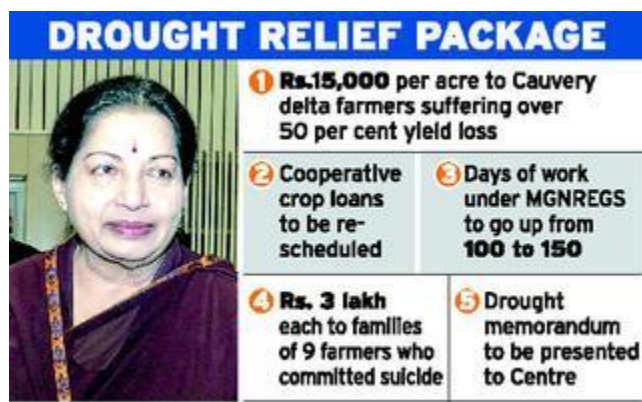


Host of relief measures for farmers in distress

All districts, except Chennai, declared drought-hit; work days under MGNREGS increased to 150



DROUGHT RELIEF PACKAGE

- 1 **Rs.15,000** per acre to Cauvery delta farmers suffering over 50 per cent yield loss
- 2 Cooperative crop loans to be re-scheduled
- 3 Days of work under MGNREGS to go up from **100 to 150**
- 4 **Rs. 3 lakh** each to families of 9 farmers who committed suicide
- 5 Drought memorandum to be presented to Centre

Chief Minister Jayalalitha announced in the Assembly on Friday that all districts in the State other than Chennai would be declared drought-hit and unveiled a host of relief measures that would cost about Rs. 2,143.60 crore, focussing on the crisis-ridden Cauvery delta.

Ms. Jayalalitha said the number of days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) would be increased from 100 to 150. In districts other than those in the delta, 3.34 lakh agricultural workers would be provided jobs under the scheme.

As was done in the case of the delta region, a committee of Ministers, headed by Finance Minister O. Panneerselvam, would go around the State to study the drought situation and submit a report, after which assistance would be provided.

Replying to the debate on the Governor's address, Ms. Jayalalitha said a total of 1.75 lakh farmers in the delta, covering an extent of 3.61 lakh acres, would be given immediate compensation of Rs. 15,000 an acre, if their yield loss was more than 50 per cent. The amount would cover disaster relief, farm insurance and special additional relief.

In the normal course, those experiencing 50 per cent yield loss would get only Rs. 4,350 an acre under crop insurance cover and even this would take time.

Recalling her earlier announcement on payment of Rs. 8,692 an acre [in addition to an assistance of Rs. 5,000 under the State Disaster Relief Fund], she said that in respect of insured crops, the amount of Rs. 8,692 would be paid only in the event of 100 per cent yield loss.

For those experiencing less than 50 per cent yield loss, the assistance would depend on the average crop loss in such areas, after getting the nod of the insurance company.

Under the MGNREGS, 15,000 farm ponds would be created in the delta districts at a cost of Rs. 181 crore. Other works, costing Rs. 1,336 crore, would be taken up. Totally, agricultural workers in the delta would get wages to the tune of Rs. 1,517 crore through all the works.

The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries would execute projects, estimated to cost Rs. 47.85 crore, for the development of green fodder, concentrates and dry fodder, besides inland fisheries. To address the problem of drinking water shortage in the delta, works for Rs. 37.25 crore would be implemented.

TDP tells farmers not to repay loans

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) on Friday called upon farmers not to repay their crop loans as the party would return to power in six months and waive them.

The TDP also reminded the farmers that the party president N. Chandrababu Naidu had already promised to sign the first file upon assuming office in respect of loan waiver.

The promise would be kept even if the burden to the government would be to a tune of Rs. 60,000 to 70,000 crore out of a budget of Rs. 1.50 lakh crore, the deputy leader of Telugu Desam Legislature Party Motkupalli Narasimhulu told a press conference here.

He criticised Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy for ruling out loan waiver as impractical and said the latter was not supposed to make such a statement. The question was whether Mr. Reddy was willing or not to waive the loans.

Government challenged

Another senior TDP leader, G. Muddukrishnama Naidu, who was also present, challenged the State government to hold elections to local bodies in three months if the Congress wanted to disprove that it did not indulge in manipulations to win the cooperative polls. He said the State government had lost a Central aid of Rs. 10,000 crore for delay in conducting elections to local bodies.

Power tariff

Meanwhile, at another press conference, TDP MLA R. Prakash Reddy said the party leaders would represent against the proposed power tariff hike when the public hearing at Discom headquarters would be held from February 19 to 25. They would demand rollback of the tariff to pre-2004 rates.

Bandh plan

Telangana Telugu Desam Party Forum convener E. Dayakar Rao said that the party would organise a bandh in Warangal and other districts of the region if the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) continued not to purchase stocks directly from farmers. The middlemen were buying cotton from farmers at Rs. 3,400 a quintal and selling it to CCI, Dayakar Rao said.

Call to extend relief to all farmers

The compensation package of Rs. 15,000 per acre announced by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa in the State Assembly on Friday has not enthused the entire farming community, said R.V. Giri, State general secretary of the Consortium of Indian Farmers' Associations.

In a statement, he said the condition attached to the disbursement of compensation that it would be available only to those farmers who had incurred crop losses of 50 per cent and above had caused displeasure among other farmers whose crop prospects were bleak.

It was learnt that the size of the compensation would be proportionate to crop losses suffered. When the entire State was affected by drought, uniform compensation to all farmers would be the right course of action.

The Consortium was of the view that stipulating any condition for disbursing compensation would enable only those close to the political class and influential farmers to avail the benefit.

What was disconcerting was that the government had proposed to waive land tax. At present this levy was collected at the rate of Rs. 1 per acre. Writing off such a meagre amount had not brought any cheer to farmers who were beginning to feel that they were either slighted or their plight was not properly understood.

Work in unison, farmers appeal to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka

The Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association has appealed to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka that they should work in unison with "fraternal amity" to ensure water for irrigation and drinking in both the States after the Award of the Cauvery Waters Dispute Tribunal is gazetted.

In a statement here, Mahadhanapuram V.Rajaram, working president of the association, pointed out that the Supreme Court had categorically directed the Central government to gazette the Award before February 20.

He said that the Tribunal came out with the final Award only in 2007 after several years of inquiry.

Normally any Award would come into force within 90 days only if it were to be gazetted.

But the Central government had been postponing gazetting of the Award under the pretext that appeals had been pending against it in the court.

Even when the apex court and the legal luminaries had said that there was nothing prohibiting the Central government from gazetting the Award while appeals were pending, the Central government was not prepared to listen to them.

Mr.Rajaram said there had been a number of contrarian views expressed in both the States regarding the implications of gazetting.

CM lauded

At the same time, he was happy to note that it was because of the “indefatigable efforts” of Chief Minister Jayalalithaa that the issue had reached the current stage.

Once the Award is gazetted both the Cauvery River Authority and the Monitoring Committee would cease to exist and the Cauvery Management Board would be constituted.

This body that would consist of officials from both the States would initiate steps to implement the Award.

Once the new body is constituted, it is imperative for it to ensure that both the States get water not only for irrigation but also for drinking, he pleaded.

Farmers against setting up of stone crushing unit

Farmers from villages in Kanakapura taluk in Ramanagaram district have threatened to hold a massive protest, objecting to the district administration’s decision to allow setting up of stone crushing units in Dalimba and surrounding villages. They are anxious that it will impact the health of the people and their livestock.

Speaking to presspersons here on Friday, farmers V. Lingegowda and Chennegowda said if the stone crushing unit was set up, it would affect animal husbandry and dairy farming, on which farmers from this taluk depend. The crushing of stones would not only pollute the air affecting agriculture, sericulture and horticultural activities, but would also be a source of noise and water pollution.

Shocker for cotton farmers



The sudden showers that lashed the district threw many cotton farmers into distress as nearly 80,000 bales of produce got drenched at the Enumamula Agricultural Market in Warangal on

Mango farmers high on hopes

Flowering is extensive and the crop is healthy, say farmers



Srinivasa Rao, a farmer, showing the flowering on a mango tree at Nekkalam Gollagudem in Krishna district. —Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

Think of mangoes, and you are sure to conjure up images of the sweet, juicy, pulpy fruit that lures one and all during summer. And if one considers the varieties, the Nuzvid ‘rasalu’ certainly tops the list. This year, the farmers are hopeful of reaping a rich harvest of the famous ‘chinna rasalu’, ‘banginapalli’, and other varieties, as flowering is good and the crop in the region is not afflicted by an disease. If the weather cooperates, there will be good produce by March end, they opine.

“Krishna district, particularly Nuzvid, is known for ‘chinna rasalu’. Every year, we export some thousands of tonnes of the fruit to Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, and other places,” say the farmers. Flowering is robust and extensive in the orchards at Nuzvid, Agiripally, Nunna, Thotlavallur, and other areas in the district.

In some areas, the fruit is in a tender stage and the crop will be ready in the next 20 days.

“Compared with last year, flowering is good and we are expecting a good yield this season. The investment is also less this year, as the crop is healthy,” a mango farmer V. Srinivasa Rao of Nekkalam Gollagudem village told *The Hindu*.

“I raised chinna rasalu, pedda rasalu, and banginapalli varieties in five acres. We have already picked the fruit twice, as there was flowering in the months of November and December. We are happy as the position is good so far,” said another farmer S. Venkata Ratnam of Adavi Nekkalam village.

“Eighty per cent of trees are in flowering stage. The recent rain did not cause much damage to the crop. This year the produce may be double than last year,” said S. Veeranjanyulu, who has orchards in the Nuzvid area.

“Most of the produce will be used for consumption in Vijayawada, Khammam, Guntur, East and West Godavari, and neighbouring districts. Fine quality of ‘banginapalli’ fruit will be exported to other States and countries,” said Mr. Venkata Ratnam.

Shocker to cotton farmers

Sudden showers damage 80,000 cotton bales in Warangal



Down-the-drain: The damaged cotton bales at the Enumamula Agricultural Market on Friday.–

PHOTO: M. MURALI

The sudden showers that lashed the district threw many cotton farmers into distress as nearly 80,000 bales of produce got drenched at the Enumamula Agricultural Market here on Friday. Hundreds of farmers who brought their cotton to sell at the market have been waiting for the officials to procure it. However, the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) officials stopped the procurement from Friday. They declared that they would not be able to procure for the next 15 days as the arrivals were huge and they were unable to cope up. The chilli farmers suffered heavy loss as nearly 10,000 bags were drenched in the showers.

For the traders, it was a blessing in disguise as they were offering lesser price than the Minimum Support Price.

Following protests by the farmers, the traders came forward to buy cotton less than the MSP of Rs. 3,900 and the chilli less than the MSP of Rs. 7,000 a quintal.

The CCI officials expressed their inability to procure the entire cotton that has been arriving at the market. They say that there was no space at the ginning mills to stock the produce.

Agricultural Market secretary Srinivas urged the farmers not to rush to the market and instead bring their produce in a phased manner. During the past three days, cotton arrival was heavy. "There are one lakh bags of cotton on Thursday of which the CCI could procure half of it. The stocks got piled up with farmers arriving with their produce. The sudden showers damaged both cotton and chilli," he explained.

Much to the relief of the farmers, the traders came forward to buy the produce though at lesser price.

Elephants destroy crops

A herd of five elephants destroyed banana crops and arecanut trees on farms on the Mettupalayam – Vanabadrakaliamman temple road in the last two days.

The herd had entered the same area about 20 days ago, people said.

Though four of them went back to forest, one got separated. The single elephant had killed an aged woman last month in the same area. After re-uniting, the herd crossed river Bhavani and

strayed into various farms in the area. The herd in the last two-days destroyed crops ripe for yield in a few banana farms and even uprooted areca nut trees.

The Forest Department is on the job of deploying anti-depredation watchers to monitoring its movement and drive it deep into the forests, Farmers have demanded that a permanent solution be found to end the menace.

New techniques to help ryots reap bumper crop

Vellore Collector inspects implementation of techniques in Chinnachery village



Vellore Collector P. Sankar inspecting the functioning of a power weeder in a sugarcane field in Chinnachery village of Madhanur block on Friday.— Photo: D. Gopalakrishnan

Cultivation of rice under System of Rice Intensification (SRI), cultivation of sugarcane under Sustainable Sugarcane Initiative (SSI) method, adopting pair row technique in cultivation of sugarcane and fertigation technique, in which fertilizers are added to water supply at the time of irrigation, are some of the modern agricultural techniques propagated and implemented under the Integrated Farm System (IFS) in four blocks in Vellore district under the National Agricultural Development Programme.

The four blocks chosen for the scheme are Madhanur, Kaniyambadi, Katpadi and Alangayam. One village in each block, 12 farmers per village, and one hectare per farmer have been selected for the scheme, said P. Sankar, Vellore Collector.

Inspecting the agricultural fields where IFS is under implementation in Chinnachery village in Madhanur block on Friday, the collector told reporters that under the system all agricultural processes are integrated in such a way that the waste from one process forms the input for another process.

For instance, mulberry waste is used in the farm of K. Kamalakannan in the village for vermicompost. The compost mixed with cow dung is used for production of biogas, which, in turn, is used as fuel.

One of the new cultivation techniques aimed at enhancing productivity used by Kamalakannan in his sugarcane field is the pair row technique under which the gap between two rows of sugarcane plants is maintained alternately at five feet and three feet. In each row, two sugarcane plants are planted close to each other with minimum gap. However, the gap between two pairs is a little wider. In the conventional technique, the gap between two rows used to be uniformly five feet. Another new technique applied by the farmer is the use of drip irrigation for sugarcane to ensure that only the required quantity of water is let into the field for irrigation.

Another modern technique used in the field is the application of the fertigation technique under which fertilizers in the required quantity are mixed with the water that is supplied through drip irrigation system. This facilitates the uniform application of fertilizers in the soil besides ensuring the use of the required quantity of water for irrigation.

K. Tamilselvan, Joint Director, Agriculture, said that while the normal sugarcane yield under the conventional irrigation system was 95 tonnes per hectare, the yield would go up to 150 tonnes per hectare under drip irrigation. The adoption of the fertigation technique also enhanced the yield.

Another technique that has been recommended under IFS and adopted by farmers in the planting of sugarcane is chip budding which forms part of the Sustainable Sugarcane Initiative (SSI). Usually, a sugarcane stem is cut into three or four pieces, and each piece is planted horizontally with the bud facing upwards. Under this method, the buds are cut with the help of bud removers, and such buds are raised in pro-trays containing coir pith in shade nets. After one month, the seedling in the pro-tray is taken and planted in the field. This method also increases the yield, agriculture officials said. The method also prevents the waste of sugarcane while planting. The collector also inspected the cultivation of the K-6 groundnut variety obtained

from Andhra Pradesh under the mini-kit programme in Chinnachery village. In this variety, yield is maximised. While the pods would be bold, each pod would contain two or three kernels while in the conventional variety, there would be only one or two kernels in each pod. The number of pods in the new variety would be 25 to 30 per plant as against 15 to 20 pods in the conventional variety. Besides, the farmer could obtain a yield of 2,500 kg per hectare in this variety as against 1,500 kg per hectare in the conventional variety, said Mr. Tamilselvan.

Naidu promises crop loan waiver

Telugu Desam president Nara Chandrababu Naidu on Friday declared that he would waive farm loans completely if the party returned to power.

“It will be the first file I will sign if my party comes back to power,” Mr Naidu said at a meeting at Pedakakani village as the ‘Vastuna Meekosam’ entered day three in Guntur district. Referring to the statement made by Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy that government would not be able to waive crop loans, Mr. Naidu shot back by saying: “What does Mr. Kiran Kumar Reddy think of himself? Where does he stand before me? What is his experience in administration?”

“No other Chief Minister was in power for nine years. I am the only leader of opposition for close to 10 years,” he said.

TDP president rues falling standards in engineering colleges, to review permissions if his party comes to power

Onion price touches an eye-watering Rs. 34 a kg

Traders expect a dip this week when fresh stocks arrive

It's not just the staple Sona Masuri rice that has become costlier. The price of onion, a must-have in most cuisines, has shot up by Rs. 10 a kilo in a month, selling in retail at an eye-watering Rs. 34 a kg.

The poor man's condiment, which was being sold at just Rs. 20 to Rs. 22 a kg a month ago in Bangalore, is now hovering at Rs. 32 to Rs. 34, according to Nagaraj, a grocer on Ullal Main Road.

Mr. Nagaraj said when he sourced his stock from the wholesale market last week, it was Rs. 28 a kg, compared to Rs. 16 a month ago.

This increase in price has affected individual households and hotel owners as well since onion is an integral part of daily food.

Raghavendra Karanth, who runs a hotel, said he has had to cut back on the use of onions in the dishes to ride the price rise. There is also talk of hotel owners preparing to increase prices.

Shakuntala Shetty, a homemaker in Jayanagar 5th Block, said that her family requires at least five kg onion a month as she uses the aromatic bulb for every other dish.

“It’s difficult to prepare food without onion and now I am making up using tomato and capsicum.”

Onion merchants, however, expect the price should come down in the coming days.

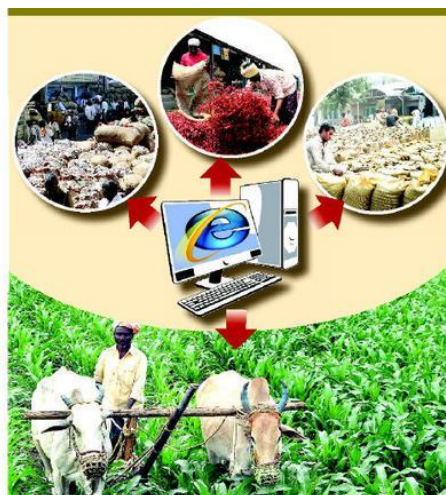
S. Balakrishna, vice-president, Bangalore Potato and Onion Merchants’ Association, told *The Hindu* the wholesale price of fine quality onion in Bangalore market has dropped by about Rs. 2 over the weekend (from Rs. 24 to Rs. 22 a kg). Its effect should be visible in the retail market in about three days since retailers have to sell their existing stock.

He, however, ruled out a repeat of 2008-09 when the price of onion touched a vertiginous Rs. 80 to Rs. 85 a kg. With the new crop in north Karnataka almost ready for harvest and produce from Maharashtra arriving in good quantity, the price is set to decrease, Mr. Balakrishna said.

The demand for a ban on onion export too could exert pressure in price reduction in the local market, he felt.

The Bangalore Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee receives an average of 10,000 quintals of onion every working day. But at least half the produce gets distributed to neighbouring districts and States.

Farmers to get relief from middlemen



Farmers in the State will command the prevailing price, if not a higher price, for their produce if the plans of the Marketing Department succeed.

Taking cue from a pilot project under implementation in Gulbarga in Karnataka, the Marketing Department has decided to take up mandi modernisation, and web-basing of the agriculture market committees, in three major commodities markets in the State. The project will be rolled out in Nizamabad, Warangal and Guntur markets while efforts are under way to include two more.

Once it takes shape, farmers will get relief from middlemen, a menace that continues in spite of numerous efforts. The project was first proposed by the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) to link all the agriculture produce market committees for trading commodities, non-perishables in particular, by enabling farmers to virtually participate in auction of the commodities at the national level. This, in turn, will ensure that the farmer is not dependent on a particular market or a set of traders to sell his produce at the prices dictated by the latter, but can command the prevailing price which will be displayed at the yard.

The project will ensure that e-tendering and e-auction processes are put in place for the products entering the market yards. "Each lot will be given a unique code so that its movement from entry into the market to its exit including the information about buyer is recorded," Marketing Commissioner G. Venkat Ram Reddy said.

According to NCDEX vice-president, south, Ramesh Chand H.C, the pilot project in Karnataka covers 15 major mandis out of the 54. Trading is currently allowed in eight commodities. The

first phase of automating the mandis has been completed. In the second phase, standardisation of products will be taken up and the third phase comprises development of technology and infrastructure for making the mandis web-based. “The process is aimed at enhancing competitiveness and this will significantly boost returns for farmers,” Mr. Ramesh Chand said. A new system ought to be put in for perishables like fruits and vegetables as their shelf life will be so short that there is no scope for their transfer from one mandi to another.

Foxtail millet good for diabetes patients



The area under which minor millets is grown is shrinking year after year in Kurnool district as has been the trend elsewhere in State.

Foxtail millet (*Sataria italica*), which used to be cultivated in an area of two lakh hectare in the district two decades ago has now shrunk to 20,000 hectare.

The millet, known as Korra in local parlance, remains to be the staple diet of rural people. However, after the introduction of the subsidised rice scheme in the early eighties, people switched over to rice and the demand started declining for millet.

However, of late, the importance of foxtail millet was recognised as diabetic food. The millet is rich in dietary fibre (6.7 per cent), protein (11 per cent) and low in fat (four per cent).

Unlike rice, foxtail millet releases glucose steadily without affecting the metabolism of the body. The incidence of diabetes is rare among the population which consumes foxtail millet diet.

According to G. Narasimha Rao, former scientist of Agriculture University, foxtail millet is a versatile crop which can be grown in any season of the year with the shortest crop cycle of 60 to 90 days.

No other food crop can be grown in such a short period. Considering the importance of the millet in Kurnool district, the government has sanctioned a research centre for the district, which is located at Nandyal.

So far, the centre has released new varieties of the millet such as Nallama Korra, Krishnadevaraya, Narasimharaya, Srilakshi and Suryanandi. Srilakshmi, which gave a yield of 14 quintal per acre this year has been popular among farmers.

The duration of Suryanandi was reduced to 60 days which could be accommodated in any season.

The foxtail millet grain is available only in select urban shops at present in ready-to-cook form and is priced at Rs.28 a kg, less than the price of rice.

Other millets of the group such as Arika, Sama, Ooda and ragi are vanishing gradually even from the homes of farmers.

Dr. Narasimha Rao argues that jowar and foxtail millet should be included in the subsidised food scheme to prevent incidence of diabetes.

'Government is ignoring the agricultural sector'

K.M. Udupa, managing trustee of Bharatiya Vikas Trust, said on Saturday that the government was not giving much importance to the agriculture sector.

He was speaking after inaugurating the "Krishi Utsav" organised by Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project (SKDRDP) and other organisations at Parkala here.

Mr. Udupa said that youths in rural areas were uninterested in agriculture. They were migrating to urban areas in search of white-collar jobs. They held the notion that agriculture was not a profitable occupation.

However, there were many good farmers in the district, who had shown how profitable agriculture could be if proper thought and techniques were applied.

It was essential to include agriculture in school curricula. This way many students would learn the importance of agriculture and get interested in it, he said.

There was no point in sending batches of farmers from the State to China merely to witness that country's progress in the agrarian sector. It was a fact that China had made rapid strides in increasing its foodgrain production, Mr. Udupa said.

"Krishi utsavs play a vital role in encouraging farmers. A large number of farmers visit such them, hoping to learn something new and also to learn about the latest agricultural equipment," Mr. Udupa said.

Pratapchandra Shetty, MLC, Upendra Nayak, president of the zilla panchayat, Kudi Srinivas Bhat, progressive farmer, K. Madhusudhan Hegde, Lions Club district governor, Gowri Poojarti, president of the Udupi Taluk Panchayat, Sridevi, president of the Yembattu Badagabettu Gram Panchayat and K. Purushotham, president of the Federation of Pragati Bandhu Self-Help Group, were present.

Exhibition

The exhibition had stalls showcasing agricultural equipment, handicrafts, solar lighting equipment, tillers and grass cutters, vegetable seeds, and books on agriculture.

In addition, there were models of 'Kambala' (buffalo race) and cock fights. A large number of farmers visited these stalls.

Progressive farmers seek enhanced technology

Progressive farmers from across the State recently appealed to the policy-makers seeking induction of technology innovations, specially bio-technology applications, in agriculture for improved productivity.

For quite some time, representatives of progressive farmers' organisations have been meeting Members of Parliament and of the Legislative Assembly, apart from senior officials of

departments concerned, drawing their attention to the challenges faced by farmers and to what they described as 'compelling' need for integration of technology in the sector.

Considering the ever-increasing costs of inputs, introduction of better seeds that could resist pests, weeds and could guarantee enhanced yields was the need of the hour for major crops that included rice, maize, pulses, oilseeds and vegetables too, said Mekala Lakshminarayana, President, Nagarjuna Rythu Samakhya of Guntur.

Reaped Benefit

Mr. Lakshminarayana and another farmer from the State's rice-growing belt, V. Subba Rao, said the farming community had benefitted immensely from Bt. cotton and hoped that the Government would soon allow commercialisation of other crops and extend benefits of technology to other farmers too.


Poultry sector sees it as panacea

It wants to be covered under MGNREGS

ASSURING JOBS

Namakkal factfile



2008 - 09	2012 - 13*
Number of families benefited 39,710	Men 21,077
 Number of works 780	Women 1,54,564
Wages paid Rs. 7.72 crore	Total 1,75,641
	Number of works 1,816
	Wages paid Rs. 88.56 crore

* Figures as on January 16, 2013

Just like agriculture, the poultry sector too wants to be covered under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The suggestion, made by poultry farmers here, is to address the problem of labour shortage faced by the sector. According to them, the wage component can be shared by the government and the poultry sector, ensuring round-the-year employment for the workers.

“Prior to the launch of the scheme, workers used to come to our farms on their own. Now, we have to arrange transportation from far-off places,” State president of the Tamil Nadu Poultry Farmers Association R. Nallathambi told *The Hindu*.

“The cost of labour has also gone up, thanks to the scheme. A woman labourer who was paid Rs. 100 a day earlier is now being paid Rs. 150, while men who got Rs. 200 a day are

demanding Rs. 400. Though we are ready to pay them, we are facing labour shortage of 25 per cent.”

By employing labourers from Bihar, the sector has been able to reduce the intensity of the problem. “Our sector is still in need of thousands of skilled and unskilled labourers for various activities, including collecting eggs and loading and unloading feed ingredients,” he says

“While the government is guaranteeing them jobs for only 100 days in a year, poultry farmers can assure work for all the 365 days,” he adds.

Kangayam cattle show on February 10

The annual Kangayam cattle show organised by Kangayam cattle breeders society and Senaapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation will be held at Vellakoil on February 10.

Farmers breeding pure Kangayam cattle from the region are expected to attend the show.

NABARD credit proposals released

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has projected credit requirements of various sectors in Villupuam district for the next financial year (2013-2014) at Rs. 3,367.21 crore, according to Collector V. Sampath.

He was making this observation while releasing credit proposals prepared by the NABARD at a bankers’ meeting here. Mr. Sampath said that during the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2012-2017), Tamil Nadu aimed at achieving an annual growth rate of 8.2 per cent.

NABARD proposals were prepared keeping that in mind. To give a thrust to farming operation, adequate provisions would be made to extend crop loans, setting up godowns for stacking essential commodities in rural areas, food processing units and for rearing cattle heads.

Bank loans for farm sector would be likely to be in the order of Rs. 1,348.03 crore, short- term crop loans to be extended would be about Rs. 1,522.80 crore, allocation for non-farming sector would be Rs. 175.98 and for other priority sector Rs. 320.40 crore.

Mr. Sampath said that based on NABARD projections, the Lead Bank in the district would prepare the Annual Credit Plan. He underscored the point that the ACP would encourage farmers to take to horticulture crops in a significant manner in the district. He called upon all bankers to extend their cooperation in realising the goals to be set in the Annual Credit Plan.

NABARD Deputy General Manager A. Balachandran, DGM of Indian Bank S. Natarajan, and District Development Officer (Reserve Bank of India) J. Kandasamy were present.

United India gets into crop insurance

United India Insurance has tied up with Agriculture Insurance Company and was selling two of the crop insurance products of the company.

Milind Kharat, Chairman-cum-Managing Director of United India Insurance, told *The Hindu* that it started selling the crop insurance products this year and focussed on the southern States. It had insured 10,000 farmers in Namakkal area in Tamil Nadu. It would expand the sale of crop insurance products on a larger-scale next financial year in other parts of the country too. It would target farmers who had not taken loans from banks.

Further, it had 461 micro offices across the country and planned to increase it to 510 by the end of this fiscal. It involved self help groups and non-governmental organisations for sale of micro insurance products, he said.

Foodgrains production expected to fall

The country's overall foodgrains production is expected to decline by 9.18 million tonnes in 2012-13 as compared to last year, owing to deficient rain in parts of the country during last year's kharif season. As against the highest-ever 259.32 million tonnes in 2011-12, the foodgrains output this year is likely to be 250.14 million tonnes as revealed in the second advance estimates released officially on Friday. In the first estimate, the total output was 250.42 million tonnes. So there is a slight decline even between the first and the second estimate.

However, Agriculture Ministry sources said the output of 250.14 million tonnes was impressive as it showed the resilience of Indian agriculture. "We had produced about 260 million tonne foodgrains last year. This year, we have crossed 250 million tonne irrespective of drought in

some districts of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and parts of Karnataka,” Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said.

Pulse production has surged ahead to a record 17.58 million tonnes, compared to 17.09 million tonnes last year. The higher minimum support price and special schemes to encourage farmers to adopt modern agronomic practices helped, the sources said. Compared to last year’s record output, there is a decline in the production of rice, wheat and coarse cereals. Oilseeds output is almost same as last year at 29.47 million tonnes. The production of rice is estimated at 101.80 million tonnes. Wheat output is 92.30 million tonnes as against 94.88 million tonnes last year.

In non-foodgrains category, oilseeds output is estimated to fall marginally to 29.46 million tonnes this year from 29.79 million tonne in previous year, while cotton is likely to be lower at 33.8 million bales, from 35.2 million bales. Sugarcane output is estimated to dip to 334.54 million tonnes from 36.04 million tonnes.

Farmers against setting up of stone crushing unit

Farmers from villages in Kanakapura taluk in Ramanagaram district have threatened to hold a massive protest, objecting to the district administration’s decision to allow setting up of stone crushing units in Dalimba and surrounding villages. They are anxious that it will impact the health of the people and their livestock.

Speaking to presspersons here on Friday, farmers V. Linge Gowda and Chennegowda said if the stone crushing unit was set up, it would affect animal husbandry and dairy farming, on which farmers from this taluk depend. The crushing of stones would not only pollute the air affecting agriculture, sericulture and horticultural activities, but would also be a source of noise and water pollution.

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Scientists oppose Agri Ministry's bid to link GM crops with food security, writes to MoEF

Over 150 scientists have sought the intervention of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to counter the Ministry of Agriculture's affidavit in the Supreme Court that genetically modified (GM) crops were essential for food security.

In a letter to the Environment Minister, Jayanthi Natarajan, the scientists said food security had no link with yield increases. They presented data from various countries to support their argument.

“Food security is not just about yield increases, but poverty, livelihoods and access for the vast majority of the people. We have buffer stocks, mountains of grain rot and yet 320 million people go hungry in the country. So, it’s not a supply side issue, as is made out to be by the Agriculture Ministry,” said Kavita Kuruganti, Member, Coalition for a GM-Free India, at a press conference to observe Food Safety Day, marking three years of the moratorium on Bt Brinjal in India.

Calling for non-transgenic solutions to increase productivity, such as the rice-intensification programme, Kuruganti said there were molecular approaches to developing newer seeds and India should invest in them instead.

On why open-field trials were being opposed, she said organisms that could propagate themselves in open fields were dangerous without proper safeguards in place and strict implementation of regulatory measures. “We are not opposed to research trials. But something as complex as transgenics should be tested in greenhouses with simulated conditions such as drought etc,” Kuruganti added.

In the letter to Jayanthi Natarajan, the scientists pointed out the flaws in the Agriculture Ministry’s stance that the apex court’s Technical Expert Committee (TEC) had recommended a 10-year moratorium on agri-biotech research.

“The Ministry has in its narrow definition included only GM crops as agriculture biotechnology. The TEC is specific; it is about GM crops and trees, and not about other biotechnologies,” says the letter.

Also, TEC has not recommended a 10-year moratorium on field trials of all GM crops, but has specified “Bt GM crops, HT GM crops and crops for which India is centre of origin or diversity”.

“Contrary to the assertions of the Ministry of Agriculture, it is in fact the Indian public sector GM crop research that will continue in a scenario where the TEC recommendations are accepted,” said the letter.

The letter urged Jayanthi Natarajan to “proactively” adopt the sound recommendations of the TEC in this regard.

Tea prices up on good demand



A good demand perked up prices of almost all varieties of tea at the Kochi Tea auction. In Cochin Sale No: 6, the quantity on offer in Dust CTC category was 10,70,500 kg.

The market was firm to dearer by a rupee to two and sometimes more following quality, according to auctioneers Forbes, Ewart and Figgis (P) Ltd.

In the Dust Orthodox grades, the quantity on offer was 10,500 kg. The market for primary varieties remained steady, while others tended to ease. Bulk of the offerings was absorbed by upcountry buyers.

In the best CTC dusts, PD varieties quoted prices between Rs 102/110, RD grades quoted Rs 104/140, SRD ruled at Rs 106/138 while SFD grades stood at Rs 107/139.

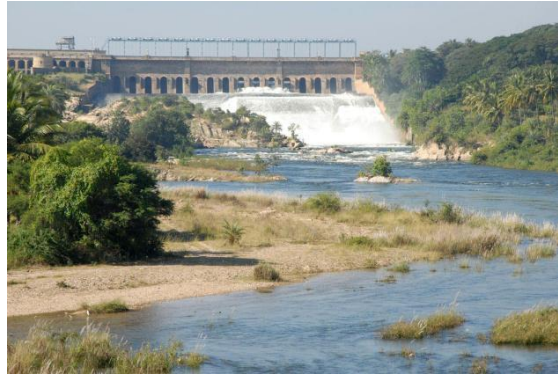
The leaf sale also witnessed a good demand and the quantity on offer in Orthodox grades was 197,500 kg. The market for selected best from all varieties of Nilgiri teas were fully firm to dearer. Some attractive prices recorded for improved Nilgiri invoices due to competition from straight line export.

Others were irregular and lower and witnessed some withdrawals. Medium Bolder Broken remained steady, while tippy grades were irregular and lower. Secondary Broken were fully firm to dearer.

The quantity on offer in the CTC grades was 71,500 kg and the market for all varieties was dearer by Rs 1 to Rs 3 and sometimes more. Exporters and upcountry buyers were active.

In the dust category, Injipara (Prm) SFD quoted the best prices of Rs 145 followed by Injipara (Prm) SRD at Rs 143. In the leaf varieties, Chamraj Green FOP (S) fetched best prices of Rs 401 followed by Pascoes Hyson Green tea at Rs 356.

Karnataka begins Cauvery water release to Tamil Nadu



Complying with the Supreme Court directive, Karnataka today commenced release of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu, as the BJP Government's action came in for sharp criticism from opposition parties and triggered protests.

"As per the Supreme Court order, we have decided to release water", Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar said defending the decision.

In an attempt to douse protests by farmers outfits, he said, "We will file a review petition before the Supreme Court on Monday", against its order directing Karnataka to release 2.44 tmc ft of water to Tamil Nadu.

Irrigation authorities said about 1,250 cusecs of water was being released from this morning from the Krishnaraja Sagar Reservoir.

Members of the Raitha Sangha led by its President K S Puttannaiah resorted to a road blockade at Gejjalagere in the district demanding immediate halt to water release.

Karnataka Janata Party (KJP) supremo B S Yeddyurappa suspended his Mysore-Bangalore padayatra, launched to press the the Centre against notifying the Cauvery Water Dispute Tribunal's final award, and headed towards Krishnaraja Sagar reservoir to stage a protest against the water release.

Shettar should quit forthwith, Yeddyurappa, whose padayatra entered the third day reaching Maddur town, said.

“The BJP government is acting like an agent of Tamil Nadu. It should stop water release and lead a delegation to the Prime Minister to convince the distress situation in Karnataka”, he demanded.

Opposition Congress leader in the Assembly Siddaramaiah also lashed out at the Government for releasing water.

After holding consultations with floor leaders of both the Houses of Legislatures yesterday, the Government had announced its decision to file a petition in the Apex court seeking review of its February 7 order directing the state to release 2.44 tmc ft of water citing depleted water storage level.

The Supreme Court gave the directive on a petition by Tamil Nadu seeking 12 TMC ft of water to save standing crops in delta districts.

Sugar mills in Haryana achieve highest recovery

Sugar mills in Haryana have achieved an average sugar recovery of 9.04 per cent during the current crushing season 2012-13, as on January 31, which is the highest in the last five years.

While stating this today, the Haryana Cooperation Minister Satpal Sangwan said that the sugar mills in the state had recorded average sugar recovery level of 8.38 per cent during the corresponding period of 2011-12.

He said that the sugar recovery level of cooperative sugar mills during the current crushing season 2012-13 in the state was 8.73 per cent as compared to 7.75 per cent during the last crushing season of 2011-12.