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## TNAU to upscale e-velanmai project in State



**TECH-SAVVY: Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University P. Murugesha Boopathi launching the website [www.evelanmai.com](http://www.evelanmai.com). at the university in Coimbatore.**

COIMBATORE: With nearly 80 lakh farm holdings in the State, it is not possible for extension workers to reach each and every farmer. In this background, the e-velanmai project has been launched by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University on a pilot basis in three sub-basins as part of the TN-IAMWARM (Tamil Nadu Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water Bodies Restoration and Management) project, P. Murugesha Boopathi, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, said here recently.

At a training on “Up-scaling of e-velanmai in Tamil Nadu”, after launching the website [www.evelanmai.com](http://www.evelanmai.com), he said the project, first of its kind in the country, was based on the application of ICT tools for solving farmers' problems, answering their queries, and clearing their doubts. This would bridge the wide gap that had resulted from the incapability of the extension worker reaching the farmer. Even the Krishi Vigyan Kendra

(KVK) scientists of the university found it impossible to contact all the farmers.

“The project will help farmers save time in approaching the extension centres of either the State Department of Agriculture or the university. Farmers can send in digital photographs of pest and disease problems from their fields to the university by e-mail and scientists can give immediate solutions. The project, which is being operated in a few basins, will be up-scaled to cover all the sub-basins. There is also a proposal to request the State Government to extend this service to the entire State,” Mr. Boopathi said.

S.R. Rajagopal, president, Water Users' Association, Palar Basin, Palladam, sharing his experiences about the project, said though there was initial hesitation in adopting the project, farmers came forward to do so after witnessing the advantages.

C. Karthikeyan, Principal Investigator of the project, said the pilot project was tested in the three sub-basins of Palar, Aliyar, and Varahanadhi. In order to enhance the participation of farmers, a paid model of the project was introduced.

“Till date, more than 1,100 farmers have enrolled as members. Through this service, timely advice on cultivation and market-related problems faced by farmers are being given by scientists,” he said.

The World Bank Review Team adjudged the model as an effective ICT based technology transfer model suited to poor and illiterate farmers. It also received the “Best ICT enabled Farming of the Year 2009” award from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, Government of India, Mr. Karthikeyan said.

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## **International programme launched to protect forests**

Delegates from more than 50 countries and international organisations agreed in Oslo on Thursday to launch an interim partnership to support developing countries' efforts to fight deforestation and reduce emissions.

Dubbed REDD+, for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation, the programme aims to encourage developing countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation while a legally binding U.N. accord on dealing with climate change is being negotiated.

The project, endorsed on Thursday by the heads of state or government, ministers and other representatives attending the Oslo Climate and Forest Conference, also covers sustainable management of forests, conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. Developed countries have promised to provide extra funding to

developing countries for the implementation of REDD+ plans and actions, which were formally introduced at the 2007 U.N. Climate Change Conference.

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## **Erosion of species**

This refers to the article, “Biodiversity challenges ahead” (May 27). As children of this planet, we are not only entitled to the right to enjoy its resources and diversity but also entrusted with the moral duty to conserve, replenish and sustain its ecological balance. The ecological value of our natural environment is far greater than its economic value. Governments all over the world should not only take steps to conserve biodiversity but also ensure that all these measures are implemented in right earnest. Utilisation of alternative resources such as solar and wind power should be the top priority.

If we do not wake up now and stop the degradation, we will be left with a planet as cold as are our hearts and as lifeless as is our greed.

D.V.R . Naveen, Secunderabad

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S. Balaji's piece has rightly argued that human greed is responsible for the extinction of wild fauna and flora. His observation that human existence depends on “protecting biodiversity in forests, coastal ecosystems and in our own neighbourhood” is in congruence with the quintessential nature of our culture which stresses that life in its varied forms and manifestations is interdependent and interrelated.

Adhering to the principle of shared membership of all living organisms, our ancestors always valued their relationship with the animal kingdom. The common man, even without knowing about the dynamics of biodiversity challenges, used to respect nature. But rulers, politicians, planners, industrialists and businessmen continue to alter, destroy or exploit natural environs in the name of development. There is a prophetic note in a hymn of the Atharva Veda which is a satire on materialists. It says: “O Death, we pay homage to thee for saving us from the scientific weapons of the learned, from the instruments and arms of kings, and from the economic troubles created by businessmen.”

Satish K. Kapoor,Solapur

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The article has rightly pointed out the need to conserve biodiversity at all levels for the well-being of the ecosystem and the world as a whole. It is embarrassing that we as humans have been causing damage to the flora and fauna. Be it global warming, deforestation, soil

erosion or any other threat to nature, everything is attributed to nothing but human greed. We must quickly start countering the erosion of species.

Tarun Girdhar, Chandigarh

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The article was extensive in its coverage of the venue and date of COP-10. However, one would have liked more information on the biodiversity erosion caused by environmental pollution — various types of soil, air and water pollution — which is a major threat to both terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity today. Many of the insect and arthropod species inhabiting the canopy and soil, and water are very sensitive. They are under severe threat due to unfavourable changes in the environment. More than the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere to which organisms are sensitive, it is the temperature rise that poses a greater threat to plant and animal species.

M. Vikram Reddy, Puducherry

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## **Farmers instructed to insure crops**

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*Special training on insurance scheme for secretaries of PACB and cooperative banks organised*

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THENI: Farmers should insure all crops under National Crop Insurance Scheme to compensate the loss if any owing to natural calamities, said Collector M. Vallalar.

He was presiding over a special training programme on national crop insurance scheme meant for secretaries of Primary Agricultural Cooperative Banks (PACB) and cooperative banks here on Wednesday.

Compensate loss

Main objective of the scheme was to compensate the loss of farmers owing to natural calamities, to encourage farmers to adopt progressive farming practices, high value in-puts and higher technology in agriculture and to help stabilise farm income, particularly during disaster period. Paddy, 'cumbu,' maize, 'cholam,' ragi, black gram, 'pachai payaru,' 'tuarai,'

groundnut, sesame, sugarcane, cotton, chillies, onion, ginger, turmeric, tapioca and banana could be insured under this scheme.

Even the lease farmers could avail this scheme, he added.

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### **Virudhunagar gearing up for mass planting of saplings on June 5**

VIRUDHUNAGAR: The district administration has formed one distribution centre for every 25 houses to enable smooth mass planting of saplings planned on June 5.

In a statement, the Collector, Sigy Thomas Vaidhyan, said that all the saplings would be moved to the distribution centres by June 2. People have been asked to dig up the pits by May 30 to plant saplings.

They have been asked to approach the panchayat Presidents and municipal Commissioners on June 4, if they do not get the saplings by June 3.

People should keep the required number saplings, the sticks and cement bags for making tree guards, Azospirillum packets, certificate for Teak saplings and the information notice for planting the saplings before June 5.

Ms. Sigy said that the saplings should be planted between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. on June 5. The leaders of distribution centres should participate in the meetings organised on June 3 and 4.

They should get forms meant for the saplings to be planted in private institutions and places of worship, from the teachers and village administrative officers, who are the enumerators for the movement. The duly signed forms should be handed over to the enumerators on June 5. People who need saplings in large numbers for private institutions and places of worship could get the required number of saplings from the Sevalur nursery on producing the permit vouchers issued by officials.

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### **Aid for marine ornamental fish breeding**

CUDDALORE: The Asian Development Bank has sanctioned a sum of Rs. 36.2 lakh for implementing the marine ornamental fish breeding scheme in four coastal villages of Cuddalore district, according to Collector P. Seetharaman.

In a statement released here, Mr. Seetharaman said that villages such as Velingirayanpettai, Periyakuppam, Parangipettai and Thammanampettai had been identified for the purpose.

A memorandum of understanding had been signed with the Annamalai University, Chidambaram, for imparting training.

At least 10 persons, either members of self-help groups or others, in each village would be selected for undergoing the training in marine ornamental fish breeding, Mr. Seetharaman said.

Fish lings would be obtained from the Marine Fisheries Research Centre located near Mandapam in Rameswaram district. People of these villages had come forward to donate either a building or a vacant site measuring 1,200 sq.ft., for conducting the training programme. Fish breeding would fetch a monthly income of Rs 5,000 per head, the Collector said

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## Business Standard

Friday, May 28, 2010

### Battle royal over Bt cotton royalty

Latha Jishnu / New Delhi May 28, 2010, 0:36 IST



Monsanto licencees have earned over Rs 1,500 crore since 2002.

A quiet but determined battle is being fought in the courts, and outside, by US agricultural biotech giant Monsanto, its Indian affiliates and seed lobbyists to free the prices of genetically modified Bt cotton from state government control. At stake is huge business running into several thousand crore of rupees, with royalty alone on the Bt cotton seeds grossing over Rs 1,500 crore for the US firm and its Indian licencees since

2002 when Bt cotton was introduced in the country (a claim that is not endorsed by the US company).

Farmers' organisations across the political spectrum, seed dealers and seed companies have been drawn into the dispute which could have a major impact on the direction that agriculture, specially the volatile cotton production sector, takes. Caught up in the trait war is the issue of the viability of the seed sector in India, which is a Rs 6,000-crore business. The National Seed Association of India (NSAI), which is being driven by the small coterie of technology providers, has also joined the fray with a lawsuit that questions the fixing of seed prices.

The major thrust of the battle is against the Andhra Pradesh (AP) government which has taken the lead in keeping Bt cotton seed prices at affordable rates for farmers. It did so by slashing the high royalty rates charged by Monsanto's technology marketing arm, Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (India) Ltd (MMB) for its Bollgard and subsequently Bollgard II branded seeds, starting in 2006. MMB charges an upfront technology fee of Rs 50 lakh each from its Indian licencees — there are 28 companies in its fold — and collects part of the royalty or trait fee levied on each packet of Bt seeds.

It is this royalty that has made the major cotton-growing states see red. In its first two years in the Indian market, Bollgard, a single trait gene, was sold for Rs 1,800 for a 450-gm packet. (All seeds are sold in packets of 450 gm although in the case of Bt seeds, a 125-gm packet of ordinary seeds, used to grow a buffer zone around Bt cotton, is part of the package.) Of this, as much as two-thirds, or Rs 1,200, is accounted for the trait fee, or royalty. In the subsequent two years, the price went up to Rs 1,850 with Rs 1,250 as the royalty. The royalty is shared by the sub-licencee and MMB in a ratio fixed by the latter in a separate agreement.

The current flashpoint is a result of the decision of the three southern states to maintain cotton seed prices at last year's level. However, the AP order issued on April 24 makes no mention of fixing the trait fees, but the order effectively brings down the royalty for Bollgard to Rs 50 per packet and that for Bollgard II to Rs 90. Although competing technology is on offer from JK Seeds and Nath Seeds, Monsanto holds 90 per cent of the market. NSAI contends that cost of production has risen and the controls will affect their viability.

A more serious argument made by the Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE), which groups the six major agri-biotech MNCs and five Indian companies, is that price controls will kill research into new seed technology. But for such companies the real issue is the trait fees which bring vast profits and for which tough battles have been fought.

In 2006, after a series of legal skirmishes between MMB and the state government which went all the way up to the Supreme Court of India, and also invited a price reduction order from the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission, AP fixed Bollgard rates at Rs 750 per packet, a price that included the trait value. MMB is a

joint venture of Monsanto's wholly-owned Indian arm and Mahyco, the Jalna-based seed company in which Monsanto also has a 26 per cent equity stake.

AP's example was quickly followed by India's largest cotton-growing states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, which also pegged Bollgard rates at the same level. Although challenged in state high courts by MMB and the All India Crop Biotech Association (AICBEA), which represents the six major multinationals in the agri-biotech sector, the three states managed to bring down the high trait fees for Bollgard and Bollgard II. As a result, farmers in the northern cotton belt rule much higher since Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan do not regulate the prices. The royalty collected on Bt cotton seeds, however, has been rising steadily since the offtake has shot up substantially — one of the arguments that AP cites in favour of lower trait fees.

According to trade figures, the sales of Bollgard peaked from the initial 125,000 packets in 2002 to over 59 million in 2008, whereas the market for Bollgard II, introduced in 2007, is growing exponentially. Sales of Bollgard II in the last three years have crossed 24 million packets. So have the number of technology providers which has grown to four now, although the bulk of the market (over 75 per cent) has been cornered by MMB's licencees. In all, the sale of Bt cotton seeds up to 2009 has crossed 83 million and brought in royalty of over Rs 1,580 crore in the past eight years, as calculations by trade sources and state governments show, based on the number of Bollgard packets sold in the southern states and in the north where different prices and royalty rates apply. Last year's royalty collection alone is estimated at around Rs 355 crore because of increased sales of Bollgard II with higher trait value.

Monsanto sidestepped questions about the royalty earned by the company in India but justified trait values by pointing out that Bt cotton technology is generating "cumulative value of over Rs 40,000 crore per annum (2008) to farmers, farm labourers, ginners, textile mills, exporters, and the seed and biotech industry, through higher cotton yields, income and lower insecticide usage".

In a detailed interview to Business Standard, Gyanendra Shukla, director, Monsanto (India), said Bt technology had helped India to become the world's second-largest cotton producer and exporter by doubling cotton production from 2002-08. As for AP, "cotton production is up 147 per cent due to better cotton hybrid seeds with competing Bt technologies and improved farmer agronomic practices. AP farmers earned an additional income of approximately Rs 4,000 crore annually," claimed Shukla.

Monsanto's contention is that trait value should be relative to the additional income generated by Bt technology which includes the savings in pesticide usage. The company estimates pesticide savings at Rs 682 crore in the state based on a saving of Rs 2,050 per acre for the state's total cotton acreage of 3.32 million acres.

Farmers, however, reject this claim and that of NSAI. The All-India Kisan Sabha says the figures of farmers' incomes are blown up to make a case for costlier seeds. "Our costs have gone up sharply as the government itself agrees. Pesticide usage has not



come down. As for Bt seeds, we have now been asked to use two packets of Bollgard per acre instead of one earlier. So, how are seed companies losing?"

For the moment, AP has won since the High Court has rejected the NSAI's petition for an interim stay. The MMB case is to be heard after the summer recess.



# Weather

Chennai - INDIA

## Today's Weather



Sunny

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs  
Humidity: 36%  
Wind: Normal

## Friday, May 28

Max Min  
40.8° | 29.7°

Sunrise: 05:41  
Sunset: 18:30  
Barometer: 1001

## Tomorrow's Forecast



Sunny

## Saturday, May 29

Max Min  
39° | 29°

## Extended Forecast for a week

| Sunday<br>May 30   | Monday<br>May 31   | Tuesday<br>Jun 1           | Wednesday<br>Jun 2         | Thursday<br>Jun 3          |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|                    |                    |                            |                            |                            |
| 38°   29°<br>Sunny | 38°   29°<br>Sunny | 38°   30°<br>Partly Cloudy | 38°   30°<br>Partly Cloudy | 39°   30°<br>Partly Cloudy |