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TNAU advises farmers to grow LRG 41 redgram

COIMBATORE: The area and production of redgram has decreased drastically, which in turn has led to an increase in the market price for consumers. The performance of LRG 41 variety of redgram has been good and hence can be popularised among farmers for large-scale adoption, Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) P. Murugesha Boopathi said here recently.

Witnessing a frontline demonstration of the variety at Boluvampatti village in Thondamuthur Block, the Vice-Chancellor observed that the gram was grown as a rainfed crop in the State in 29,000 hectares.

“Because of climate change, labour shortage and poor adoption of advanced technologies by farmers, the area and production of this gram has decreased to a great extent.

In order to increase the area, production and productivity, the Central and State Governments are implementing various schemes for the benefit of farmers,” Mr. Boopathi said.

The variety produced more number of branches, pods per plant and bold seeds with four to five seeds per pod. Due to high yielding nature and tolerance to pod borer pest, this variety had good scope for increasing the production and productivity of redgram under rainfed conditions.

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“Good rabi harvest may bring down food prices”

C. Rangarajan commends the Union budget



INFORMATIVE: C. Rangarajan Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister (second from left) and G.Thiruvasagam, Vice-Chancellor, University of Madras, releasing a souvenir at an international conference in Chennai on Tuesday. M.S. Sundara Rajan, Chairman and Managing Director, Indian Bank (second from right) and M. Ranganatham, Registrar, University of Madras, are in the picture.

CHENNAI: While the rise in prices of food products is "troubling," a good rabi harvest is expected to bring down prices in the next few weeks, said C. Rangarajan, chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, on Tuesday.

Dr. Rangarajan said the outlook on rabi arrivals [starting April] was good and that would ease some concerns of consumers even as the inflation rate closed in on double-digit figures.

Delivering the inaugural address at an international conference on "Global Financial System in the post-crisis era: Issues, Opportunities and Challenges" at the University of Madras, Dr. Rangarajan added that the government would have to wait a few weeks before deciding on a rollback of fiscal stimulus measures.

He said the revised estimates for the fiscal deficit in 2009-2010 showed it at 6.7 per cent of the GDP. This was unsustainable and the Union budget of 2010-2011 had brought the deficit down to 5.5 per cent. He commended the Union budget for striking a "proper balance between the need for fiscal consolidation and the need to provide adequate stimulus for growth."

The government had responded well in tackling the need for stimulation following the financial crisis, but reforms in the regulatory framework were required for the long term, Dr. Rangarajan said.

Ruling out an abandonment of "financial innovations" including derivatives, which he said were satisfying a felt need of customers, he said the regulatory measures were needed to discourage excessive risk-taking and leveraging by banks.

“Too little regulation may encourage financial instability but too much of it can impede financial innovations which are badly needed,” he said.

M.S. Sundara Rajan, chairman and managing director, Indian Bank, said the financial crisis had provided India an opportunity to position itself as an attractive destination for global capital. But issues including the ballooning fiscal deficit, transparency, governance norms and an adequate method for the measurement and management of fiscal risk needed to be sorted out, he said.

G. Thiruvvasagam, vice-chancellor, University of Madras, said it was time to think about rehabilitative and preventive measures to protect the Indian economy.

The two-day conference is being organised by the Department of Commerce of the Madras University and is supported by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Indian Bank.

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Watermelons flood Ramnad

No change in price compared to last year



MOUTH-WATERING:Watermelons being unloaded for sale in Ramanathapuram.

RAMANATHAPURAM: Though there are symptoms for gruelling summer in southern districts this year, the lusciously succulent watermelons have hit the markets in large numbers here as one of the ways to keep cool in the summer.

For customers, the sweet information for tasting the juicy flesh of sweet melon is that there is no change of price of melon when compared to the last year. Heaps of watermelons have been seen in different parts of important roads of Ramanathapuram.

The roadside hawkers, who often change the business depending upon seasonal fruits and vegetables, keep themselves busy in cutting, slicing and selling the colourful fruit. A few of them work overtime to get melons from the suppliers, besides selling them to the customers during daytime. Different sizes of melons weighing from 3 to 15 kg are available in the market, particularly roadsides.

"The sun is shining bright than last summer, during which the town and peripherals received good summer shower. I hope we will have a good business this season," says C. Murugan, a wholesale and retail melon merchant in Ramanathapuram.

According to a rough estimate, around 400 to 500 kg of watermelon arrives daily to the town alone. While some traders get melons from the Madurai market, some have contact with the traders in Poovanthi near Madurai, who buy melons from the farmers in the nearby localities in Madurai and Sivaganga districts.

The average retail price for a kg of melon is Rs.10. A piece of melon is being sold at Rs.5. Some traders, particularly fresh juice stalls, offer a glass of melon drink at a cost of Rs.15.

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Bank to promote milk production

TIRUCHI: Punjab National Bank has taken a special effort to release loans to the tune of Rs. 3 crore to a total of 1,000 beneficiaries in central districts for the purchase of milch animals during the current financial year at the rate of Rs. 30,000 a beneficiary.

So far loans had been disbursed to 650 persons and efforts are being taken to achieve the target well before the end of this financial year, said S. M. Veerappan, Deputy General Manager and Circle Head of the Bank, Tiruchi Circle.

Presiding over a function to mark the distribution of loans to the farmers and women self-help groups at the Farmers Training Centre at Pillayarpatti, Mr. Veerappan said that the Bank had entered into memorandum of understanding with M/s Hatsun and M/s G.K. Dairy for sanctioning loans to the dairy farmers. A total of 100

beneficiaries would get loans for the purchase of milch-animals at Manikandam shortly, he added.

Mr. Veerappan appealed to the farmers to take maximum advantage of the free training being imparted at this centre on various farming techniques – right from drip irrigation to system of rice intensification strategy. This year, as many as 13,000 farmers including 6,730 women, had undergone the training at the centre.

Malkiat Sandhu, Assistant General Manager, Primary Sector Lead Bank Division of the Bank and vice-president of Punjab National Bank Farmers' Welfare Trust, New Delhi, said that women benefited through training in tailoring and computer operation at the centre.

Earlier, Mr. Veerappan gave away loans to the tune of Rs.80 lakh to the farmers and women members of self-help groups. Seven farmers got loans to the tune of Rs.50 lakh for the purchase of tractors and trailers; 20 SHGs got Rs. 20 lakh; while three farmers got Rs.10 lakh for the purchase of agricultural implements under the subsidy-based National Agriculture Development Programme.

Elango, Chief Manager, Repco Bank; Gunasekaran, Director of the centre and R. Michael, Senior Manager, Circle Office were among those who spoke.

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Research opens new option for fishermen

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CUDDALORE: A five-year research by marine biologists has now made it possible to breed marine ornamental fishes in hatcheries even using low saline estuarine water – a heretofore impossible.

The new technology gains significance because — it has opened up a new livelihood opportunity for fishers who can set up hatcheries and the hatchery production of the marine fishes will avoid the need to fish them in seas.

The second cause will help prevent the destruction of coral reefs and will put a stop to harmful fishing practices like cyanide fishing.

Explaining about their research, the team leader, Prof T T Ajith Kumar of the Center of Advanced Study in Marine Biology, Annamalai University, told Express that they have successfully bred two varieties of marine ornamental fishes — Clown and Damsel — using backwaters which are relatively less saline than sea water.

The team has also formulated simple methods to breed the fishes enabling it to make this a livelihood opportunity for fishers given the fact the ornamental fishes are a surging trade and a multi-million dollar industry.

Ajith Kumar says that with a minimal initial investment of Rs 25,000 the fisher can set up a hatchery in his backyard and expect a minimum monthly income of Rs 3,000.

“If they are ready to make higher investment, they can get very high returns,” he added.

The institute has extend support interested persons free of cost.

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Indian spices, sindoor contain lead, claims Harvard study

Agencies Posted online: Wednesday, Mar 17, 2010 at 0906 hrs



Washington : Young children who regularly ingest Indian spices and ceremonial powders like vermilion, or sindoor, may be exposed to lead, a dangerous neurotoxin, an American study has claimed.

The study carried out by researchers at Children's Hospital Boston and the Harvard School of Public Health found that about 25 per cent of Indian spices available in the US such as cardamom, fenugreek and chili powder contain more than one microgram of lead per gram of product. And about 65 per cent of the ceremonial powders such as vermilion — commonly used to mark newborn Indian infants — contained the same amount of the toxic heavy metal, the 'Time' magazine reported online.

The research, published in the latest issue of journal Pediatrics, was conducted after several reports of lead poisoning in Indian children in Boston area were linked to consumption of Indian spices, said the report. Though the levels are below the European Union's acceptable threshold of two to three mcg/g of lead, the authors of the study said the presence of lead in these products, regardless of the amount, is a reason for concern as they could potentially add to exposure from other sources of the neurotoxin in a child's environment.

With repeated exposure at high enough levels, lead can cause cognitive damage and behavioural changes in children. In severe cases of prolonged poisoning, the "damage may be permanent", says Dr Cristiane Lin, the lead author of the study. "Studies have shown that a blood level of 10 mcg of lead per decilitre of blood is associated with potentially irreversible harm, although recent studies have shown that as little as 5 mcg/dL can also be dangerous," the report said.

The experts, who have examined 71 powder items and 86 spices for their research, estimated that if a population of children under age 4 was routinely exposed to Indian spices or ceremonial powders, the additional ingestion of lead would lead to a threefold increase — from 0.8 per cent to 2.8 per cent — in the percentage of children with a blood level of lead over 10 mcg/dL.

"Our message is to say, Be aware of these products that may contain lead," says Lin. "From a pediatrician's perspective, it's good to push for screening of non-paint sources of lead." As high level of lead found in some spices and sindoor samples, "import, sale and labelling of these items should be carefully monitored, and low-lead sindoor (less than five micrograms per gram) could be suggested as a safer alternative," the study said.

Currently, the Food and Drug Administration, which oversees the safety of food products imported into the US, does not have specific guidelines for screening lead in dried products like spices.

At GEAC dinner, Jairam skips Bt, takes swipe at foreign univ Bill

Ravish Tiwari Posted online: Wednesday, Mar 17, 2010 at 0807 hrs

New Delhi : Members of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) — the apex regulator for genetically modified products — were invited to an ice-breaking dinner by Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh today but at the end of it there was little sign of a thaw.

Ramesh had publicly rejected the GEAC's approval of Bt brinjal kicking off a storm following which the Prime Minister's Office snubbed the Minister and lobbed the ball back into the GEAC's court, asking it to look into the "scientific" issues involved.

"But there was absolutely no mention of Bt brinjal at today's dinner," said a GEAC member who attended the dinner.

"This was very surprising since many of us had come from outside Delhi to attend the meeting. What was the point of the dinner?"

At least three GEAC members echoed this.

They said that instead of Bt brinjal, Ramesh discussed the "Indian education system, Indian culture, the Women's Bill" and took a swipe at the foreign universities Bill passed by the Cabinet yesterday.

"The Minister said he was apprehensive about the Bill since it would drive away the best teachers to foreign universities here which would not have the same standards as their parent institutions," said another GEAC member.

Ramesh didn't respond to phone calls and a text message.

Incidentally, HRD minister Kapil Sibal — while making it clear that he was not targeting any specific decision — had said that on issues (such as Bt brinjal), "we have to trust our scientists and accept their advice on scientific issues."

Later, the Prime Minister had to convene a meeting of Ramesh, Sibal, S&T Minister Prithviraj Chavan and Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar to reconcile their differences on the issue. Chavan was also present at tonight's dinner.