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## **Horticulture has huge potential to raise socio-economic status of farmers: VC**

COIMBATORE: Farmers need to be regularly advised to raise horticultural crops suited to their locality to supplement their farm income because horticulture has immense potential to elevate their socio-economic status, P. Murugesha Boopathi, Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, said here recently.

Inaugurating a two-day annual research meet on horticulture at the university, the Vice-Chancellor said horticulture was the fastest growing sector within agriculture.

“The area under horticultural crops in the country increased from 12.8 million hectares in 1991-92 to 20.7 million hectares in 2008-09 with a corresponding increase in production from 96.6 million tonnes to 220 million tonnes during the same period.

In Tamil Nadu too, the area, production, and productivity increased indicating the huge potential available in the horticultural sector both at the national and state level,” Mr. Boopathi said.

### **Fruit varieties**

Pointing out that the university had so far released 90 varieties in fruits, vegetables, spices, flowers, plantation crops, and medicinal crops, Mr. Boopathi said efforts should be initiated to popularise these varieties among farmers and other stakeholders.

“The private sector is playing a dominant role in the horticulture seed market, and therefore the public sector research needs to rise up to the occasion and develop potential varieties with favourable traits,” he added.

N. Anand, Director of Research, Namdhari Seeds Private Limited, Bangalore, outlined the areas of research that needed special focus. They were: development of abiotic stress tolerant hybrids for drought, heat, and salinity, multiple resistant varieties, hybrids suited for export needs, etc.

M. Paramathma, Director of Research, TNAU, urged the horticultural scientists to introduce changes in their research activities in accordance with market needs and consumer preferences.

N. Ajjan, Director, Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies, TNAU, said that though India ranked first in production and productivity of several fruits and vegetables at the world level, its share in horticulture trade was just two per cent. Also the quantum being processed was very negligible.

“There is a need to create awareness on hi-tech horticultural practices, to upscale precision farming practices, to develop fruits and vegetable varieties suitable for processing, and to form commodity groups to grow raw materials for the industry.

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## **Special task force for Tirupur to boost pulses production**

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*The proposed team will be headed by Joint Director of Agriculture*

*A series of campaign would be conducted to educate farmers*

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Tirupur: A special task force is all set to be constituted by the Department of Agriculture for boosting pulses production in the district since the overall area coverage under pulses fell much below the target set for the district during the last financial year.

In 2009-10, pulses could be raised only on 18,110 ha against the target of 39,658 ha assigned for the district.

Target

Variety-wise, only area coverage of Bengal Gram exceeded the target of 1,510 ha and stood at 3,733 ha while the area brought under black gram, green gram, cowpea, red gram and horse gram were way off the target.

The proposed task force team will be headed by Joint Director of Agriculture and assisted by Assistant Directors of Agriculture at the block level.

Joint Director of Agriculture A. Gopal told The Hindu that the main purpose of the constitution of task force was to look into the ways and means of increasing pulses production in the district.

“We will draw an action plan to reduce the yield gap in the crop and to seek necessary funds for pulses projects in the district,” he said.

Mr. Gopal said that the task force team would also organise a series of campaign across the district to educate the farmers on the benefits of raising pulses.

“They will be told that pulses is one crop which gives yield to them in about 65 days from the date of sowing and the profit margins are high,” he said.

With these steps, Mr. Gopal said, the department expects to increase the productivity of pulses by at least 25 percent at the end of the fiscal.

During the last fiscal, yield was computed at 200 kg/ha under rain fed conditions and about 450 kg/ha in irrigated areas.

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*By Athul Lal A G*

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## Fertiliser distribution system in jeopardy



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The delay in constituting an effective mechanism has jeopardised the fertiliser and chemical distribution system in the state. Subsequent to the urea scam, the Agriculture Department had set up a four-member committee during the first week of April to recommend measures for revamping the fertiliser distribution system. The committee, comprising Director of Agriculture, Director of Paddy Mission, a principal agricultural officer and an area manager of FACT, was to present its report within 10 days. But, even after nearly two months, the committee has not even conducted a sitting, according to sources.

After the urea scam, only indigenously-produced urea allotted by the Centre is being distributed in the state which comes around 6500 metric tonnes. This quantity was

enough during the summer season.

But, around 10,000 metric tonnes of urea is additionally required for manuring purposes during the monsoon period.

This has resulted in shortage of urea in the state.

“The allocation by the Centre has been distributed for producing fertiliser mixtures, which are used as manure for rubber plants. Owing to this, there is now a shortage of urea in retail fertiliser depots from where they are directly supplied to farmers,” sources said.

Meanwhile, the Centre has again deputed the Krishak Bharathi Cooperative Limited (Kribhco) to supply imported urea in the state. “In the wake of urea scam, the Agriculture Department had suspended the registration of Southern Phosphates and Minerals (SPM), which is the only distributor of Kribhco in the state. Though the Centre has been informed of the situation, the Centre had taken the stand that the issue should be sorted out by the State Government itself. This will further worsen the situation,” sources said.

Experts in the farming sector point out the need for setting up a fertiliser control and monitoring wing in the state similar to the ones in neighbouring states.

“Some 20 years back, there existed a high- power committee chaired by the Agriculture Production Commissioner (APC). It used to meet once in three months to review the requirement, supply and distribution of fertilisers. Later, as the rice and coconut farming sector slipped into a crisis, the fertiliser distribution system also was affected. Due to this, the importance of the committee also declined. Such a high-power committee has to be formed now not only to monitor fertiliser supply but also to conduct discussions with the Centre regarding the needs of the state,” R Hali, former director of Agriculture, said.

According to him, FACT, which is distributing Factomphos in the state, should be revamped to distribute urea also.

# Weather

Chennai - INDIA

## Today's Weather



Clear

**Tuesday, May 25**

Max Min

39.8° | 28.2°

Rain: Trace

Sunrise: 05:41

Humidity: 80%

Sunset: 18:29

Wind: Normal

Barometer: 1002.0

## Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

**Wednesday, May 26**

Max Min

39° | 30°

## Extended Forecast for a week

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

May 27

May 28

May 29

May 30

May 31



37° | 30°

36° | 30°

37° | 29°

37° | 29°

37° | 29°

Sunny

Partly Cloudy

Partly Cloudy

Partly Cloudy

Sunny