

Model plots to be set up to grow grapes

Staff Reporter

Cultivators to give 100 acres of land for the purpose



Informative: S. D. Ramteke, Senior Scientist, National Research Centre on Grapes, Pune, addressing a meeting with grape growers at Kamayagundenpatti in Theni district on Wednesday.

CUMBUM: For the first time, model plots would be established in Cumbum valley to grow high quality grapes suitable for export as well as for wine manufacture. Grape growers have agreed to provide 100 acres for this purpose.

National Research Centre on Grapes in Pune would offer technical expertise and sophisticated agriculture practices and private wine manufacturer would offer high quality saplings.

The district administration would take measures to set up a grape research station. These decisions were made at a special interaction meeting between farmers and scientists from Pune held at Kamayagundenpatti village near here on Wednesday.

In his address, Collector P. Muthuveeran has announced that a federation comprising 100 growers

would be constituted in this connection. Each farmer has agreed to offer one acre to grow these new varieties.

In the meanwhile, a buy-back arrangement between farmers and private wine manufacturer would be arranged.

Steps would be taken to set up a grapes research station in the district. Communication centre to disseminate latest information would be set up at Cumbum, KK Patty and Odaipatti. Grape farming would be brought under precision farming, he added.

The Collector said that sophisticated technology is a must to improve quality of grapes.

He also imposed a total ban on 'manu,' a local measuring system, and asked traders to measure the fruit in kilograms, (one manu is 12 kg).

S.D. Ramteke, Senior Scientist, National Research Centre on Grapes, said that farmers should shift to new varieties and adopt modern cultivation methods to produce fruits matching international standard with uniform colour, size and required total soluble sugar (TSS) content.

Application of right quantum of input would improve fruit quality and excess application would make fruit residue high. Prolonging harvesting time to 130 days from normal 110 days would improve TSS content to 24 per cent, required level to make wine. Uneven berries and ripening, TSS level below 15 per cent and excess use of fertilisers were major hurdles to overcome, he added.

Sample fruits taken from various farms would be tested at Pune lab to calculate residue level. Commissioning of mini weather stations and cold storage chain would be useful.

Horticulture College Professor M. Selvaraj said research on grapes took place 15 years ago. It was abandoned later.

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Training begins for agricultural graduates

CHENNAI: The first batch of the residential training programme for agriculture graduates and diploma holders commenced at the National Agro Foundation Center for Rural Development on Wednesday. The training organised under the aegis of the Agri Clinic and Agri Business Centre is a scheme of Ministry of Agriculture coordinated by MANAGE, Hyderabad.

60 graduates to be trained

It is planned to train 60 graduates / diploma holders attached to Primary Agriculture Credit Societies under Agri Clinic in 2 batches in 4 months. Inaugurating the function, R.I. Raghunathan, CEO, NAF, stressed the need for such training for agriculture development in the country. Koteeswara Rao, consultant, MANAGE, elaborated on the benefits of the scheme, according to a release.

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'Create confidence among farmers'

TIRUCHI: It is imperative to create confidence among the farming community on organic farming and its long term benefits, District Collector T. Soundiah said.

Inaugurating an awareness camp on organic farming at Ariyamangalam village in Tiruverambur panchayat union on Tuesday, Mr. Soundiah said necessary arrangements would be made to ensure that farmers received competitive prices for the agricultural produce raised using organic manure. This would also extend to the produce being sold through the 'uzhavar sandhais'. Though farmers were initially hesitant to adopt the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technique, many agriculturists have now started to follow this method realising the two-fold increase in yield by using this technique. During the current kuruvai season, paddy would be raised in 30,000 acres by adopting the SRI technique, the Collector said.

Extensive use of fertilisers and pesticides had no doubt increased the yield, but it had caused damage to the land quality. There would be a two-fold rise in yield by using organic manure and adopting the SRI technique.

Utilising organic manure for farming would protect the land quality in the long run, he added. The Joint Director, Agriculture J. Sekar and other agricultural department officials participated, an official press release here said.

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Oliver Twist seeks food security

The NREGS is restricted. The PDS is targeted. Only exploitation is universal.

The rotting of lakhs of tonnes of foodgrain in open yards, while shocking, is hardly new or surprising. Remember the rural poor marching on godowns in Andhra Pradesh in 2001 in similar circumstances? The Supreme Court was quite right in jolting the Union government. "In a country where admittedly people are starving, it is a crime to waste even a single grain," said the annoyed Court. And suggested that the grain be released to those who deserve it.

Strong and welcome words. However, the Court could take matters much further if it sees why the Government of India would rather have that grain rot than let the hungry eat it. The failure to understand that leads us to pit poor against poor. To see people in the APL category as the enemies of those who are BPL. Hence the suggestion that we take away grain from one to give it to the other. APL was itself a fiction created by the government to "reduce" the number of poor it was obliged to help. So the GoI would act selectively on this part of the Court's advice with glee. This would exclude those in APL from even the pathetic little aid they get.

It will ignore the more important order of the Court to distribute the grain before it rots. It might pull up Food Corporation of India officers unable to look after the grain but who did not cause it to pile up in the first place. When you have twice the grain you are equipped to stock, you have a problem. The GoI could distribute that grain. Or release it at low prices through the public distribution system. It would hate either option. That would run against the grain of its ideology and economics. Letting the hungry eat it would, for the government, increase the "subsidy burden." Why would the government do that after successfully slashing Rs. 450 crore from food subsidy in the current budget?

Two arguments mark the opposition to a universal system (whether in the PDS or other sectors like health). One, there is no money. Two, we do not have enough grain for a universal system.

The nation has spawned 49 dollar billionaires and about a 100,000 dollar millionaires in a decade. But it has no money to feed its hungry. So says a government that tosses Rs.500,000 crore of tax exemptions to the wealthy in the current budget under just three heads.

Not producing enough grain? Well, we spent two decades shifting countless lakhs of farmers from growing food to raising cash crops. That shift involved greater input costs, higher debt and more. We sowed risk and harvested hunger.

The impact on foodgrain? The average daily net per capita availability of foodgrain between 2005 and 2008 is a dismal 436 grams per Indian. That's less than it was half a century ago. In 1955-58, it was 440 grams. Take pulses separately and the fall is 50 per cent. Around 35 grams in 2005-08

from nearly 70 grams in 1955-58.

This hasn't stopped governments from claiming "record production" every other year. Remember the "record surpluses" in 2001-03? Those years we exported millions of tonnes of grain at prices lower than those offered to our own deprived. That grain fed European cattle — the most food-secure creatures on earth. While hundreds of millions went hungry at home. Today's rotting grain, too, will at some point be flogged off to private traders at throwaway rates.

These last two decades also saw the collapse of public investment in agriculture. To starve farming of funds and say we haven't enough grain is a travesty. Actually, commit yourself to universalisation, revive food crop, give the farmer a good price and boost the dismal levels of procurement that now exist. You'd be surprised how fast you can meet that challenge of production.

Instead, we seem to be heading, courtesy the National Advisory Council (NAC), for a "universal" system in 150 districts. "Universal" here could mean rice or wheat at Rs. 3 a kg to a limit of 35 kg per household. This "universal" stops at rice and wheat, will not include pulses, oils and millets, does not see the size of a household and is limited to a fourth of the country. You can't, goes the saying, be a little bit pregnant. You can't be a little bit universal either. The debate between "targeting" — which is what the 150-districts notion is — and a universal PDS is not one over different routes to the same goal. It is one over different goals. You are either universal, or you are not. This move invites chaos.

First, as an editorial (August 10) in this newspaper pointed out, this seems to equate hunger with geography. What of millions in other districts? Are they not hungry? And how, for instance, would this impact on millions of poor migrant labourers?

Take Orissa's Ganjam district which sends out four lakh migrant workers to Surat alone in Gujarat. Now Ganjam could well be in the 150 districts. How will its hungry migrants access that grain in Surat? Surely, Surat will not be in the list of 150? Can't you just see the store keeper in Surat telling the migrant: "Yes, son, I've seen the law, too. Here's your rice at Rs. 3."

Meanwhile, even as these migrants fail to access their Rs. 3 a kilo grain, Ganjam could well be dropped from the list of 150 at some point — citing "poor demand." Thane in Maharashtra with its famished adivasis, could well be a Rs.3-a-kilo district. Next door is Mumbai where rice goes at Rs.30 to Rs.40 a kilo. Result? Most of Thane's cheap rice will migrate to Mumbai.

Or take agricultural labourers in Orissa. An adult needs at least 750 grams of rice a day. So a family of five (including children) needs around 3 kg of rice a day. Let's say they cannot manage more than

2.75 kg a day. They would still consume 82.5 kilos a month. The new “universal” would give them 35 kg of that for Rs.105. The remaining 47.5 kg, at Rs. 22 a kilo or more, would cost them well over Rs.1000. Where will they get that from?

Why do lakhs migrate each year from Kalahandi or Bolangir seeking work outside when the NREGS exists in those districts? Why do so many prefer the lesser pay of brick kilns in Andhra Pradesh? One major reason is that the NREGS restricts them to 100 days per household. In the awful brick kilns of Andhra Pradesh, every member of a five-strong family (including children) can get work for up to 180-200 days. The NREGS is restricted. The PDS is targeted. Only exploitation is universal.

Yet the debate has been over things like whether each family should have 25 or 35 kg. This is an Oliver Twist approach to food security. “Please, sir, I want some more.” Coming from within the NAC, that wrongly casts Montek Ahluwalia of the Planning Commission in the role of Bumble, or Pranab Mukherjee as Fagin. In truth, the two make Bumble and Fagin seem reckless philanthropists. But there's a bigger problem to what's going on. It happens with each sector. The sequence is the same.

The good guys create a demand for legislation. The government agrees. Next, the well-intentioned come up with a draft the government then dilutes. After which the Planning Commission declares the effort to still be unworkable. So it's thinned down again. Then the Finance Ministry says: “where's the money?” And it's watered down to an irrelevance. What remains is something that enshrines the right of the Indian people to cross the street (when the green signal that says ‘walk’ is on).

Obviously it fails badly in practice. Targeting always does. That's when Bumble, Fagin, The Artful Dodger and the rest of the Dickensian crew come up with what will be their solution to every such problem: smart cards, unique identification numbers, food stamps, vouchers and cash transfers. (And GM foods to meet production targets.) That's where it's headed — towards a worse disaster.

The food security legislation in the form that now seems likely weakens and dilutes the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution. Those are universal, not targeted. Sure, we have to move towards making them real. But we need at every stage to ask whether the steps we take strengthen or weaken the Directive Principles. These steps on food security weaken them. Also when we act in isolation in one sector like food, we undermine the vital others. What we could do with is a comprehensive universal programme that covers nutrition, work, health and education. At one time, for one nation.

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FARMER'S NOTEBOOK

Indigenous paddy thresher may address labour shortage crisis

M.J. PRABU

The unit priced at Rs. 35,000 was exhibited at the Rashtrapati Bhavan



Good solution: Mohammed Fazlul Haque, Moirabari village, Assam standing next to his invention.

Unlike in the west, not much mechanisation has taken place in the agriculture sector in the country.

“Even those using machines hold a grievance that they cannot use it all through the year, or they are not available on rent when needed.

Blissfully ignorant

“And our agriculture experts keep on harping that mechanisation helps increase production, blissfully ignorant about the lack of its popularity among farmers,” says Mr. Kishore Kalita, Fellow, National Innovation Foundation, Guwahati, Assam.

“While this is the stark reality in many places, on the other side there are hundreds of farmers-turned-innovators coming up with something new to address a specific problem in their locality or region.

“These inventors develop new devices practically every alternate day in the hope that they could solve not only their problems but also of others,” he adds.

Backyard scientists

These backyard scientists are in no way inferior to the other so called successful entrepreneurs. The only thing they lack is media support and funding, according to him.

Mr. Mohammed Fazlul Haque from Assam developed a paddy thresher that does not cut the paddy chaff into bits and pieces but throws them out whole.

Traditionally farmers thresh paddy by beating it on the ground and clean it by dropping it before a fan for removing the dirt and dust particles.

In some places, cattle are made to walk over the harvested paddy bunches and yet in some places pedal operated threshers are used.

Some farmers also thresh paddy using commercial threshers tailored for different kinds of crops.

These multipurpose threshers chop the paddy chaff into small bits and render them unfit for use as cattle do not eat these cut pieces. Farmers also cannot sell the cut pieces of straw thus losing additional revenue.

Benefits

According to Mr. Fazlul, by using his machine the whole paddy stalk can be obtained instead of chopped pieces. The nutritional value is conserved in the whole stalk and fed to cattle or sold.

The machine, fitted with a spike tooth cylinder, and semi cylindrical concave can be adjusted by changing the length of each spike.

There is no sieve or shaker and the grains fall directly from the concave gap and are cleaned by the blower just below the concave.

Power generation

It runs on 5 hp power (either stationary engine, electric motor or tractor can be coupled) and the average feed rate is 300 kg/h (paddy crop). It can also support feed rate up to 900 kg/h (mansuri variety grown in Assam).

Says Mr. Fazlul:

“Especially for paddy crop, right from raising the seedlings to harvesting, labour requirement is quite high and villages today face a serious shortage of manpower.

Per acre income

The returns from per acre yield for paddy are not so remunerative compared to the labour charge and market price one gets today. For those continuing to grow their paddy crops, my device definitely provides a good solution.”

The farmer adds that he started working on developing the machine from 2003 and after developing many prototypes came up with this final version in 2005.

According to a report from the Department of Agriculture, Assam, “The machine is the first indigenously manufactured thresher in the region and proves to be a gift to the paddy growers of the region.”

Made to order

Till date Mr. Fazlul has sold more than 75 machines in different parts of the state. He delivers the machines based on order in a week's time.

The unit priced at Rs. 35,000 (excluding prime mover and cost of transportation) was exhibited the Rashtrapati Bhavan recently at the grassroot innovation exhibition organised by National Innovation Foundation (NIF) India, which is also supporting him under the Micro Venture Innovation Fund.

For more information readers can contact Mr. Md. Fazlul Haque, Moirabari village, Morigaon district, Assam-782126, Mobile: 98648 67012.

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<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/seta/2010/08/12/stories/2010081251891400.htm>

Management of potato tuber moth

Potato tuber moth is a small grey brown moth. They are active at night, and rest under clods of earth or leaves during the daylight.

Tiny pearly white eggs are laid singly or in clusters of up to six on sheltered spots on the plants, on the ground near the plants, or on exposed potatoes. They are oval in shape and hatch in about a week.

Newly hatched larvae wander around briefly before eating their way into leaves, stems or tubers. The rest of the larval development (passing through four instars) takes place within the plant tissues, and takes up to three weeks (depending on temperature).

The caterpillars then leave the plant, moving down to the soil, and spin a loose cocoon to pupate.

Pupal development takes about a week, but may be much longer during winter. During the summer the whole cycle takes about a month but may extend to ten weeks during winter. Moths are short-lived

Other crops

Apart from potato this pest attacks tobacco "Apple of Peru" and Thornapple. There are occasional records of attack on brinjal and tomato.

Damage is caused by the tunnelling in leaves. The mines have a blotchy appearance, and are often associated with brown and dying bits of tissue.

One larva makes 3-4 tunnels, gradually filling them with excrement. They create twisting tunnels in fruits and tubers.

In potatoes, towards the end of the season, the caterpillars move down the plant towards the exposed tubers in the soil.

Here the first sign of infestation is the appearance of grey or whitish frass on the surface of the tubers, usually near the "eyes."

Infestation can continue in the potato store room infested potatoes soon become filled with unsightly black tunnels.

Management

Controlling alternate weed hosts, clean harvesting of potatoes and careful ridging during and at the end of the growing season.

Where potatoes are grown all year round control measures may need to be taken early.

Releasing egg-larval parasitoid. *Chelonus blackburni* at 30,000/ha twice, 40 and 70 days after planting helps in management.

N.D. SUNITHA & S.B. JAGGINAVAR

Assistant Professor of Entomology College of Agriculture Bijapur

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<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/seta/2010/08/12/stories/2010081251931400.htm>

FARM QUERY

Chaff cutter with lock

Has anyone developed a locking mechanism for chaff cutters?

L.V. Sharma

Meerut

Mr. Kamruddin Saifi from Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh has developed a mechanism consisting of combination of simple mechanical clutch and brake, which can be operated by a foot operated lever. When one presses the lever, flywheel of chaff cutter instantaneously gets locked and disengages the power source from the chaff cutter. For more details contact Mr. Kamruddin Saifi, Vikas Fabrication Works, Delhi-Meerut Road, Near Thana Muradnagar, Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh – 201206, mobile: 099975-07197.

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Reuters

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Inflation to fall; easing rates pressure: Montek

India's headline inflation should ease faster than expected by the central bank, as past actions take effect, and this will reduce the pressure to further tighten monetary policy, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission said.

Ahluwalia, the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, said wholesale price inflation would fall to 6 per cent by December compared with 10.55 per cent in June. The central bank expects that level only by end March 2011.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has raised key interest rates four times by a total of 100 to 125 basis points since March. It has said that the balance of policy has shifted to contain inflation, in double digits for five straight months.

"If it turns out that, say, four weeks down the road it clearly looks like inflation is coming down, then the pressure to tighten further may be less," Ahluwalia, an influential aide to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, told Reuters late on Tuesday.

Last week, RBI deputy governor Subir Gokarn said the central bank had done enough to tamp down inflation and now had a "handle on inflation."

That statement calmed markets that had feared further steep rate hikes to rein in inflation which is on target to hit 11 per cent in July.

The central bank will next review policy on Sept 16, but it is free to take action at any date if it so chooses.

Food inflation, which the government blames for these high levels of headline inflation, fell in late July on account of good monsoon rain, a fall in seasonal prices of fruits and vegetables, and the release of government food grains in the market.

But the central bank has highlighted rising demand-side pressures which could keep inflation at high levels.

Ahluwalia said in the interview that the central bank's actions to tighten policy were to take care of these factors and expected them to show results in the coming months.

"The RBI is just being cautious, they're giving themselves another three months (for 6 per cent inflation). I'm sticking my neck out."

He also noted that normal monsoon rains would boost agricultural production and that government was on track to meet its target of bringing down the fiscal deficit.

"All of these things taken together suggest we will get out of this high inflation phase by the end of the calendar year."

NO IMMEDIATE DIESEL DECONTROL

The Congress party-led government has been attacked by the opposition parties who say it has not done enough to control prices. The rivals have criticised a June decision to remove controls on petrol prices and are resisting a similar move on diesel.

Ahluwalia said there would not be any immediate freeing up of diesel prices, a step required to narrow the fiscal deficit and to improve oil retailers' profitability.

"It's not something we expect in the next two months or three months or four months ...

The most important thing for now is to have the petrol price increase understood, absorbed, and for people see it move up and down."

But Ahluwalia suggested a decline in crude oil prices could be used to push through the politically sensitive decision.

"If oil prices go down they should lower petrol prices and immediately link diesel at the existing prices, so that they can then move in tandem."

Ahluwalia said a proposed \$11 billion infrastructure debt fund was unlikely to come up this year, as several regulatory changes were still required to set it up.

"We should have a decision by the end of the year on regulatory changes needed to facilitate that actually happen."

The fund is crucial for upgrading India's creaky infrastructure to levels needed for double-digit economic growth and for developing the country's fledgling bond market.

Proposals to open up India's multi-brand retail sector to foreign investors too would not see progress soon, he said. India currently does not let firms like Wal-Mart run multi-brand stores in Asia's third-largest economy.

"I am glad they (government) have put out a discussion paper as it clearly gives the signal that this issue remains on the agenda and we are trying to evoke response."

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/585112.aspx>

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 71%

Wind: Normal

Thursday, Aug 12

Max Min

36.2° | 27.5°

Sunrise: 05:49

Sunset: 18:35

Barometer: 1003.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Friday, Aug 13

Max Min

36° | 27°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Aug 14	Sunday Aug 15	Monday Aug 16	Tuesday Aug 17	Wednesday Aug 18
33° 28°	31° 27°	29° 26°	29° 26°	31° 26°
Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

India wheat slightly up on higher export hopes

11 Aug 2010, 1613 hrs IST,REUTERS

MUMBAI: India's wheat futures were slightly higher on Wednesday afternoon on market hopes of exports to Asian neighbours after a drought forced Russia to temporarily halt shipments, but a bumper crop and stocks limited upside, analysts and trade said.

The September wheat contract on the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) was 0.53 percent higher at 1,263 rupees per 100 kg at 1:17 p.m.

India may allow more exports to Asian buyers as Russia's absence from the overseas markets will boost prices, trade said. Russia is the world's third biggest exporter of wheat.

The World Bank on Monday urged countries to refrain from imposing policies that could trigger a new global food price crisis as drought-hit Russia said it could extend a grain export ban into next year.

"It is almost certain that exports from India are to increase through diplomatic route... but we have to see if private exports are allowed," said an executive with a multinational trader. India has allowed the export of 300,000 tonnes of non-basmati rice and 200,000 tonnes of wheat to Bangladesh, a government statement said on Friday, as good rainfall and higher planting have boosted crop prospects.

India, which curbed grain exports in recent years to head off domestic price rises, made the announcement after two global suppliers cancelled deals to ship some 65,000 tonnes of Black Sea wheat to Bangladesh after Russia curbed grain exports.

Bangladesh, the world's fifth-biggest wheat importer, is expected to buy more than 3 million tonnes of the grain this year against 2.2 million tonnes the previous year. Trade expects India to allow up to 3 million tonnes of exports by end of December to manage stocks. India's wheat stocks on Aug. 1 were at 32.0 million tonnes against a target of 17.1 million tonnes, government sources said on Monday.

Indian government estimated in mid-July India's wheat harvest at a record 80.71 million tonnes.

Global markets await sugar supply from Indian mills

11 Aug 2010, 1334 hrs IST, S Sujatha, ET Bureau

COIMBATORE: Indian sugar mills are waiting for a green signal from the government to begin exports as enquiries pour in from Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Singapore, Malaysia and West Asia.

However, Coimbatore-based Sakthi Sugars has entered into a contract with Sucden, a French trading company, to export 70,000 tonne of white sugar to Pakistan from this August. It is under the tolling system, in which the company imports fresh raw sugar, refines and reexports it. With lower sugarcane area in 2009-10 compared to the previous three years, the Pakistan government has decided to import both raw sugar and white sugar for this season.

"It is time to allow exports as production is picking up in the country and there is a demand for white sugar in the international market," said Bannari Amman Sugars chairman SV Balasubramaniam. The mills will get better prices by exporting white sugar and it will directly result in proper payment to the cane growers, he added. "Even if the government is prepared to allow exports only from the coming season that starts in October, it can at least allow exports from mills that have export obligations," said Sakthi Sugars MD M Manickam. Sakthi Sugars needs to export 1.6 lakh tonne of white sugar under export obligations before March 2011.

Ponni Sugars MD and South Indian Sugar Mills Association president N Ramanathan said that every estimate was optimistic about the future sugar stock position in the country and there was no point in holding back exports. He said the mills in Tamil Nadu alone have more than 50% of total export obligation and a majority of the rest is due from millers in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Four years ago, the country allowed free import of raw sugar due to a shortage in the domestic market with an obligation to re-export it. "As the total quantity to be exported under the advance licence scheme (ALS) is around 10 lakh tonne, it is better to start early than dump everything in the international market at the last hour, which will drastically bring down the prices," added Mr Ramanathan. He said the country should make use of the present opportunity as the spot prices are 2 to 3 cents/pound stronger than the future prices. "Even though we always estimate the production a little elevated, be it on the lower side or the higher side, the coming season is going to see a surplus and so exports should be opened up now," he added.

The country is expected to produce 250 lakh tonne of sugar in the coming season and with the opening stock of 59 lakh tonne and import of around 15 lakh tonne, the availability of sugar will be around 325 lakh tonne, while the consumption will be around 225 lakh tonne. "So, ideally, out of 100 lakh tonne excess sugar, only 60 lakh tonne is needed as carryover stock. The remaining 40 lakh tonne can easily be allowed for exports," Mr Balasubramaniam added.

A commodity analyst told ET that as India is the second largest producer of sugar, all countries including Brazil, the leading producer, are keenly watching the prices in the Indian market. "The production estimate is high in India while countries like Pakistan are sure about the shortfall and thus, demand for Indian sugar is very high in the global market," she added. At the New York futures market, the white sugar was trading at around \$524 per tonne for October 2010 contract and at \$485 per tonne for December 2010 contract. In India, the spot sugar prices are around \$494- \$516 per tonne.

Darjeeling tea prices zoom on aggressive buying by exporters

11 Aug 2010, 1327 hrs IST, Sutanuka Ghosal, ET Bureau

KOLKATA: Aggressive buying by Tata Global Beverages, Hindustan Unilever, Global Exports & Marketing (Aditya Birla group company), Godfrey Phillips, Balaji Agro International, Raghunath Exports has pushed up Darjeeling tea prices by Rs 20 per kg at the auctions. The packeteers and exporters have become active at the auctions as the demand for Darjeeling tea has picked up in the international markets, particularly in the EU nations.

Darjeeling tea is exported to countries like the United States, UK, Germany, Japan, Netherlands and France. According to Tea Board statistics, the annual production of Darjeeling tea hovers around 9-9.5 million kg. "Despite the Euro crisis, Darjeeling tea has fetched good prices (€50-100 per kg) in the European nations," said Ashok Lohia, chairman, Chamong Tee Exports, the largest producer of Darjeeling tea. He added that prices of leaf-grade variety has shot up by 100 per kg.

"We had lost quite a significant volume of first- and secondflush of Darjeeling tea due to a drought-like situation in the beginning of the season. This had resulted in the revenue loss for the companies. We are trying to recover the lost during the March-June period. We are not sure whether we will be able to make up the loss," Mr Lohia said.

J Kalyansundaram, secretary, Calcutta Tea Traders Association, said that 10 leading packeteers and

exporters have become active at the Kolkata auctions. "The demand for Darjeeling tea is increasing in the domestic market as well. The purchasing power of the people has increased significantly. Therefore, they are looking at quality tea consumption," he said.

Pulses import bill may go up as rains damage Canada crop

11 Aug 2010, 0406 hrs IST,ET Bureau

NEW DELHI: Prices of pulses may rise marginally in import-dependent India due to heavy crop damage in the Saskatchewan and Manitoba provinces of Canada, which is one of the largest exporters of pulses.

India is also witnessing a steady increase in demand. Analysts say its bargaining power as the world's largest consumer of pulses may help the country to avoid a sharp increase in prices.

The country imported more than 8.8 million tonne of pulses worth over Rs 21,793 crore in the last three years to meet its domestic demand. Annually, about 12-15% of the country's total demand for pulses is met through imports.

"India is the largest producer of pulses in the world, but is not self-sufficient," food and civil supplies minister Sharad Pawar informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

"The gap between demand and supply is filled by import of variety of pulses from different countries," he said in a written reply. Heavy rains in Canada's pulses-growing provinces have resulted in an estimated 13% drop in pulses production this year to only 4.9 million tonne. Canada is among the largest exporters of pulses to India, along with Australia, Myanmar and the US.

Global commodity analysts have pegged potential losses to Canadian farmers at an estimated \$3 billion. The damage is exceptionally heavy since the area under pulses in the country for 2010-11 was higher by an estimated 16% compared to the previous year. Peas and lentils have been affected the most by heavy rains in the region.

But India could be insulated to an extent against a sharp hike in pulses import prices. For one thing, supply of pulses for export from Canada could be around the same as last year, thanks to ample carryover stocks, according to reports.

Analysts hold that India's biggest insulation against a big hike in pulses prices globally could be both a blessing and a bane: it's position as the world's largest consumer. As the biggest global consumer of

pulses, the country also indicates the price ceiling band in a global market where there is virtually nil trading on pulses.

“Unlike wheat, rice and more so, pulses, have a highly limited global trade. Less than 8% of rice production enters global markets, well below 10-12% for corn, about 18% for wheat, and nearly 30% for soybeans. It is India’s demand that sets the benchmark for acreage and prices in countries like Canada and Australia,” a Delhi based grain and pulses trader emphasized. There is some optimism on the home front, too. This kharif , acreage under various pulses went up to 57.23 lakh hectares (lakh ha) compared to 50.55 lakh ha during the same period last year. Rains in major kharif pulses growing regions have heightened sowing. While acreage under tur is reported at 26.56 lakh ha compared to only 21.76 lakh ha in July 2009, acreage under urad is reported at 12.83 lakh ha compared to a marginally higher 12.92 in July 2009. However, area under moong has risen to 13.60 lakh ha from 11.01 lakh ha last year.

However, domestic production of pulses has only been around 14-14.8 million tonnes in last three years whereas demand stands around 17-18 million tonnes , dwarfing the increase in acreage compared to the actual annual demand. But increasing home demand for pulses annually could well neutralise the advantage of increased home acreage. Pulses’ import went up to 3.5 million tonnes in 2009-10 fiscal from 2.48 MT in the previous financial year.

In value terms, the import was worth Rs 9,813crore in 2009-10 fiscal against Rs 6,246 crore in 2008-09.

In 2007-08 fiscal, total import of pulses stood at 2.8 million tonnes a Rs 5,374crore in value terms.

At home, the rising graph of pulses’ price has also been of immense political worry to the Centre.

However, data for 23rd July showed inflation for pulses falling from 28.98% to 23.79%.

Business Standard

Thursday, Aug 12, 2010

UP private mills owe Rs 237 crore to cane farmers

Virendra Singh Rawat / Lucknow August 12, 2010, 0:34 IST

Private sugar mills in the state owe cane farmers Rs 237 crore for the current, 2009-10 crushing season (which runs from October to September). While 72 of the 92 private mills owe none, the remaining 20 make for the entire debt.



UP sugarcane development and sugar industry minister Naseemuddin Siddiqui told the legislative assembly the government was exerting pressure on the private millers to clear the dues. Under the rules, the cane commissioner issues notices and recovery certificates (RC) against defaulting mills.

During the last season, UP millers, private and public sector units, had made a record payment of Rs 12,000 crore to the farmers, up from Rs 5,900 crore in the earlier season.

Siddiqui said the government was not considering any special package for farmers to augment cane production. UP is the country's second largest sugar producer after Maharashtra.

During the 2010-11 season, cane acreage in UP is likely to rise by 20 per cent to 2.15 million hectares. In 2009-10, sugar mills have produced about 5.2 million tonnes of sugar, compared to 4 million tonnes in 2008-09.

Total co-generation (of power, using bagasse residue from cane crushing) by state sugar mills was estimated at roughly 300 Mw. The mills are allowed to sell power to state-owned UP Power Corporation Ltd.

Refined palmolein declines on reduced stockists demand

Press Trust of India / Mumbai August 11, 2010, 17:54 IST

Refined palmolein prices declined at the oils and oilseeds market here today due to reduced demand from stockists and traders at existing higher levels.

Groundnut oil, on the other hand closed steady in the absence of necessary buying support.

Meanwhile, castor seeds bold and castor oil commercial edged higher owing to good off-take from industrial users. Castor seed futures slipped owing to weak export enquiries.

Linseed oil maintained a stable trend on lack of market moving factors.

In the edible section, refined palmolein fell by Rs 6 per ten kg to Rs 494 from yesterday's closing level of Rs 500, while groundnut oil held steady at Rs 870 per ten kg.

Turning to the non-edible section, castor seeds bold moved up by Rs 5 per 100 kg to Rs 3,725 from Rs 3,720 and castor oil commercial inched up to Rs 775, as against Rs 774 per ten kg previously.

Linseed oil closed unchanged at Rs 570 per ten kg.

Moving to futures section, castorseed's October contract resumed higher at Rs 3,725 and traded in a range of Rs 3,734 and Rs 3,690 before closing at Rs 3,698, as against Rs 3,720 previously, showing a loss of Rs 22 per tonne.

Non-basmati rice up on fresh buying

Press Trust of India / New Delhi August 11, 2010, 16:24 IST

Non-basmati rice prices rose by Rs 25 per quintal in the wholesale grains market today on fresh buying by stockists and hopes of pick up in demand.

Traders said fresh buying by stockists on expectations of pick up in demand mainly pushed up wholesale non-basmati rice prices.

In the rice section, permal raw, wand, sela and IR-8 were traded higher by Rs 25 each to Rs 1,875-1,925, Rs 1,950-2,100, Rs 2,175-2,225 and Rs 1,700-1,725 per quintal, respectively.

Following are today's quotations in Rs per quintal:

Wheat MP (desi) 1,700-1,800, wheat dara (for mills) 1,220-1,225 chakki atta (delivery) 1,225-1,230, atta Rajdhani (10 kg) 175, Shakti bhog (10 kg) 175, Roller flour mill 650-670 (50 kg), Maida 770-800 (50 kilos) and Sooji 880-900 (50 kg)

Basmati rice (Lal Quila) 9,300, Shri Lal Mahal 9,300, Super basmati rice 9,000, Basmati common 5,500-5,600, rice Pusa-(1121) 4,400-4,900, Permal raw 1,875-1,925, Permal wand 1,950-2,100

Sela 2,175-2,225 and Rice IR-8- 1,700-1,725, Bajra 990-1,000, Jowar yellow 1,400-1,500, white 2,450-2,500, Maize 1,065-1,075, Barley (UP) 1,090-1,110 and Rajasthan 1,080-1,090

Soyabean oil rises on selective buying

Press Trust of India / New Delhi August 11, 2010, 16:22 IST

In restricted activity, soyabean oil prices rose up to Rs 50 per quintal in the wholesale oils and oilseed market today on selective buying by vanaspati millers and rising demand for the upcoming festive season.

Marketmen said selective buying by vanaspati millers to meet the upcoming festive season demand mainly pushed up the wholesale soyabean oil prices.

In the edible section, soyabean refined mill delivery (Indore) and soyabean degum (Delhi) rose by Rs 50 and Rs 10 to Rs 4,950 and Rs 4,660 per quintal.

Following are today's quotations in Rs per quintal:

Oilseeds: mustard seed 2,500-2,600 and groundnut seed 2,100-2,850

Vanaspati ghee (15 litres tin) 750-860

Edible oils: Groundnut mill delivery (Gujarat) 8,500, groundnut Solvent refined (per tin) 1,450-1,460, Mustard Expeller (Dadri) 5,300, Mustard Pakki ghani (per tin) 710-865, Mustard kachi ghani (per tin) 865-965

Sunflower 6,300, Sesame mill delivery 5,900, soybean Refined mill delivery (Indore) 4,950 Soyabean degum (Delhi) 4,660, Crude Palm Oil (Ex-kandla) 3,980, Cottonseed mill delivery (Haryana) 4,500, Palmolein (RBD) 4,680, Rice bran (phy) 3,750 and Coconut (per tin) 1,050-1,080

Non-edible oils: Linseed 4,150, Mahuwa 4,000, Castor 7,700-7,800, Neem 3,750-3,850, Rice bran 3,300-3,400 and palm fatty 3,225-3,300

Oilcakes: groundnut de-husk 800-850, sesame 950-1,150, Mustard (new) 1,025-1,050, Mustard 1,200-1,210 and Cottonseed 1,075-1,175

Sugar ends flat in thin trade

Press Trust of India / Mumbai August 11, 2010, 16:38 IST



Sugar prices ended almost flat at the Vashi wholesale market here today due to uneven demand and supply, coupled with alternate bouts of buying and selling.

Medium sugar quality (M-30) was quoted at Rs 2,520/2,620 from yesterday's closing level of Rs 2,520/2,621.

However, small sugar quality (S-30) closed unaltered at Rs 2,500/2,565 per quintal.

Following are today's closing rates per quintal, with previous rates in brackets:

Small sugar (S-30) quality Rs 2,500/2,565 (Rs 2,500/ 2,565) and Medium sugar (M-30) quality Rs 2,520/2,620 (Rs 2,520/2,621)

Almond rises on tight supply

Press Trust of India / New Delhi August 11, 2010, 16:20 IST

Almond prices rose by Rs 100 per 40 kg bag in the national capital today on pick up in buying activity on firm demand.

Tight stocks followed by fall in supplies from overseas markets also supported the upside in the prices.

Almond (california) prices firmed by Rs 100 to Rs 10,600 per 40 kg and its kernel also moved up to Rs 365-370 from the previous close of Rs 360-365 per kg, respectively.

Marketmen said apart from restricted supplies from global markets, increased demand from stockists and retailers, also gave push to rising almond prices.

Following are today's quotations in Rs per 40 kg:

Almond (California) new Rs 10,600 Almond (gurbandi-new) Rs 4,600-4,700 almond (girdhi) Rs 2,300-2,400 and Abjosh Afghani Rs 7,000-16,000

Almond kernel in per kg (California) Rs 365-370, almond kernel (gurbandi-new) (kg) Rs 300-375

Chilgoza raw-new (1 kg) Rs 500 Chilgoza (roasted) (1 kg) Rs 825-875 Cashew kernel 1 kg (no 180) Rs 525-530 Cashew kernel (no 210) Rs 475-480 Cashew kernel (no 240) Rs 425-440 Cashew kernel (no 320) Rs 390-400 Cashew kernel broken 2 pieces Rs 320-325

Cashew kernel broken 4 pieces Rs 250-290 Cashew kernel broken 8 pieces Rs 220-250 Copra (qtl) Rs 5,600-5,700 Coconut powder (25 kg) Rs 1,750-1,850 Dry dates red (qtl) Rs 2,900-7,000 Fig Rs 6,000-14,000 Kishmish Kandhari local Rs 7,000-7,500

Kishmish Kandhari special Rs 12,000-20,000 Kishmish Indian yellow Rs 3,900-4,200 Kishmish Indian green Rs 5,300-6,800 Pistachio Irani Rs 750-900 Pistachio Hairati Rs 1,090-1,140 Pistachio Peshawari Rs 1,390-1,440 Pistachio Dodi (roasted) 520-600 Walnut Rs 110-170 Walnut kernel (1kg) Rs 300-500

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It is showering optimism on kharif

Chennai, Aug. 11

A beneficial monsoon is likely to result in a better kharif production this year, though there are a few hiccups in the form of deficient rainfall in the eastern parts of the country.

Production of rice has come under pressure because of this, as barely half the usual area has been covered under the cereal in Bihar.

In West Bengal, scanty rainfall in the southern parts is likely to affect paddy production as also of jute. But overall rice production may be higher than last year. In Gujarat, the monsoon has ensured that even the rabi crop could gain with half the reservoirs in the State filled to capacity. Pulses and cotton also seem to be gaining at the cost of grains as well as oilseeds.

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Time to get serious about agriculture

G. CHANDRASHEKHAR



Large sums are spent on 'creating irrigation potential' but the area under cultivation has shown no marked increase in recent years.

“Farm sector crucial for overall growth”; “Farm growth must go up to ensure food security; “Double farm growth rate to ensure food security” — these are some of the headlines in the press in recent weeks. These statements have been made by eminent persons holding exalted positions — the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia. What is new in these statements about agriculture and food security? Nothing, really. We are tired of hearing such platitudes. On the ground little has changed, and farm output continues to languish.

While the demand side, currently driven by rising incomes and population pressure, is indeed robust, the supply side has failed to match the pace of demand growth. This is inevitably leading to high levels of food inflation and its attendant problems, especially for the poor.

The annual average agricultural growth rate of the last ten years has been woefully low, at just 2.2 per cent. The Prime Minister wants this rate to double to 4 per cent. The Planning Commission Deputy Chairman too echoed a similar sentiment when he told journalists that a 4 per cent farm growth rate is a good target for the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. He admitted that the same 4 per cent target, fixed for the ongoing Eleventh Plan, could not be achieved so far.

Missing action

The tragedy is that the powers-that-be have, all along, been talking about agriculture, the need to raise growth rates, improve farmers' returns, and so on; but concrete action has been missing. The policy-makers would do well to first establish a system of monitoring and evaluation of numerous agriculture-related plans, schemes and programmes. Also, there has been little accountability on part of the government, in general, and of various departments, in particular. Ministers and officials ought to be made responsible and accountable for performance; otherwise, it would be naïve to expect substantial improvement.

Without doubt, huge amounts are being earmarked and spent on various agriculture-related programmes; but much of these seem to evaporate into thin air. Large sums are spent on irrigation (or ‘creating irrigation potential’); but the actual area under irrigated cultivation has shown no marked increase for any of the major field crops in recent years. Where has all the money gone? And who is responsible?

No breakthroughs

The same is the case with fertiliser subsidy. Enormous amounts have been paid to the fertiliser industry; but there is little to show by way of tangible results. Although rising, the per hectare use of fertilisers is still low; and there is an awkward skew in fertiliser consumption.

The budgetary outlays for farm research institutions have been rising; but have resulted in little by way of results. For instance, there has been no breakthrough in seed technology for oilseeds and pulses the last several years.

The Planning Commission now wants to retain 4 per cent as the agriculture growth target for the Twelfth Plan period. But what is the sense in fixing a target without the appropriate strategies in place to achieve it? The Planning Commission is yet to tell us what it will do differently in the next Plan period that will make that target achievable. So, it looks like no one within the government is truly committed to ensuring the sustained growth of the farm sector. The supply-side issues have been ignored or glossed over for so long that, with each passing year, the challenges are becoming more daunting.

Smug and deluded

Within government circles, there seems to be a smug feeling that we are food self-sufficient. This is probably because we do not import rice and wheat. The rate at which our consumption demand for fine cereals is rising and domestic output is trailing, in about three years from now, we may be forced to import rice and wheat regularly.

Currently, we are very large importers of edible oil and pulses. Sugar is imported from time to time, and so is wheat. Rice exports have dried up because of domestic pressure. The claim that India is self-sufficient in food is dubious, simply because the food needs of the people are far from satisfied. There are still a few hundred million poor people who have no access to sufficient food at affordable prices. On the other hand, public granaries are overflowing. But millions of tonnes of grains in government warehouses do not translate to food security.

The stocks have to be effectively deployed to fight poverty and malnutrition. In the latest Union Budget, the Government proposed to organise 60,000 'pulses and oilseed villages' in rain-fed areas during 2010-11 and provide an integrated intervention for water harvesting, watershed management and soil health to enhance the productivity of the dryland farming areas. A quick calculation shows that the Budget works out to Rs 50,000 per village — a mere pittance for achieving a laudable objective.

The same may be said of extending the new 'green revolution' to the eastern region comprising Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa, with a provision of Rs 400 crore for the year.

Meanwhile, the Minister for Food and Agriculture has realised that he has bitten off more than he can chew and has requested the Prime Minister to relieve him of some of his responsibilities. How things will pan out in the near future is anybody's guess.

Monsoon showers bounty on AP



Fingers crossed:A farmer passing through paddy nurseries that are ready for transplantation at Kundavari Kandrika near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh.

K.V. Kurmanath

Hyderabad, Aug 11

If drought was the problem for Andhra Pradesh farmers last year, this year, there can be no complaint on that count. But the recent heavy rains that is being witnessed of late is surely a source of worry.

The downpour caused by low-pressure has inundated crops on 44,000 hectares, including 28,000 hectares of cotton. "Officials have reported that flood waters might recede and that there may not be any crop losses," Mr N Raghuvveera Reddy, the Minister for Agriculture, said.

Farmers are also grappling with short supply and scarcity of fertilisers in different parts of the State. But Mr Reddy said the Government had set up a monitoring cell to ensure timely supply. "We estimate that the farmers need 11.2 million tonnes. We have made 12 mt of fertiliser ready," he said.

Rainfall under the influence of the South-West monsoon has been better than the average rainfall after two years. In the last five weeks since June 6, the average rainfall registered in the State has been 396 mm against the normal of 317 mm, an 'excess' of 25 per cent.

This is compared with 153 mm in 2009 and 311 mm rain fall the year before. All the major reservoirs in the State hold 609.27 tmc of water as against 507.53 tmc.

'No Damage'

According to the latest information reaching the Agriculture Ministry, incessant rains across the State in the last few days due to low pressure did not have any adverse impact on crops. "We are hopeful that floods caused by last week rains will recede soon and cause no damage to the standing crops," a senior official of the Ministry told Business Line.

Farmers in the Godavari delta were forced to stop sowing of paddy temporarily due to incessant rains last week. "Progress of monsoon rains helped accelerate the sowings of paddy, oilseeds and cotton to reach a peak. Maize is at knee-height stage, while groundnut is at vegetative-to-flowering stage and sugarcane is at cane development stage. Early kharif paddy is being taken up in Nellore district. Overall, the status of crops is satisfactory," the official said.

Cropped area

As a result of abundant rains, the total sown area as on date is 59 lakh hectares (lh) as against the normal (to date) of 56 lh and 39.5 lh in 2009. The State grows crops to an extent of 78.23 lakh ha in a season. "The farmers have covered 75 per cent of the area. We expect that the remaining area will be covered in the next few days," he said.

Coverage of crops such as cotton, groundnut, redgram, chillies and turmeric have either been normal or higher. Cotton has been sown on 16 lh as against 10.77 lh; groundnut on 12.57 lh (12 lh)' redgram on 5.13 lh (3.45 lh) and chillies on 0.38 lh (0.41 lh).

While paddy has been sown on 8 lh against 10 lh, maize on 4.13 l(4.70 lh) and sugarcane 1.77 lh (2.19 lh) were sown marginally lesser than the as-on-date averages. The officials, however, felt that the gaps would be covered in the next few days.

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Higher basmati share may hit Punjab, Haryana rice production



Harish Damodaran

New Delhi, Aug. 11

There has been a significant increase in the share of basmati varieties in the total area planted to paddy in Punjab and Haryana this year. That could, in turn, have implications for the country's overall rice production.

Farmers in Punjab have sown 27.5 lakh hectares (lh) under paddy this time, compared with 28.02 lh in 2009. Haryana, too, has reported a decline, from 12.05 lh to 11.5 lh. However, both States have witnessed higher basmati acreages.

"I expect basmati's share in total paddy area to go up from 50 to 60 per cent," said Mr B.S. Duggal, Additional Director of Agriculture (Extension), Haryana. In absolute terms, it means a rise from six lh to about 6.9 lh.

Punjab's basmati coverage last year stood around 5.1 lh. "This time, we might exceed 6.5 lh," according to the State's Director of Agriculture, Dr B.S. Sidhu. In other words, basmati will occupy a quarter of Punjab's paddy area.

Part of the expansion in basmati plantings has been the outcome of floods in the first week of July, inundating large areas in northern Haryana and South-East Punjab.

Only alternative

The heavy downpour and accompanying breach of canal embankments damaged an estimated 1.9 lh of crop area in Punjab and 0.85 lh in Haryana — where farmers had already undertaken transplanting of normal high-yielding paddy varieties.

“This area could not have been re-transplanted with non-basmati, as the window for it (the whole of June) was over. The only alternative was to go for basmati varieties, where the regular transplantation schedule is from July 1 to end-July. And this time, transplanting went on till the first week of August,” noted Mr Vijay Sethia, President, All-India Rice Exporters Association.

Will this late transplanting impact yields? “It is quite possible that the farmer who usually gets 18-20 quintals an acre from Pusa-1121 basmati may harvest 2-2.5 quintals less this year,” pointed out Mr Anil Mittal, CMD of KRBL Ltd.

Moreover, even within basmati, there has been a distinct acreage shift from the relatively high-yielding Pusa-1121 and Pusa Basmati-1 to traditional varieties, especially HBC-19/CSR-30.

Price factor

Mr R.S. Seshadri, Director of Tilda Riceland Pvt Ltd, reckons that the area under traditional basmati may well have doubled this time, while falling by 35-40 per cent for Pusa Basmati-1 and 15-20 per cent in the case of Pusa-1121. This shift has been prompted largely by prices.

Traditional basmati paddy is now fetching Rs 35 a kg, having started at Rs 25 in October and scaling Rs 38-plus in January. Pusa-1121 prices ruled at Rs 16-18 a kg in October and briefly touched Rs 28 in January before falling to Rs 20-21 under the weight of a bumper crop.

Last year, the country produced an unprecedented nine crore bags of Pusa-1121 paddy, translating into 22.5 lakh tonnes (lt) of rice. As against this, traditional basmati output was a mere 1.5 crore bags or 3.75 lt rice (one bag of paddy is equivalent to 2,500 tonnes rice).

The trade believes that out of the nine crore bags of Pusa-1121, about three crore would be carried over to the new season. On the other hand, there will be very little opening stocks of traditional basmati.

“Farmers foresee better price prospects in traditional varieties compared to Pusa-1121, where the huge overhang from the 2009 crop could be a dampener,” said a Delhi-based exporter.

On a wider note, the higher share of basmati (and within that, traditional varieties) in their total paddy acreage is likely to result in a lower rice output from the two granary States this year. In 2009-10, Punjab produced an all-time-high 122.36 lt and so did Haryana, at 36.25 lt. This came even as the country's rice

production fell from 991.82 Mt to 891.27 because of drought in major growing States such as Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar and Andhra Pradesh (AP).

This year, production is set to recover in AP, but not so spectacularly in UP, Bihar or West Bengal, where the rains haven't been all that good. Combined with lower output in Punjab and Haryana, the country may produce more than last year, but not as much as the record level of 2008-09.

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Slack export demand drags basmati rice a tad

Karnal, Aug 11

With sentiments being low and slackness in export demand, the basmati rice market dropped marginally from their upper levels while the non-basmati variety ruled firm, here on Wednesday.

The price of Pusa-1121 (steam) ruled between Rs 5,000 and Rs 5,180 a quintal. Pusa-1121 (sela) was quoted at Rs 4,000-4,085 a quintal; while Pusa-1121 (raw) was quoted at Rs 5,000-5,180. Pusa (sela) variety was quoted at Rs 3,085 a quintal and Pusa (raw) ruled between Rs 3,385 and Rs 3,920 a quintal.

Basmati Sela ruled between Rs 6,000 and Rs 6,050 a quintal; while basmati raw was quoted at Rs 7,110 a quintal. On the other hand due to the uncertain weather, fresh arrivals from Uttar Pradesh dropped marginally and the prices of non-basmati variety ruled firm.

The Sharbati sela variety ruled around Rs 2,825 and Sharbati steam was quoted at Rs 2,900-3010. Permal (PR) sela was quoted at Rs 2,000-2,150; PR (raw) at Rs 2,060-2,265; and PR (steam) at Rs 2,210-2,365. Broken such as Tibar ruled at Rs 3,480 a quintal, Dubar at Rs 2,830, and Mongra at Rs 2,020.

Mr Amit Kumar, Proprietor, Hanuman Rice Trading Company, told Business Line that with low export demand, market sentiment is low. Inventories are already high and new arrivals continue to flood the market. In such a situation, every trader wants to clear the old stocks so that they can have liquidity to purchase the new arrivals, he said.

He further said that new season might witness some rally in the price of export varieties as there was not much sowing of Pusa varieties this year.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, around 8,000 bags (60 kg each) of Govinda paddy arrived in the market. The early variety paddy was quoted Rs 1,045 a quintal. Because of low arrivals from Uttar Pradesh, Govinda paddy witnessed a good rally in the prices. Millers lifted the new arrivals.

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Poor rainfall could mar Bengal's rice output

Transplantation likely to be delayed, say experts.



Rain disappoints: The farmers in southern parts of West Bengal are struggling with low rainfall in this monsoon. As a result, they might face setback in paddy farming this time.

Shobha Roy

Kolkata, Aug.11

The lower-than-anticipated rainfall so far in the southern districts of West Bengal could be a dampener for the major kharif crops such as paddy and jute grown in the State. Rainfall is deficient by about 30-35 per cent in the southern districts, while the northern districts have received excess rainfall.

The sowing of paddy has been on time. However, the transplantation could be delayed due to delayed rains, according to experts. West Bengal is the country's largest rice growing State.

"Initially we were estimating 35-40 per cent rainfall deficit in several districts of south Bengal. However, with some improvement in the second week of July, we've revised our estimate and put the deficit at around 30-35 per cent," said Mr Angshujyoti Das, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, ExpressWeather. Rainfall, he hoped, would pick up by the second and third week of August.



Paddy acreage

Given the current trend, the total paddy acreage in the State could come down by about 10-15 per cent this year, according to analysts.

The total area under rice in the State is about 59 lakh hectares, and the State produces about 16 million tonnes rice every year in three seasons — Aus, Aman and Boro.

According to provisional Government data, the total rice production in the State fell about 10 per cent in 2009-10 due to poor rainfall and was at about 14.9 million tonnes. “Monsoon is delayed slightly, but we can expect good rains in August and September. However, paddy production in the State could drop by about ten per cent due to the delayed monsoon,” said Mr Badruddin, Senior Research Analyst, Agriculture, Angel Broking.

Impact

Though it is difficult to predict the exact impact of poor rainfall on paddy transplantation now, in certain districts, the transplantation has been slow and seedlings have withered and died due to scanty rain, said Mr Pranab Chatterjee, Director of Farms, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya.

However, there is still time as transplantation could be done till middle of August.

“The damage will not be much; the shortfall can be made good if there is sufficient rainfall now,” he added.

Burdwan, Birbhum, Nadia and Hooghly are the four high rice producing districts in the State, and make up 27 per cent of the total rice acreage, and 32 per cent of the total production. Districts such as 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Bankura, Malda, Midnapore, Dinajpur and Howrah, fall under the medium productivity areas.

Poor rainfall

The poor rainfall could also affect the retting process of jute. Post-harvesting, jute has to undergo retting process which needs plenty of water. Insufficient monsoon might impact the quality of jute produced as the retting would have to be done in muddy water, according to a senior official in the jute industry.

“While there has been excessive rainfall in north Bengal, there has been a severe shortfall in south Bengal, particularly Nadia and Murshidabad, which are major jute growing areas. The crop is ready to be harvested but in absence of adequate rainfall, retting has become difficult,” he said. The process of retting usually begins by August 1 and gets completed by September 15.

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Turmeric futures mixed; sales stalled at Erode

Erode, Aug 11

Turmeric futures witnessed a mixed trend on Wednesday with August contracts rising on short-covering, while the rest dropping on hopes of a bumper crop.

Spot prices in Nizamabad, too, dropped to Rs 14,897.35 a quintal.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, August contracts increased Rs 48 a quintal to Rs 14,140.

Meanwhile, over here the sale of turmeric in all the four auction centres was cancelled on Wednesday. The sale is likely to resume on Thursday.

According to Mr V. Ravishankar, President of the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the sale in the private market was cancelled on Tuesday due to the absence of weighing employee of the regulated marketing committee that conducts the sale.

Further, on Wednesday protesting against the shifting of the Regulated Market from the present place in Park Road, Erode, to Sunnambu Odai area, located 7 km away from Erode, the traders decided to boycott the auction. Therefore, all the auction sales in three markets of Erode Turmeric Merchants Market, the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Society and the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society were cancelled.

He said turmeric traders were opposed to shifting of the Regulated Market due to the distance, as they would have to rush to file tenders before 1 p.m. Sales in the three local markets would be completed by then and therefore, it is a problem. Further, he said there is no space in the new premises to keep the stocks, as it has only 25,000 sq ft space whereas the older one had over 30,000 sq.ft..

He said turmeric traders and the market authorities will meet the district collector on August 18, when a final solution could be arrived at. Till then, they would participate in all the auctions.

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Pulses lead sowing surge in Karnataka



A. Srinivas

Bangalore, Aug 11

Sowing of pulses, cereals, oilseeds and cash crops is up 30 per cent over the kharif last year, thanks to a near-normal monsoon since June 1. Of the 30 districts, 26 have received normal or excess rain. The rain-deficit districts are Chikmagalur, Kodagu, Hassan and Dakshina Kannada.

Area Sown

Total area sown under all crops, as on July 27, was nearly 11 lakh hectares (lh) more at about 45 lh, compared with sowing between June 1 and July 27 last year. Of the 11 lh increase in sowing area, pulses accounted for nearly five lh, cereals three lh, cash crops, such as cotton, sugarcane and tobacco, 1.5 lh and oilseeds a little under two lh.

According to the weather and crop bulletin of the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre, area sown under rice and potato are below last year's levels. There has been an 80,000 ha drop in the area sown under rice, at 3.29 lh in relation to the coverage during the same two-month period in 2009. Potato area is less than 24,000 ha against a coverage of nearly 46,000 ha at this time last year.

Dr D.K. Dharmarajan, Additional Director of Agriculture in the State Government, said: "In the case of paddy, the area is likely to be covered by the end of August. Transplanting will be taken up in the later part of the month. Except for coastal districts, planting is yet to be taken up in other areas."

Shift

He added: "There has been a shift from hybrid jowar and sunflower to maize, red gram and cotton. The shift is on account of better prices and good rainfall distribution in July in the case of red gram. There has been a slight decrease in soyabean coverage on account of a dry spell in June in the Belgaum and Dharwad regions. Potato sowing in Hassan has been hit by wilt disease. It is, therefore, preferable that crops are rotated."

Dr H. Shivanna, Director, Research, University of Agriculture Sciences, Bangalore, said: "Sowing has proceeded satisfactorily in all parts of the State. It is picking up in the southern regions of Bangalore rural, Kolar and Mysore. Dams are at saturation levels. Area covered under maize is increasing. Pulses, particularly red gram, are being cultivated even as a sole crop." The area under pulses has nearly doubled over the last year, from 4.98 lakh ha to 9.49 lakh ha. Of this, area sown under tur dal and greengram have more than doubled from 1.95 lakh ha to 4.14 lakh ha, and from 1.65 lakh ha to 3.51 lakh ha, respectively.

The area under onion has tripled over last year's levels at this time of the year, or from about 31,000 ha to nearly 93,000 ha. Chilli sowing area has increased five times from over 15,000 ha to about 76,000 ha.

The area under maize has increased 52 per cent from 6.25 lakh ha to 9.59 lakh ha.

Area sown under ragi is less than half of last year's level, while that under bajra has more than tripled from 0.69 lakh ha to 2.37 lakh ha

There has been a sharp increase in area under sunflower, from 1.52 lakh hectares to 3.09 lakh ha. Soyabean area has increased by about 40,000 ha to 2.23 lakh ha.

According to the bulletin, sowing status was normal or above normal in 18 districts and below normal or negligible in 11 districts.

The districts in the latter category are: Chitradurga, Gulbarga, Koppal, Raichur, Bangalore (Urban), Bangalore (Rural), Tumkur and Kodagu.

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Rabi crops also likely to gain in Gujarat

RAINING BENEFITS.



Virendra Pandit

Gandhinagar, Aug 11

With the targeted kharif sowing area almost completed and around 70 per cent of the average annual rain already drenching Gujarat, the State is expecting to reap a rich harvest of crops in about 85 lakh hectares (lh) area, or even break all previous records.

All the 226 talukas of Gujarat have reported good rains and the scenario is expected to continue until end of the season as sowing continues. Till last week, sowing had been completed in nearly 75 lh and is expected to continue until it equals or crosses the last year's 85 lh.

Against the average 900 mm of rainfall in the last 10 years, the State has so far received nearly 600 mm rainfall, official sources told Business Line. Reports from across the State indicated that cotton has so far been sown in 25 lh, followed by groundnut in 17 lh, paddy (rice) in four lh and castor in three lh, besides other crops.

As the monsoon progresses, more sowing is expected in additional cultivable land. In particular, the coastal Kutch-Saurashtra region, which reeled under severe drought until a few years ago, has received excess rains: Jamnagar (150 per cent), Kutch (115 per cent) and Junagarh (110 per cent).

But the rain has been fairly widespread over the last two months with sunny days alternating. This has prevented crops from any damage and there have been no such report, the sources said.

In addition to kharif crops, the State is expected to reap a better rabi crop as well. Since the widespread and bountiful monsoon has recharged groundwater sources and made additional irrigation unnecessary for the kharif crop, the water thus saved in the wells and reservoirs is expected to be used during rabi sowing. Wheat sowing during kharif, for instance, is expected to return to the 34 lh level after falling to 25 lh last year. Of the 200-odd small, medium and big dams and reservoirs, over half are already filled to the brim. The State is known for focusing on cash crops, sometimes replacing even traditional crops. Last season, Gujarat is estimated to have produced 78.75 lakh bales cotton (70.13 lakh bales in 2008-09), 17.41 lakh tonnes (lt) groundnut (26.60 lt), 27.39 lt wheat (25.40 lt), 13 lt rice (12.25 lt), 7.33 lt castor (8.51 lt) and 1.28 lt of jeera (cumin).

The area under major kharif crops in Gujarat has changed in view of the farmers' choice to produce-on-demand and the new crops' cash potential. Thus, the area under rice this year could be 6.91 lh (7.22 lh in 2008-09), wheat 9.13 lh (10.91 lh), groundnut 17.86 lh (19.07 lh) and cotton 26.25 lh (23.52 lh).

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Pepper futures fall on liquidation

G. K. Nair

Kochi, Aug. 11

Pepper futures, after witnessing high volatility, dropped in the closing hours on Wednesday on bearish activities and liquidation.

Speculators holding long positions and not wanting to take delivery resorted to liquidation and that in turn pulled the market down.

Availability of spot pepper continued to remain tight and, in fact, the fundamentals are known to few people only, market sources told Business Line. August contract on NCDEX dropped by Rs 102 to close at Rs 18,865 a quintal.

September and October were down by Rs 115 and Rs 116 respectively to close at Rs 19,100 and Rs 19,339 a quintal.

Total turnover increased by 1,457 tonnes to 22,450 tonnes. Total open interest fell by 313 tonnes to 17,629 tonnes.

August open interest fell by 570 tonnes to 6,352 tonnes.

September and October increased by 165 tonnes and 65 tonnes respectively to 8,942 tonnes and 1,525 tonnes.

Spot prices remained unchanged as there were no sellers.

They were not interested to sell at lower levels. Spot prices were at Rs 19,300 (MG 1) and Rs 18,800 (ungarbled) a quintal. Indian parity in the international market stood at \$4,300-4,325 a tonne (c&f) and remained out-priced.

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Call to improve soil organic matter content

Our Bureau

Hyderabad, Aug. 11

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has called for efforts to improve the soil organic matter content of tropical soils.

“Plant nutrition is very tightly linked with soil organic matter content as it drives the complete cycle of plant nutrient release and availability. The challenge lies in improving the soil organic matter content of tropical soils,” Dr William D. Dar, Director-General of ICRISAT, said.

Addressing the inaugural of the three-day international conference on plant nutrients here on Wednesday, he said soils in the dryland tropics were not only thirsty but hungry too and were under high pressure as a large number of people were dependent on it for their food, fibre, and fuel needs.

Quoting FAO estimates, he said there were 102-crore undernourished people in the world as of 2009. China and India accounted for over 36.3 crore hungry people, followed by 20.4 crore in sub-Saharan Africa.

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has asked policy makers to increase their investment in agricultural research and encourage private sector players to bring down the number of malnourished people in the country.

“We need to adopt a five-point agenda that includes increasing investment in research and encouraging private players and philanthropic organisations to invest in agriculture,” Dr Dar said, addressing another conference held recently at the institute.

He said the MDG target could still be attained if the ‘business-as-usual’ approach was replaced by a new strategy to fight hunger.

Dr Dar and Mr K. S. Raju, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of Nagarjuna Fertilisers, presented the International Plant Nutrition Award to Prof. Maarten J Chrispeels, an agriculture scientist from the US.

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Maharashtra looks to bumper harvest



Rahul Wadke

Mumbai, Aug 11

The rain gods have been very kind to Maharashtra. In the last two months, out of the 35 districts, 29 have received over 100 per cent rainfall.

Farmers across the State have completed kharif planting.

The Agriculture Secretary, Mr Nanasheeb Patil, told Business Line that with good rains across the State and even in drought-prone areas of Marathwada and Vidahrbha, there will be bumper harvest for the farmers, "Crop planting across the State is almost 100 per cent complete," he said.

Rainfall

According to a State Government's note on the status of monsoon and crops, the rainfall in June was 218 mm, 98 per cent of the normal rainfall.

In July, it was 506 mm, 29 per cent higher than normal. During June–July, the State received 724 mm of rainfall, 18 per cent higher than normal rainfall.

Kharif crops are usually planted over 132.34 lakh hectares (lh) and this year until August 9, about 145.3 lh have been brought under various crops.

In some areas of Konkan, green shoots have already started appearing in rice fields, while crops of green gram (moong) and black gram (urad) are flowering.

Growth of soyabean, cotton and sorghum is also satisfactory, the note said.

Cultivated area under major crops like pigeon pea (tur) and cotton has increased. The pigeon pea area which was about 11.16 lh last year has increased to 13.60 lh. In 2009, cotton was spread over 35.03 lh while this year it has been planted over 39.50 lh.

Pest Attacks

The note also said that in the districts of Nagpur, Amravati, Latur and Kolhapur, some of the crops are suffering from worm infestations, while in Amravati, Latur and Nagpur, cotton crops have been attacked by pests like Aphid.

But the attacks are not threatening and can be easily controlled, the note observed. In spite of the good rains and smooth planting in the State, a section of the State Government officials are worried as getting labourers for agricultural work has become difficult.

The area under pulses has increased six per cent to 25.9 lh, while coverage of cereals is lower by 19 per cent at 40.6 lh. But their sowing is likely to continue for another month or so.

The acreage under sugarcane has increased 33 per cent to 9.45 lh.

Labour Shortage

Officials said that farmers will reap a bumper crop but with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme (MGREGA) running in the State along with the State Employment Guarantee schemes, getting labourers for kharif harvesting could be a nightmare.

“With the labourers getting 30 kg of foodgrain for free and easy work at hand, why will they go in search of work? Free grains keep them away from farm work,” an official said.

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Govt plans comprehensive animal welfare Act

New Delhi, Aug. 11

The Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday that the Government would come forward with a comprehensive Animal Welfare Act with “steep penalties”, even though it has no agenda to amend the existing Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act that came into being in 1960 with a very small penalty

Replying to a spate of supplementaries on the main question raised by Mr Ramshanker Rajbhar, the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, said the country has an elaborate legal network and an institutional network for implementing both the law as well as the rules.

He said the Animal Welfare Board of India has registered 2,800 NGOs on its books out of which some 1,700 are goshalas which take care of migrant, roaming, unacknowledged animals on the streets. He said his Ministry provides every year Rs 13 crore by way of Plan and non-Plan support.

He said despite all these assistance, there were still visible cases of cruelty, besides organised cases of cruelty such as bull-fighting which is an accepted cultural practice in many States.

When Mr. N.S.V.Chitthan (Congress) said that in Tamil Nadu bull-fighting is celebrated during the festival of harvest, Mr Ramesh said that "not every cultural practice is sustainable". When the member said that cannot be treated as cruelty to animals, the Minister said that it has also seen the death of human beings. That was why, he said, the Animal Welfare Board moved the apex court in 2007 to ban jallikattu. But in response to this, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed regulations.

Mr Ramesh said that the Catalonia Province of Spain, long associated with gory bull-fighting, has banned bull-fighting and why not Tamil Nadu ban jallikattu?

When Ms. Maneka Gandhi (BJP) sought to know whether he would ban animal sacrifice practised across the country, the Minister said that a number of States have banned animal sacrifice in religious places.

He said that he would send an advisory to all the States to emulate the States which have already banned animal sacrifices.

The Minister also voiced concern, in response to a query from Mr Lalu Prasad (RJD), over the Sonpur Mela (Bihar) where elephants are traded. He said the Ministry of Environment and Forests has set up an Expert Group on Project Elephant which would submit its report by the end of this month. As long as the Sonpur Mela remains, the problem of elephant trade with all its attendant consequences would continue, he said adding that is why he has asked the group to look at the future of Sonpur Mela. The Minister also described as "a matter of great shame" the manner in which elephants are treated in some of the most sacred temples of the country.

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Depleting stocks boost soyabean

Indore, Aug 11

Soyabean prices ruled higher on Wednesday, rising Rs 40-50 a quintal on increased purchasing at plant level despite higher arrivals.

In the futures market, soyabean prices quoted at Rs 2,100-21,40, up Rs 50 from the Tuesday's close. This was a correction from the decline witnessed on Tuesday.

Plants delivery rates were Rs 2,100-2,140, up Rs 25. Soyabean August futures on the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange closed at Rs 2,171, up Rs 21.

With stocks of soyabean depleting and increase in purchasing at plant level, soyabean prices are bound to rise further in the coming days till new crops arrive in the market sometime in October, a trader said.

The recent spell of rains and hope of bumper crops have forced the farmers to release their old stock. This has led to rise in the arrival of soyabean in various mandis of the State. The Indore mandi on Wednesday witnessed an arrival of 7,000 bags (of 90 kg). The arrival at various other markets in the State was one lakh bags.

Supported by good rains, the coverage of soyabean in Madhya Pradesh this year has increased to 53 lakh hectares against a target of 50 lakh hectares set by the State Government.

Soya oil prices also perked up on increased festival demand in the domestic market as well as firmness in the international market. Spot rates for soya refined oil were Rs 486-490, up Rs 6, while soya solvent rates were also quoted Rs 4 higher at Rs 460-465.

On the Dalian Commodity Exchange, soyabean oil for delivery in May lost 0.6 per cent to 8,166 yuan.

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Pakistan floods offer hope for Indian basmati



Harish Damodaran

New Delhi, Aug. 11 Basmati exporters here are keeping a close eye on the impact of the recent floods in Pakistan that have caused extensive damage to crops, particularly cotton, rice, sugarcane and maize.

Lower than india

During the year ended June 30, 2010, Pakistan exported 1.05 million tonnes (mt) of basmati rice, valued at \$875 million.

This was lower than India's shipments, which, during 2009-10 (April-March) were estimated at slightly above 2 mt, worth \$ 2.28 billion.

Cheaper offer

"Although Pakistan's exports are below that of India, it is able to offer material at a cheaper price, courtesy of its weak currency. As a result, it is setting the world price, much to our disadvantage," a Delhi-based exporter pointed out.

Pakistan exported basmati rice at an average \$830 a tonne in 2009-10, as against India's \$ 1,150. "We are still ahead mainly because of Pusa-1121. It is largely this variety that has led to our exports more than doubling in the last two years", the exporter added.

To what extent will the floods change the picture? "It is difficult to say, more so when the bulk of their rice exports (4.6 mt in 2009-10) consists of non-basmati. Basmati shipments per se may not be all that affected", the exporter added.

AFFECTED BELT

According to Mr Saqib Choudhary, Director of the Karachi-based Amir Rice Trading Company, the floods have mainly affected the belt in Punjab province along the Jhelum river, from Mandi Bahawaludin to Jhang, Sargodha, Layyah, Bhakkar and Rahim Yar Khan.

“My guess is that about 12-15 per cent of the area sown to coarse (non-basmati) varieties in this stretch would have been destroyed. The damage may be only 8-10 per cent in respect of basmati,” he told Business Line over phone.

SAFER AREA

In the other major rice-growing belt, which is along the Chenab (covering Gujrat, Daska, Sialkot, Narowal and Muridke), “there has been no major damage”, Mr Choudhary added.

DAMAGE TO COTTON

Our Chennai Bureau reports: Meanwhile, Pakistan's deadliest floods is feared to have damaged at least 30 per cent of the cotton crop.

The Pakistan Government had fixed a target of 140 lakh bales for cotton production.

Industry experts and government officials now say that the target is unlikely to be met.

In fact, with India looking at a better crop, possibly a record 325 lakh bales (of 170 kg), Pakistan could turn to India to meet the demand for its spinners.

The damage to Pakistan's sugarcane crop has opened up a scenario where Indian mills can look forward to sell sugar to the neighbouring country as it happened a few yeas ago.

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Kerala likely to see drop in rice deficit



C.J. Punnathara

Kochi, Aug 11

Good rains mean a good agricultural crop for Kerala. "There were substantial rains over the high and midlands which promises a good agricultural crop this rainy season. Although there was a small deficit over the low lands, the recent revival in the monsoon rains are expected to make up for the early shortfall," Dr P.V. Balachandran, Director-Extension of the Kerala Agriculture University, said.

And it is not the rain gods alone who are smiling at the foodgrain deficit State. The falling trend in area under rice, the staple grain of the State, has not only been arrested but reversed. Both production and productivity of rice, which again had been falling for the past couple of decades has now shown signs of revival and growth. The area under rice cultivation in the State had fallen sharply from 8.7 lakh hectares (lh) in 1970-71 to 2.3 lh in 2007-08. Production had also plunged from 13.5 lakh tonnes (lt) to 5.8 lt in the same time period. But a slow and steady recovery was evident by 2009-10 when the area under rice had grown close to 20,000 hectares and production had grown 1.25 lt. The recovery trends in area, production and productivity are quite likely to continue into the current year as well, Dr Balachandran said.

Thanks to the good rain, more areas are likely to come under a second rice crop this season, he pointed out. Although there is hardly any reversion of area from cash crops to paddy, the area lying fallow has been coming down. More panchayats are now declaring themselves to be fallow-free land. Productivity of rice has meanwhile grown from 2.3 to 2.5 tonnes a hectare.

But despite the good rains, production as well as productivity, Kerala will continue to remain a rice-deficit State. Against a production of around seven lt, the State consumes close to 40 lt of rice a year.

The spell of good rains, especially to the midlands and highlands seems to have brought cheer not only to the paddy farmers but also to the commercial crop cultivation in the State. Although the rains have hindered tapping in rubber plantations, the increased soil humidity and ground water recharge promises good yields in the months to come. Unlike the plains, the rains have been persistent in the highlands growing cardamom.

The rains seem to have been adequate for this extremely water sensitive crop and farmers are expecting a good harvest.

But if the yields are to be sustained, the coming North-East monsoon also has to be bountiful, some of the farmers said.

There were some concerns among cardamom farmers when the early rains abated, but were re-assured when the spell of rain intensified later.

The yields of other highland crops such as coffee and tea are also expected to get a boost on account of the good rains. The high prices have resulted in the farmers putting in that extra effort to get a better crop. Being mainly a midland and highland crop, production of pepper is also expected to be higher this year. While docile pepper prices have unnerved several farmers, the recent rally to cross Rs 200 a per kg has been a morale booster for the farmer. Two factors, the good rains in the highlands and midlands and the high prices for most cash crop are likely to drive up the production of cash crops from Kerala this year.

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M.P. bets its hopes on higher yield



Purnima S. Tripathi

New Delhi, Aug 11

Madhya Pradesh, the soyabean hub, accounts for over 85 per cent of the oilseed production (a major kharif crop) in the country. It is looking forward to a good kharif crop this season, as near normal rains, though beginning slightly late, have ensured that almost 90 per cent of the targeted area for major kharif crops has been sown.

With intermittent rains, the yield is likely to be “much better than last year,” says the State's Agriculture and Farmer Development Minister, Mr Brijendra Pratap Singh. According to the latest State Government data, against the targeted sowing in 108.25 lakh hectares (lh), 98.50 lh have already been covered, with still a month to go. “Sowing continues till the end of August and rains are still happening. So we still have a month to go and it is likely to exceed our expectations,” says the Minister. As for the yield, since the rainfall has been “good,” he says it is likely to exceed that of last year.

Soya sowing

Interestingly, while almost the entire country was reeling under draught-like conditions last year, Madhya Pradesh recorded a good kharif crop. It had almost covered the entire targeted area of 106 lakh hectares for sowing last year. The major kharif crops in the State are paddy, soyabean, maize, moong, urad, bajra, toor, and cotton. Soyabean sowing has already been done in 52.95 lh against a target of 53.5 lh, up 13 per cent over the target. The total sowing acreage of cereals such as rice, maize, jowar, Kodo and others had already been done in 25.19 lh against the target of 32.05 lh, which is 68.3 per cent. Paddy, the major cereal, has been sown in 10.66 lh against the targeted 15.50 lakh hectares. “But that is because paddy sowing is still continuing. Besides, in some regions like Mahakosal, Bundelkhand and Bhind etc, the rainfall has been lower than normal so the total paddy sowing has been affected. But in the western region of the State, especially the Malwa-Bhopal region, sowing is good,” says the Minister.

Pulses

Sowing of pulses has also been good. Against the targeted 11.20 lh, pulses have been sown in 10.29 lh, roughly 95.6 per cent of the area. The sowing area under oilseeds, including soyabean, groundnut, sesame, niger and others, is targeted at 58.50 lh against which actual sowing has been done in 56.54 lh. The area sown under soyabean was 52.95 lh against the targeted area of 53.5 lh. The area sown for oilseeds is likely to exceed the target. According to senior State Government officials, the yield, going by the rain pattern, should be much better than last year. “The rain is intermittent, but good enough for a

good rice and soya crop, though drinking water could become a problem,” says Mr Ram Gopal Dogalia, a farmer who tills a six-acre farm at Mesroth village near Bhopal.

Rainfall

The rains have actually played truant in 10-12 districts of the Mahakosal, Bundelkhand and Bhind region, where rainfall has been deficient, resulting in only 10-12 per cent of the sowing target having been met.

But in other districts, the rainfall, though late, has been almost normal, so the shortfall, on a State average basis, could be neutralised, says the Minister.

Meanwhile, the State Agriculture Department has already launched an awareness campaign for farmers to help safeguard their crop against pests/insects by giving them information on eco-friendly pesticides and sowing two or three simultaneous crops to minimise crop damage. For example, farmers are being taught that soyabean and tur could be sown alongside. Similarly, soyabean and jowar and bajra can also be sown together without any harmful effects.

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Covering purchases support cotton

Rajkot, Aug 11

Strong demand from mills and the export sector kept cotton prices firm at higher levels.

According to market sources, the prices ruled strong at the current level as mills are covering for new season. Moreover, the country has very little carry-forward stock on hand.

Cotton price for the Shankar-6 grade in Gujarat is Rs 30,500-31,000 for a candy (356 kg). It traded at Rs 29,300-29,800 in Maharashtra. Raw cotton price in Rajkot was Rs 735-740 for 20 kg.

A Rajkot-based cotton broker said: “Price will not come down in present condition, and it will be steady on this level as millers are buying to cover the stocks for next season. Export demand is also there.”

Shipments rise

Meanwhile, the Cotton Advisory Board (CAB) has estimated that cotton exports have actually increased four per cent this year from 80 lakh bales to 83 lakh bales (170 kg each).

This season's production is estimated at 295 lakh bales, up from 292 lakh bales last year.

The total cotton acreage is expected to increase next season as well, from 103 lakh hectares to 105 lakh hectares.

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Symposium on climate change and impact on plant diseases

Kozhikode, Aug. 11

The Indian Phytopathological Society, in association with the Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR), is holding a national symposium on various aspects of climate change and its impact on diseases of various crops.

The two-day symposium on 'Changing Plant Disease Scenario in Relation to Climate Change' will be held on October 22 and 23 at the Silver Jubilee Hall of IISR in Kozhikode.

The seminar will deliberate on key issues like global warming and climate change, remote sensing and surveillance, impact assessment, plant health in changing climate and sustainable development.

Plant pathology

According to an IISR statement, the symposium will have both oral and poster sessions on various aspects of changing diseases scenario in crop plants in relation to climate change. Scientists, researchers, faculty members and students of research institutions/universities/colleges, who are interested in plant pathology and keen to apply it in their domains, can participate in the symposium.

The institute has invited abstracts on all aspects of original work in plant pathology in agriculture or related fields. The Indian Phytopathological Society has also invited applications for Prof. M.J. Narasimhan Academic Merit Award contest. The preliminary selection of the contestants for the award will also be held during the symposium.