

Nematology conference at TNAU from Feb. 23

COIMBATORE: A national conference on “Innovations in Nematological Research for Agricultural Sustainability – Challenges and a Road Map Ahead” will be held at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) from February 23 to 25. According to a release, the conference will be organised in collaboration with the Nematological Society of India.

It will involve topics like nematode bio-diversity, bio-ecology, molecular nematology, and chemical and non-chemical management of nematodes. Nearly 150 nematologists from across the country are expected to participate in the conference.

It will be inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor of TNAU P. Murugesu Boopathi. Assistant Director General (Plant Protection), Indian Council of Agricultural Research, T.P. Rajendran, will preside.

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Irrigation canal crying for attention

The irrigation canal running across State Bank Colony and Mohan Nagar is full of slush and has turned into a breeding ground for mosquitoes. The menace is more on the main road of the colony because the drainage canal has not been cleaned for a long time. Besides, garbage is also being dumped on the main road, which worsens the situation.

I request the authorities concerned to take action at the earliest.

R. Sankaran State Bank Colony, Mohan Nagar Extension

Plots misused

Though Ilango Nagar is one of the early colonies to come up in Puducherry, it is not given much attention by officials. Plots in the heart of the town are being used as open toilets by slum dwellers. Overgrowth of bushes and rainwater stagnation have made several plots a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Garbage dumping adds up to the menace.

Miscreants gather at the plots at night and consume alcohol. Officials concerned should intervene and ensure that residents of the area live free from any kind of menace.

A. Saravanan Ilango Nagar

Garbage dumping

Despite repeated pleas for removing garbage, the condition of Fourth Main Road, Avvai Nagar, Ashok Nagar, and its adjoining roads continues to be the same. Unless a fine is imposed, people are not going to stop dumping waste on the road. At least, a notice could be displayed on the road insisting on cleanliness. A green Puducherry can be maintained only with the cooperation of the public and municipal authorities.

S. V. Iyer Avvai Nagar, Lawspet (Readers can send their letters to *The Hindu*, No. 135, First Floor, Mission Street, Puducherry – 605 001)

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Plastic waste pollutes river at Attur



Non-biodegradable: Plastic waste choking River Vasiishta at Attur in Salem district. —

ATTUR: River Vasishta that once kept Attur and its neighbourhood green has become dirty and unholy.

The river, which once supplied drinking water to the people who resided on its banks, is dying slowly with indiscriminate dumping of plastic garbage.

It supplied water for irrigation to over 10,000 hectares in Salem, Villupuram, Cuddalore and other areas.

The stretch of river near Attur town has become a big sewer emanating foul odour and has also become a breeding ground for mosquitoes that besiege residents at all hours of the day and night.

At one time, the river happened to be the livelihood resource for hundreds of farmers and drinking water for many more.

Cauvery River in Mettur, a source located some 120 kilometres away from Attur town is now supplying water to its residents. Plastic waste has blocked water flow in the river. Garbage mounds, the people here say, remain without being cleared for years with not a single attempt to remove them.

Despite repeated requests from people, farmers and environmentalists, the Attur municipality shows no interest in keeping the river clean.

“There is no proper rehabilitation scheme for the river which cuts through the town on the lines of Tirumanimutharu River rehabilitation project in Salem. The worst affected are the farmers downstream who still depend on its water for farming activities,” said a farmer.

When contacted, officials in Attur municipality claimed that they had been collecting garbage at the door steps under solid waste management scheme.

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Alternative fuel from sugarcane trash

Sugarcane is cultivated on 5,73 ha in the district

Families making briquettes earn

Rs. 800 to

Rs. 1,000 dail

TIUNELVELI: Making of carbon briquettes, a cost-effective alternative fuel from the sugarcane trash, is gradually picking up in the district.

The collection of wood for fuel or illegal felling of trees for firewood also exert pressure on forest and the smoke emanating from the burning wood affects the health of women.

Hence identifying an alternative fuel that does not affect the environment as well as the housewives' health has become a compulsion.

Sugarcane is cultivated on 5,732 ha in the district. An estimate shows that 10 tonnes of sugarcane dry leaves or trash is generated from the sugarcane cultivated on every hectare. Because it has no value as cattle fodder and since it also resists easy decomposition, the trash is burnt to clear the field for the next crop.

This kind of burning leads to environmental hazards through mass liberation of carbon in the atmosphere even as the heat exerted on the ground kills the soil-borne beneficial micro-organisms and earthworms that maintain soil fertility and soil health.

It is found that this sugarcane trash can be converted to useful products through environmentally benign technology.

The dry sugarcane leaves are sliced into pieces and burnt inside a metal barrel. The ash is mixed with rice water, put in the briquette-maker and dried in the sunlight.

“Making of fuel briquettes from sugarcane trash can be a very profitable, small-scale, rural business. Farmers, women self-help group members can be trained in this technology and can be started as a family business enterprise.

A family unit of three can produce 100 kg briquettes every day, which enjoy good demand in rural and urban areas, where a cheap and cleanly burning fuel is in high demand.

Marketing of the briquettes can be arranged through non-governmental organisations, SHGs or SHG federation,” said Assistant General Manager, NABARD, Tirunelveli, J. Suresh.

Families making the briquettes can thus earn Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,000 daily, which is equivalent to the income of an urban middle class family. If the 16 weeks of the monsoon season are excluded, such a unit can work for about 36 weeks in a year, earning about Rs. 2 lakh including a profit of Rs. 1.50 lakh annually.

“This revenue works out to be more than Rs.10, 000 a month, a very good income by Indian rural standards,” Mr. Suresh said.

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Chamber wants steps to boost agriculture in Union Budget

MADURAI: The Agro Food Chamber of Commerce and Industry has urged the Union Government to give a major thrust to the agricultural sector in the upcoming Budget.

Association president S. Rethinavelu said that the budget should be loaded with proactive and efficacious schemes that would accelerate agricultural growth and also attract younger generations to the sector.

Programmes for deploying latest scientific technology for increasing productivity and improving the quality of crops should be implemented. He also called for mechanising agricultural operations and encouraging farmers to adopt the traditional natural manure farming.

He noted that despite the share of agriculture in gross domestic produce had declined to 18 per cent from 25 per cent, more than 60 per cent of the country's population was still dependent on it.

While manufacturing sector was estimated to have grown at 8.9 per cent, farm output had contracted by 0.2 per cent to settle down at 1.4 per cent. The agriculture must record a minimum annual growth of 4 per cent for the output to be commensurate with the population growth.

The lack of scientific post-harvest management and storage facilities were leading to the wastage of produce.

The loss on this account alone was estimated to be in the tune of Rs.58,000 crore nation-wide and this was also contributing to the increasing inflation, said Mr. Rethinavelu.

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Water level

MADURAI: The water level in the Periyar dam on Sunday stood at 110.80 feet with an inflow of 120 cusecs and a discharge of 300 cusecs. The level in the Vaigai dam was 38.06 feet with an inflow of 78 cusecs and a discharge of 60 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 735 mcft.

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"Sugarcane harvesters increase yield"

Subsidy of Rs.65,000 per ha provided for precision farming

Under National Agricultural Development Project, over Rs. 4 crore allotted for about 4,000 demonstrations to augment pulses production.

The technology of precision farming was introduced with Israel's support in Dharmapuri.

NAGAPATTINAM: Drip-irrigated precision farming along with use of mechanised sugarcane harvesters would increase the economic yield of sugarcane cultivation. An awareness on this concept was given to the farmers at a demonstration-cum seminar on precision farming and use of sugarcane harvesters here at Mangayanallur village in Mayiladuturai on Saturday.

The demonstration was steered by Arrooran Sugars that had purchased the sugarcane harvesters from Jain Irrigation Systems Limited at a cost of Rs.2.5 crore. According to them, the sugarcane harvesters simultaneously harvested and shredded the produce resulting in reduced harvest cost of Rs.250 per tonne. The cost incurred through manual labour is Rs.350 per tonne.

Under sugarcane cultivation, ratoon practice (where the second sowing is done without seeds, but watering the harvested field) provided an yield for up to three years. According to the Arrooran Sugars, use of sugarcane harvesters would enhance the yield for up to 10 years under the ratoon practice.

Commissioner of Agriculture Kosalaraman stated that Tamil Nadu with a population of 6.24 crore constituted over seven per cent of the country's population. However, with cultivable land of four per cent and available water resources of three per cent, food security had to be ensured.

System of Rice Intensification mode of paddy cultivation has brought remarkable results of about 7.5 tonne per hectare. Similarly, precision farming should be taken up with zest by farmers.

The technology of precision farming was introduced with Israel's support in Dharmapuri in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Initially, 50 acres were brought under precision farming on pilot basis, said Mr.Kosalaraman.

The Tamil Nadu government has expended over 53.14 crore for precision farming since 2007. Over 6,050 ha was brought under sugarcane cultivation through precision farming during 2007-8, 4,250 ha in 2008-09, and 4,000 ha in 2009-10.

Further, a subsidy of Rs.65,000 per hectare was being provided for precision farming which includes Rs.40,000 towards drip irrigation and Rs.15,000 towards fertilizers and PP chemicals (plant protection measures).

Under the National Agricultural Development Project, over Rs. 4 crore has been allotted for about 4,000 demonstrations to augment pulses production.

Under the NADP, Nagapattinam has been allotted with Rs.30 lakh for about 150 demonstrations. Pulses subsidy has been allowed at Rs.20,000 per hectare of which Rs.5,000 was towards cultivation costs and Rs.15,000 was towards laying sprinklers.

Earlier, the Agricultural Commissioner reviewed the area under pulses crop coverage. In a departure from the previous years, where the area under pulses was about 96,000 ha in the district, the area under pulses during the current season was about 66,000 ha.

Since Samba harvest was under way, he advised farmers to spray DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) fertilizer with two per cent concentration to augment the productivity of pulses crops.

A subsidy of Rs.200 per hectare was available under NADP and the farmers should avail this, Mr.Kosalaraman said. Over 12,000 hectares was covered under the DAP in Nagapattinam and demonstration of DAP spraying was conducted here at Pandaaravadai. He also reviewed the pulses black gram seed farm and farmers field schools being conducted by the Agricultural Department.

Though, some farmers have stated that the yield may not be substantial in certain cases, use of sugarcane harvester is stated to be labour-saving in times of labour deficit, and cost-effective, says R.V. Karunakaran, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu*.

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Mettur level

TIRUCHI: The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 75.36 feet on Sunday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 868 cusecs and the discharge, 1,800 cusecs.

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Plea on sugarcane purchase price

TIRUCHI: Bharathiya Kisan Sangam has urged the government to fix purchase price for sugarcane at Rs. 3,000 per tonne and procurement price for paddy at Rs. 2,500 per quintal.

A resolution to this effect was adopted at the four-day all India executive committee meeting of the Bharathiya Kisan Sangam which concluded here on Sunday. The purchase price for cane in Tamil Nadu was the lowest in the whole country, the resolution said and threatened to organise mass agitations to bring pressure on the State Government to fix the price at Rs. 3,000 per tonne.

Another resolution demanded subsidy of Rs. 10,000 per acre to the farmers till they got profitable price for the agricultural products. If the government was not prepared to provide the subsidy, it should waive all the farm loans extended to the farmers.

The meeting condemned the Centre for increasing the price of urea by Rs. 25 per bag. The price hike should be withdrawn immediately, it said and warned that the Sangam will organise serious agitations in the capital of all states till the Centre conceded the above demand.

The farming community is the worst hit due to global warming. This damaged the farm crop too to a big extent. The resolution called upon the farmers to take steps for the planting of more trees to increase the forest cover to escape from the dire effects of global warming.

Renga Reddy, all India vice-president of the Sangam, presided over the executive committee meeting, in which representatives from all the states participated.

Prabhakar Kelkar, all India general secretary, felicitated P. Ayyakannu, state general secretary of the Sangam, for achieving paddy crop of 6,750 kgs in one acre. He said that the farmers of all the states could try SRI method and increase paddy production. Sunil Pandey, Mohini Mohan Mishra, Dinesh Kulkarni, all India secretaries; Ramesh Kulkarni, all India treasurer and other office-bearers spoke. Representatives of various states participated in discussions on various issues concerning the farmers. The SRI method of paddy production was demonstrated to the participants at a special session.

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Need for caution on fertilizers

Armed with Cabinet approval, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee seem all set to introduce the new nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) policy for fertilizer pricing in the Union Budget to be presented on February 26. The move has generated controversy with the Left parties attacking it as anti-farmer and even parties within the United Progressive Alliance government such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam expressing reservations about the impact of the new policy on the farm gate price for fertilizers. If the sole purpose behind the NBS policy was to promote the balanced use of different nutrients like nitrogen, potash, phosphorous, and sulphur, there would be no reason for anyone to object. The excessive use of urea, for example, has pushed nitrogen in the soil to a high level in many parts of India, affecting crop production. That certain nutrients are used indiscriminately because of price despite their inappropriateness for particular crops, soil and local ecologies is a problem that needs to be addressed, in part, by the revival of agricultural extension services that were one of the first casualties of the reforms process two decades ago. But the proposed fertilizer subsidy scheme stems from another impulse: the desire to decontrol prices.

While assurances have been sought, and reportedly received, from the fertilizer industry that the price line would be maintained around the current level during the 2010 kharif season, there are sound reasons to worry about what will happen to fertilizer prices thereafter. The squeeze on India's farmers began way back in 1991 when Finance Minister Manmohan Singh first began to reduce the fertilizer subsidy. As input prices increased, farmers, especially those with marginal, small, and medium holdings, reduced their fertilizer consumption with detrimental effects upon yields. The price mismatch across different nutrients further complicated the picture. The NBS policy might make all fertilizers available at uniform rates, thus allowing the farmer to choose what is best for his land without worrying about opportunity cost. But if overall prices start rising, farmers are likely to cut back. That this is more than likely to happen is clear from the reaction of the industry. From the retention price system of the 1970s to the price system prevailing now, fertilizer companies have been clear that the only way they can realise their "full potential" is by full decontrol. Short of that, the industry was lobbying for a nutrient-based fixed subsidy alongside the freedom to set the maximum retail prices (MRPs). The UPA's new policy is in line with this wish.