

Produce low-cost briquettes: VC



STRESSING ON ECONOMY:Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University P. Murugesha Boopathi addressing participants of the workshop on briquettes at the university in Coimbatore.

COIMBATORE: Many of the briquetting industries are dependent on saw dust, which has led to the increase in price of saw dust pushing up the manufacturing cost of briquettes. Hence, it is imperative to develop new machinery for producing more briquettes at low cost, P. Murugesha Boopathi, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), said here recently.

Waste

Inaugurating a workshop on "Briquetting of Agro-residues" at the university, he said 300 million tonnes of agro-residues were generated in India, of which 70 million tonnes were wasted even after they had been used for various purposes.

Some of the uses were for cattle feed, making cowsheds, roofing for houses, and for burning stoves. Residues were burnt and disposed prior to the next tilling of the land. Such burning polluted the air, land, and the environment on the whole. Burning of 1 kg of agro-residues generated 3,600 to 4,400 kilo calories, the Vice-Chancellor added.

"In such a scenario, collection of these wasted agro-residues and using them in briquette form will prevent

pollution and provide high value energy. Besides, it will help enhance the farmers' income," Mr. Boopathi said.

Briquette manufacturing was not to the expected level in India, the Vice-Chancellor said adding that briquette manufacturing should be planned after assessing the local regions for feed stock availability and its year round supply.

Anil Kumar Dubey, Principal Scientist, Central Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Bhopal, spoke.

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"Special thrust to floriculture"

Cultivation area at Vadakavunji to be expanded to 900 acres: Collector



Independent:Collector M. Vallalar at the inaugural of Rural Self-Employment Training Centre in Dindigul.

DINDIGUL: Horticulture cultivation area under precision farming at Vadakavunji village on Kodaikanal hill will be expanded to 900 acres from the existing 200 acres. Special thrust will be given to floriculture, said Collector M. Vallalar.

He was inaugurating the 24 {+t} {+h} Rural Self Employment Training Institute, set up by the Canara Bank here on Monday.

Poly green house would be established to raise nurseries for floriculture at this village. Moreover, a new check dam at an estimated cost of Rs.1 crore would also be constructed to enhance irrigation facilities to this mega cluster.

Organic farming and good agriculture practices have become the norm for agriculture. So intense training on organic farming was essential, he added.

District administration had provided one acre land at Chettinaickenpatti, opposite to the Collectorate Master Complex for the construction of training shed and classrooms for this institute. Now, the institute had started functioning temporarily in a private building and would shift to its own building shortly.

The Collector also appealed to the bankers to include training for masonry, marble, granite and tiles laying techniques and other areas relating to civil construction, especially for unskilled construction workers.

Jobs were available in plenty in several industries in the district. What industrialists wanted was skilled labourers and employable persons. This training would generate more skilled and employable candidates suitable to all jobs, Mr. Vallalar stated.

In his special address, Dindigul MP N.S.V. Chitthan said Palani-Dindigul highway would be converted into a four-lane shortly.

PHC to be set up

The Canara Bank Assistant General Manager, S. Annamalai, said the main aim was to provide training to rural people below poverty line and youth and ensure employment to them. The bank would set up primary health centres and provide drinking water facilities to villages as part of its corporate social responsibility ventures.

The capital expenditure of the institute would be Rs.3 crore and revenue expenditure would be Rs.10 lakh. It would offer in-house training on 32 skills including computer operation, catering, organic farming, modern dairy, digital photography and videography, floriculture, cell phone repair mechanism, beautician course and wiring and plumbing.

Training period would be 3 to 30 days.

The bank had trained 84,000 persons so far. Unemployed men and women who studied sixth class to HSC were eligible, he added.

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Workshop on fisheries eco-labelling

KOCHI: A workshop to sensitise various fisheries stakeholders on eco-labelling was held at Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute.

The workshop was jointly organised by National Agricultural Innovation Project of the Indian Council for

Agricultural Research, New Delhi and Socio Economic division of the Institute.

Eco-labeling is the granting of product labels for informing consumers about the environmental impact of a product.

The self-declaration of eco-label would provide an opportunity to access the market for eco-labeled products and re-orient the regulatory and fisheries management measures, a communication from the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute said.

Fisheries experts including E. Vivekanandan, M.R. Boopendranath and C Ramachandran and representatives of various stakeholders attended.

G. Syda Rao, director of the Institute, also spoke.

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Panel to decide on tree cutting

KOCHI: Trees located at public places in the State will get protection from being unnecessarily axed down.

From now onwards, it would require the approval of a panel consisting of civic representatives, forest officials and representatives of non-governmental organisation for cutting trees.

Earlier, the applications for cutting trees were to be submitted to the officials of the Social Forestry Wing of the Forest Department and decisions were taken without any public consultation.

Transparency

The new scheme is expected to ensure transparency in the process and save trees.

The committees, to be formed at local levels, will have the head of the civic body as its chairman and Assistant Forest Conservator (Social Forestry) as its convener.

The local councillor, town planner and two representatives of the non-governmental organisations will be the members of the committee.

Any application for cutting the trees should be considered by the committee.

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Tirupur to get cold storage facility to stock onion; farmers can avoid distress sales

It will have a capacity of 50 tonnes; cost expected is Rs. 1 crore

Tirupur: Onion farmers in the district who now have very little facilities to hold back their stock till prices scale up can rejoice as a cold storage is all set to come up shortly at Pongalur to stack onions soon after the harvest.

Joint Director of Agriculture L. Sankararaj told The Hindu that the facility would be set up by Tamil Nadu Agriculture Marketing Board at an estimated outlay of Rs one crore and it was expected to be commissioned before the end of the first half of 2010-11 financial year.

The cold storage would have the capacity to hold 50 metric tonnes of onion at a time.

The Onion cold storage was expected to be a big boon to the small and marginal farmers since it would protect them against making distress selling of their produce when confronted with shrinkage of demand and lack of storage capabilities. "At present, onion is raised over 3,000 ha in the district," Mr. Sankararaj said.

From the consumer point of view, the cold storage would ensure stable onion prices. Mr. Sankararaj said that cold storage structure would be provided with reinforced cement concrete (RCC) roof embedded with adequate insulation materials to prevent build up of high temperature inside.

The onion being a delicate commodity to store since it was high in water content, special storage process would be followed to ensure desired results.

Only the onions whose outer scales were adequately dried either in the field or through artificial means would be allowed inside for stuffing. Stacking heights would be maintained as per the norms and plastic crates would be used to store the produce to avoid pressure bruising.

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20.02 lakh tonnes of sugar for April

NEW DELHI: The Central government has made available 20.02 lakh tonnes of sugar, comprising 18 lakh tonnes of non-levy and 2.02 lakh tonnes of levy sugar, for April.

This quantum is considered adequate to meet the internal demand in April.

Millers have to sell and despatch the entire released non-levy quota for April within the validity period.

Land acquisition for restoring canals begins

CHENNAI: The process of acquiring land for restoring the surplus course of various water bodies on the city fringes, as part of flood mitigation measures have been initiated by the Water Resources Department (WRD).

Officials of WRD said the Manapakkam channel, which carries surplus water from the Porur lake to the Adyar , has been encroached upon in a few places. This had resulted in inundation in the neighbouring localities during monsoon. Of the 6.3-km long channel covering areas such as Gerugambakkam and Moulivakkam, the 1.2-km stretch along the service lane of Chennai bypass has been blocked.

The WRD plans to widen the channel by acquiring land on the stretch and also remove encroachments in other places. With this, the carrying capacity of the channel would increase to 2,000 cubic feet per second from the existing 800 cusecs. The branch canal in Kolappakkam would also be covered, an official said.

The Rs.26-crore project would be taken up under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission.

The canal from the Ambattur lake to the water body in Korattur would also be rejuvenated.

As a portion of the channel falls in the area under the control of SIDCO, the WRD is coordinating with the Ambattur Industrial Estate Manufacturers Association to acquire land for expanding the canal, an official said.

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India's mountains of shame

Covered by plastic sheets in a football-field-sized area, the black mountain is a formidable presence amid the rolling fields of wheat ripening under a warm March sun.

Under its tarpaulin sheets, Fatehgarh Sahib's mountain, 40 km west of state capital Chandigarh, stores wheat harvested three years ago.

The wheat bags have holes and rats run riot. This is part of India's federal reserve of grain, to be stocked in a warehouse to feed the poor.

Out in the open, it quietly turns to garbage in a granary state that has more hungry people than 33 developing countries.

As India prepares for a record 2010 wheat harvest, many times more than the nation's needs, the field of grain here in the eastern district of Fatehgarh Sahib is one of hundreds across Punjab. The black mountain — if it doesn't completely rot away — holds enough grain to feed 300,000 people.

It hides the nation's inability to store its plentiful food, one of the challenges ahead for Congress President Sonia Gandhi as she prepares to pilot a national effort to get food to the poor where and when they need it.

The annual test begins on April 1 as procurement, the process of buying foodgrain from farmers for national food stocks, begins at Ludhiana's Khanna Mandi, Asia's biggest grain market.

The portents for this year are as grim as ever. Officials expect 11 million tonnes of wheat from a bumper harvest from Punjab alone. With the state's storage capacity being 18 million tonnes (of which space for 13 million tonnes is already occupied), Punjab needs to create room for 6 million tonnes.

Across India, unless the government finds a solution, rot and rodents will claim 20 million tonnes, or a tenth of the total harvest.

These lost grains are keeping millions hungry: India ranks 66 out of 88 countries on the 2008 Global Hunger Index.

"We are doing our best to prevent further damage," said Rattan Mittal, general manager, procurement, Punjab Agro Ltd, one of seven agencies that buy wheat and rice for the Food Corporation of India (FCI), which never moved the mountain at Fatehgarh Sahib for distribution.

Mittal said Punjab Agro hopes to hire panchayat (village council) land to store the grain that will spill out of warehouses this year.

Nearly 20 km north of Fatehgarh Sahib, a whole stadium-sized depot of openly stored grains risks contamination from a junkyard of food debris. Punjab stores 80 per cent of its grain in the open, said Mittal.

Getting the math right

How much foodgrain does India waste every year?

The FCI, the government company that manages foodstocks, isn't particularly willing to answer that.

It took a right-to-information query in 2008 to force an answer: between 1997 and 2007, more than 1.3 million tonnes of grain (130,000 truckloads) decayed in storage. The government spent Rs 2.59 crore just to get rid of the rotten food.

The problem is more formidable today. India's federal reserve of foodgrain is about 45 million tonnes, double the stocks held last year and 17 million tonnes more than FCI's storage capacity.

"Obviously, this is much more than what is needed," said Ashok Gulati, Asia director of the International Food Policy Research Institute. "Stocks kept in the open without proper care lead to unacceptably large wastages."

If the stocks were to be distributed, every Indian, all 1.1 billion of us, would get 45 kg.

State-run companies and cooperatives have a capacity to hold about 109.2 million tonnes and need an additional 35 million tonnes of space to fill the gap with an investment of Rs 7,687 crore, according to the Planning Commission.

It costs the FCI Rs 15,000 to buy and store a tonne of wheat; Rs 19,000 for rice.

"So, 1 million tonnes wasted means a loss of at least Rs 1,500 crore for wheat and Rs 1,900 crore for rice," said Gulati.

In July 2002, government agencies ended up with 63 million tonnes of foodgrain. It had to provide subsidies so the grain could be exported. Grain export is at present banned because last year's drought and soaring prices led to an 11-year high in food inflation, 19.95 per cent on December 5, 2009. It's 16 per cent today.

Experts say the government urgently needs to invest in modern storage, or failing that, throw open the doors to the private sector, or both.

Until then? Here's Gulati's prescription: Distribute the surplus grains to more people at subsidised prices, not just to those below the poverty line. That's a better solution than letting grain rot in a country hungry for food.

(The Hunger Project is a Hindustan Times effort to track, investigate and report every aspect of the struggle to rid India of hunger. You can read previous stories in this series at www.hindustantimes.com/hungerproject).

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/525218.aspx>

Food inflation coming down: Cabinet secretary

New Delhi, March 30, 2010

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Food inflation is coming down, with sugar and vegetable prices falling and other indicators remaining stable, cabinet secretary K M Chandrashekar said on Tuesday.

"Sugar prices have come down. Pulses have come down. Wheat and rice are stable. Edible oils are stable. Vegetables are coming down," Chandrashekar told reporters on the sidelines of a conference here when asked about food inflation.

"Food inflation, even if you take the inflation figures, is coming down," he added.

India's annual food inflation fell marginally once again to 16.22 per cent for the week ended March 13 from 16.3 percent in the week before.

According to data on wholesale price index released by the commerce and industry ministry last Thursday, the index for food articles rose 0.1 per cent during the week under review, while that for non-food articles fell 0.2 per cent.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/524942.aspx>

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Clear

Wednesday, Mar 31

Max Min

36.9° | 27.3°

Rain: 00mm in24hrs Sunrise: 06:07

Humidity: 89% Sunset: 18:20

Wind: Normal Barometer: 1008.1mb

Tomorrow's Forecast



Tstorm

Thursday, Apr 1

Max Min

37° | 28°

Extended Forecast for a week

| Friday | Saturday | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Apr 2 | Apr 3 | Apr 4 | Apr 5 | Apr 6 |
| | | | | |
| 37° 28° | 36° 29° | 36° 27° | 36° 27° | 35° 26° |
| Sunny | Sunny | Sunny | Partly Cloudy | Partly Cloudy |