

Mechanised implements given to farmers

: To encourage farmers to adopt successful methods of agricultural engineering, mechanised implements were given to farmers here on Friday.

Labour Minister S.T. Chellapandian extended the benefits in the presence of officials on the premises of the Agriculture Department. The farm implements, including paddy transplanter, power tiller and power weeder at a cost of Rs. 12 lakh, were provided to four groups of farmers under the assistance of National Agriculture Development Programme. Each of the Agriculture Development Programme farmers' group received a set of these implements with 100 per cent subsidy. It was aimed at promoting cluster-based activities to enhance agricultural productivity, said Sam Selvaraj, Executive Engineer, Department of Agricultural Engineering.

Farmers' protest

Decline to accept compensation offered by company

Farmers of Kottarapatti village near Sengipatti staged a demonstration on Friday objecting to the laying of pipeline in their lands for carrying petrol to Tiruchi from Narimanam in Nagapattinam district. The farmers besieged the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) officials who visited their village for paying compensation and declined to accept it. IOC has planned to lay a pipeline for 116 km from Narimanam to Vazhavandankottai.

Compensation for crop loss

Nine farmers in the district have received compensation for the crop loss they have suffered due to raid by animals.

After distributing the total amount of Rs 1.87 lakh to these farmers on Monday, Collector Darez Ahmed pointed out that the farms contiguous to the forest areas in the district suffered considerable losses as animals, including deer and boar, and birds, including peacock, visited these areas in search of drinking water. Hence, in order to provide drinking water to these animals, 25 borewells (10 in Veppanthattai panchayat union, and five each in Perambalur, Veppur and Alathur blocks) would be sunk.

According to an official release, he said that if the farmers were to complain to the village administrative officer within 24 hours of the crop loss by the animals, the VAO and officials from the agriculture department have been advised to assess the damage and submit a report to the district administration.

Sundarbans: New toilets boost hygiene, crop productivity

The ECOSAN toilets in Sundarbans are converting excreta into organic manures.



The newly-introduced ECOSAN toilets in the remote islands of Sundarbans are not only providing a hygienic sanitary option to villagers, but are also converting excreta into organic manures.

With technical and financial support from NGOs, Alpona Gayen of Durbachoti Gram Panchayat in Patharpratima block motivated women folk in her village to install these innovative toilets.

These toilets comprise of closed enclosure on a raised platform above two chambers, one in use and one composting that stores excreta.

“It takes roughly five months for pathogen free compost to be produced. To help prevent offensive smell in the toilet, urine diversion is introduced whereby feces and urine are not allowed to mix, as a chemical reaction between the two creates odour,” says sanitation expert Jyotirmoy Chakraborty.

The diverted urine is taken to a separate chamber that is used to nourish soils for crop growth while the excreta is used similarly as an organic manure later on after it gets decomposed automatically.

The idea of these ECOSAN toilets was initiated by international NGO Save the Children and implemented by the Sundarban Social Development Centre.

Water conservation

Moreover, only about a litre of water is needed for ablution in ECOSAN compost toilet as against 4 to 5 litres in the conventional toilets.

Farmers recall how after the 2009 Aila cyclone the traditional toilets were rendered dysfunctional as the entire village went under water.

“There was a massive outbreak of water-borne diseases during that time. Water was contaminated due to these pit toilets,” says Prof

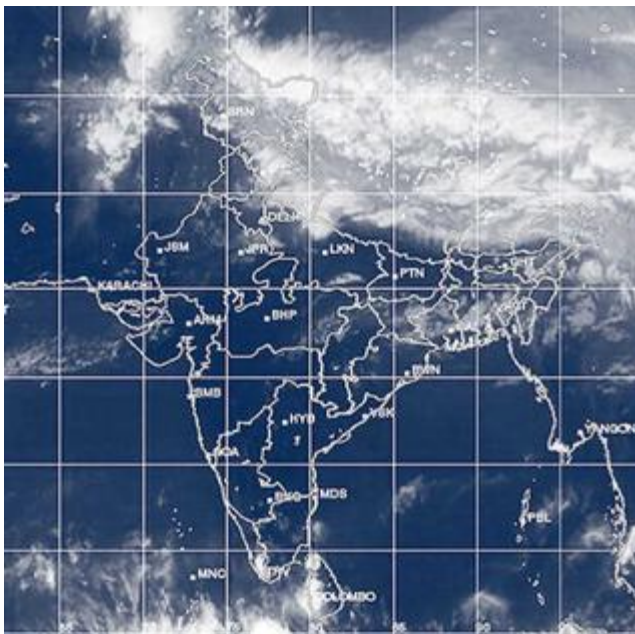
Barun Kanjilal of Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR).

Even now most of the villagers either defecate in the open or use leech pit toilets.

Dr Samiran Panda of the city-based National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED) warns that in the Sundarbans where floods are common, both options are risky.

According to India Human Development Report 2011 about half of Indian households lack access to sanitation facilities resulting in outbreak of diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid and other water-borne diseases.PTI

weather



INSAT PICTURE AT 14.00 hrs. Observations recorded at 8.30 a.m. on March 29th.

	Max	Min	R	TR
New Delhi (Plm)	34	18	3	8
New Delhi (Sfd)	34	17	4	5
Chandigarh	28	17	tr.	25
Hissar	29	14	3	39
Bhuntar	19	7	11	101
Shimla	16	7	7	76
Jammu	26	14	0	32

Srinagar	17	7	2	69
Amritsar	26	14	tr.	4
Patiala	26	16	1	19
Jaipur	35	19	3	3
Udaipur	33	17	0	0
Allahabad	33	19	3	5
Lucknow	29	16	1	1
Varanasi	31	19	2	4
Dehradun	31	15	0	17
Agartala	35	25	0	25
Ahmedabad	35	21	0	0
Bangalore	36	23	0	1
Bhubaneshwar	38	24	0	0
Bhopal	36	18	2	21
Chennai	35	25	0	32
Guwahati	33	18	0	14
Hyderabad	39	24	0	0
Kolkata	37	25	0	0
Mumbai	31	24	0	0
Nagpur	40	23	0	15
Patna	33	20	1	1
Pune	36	19	0	3
Thiruvananthapuram	34	27	0	80
Imphal	31	15	0	26
Shillong	23	14	0	19

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

RAIN AT MANY PLACES

RAINFALL: Rain/thundershowers have occurred at many places over Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and east Uttar Pradesh, at a few places over Punjab, west Rajasthan and west Uttar Pradesh and at isolated places over the rest of the region. The chief amounts of rainfall in cm are: HARYANA: Ayanagar 1, Himachal Pradesh: Kalpa and Bhunter 1 each, JAMMU AND KASHMIR: Banihal, Batote and Udhampur 1 each and WEST RAJASTHAN: Jaisalmer 2.

MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES : The maximum temperatures rose in Haryana, fell appreciably in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and east Uttar Pradesh, fell in Himachal Pradesh and changed little elsewhere. They were above normal in Uttarakhand, markedly

below normal in Punjab, appreciably below normal in west Rajasthan and east Uttar Pradesh, below normal in Himachal Pradesh and east Rajasthan and normal in rest of the region. The highest maximum temperature in the region was 36.6°C recorded at Bundi (Rajasthan).

MINIMUM TEMPERATURES : The minimum temperatures fell appreciably in Himachal Pradesh, fell in Punjab and changed little elsewhere. They were normal over the region. The lowest minimum temperature in the plains was 13.1°C recorded at Adampur (Punjab).

FORECAST VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 31st March 2013: Rain/thundershowers may occur at one or two places over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan during next 24 hours and mainly dry weather thereafter. Rain/thundershowers may occur at one or two places over Uttarakhand during next 48 hours and mainly dry weather thereafter. Weather would be mainly dry over rest of the region.

WARNING : Thunder squall accompanied with hailstorm may occur at one or two places over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan during next 24 hours.

FORECAST FOR DELHI AND NEIGHBOURHOOD VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 31st March 2013: Partly cloudy sky. Rain/thundershowers accompanied with thunder squall/hailstorm may occur in some areas.

Water level

: Water level in the Papanasam dam on Friday stood at 78.20 feet (maximum level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 165.39 cusecs and 299.50 cusecs is discharged from the dam. The level of

Manimuthar dam stood at 88.77 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 66 cusecs and 400 cusecs is discharged.

Nagercoil

Water level in the Pechipparai dam stood at 9 feet, 29.15 feet in Perunchani, 4.20 feet in Chittar I, 4.30 feet in Chittar II and 3.30 feet in the Poigai dam.

The water level in Periyar dam stood at 113.10 feet (permissible level is 136 feet) with an inflow of 100 cusecs and discharge of 100 cusecs. According to the Public Works Department authorities, the water level in Vaigai dam was 45.80 feet (permissible level is 71 feet) with an inflow of 85 cusecs and discharge of 60 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit was at 2,168 mcft. There was no rain in the region on Friday, officials added.

THE HINDU Business Line

Northern plains take a fancy to strawberry farming

BINDU D. MENON
VISHWANATH KULKARNI

NEW DELHI, MARCH 30:

Dressed in formal grey trousers and carrying a Samsung Galaxy phone, Arvind Beniwal doesn't look like a regular farmer. But he isn't. He is one of a small group of farmers who have reaped rich dividends from strawberries in a most unlikely area – the dry northern plains around Delhi and Hisar in Haryana.

About two dozen farmers have devoted around 100 acres to growing this exotic fruit, which was once the preserve of hilly tracts with moderate climates such as Mahabaleshwar, Udhagamandalam (Ooty) and Himachal Pradesh.



*High-value: Arvind Beniwal at his strawberry farm at Palla village near Delhi.
— Ramesh Sharma*

‘Sandy loamy soil perfect for growing the fruit’

RICH DIVIDEND

Beniwal first planted the juicy red fruit in 1998 on a part of his 30-acre farm on the banks of Yamuna, just before the river enters Delhi, with planting material imported from California. The risk taken by moving away from the traditional cereal and vegetable crops seemed to have paid off as Beniwal has been planting strawberry every year on at least 10 acres of his farm.

“The demand is growing for the fresh fruit and about 90 per cent of the produce is consumed directly. The rest is processed into jams

and jellies,” he says. Beniwal’s local bulk buyers include Mother Dairy, Reliance Fresh and Bharti Walmart. The buy about 100-150 kg each daily. Besides, he sends the produce to markets in Kolkata through vendors.

“The biggest advantage is that our farm is near the banks of river Yamuna which provides not just adequate moisture to grow the crop but also temperate climate. And the sandy loamy soil is a perfect fit for strawberry cultivation,” he says, adding that transporting and storing the delicate crop requires huge efforts as infrastructure bottlenecks are constrained.

Beniwal, who grows strawberries by intercropping with watermelon and capsicum, says the cost of cultivation for the fruit is about Rs 5 lakh per acre, including the rising labour costs.

Production ranges from 12-15 tonnes per acre and the best produce comes from November and goes on till mid-April. Beniwal, who has got ISO 9001 certification for his farm, has floated a brand in his name – Arvind to market packaged strawberries.

Indian strawberry market is negligible compared to the global production of four million tonnes. US is the biggest producer and consumer of the fruit that is directly consumed and also used in jams and jellies.

RISING PRODUCTION

Indian strawberry production has been increasing since 1992, boosting yields and fruit quality. The Panchgani-Mahabaleshwar region accounts for about 85 per cent of the country's strawberries.

Despite huge stock, India misses wheat export bus

India seems to have missed an opportunity to stamp its authority on the world wheat market and emerge as a big exporter in 2012-13, just like it did in rice last year. The government's inability to liquidate wheat from its own inventories in time will limit exports in 2012-13 to around 5 million tonnes as against a potential of almost 10 million tonnes. The year 2012-13 provided an opportunity to India to place itself among the world's five largest wheat exports against among ten currently, as the leading producers like US are all set to export less amount.

Though the exports have cost the exchequer an extra subsidy of around Rs 1,700 crore because the outbound shipments were at rates lower than the cost of procurement, storage and transportation of wheat incurred by Food Corporation of India (FCI), experts believe that it is better than bearing a higher subsidy in just carrying the grains from one season to another.

"The choice is very simple either you bear a subsidy of \$15-20 (Rs 800-1,080) per tonne on exporting wheat or you bear a subsidy of almost \$50 (2,700) per tonne in carrying the wheat into the next season and thereafter in every season as granaries don't have space," eminent agriculture economist and chairman of Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices (CACP) Ashok Gulati said.

Gulati, who had strongly advocated that government should liquidate almost 10-15 million tonnes of wheat by end of March, now feels that India missed a great opportunity to export sizeable quantities of wheat because of slow action.

"This would have helped the government earn valuable \$3 billion in foreign exchange and bring down its now infamous Current Account Deficit (CAD),"

he said.

Another expert said the best time to export could have been around August-September as domestic procurement was over and international market was benign. "However, as against a requirement of 10-15 million tonnes, only about 4.5 million tonnes were cleared. Subsequently, another 5.5 million tonnes were cleared, but the international market had firmed up by then," another expert said.

He said 2012-13 provided a unique opportunity to India as US, the world's biggest wheat exporter was selling less, so also were some of the other major players like Russia.

"In 2013-14, the same will not prevail as US production is showing signs of improvement and getting an average price of \$300 per tonne will be difficult," Gulati opined.

MAJOR WHEAT EXPORTERS IN 2012-13	
Country	Export*
United States	28
Canada	18.50
Australia	16.50
Russia	10.50
Ukraine	6.50
India	5.00

*In million tonnes
Source: United States Department of Agriculture

In 2012-13, as per an assessment by United States Department of Agriculture, US is expected to export around 28 million tonnes of wheat, Australia around 16.50 million tonnes, Canada around 18.50 million tonnes and Russia around 10.50 million tonnes.

India, could have been almost at par with Russia and among the world's five largest exporters.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in 2012 calendar year, India emerged as the world's biggest exporter of rice piping traditional leader Thailand by exporting almost 9 million tonnes of rice.

As of March 1, 2013, India has wheat stocks of around 27.1 million tonnes, as against a requirement of mere 7 million tonnes, while total foodgrains stocks in the central pool (which also includes rice) is estimated to be almost 63

million tonnes, as against a requirement of 21.2 million tonnes.

Experts believe that foodgrains stocks could rise to mind boggling 95-100 million tonnes by June 1 as government is again expected to procure a record 42 million tonnes of wheat from April 1, 2013.
