THE HINDU

Bungle in pest control hits grape farmers

50 acres have been destroyed in Odaipatti

Pesticides that were supposed to control pests in tender grape bunches have destroyed the whole yield in more than 50 acres at Odaipatti village here on Wednesday.

Disgruntled farmers have lodged a complaint with the police against the distributor and manufacturers of the pesticide, which they said was unsuitable for grapes. Farmers fear that they have to destroy the standing plants to stop the destruction.

On application of the pesticide, the pests were controlled to a large extent. But fruits in many vines began to fall and tender bunches began to wither, said A. Ravi, a grape grower at Odaipatti village.

“Summer is the peak season for grape production. Destruction of grapes at this stage would hit the yield and ultimately we could incur huge loss,” said K. Periasamy, another grape grower at this village. With no water for irrigation, farmers invested heavily on drip irrigation to protect standing crop. Farmers can harvest five times over two years. Pruning would suffice to protect the crop for the subsequent harvesting period. “If we are forced to destroy the pest infected plants, we would have to wait for a long time to harvest the yeild”, said another farmer S. Krishnamurthy.

Meanwhile, the police, who received the complaints from the farmers, did not file a case and instead referred the matter to the horticulture officials for action.

Horticulture officials, who inspected the spot, said that they proposed to invite scientists from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research to visit the spot and spell out the remedy.

After preliminary investigations, police found that pesticides used to control pests in cotton crop were sold to grape growers. “Why were the distributors allowed to sell pesticides meant for cotton farmers sold to farmers here and that too in Cumbum valley, where cotton is not grown”, are questions that the farmers ask.

- ***Police found pesticides used to control pests in cotton crop were sold to grape growers***
- ***With no water for irrigation, farmers had invested heavily on drip irrigation***

Farmers may get subsidy for fodder cultivation

Cultivation to be taken up on 700 acres

In a bid to meet the fodder shortage caused by drought, departments of animal husbandry and agriculture have proposed schemes for fodder cultivation by farmers at subsidy.

The scheme is part of the State government's allocation of Rs. 15 crore for dry fodder provisioning as a component of drought mitigation efforts for the delta districts. The scheme envisages fodder cultivation on over 700 acres of land with irrigation facilities in the district, to ensure availability at village-level and wean out distress sale of livestock.

The dry fodder requirement is usually met by crop residues from rice intensive districts such as Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Karur, and Tiruchi.

The fodder is covered by crop residues of paddy, sorghum, maize, groundnut, sugarcane, pulses and so on.

Sorghum, a relatively short term crop, with a harvest period of 60 days and higher nutritive value is proposed to overcome dry fodder shortage in the ensuring months.

The departments of animal husbandry and agriculture would constitute teams for identification of farmers willing to grow fodder crops.

The departments shall provide fodder seeds, along with 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of cultivation or Rs. 6,800 an acre, whichever is less.

The arrangement envisages obtaining a letter of consent from these farmers and the fodder raised will be procured by district milk producers' union at Rs. 2 a kg (green fodder) and Rs. 10 a kg (dry fodder).

To ensure an assured market for the produced fodder, the scheme proposes an assurance of buy back through local milk producers' cooperative society (MPCS) and to be sold at 50 per cent subsidy through MPCS to the needy farmers.

Interested farmers may avail the scheme by contacting the veterinary institutions.

- ***Rs. 15 crore allocated for dry fodder cultivation***
- ***Milk producers' union to procure fodder***

Farmers urged to attend divisional-level meetings

Collector C. Samayamoorthy has appealed to the farmers to actively participate in the divisional-level farmers' grievance day meetings being conducted by the Revenue Divisional Officer or Sub-Collector to redress their complaints.

Addressing the mass contact programme held at Rajakkalmangalam on Wednesday, Mr. Samayamoorthy said that the decision to conduct divisional-level farmers' grievance day meetings, besides organising district-level meetings on every third Friday, was taken recently as some problems being faced by the agriculturists could be redressed at the lower level itself without waiting for any order from the higher-ups.

While the aggrieved farmer could get his grievance redressed within the shortest possible time, it would also lessen the burden of the officials. “Apart from getting remedies to their problems, the farmers can be acquainted with heavily-subsidised welfare schemes being implemented by Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Agricultural Engineering, Forest, Revenue, and Public Works,” he said. The public should also contact their taluk offices to solve their problems in getting welfare schemes. If the problems were not properly attended to, they could meet the Collector on Mondays for appropriate remedy, he said.

Mr. Samayamoorthy handed over welfare measures worth Rs. 6.60 lakh to 139 beneficiaries in the mass contact programme in the presence of Sub-Collector, Cheranmahadevi, Rohin Ramdas, and Joint Director of Agriculture K. Soundararajan.

Guidance meet for farmers on Saturday

A guidance meet for farmers is being organised on Saturday at the Senate Hall in Central College by the National Agro Farmers Trust.

Over 300 farmers from across the State are expected to attend the convention which will be addressed by agriculture experts.

Trust spokesperson K.S. Lava Kumar told presspersons here Wednesday that agricultural space was shrinking as farmers were opting to give farming land for non-agricultural activities as they find it economically unviable.

Help

The trust, after studying these factors, wanted to help the farmers in providing agriculture-related information including scientific method of cultivation, storage and marketing, and assistance offered by financial institutions and crop insurance.

“The trust will act as a bridge between government and farmers.”

The trust is planning to conduct free training for farmers in agriculture, dairy and poultry farming, mushroom culture and other agriculture-related activities at district and taluk levels.

Farmers protest demanding regular power supply

A large number of farmers under the banner of the All-India Kisan Sabha staged a protest outside Bescom office in Mulbagal town on Tuesday condemning irregular power supply. The protesters demanded three-phase power supply for at least for 10 hours a day. They said transformers should be repaired without collecting any charge from farmers.

Pokkali farmers seek a better deal

The Pokkali Paddy Protection Council will march to the Ezhupunna grama panchayat office in the district on March 16 demanding the implementation of the 'One paddy, one rice' scheme of the government. The other demands include timely setting up of bunds to prevent flow of saline water into paddy fields and steps to lease out public water bodies to private parties.

Ernakulam Maharajas College former principal K. Aravindakshan will inaugurate the march. General convenor, Pokkali Paddy Protection Council, Francis Kalathungal, said the lives of hundreds of people living near Pokkali paddy fields were badly affected. Potable water has become a scarce commodity. Farm workers and fishermen have lost their livelihood. The pokkali rice which is resistant to salt and grown organically is on the verge of extinction.

Ezhupunna grama panchayat had submitted a report to the district collector pointing out that the round-the-clock aquaculture was causing environmental problems.

The panchayat has also passed resolutions for the last three years demanding construction of the Chakkarachal bund. A mass signature campaign is on, Mr. Kalathungal said. The signatures will be submitted to the panchayat president.

Combine harvesters fail to alleviate farmers' woes

The machines were introduced to bring down operation rates charged for these machines in the harvesting process in Kuttanad

Recent developments have shown that the 150 combine harvester machines bought by the government under the Kuttanad package have failed to bring any solace to the Kuttanad farmers' woes.

The machines were introduced to bring down operation rates charged for these machines in the harvesting process in Kuttanad.

The district administration had earlier fixed the rate per hour for utilising private machines at Rs.1,350 and then at a meeting on Tuesday, raised the ceiling to Rs.1,800 per hour, in the wake of shortage of combine harvester machines. This happened at a time when the agents who had formed an association, All Kerala Harvester Owners and Agents Association, had promised farmers to get them these machines at Rs.1,110 per hour (as mentioned in their printed notices distributed by them).

When the price was again raised to Rs.1,800 per hour (in paddy fields close to roads), the agents had reportedly told that more machines would be made available in a week's time. This clearly shows that the agents had their way in forcing the district administration to raise the rates.

The Kerala Agro Industries Corporation (KAIC) which bought 150 machines spending at least Rs.30 crore had also bungled the whole process by not making machines available at the appropriate time. Agents also allegedly created artificial scarcity for meeting their purpose. The meeting on Tuesday saw several persons alleging that KAIC authorities were hand in glove with agents and some of the machines of KAIC landed in the hands of agents.

KAIC had also trained 260 persons for operating these machines and minor repair works. A total of Rs.20 lakh was spent for training under the Kuttanad package. But only a handful of the trained people are now employed as operators.

The administration had earlier fixed the rate per hour for utilising private machines at Rs.1,350 and then it raised the ceiling to Rs.1,800 per hour

Canara Bank to focus on rural development, agriculture

Crystal clear:Canara Bank Chairman and Managing Director R.K. Dubey donated a water purifier to Gurutipperudraswamy temple in Nayakanhatti village in Challakere taluk, Chitradurga district, on Wednesday.

: Canara Bank has disbursed 25 per cent of all agriculture loans in the country, said the bank's Chairman and Managing Director R.K. Dubey.

Speaking after donating a water purifier to Shri Gurutipperudraswamy temple and distributing loan certificates to members of self-help groups (SHGs) here on Wednesday, he said that the bank had given top priority for rural development and in the past few decades focussed on agriculture development in south India. The bank also plans to focus on north India, he said.

As per the directions of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Canara Bank had taken steps to open micro branches in villages that have a population of less than 2,000. A few years ago customers were not satisfied with the service provided by the bank owing to shortage of staff. Now steps have been taken to recruit staff to provide better service, he added.

The bank has also given priority for empowerment of women, by financing SHGs, as women have the ability to make sustained efforts for the overall development of a family by educating children and sharing equal responsibilities. “Apart from providing loans to SHGs, the bank is also providing benefits of various government schemes to them,” Mr. Dubey said.

He stated that special coaching on finance management would be provided in schools and colleges.

Deputy Commissioner V.P. Ikkeri, bank’s general manager K.S. Prabhakar Rao, NABARD Manager Prakash Bhandari, Lead Bank Manager R.C. Patil and Shri Gurutipperudraswamy temple management committee president Tippeswamy were present.

Novel way to irrigate fields using plastic saline bottles

Ingenuous idea: It is a good alternative to big drip systems but requires labour and patience. — Photo: Special Arrangement

Irrigation poses the greatest challenge for a farmer since water availability needs to be there almost throughout the year. Monsoon failure means fall in yield and farmers are the direct sufferers when the rains are inadquate.

“Especially in a country like India, the unseasonal and unpredictable weather, especially when it turns into droughts forces agriculture scientists and farmers to think of alternative simple and effective solutions to overcome the crises,” says Dr. I.S.Tomar, Programme Coordinator, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) near Rajgarh Naka, Jhabua.

Case study

One such case study that has been quite popular is use of discarded plastic saline bottles for irrigation by farmers in Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh. Basically a tribal dominated dry region, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the people there. Maize, blackgram, soyabean, wheat, and cotton are normally grown.

To enhance income of the farmers of the area, an attempt was made to introduce improved vegetable cultivation under National Agricultural Innovation Sub Project called Integrated farming system for sustainable rural livelihood in undulating and rainfed areas.

Mr. Ramash Bariya, a small farmer from the village, started growing vegetables under this project guidance in a small area. He got a good profit initially and this encouraged him to start growing some gourd varieties like bitter and sponge gourds. He prepared a small nursery for raising the seedlings but faced acute water shortage due to delayed monsoon.

Worried, he discussed with NAIP project scientists who advised him to adopt an innovative irrigation technique using waste saline bottle.

“We wanted to try out this method in the farmer’s field since it is quite cheap and effective and farmers who cannot financially afford big drip systems can try this. But farmers should realise that it requires labour and patience,” says Dr. Tomar.

Remove bottom portion

In this technique, the bottom portion of the bottle is removed using a sharp knife and the bottle filled with water. It is hung upside-down from a stake next to the sapling in the field. The plastic tube with the nozzle is made to touch the ground near the plant root.

Instead of allowing water to be irrigated through the channels in the field or pouring it on the crop with a bucket, water starts dripping on the soil surface making the root zone wet, thereby supplying moisture continuously to the crop.

Purchased the bottles

The plastic control knob in the middle of the tube can be adjusted to control the drip. The farmer purchased about 350 bottles from a waste paper mart and started using them for his cultivation. His entire family used to help him in filling the bottles with water.

“I have been able to get a net profit Rs.15,200 from less than a hectare till date by using this method for my vegetables,” says the farmer..

The state agriculture department conferred an achievement award on him for adopting this simple yet effective method to overcome water shortage.

Many others in the surrounding areas have also started adopting this method for their crops.

According to Dr. Tomar, this type of irrigation is quite popular in African countries like Kenya. Many American farmers are also using this system to grow their kitchen gardens.

But in India it is not popular. The reason could be that it is time consuming and labour intensive.

Though today there are several government schemes and subsidies available to install a full fledged drip irrigation system the paperwork involved is quite laborious, and delays cultivation work.

Can tie up

So farmers are encouraged to adopt such indigenous ideas to overcome their local cultivation problems. If there is a hospital nearby, farmers can tie up with it to collect the waste bottles directly, and on a regular basis.

For more information readers can contact Dr. I.S.Tomar, Programme Coordinator, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Near Rajgarh Naka,Jhabua-457661, Madhya Pradesh,phone: 07392-244367,mobile:

09425188028 and Mr. Ramesh Parmar S/o Sh.Jawa Parmar, Rotla village, Rama block, Jhabua, Madhya

Pradesh, mobile 09893593135 (pp).

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hindustantimes

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Sunny

Thursday, Mar 14

Max	Min
30°	24°

Rain: 0
Humidity: 94
Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:17
Sunset: 06:19
Barometer: 1012

Tomorrow's Forecast

Sunny

Friday, Mar 15

Max	Min
34°	22°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Mar 16	Sunday Mar 17	Monday Mar 18	Tuesday Mar 19	Wednesday Mar 20
34° | 23°	33° | 23°	33° | 23°	34° | 22°	35° | 22°
Sunny	Cloudy	Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast

THE TIMES OF INDIA | India

Farmers get relief from land takeover

NOIDA: Farmers of villages near Sector 132 opposing land takeover by Faridabad police inChakSalarpur bordering Haryana have got a temporary reprieve. The Punjab and Haryanahigh court, hearing a petition filed by farmers, passed directions on Tuesday restraining harassment of any kind to farmers by way of forcible takeover of land till the next date of hearing scheduled in April.

Farmers from at least five villages had been opposing takeover of nearly 210 acres of land in Chak Salarpur village by the Haryana police. "We have received a stay order from the Chandigarh high court today. The high court has directed the authorities not to take forcible possession of land till the next date of hearing," said farmer leader Ajay Singh Tomar.

Farmers had appealed in the Chandigarh high court against an order of the Faridabad district court last year, in which the contentious land was allowed to be taken over by the Indian Air Force. The land belongs to farmers in the villages of Nangli Wajidpur, Shahpur Goverdhanpur, Nangli Nangla, Rohilapur and Sakhpur in Gautam Buddh Nagar district, who claim to have bought it at a price of Rs 11,000 in the year 1977. Subsequently, according to farmers, the land passed over to Haryana in the Alteration of Boundary Act in 1979.

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

641 emu birds go under the hammer for Rs 3.85 lakh in Erode

As many as 641 emu birds were auctioned for a sum of Rs 3.85 lakh at the collectorate here on Tuesday.

But the response to the auction was poor as only five traders — three from Hyderabad and one each from Coimbatore and Dindigul – were present at the venue. A minimum price of Rs 500 was fixed for each bird of Alma, which was purchased by a trader from Coimbatore at a cost of Rs 550 per bird.

While the minimum auction price for the birds of TVS was Rs 300, they went for Rs 425. The minimum price of the birds of Nidhi emu firm was put at Rs 500 and they were bought for Rs 1300 per bird by a trader from Hyderabad. Altogether, 641 birds were sold for a total price of Rs 3.85 lakh, officials said.

In August last year, several depositors of the Susi Emu Farm Pvt Ltd, Perundurai, lodged a complaint stating that the firm had failed to pay the monthly incentive of Rs 6,000 for every Rs 1.5 lakh deposit.

As per the TNPID Act, the competent authority — District Revenue Officer — could only auction the valuables and pay back the money to the investors after getting a court order. Accordingly, the court permitted the DRO to auction 351 birds of Alma Emu Farm, Bavani, 215 of TVS Emu Farm, Sathy, and 75 of Nidhi Emu Farm, Perundurai. Hence, the auction was held on Tuesday, which was presided over by DRO S Ganesh.

Business Standard beta

Stricter norms force shrimp farmers to go for low stocking

Culture shrimp production likely to dip by 30%

A sharp fall in the stocking of seeds at shrimp farms is likely to have a toll on the marine food production in the state.

Under realisation of price due to presence of ethoxyquin (an antioxidant) in shrimps and stricter guidelines for obtaining Pre-Harvest Test Certificate (PHTC) from Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) have compelled the farmers to take a cautious stand and go for low stocking.

"Only 60 million seeds have been stocked at various shrimp farms in the state by March, this year, compared to about 200 million seeds last year. This is likely to affect the culture production of shrimps, which may dip by 30 per cent compared to about 8,000 tonne last year," said Prava Ranajan Patnaik, managing director, Falcon Marine Exports Ltd, a leading exporter of the country.

Patnaik attributed the decline in stocking to the stricter implementation of the PHTC system norms.

Sources say, out of 16,000 hectares under aquaculture in the state, only 4,327 hectares belonged to registered farms. While 4,651 farmers are registered with Coastal Aquaculture Authority (CAA), 70 per cent of the farmers are unregistered.

As per the Export Inspection Council notification, all those establishments procuring/processing aquaculture products have to obtain PHTC from MPEDA after due test of their produce prior to the harvest so as to establish that the stock procured by them are harvested from ponds which are free from the residues of harmful anti-biotics like Nitrofuran metabiolities and chloramphenicol.

Farmers say, they are going slow on stocking due to the huge loss suffered by them after imposition of restriction by Japan on import of shrimps.

The restriction has resulted in under realisation of prices, said Manoranjan Panda, Vice President, Odisha Shrimp Farmers Association.

Expressing concern on the issue, G Mohanty, President, Sea Food Exporter Association of India (SEAI) - Odisha region said we are keeping our fingers crossed on the likely impacts on the exports.

Japan had imposed compulsory testing for Ethoxyquin in the shrimp consignments received from India on the basis of default standard of 0.01 parts per million (ppm). Upon the request of SEAI, the Union Ministry of Commerce had sent a three member delegation to Japan led by MPEDA chairperson, Leena Nair, and the director of the Export Inspection Council, S K Saxena last year to resolve the issue.

States against subsidy sharing for PDS sugar

Centre mulls various options, may bear the subsidy completely for the time being as per food ministry proposal to cabinet

While welcoming the proposal of the food ministry to retain sugar distribution under the public distribution system, various states have been opposed to the Centre's proposal of sharing of subsidy for buying sugar under the scheme.

The food ministry has sent its proposals to the cabinet on Rangarajan report on sugar decontrol and the cabinet is expected to discuss the issue soon. The recommendations also contain the views of various states that have studied the sugar decontrol report.

In its recommendations, the food ministry has discussed several scenarios and suggestions for bearing the cost of subsidising sugar for distribution under PDS in various states. The ministry has calculated the revenue burden on account of PDS sugar to be around RS 3,500 crore a year. Officials said this could increase, depending on the market price of sugar.
According to official sources, there are two key issues -– abolition of levy on sugar distribution and deregulation of release mechanism -- which are contentious and need consensus with states and other stakeholders. They

clarified that in the long run, end users will have to bear the burnt of the deregulation mechanism.

As far as deregulation of release mechanism is concerned, the food ministry is in favour of freeing sugar mills from the levy obligation. Accordingly, they will be free to sell their entire quota either in free market or to states for PDS depending on the price. Therefore states have to buy sugar from the open market at market price and sell it cheap under PDS. The difference has to be borne either by states or centre or both.

However citing PDS to be central government obligation and that claiming that the state governments themselves have lot of other social welfare issues, states have backed out of the subsidy sharing mechanism.

Official sources said, going by the political compulsions, the centre may just agree to fund the states the entire money required to buy sugar from the open market for sometime post deregulation. In the meantime, the centre can explore other ways to garner additional revenue to fund sugar PDS.

Sugar may form part of the combined subsidy which the states get annually from the central government for different schemes and projects. Officials said, to that extent the frame of other plans and projects may be tailored to incorporate sugar subsidy in the total amount. In the long run, states may eventually agree to bear the costs since they would need the central subsidy for other important issues.

Secondly, for the time being, the government may hike the excise duty on sugar which currently stands at Rs 95 per quintal.

As regards to the levy obligation, the food ministry has already taken measures by extending the quota period from monthly to quarterly before completely doing away with it.

Last year, in a first to deregulate PDS price of sugar, the Sikkim government increased the price of levy sugar, meant for the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Sikkim raised the price of levy sugar to Rs 26 a kg as against the central government rate of Rs 13.50, setting the precedence for partial deregulation of levy sugar pricing. Levy sugar is amount set aside from the total production for PDS.

Background

The Union ministry of food had moved a proposal for the Cabinet to raise the price of levy sugar from Rs 13.50 a kg, fixed since 2002, to Rs 24-26 a kg but decision has been deferred more than once. The market price is Rs 30 a kg. To cut the subsidy under PDS for sugar to the states, the central government had asked states to raise the price of sugar for the PDS without waiting for its own decision.

Earlier, there was not much difference between the market price and levy sugar meant for the PDS but the difference has been rising over recent years. Since the states are reimbursed to the extent of Rs 13.50 per kg and the market price was around it, supply was not a problem for the PDS earlier. The situation has since reversed and the lifting of sugar under the PDS from mills has come down to 60-70 per cent of the stock as against 90-95 per cent earlier, said officials.

The subsidy is given to states against receipts of distribution of sugar under PDS at the levy price of Rs 13.50 per kg only. For instance, say sources, the Bihar and Chhattisgarh governments have almost stopped lifting sugar from mills for the PDS.

Centre okays Rs 2,893 crore for 7 states

An Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) headed by Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar today cleared a comprehensive package of Rs 2,893 crore for seven states to deal with the outcome of various natural calamities.

"Of this, Rs 1,208 crore has been approved for Maharashtra, Rs 865 crore for Gujarat and Rs 67 crore for Kerala to tackle drought. Apart from this, another Rs 54.5 crore relief package has been approved for Kerala, which suffered floods last year. Besides, Rs 417 crore has been approved for Andhra Pradesh in the wake of Cyclone Nilam, Rs 115 crore for Himachal Pradesh, Rs 94 crore for Sikkim and Rs 73 crore for Uttarakhand due to cloud burst, floods and landslides. The relief package, to be released under the National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF), will be implemented from March 1," Pawar told reporters after the EGoM meeting.

The government has also decided to send a team of officials to Kerala to assess the impact of low rain. The ongoing drought in Maharashtra is the worst in the past 40 years, said Pawar, adding the EGoM had taken additional measures to help farmers. This would be over and above the relief package of Rs 1,208 crore approved for the state. Of the latter amount, Pawar said Rs 808 crore would be released under the NDRF to protect rabi crops and Rs 400 crore will be sanctioned under the National Horticulture Mission to save orchard crops.

Farmers having orchards of up to two hectares will get assistance up to Rs 30,000 for each ha under the mission. To protect small and marginal farmers in drought-hit areas of the state, Pawar said the EGoM had raised input subsidy in rainfed areas to Rs 4,500 a ha, from Rs 3,000 a hectare; in irrigated areas, it has been increased to Rs 9,000 a ha from Rs 6,000 a ha. For perennial crops, the subsidy has been increased to 12,000 a ha from 8,000 a ha, he said, adding farmers who had incurred more than 50 per cent crop loss in areas up to two ha would be eligible for this.

To protect the 455,000 heads of cattle in the state, the minister said camps were being organised. The EGoM had approved raising the amount of money given to farmers to take care of cattle to Rs 50 each for big animals and Rs 25 each for smaller ones. Currently, the Centre gives Rs 32 for big animals and Rs 16 for small cattle, he said, adding the camps had also been extended for three months, till May. "If the state wants to extend the cattle camp till June-July, the government can submit the proposal and we will consider it sympathetically," he said.

Maharashtra had, said Pawar, faced drought-like situations on many occasions but never a shortage of water as in this year. He blamed pendency in irrigation projects for the aggravated water shortage.

"Previously, we were facing the problem of a shortage of foodgrains but had never faced a shortage of water. Today, there is a severe shortage of water. There are many villages where water is available once in eight days. Some towns get water once in 10 days," he said. "Of 254 minor reservoirs, 157 have reached zero level. So, the real problem is drinking water. Basically, a number of irrigation projects are pending. One has to provide money. There are some problems in the state. The percentage of irrigation in Vidarbha is less, compared to other parts; allocation to irrigation projects (there) is decided by the governor and not the chief minister."

To ensure drinking water, the state government has taken a decision not to release water for any crops. Water has been reserved exclusively for drinking purposes, he added. The minister said sugarcane yield in the state would be lower, as a sizeable crop had been diverted as fodder to save livestock.

The worst-affected districts in Maharashtra are Solapur, Ahmednagar, Sangli, Pune, Satara, Beed and Nashik.

The situation was also serious in Buldhana, Latur, Osmanabad, Nanded, Aurangabad, Jalna, Jalgaon and Dhule districts, an official said. The Maharashtra government had demanded a relief package of Rs 1,801 crore under the NDRF.

Rabi crops, priority sector norms boost farm loans

Credit to agriculture rose 19.8% in January, against 6.3% a year ago

In the 12-month period up to January, agricultural credit rose about threefold, boosted by revised priority sector lending norms and a rise in the use of the liberalised Kisan Credit Card scheme.

Public sector bank executives said the rabi harvest and special steps to help drought-hit farmers also contributed to the rise in agricultural credit.

Data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) show credit to agriculture rose 19.8 per cent in January, against 6.3 per cent a year ago. In January 2012, credit due by the agricultural segment stood at Rs 5,58,000 crore.

A senior State Bank of India (SBI) executive said the new priority sector lending norms had resulted in banks reworking their strategies, opting for direct lending to agriculture.

SBI reported a 13 per cent rise in farm credit till December 2012. As on December 31, its farm loan book stood at Rs 1,15,432 crore.

Earlier, the emphasis (especially of private banks) was on lending to intermediaries — non-banking financial companies and microfinance institutions. However, this exposure doesn't account for priority sector lending targets any more.

In 2011-12, credit growth had seen a sharp fall. Credit growth in the previous financial years stood at about 21 per cent each.

An official in charge of agriculture credit at a large state-owned bank said, “In areas where single crops such as sugarcane and cotton are grown, harvesting was over by December. In January, fresh credit was needed.”

RBI has several guidelines regarding credit facilitation in drought-hit areas.

Existing credit facilities are converted into demand loans, repayable in three to five years. As farmers were also eligible for production credit, farm credit was getting a boost, the banker said.

Other bankers said as the demand from other segments wasn’t high, banks were concentrating on agriculture.

“Agricultural credit can’t see a slowdown for two reasons. First, on the land available for cultivation, farmers would produce something or the other — it won’t be lying idle. The crop might change, depending on factors such as water availability, etc. But it would be used for cultivation. Second, there would be demand for production credit.”

Banks have to meet priority sector lending targets before the end of the financial year.

They have to lend 13.5 per cent of their total credit to direct agricultural activities and an additional 4.5 per cent to indirect agricultural activities, including warehousing, purchase and distribution of fertilisers, pesticides and seeds and irrigation systems.

THE HINDU Business Line

Marginal increase in tomato arrivals

Karnal, March 13: After witnessing some good levels over the last few days, tomato price eased by Rs 50-200 a quintal on marginal increase in supplies, on Wednesday.
Around 700 crates (a crate is 25 kg) of different varieties of tomato arrived at the Karnal vegetable market and were quoted at Rs 700-2,400.

Around 4,200 crates of varieties such as 524, Anoop, Himsona, Trishul, Himshikhar and Ahmedabad were received in Karnal district markets.

Out of total arrivals, about 35 per cent stocks was of low quality; around 50 per cent medium quality while just about 15 per cent was of superior quality.

Vikas Sachdeva, a trade expert, told *Business Line* that marginal increase in supplies pulled tomato prices marginally down.

With the arrivals of previous crop, arrivals of new crop have also started with small consignments.

However, the size of tomatoes is smaller and the quality lower, he added.

Prices of superior quality decreased by Rs 200 a quintal and quoted at Rs 2,100-2,400; medium quality was down by Rs 50 and quoted at 1,300-1,500 while low quality was Rs 100 down at Rs 700-1,000.

There has been volatility in the last few days but it is unlikely to see any major change in the next couple of days, said Vikas Sachdeva.

Superior quality has touched Rs 2,600 on Tuesday and in the retail market, superior quality sold at Rs 40 a kg.

However, prices have decreased on Wednesday, market is still ruling on the higher side.

Mixed trend in spot rubber

Kottayam, March 13: Spot rubber showed a mixed trend on Wednesday. The market shed the early gains partially in sheet rubber RSS 4, as certain traders were sellers in the counter following the sharp declines in Japanese futures. The grade slipped to Rs 162 (162.50) a kg at Kottayam and Kochi according to traders and the Rubber Board. According to sources, growers continued to hold the stocks expecting to take advantage of the low production season.
The Key TOCOM rubber futures fell on a second straight session as softer Chinese equity markets prompted investors to book profits. Signs of recovery in Yen added further fuel to the negative sentiments.

The March series concluded at Rs 160.10 (160.08), April at Rs 163.69 (163.37), May at Rs 166.85 (166.98), June at Rs 169.41 (170.15), July at Rs 172.50 (172.65) and August at Rs 178 (172.82) a kg on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) dropped to Rs 162.39 (165.23) a kg at Bangkok. The March futures nose dived to ¥266.4 (Rs 151.13) from ¥277 a kg during the day session and then to ¥261.8 (Rs 148.52) a kg in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 162 (162.50); RSS-5: 159 (159.50); ungraded: 156 (156); ISNR 20: 160 (159) and latex 60 per cent: 107 (105).

Drought hits sugarcane planting in Maharashtra

Likely shortage of sugarcanes: A file photo of a drought-hit sugarcane field in Maharashtra.

New Delhi, March 13: The prevailing drought in Maharashtra, the country's key sugar producing State, will affect the sugarcane availability for the 2013-14 season starting October. The shortage of water in major parts of cane growing areas has affected the fresh planting in the State.
A section of the industry estimates the sugarcane area in the State to be down by about 30 per cent over last year. This may impact next year's sugar output in the State, which has seen prolonged dry spells in the past two years.

Admitting that sugar output will be lower in Maharashtra, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar maintained that the country's total output for 2013-14 would be around the current year's level of around 24 million tonnes.

In the current year, sugar production is expected to touch 24.5 mt.

Pawar said sugarcane planting has not yet begun in Maharashtra as the drought situation is so severe that the State Government has decided to save water for drinking purpose and not supply for crops.

"We feel that sugar production in Maharashtra could come down to around five million tonnes in 2013-14 from the current year's seven million tonnes," said Vinay Kumar, Managing Director, National Sugar Co-operative Federation Ltd.

However, the decline in output will not affect the availability as the country is expected to have comfortable carry forward stocks for 2013-14, Kumar said.

"If the monsoon arrives on time, there could be some revival of the crop," Kumar said.

erratic monsoon

The erratic monsoon, last year, triggered a cane shortage as a major portion of the crop was diverted to fodder in the State. This has resulted in early closure of factories in the state. An estimated 40 factories have already closed their operations for the current season.

"The average decline in planted cane area for next season is about 30 per cent across the State. We expect the sugar output in the state to decline to around 5.3 mt next year from the current year's projection of 7.3 mt," said B.B. Mehta, Chief Executive Officer of Dalmia Bharat Sugar Industries Ltd.

The fresh cane acreage is down by about 10-15 per cent in Kolhapur, where Dalmia currently operates a 2,500 tonnes crushed a day (tcd) plant.

In other sugar zones such as Pune and Solapur, the cane acreage is down by 20-25 per cent and the highest decline would be in Marathawada and Vidarbha at around 35 per cent.

Officials at the Indian Sugar Mills Association preferred not to hazard any guess on the impact at this point in time.

"A clearer picture will emerge in about a month's time once the field surveys and satellite mapping is completed" said Abinash Verma, Director General, ISMA.

In the neighbouring Karnataka, the crushing has almost come to an end. Narendra Murkumbi, Managing Director of Shree Renuka Sugars Ltd, said the fresh planting in northern Karnataka is down by about 54 per cent.

“This means the decline in acreage would be around 25-27 per cent of last year as half of the cane area is replanted every year,” he said.

Edible oils slip as stockists avoid fresh purchases

Mumbai, March 13: Weak demand and bearish global cues pulled down physical edible oils prices in domestic market. Higher arrivals of kharif crop, especially mustard seeds, in producing centres and bearish sentiment in futures markets weighed on physical markets, said traders. According to Bombay Commodity Exchange barring groundnut oil, which rose by Rs 10 tracking jump in Saurashtra markets, all other edible oils declined in the range of Rs 2-5 for 10 kg. Selling by refineries at lower rates pulled down palmolein by Rs 2 and soyabean refined oil by Rs 5. Sunflower, cotton and rapeseed oil also made losses.

Sources said, “slack local demand keeps stockists away from fresh forward buying. Only needy wholesalers covered 750-800 tonnes of palmolein for delivery up to March directly from the refineries at Rs 505 ex-JNPT. Volumes in other edible oils remained thin.”

At producing level, mustard seeds arrivals were 4.40 lakh bags and soyabean arrivals were 1.60 lakh bags nationally. Mustard seeds prices were Rs 3,525-3,625 while that of soyabeans were Rs 3,350-3,450 at mandi level and Rs 3,525-3,550 at plant level, said sources.

Towards the day’s close, Liberty was quoting palmolein Rs 515-516 ex Shahpur – Mumbai and Rs 512 ex-JNPT up to April 15. Super palmolein Rs 553 for March – April, Sunflower refined oil Rs 785. Ruchi was quoting palmolein at Rs 515 to April 15 and Rs 512 for March 15-31 ex JNPT, soyabean refined oil Rs 650 and sunflower refined oil Rs 775. Allana quoted super palmolein at Rs 550. In Saurashtra – Rajkot, on the back of brand makers’ fresh buying, groundnut oil increased by Rs 30 to Rs 1,880 for*telia* tin and by Rs 25 to Rs 1,225 for loose (10 kg).

Malaysian BMD crude palm oil’s April futures settled at MYR 2,386 (MYR 2,404), May at MYR 2,397 (MYR 2,411) and June at MYR 2,401 (MYR 2,414) a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,220 (1,210), soya refined oil 650 (655), sunflower exp. ref. 700 (705), sunflower ref. 775 (780), rapeseed ref. oil 708 (711), rapeseed expeller ref. 678 (681) cottonseed ref. oil 615 (616) and palmolein 510 (512).

Vikram Global has quoted Rs 547 ex-Chennai and Rs 543 for April delivery. Also quoted $933 CIF JNPT and $946 CIF Kandla in container (Flexibag).

Pepper heads north on buying support

Kochi, March 13: Pepper prices continued their uptrend on Wednesday on buying interest. Consequently all the active contracts ended much above the previous day's close.
Leading exporters and international players were active in the markets in Karnataka and Kerala and that had activated the speculators to push up the prices.

Market was volatile and the running contract touched the first upper circuit level of three per cent and then declined in the closing session, they said. April delivery also behaved almost similarly. There was heavy liquidation in April.

On the spot, at higher level sellers started emerging in Kerala's Idukki and Wayanad districts and Karnataka.

Much of the upcountry demand has gone to Karnataka from those areas which preferred low bulk density bolder looking pepper while demand from areas such as Maharashtra and some parts of Tamil Nadu for bulk density material is coming to Kerala, they said.

On the spot, 70 tonnes of fresh pepper arrived but all were traded afloat at an average price of Rs 351 a kg.

March contract on the NCDEX went up by Rs 390 to Rs 37,155 a quintal while April and May increased by Rs 925 and Rs 920 respectively to Rs 35,990 and Rs 35,870 a quintal.

Total turn over surged by 1,617 tonnes to close at 3,555 tonnes.

Total open interest decreased by 483 tonnes to 3,088 tonnes.

Spot prices moved up by Rs 300 to Rs 35,100 (ungarbled) and Rs 36,600 (Garbled) a quintal.

Ample supply, sluggish offtake hold sugar steady

Mumbai, March 13: Sugar prices on the spot market ruled steady on Wednesday. Routine wholesale and retail demand in middle of the month kept prices under check at upper and market level.
Mills sold regular quality at steady rates that kept naka and spot prices unchanged. Domestic futures prices were also range-bound on thin trade. Morale was calm, said traders.

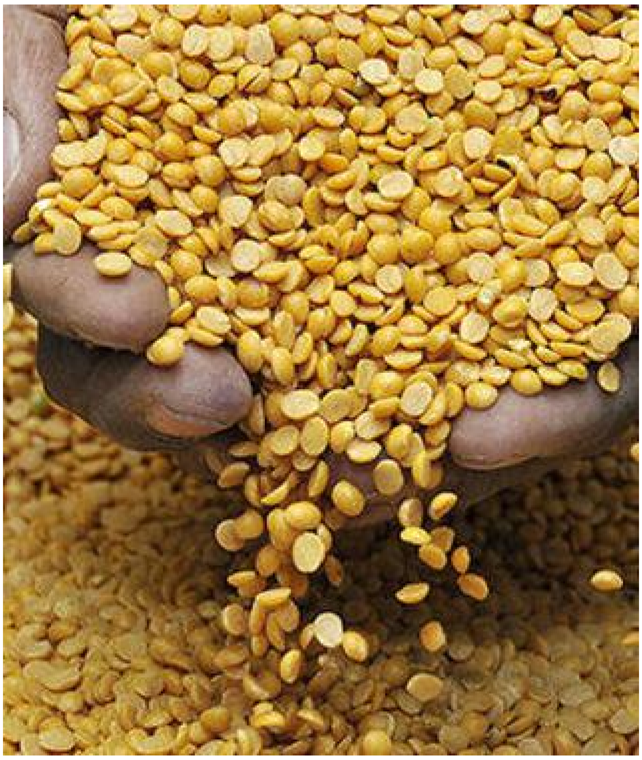
A wholesaler said, “In the absence of bulk buying enquiry activities remained need-based. Mills and traders are carrying sufficient stocks with them resulting in continuous selling pressure. Neighbouring States buying is lacking in Maharashtra as sugar prices in other producing centres are at par with the parity of Maharashtra. Local retail demand also eased in middle month. Daily arrivals are more than demand”.

On the NCDEX, sugar April futures was Rs 3,078 (Rs 3,079), May contracts dropped to Rs 3,136 (Rs 3,137) and June was up at Rs 3,231 (Rs 3,227).

In Vashi market, arrivals were 61-62 truck loads (each of 100 bags) and local dispatches were 59-60 truck loads. On Tuesday evening, about 16-17 mills sold 45,000-48,000 bags to local traders at Rs 3,000-3,060 (Rs 3,000-3,060) for S-grade and Rs 3,100-3,200 (Rs 3,100-3,200) for M-grade. There was no change in freight rates.

Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade Rs 3,142-3,241 (Rs 3,142-3,241) and M-grade Rs 3,232-3,421 (Rs 3,232- 3,421). *Naka* **delivery rates:** S-grade Rs 3,095-3,150 (Rs 3,095-3,150) and M-grade Rs 3,160-3,305 (Rs 3,160-3,305).

Improved demand from mills puts pulses on the boil



Indore, March 13: Pulse seeds and pulses showed a mixed trend in Indore mandis with chana, tur and masoor showing a marginal gain on improved buying support, while moong and urad ruled stable on subdued demand.
Tur (Maharashtra) gained Rs 50 to Rs 4,650 a quintal on improved demand and buying support at the lower rate, while tur (Madhya Pradesh) declined by Rs 100 to Rs 4,000-4,200. Tur had been witnessing a bullish trend during the last week with its prices going as high as Rs 4,800 a quintal few days back on strong buying support from the millers and weak arrival.

According to Prakash Vora, a local whole-sale pulse trader, any major fall in tur prices from its current level appears unlikely, given lower crop output this year and dependency on imported tur.

Tur dal remained unchanged with tur dal (full) being quoted at Rs 6,100-6,200, tur dal (sawa no.) at Rs 5,500-5,600, while tur marka ruled at Rs 6,700.

Masoor and its dal also gained on rise in buying support from the millers. Masoor (bold) rose to Rs 3,800 (up Rs 50), while masoor (medium) ruled at Rs 3,400-3,500. Rise in sport masoor also lifted its dal by Rs 25 with masoor dal (average) rising to Rs 4,150-75, masoor dal (medium) at Rs 4,250-75, while masoor dal (bold) rose to Rs 4,350-75 .

Moong and urad also ruled stable on subdued demand. Moong (best) remained firm at Rs 5,200-5,400 while moong (medium) ruled at Rs 4,500-4,800.

Moong dal also ruled stable even as demand in pulses continued to remain slack. In local mandis, moong dal (medium) ruled at Rs 6,000-6,100, moong dal (best) at Rs 6,600-6,700, while moong mongar ruled at Rs 7,000-7,300.

Urad and its dal ruled flat on weak demand with urad (bold) being quoted at Rs 3,400 a quintal, while urad (medium) ruled at Rs 3,000-3,200.

Urad dal also ruled steady with urad dal (medium) being quoted at Rs 3,800-3,900, while urad dal (bold) ruled at Rs 4,500-4,600 .

Urad (Mongar) gained Rs 100 to Rs 5,600-5,900 a quintal on rise in buying support.

Quality turmeric fetches Rs 8,000/quintal

Erode, March 13: To fulfil the upcountry orders they got, buyers showed interest in purchasing quality hybrid turmeric which zoomed by Rs 450 a quintal.
"Traders of Erode received huge orders from North Indian turmeric exporters for the hybrid turmeric. More than 200 bags arrived and those who received good number of orders from North India for the quality hybrid turmeric quoted competitive price at Rs 8,329 a quintal, up Rs 450, " said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said the exporters have received reasonable order form almost all the northern States and they are quoting higher prices .

The prices will go up further soon, said the traders. Of the arrival of 5,238 bags of turmeric, 3,978 were sold. Stockists also procured about 500 bags.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,519-7,606; the root variety Rs 5,306-6,256.

Salem Hybrid Crop: The finger variety fetched Rs 6,826-8,329; the root variety Rs 6,289-6,806. Of the 1,010 bags, 65 per cent stocks were sold. At the Regulated market Committee, the finger variety fetched Rs 6,191-7,777; the root variety Rs 5,691-6,669. All the 422 bags found takers.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,500-7,309 and the root variety Rs 5,200-6,219. All the 82 bags were sold. At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety ruled at Rs 5,999-7,369; the root variety Rs 5,459-6,199. All the 411 bags were sold.

Corporate demand heats up coconut oil

Kochi, March 13: The coconut oil market is witnessing short covering as major corporates started buying huge quantities of copra.
This has resulted in slight improvement in prices to Rs 63.50 a kg in Kerala (Rs 63), while in Tamil Nadu it went up to Rs 62 against Rs 60 quoted last week.

According to Prakash B.Rao, Vice-President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA), major corporates have increased their purchase price which has also boosted the market sentiments.

Copra prices also shown an upward trend at Rs 4,600 a quintal in Kerala (Rs 4,400), while in Tamil Nadu it stood at Rs 4,500 (Rs 4,350). The upward trend witnessed in copra market is due to lower level buying by corporates and traders, he said. This is expected to be a short-term rally as the season in Tamil Nadu is about to start next month, he added.

Other edible oils such as palm oil and palm kernel oil remained flat at Rs 52 and Rs 53 a kg respectively. Piling up of edible oil stocks with large scale importers was the reason for the prices remaining stagnant, he added.

Thalath Mahamood, former President, COMA, said that the market, which is witnessing a steady trend, is expected to continue for the time being. The market sentiments have improved with the Government agreed to bear the loss suffered by Nafed on copra procurement, he said. Moreover, the decision of the Kerala Government to procure raw coconuts to sell in the open market will also boost up the sales and get a better price for farmers, he added.

Bharat N. Khona , former Board Member, COMA, said that though the market is ruling steady, the demand from upcountry buyers was not reflected due to low pricing of other edible oils.