

THE HINDU

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"Farmers should get quality seeds"

PUDUKOTAI: Officials of the Agriculture Department should ensure supply of certified seeds to the farmers and action should be initiated against persons selling poor quality seeds, said Collector A. Suganthi here on Tuesday.

Inaugurating the two-day seminar for seed inspectors of the Department of Seed Certification at State Agricultural Extension Management Institute in Kudumianmalai in Pudukottai district, the Collector said that an awareness should be created among the farmers to buy certified seeds for a good yield.

She pointed out that the Agriculture Department had been taking action against persons selling poor quality seeds through private outlets. The farmers should check the quality of seeds.

A. Karmugilan, Director of Seed Certification, said that the seed inspectors were checking the quality of various seeds being sold at the Government and private outlets. He said that the seed inspectors took 46,319 samples of seeds from 53,602 seed sales depots during 2009-2010 and pointed out that 1,740 samples were found to be defective. He said that action had been initiated against 442 sales centres.

S.P. Subramanian, Joint Director of Seed Certification and P. Krishnasamy, Joint Director of Agriculture, Pudukottai spoke.

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Paddy yield by far highest in current samba season

The harvest is over on 11.3 lakh hectares

CHENNAI: Paddy productivity in the current samba season in the State is by far the highest in recent times. The State has achieved an average of 5.8 tonnes per hectare this year as against the normal yield of about 4.5 tonnes to 4.8 tonnes per hectare during previous years.

Barring some pockets in Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Villupuram, Theni, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Coimbatore and Erode districts, the samba harvest is almost over. Harvest is over on 11.3 lakh hectares, as against the samba paddy coverage of 15.3 lakh hectares.

One reason for the increase in productivity was adoption of system of rice intensification technique on six lakh hectares by progressive farmers.

In Tiruchi district, a farmer had harvested 9.54 tonnes per hectare.

This was followed by 8.6 tonnes in Salem, 8.3 tonnes in Karur, 7.9 tonnes in Kancheepuram and 7.3 tonnes in Tiruvarur districts, according to an Agriculturist Department official.

In Cauvery delta districts, about 7 lakh hectares had been brought under cultivation and the harvest was over on 5.9 lakh hectares. It was in progress in some taluks in Cuddalore, Tiruchi and Karur. The average yield in the delta districts was also encouraging with around 5 tonnes per hectare.

High-yielding varieties

This time farmers in the delta districts had gone for high-yielding varieties in view of better market for the produce and better price. The open market price of fine rice varieties was about Rs. 35 per kg as against Rs. 25 per kg for normal varieties.

Dealers also preferred fine varieties and were ready to purchase any amount of quantity from farmers if it was fine variety, the official added.

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Into the world of mushrooms

The exhibition will be open at Government Museum till March 16



Thick with zeal:Visitors at the exhibition organised at Government Museum, Egmore, on Wednesday.

CHENNAI: The beauty and utility of mushrooms have mostly remained confined to theses and books. There are 6,000 to 7,000 species of mushrooms and many of them are medicinal or edible, said C.V.Subramanian, former director, Centre for Advanced Studies in Botany, University of Madras.

He was speaking about the diversity and relevance of mushrooms at the inauguration of an exhibition 'World of Mushrooms' organised at the Government Museum, Egmore, on Wednesday.

"Many species of mushrooms are symbiotic. They grow on trees found in dense forests and supply them with certain nutrients that are essential for their growth. The trees cannot survive without the fungus. Understanding this interdependence has important relevance in afforestation programmes," Dr. Subramanian said.

According to him, while Darwin's theory identifies competition as the driving force of evolution, there is an important element of cooperation and co-evolution in nature that is highlighted by certain species of mushrooms.

He also pointed out interesting species like Termitomyces, which are grown by termite colonies in nature while microbiologists find it difficult to grow them in labs, and species with slight variations belonging to the same fungal family resulting in the fungus being either poisonous or edible.

"Why should similar looking species with the same genetic roots be so markedly different? It is a fascinating look into the process of evolution," Dr.Subramanian added. The exhibition will be open till March 16 between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

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Agro-clinic inaugurated

MADURAI: An Agro-clinic Centre that would provide soil and water testing facilities to farmers was inaugurated at Sathangudi near here recently by the Thirumangalam MLA, Latha Adhiyaman. It would function under the Sathangudi primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACS).

Delivering the inaugural address, she recalled that the first order signed by the Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi after taking charge in the current term was waiving farmer's loans from cooperative societies.

K. Kalyani, Deputy Registrar, Usilampatti Range, said that keeping in mind the welfare of farmers, the cooperatives were directly procuring commodities such as paddy and Tuvar from them. The cooperative societies were also extending loans to farmers for taking to drip irrigation.

P. Sankaralingam, Joint Director (Agriculture), said that such clinics have been opened at 13 locations in the district. The National Agriculture Development Plan provided a sum of Rs. 6 lakh, of which half would be granted as subsidy, for opening such clinics, he added.

P. Uma Maheswari, Special Officer, Pandian Cooperative Supermarket, P. Manoharan, Assistant Director (Agriculture), Thirumangalam, and others spoke, says a release.

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Paddy farmers asked to make use of loan facility

At regulated markets to get better price for their produce



TIPS:KR.Sathappan, Assistant Director of Agriculture (Publicity and Propaganda), speaking at the training programme in the city on Wednesday.

MADURAI: Paddy farmers have been asked to make use of the pledge loan facility at the regulated markets to get better price for their produce.

At a two-day training in post harvest technology conducted by the Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, the farmers were told that they could get a pledge loan against their agricultural produce. They need not indulge in distress sale and get lesser price for paddy. They could get 50 per cent of the market rate of the produce as loan with a maximum limit of Rs. One lakh.

The regulated market does not collect any interest on the loan amount for the first 15 days. The rate of interest for up to 180 days is only 5 per cent, the Assistant Director of Agriculture (Publicity and Propaganda) KR. Sathappan, said. The farmers could wait till they get better market price for their produce, he said. The pledge loan facility is available at the regulated markets at Mattuthavani, Usilampatti, Tirumangalam and Vadipatti.

Twenty farmers participated in the training, which was aimed to enable them to get better price and ensure good profit for their agricultural produce.

The training programme covered value addition, grading and storage of agricultural produce and post harvest technologies for paddy, millets and pulses. He also highlighted the farmers' welfare schemes being implemented by the regulated market.

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1,90,733 tonnes of paddy procured in Nagapattinam

NAGAPATTINAM: Paddy procurement is under progress through all 233 direct procurement centres in the district. So far, over 1,90,733 tonnes of paddy has procured with an allowance of 17 per cent moisture content up to March 2. However, the moisture allowance has been increased to 20 per cent for the benefit of farmers. Additionally, action has been initiated to weed out malpractices during procurement. About three assistants and a guard has been removed following action against malpractices, a press release stated.

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Ooty to host spices show for first time

Flower show at Government Botanical Garden from May 14

Rose Show will be held at the Government Rose Garden on May 8 and 9

Fruit Show at Sim's Park on May 22 and 23

Udhagamandalam: Efforts are on to make the 2010 flower show at the Government Botanical Garden (GBG) here as attractive as possible.

Stating this to presspersons here on Wednesday, the Director of Horticulture, B. Chandramohan, said that the show would be held from May 14 to 16.

He said that the annual Rose Show would be held at the Government Rose Garden here on May 8 and 9 and the Fruit Show would be held at the Sim's Park in Coonoor on May 22 and 23.

The curtain on the season-related activities organised by the Department of Horticulture would be brought down with a vegetable show at the Nehru Park in Kotagiri on May 29 and 30.

The Nilgiris Collector, Anandrao V. Patil, said that for the first time a spices show would be organised at the Devala Horticulture Farm near Gudalur as part of the Summer Festival.

Adverting to steps being taken to enhance the beauty of the GBG, Mr. Chandramohan said that suitable flower beds are in the process of being developed along the base of some of the rare and beautiful trees.

The heritage structures near the threshold of the GBG would be restored to their original state.

Stating that 15,000 pots are now getting ready to provide a visual treat to the visitors, he said that earlier only about 9,000 pots had been displayed.

A display of bonsai plants would be one of the highlights this year.

On no account would footpath vendors and hawkers be aloud to affect the quality of the show.

Efforts would be made to promote the arboretum being maintained by the Horticulture department near the Ooty Lake.

Earlier, Mr. Chandramohan presided over a meeting of the Nilgiris Flower and Fruit Show Committee. Among those who participated were Mr. Patil, the Superintendent of Police, Kapil Kumar C. Saratkar, the Project Director, Hill Area Development Programme, R.K. Bharathy and the Joint Director of Horticulture C. Isravel.

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New groundnut variety receives good feedback

In groundnut the spread of new high yielding varieties among farmers takes considerable time when compared to other crops.

It may be due to the predominantly rainfed nature of the crop, high seed rate coupled with low seed multiplication ratio.

To overcome this, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and International Crop Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad introduced a novel approach — farmers' participatory varietal selection.

Field evaluation

Under this method a set of high yielding varieties were provided to a set of farmers for evaluation in their fields, who in turn short listed one or two varieties. The seeds were subsequently multiplied and shared with other farmers.

A detailed evaluation chart which comprised details right from germination, vigour, flowering, pod number, pod and seed trials besides reaction to pest, diseases and drought was provided to farmers for their recordings.

The farmers collectively decided on their choice based on the evaluation.

The results revealed that ICGV 87846 was distinctly superior when compared to all others, for pod yield, drought tolerance and disease resistance. When exposed to groundnut traders, the variety received a good feedback. The seed production of the identified variety started immediately.

Crop characteristics

ICGV 87846 is a semi-erect type, maturing in 125-135 days. It is highly tolerant to drought and has recorded up to 2,400 kg / ha under severe drought. It is also tolerant to foliar diseases viz., rust and late leaf spot and thereby yields higher haulms which are good cattle feed.

The pods are medium sized with tan colour testa. The shelling outturn is 73.5 per cent, and the oil content is 49.5 per cent.

The semi-erect nature of the plant envisages easy pulling out of the plant without losing the pods in the soil. ICRISAT and TNAU are multiplying large quantities of this variety.

For more information contact Dr.S.N.Nigam, Principal Groundnut Breeder, ICRISAT, Patancheru, Hyderabad, email: S.NIGAM@cgiar.org and Dr. P.Vindhiyavarman, Professor & Head, Department of Oilseeds, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore – 641 003, email: oilseeds@tnau.ac.in, phone: 0422-2450812.

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Popular nanoparticle causes toxicity in fish



A nanoparticle, nanosilver, growing in popularity as a bactericidal agent and tested on fish, has been shown to be toxic to them, according to a Purdue University study. Suspended in solution it was even lethal to fish.

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Tobacco plant springs a pleasant surprise



A genetically modified strain of tobacco helps temper the damaging effects of toxic pond scum, known as microcystin-LR (MC-LR), which makes water unsafe for drinking, swimming, or fishing.

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Melia dubia tree holds promise of good returns for ryots

About Rs.2 lakhs per acre can be expected from sixth year of planting



Remunerative: G. Kumaravelu with some high yielding tree varieties.

One of the main problems that farmers face today is decreasing income from an acre per year against sudden increase in the value of agricultural lands due to newly formed rural roads, mushrooming of industries, and concrete dwellings.

This forces several small farmers to sell their lands and settle in urban concrete jungles.

Low income

Diminishing income from an acre against increasing land value, forces many farmers to sell their lands. A family of 4 members need a monthly income of Rs.40,000 from an acre if they have to survive. But today from an acre one gets anything between Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 12,000.

“How is this enough? Naturally he prefers to sell his lands than continue farming. If we are keen that farming lands should not be sold then we must ensure income generation of at least Rs.20,000 to Rs.30,000 from an acre a year,” explains Dr. G. Kumaravelu, Member, Tamil Nadu Planning Commission and former Chief Conservator of Forests, Tamil Nadu.

Easy method

The easiest way to increase income from an acre is by planting certain tree varieties such Melia dubia (Malai Vembu in Tamil) which fetch a handsome price in the market, assured buyback, and require low maintenance expenditure.

In addition, the trees also aid the planet by preventing temperature rise and checking gas emission into the atmosphere as the trees are naturally endowed to absorb maximum CO₂.

Money spinner

Melia is a money spinning tree of short duration. Even if planted as a single row along the field bunds, about 60 trees can be planted per acre, which will fetch an income of about Rs.2 lakhs in the sixth year of planting.

“Since there is a total mismatch between demand and supply for wood and veneer, block planting of 300 to 400 trees per acre can ensure a minimum profit of rupees one lakh per year from an acre.

Under good maintenance and controlled irrigation from sixth year onwards, depending on the soil depth and quality trees of 80 to 100 cm gbh with a clear bole of 5 metres height can fetch Rs.4, 000 at today's price (7 per cent escalation can be added per year for the sale price).

Intercultivation can be done with annual crops in the first three years and then spices such as pepper can be grown.

Single row planting

Even if planted in a single row along the field bunds, about 60 trees can be planted at six feet spacing which will fetch an income of about Rs.2 lakhs in the sixth year.

Under high density planting with 1,000 to 1,500 trees in an acre, a yield of 40 to 50 tonnes is possible from the second and third year of planting.

“As the demand for Melia wood is quite high, minimum profit of about Rs.40,000 per year from an acre can be ensured for the farmers today,” says, Dr. Kumaravelu.

Pest infestations

Regarding pest infestations affecting this tree Dr. Kumaravelu says, “the variety is susceptible to root rot. Only optimum irrigation is required .

While planting the seedlings application of 2-3 kgs of vermicompost, 40 gms of Phosphobacteria, Azospirillum and Trichoderma Viride each in addition to 10-20 gms of Pseudomonas and 100 grams of VAM (vesicular arbuscular mycoriza) helps in promoting good growth.

Buy back

“Interested farmers who want to buy the seedlings can contact our office and we are willing to guide them right from purchasing the seedlings to buy back,” assures Dr. Kumaravelu.

For information contact Dr. G. Kumaravelu, State Planning Commission, 5th floor, Ezhilagam, Chepauk, Chennai: 600005, email: drgkumaravel@gmail.com, Phone: 044-28545482 (Off).

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New evidence of global glaciation event



Evidence, based on an analysis of ancient tropical rocks, that sea ice extended to the equator 716.5 million years ago, brings precision to a 'snowball Earth' event long suspected to have taken place around that time.

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Brave new brinjals

There is nothing like a good dystopian fable to show you what would really happen if...

The horrors of Bt brinjal are put off for the time being. We have taken a small, unexpected step back from the brink. Opinions may be divided now, but one day we will surely be grateful for whatever it was that made our Minister for Environment and Forests stand up to Monsanto.

I have read about Bt rice, Bt cotton and other transgenic crops for nearly two decades in volumes of conference papers, most of which painted a jolly picture of the wonders of genetic modification, if you skipped the bits about the potential for toxic reactions and tumour formation, and the need for long-term trials.

But what made me sit up and take note was Margaret Atwood's 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*, which I got as a birthday gift just as I was translating a treatise on genetically modified organisms.

The novel opens on a post-apocalyptic scene. Most humans have died of deliberately initiated plagues and their mechanised cities and gated compounds have broken down. One survivor, the last as far as he knows, navigates a world in which wolvogs, pigeons, and other transgenic creatures have gone feral.

Drug-resistant viruses and bacteria make the water and soil toxic to him. His only humanoid companions are the Crakers, created by scientists in a pleasing range of colours and genetically designed to feed on leaves and grass, resist diseases and UV rays, and die without regrets at the age of 30.

We may read doomsday scenarios in newspapers, although denial is the more likely story there, but there is nothing like a good dystopian fable to show you what would really happen if. If we surrender our civil rights, we get George Orwell's 1984. If we let the market decide who gets an organ transplant, we get Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*. If we don't clean up our messes, we get Pixar's "Wall-E".

Atwood's first dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, showed us what would happen if we let neo-conservatives decide that women should stay at home and have babies, blonde babies. In 1985, when it was published, Ronald Reagan and the moral majority had a death's grip on America, and a novel in which women of child-bearing age were nationalised and made to produce offspring for the elite made our mouths go dry. "Read it while it's still allowed," said the *Houston Chronicle*.

Those terrors have receded, and new ones have taken their place. In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood tells us what happens when we leave agricultural research to the fertilizer and seed companies, and medical research to the drug companies. And when the law says we can't even criticise a transgenic product.

I've just picked up *The Year of the Flood*, in which Atwood, as always witty but relentless, takes the tale further.

If it is anything like her first two dystopian fables, it ought to frighten us into fighting the good fight. And, perhaps, we should send a copy to the Environment Minister, while it's still allowed.

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