had its adverse impact in cardamom production. Cardamom growers in Guatemala solely depend on exports as they do not sell single kg of cardamom domestically. Moreover, exporters fund liberally to cardamom growers for cultivation. The US economic recession cut flow of funds to Guatemala and hit cardamom production there. Moreover, natural calamities also affect cultivation. These handicaps help Indian cardamom get better prices.

Despite good procurement prices, cardamom cultivation too has become a costly affair.

Labour shortage not only haunted Guatemala but also growers in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. With acute labour shortage, growers transport labourers from Tamil Nadu for farm work in Kerala. Transportation increases the costs and cut working hours. While labours in Kerala work for eight hours, labours from Tamil Nadu work for six to seven hours only, says P. Ashok Kumar, former member of Spices Board.

Normally, buyers auction cardamom throughout the year without any break in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, thanks to availability of stock till next harvesting season that

commenced only August. But, it will not be possible this year, he forecasted. There will possibly be no auction after May. No cardamom will be available for auction in June and July. Next harvesting season will commence only in August, he added.

Market trend of this year will continue for next year also because farmers expect low production in next harvesting season. Already, summer rain was very scanty and showered only in some pockets. With no water for irrigation, production will be low.

Above all, production costs too have gone up manifold. Cardamom growers need at least Rs.1 lakh for a season. Cardamom growers appeal to bankers to increase agriculture loan to meet production expenses. Now, they get Rs.45,000 per acre which was insufficient to make it, he added.

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DECCAN
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'Agri and retail loans our area of focus'

Apr 12 2010

T.M. Bhasin took over as the chairman and managing director of the Indian Bank on April 1, 2010. Indian Bank is a public sector bank with a business of over Rs 1.4 lakh crore on December '09.

Mr Bhasin's previous assignment as an executive director with Union Bank of India, a charge that he had held since November 2007. He started his career with the Oriental Bank of Commerce in 1978 and worked there for almost three decades.

Mr Bhasin spoke to Amit Bhandari on the economy, interest rates and his plans in his current assignment.

Excerpts:

Inflation is nearly in double digits and the most recent food price inflation figures were also up.

Do you see a rate hike by the Reserve Bank in this scenario? Will it impact interest rates on loans?

Food price inflation is likely to settle down post the harvest of the rabi crop. As for the RBI, the credit policy is due only about ten days from now, so we can wait and watch. Any action by the RBI will depend upon two factors, liquidity and credit demand. RBI has two tools — a change in the repo/reverse repo rates is one option. However, right now, there is plenty of cash in the system and a change here shouldn't lead to a rate hike.

However, a rise in the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) will remove liquidity from the system and could lead to a hike in loan rates.

The economy has just been through a slowdown — do you see it getting over in terms of loan growth?

We were in a low growth period so far, but things are now picking up.

Most of the banks have large credit limits sanctioned, and we expect growth to pick up now. Internally, we are looking at 22 per cent growth in lending. At this stage, we are still finalising our targets.

The pick-up in business activity should start in the second half of April.

Basically, our target is to grow 2 per cent better than our peer group. We have been able to manage that so far.

What about the quality of your loan book — did that suffer during the slowdown too? Do you see problems with specific sectors, such as textiles?

The gross NPA level for us is currently at 0.89 per cent while net NPA level is 1.6 per cent, which are both manageable. Our credit quality is quite good at this point.

We continuously monitor accounts which are even one instalment behind.

As for the textile sector, they say that they are now doing well and that the sector is out of the woods.

You have just taken charge at the Indian Bank. What will be the focus areas for you?

The two big focus areas for us are farm loans and loans to medium and small enterprises. Next on the list are loans to retail borrowers and to the infrastructure sector. Infrastructure sector is a huge area for us — a few loans here can easily help us meet our targets. At this point, we are already a part of several large projects as lenders.

What about home loans?

The demand for housing loans is strong. We also have a healthy portfolio with assets of Rs 5,000 crore.

This seems to be the right time in terms of interest rates.

There are price increases in markets such as Chennai, but all in all, a good time to buy I think. As of now, 93 of our branches are focussed on home loans.

Indian Bank has traditionally been strong in the South. Do you have plans to scale up elsewhere?

Around 50 per cent of our branches are in two states — Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh — 757 and 230 respectively out of 1,756.

This year, we plan to start close to 200 branches, of which 80 per cent will be in the North and the West.

What about the presence outside India — any plans to scale up there?

We currently have branches outside India in Colombo and Singapore.

We used to have a branch in Jaffna. We would also like to be in other centres that have a large Tamil population.

Remittance of money is a big business, and we also get a lot of other business as people tend to do all their business with a single bank.

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By N R Madhusudhan

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Rising prices hit Bangaloreans

BANGALORE: Bangaloreans who have drawn up a monthly budget, will have to re-do the math. It is not only the milk prices that have gone up last week, but the price of food items too have gone through the roof.

The prices of some pulses and vegetables have increased by more than Rs 10 a kilo in a week's time.

While a kilo of tur dal cost Rs 70 per kilo a week ago, it is now being sold at Rs 78. Urad dal has shot up to Rs 85 per kilo from Rs 72 and green gram dal to Rs 96 from Rs 86. Groundnuts cost Rs 53 where it used to be 48.

Vegetables prices too are gradually increasing. Carrots, which were being sold at Rs 20 per kg now cost Rs 28, the price of capsicum has increased from Rs 25 to 37, and beans from Rs 35 to Rs 40. Peas now cost between Rs 90 and Rs 120 a kilo.

"The price of the vegetables might not come down until it rains.

The farmers are unable to irrigate their fields due to shortage of power.

The soaring temperatures too have contributed to their woes," said B Krishna, the Managing Director of the Horticultural Producers' Co-operative Marketing and

Processing Society.

With the government increasing the VAT on edible oil from 4 per cent to 5 per cent from April 1, edible oil prices have gone up by Rs 3 to Rs 5 per litre. The price of ghee has increase by nearly Rs 40 in the past fifteen days. With the hike in the price of milk, expect to shell out more for milk products like ghee and butter.

With a water tariff hike too hanging over their heads' Bangalore's citizens might just as well tear up their expenditure plans.

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Nights getting warmer in India, cereal output may fall: Study

Amit Bhattacharya, TNN, Apr 12, 2010, 05.26am IST

NEW DELHI: In an ominous sign of climate change hitting home, India has seen accelerated warming in the past few decades and the temperature-rise pattern is now increasingly in line with global warming trends.

The most up-to-date study of temperatures in India, from 1901 to 2007, has found that while it's getting warmer across regions and seasons, night temperatures have been rising significantly in almost all parts of the country.

The rise in night temperatures — 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade since 1970, according to the study — could have potentially adverse impact on yields of cereal crops like rice. The paper also finds that warming has been highest in post-monsoon and winter months (October to February).

“Until the late 1980s, minimum (or night) temperatures were trendless in India. India was an odd

dot in the global map as most regions worldwide were seeing a rise in night temperatures in sync with growing levels of greenhouse gases. Our analysis shows the global trend has caught up with India,” said K Krishna Kumar, senior scientist and programme manager at Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, and one of the authors.

Regional factors seem to be getting over-ridden by warming caused by greenhouse gases. For instance, the cooling trend in much of north India seen in the 1950s and 60s has been reversed, possibly because the effect of aerosols in the air can no longer compensate for greenhouse gas warming.

The study — Surface air temperature variability over India during 1901-2007 and its association with ENSO — by IITM scientists D R Kothawale and A A Munot besides Kumar, is a comprehensive analysis of temperature data gathered from 388 weather stations in the country and has been accepted for publication in the international Climate Research journal.

The rising night temperatures are a major cause of worry. Said Jagdish K Ladha, principal scientist in the India chapter of International Rice Research Institute, “Minimum temperatures have a link with rice fertility. At higher than normal night temperatures, rice grains aren’t properly filled up, leading to a drop in yield.”

During 1901 to 2007, the all-India mean, maximum and minimum annual temperatures rose at the rate of 0.51, 0.71 and 0.27 degrees Celsius per 100 years, respectively.

However, post 1970, the rise has been sharper with mean and minimum temperatures both increasing at the rate of 0.2 degrees per decade, faster than the maximum temperature which rose by 0.17 degrees.

Among regions, the hardest hit seems to be the western Himalayas encompassing portions of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Here the mean temperature rise in the


last century was 0.86 degrees while, more recently, temperatures have been going up by as much as 0.46 degrees per decade. The rapid warming of the region would have obvious fallouts on glacier melts.

On a seasonal scale, winter and post-monsoon temperatures show significant warming trends in recent decades though temperatures in other months have also been going up more modestly.




Chennai - INDIA






Today's Weather


Monday, Apr 12
 Max Min
 37.8° | 26.7°
 Rain: 00mm in24hrs Sunrise: 06:59
 Humidity: 34% Sunset: 18:21
 Wind: Normal Barometer: 1008.1mb

Tomorrow's Forecast


Tuesday, Apr 13
 Max Min
 37° | 28°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday Apr 14	Thursday Apr 15	Friday Apr 16	Saturday Apr 17	Sunday Apr 18
				
37° 27° Partly Cloudy	37° 27° Sunny	37° 28° Partly Cloudy	37° 28° Sunny	37° 28° Sunny