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## **NABARD scheme aims to increase crop production**

Staff Reporter

*Pilot project to cover 500 maize cultivators*

Tuticorin: Following the success of self-help group (SHG) and Joint Liability Group (JLG) concepts aimed at the rural poor in the country, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has introduced yet another concept — Activity-Based Groups (ABG) for increasing the production and productivity of agricultural products.

Under this scheme, small and marginal farmers, who have no access to formal delivery systems, are encouraged to form groups in accordance with their activities.

All their requirements such as technology transfer, access to credit and insurance, market linkage, supply of agricultural implements and other extension support services relating to soil, water, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides will be met in an integrated manner.

Banks, insurance companies, line departments of the district administration, agricultural universities and other resource support organisations are the other hand-holding partners.

On a pilot basis in Tuticorin district, the scheme would cover an initial target of 500 maize cultivators in Ottapidaram block. Veerapandia Kattaboman Farmers' Club, an active club operating at Aathanoor, would be the Group Promoting Agency, M.R. Natarajan, Manager, NABARD, Tuticorin, told *The Hindu* here on Saturday.

Indian Overseas Bank, Pandyan Grama Bank and Tamilnad Mercantile Bank would assess the credit needs of the ABGs and provide credit through their crop loan scheme.

The departments of agriculture and agricultural engineering would provide all extension and infrastructural requirements through existing schemes.

The ABG members would be insulated from the risk of crop loss through a comprehensive crop insurance scheme. For adoption of improved technologies, the farmers would be taken for exposure visits to places where higher benchmarks had been achieved in maize cultivation.

“NABARD will provide necessary grant assistance to the group promoting agency for conducting awareness cum demonstration programmes and seminars relating to technology transfer, market linkages and other value additions to maize crop. Based on the success of this pilot scheme, the ABG will be extended to other areas in all blocks” Mr. Natarajan said.

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## **Now festive aura around canes**

A.V. Ragunathan

*It's harvest time for farmers ahead of festival*

— Photo: C Venkatachalapathy



***Headed for Pongal: Edible sugarcane registers higher prices this year in Cuddalore.***

**CUDDALORE:** With hardly three days to go for Pongal, farmers in Cuddalore district are busy harvesting edible sugarcane.

This sugarcane variety, with blackish red or black stalk, is raised mainly in Sethiathope, Kattumannarkoil and Chidambaram areas. Unlike the light greenish sugarcane used in the production of sugar, the edible one is grown in fewer areas.

Edible sugarcane is usually grown on a portion of a parcel of lands by a farmer. According to S.Jagannathan, a farmer, the edible yield has significantly come down this year, which is mainly due to two factors: dwindling acreage and adverse climatic conditions.

And, moreover, whatever produce obtained is not of high quality, and therefore, will fetch only lower revenue this season. Shortage of workforce is one of the reasons for reduced acreage. The labourers are attracted to worksites identified under the National Rural Employment

Guarantee Scheme because it involves less tedium and more wages.

Therefore, mostly the family members of farmers are involved in harvesting sugarcane and loading these on to trucks bound for upcountry markets. Generally, 25 stalks are tied in a single bundle for easy handling and transportation. At the farm gates, women sell the stunted stalks to the passers-by at cheaper rates.

Another farmer, Karmangudi Venkatesan, says that the edible sugarcane stalks can stand six to eight feet tall and, hence, these can be easily uprooted by gale. Therefore, the farmers would have to put in a great deal of efforts to protect sugarcane.

The farmers also face another menace from bandicoots, which have a special liking for the edible sugarcane. These pets burrow into the roots and damage the crops. Wild animals such as fox and jackals too forage into sugarcane fields.

Mr. Venkatesan says that the shoots appearing at the nodules should be periodically removed, so as to enable the sugarcane to acquire sizeable girth. Thus, the edible variety requires more care than the one meant for the sugar mills.

The edible sugarcane has ready markets in the urban areas, as during Pongal each household will buy at least a pair of stalks. For the current season, the price of each stalk would range from Rs.12 to Rs.20, depending upon its size.

Mr. Jagannathan says that owing to poor yield the price of a truckload of sugarcane has gone up from Rs.25,000 to Rs.35,000, and this will definitely reflect on the retail prices.

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## **Foodgrains merchants hail move to establish auditorium**

Staff Reporter

*To come up at an estimated cost of Rs. 25 crore in Madurai*

MADURAI: The Tamil Nadu Foodgrains Merchants Association has welcomed the Central Government's announcement to establish a huge commercial auditorium in Madurai.

Association president S.P. Jeyapragasam said that the auditorium, estimated to cost Rs. 25 crore, would comprise modern satellite facilities.

A site behind the Hotel Tamil Nadu at Alagarkoil had been allotted.

The works would be taken up by the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation and Public Works Department, he informed.

Welcoming this initiative, he said that commercial auditorium would pave way for organising a permanent commercial exhibition.

This would also create an awareness among the people of the need for modernisation of industries, innovations and technical aspects.

The manufacturers and traders would greatly benefit from the auditorium and boost the development of the city, said Mr. Jeyapragasam.

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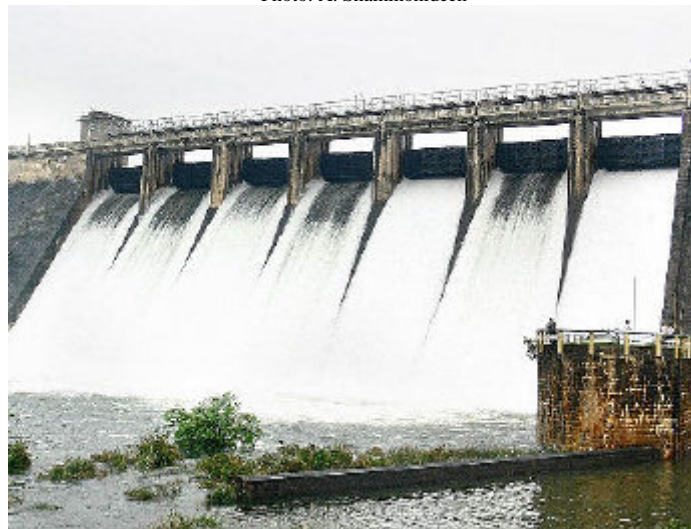
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## **Good inflow into dam following rain**

Staff Reporter

—Photo: A. Shaikmohideen



***BOON FOR FARMERS: Surplus water flowing from Manimuthar dam in Tirunelveli district on Sunday.***

TIRUNELVELI: All seven shutters of Manimuthar dam was opened on Sunday following intermittent drizzle in its catchment areas in the Western Ghats and consequent good inflow of water into the largest reservoir of the district.

Thanks to the low pressure in the Bay of Bengal, there were intermittent drizzles in the plains of the district as well as the Western Ghats on Saturday night.

As water level at the dam, which stood at 115.33 feet on Saturday, rose to

117.80 feet on Sunday against the maximum capacity of 118 feet following the inflow of 22,000 cusecs around 6.30 a.m., 12,572 cusecs were discharged through the surplus gates.

However, the discharge was lowered to 5,500 cusecs after 11 a.m. as the inflow also reduced considerably.

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### **Mettur level**

TIRUCHI: The water-level in the Mettur Dam stood at 85.62 feet on Sunday, against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 1,857 cusecs and the discharge, 7,199 cusecs.

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