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Precision farming yields good results

Advantages are equitable distribution of water and fertilizer and increase in yield

THANJAVUR: Precision farming has caught the fancy of farmers in Thanjavur district, particularly among those raising sugar cane.

Twenty farmers of Thirupurambiyam in Kumbakonam agriculture division have raised sugar cane under precision farming on 20 hectares of land, thanks to the National Agriculture Development Programme. "The advantage of precision farming is that it facilitates equitable distribution of water and fertilizer through fertigation technique, besides increase in yield," said P. Loganathan, Joint Director of Agriculture, Thanjavur district.

Fertilizer was mixed with water in precision farming through fertigation technique and taken to each and every plant in the field. The girth and weight of sugar cane was more when raised under precision farming and recovery of sugar was also high, said Mr. Loganathan.

The agriculture department was giving a total subsidy of Rs. 65,000 to a farmer per hectare for raising sugar cane under precision farming. A sum of Rs. 40,000 is given for micro irrigation and another Rs. 25,000 worth inputs such as liquid

fertilizer was given to the farmer.

"Water saving is yet another advantage in precision farming. At a time of frequent power cuts, it is enough if the farmer irrigates the field for one hour per hectare in precision farming instead of four to five hours in conventional farming method," said Mr. Loganathan. The required water alone was let into the field thus avoiding wastage since water pipes run along the field carrying water mixed with fertilizer to each and every plant. Micro nutrients were also supplied to the plants.

Horticulture crops

The horticulture department was providing subsidy for raising vegetables, banana and even bamboo under precision farming.

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Fertile ground



Dry:Goats grazing in the big tank in Ramanathapuram.

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Uzhavar sandhais register increase in sales

ERODE: Uzhavar sandhais in Erode district registered an impressive 33 per cent increase in the total sales during the financial year ended on March 2010.

The markets, located at Sampath Nagar, Periyar Nagar, Gobichettipalayam, Sathyamangalam, Perundurai and Dharapuram (which is now included in the newly formed Tirupur district), received over 21,453 tonnes of vegetables and fruits from 2,11,820 farmers during the financial year. The agricultural produce were sold to the tune of Rs. 26.87 crore, which was 33 per cent higher when compared to the sales in 2008-2009. More than 40 lakh consumers have purchased vegetables and fruits from these markets.

In 2008-2009, the six markets received 17,235 tonnes of vegetables and fruits and the sales stood at Rs. 20.23 crore.

Out of the six markets, Sampath Nagar market witnessed huge arrival of vegetables and fruits. The average arrival in the market was 18.66 tonnes per day. In 2009-2010, the arrival in the market had gone up by 12 per cent. The average arrival of vegetables per day in other markets is as follows: Dharapuram - 12 tonnes, Gobichettipalayam - 9.27 tonnes, Sathyamangalam - 8.92 tonnes, Periyar Nagar - 5.40 tonnes and Perundurai - 4.59 tonnes.

Deputy Director, Agri Business, V. Paramasivam said that the department was providing identity cards to the farmers who were interested in selling their produce through the markets. Farmers could approach the Assistant Director of the respective blocks to receive the identity cards.

The department had also initiated efforts to provide more facilities to the farmers and consumers utilising the market, he said.

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SRI technique gaining popularity in Thanjavur

Farmers raising summer paddy crop at many places



A farmer removing weeds from a farm near Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district.

THANJAVUR: System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method of farming has become popular among farmers of Thanjavur district.

With less water and seed requirement, early transplantation, increased yield, SRI is the most sought after agriculture technology in the district.

At present, farmers are involved in raising summer paddy crop at many places. Out of total area of 7,500 hectares to be covered under summer crop, they have raised paddy under SRI on 2,200 hectares.

At Ariyapadaiveedu village in Kumbakonam agriculture division, summer paddy

crop has been raised on 30 hectares.

The total area of cultivation in the village is 38 hectares out of which 30 have come under SRI and conventional method of cultivation has been taken up on eight hectares only.

There are 52 farmers who have raised paddy under SRI in the village.

R.Balakrishnan, a farmer of the village said, "expenditure is less in SRI method. Crop is good. Less quantity of seed is required. We have used conoweeder to remove weeds in the field when SRI method is followed." Farmers say that rat menace is less when SRI method is followed. SRI is the answer to farmer at a time power cut is in peak as the crop requires only less water.

According to P. Loganathan, Joint Director of Agriculture, Thanjavur district, and K.Nedunchezhiyan, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Kumbakonam division, 40 per cent of water is saved in SRI method per hectare. Seedlings can be raised using mat or on a raised land and they can be plucked and planted within 15 to 20 days. In the conventional method, the seedlings are transplanted only after a month. Thus water requirement becomes less.

With respect to seeds only five to six kg of seeds is required for a hectare while in conventional method farmers have to use 70 kg of seeds. As conoweeder is used for removing weeds, it presses the soil around the root of the seedlings planted. The crop matures early also.

With respect to yield, a farmer can take nearly 8050 kg per hectare under SRI method while the yield will be only 5000 to 6000 kg under conventional method. During samba this year, paddy under SRI was raised on 48,000 hectares out of the total area of 1,38,000 hectares. During kuruvai, it was raised on 8500 hectares under SRI out of the total area of 22,000 hectares, Mr.Loganathan said.

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Sugar prices fall by 20%

Apr 19 2010

New Delhi, April 18: Retail sugar prices, which were ruling high at nearly Rs 50 a kg in January, have fallen up to 20 per cent in March across the country, according to government data.

“As per weekly retail and wholesale price analysis available for four weeks ending March 31, 2010, wheat and sugar prices are showing either a declining trend or have ruled steady at all the reporting centres throughout the country,” an official statement said.

The department of consumer affairs collects daily and weekly data from 37 major cities. The trend was visible in wholesale prices as well. “In Ahmedabad, the fall in retail prices was significant from Rs 41 per kg at the beginning of March to Rs 33 by the month end,” the release said. Wholesale prices of sugar fell from Rs 4,000 per quintal to Rs 3,330 within March in Ahmedabad. In Delhi, the wholesale prices declined from Rs 3,450 to Rs 3,175 a quintal.

The stockholding limit imposed on bulk users, who consume about 60-65 per cent of the country’s total sugar demand of 23 million tonnes, and higher production than earlier estimated are the main factors for the fall in the prices of the sweetener. For wheat, the highest decline in retail prices was seen in Ahmedabad from Rs 16 per kg.

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Food security for all

By Arjun Sengupta

Apr 19 2010

The recently proposed food security bill can become another landmark scheme of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, comparable to the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). It is under Mrs Sonia Gandhi's personal initiative that the UPA adopted NREGA earlier and again has pressure to implement the scheme initiated in the Congress election manifesto will initiate the scheme this year. It is the most effective anti-poverty measure to be adopted by any government anywhere in the world.

Before the scheme is actually adopted it is necessary to openly debate its provisions. The proposed National Food Security Act is a first step towards ensuring food security to all citizens in the country. It focuses primarily on below poverty line (BPL) families with a minimum quantity of foodgrains per month.

The current Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) scheme under the public distribution system (PDS) provides for 35 kg per BPL family per month with Rs 3 per kg for rice and Rs 2 per kg for wheat. The eligible people for AAY are the poorest of the poor who do not have even two square meals a day and in May 2005, the number of beneficiaries came to 2.5 crore households which is 38 per cent of the total BPL households. The idea is to extend this programme to all the BPL households in the country, with an almost revolutionary impact on our food security system.

I would want everyone to discuss an alternative: instead of extending this programme to all the BPL families we should extend the coverage universally, i.e. whole population of the country. This would not only simplify the scheme but it will also practically eliminate the scope of leakage currently severely affecting our PDS. That would of course bring a substantial increase in the subsidies, if the non-BPL families fully avail of these facilities. But there is every reason to expect they will not because most of the non-BPL families

are expected to go for higher quality of food with much lower transaction costs for securing them from the market. A 35 kg per family of foodgrains is much lower than the international standards of 60 kg per family. The richer sections would try to acquire that from the markets rather than through PDS.

That has been the experience of some of the southern states that have adopted universal coverage. So a provision made in the Budget for universal coverage of the programme for India may not be actually utilised. If, however, the claim on the budgetary resources becomes too high for the government to afford, I would suggest the quantity of food be reduced from 35 to 25 kg instead of limiting it mainly to BPL families. Indeed in actual practice, the amount of foodgrains used has been less than 20-21 kg per family mostly because of huge transaction costs and leakages in the system. If everybody is entitled to 25 kg per family and the requirements above that can always be procured from the local market, incentives for diversions would almost disappear.

My main problem for using the BPL criteria for PDS is that it is virtually impossible to arrive at a consensus about that number however much Planning Commission may provide their estimates. The number of people below a calculated poverty line is a statistical concept, which would be very difficult to apply to the concrete situations on the ground. The criteria for poverty vary from state to state almost entirely determined by political pressures of groups and subgroups. Currently the number of BPL families based on 93-94 poverty estimates of the Planning Commission and March 2000 population estimates is only 6.52 crores.

If this is revised by the latest poverty estimates of 2004-2005 and population of 2009 it would be reduced to 5.91 crores. But different states have used different criteria of poverty estimates and issued BPL ration cards according to their estimates, amounting to 10.68 crores today with many states demanding for raising the numbers further. An attempt to limit these to a statistical average will be almost impossible. While the Planning Commission estimate is about 27.7 per cent of people below the poverty line

based on calorie content of minimal food baskets, the Tendulkar Committee estimate is about 37 per cent and the Supreme Court appointed expert N.C. Saxena's estimate is above 50 per cent.

On the other hand, the current system of identifying BPL families or AAY families is full of loopholes with scope for discretionary identification by officials susceptible to bribes and other kinds of pressures. The matter gets even more complicated when attempts are made to provide additional 10 kg to above poverty line families. A Planning Commission 2005 report hold that 58 per cent of the subsidised foodgrains issued from the Central government do not reach the BPL families because of identification errors and non transparent practices in the implementation of the schemes. Thirty-six per cent of the budgetary subsidies are siphoned off, and only about 42 per cent reaches the targeted BPL group.

Every attempt should now be made to simplify the scheme that can be effectively done if we make the system universal and not depending upon the identification and estimation of the BPL families.

This of course would not make the system perfect and it is important that the government concentrates on improving the governance of universal PDS rather than wasting time on identifying the poor. The first requirement would be to improve the working of the Food Corporation of India, which is supposed to procure food from the surplus states directly from the producers and transport them to the deficit states.

The problem is much more serious at the level of the states. Many of them are unable to lift the allocated foodgrains because of shortage of resources. The Centre has to play a major role in helping the states, if necessary with substantial loans so that foodgrains are available at the fair price shops when a consumer demands it. The fair price shops themselves have to be supported with incentives and if necessary with transport and storage facilities.

A universal PDS for the provision of subsidised foodgrains to all consumers would not obviate the need for reforming the delivery system through PDS. The new food security act must provide for methods of improving the delivery and monitoring their effectiveness.

- Dr Arjun Sengupta is a Member of Parliament and former Economic Adviser to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

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By Reuters

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Monsoon may start erratically



NEW DELHI: India's annual June-September monsoon rains are expected to be normal this year but weather patterns suggest an erratic start, the Economic Times reported on Monday.


"Rains could be a little slow or erratic in the pre-monsoon period of May-June. They will catch up in July-August," the newspaper said quoting Dale Mohler, agricultural meteorologist with AccuWeather, a Pennsylvania-based weather consultancy.

Farmers in India, where only 40 percent farms are irrigated, depend on monsoon rains to sow rice, corn and oilseeds during rainy months of June and July.

Last year's weakest rains in 37 years hit farm output and decelerated growth. But Indian and western forecasts signal good monsoon this year.

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 Mon, 19 Apr 2010

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Monday, Apr 19

Max Min

37.3° | 27.4°

Rain: 00mm in24hrs Sunrise: 05:55

Humidity: 34% Sunset: 18:22

Tomorrow's Forecast



Sunny

Tuesday, Apr 20

Max Min

36° | 28°

Wind: Normal

Barometer: 1008.1mb

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Apr 21

Apr 22

Apr 23

Apr 24

Apr 25



32° | 25°

37° | 29°

37° | 29°

36° | 29°

36° | 28°

Tstorm

Partly Cloudy

Sunny

Sunny

Sunny