

Punjabi farmers turn Madurai's barren tracts green



Success story: Tissue-culture banana and papayas (right) grown in a farm near Subbulapuram in Peraiyur taluk in Madurai district.— Photos: R. Ashok

Become trend-setters as locals embrace papaya farming

No rain. No water. No electricity. No money. And the list of woes goes on. Big, small or marginal farmer in any district is no exception to the situation.

Yet, there is always hope amidst loss. The ryots may be grudging the long dry spell, but here is a small group of people in remote

Subbulapuram of Peraiyur taluk, near Usilampatti, that has taken the farmers by surprise with their yield in the dry season.

They are Punjabi migrants who for the past few years have been successfully cultivating papaya, ladies finger, tissue culture banana, cucumber and more. They have converted the sun-blistered land into green tracts. The area almost resembles a mini Punjab lush with its green fields on the outskirts of Madurai.

Young Sikh boys sport jeans, T-shirts and turbans and drive around in their farm tractors inside a neatly fenced campus spread over seven acres.

Lives and livelihood have taken on a new meaning here. Despite teething troubles, they are growing crops through drip irrigation system under the National Horticulture Mission (NHM). The Tamil Nadu Horticulture Department is providing financial and technical aid.

Manmohan Singh has to be coaxed into speaking. And when he does, he surprises all with his chaste Tamil and explains the various stages involved in raising the papaya fruit. “The three feet tall plants have to be watered more frequently as the temperature is rising,” he says.

With him are Jitender Singh and Dharshan Singh, along with a few more co-workers who toil round-the-clock. From farmers, gardeners and cleaners during the day they turn into watchmen during the night for the farm. “We don’t waste time. We only break for “naashta” and eat very little. We cook our own dal-chawal or roti-subzi,” says Jitender.

Local man Ramalingam is their permanent companion. At 50, he has picked up a few words of Hindi from his Punjabi friends and in return taught them Tamil to keep the communication going.

“When the Punjabis came here, the land prices were abysmally low. Now, after seeing the greenery, many people visit us and evince interest in growing papaya,” he says.

The Assistant Director (Horticulture), T. Padmini, says under the NHM, Rs. 31,202 is offered as subsidy for every hectare of land. There are 25 government approved drip irrigation farms.

The beneficiaries are also given a short-term training course on use and benefits of drip irrigation, judicious water management, latest technology and use of machines. The in-house training is given at the Agricultural College and Research Institute by trained faculty members. Field visits are also part of the programme, she adds.

The Assistant Agriculture Officer, V. Pandian, says the seeds of “Red Lady” variety of papaya were procured from Bangalore and supplied by the Department. The fruit has 10 to 12 days of shelf life from the day it is plucked. Till a year ago, buyers came even from Dubai and Singapore. Most of the produce is sold locally in T. Kallupatti. Many wholesale merchants from Virudhunagar also purchase from the Punjabis.

Hearing about the papaya’s success story, Alagarsami from T. Kunnathur, a small-scale farmer, came calling. A drive into the interior of Perayur-Subbulapuram-Kunnathur-T. Kallupatti reveal the growing presence of papaya raised through precision farming.

The Horticulture department officials in Madurai district disbursed Rs 94.86 lakh as subsidy and other sops to beneficiaries during the year, says Deputy Director S.V.K. Rajendran. The district has 18,000 acres under mango cultivation, 5,000 acres of plantains, 1,500 acres of guava, 1,600 acres of sapota and around 100 acres of papaya.

With the National Horticulture Mission giving more sops to farmers’ for taking up papaya cultivation after the Peraiyur success,

the field staff have identified barren lands in Usilampatti, Sedapatti, Chellampatti and in parts of Alanganallur for expansion.

However, the farmers in Peraiyur claim that a disease known as “mealy bug” is causing concern. But Horticultural officials say the Department of Entomology in Agricultural College and Research Institute have solved the problem.

On the other hand, real estate agents in the bone dry Usilampatti belt are trying to capitalise on the non-availability of water and the poor prospects for carrying out farm operations. As a result, many barren lands are turning into housing plots. What was available for Rs. 1 lakh per acre five years back is now priced at over Rs. 3 lakh.

“The government should discourage such rampant plot promotion,” plead the farmers. “We should be encouraged to try innovative methods to keep the land cultivable,” they say.

Training camp for farmers

Extension officers of the Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries Sciences University organised a training camp for dairy farmers about azolla farming and nutrient addition to fodder in Mangalagi village on Wednesday. Azolla acts as a very powerful nutrition supplement but also reduces the cost of feeding cattle, Channappagouda Biradar, extension officer, said. He demonstrated the process of cultivating azolla in ponds. The farmers were also taught to fortify grass by adding molasses and urea.

Western ragweed hits farming

M. Bevinahalli, Muniyur among villages facing the brunt of it



The weed is depleting nutrients, moisture, minerals in soil in Turuvekere taluk in Tumkur district.

A perennial weed, called the western ragweed, has been growing rampantly in four villages of Turuvekere taluk, Tumkur district, and farmers see it as a threat to their agricultural produce.

Called locally as the “ketta dawana”, the weed has been found in M. Bevinahalli, Muniyur, Srirampura and Gottikere Pura villages in around 300 acres of land — among crops and in coconut and arecanut plantations.

The weed is depleting nutrients, moisture and minerals in soil. Farmers say this has decreased yield by more than 35 per cent. Farmers have tried different methods to control the rampaging weed, but to no effect.

Yathiraju S. of M. Bevinahalli told *The Hindu* , “There is no grass for my cattle to graze and coconuts are sparse.” Puttaswamy L. from Muniyur, said: “I have spent thousands of rupees on pesticides, but I cannot destroy the weed or control its growth.” So he has left his field fallow. Lavakumar M.R. from the same village said that though he had set fire to the weed, it kept growing back. He urged the government to intervene and help control the menace.

According to scientists, the weed will attain the status of Parthenium in due course and this requires the immediate attention of experts to control it. It will affect bio-diversity, fodder production, yield and crop quality severely.

The scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Konehalli in Tiptur taluk and University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, are conducting research to root out the weed.

Programme coordinator of Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Konehalli, G.M. Sujith, said: “If the western ragweed is not controlled now, it will spread to larger areas and will adversely affect food production.” He urged the Ministry of Agriculture to declare the weed (*Ambrosia psilostchya*) as a “quarantine weed”, which would help in controlling it.

Solar powered ‘drought fighter’ ensures water for small farms



Need of the hour:Mr. David demonstrating the use of the solar pwered drought fighter.Photo: Special Arrangement

Presently farmers in Tamil Nadu are battling two problems — acute water shortage and a major power crisis. “Even to pump out the fast dwindling water from the wells for irrigating the crops farmers need electricity. Sometimes they get it after 14 hours or some days they get the supply in 6-7 hours.

“There is no fixed time. A few months ago, when I was visiting a field in Kadayam region in Tirunelveli I saw a farmer spraying his

25 cents of rose crop carrying a hand operated sprayer. He was walking several times towards his field bund to fill his manual sprayer.

Rapidly dwindling

“Only a few more weeks were left for him to do the daily pickings after which he cannot continue, since summer is fast approaching and already the water level in the wells is rapidly dwindling,” says Dr. P. David Raja Beula, Assistant Director of Horticulture Kadayam.

Mr. David has developed a device called ‘Drought fighter’ that promises to be of help during dry season or when water availability is low.

The main feature of this device is that it does not require electricity to operate it, but works on solar energy. It is priced at Rs.15,000.

“The machine is mainly developed to help a farmer conserve water and use the available water efficiently for irrigating his crops, without using electricity. Already several wells in the region are fast becoming dry with no water. Throughout the State it is the same. Having already developed a solar spray I decided to apply the same idea and developed this new water conserving machine that runs on solar power,” he says.

The drought fighter has a two-metre-long sucking tube and a 20 metre long delivery hose with a lance and a nozzle attached.

An 18 watt small solar panel is attached to a 12 volt electric motor. All farmers need to do is place the solar panel along with the motor under the sun for an hour and start using it.

Running time

Once charged it can continuously run for three hours, after which the motor needs to be switched off and the panel needs to be charged again.

Whenever there is electricity, water from the well can be pumped into four or five 200 litres plastic barrels. Later the drought fighter is kept on top of one of the barrels and the sucking hose immersed in it..

Water can be sprayed in a 360 degrees circle using the 20 metre-long delivery hose, covering 25 cents of area at a time. More area can be covered by periodically shifting of the entire system.

Farmers can also mix their choice of pesticides or bio-pesticides in the barrel and spray.

As water need not be carried on the back it reduces physical labour for the farmer. The device can be used to cultivate almost all crops.

Major advantage

“The major advantage of this over the traditional back pack sprayer is that a farmer need not have to carry the weight of 16 litres of water on his back every time. All he needs to do is place the plastic barrels in different places in the field, fill them with water and use this machine to irrigate, spray his crops,” explains Mr. David.

Mr. Mathew, a farmer from Thiruvananthapuram, who uses this drought fighter to spray his betel vine and pepper crop says, “It is quite a sturdy instrument and requires only one person to operate it. Since it is powered by solar energy I save on the cost of fuel.”

Lot of queries

“Even when the well has minimum quantity of water, vegetables and flowers can be cultivated in a few cents of land using this device. In Kadayam block, Tirunelveli farmers were encouraged to carry on flower cultivation with the help of this drought fighter and

now our Horticulture office is flooded with requests from farmers to purchase hybrid Tomato, Bhendi, Brinjal, Bitter gourd and leafy vegetables seeds,” says Mr. David.

“Till date I have manufactured this device only on order. And nationalized banks are giving credit assistance to farmers to buy this machine,” he says.

For further details those interested can contact Mr. P.David Raja Beula , Assistant Director of Horticulture Kadayam on email:microeconomicsdavid@yahoo.co.in or mobile: 09486285704.

Farmers in Chidambaram take up gladiolus cultivation

Farmers in Chidambaram district, Tamil Nadu have been introduced to a new annual flowering crop called Gladiolus by the Annamalai University in association with State Department of Agriculture (Jammu & Kashmir).

Since the crop is new to the cultivators of the region and many have never seen or heard about it, the University arranged a meeting recently and used slides and photographs to make them aware about the crop.

Training

Farmers from C.Mutlur village in the district were also selected and imparted training on the same. About 75 farm women and venturesome farmers participated in this awareness campaign.

A demonstration plot for growing the crop in an innovative farmer's field was also taken up along with active participation from the local SHG members of the village.

Four varieties of gladiolus namely American beauty, Summer sunshine, Candy man and White prosperity are presently being grown in the demonstration field. After the successful cultivation of gladiolus in the village another meeting was organized in which representatives from a local bank, different farm organization, women organisations of Cauvery delta participated.

Doubts about the crop cultivation were dealt with in detail in the question-answer session and the bank also came forward to offer short-term farm loans to a tune of Rs. 50,000 without any collateral security to those interested to take up this cultivation.

Success

The success of this participatory exercise resulted in more farmers venturing into raising the crop in the subsequent seasons. A gladiolus growers club was also formed for transferring technologies through farmer to farmer extension mode and an annual award for the best cultivator was also instituted.

At present with the available water facilities farmers belonging to growers club and Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha (TNKS) have established model farms in two villages of Chidambaram.

(Dr. Manoj Nazir, Scientist (Floriculture), Directorate of Agriculture, State Dept. of Jammu (J&K), Talab Tillo, Jammu (J&K), Mobile: 09622042000 and Dr.T. Raj Pravin, Assistant Professor, Dept of Agricultural Extension, Annmalai University, Annamalai Nagar-608002, Mobile: 9486385423.)

Forum demands waiver of agriculture loans

The Tamizhaga Eri Mattrum Attru Pasana Vivasayigal Sangam has demanded the waiver of all agricultural loans sanctioned through

the primary agricultural cooperative societies and nationalised bank in view of the drought conditions prevailing in the State.

A resolution adopted at a farmers seminar organised by the association here on Wednesday also urged the State government to increase the procurement price to Rs.3,000 a tonne of sugarcane, Rs.1,750 a quintal of paddy and Rs.75 a kg of cotton.

The government should also introduce a separate budget for agriculture and sanction a monthly pension of Rs.5,000 to all farmers.

While thanking Chief Minister Jayalalithaa for her efforts to get the final award of the Cauvery Tribunal notified, the association also urged her to take steps to ensure the formation of the Cauvery Management Board at the earliest.

The State government should order sanction of loans for digging open wells for farmers.

The procurement price of milk should also be increased in view of the steep rise in the prices of cattle feed.

All farmers who have registered under the Farmers Protection Scheme should be issued identity cards immediately, it demanded.

Expressing its opposition to the National Water Policy, it urged the Centre to discard the same.

P.Viswanathan, president of the association, and others spoke.

Solar-powered green houses for Tuticorin

: A total of 1,531 solar-powered green houses were constructed in 2011-12 under Chief Minister's Solar Powered Green Houses Scheme (Pasumai Veedugal Thittam) across the district, according to Collector Ashish Kumar.

The scheme was aimed at improving the living standards of economically weaker section. Mr. Kumar said in a statement here on Wednesday that the beneficiaries should get accommodated in the houses at the earliest.

The State government is extending financial support of Rs.1.80 lakh, which includes construction of houses at Rs.1.50 lakh with solar power at Rs.30, 000 as subsidy for every beneficiary.

During 2011-12, green houses were set up in parts of various panchayat unions — Vilathikulam 33 houses, Sathankulam 226 houses, Tuticorin 175 houses, Karunkulam 123, Ottapidaram 135, Alwarthirunagari 114, Udangudi 44, Srivaikuntam 87, Tiruchendur 64, Kovilpatti 40, Kayathar 64 and Pudur 126 houses.

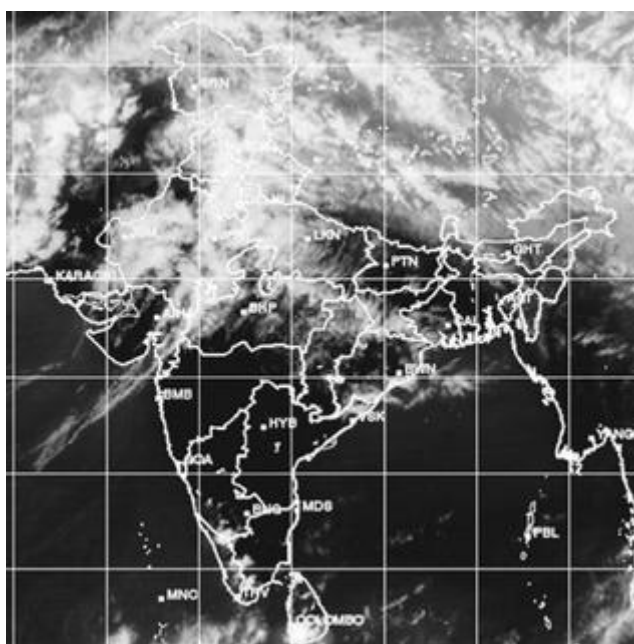
He took stock of works in progress in Manja Nayakkanpatti, South Kodangipatti, Keela Eral, Mela Eral, T. Shamugapuram, Eeratchi, Kasavankunru, Kodukamparai and Thittangulam of Kovilpatti panchayat union.

A total of 125 beneficiaries had been selected in Karunkulam panchayat union and 32 houses were completed. In Ottapidaram union, 126 beneficiaries were selected and work was over for 48 houses. For Tuticorin, 110 beneficiaries were chosen and 28 houses constructed. Alwarthirunagari 136 beneficiaries; 21 houses completed. Twelve houses had been constructed in Udangudi, where 83 beneficiaries were selected.

Out of 110 beneficiaries in Sathankulam, 28 houses had been constructed. With 122 beneficiaries in Srivaikuntam, 18 beneficiaries got houses. In Srivaikuntam, 18 out of 122 beneficiaries were enjoying the Green House scheme.

Six out of 30 beneficiaries in Tiruchendur were provided with the housing facility and in Kovilpatti it was 28 out of 190 beneficiaries. In Vilathikulam, construction was over for 34 out of 152 beneficiaries. As for Kayathar union, the facility was extended to 24 out of 160 beneficiaries and in Pudur 42 houses were powered with solar energy. A total of 177 beneficiaries were selected in Pudur union.

Weather



INSAT PICTURE AT 11-30 hrs. Observations recorded at 8-30 a.m. on Mar. 27.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Anantapur	41	25	0	0
Arogyavaram	37	21	0	1
Bapatla	33	24	0	0
Calingapatnam	34	24	0	1
Gannavaram	37	23	0	0
Hanamkonda	39	22	0	0
Hyderabad AP	39	26	0	0
Kakinada	35	25	0	0

Kavali	37	24	0	0
Kurnool	41	25	0	0
Mahabubnagar	40	25	0	0
Machilipatnam	35	24	0	0
Nandyal	41	24	0	0
Narasapur	35	25	0	0
Nellore	38	25	0	2
Nizamabad	41	27	0	1
Ongole	37	25	0	0
Ramagundam	39	27	0	0
Tirupathi AP	39	25	0	90
Tuni	39	25	0	0
Vizag AP	38	26	0	0
Vizag	33	25	0	1

KARNATAKA

Agumbe	33	19	0	13
Bangalore AP	35	21	0	tr
Bangalore	35	23	0	1
Belgaum AP	36	18	0	4
Bellary	40	26	0	0
Bijapur	38	22	0	1
Chitradurga	37	22	0	7
Chickmagalur	33	19	0	21
Chintamani	36	20	0	0
Gadag	37	21	0	7
Gulbarga	40	26	0	0
Hassan	33	20	3	42
Honavar	33	25	0	0
Karwar	35	25	0	0
Madikeri	26	19	0	110
Mangalore AP	34	26	0	0
Mysore	36	22	0	4
Mandya	37	23	0	4
Panambur	34	27	0	26
Raichur	39	24	0	0
Shirali	34	25	0	0

KERALA

Alappuzha	33	23	15	83
Kannur	34	27	0	11
Kochi AP	33	24	0	32
Kottayam	35	22	34	100
Kozhikode	35	27	0	25
Punalur	35	23	0	55
Thiruvanantha				
-puram AP	33	25	0	33
Thiruvanantha				
-puram City	33	25	0	80
Vellanikkara	34	24	0	15

TAMIL NADU

Adiramapattinam	34	27	0	100
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Coimbatore AP	37	24	0	2
Coonoor	24	16	tr	126
Cuddalore	33	26	0	73
Chennai AP	35	25	0	32
Chennai	34	27	0	12
Dharmapuri	39	23	0	0
Kanyakumari	31	25	0	63
Karaikal	33	25	0	10
Kodaikanal	21	12	0	63
Madurai AP	38	27	0	18
Nagapattinam	33	26	0	27
Palayamkottai	35	24	0	111
Pamban	35	27	0	83
Parangipettai	32	26	0	40
Puducherry	33	26	0	8
Salem	39	25	0	0
Thanjavur	36	28	0	33
Tiruchi AP	39	27	0	15
Tirupattur	38	23	0	1
Tondi	33	27	0	56
Tuticorin	33	26	0	42
Ooty	19	12	11	23
Valparai	27	16	0	86
Vellore	39	25	0	45
LAKSHADWEEP				
Amini Divi	35	27	0	1
Minicoy	33	28	0	69
Kavarathi	35	26	0	64
OTHER STATIONS				
Kolkata (Alipore)	38	25	0	0
Mumbai	31	24	0	0
New Delhi	29	17	0	1

The columns show maximum and minimum temperature in Celsius, rainfall during last 24 hours (trace) and total rainfall in mm since March 1, 2013.

DRY WEATHER IN A.P.

CHENNAI: Isolated rainfall occurred over Kerala, south interior Karnataka, south Tamil Nadu and north interior Tamil Nadu.

Dry weather prevailed over north coastal Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep, Andhra Pradesh, coastal and north interior Karnataka.

On Tuesday, the maximum temperature rose appreciably above normal at one or two places over coastal Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, coastal Karnataka, above normal at a few places over rest coastal Andhra Pradesh, north Tamil Nadu, Rayalaseema, appreciably below normal at one or two places over north interior Tamil Nadu, below normal at one or two places over south interior Tamil Nadu, Kerala.

The minimum temperature rose appreciably at one or two places over Telangana, north interior Tamil Nadu, Rayalaseema, .

They were appreciably above normal at most places over Telangana, above normal at a few places over Tamil Nadu.

FORECAST (valid until Friday morning): Isolated rain or thundershowers may occur over south interior Karnataka, Kerala, south Tamil Nadu and north interior Tamil Nadu.

Mainly dry weather will prevail over north coastal Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Andhra Pradesh, coastal and north interior Karnataka.

Water level

: Water level in the Papanasam dam on Wednesday stood at 79.10 feet (maximum level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 258.44 cusecs and 504.75 cusecs is discharged from the dam. The level of Manimuthar dam stood at 89.48 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 94 cusecs and 400 cusecs is discharged.

Nagercoil

Water level in the Pechipparai dam stood at 8.40 feet, 29.45 feet in Perunchani, 4.23 feet in Chittar I, 4.33 feet in Chittar II and 3.50 feet in the Poigai dam.

Water level in Periyar dam stood at 113 feet with an inflow of 470 cusecs and discharge of 100 cusecs. According to PWD officials, the

water level in Vaigai dam stood at 45.83 feet with an inflow of 50 cusecs and discharge of 60 cusecs on Wednesday. The combined water storage was 2,153 mcft. Periyar dam recorded 22.4 mm rainfall, officials added.



Weather Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Thursday, Mar 28

Max Min

32° | 25°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 06:08

Humidity: 94

Sunset: 06:20

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1010

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Friday, Mar 29

Max Min

35° | 26°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Mar 30	Sunday Mar 31	Monday Apr 1	Tuesday Apr 2	Wednesday Apr 3
35° 25°	35° 26°	34° 26°	34° 25°	34° 24°
Partly Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Works, farming get major share

The Thiruvananthapuram district panchayat budget for the 2013-14 financial year envisaging an income of Rs 167,52,53,000, expenditure of Rs 159,18,71,630 and a surplus

of Rs 8,33,81,370 was presented by Panchayat vice-president T Rufus Daniel here on Tuesday.

The budget has major allocations for public works with a total outlay of Rs 34,75,00,000, followed by agriculture and animal husbandry sector with Rs 27,00,66,300. Projects worth Rs 19,90,12,695 are for SC/ST welfare. Education and Health have got allocations of Rs 19,83,64,000 and Rs 17,53,27,850 respectively.

Thrust on the agriculture sector is for rejuvenating all water bodies and storage tanks for agriculture and ensuring potable water and a plan has been formulated to protect them. The comprehensive plan incorporates Rs 50 crore of the National Employment Guarantee Scheme, three-tier panchayat fund and other funds. A special consideration in the animal husbandry sector is for setting up 'Aadu Gramam' and 'Ksheera Sagaram' in association with Kudumbashree.

The main projects in the health sector promise modern treatment facilities accessible to the common man with an allocation of Rs 1 crore for setting up serology, microbiology and biochemistry labs. A comprehensive package for Neyyatinkara district hospital, Peroorkada hospital, Varkala ayurveda hospital and Pattom Thanu Pillai district homoeo hospital worth Rs 1.25 crore is also given emphasis in the budget. In the social security sector that has a total allocation of Rs 6,19,09,350 comes a project 'Home of innocents' worth Rs 2 crore. This would come up in four locations and is aimed at the protection and rehabilitation of differently-abled above 18 years of age.

At Alamcode, a Rs 1.25-crore multi-storeyed production-cum-industrial estate is envisaged. This is to bring under one roof, processing and marketing of products of Kudumbashree Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) and men self-help groups from the 73 panchayats in the district.

The annual budget of the poverty mitigation unit under the District Panchayat expecting an income of Rs 369,66,33,231,

expenditure of Rs 356,02,50,310 and a surplus of Rs 13,63,82,921 was also presented. It comprises projects for agriculture-drinking water-soil protection.

Business Standard^{beta}

Wheat procurement to gain steam next week



With the arrival of wheat likely to pick up pace in the first week of April, procurement agencies are gearing up to stock the new crop. While procurement in most states would commence from April 1, Madhya Pradesh has already procured 250,000 tonnes, said sources at Food Corporation of India.

The procurement target for 2012-13 is 44 million tonnes (mt), higher than last year's figure of 38.1 mt. As on March 1, 2013, the country has wheat stocks of about 27 mt. The cool weather, use of better variety seeds and timely sowing could help farmers fetch higher yields. Except for Saurashtra in Gujarat, which faced dry weather, all other states are likely to harvest a good crop this year. This would result in back-to-back bumper wheat harvests for the country.

Procurement in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is likely to get a boost, thanks to a bonus of Rs 150 per quintal.

However, in Saurashtra, besides the dry weather which may have a downward pressure on arrivals in south Gujarat, the premium offered to farmers by exporters may not leave much room for procurement agencies in the state.

With an average evacuation / liquidation of about three mt per month of wheat, by the end of June (the wheat procurement stretches till this time), the total wheat stock in the country would be approximately 60 mt.

The country has total storage capacity of about 64 mt, which includes about 20 mt in temporary storage space.

Procurement agencies would be hard put to use scientific storage methods in view of the huge quantities of foodgrain they would be called upon to handle by June-end.

THE HINDU Business Line

AP draft seed Bill leaves farmers disappointed

‘Pricing, contamination issues lack clarity’

Hyderabad, March 27:

Farmers’ organisation and non-governmental organisation are irked over the draft Andhra Pradesh Seed Bill. According to them, it “lacks clarity on issues such as pricing, seed producers and contamination of native seed varieties”.

“The draft doesn’t have any mention on contamination (one seed variety getting attributes of another by pollination caused by wind). We have seen incidence of multinational companies suing farmers

for using certain traits illegally. The truth was the farmers' seeds were contaminated," said Saraswati, a representative of National Alliance of People's Movements, commenting on the draft.

The State Government is planning to introduce the Bill in the current session of Assembly that will meet again in the third week of April.

The Forum for Farmers' Seed Rights felt that the Bill provides for free flow of import of seeds.

"Response of varieties, including hybrids, is highly location specific. Performance of imported seeds has to be assessed in the agro climatic zones. Or, farmers could face losses," K.R. Chowdhary and A.Prasad Rao, leaders of the forum, said.

It also called for a provision to make it mandatory for companies to have written agreements with seed growers.

"You should make this a cognizable offence. Because of most of the agreements remain unwritten, making it difficult for the Government to intervene in times of dispute," they said.

The draft is also silent on 'research hybrids', a term frequently used by some seed companies to circulate the seeds in the open market.

"It should put a clamp on such surrogate sales," the forum leaders commented.

The Centre for Sustainable Agriculture wanted the Government to define what a spurious seed is in the draft.

"A spurious seed is a seed that deviates more than five per cent from the registered characters, including hybrid vigour," K. Ravi of CSA said.

The farmers' leaders expected more presence on the 15-member empowered committee.

"It provides for only three representatives. We need some more strength there," they said.

The Seedsmen Association of Andhra Pradesh, however, said it required 10 days' time to respond.

“We have seen it only on Saturday. We need sometime to go through it and respond,” a representative of the association told *Business Line*.

Spot rubber stead amidst holiday mood

Kottayam, March 27:

Spot rubber closed steady on Wednesday.

The commodity lost its direction in the absence of local guidance as the National Multi Commodity Exchange was closed for Holi.

The market was in a holiday mood prior to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Volumes were dull.

Sheet rubber closed flat at Rs 167.50 a kg, according to traders.

The grade finished unchanged at Rs 168 a kg both at Kottayam and Kochi, as quoted by the Rubber Board.

RSS 3 (spot) improved to Rs 160.97 (Rs 160.43) a kg at Bangkok.

April futures for the grade weakened to ¥264.5 (Rs 152.54) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rubber rates (Rs/kg) were: RSS-4: 167.50 (167.50); RSS-5: 164.50 (164.50); Ungraded: 162 (162); ISNR 20: 162 (162) and Latex 60%: 111 (111).

A cotton variety that can withstand jassid pest

Mokhila (Ranga Reddy dist), March 27:

With reports suggesting resurgence of sucking pests, Shriram Bioseed has come out with a solution to address the problem.

It sold 1.32 lakh packets of Yuava in the last kharif, which Paresh Verma, Research Director of Bioseed Research India claims, significantly reduces sprays to control sucking pests.

Bioseed is an arm of the DCM Shriram Consolidated Limited.

Sucking pests such as jassids have been causing severe losses to the cotton crop.

Non-bollworm threats

Though the farmers are getting genetic technology (Bt-II) to ward off bollworms, farmers are relying on insecticides and pesticides to get rid of the non-bollworm threats. (Bt cotton is armed with the technology only to tackle bollworms.)

“We have developed the variety by choosing the natural attribute that shows significant resistance to such pests. We used a trait from a cotton germplasm we have in our bank. Going by the demand for Yuava, we are hoping to sell about five lakh packets in the upcoming kharif season.

“We have seen interest for this product in Guntur, Warangal and Karimnagar where the jassid problem is high,” Paresh Verma told reporters, before showcasing the field trials of various crops here.

The variety, however, continues to offer the BG-II protection against bollworms

It has a market share of 12 per cent (of 3.58 crore packets) in the cottonseed business.

Hybrid rice

It's share in the hybrid rice market (30,000 tonnes) is put at eight per cent and in 10 per cent in the corn market of 80,000 tonnes. The company, which registered a turnover of Rs 391 crore in 2011-12, is looking at a growth of 25 per cent this financial year.

New Tomato hybrid

It is pinning hopes on a new tomato hybrid (Bio 90) that can withstand prolonged transportation of up to two weeks.

“Generally the juicy tomatoes are to be transported overnight,” he said. The firm is also working on drought-tolerant and salinity-resistance rice varieties.
