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U.S. meat farmers brace for limits on antibiotics

Erik Eckholm

Piglets hop, scurry and squeal their way to the far corner of the pen, eyeing an approaching human.

"It shows that they're healthy animals," Craig Rowles, the owner of a large pork farm here, said with pride.

Rowles says he keeps his pigs fit by feeding them antibiotics for weeks after weaning, to ward off possible illness in that vulnerable period. And for months after that, he administers an antibiotic that promotes faster growth with less feed.

Dispensing antibiotics to healthy animals is routine on the large, concentrated farms that now dominate American agriculture. But the practice is increasingly condemned by medical experts who say it contributes to a growing scourge of modern medicine: the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, including dangerous E. coli strains that account for millions of bladder infections each year, as well as resistant types of salmonella and other microbes.

FDA guidelines

Now, after decades of debate, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) appears poised to issue its strongest guidelines on animal antibiotics yet, intended to reduce what it calls a clear risk to human health. They would end farm uses of the drugs simply to promote faster animal growth and call for tighter oversight by veterinarians.

The agency's final version is expected within months, and comes at a time when animal-confinement methods, safety monitoring and other aspects of so-called factory farming are also under sharp attack. The federal proposal has struck a nerve among major livestock producers, who argue that a direct link between farms and human illness has not been proved. The producers are vigorously opposing it even as many medical and health experts call it too timid.

Scores of scientific groups, including the American Medical Association and the Infectious Diseases Society of America, are calling for even stronger action that would bar most uses of key antibiotics in healthy animals, including use for disease prevention, as with Rowles' piglets. Such a bill is gaining traction in Congress.

“Is producing the cheapest food in the world our only goal?” asked Dr. Gail R. Hansen, a veterinarian and senior officer of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which has campaigned for new limits on farm antibiotics. “Those who say there is no evidence of risk are discounting 40 years of science. To wait until there's nothing we can do about it doesn't seem like the wisest course.”

Farmers react

With the backing of some leading veterinary scientists, farmers assert that the risks are remote and are outweighed by improved animal health and lower food costs.

“There is no conclusive scientific evidence that antibiotics used in food animals have a significant impact on the effectiveness of antibiotics in people,” the National Pork Producers Council said.

But leading medical experts say the threat is real and growing.

As drug-resistant strains of microbes evolve on the farms, they are passed along in meat sold in grocery stores. They can infect people as they handle the uncooked product or when eating, if cooking is not thorough. The dangerous strains can also enter the environment via manure or the clothes of farm workers.

Genetic studies of drug-resistant E. coli strains found on poultry and beef in grocery stores

and strains in sick patients have found them to be virtually identical, and further evidence also indicated that the resistant microbes evolved on farms and were transferred to consumers, said Dr. James R. Johnson, an infectious-disease expert at the University of Minnesota. Hospitals now find that up to 30 percent of urinary infections do not respond to the front-line treatments, ciprofloxacin and the drug known as Bactrim or Septra, and that resistance to key newer antibiotics is also emerging. E. coli is also implicated in serious blood, brain and other infections.

“For those of us in the public health community, the evidence is unambiguously clear,” Johnson said. “Most of the E. coli resistance in humans can be traced to food-animal sources.” — © *New York Times News Service*

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[Back](#) [Sci Tech](#)

Indian farmers' visit America's biggest farm show

— Photo: M.J. Prabu



New experience: Some of the farmers who visited U.S. as part of the delegation.

Croplife International, Crop life Asia and the Association of Biotechnology led enterprises special Interest group of Agri Biotechnology (Able-sigab) invited a delegation of Indian farmers to participate in a farm progress show held in Iowa, U.S., recently.

The annual farm show being held for nearly last 55 years, holds a reputation as a U.S.

premier farm show. Every year the show is held in different parts of America.

India lags behind

Mr. K.K. Agarwal, Divisional chairman from Bharat Krishak Samaj in Madhya Pradesh, says,, "Agriculture functions more as a business in the U.S. The rates of produce are decided day-to-day at the Chicago Board of Trade.

The American government offers several subsidies on acre basis to its farmers and the cost of land varies enormously according to rates of produce and yield.

"While American farmers are way ahead in GM Technologies and big machineries, India lags behind in food production and using machines. The gigantic harvestors and tillers that an American farmer uses, our state governments will think 10 times to buy."

According to Dr. Chandra Kumar Mohanty, another member, from Orissa, "There is no land ceiling act in America and they have the concept of individual insurance. But sadly in our country there is still nothing like individual insurance. Though we grow a vast majority of crops we are still not able to get a good price for the produce inspite of a government-established price fixing committee."

Unknown fact

"An interesting unknown fact about the committee is that no farmer has been or is a member of the committee. One cannot compare Indian agriculture with American agriculture, An American maize or soya farmer gets loan at 4 per cent interest and the government is taking a keen interest in them. Here the interest rates could be anything between 12-15 per cent," adds Mr. Mohanty.

Mr. Andu Gowder from the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, who also attended the week long tour says, "The farmers with whom we interacted, said they get sufficient rain for their crops.

"In addition a good price is also ensured for their harvested produce.

"We saw how in a busy Chicago street, small plants and avenue trees were being grown on the platform and taken care of.

“If it was our country, we would have the plants removed, and trees felled to widen roads and hold meetings to prevent global warming sitting on the felled tree trunks and uprooted grass,” adds Mr. Mohanty bitterly.

M.J. PRABU *Recently in Iowa*

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FARMERS'S NOTEBOOK

Backyard poultry units generate income when harvest fails

M.J. PRABU

Shells with brown colour fetch between Rs. 4 and Rs. 5 per egg

— Photo: IISR



Economical: Farmers get more income at no extra cost.

The trials and tribulations that farmers face every day to survive remains an experience to live through, rather than getting debated in closed auditoria.

Dr. V A Parthasarathy, Director of Indian Institute of Spices Research, (IISR) Kozhikode, Kerala, says:

"To earn even one rupee, a farmer needs to sweat and toil several days in the sun and rain. Often it is the case of the rat eating the stored grains, or dubious middlemen cheating innocent farmers.

"It is time that our farmers turn their attention to other areas such as animal or poultry rearing to generate additional income. These extra activities always ensure some amount of money flow in a farmer's hands. They act as parachutes when the flight to a good harvest fails."

Low investment

There are many agriculture-related enterprises for generating additional income with low investment. But it is up to the Government and scientists to popularize such low cost, less labour intensive technologies among our farmers, especially the farm women.

'Kaveri Kudumbasree', a self help group under the leadership of Ms. Preethi Sunil at Narinada in Chakkittappara Panchayat in Kozhikode, is a role model in successful backyard poultry using improved breeds.

Ms Preethi Sunil and 13 other members of the group belong to poor agriculture families and depend on their husbands, economically. As agricultural labourers, their meagre income is not sufficient to meet their daily expenditure on food and education of children. The women rear local breeds in their backyard.

As the breeds are poor layers, they did not get sufficient eggs for meeting their own family need.

The demand for country eggs in the local market is very high and eggs with brown shell even fetch better price at Rs. 4 - Rs. 5 per egg.

During one of their visits to the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), they discussed the problems they faced with local breeds.

Training programme

KVK conducted a two day training programme for the group on shelter and feeding

requirements of birds, improved breeds of poultry, identification of common diseases infesting the birds and method of vaccination against some common diseases.

After the training, the KVK supplied them 45-day old immunized chicks. Frequent visits by subject matter specialists to their units further inspired confidence in them and gave them a practical orientation in handling the birds. Moreover, veterinary services were assured to them over a phone call.

“Improved breeds such as Grammasree, Gramma Lakshmi, Kalinga Brown and Rhode Island Red are ideal for back yard poultry. In Kerala, Grammasree and Kalinga Brown are found suitable for backyard poultry. A house holding 10 cents can easily rear up to 20 birds,” says Dr. Shanmughavel, subject matter specialist.

Cage size

A cage of 120 x 90 x 60 (Length, width and height) cm size made of wood or bamboo with coconut leaf or plastic thatching is sufficient for housing 10 birds. Five to six month old birds start laying eggs.

A single hen can produce 230-250 eggs in the first year and around 180 eggs in the second year. “It is economical to rear the birds for 2 years and dispose them for meat purposes afterwards,” adds Dr. Shanmughavel.

In the improved breeds a non-egg laying period extending up to one month may be observed in the 2nd year. Lighting of a zero watt red light in the cage during night reduces the length of the non laying period.

Precautions may be taken to protect the birds from high temperature and rainfall which affect the egg laying capacity of the birds.

Feed

In addition to kitchen waste, rice or wheat bran at 80-120g/day/bird improves the health of the birds. Mixing of sea shells or egg cases in feed as a source of calcium carbonate improves the color and size of eggs.

Supplementation of the food with leguminous fodders at 200g / 10 birds / day in the hanging method enriches the nutrition of the birds.

“We were keeping 2 to 3 birds (local breeds) in our backyard for egg and meat purposes. After adoption of new technologies, we are getting more income at no extra cost,” says Ms. Preethi, leader of the group.

Earlier due to sudden outbreak of diseases, several birds died.

But, after training the women members started rearing breeds such as Grammasree and Kalinga Brown that are disease resistant, they now know how to identify common diseases in birds and treat them at the initial stage.

For details contact Ms. Preethi Sunil, Thalimothu Meethal House, Narinada, Chakkittapara, post, Kozhikode- 673 526, Kerala, Phone: 09745786706.

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Bangalore, September 14, 2010

Starring farmers, video goes 'grassroots' here



The Hindu Having grown up in the U.S., at 28, Gandhi says this was his first “tryst with rural India”.

Using video to educate farmers is hardly novel. For over two decades, ‘Krishi Darshan’ on Doordarshan has broadcast special programmes, discussions on best agricultural practices

and farmer success stories to farmers across India. Taking this forward, this young entrepreneur decided to use the medium, coupled with some low-cost technological interventions and mediated instruction.

So, while most people his age spent their waking hours stimulating the whole 'ranch experience' on Facebook's Farmville, Rikin Gandhi, an aerospace engineer from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, decided to pilot a technology initiative for small and marginal farmers living in villages in Kolar, Karnataka. A joint venture between his company, Digital Green; a local NGO, the Green Foundation; and Microsoft Research, his 'innovation' came to the limelight when he was listed as an 'Outstanding Innovator under the age of 35' by the MIT's publication Technology Review.

Having grown up in the U.S., at 28, Gandhi says this was his first "tryst with rural India". After travelling and interacting with farmers for months, he found that romantic notions of ICT being used to transform the lot of Indian farmers were far from reality. Instead, his ground work taught him that small and marginal farmers were cut-off from the information stream, and were clueless about technology. What they needed was far more simple, Gandhi realised.

"They needed to know what can help improve their produce, and this could be anything from how to use a certain fertilizer to some traditional know-how. Also, farmers needed to see that what was being 'preached' on video was actually implemented and worked elsewhere," Gandhi explains.

This led him to video, a lot like Krishi Darshan, but in a far more localised manner. The idea was simple, and the key was to keep it as "locally relevant" as possible. Gandhi started off experimenting with video. Short 10-minute clippings starring farmers from their district, town or village, captured the attention of the farmers wherever they arranged a screening. Unlike experts who 'talked-down' to them on various agricultural practices, often in a language that was rather alien to them, they were able to identify with their new 'educators'. They paid attention to what they were wearing, where the filming was done and even knew they could reach out to them, Gandhi describes.

For instance, he says, we found that when farmers identified with people who were

demonstrating something on screen, they would ask what the name of the farmer was or seek other details on what they were doing. They would pick up audio and visual cues, and dialects too are critical here. “Once they form the connection, we knew we had them ‘hooked’.”

Taking it a step further, Gandhi and his friends organised farmer volunteers into small groups and trained one person in each group to shoot, do basic video editing and operate a small, portable battery-run pico projector (that costs around \$ 150). So, farmers shot videos of their peers and arranged screenings for groups of 25 to 30 people, sometimes organised through existing Self-Help Groups in villages. Attendees were charged a nominal Rs. 2-4 per member, per screening. And what was significant is that the screenings were followed by lively discussions. “We trained coordinators to take every meet beyond the screening. They would mediate discussions, clear doubts and even address issues — we looked for coordinators who are proactive and well-accepted within their communities,” Gandhi explains.

Online, Offline

Besides pico projectors and training resource persons in village to film, edit and screen, the tech team at Digital Green is building a platform that allows hosting and sharing video data in places with limited bandwidth. An open source online data input system, COCO (Connect Online, Connect Offline), forms the base of the company's software stack. This attempts to make the video sharing and information dissemination process easy so as to be accessible in remote areas.

Basically, it allows to take the application offline in limited bandwidth conditions with uninterrupted usage in the browser. This can support up to 100,000 users located anywhere in the world and only requires Internet connectivity whenever a user is ready to synchronise the data, Gandhi explains. A robust standalone browser application, it is simple to use as it requires no installation or maintenance resources. This open source framework is similar to other existing application frameworks such as Django or Ruby on Rails, and is developed using Google Web Toolkit 2.0. It uses Google Gears, a browser plug-in that helps store data relationally and uses a local cache to access all requisite static content.

Gandhi believes that this open source technology could solve the ubiquitous problem of low bandwidth persistent across India, and help take technology to the masses. "These tech tools can be of great use. Being Open Source, we are open to sharing this with NGOs and rural networks to take it to as many people as possible."

The way ahead

After meeting with substantial success in Kolar, Gandhi decided to extend his pilot projects to other areas. Today, it is being tried out in several villages in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and parts of Chattisgarh. In its fourth year, his venture involves over 16,000 farmers. More than 500 videos have been produced and 5,414 screenings have been held.

Having been named as a 'young innovator' by an international publication has helped draw the attention of the media and several companies. However, Gandhi believes that a venture like his needs multiple partners to work with to be able to sustain itself. He is open to working with the government and public sector units to reach more people, but is weary of the "traditional top-down approach". "To make any connection, we need to work at the grassroot level," he insists.

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Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Thursday, Sep 16

Max Min
31.8° | 25.6°

Rain: 00 mm in 24 hrs

Sunrise: 5:58

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Friday, Sep 17

Max Min
31° | 24°






Humidity: 79%

Sunset: 18:11

Wind: Normal

Barometer: 1003

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Sep 18	Sep 19	Sep 20	Sep 21	Sep 22
				
31° 26°	33° 26°	33° 27°	32° 27°	32° 27°
Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy

Business Standard

Thursday, Sep 16, 2010

Groundnut oil prices rise by Rs 100 per tin

Vimukt Dave / Rajkot September 16, 2010, 0:45 IST

Groundnut oil prices rose more than Rs 100 per tin (of 15 kg) last week due to scarcity of groundnut in the state. On the other hand, some industry players believe the price rise is speculative as there is not much demand in the market.

A 15 kg tin of groundnut oil in Rajkot (Saurashtra) is now available at an all-time high of Rs 1,570-1,575. While packaged 15 litre groundnut oil tin is priced at Rs 1,470-1,475, groundnut oil sold in loose form is at Rs 955-960 per 10 kg.

According to APMC sources, groundnut bold price gained Rs 105 to Rs 750-785 and groundnut small price by Rs 50 to Rs 680-720 per 20 kg.

“Scarcity of the main raw material for groundnut oil supports the price at the upper level. Till the new season, starts from October, the prices of groundnut oil are not likely to come down,” said a Jamnagar-based miller.

According to market sources, fresh produce of groundnut will arrive in the market within a month. Interestingly, the new production is expected to be good as sowing has increased by 10-15 per cent in Saurashtra region.

Rajkot-based trader Mukesh Vora said, “At present nobody has ready stock, so there is a grim chance that prices of groundnut oil would decrease. Since the price of groundnut in Gujarat is lesser compared to other states, a lot of the groundnut stock is supplied across the country. Irrespective of whether there is demand for the groundnut oil, the prices will not come down till the new season sets in.”

Excess rain damages sesame, groundnut crops in Gujarat

Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai September 16, 2010, 0:43 IST



A third of sesame seed and 15-20% of groundnut crop damaged.

The extended monsoon has extensively damaged sesame seed and groundnut crops in Gujarat, the country's largest oilseed producer. Trade sources say the crop has also been damaged in Andhra and Maharashtra.

A formal assessment is yet to be done. However, trade sources said a third of sesame seed and 15-20 per cent of groundnut crops had been damaged until the first week of September.

Hybrid sesame seed, a 60-day kharif crop, is sown in June for harvesting in the first week of September. The crop size is very low, 7,000-8,000 tonnes. It is largely finished, says Sanjiv Sawla, partner of M Lakshamsi & Co, a Mumbai-based oilseed and oil trader. Due to the small crop size, it does not make much difference to the overall output. But it works on the market sentiment, he says.

Gujarat contributed nearly 90,000 tonnes to India's total output (275,000 tonnes) of the whitish variety of sesame seed last year. This year, "we would be happy if we get 50,000 tonnes sesame in Gujarat", said a renowned oilseed analyst in Gujarat. Until September 4, Gujarat had recorded over 100 per cent normal monsoon rainfall, with Kutch getting 193.3 per cent of the normal rain, followed by Saurashtra (138.5 per cent) and North Gujarat (101 per cent). South and east-central Gujarat, however, remained rain-deficient by 71.9 per cent and 83.2 per, respectively.

Saurashtra, rich in sesame seed growing areas, was the most affected, said Sanjay Shah, a leading oilseed trader and former chairman of the apex trade body, the Indian Oilseeds and Produce Export Promotion Council. Groundnut farmers have been unable to assess the full damage as the crop is grown underground. Fields are still muddy and need at least five continuous days of bright sunshine. A long period of mud damages the fruit.

Last year, Gujarat produced 1.35 million tonnes groundnut in the kharif season. According to early estimates, this was expected to rise to 1.45 million tonnes due to favourable monsoon. But excessive rain will lower output this season, says B V Mehta, executive director, the Solvent Extractors' Association.

As a result of the damage, groundnut bold (60/90) prices have risen nearly three per cent to Rs 5,650 a quintal from Rs 5,500 a quintal a month before. Groundnut java (80/90) has risen to Rs

5,950 a quintal from Rs 5,750 a quintal in the last one month. Sesame seed whittish (premium quality) perked marginally to Rs 5,950 a quintal from Rs 5,900 a quintal nearly a month before.

Groundnut acreage in the country was pegged at 4.9 million hectares (ha) as on September 4, as compared to 4.19 million ha on this date last year. The normal kharif acreage is about 5.4 million ha.

Sooji eases on reduced offtake

Press Trust of India / New Delhi September 15, 2010, 15:53 IST

In an otherwise steady wholesale grains market today, sooji prices fell by Rs 35 per 50 kg on reduced offtake and fall in demand from retailers.

Traders said reduced offtake due to fall in demand pulled down the sooji prices.

Sooji prices drifted by Rs 35 to Rs 840-860 per 50 kg.

Following are today's quotations in Rs per quintal:

Wheat MP (deshi) 1,650-1,750, wheat dara (for mills) 1,225-1,230, chakki atta (delivery) 1,230-1,235, atta Rajdhani (10 kg) 175, Shakti bhog (10 kg) 175, Roller flour mill 630 -650 (50 kg)

Maida 750-780 (50 kilos) and Sooji 840-860 (50 kg) Basmati rice (Lal Quila) 9,300, Shri Lal Mahal 9,300, Super basmati rice 9,000, Basmati common 5,500-5,600, rice Pusa-(1121) 4,500-5,000

Permal raw 2,000-2,050, Permal wand 2,075-2,225, Sela 2,300-2,350 and Rice IR-8- 1,825-1,850, Bajra 1,015-1,025, Jowar yellow 1,200-1,300, white 2,300-2,350, Maize 1,100-1,110, Barley (UP) 1,080-1,100 and Rajasthan 1,080-1,090

India to allow sugar futures trade from October: FMC

Reuters / New Delhi September 16, 2010, 0:50 IST



The Forward Markets Commission will relaunch sugar futures trading from October when the new marketing season starts, the regulatory body's chairman B C Khatua said on Wednesday.

In May 2009, the market regulator had barred new sugar contracts launch to rein in prices in the world's top consumer.

India, the world's second-biggest producer after Brazil, was a large importer of sugar in the past two years as farmers switched to other crops and a severe drought hit cane output in 2009.

But this year, normal monsoon rains and higher cane planting have raised expectations of surplus production. But, there is no immediate plan to resume futures trade in rice, Khatua added.

Betel leaf production rises on good monsoon

Siddharth Kalhans / Lucknow September 16, 2010, 0:46 IST



Good monsoon has given betel farmers a reason to cheer as the production of betel leaf has risen this season. Wholesale dealers in Uttar Pradesh (UP) expect the output to increase 15-20 per cent this year.

After consistent rain since July, the new crop from UP, West Bengal, Tripura and Madhya Pradesh has arrived a little early in the market. Bumper production has also helped bring down prices.

Besides, Bangladesh has also seen good crop this year due to heavy rain in the region. Nearly half the demand of betel in India is met through imports from Bangladesh.

It may be mentioned that poor monsoon and rough winters had destroyed the betel crop last year. Due to a drop in production, prices in India as well Bangladesh reached record highs. The Desi Bangla Paan (local variety of betel leaf) was sold at Rs 250-300 a bundle, while the price of Maghi Benarusi Paan was Rs 1,000 a bundle, last year. One bundle comprises 160 leaves.

This year, the price of Desi Bangla betel leaf has fallen to Rs 60-70 a bundle, while the one from Varanasi is selling for Rs 200 a bundle. Wholesale traders expect prices to rise only in winter, when the arrival of fresh stock comes to a halt.

According to agri scientist S K Singh, 66 per cent of the total betel leaf production in the country comes from West Bengal, while UP contributes 22 per cent. He said this year the total cultivated area for betel leaf had reduced 10 per cent, but bumper production has compensated for it. The annual turnover of the betel leaf industry in the country is around Rs 900 crore.

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Back Wet weather makes basmati exporters edgy

Standing crop due for harvesting in less than three weeks.

Galloping Basmati		
	Qty*	Value**
2006-07	10.46	2792.81
2007-08	11.83	4344.58
2008-09	15.56	9477.03
2009-10	20.16	10838.86

*Basmati exports in lakh tonnes
**Value in Rs crore.

Harish Damodaran

New Delhi, Sept 15

The persistent rains and cloudy weather across the north-west is keeping basmati exporters on tenterhooks, even as the standing crop of improved varieties such as Pusa-1121 and Pusa Basmati-1 is due for harvesting in less than three weeks.

“The next 7-10 days are going to be crucial. Ideally, we should have about 15 days of clear sunshine. Otherwise, yields may get affected,” said Mr Anil Kumar Mittal, Chairman of KRBL Ltd.

The current combination of rains, cloudiness, intermittent sunshine, and day temperatures of 30-35 degrees Celsius is, moreover, conducive for pest and disease outbreaks. The Pusa-1121 and Pusa Basmati-1 crops, which would be harvested from early October, are just about in the grain formation stage.

“If we do not have proper sunshine and dry weather, there is always the risk of neck blast, brown hopper or leaf blight infestation,” noted Mr Vijay Sethia, President, All-India Rice Exporters' Association (AIREA).

Aflatoxin woes

Associated with wet weather during harvesting is also the problem of aflatoxins.

“This can happen if the harvested paddy contains say, 19-20 per cent moisture. Mills will

have to ensure that the paddy they bring is dried to 13-14 per cent levels before milling,” Mr Mittal pointed out.

That, of course, entails additional energy costs towards drying.

In effect, what the exporters are desperately seeking is a withdrawal of the monsoon. “The monsoon this time was a real welcome guest. Our only prayer now is that it does not overstay like Paresh Rawal in *Atithi Tum Kab Jaoge*,” quipped a Delhi-based exporter, referring to the plot of a recent Hindi comedy film.

The monsoon's delayed withdrawal — compared to the normal schedule from September 1 — will, however, not impact traditional basmati varieties that are harvested late, towards early to mid-November.

Rains, no worry now

“In traditional varieties, even flowering will start only after the autumnal equinox on September 22 (when the shortening in day-length provides optimal conditions for ripening and production of the distinct basmati aroma). Rains are, therefore, not an immediate worry,” said Mr R.S. Seshadri, Director, Tilda Riceland Pvt. Ltd.

This year, farmers have vastly expanded the area under traditional basmati varieties such as HBC-19/CSR-30. In Punjab alone, acreage has gone up from some 80,000 hectares to an estimated 1.84 lakh hectares, while correspondingly rising from just 65,000 hectares to 2.45 lakh hectares in Haryana. These are still below the total area under evolved Pusa varieties — 5.2 lakh hectares in Punjab and 5.11 lakh hectares in Haryana.

The impetus for enhanced traditional basmati sowing this time has come mainly from expectations regarding prices.

In 2009, there was huge glut in production of Pusa-1121, so much so that the new marketing season is seen to open with un-milled paddy stocks of 2.5 to 3 crore bags of 50 kg each. That translates into about seven lakh tonnes of head rice (one lakh bags of paddy equals 2,500 tonnes of full-grain rice).

Price prospects

Besides, the trade is also believed to be holding 2,00,000 tonnes of raw Pusa Basmati-1 rice from last year's crop. By contrast, there are no stocks of traditional basmati, which improves the price prospects for these varieties. Exporters have been additionally bullish on account of the heavy floods in Pakistan, which are said to have damaged roughly 40 per cent of its standing paddy.

Since 2006-07, India's basmati exports have doubled in quantity terms and almost quadrupled in value to over Rs 10,800 crore for the year ended March 31, 2010. Much of this jump has been courtesy Pusa-1121. This year, traditional varieties may recover a bit of their lost share.

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Back Karnataka chosen for agri e-gov initiative

Among seven States selected to provide farm-related solutions.

Through this initiative, about 12 farmer-related services, such as pre- and post-harvest technology dissemination, timely weather forecast, information of availability of pesticides, fertilisers and market-related, real-time information, are to be provided.

Our Bureau

Dharwad, Sept.15

Karnataka has been selected, along with six other States, for the Rs 200-crore National E-Governance Initiative in agricultural extension.

“The National E-Governance Initiative is a Web-based solution to provide end-to-end farm-related solutions to farmers. At present it is under consideration in the Union Agriculture Ministry and is likely to go before the Cabinet shortly,” said Mr Sanjeev Gupta, joint secretary – extension, Government of India.

He was speaking at the “Orientation-cum-review workshop on Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) implementation of modified extension reforms scheme during 11th Five Year Plan” at the University of Agricultural Sciences-Dharwad.

“Through this initiative, about 12 farmer-related services, such as pre- and post-harvest technology dissemination, timely weather forecast, information of availability of pesticides, fertilisers and market-related, real-time information, are to be provided.

The other states selected for the project are Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Assam.

Dr K.V. Sarvesh, director of agriculture, Karnataka, said, “Efforts are on to strengthen the extension system in the state by fresh recruitments.

Through Central government's Agriculture Technology Management Agency scheme, we plan to integrate extension at zilla panchayat, taluk panchayat and gram panchayat levels.”

IIT Madras roped in

The National E-Governance initiative is expected to integrate mobile SMS-based dissemination, broadcast (radio and television) and IVRS (interactive voice recognition service) mode.

Mr Gupta said: “For creating special software to run the IVRS and other Web-based tools, the ministry has roped in Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras.

“The other key objective is to integrate Web-based network nationally, such as the all-agriculture, horticulture and watershed related portals.

“There are about 80 such portals in the country related to agriculture.”

“Once implemented at national level, an effort to integrate at state level will be taken up under the second phase. At state level, we will be able to showcase best agricultural practices and to help agriculture extension officers to replicate such practices across the region or at state level,” he added.

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<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2010/09/16/stories/2010091650671900.htm>

Back Coconut-based tourism on cards

Board plans trail project to revive coconut farming.



A tourist enjoying the beauty of the lake at a coconut farm near Kochi.

V. Sajeev Kumar

Kochi, Sept 15

In a first of its kind venture, the Coconut Development Board has initiated a coconut trail project as part of promoting coconut-based tourism in a big way in the country.

The trail will take the tourists from Kumbalangi, the first model tourism village in India, to the other tourist spots in South India, East, North and North-Eastern parts of the country, where they will get first-hand knowledge of the lifestyle of coconut farming community and the various end uses of the nut and other palm parts.

Coconut Development Board officials said that the project, which is expected to be launched on September 23 here, is aimed at reviving the lost glory of coconut farming and also to make the villages self-dependent. Increasing coconut production, encouraging the production of value-added coconut products and making facilities for the marketing of the produce are envisaged in the project. In the trail, one can fully savour a variety of coconut

splendours, refreshing drink, tongue-teasing cuisine, beautiful artefacts, etc., besides sailing through palm-fringed backwaters, the officials said.

A coconut museum exhibiting different varieties of coconut is also planned. Various activities centred around coconut, such as climbing, harvesting by various modes and de-husking by mechanical and manual methods, would also form part of the project.

The Board is also planning to build a coconut house entirely made of coconut wood, leaf thatch etc., a coconut park for the production and marketing of value-added coconut products, a craft village for the display-cum-sale of handicraft items made of coconut wood and shell, and also a training centre. Coconut villages in the project areas will be turned into centres where all activities associated with coconut will be demonstrated and from where all products of coconut can be sourced.

Coconut farmers, who mainly belong to the weaker section of the society, will benefit from these ventures. The officials said that the Board is pinning its hopes in promoting coconut-based tourism on a wider scale in the country and, thereby, improving the income level and standard of living of millions of rural poor.

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Back Slack demand holds basmati rice steady



Our Correspondent

Karnal, Sept. 15

With slack demand from the overseas market, basmati rice continued to witness a steady

trend.

Sluggish demand and fresh arrivals of new non-basmati rice weighed on the domestic market.

On Wednesday, Pusa-1121 (steam) ruled around Rs 5,500 a quintal; Pusa-1121 (sela) at Rs 4,300-4,500; Pusa-1121 (raw) at Rs 5,300-5,500.

Pusa (sela) quoted between Rs 3,400 and Rs 3,500 a quintal and Pusa (raw) at Rs 4,200-4,250.

Basmati sela ruled at Rs 6,200-6,300 a quintal, while basmati raw was quoted around Rs 7,100-7,300.

The Sugandha-999 sela was quoted at Rs 2,700-2,800; PR14 (old) was at Rs 2,225-2,250, PR (new) was quoted between Rs 1,925 and Rs 2,000 while the PR (old) ruled at Rs 2,000-2,100 a quintal.

The Sharbati sela variety ruled around Rs 2,800-2,850 a quintal; Sharbati steam was quoted at Rs 2,900; Parmal (PR) sela quoted around Rs 2,180, PR (raw) at Rs 2,250 and PR (steam) around Rs 2,300 a quintal.

Brokens such as Tibar ruled around Rs 3,470 a quintal; Dubar at Rs 2,800 and Mongra at Rs 2,100.

Mr Tara Chand Sharma, a rice trader, told Business Line that traders were expecting high arrivals this week but following the uncertain weather the arrivals are low.

“We were expecting the arrival of around 20,000 bags a day from this week but the actual arrival is just 6,000-10,000 bags,” he said.

The present stock is a combined arrival from the farmers of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, he added.

Only around 8,000 bags of early-variety paddy arrived at the Karnal mandi.

Around 5,000 bags of Govinda paddy arrived and the early variety was quoted at Rs 850-980 a quintal.

Around 1,000 bags of Sugandgha-999 arrived and it was lifted at around Rs 1,300-1,350 a quintal.

Around 1,000 bags of Sharbati variety arrived and the stock was lifted to the levels of Rs 1,150-1,250.

Another early variety arrived in the market on Wednesday; the 1,000 bags of RS10 that arrived were quoted at Rs 1,125-1,200 a quintal.

Date:16/09/2010 URL:

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2010/09/16/stories/2010091651901600.htm>

Back Cotton export contracts registration postponed to Oct 1

Move to prevent surge in prices due to speculation.

Our Bureau

New Delhi, Sept. 15

The Government has postponed registration of cotton export contracts by a fortnight to October 1. This is being done to prevent surge in prices of the item due to speculation, official sources said. This follows hectic lobbying by the textile industry, which raised concerns over rising cotton prices in the country.

“Registration of cotton exports was to begin today. That has been postponed to October 1,” the Commerce Secretary, Dr Rahul Khullar, told presspersons here.

Sources said there has been an increase in cotton prices due to speculation and that it was causing problems. However, they emphasised that there will be no change in what the Government announced recently as a policy on cotton exports.

Cap on exports

Dr Khullar had said earlier this month that the Government will cap cotton exports for the season starting October 1 at 55 lakh bales. A prohibitive duty will be imposed on shipments above this ceiling, he had said.

India's textile and clothing industry bodies, including the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI), had demanded that the Government should stop registration of cotton export contracts in the October-December period to facilitate an increase in the availability of the item to the domestic textile industry.

They also called for imposition of an export duty of Rs 10,000/tonne to discourage shipments, and restricting the registration of contracts for export of cotton for the January-September 2011 period to the exportable surplus assessed by the Cotton Advisory Board of 49.5 lakh bales. China is the world's largest cotton grower, and India comes second.

Delayed harvest

The ongoing heavy rains in cotton-producing states in the country is expected to delay cotton harvest by around two to three weeks. This is expected to result in an increase of prices of the item and postponement of its exports to countries such as Pakistan and China.

India's cotton production for 2010-11 is estimated to be around 325 lakh bales, up from 295 lakh bales during the year-ago period.

The industry bodies, in a joint letter addressed to the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister, the Commerce Minister and the Textile Minister, had sought that contracts should be registered only for exports to actual users, in order to avoid stock transfer among traders and hoarding. The withdrawal of the export incentive of 1.5 per cent being given on exports of raw cotton was also sought.

CITI said that despite bumper crop of 295 lakh bales during cotton year 2009-10 (October-December), Shanker-6, which is the standard cotton, is being sold at Rs 38,000/candy (355 kg) as against Rs 23,000/candy in the beginning of the year.

Date:16/09/2010 URL:

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[Back](#) **Weak global cues cool groundnut oil**



Our Correspondent

Mumbai, Sept. 15

Imported edible oil prices declined for the third consecutive day on a weak Malaysian report, bearish global cues and lack of local demand.

On Wednesday, groundnut oil fell by Rs 10 on a bearish report from Saurashtra. Palmolein and soya refined oil fell by Rs 2 and Rs 3 respectively. Sunflower, rapeseed and cotton oil were steady.

A commission agent/trader said desi groundnut oil, after reaching an all-time high of Rs 900 on Tuesday, dropped by Rs 10 to Rs 890 for 10 kg thanks to clear weather conditions in the prodcing areas, especially Saurashtra in Gujarat. This has given rise to expectations for the early onset of the new season.

Some market players, however, hold the opposite view — that of late arrivals in Gujarat, Maharashtra and the North due to the recent heavy rains. Their opinion is that crop arrivals will be delayed by 15-20 days.

Today, at Rajkot, groundnut oil Telia tin (15 kg) and loose 10 kg declined sharply by Rs 15

and was quoted at Rs 1,455/Rs 950.

In the city, most branded players were sourcing directly from the producing centres, keeping trade volumes negligible at the local level. Demand for other oils was dull. About 100/150 tonnes of palmolein was resale traded, say traders.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's August crude palm oil output rose 5.7 per cent on month to 1.61 million tonnes, the Malaysian Palm Oil Board said on Wednesday.

At Malaysia's BMD CPO futures, October closed 23 ringgits lower at 2,685 (2,708) Malaysian ringgits (MYR) and November 10 by 28 at 2,615 (2,643) MYR a tonne.

In the Mumbai commodity exchange, the spot rate for groundnut oil was at Rs 890 (Rs 900), soya refined oil Rs 472 (Rs 475), sunflower exp ref Rs 535 (Rs 535), sunflower ref Rs 585 (Rs 585), rapeseed ref oil Rs 572 (Rs 572), rapeseed expeller ref Rs 542 (Rs 542), cotton ref Rs 505 (Rs 505) and palmolein at Rs 462 (Rs 464) for 10 kg.

Date:16/09/2010 URL:

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Back Bengal potato prices inch up Rs 100/quintal on supply crunch

Shobha Roy

Kolkata, Sept 15

Potato prices in West Bengal shot up by about Rs 100 a quintal on account of a temporary shortfall of supply of the tuber in the market.

The State Government has not yet started offloading the stock it holds into the market and the stock held by the cultivators has already been sold to a great extent, thereby creating a temporary shortfall in supply, according to Mr Patit Paban De, past President, West Bengal Cold Storage Association.

'Junction period'

The wholesale price of the tuber (Jyoti variety) was hovering around Rs 500 a quintal on Wednesday, against Rs 400 last week. "The State Government is holding on to about 18 per cent of the total stock stored in cold storages and the release of these potatoes have not picked up in full swing so far. The potatoes held by the cultivators have been mostly sold out. This is a kind of 'junction period' when there is a temporary shortfall in supply of potatoes in the market, therefore the prices have moved up," Mr De told Business Line.

The State Government had procured about ten lakh tonne (lt) of potatoes through the consumer co-operatives under the West Bengal State Consumers Cooperative Federation (Confed) during this year. The potatoes were procured from farmers at Rs 3.5 a kg. The State had produced a bumper crop of about 100 lt of potato this year, which caused the prices to fall.

The Government plans to offload the potatoes held by them through the tendering process and also by way of public distribution system and the process was likely to begin next week. "The State Government has time till November 30 to release the potatoes held by them. So typically they will have to release about seven per cent of the total potatoes held every month. Currently very minimal amount is being released through the PDS so the prices are ruling firm," he said.

However, the prices could fall anywhere between Rs 50 and 60 a quintal next week on account of the release of potatoes by the State Government, he added. The Government plans to sell close to four lt potatoes through a tendering process and another one lt through public distribution system at a slightly lower price as compared with the market price of the tuber.

The shortfall in supply of potatoes from Bengal to other states was being compensated by supply of the tuber from other States such as Uttar Pradesh thereby leading to a higher demand for the tuber and corresponding price rise in those markets. "The release of potatoes from Bengal has been 50 per cent lower than the normal flow and this is being compensated by the release from other States such as UP so the price of potatoes have firmed up in these states," he pointed out.

Moreover, the cultivation of the tuber in the northern states was likely to be delayed due to the heavy rainfall. "The cultivation usually starts in the mid week of September. Due to the heavy rainfall it is being anticipated that the cultivation could be delayed and this sentiment has lead to a further increase in prices," Mr De observed.

Date:16/09/2010 **URL:**

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Back **Sugar turns sour on reduced offtake**



Our Correspondent

Mumbai, Sept. 15

At the Vashi market, sugar prices were steady on Wednesday. No movement was seen in price.

Lack of fresh demand kept trade volumes low. Resale selling pressure of stockist for outstanding position of purchases up to date and September 20, weighed on the market.

Market sources said that most of the festival retail demand is now over and expecting higher production in the new season, stockist and industry users are buying quantity. Market witness hand-to-mouth trade volume since last one week.

Until next month, sugar demand will decline further. There is disparity in buying from Maharashtra, and the neighbouring States' traders are also not very active. Expectation of higher free sale sugar quota for the festival month of October is also the reason for the

lower demand.

On Wednesday, arrivals at the Vashi market totalled 55-60 truck loads (of 10 tonnes each) because of increased lifting by stockists. Local demand/lifting was less than that at 45-48 truck loads. Mills sold small quantities in the range of S-grade Rs 2,540-2,675, and M-grade Rs 2,580-2,630 a quintal.

Lack of demand kept pressure on mills, but they were not keen to sell at lower rates. Low inventory stock in the market will support the price at present level, market sources added.

According to the Sugar Merchants Association, spot rates were: S-grade: Rs 2,630-2,680 (Rs 2,628-2,680) and M-grade: Rs 2,675-2,771 (Rs 2,675-2,771).

Naka delivery rates were: S-grade: Rs 2,600-2,640 (Rs 2,600-2,640) and M-grade: Rs 2,650-2,710 (Rs 2,650-2,710).

Date:16/09/2010 URL:

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2010/09/16/stories/2010091652501700.htm>

Back Higher arrivals crush soyabean



Our Correspondent

Indore, Sept 15

Spot soyabean prices continued to decline in Indore and major markets of Madhya Pradesh on the back of increased arrivals and fall in demand at the plant level.

Arrivals of new soyabean have already picked up in State mandis.

Local mandi witnessed arrival of 400 bags (of 55 kg each) of new soya seed against 800 bags at State-level.

In the spot, better quality of new soyabean was quoted at Rs 1,800-1,825 a quintal, while lower quality quoted at Rs 1,500-1,700 a quintal. Along with new soyabean, arrivals of old stock of soyabean in the State mandis have further gained momentum.

On Wednesday, 1.25 lakh bags of old soyabean arrived at various mandis of the State.

In Indore, its arrival was recorded at about 7,000 bags and quoted down Rs 20 at Rs 1,890-1,930 a quintal. Similarly, plant deliveries of soyabean also declined by Rs 50-80 at Rs 1,975-2,000 a quintal due to lack of purchasing at plant level. Soyabean futures at NCDEX also declined by one per cent with soyabean's September and October futures closing at Rs 1,980 and Rs 1,992, respectively. Soya oil also continued to witness a downtrend because of sluggish demand of Malaysia cash palm and slump in its prices because of strengthening ringgit in the last few days, coupled with decline in domestic demand. In spot trading, soya refined further declined by Rs 3 at Rs 445- 450, while soya solvent slipped to Rs 415-420, down Rs 4. At National Board of Trade, soya oil prices traded lower. Soya oil October futures at NBOT closed down Rs 7 at Rs 477.

Date:16/09/2010 URL:

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[Back](#) Export demand lifts castor



Our Correspondent

Rajkot, Sept. 15

Castor prices are up on rising export demand. Domestic industrial buying also lent support to the price.

At the Rajkot Commodity Exchange (RCX) castor September futures increased by Rs 84 to Rs 4,105 from yesterday's close of Rs 4021 a quintal.

The December futures gained Rs 37 to Rs 3,819 for 100 kg.

On the NCDEX, castor seed September contract gained Rs 66.50 to Rs 4,115 with an open interest of 620 lots. October contract gained Rs 37.50 to Rs 4,090 with an open interest of 3,050 lots.

At the National Multi Commodity Exchange (NMCE), October series gained Rs 22 to Rs 4,065. December series gained Rs 22 to Rs 3,815.

About 2,500-3,000 bags of 55 kg arrived in various mandis of Gujarat and the price was at Rs 810-820 for 20 kg, 600 bags arrived in the Saurashtra region and price was at Rs 720-770.

RCX sources said, "Since exporters are buying the price has crossed the Rs 4,000 level. After a few days the market may see some profit booking." Favourable temperature in major producers such as Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh reported steady progress of castor crop in the current season. In Gujarat, weather conditions in Banaskantha, Kutch, Patan, Mahesana, Sabarkantha, Junagarh, Rajkot and Kheda are favourable for the raceme development and flowering.

Date: 16/09/2010 URL:

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Back Bearish futures, low buying ground turmeric



Our Correspondent

Erode, Sept. 15

Both farmers and traders were disappointed due to sudden fall in turmeric prices in Erode.

The farmers were expecting the prices to go up on Wednesday as the prices and demand had started to increase in the beginning of the week.

Contrary to their expectations, the prices declined by Rs 400 a quintal and the demand was also very poor.

Both turmeric farmers and traders were expecting the price to rise by Rs 400 a quintal in Erode, but to their dismay, it decreased by Rs 400 a quintal. "This fall is due to the weak trend in the futures. In the futures, the price quoted on Tuesday was only Rs13,000 a quintal and on Wednesday it was Rs 12,560 a quintal. This has reflected in the spot price also," said the President of the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, Mr R.V. Ravishankar .

He said the prices may go up only after the rain stops in the North India. He said the low demand also led to the fall in prices. In Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales centre, the finger variety was sold on Wednesday at Rs 9,199-13,934 a quintal, the root variety was sold at Rs 8,589-13,674 a quintal. In the Regulated Market, the finger variety was sold at Rs 13,619-14,057 a quintal and the root variety sold at Rs 13,769-13,618 a quintal. Out of the 801 bags, only 527 were sold.

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