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THE HINDU

Maize cultivation picks up in rainfed areas



FIELD WORK: Farmers place high hopes on maize cultivation in rainfed areas in Tiruchi district.— Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

Pinning their hopes on the timely onset of North-East monsoon, farmers in the rainfed blocks of the district have taken up maize cultivation.

Farming activity has been brisk in a cluster of villages in Pullampadi, Mannachanallur, Thuraiyur, Uppliyapuram, Musiri and Thottiyam blocks in Tiruchi district.

Farmers said that they had raised a hybrid variety which fetches attractive returns every year.

The recent showers has facilitated the farmers to prepare the fields by ploughing and planting of the seedlings has been brisk in parts of the rainfed areas.

According to the Agriculture Department officials, an estimated 8,750 hectares will be brought under the crop this season which is of 105 days duration.

The Agriculture Department has taken up, under the Coarse Cereal Technical Demonstration Scheme of the National Food Security Mission, a special demonstration plan under which 1,000 hectares would be covered.

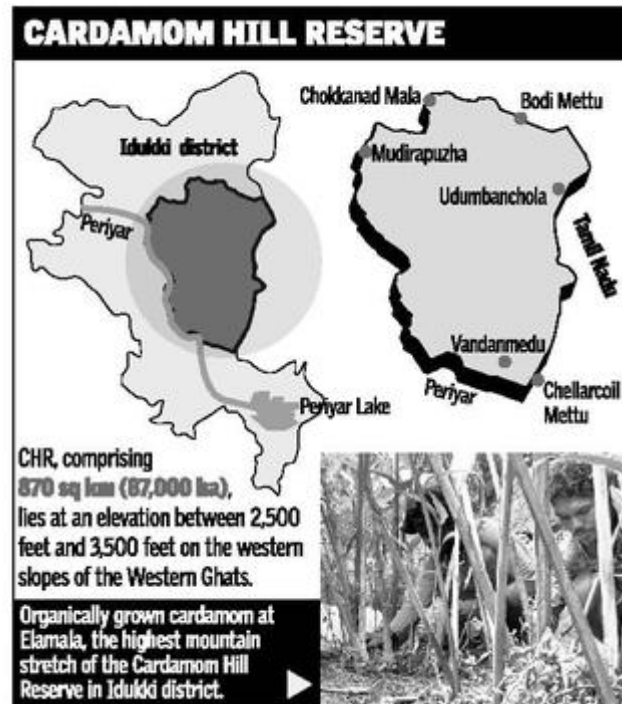
A subsidy of Rs. 4,000 per hectare would be sanctioned to the farmers.

About 500 hectares would be covered in Pullampadi block, 200 in Mannachanallur, 100 each in Thuraiyur and Musiri under the initiative.

The yield per hectare was expected to be between 2.5 and 3 tonnes.

Changing face of cardamom farming at CHR

Ryots turn to artificial quality enhancement measures



A wrong perception of judging the quality of cardamom in terms of its colour, shape, and smell has resulted in spreading mono variety of the crop, large-scale destruction of trees, and intensive use of banned pesticides in the Cardamom Hill Reserve (CHR) areas.

As per a survey by the Botanical Survey of India, there are 13 species of cardamom in the Western Ghats, of which a large number is now confined to the forest areas, as farmers prefer highly-productive varieties, though they are highly sensitive to changes in climatic and soil conditions. Such species need extra care and farmers spray re-labelled pesticides and apply chemical fertilizers for high production. This has badly affected natural elements in the soil and the atmospheric temperature in the cardamom cultivation areas, in addition to the high level of pollution of water sources and living organisms.

Sensitive varieties

Over 80 per cent of cardamom cultivation in the CHR has turned to one or two varieties that require less shade and frequent application of pesticides and fertilizers.

Principal Agriculture Officer P.G. Ushakumary said a Statewide campaign, in the line of the one against endosulfan, was needed in the CHR area against the rampant usage of red-labelled pesticides. She said the banned pesticides reached the district through the border check-posts of Kumily and Combom Mettu at night. Special squads would be deployed to effectively deal with the banned pesticides, she added.

Several farmers *The Hindu* contacted said they preferred the new varieties for replanting as it could be harvested five times a season from June. With extra care, the plants provided more than double the quantity over the traditionally cultivated species, most of which could be cultivated only thrice a season, though the plants were highly adaptable to changes in weather or atmospheric temperature. They were more resistant and required less pesticides and fertilizers.

Wrong perceptions

Ponni V.S., who had done research as part of a project of the Spices Board of India, said the market value of cardamom was judged on the basis of a wrong perception, prompting the farmers to turn away from good agriculture practices.

Red-labelled pesticides were sprayed heavily to destroy thrips (*sclothrips cardamoni*), which suck the juice from the outer cover leaving scratches on the beans. These scratches reduced the crop's value in the market, though they had no effect on the grains inside, she said.

Artificial green colour is added to dried cardamom to increase the price fetched. In reality, the crop is fully ripe when it is yellow and the grains will have more oil content then. However, yellow beans are considered inferior in the market. Bolt-shaped beans and big grains are valued high, though the small grains provide equal quality.

Sudarshanan V., an organic cardamom farmer, said the pesticides applied could seep into the grains and affect their quality. And the farmers artificially created that 'high quality' as per market demands, he added.

Collector to chair grievance meeting

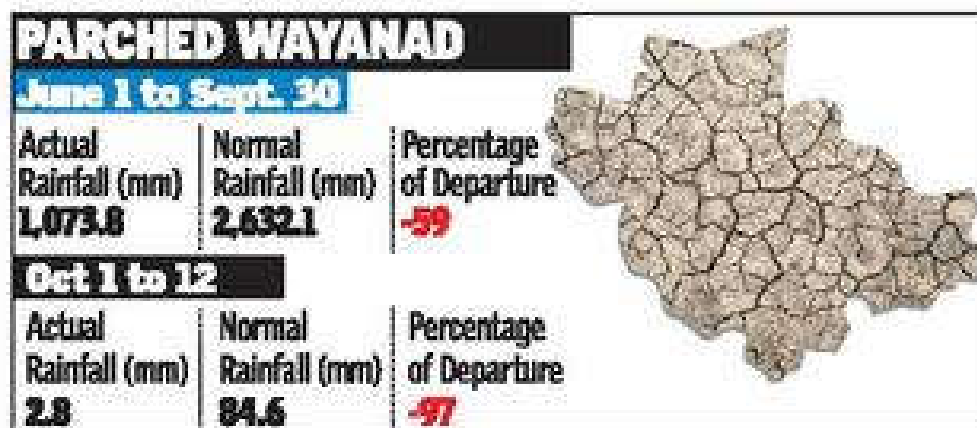
The farmers' grievance redressal meeting will be held from 10.30 a.m. on October 21 at the Collector's office. To be chaired by Collector S.A. Raman, the meeting will have participation of officials from various departments such as agriculture, horticulture, agriculture engineering, sericulture, animal husbandry, cooperative sugar mills, water resources organisation and forest. The officials will reply to the grievances raised by members of farmers' associations, according to a press release.

Grievances day

Farmers grievances day meeting will be held at the collectorate at 10 a.m. on October 20. Farmers may take part and get their grievances redressed, says Collector T.G. Vinay in a press release here on Tuesday.

Wayanad farmers facing wilted crops

District records deficit of 59% rainfall during southwest monsoon



A sharp decline in rainfall during the southwest monsoon has cast a shadow over farming in Wayanad, a major coffee and spices growing region.

According to the rainfall data available with the Meteorological Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, Wayanad received only 1,073.8 mm rainfall during the southwest monsoon (from June 1 to September 30) as against the normal rainfall of 2,632.1, a deficit of 59 per cent, the highest among all districts in Kerala.

Northwest monsoon

The district has so far recorded 97 per cent deficit of rainfall in the first few days of the northwest monsoon. The district has received only 2.8 mm rainfall since October as against the normal rainfall of 84.6 mm during the same period.

The rainfall data recorded at the Regional Agriculture Research Station (RARS) of Kerala Agricultural University at Ambalavayal also point that things will not be easy for the farmers unless the district receives a normal northwest monsoon. According to the data at RARS, the Ambalavayal region has received 960 mm rainfall since 1 June, as against 1,517 mm received during the corresponding period last year.

The normal annual rainfall received by the district a year was above 2,000 mm, RARS sources said. The station recorded a total rainfall of 1,250 mm, including the summer showers, since January 1, 2016, as against 1,850 mm during the same period last year, sources added.

Usually, 30 per cent of the rain is contributed by the northeast monsoon, which is yet set in in the district, the sources added.

Grim situation

The monsoon played a crucial role in the production of cash crops such as pepper, coffee, tea, cardamom, plantain, ginger, and tuber crops.

Pepper production might dip by 50 per cent owing to the sharp decline in rainfall during its pollination period, farming sources said. Also, ginger farmers could not apply fertilizer to the crop on time, which would adversely affect production, sources added.

Sources in the coffee sector said that coffee production would decline up to 30 per cent owing to the dearth of summer rain.

‘Make seeds, fertilizers available for rabi’

Deputy Speaker M. Padma Devender Reddy called upon the officials to make seeds and fertilizers available for farmers for the coming Rabi season.

Participating in a review meeting held here on Tuesday, Ms. Padma said that officials should be alert about spurious seeds and see that new Agros centres should be established wherever required.

“Action will be initiated against those officials responsible for poor supply of seeds and fertilizers. Similarly, you should not hesitate to take action against the suppliers of spurious seeds. Register criminal cases against them,” she told officials.

Uncovering the genetic secrets of purple rice



The mysterious ways of genes influencing the character of crop plants through long periods of domestication, selection and modern breeding continues to perplex genomics specialists, as found out by the genome researchers working on coloured rice, Purpleputtu recently. Even the whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) of the Purpleputtu rice variety has not fully opened the windows to the genetic secrets to the researchers.

Researchers at the SciGenom Research Foundation, Chennai, said the genome sequencing of Purpleputtu revealed around 65,000 unique genetic mutations compared with the reference sequence, of which about 50 are in the genes of the colour pathway. The question of how specific genes and gene networks control the expression of its uniqueness, the purple colour, still remains an unanswered mystery, say researchers.

In most cultivated white grain rice varieties, a regulatory gene, Rc is missing 14 base pairs, which is believed to have changed the phenotype of seeds from coloured to white. The presence of the 14 base pairs is believed to help regulate the anthocyanin pathway enzymes to produce coloured seeds, and its absence is accounted for the grains remaining more or less white. The sequencing revealed that the 14 base pairs of Rc gene were absent in Purpleputtu variety. Yet, its seeds remained true to the nomenclature and were found retaining the colour, explained George Thomas, Director, SGRF, and Arjula R. Reddy, advisor to the Foundation. This leads to the

conclusion that there are alternative regulatory pathways operating in Purpleputtu, they explained.

The Foundation decided to focus on the purple rice variety as many traditional lines or their wild cousins have not yet been fully sequenced. This traditional variety, while being grown as a bio-barrier and as a marker line between test plots in rice fields to prevent cross-pollination, remained genetically uncorrupted and retained its unique characters over the years. The seed shattering gene and a few other domestication-related genes were found intact in a highly conserved area of about 4.5 million base pairs of Purpleputtu rice genome.

The whole genome sequence has been released in the public domain to serve as a reference point for indica rices, particularly coloured ones, they said.

The focus has now shifted to “understanding the molecular regulation of colour development, domestication and responses to stresses like drought, salt, extreme temperatures and photoperiodic insensitivity of this rice in order to improve it for better performance and its possible utility in breeding for these traits” they explained.



Aim is to bring 200 grain markets under govt’s wing: Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh

Speaking at the event, Radha Mohan said that till October 2, 250 grain markets have come under the government scheme Ek Desh Ek Bazar.



Union Agriculture Minister Dr Radha Mohan Singh during the cleanliness drive at new grain market in Sector 39, Chandigarh, Tuesday. (Express Photo by Jasbir Malhi)

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh visited the new grain market in Sector 39 for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, in Chandigarh on Tuesday.

Speaking at the event, Radha Mohan said that till October 2, 250 grain markets have come under the government scheme Ek Desh Ek Bazar. The aim is to bring 200 more grain markets directly under the government's wing by March 2017. He said that burning paddy stubble was harmful and farmers should not indulge in it.

Singh also said that Punjab government was yet to implement this scheme but the government has given funds to eight states to start horticulture farming with growing fruits and trees.

The members of the market committee said that they would continue with the cleanliness drive till the end of this month.

Meanwhile, as the minister was to visit the new grain market, concerned officials put an old banner pertaining to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

The banner, prepared by the Himachal Mandi Board, was prepared for the drive conducted from November 1, 2015 to November 11, 2015. When a senior officer noticed this, he directed an official to correct the dates with a marker.

When marker failed to remove the glitch, Ramvir Bhatti, Chairman of the market committee, decided to remove the banner at the last moment.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Tea Board puts e-auction payment module on hold



Move follows technical glitches in payment settlement and suspension of sales at centres across the country

The Tea Board has decided to keep on hold the implementation of pan-India post-auction module for a period four weeks with effect from October 18.

The post-auction settlement process for sales happening on or from October 18 will be carried out as followed till September 12. However, the payments and settlements for auctions completed from September 14 to October 14 will have to be routed through settlement bank under Pan India e-auction module.

The directive comes in the wake of the meeting called by the Tea Board Chairman in Kolkata with various stakeholders in the sector to discuss the issues being faced by the trade after the implementation of pan-India auctions.

The issues connected with pan-India sales rules had also led to the postponement of Kochi auctions last week.

A stakeholder, who participated in the Kolkata meeting, told *BusinessLine* that Kochi has been given separate hearing and the Chairman had assured that senior officials from the Board would visit Kochi auction centre within two weeks to address the grievances of the trade.

According to Jinesh Dagali, President, Tea Buyers Association, majority of the buyers have raised their concern over the “post-sale” operations as they are not getting delivery orders for the payment being made at the auctions or refund for an unsuccessful transaction.

The delivery orders are not generated after payments are made. There have been instances where this has been delayed for almost 10 days, he said. Since majority of the buyers are from the small and medium category, he said they have limited access to financial resources. Hence there has to be a system to return the funds to buyers on the same day. The pan-India Auction rule stipulates that all refunds should be made within 48 hours, he added.

Buzz builds in Bay of Bengal, but North-East monsoon is still away

True to forecasts, a low-pressure area may be building in the Bay of Bengal as early as during the next 24 hours (by Wednesday) thanks to typhoon *Sarika* that hit South China and Vietnam on Tuesday.

Westward-bound typhoons (cyclones) originating in the North-West Pacific/South China Sea are always expected to trigger some kind of response in the Bay that lies to the immediate west.

Onset window

Normally, a ‘low’ forming during the monsoon transition period such as this should help bring in the North-East monsoon.

But this is apparently being ruled out now, according to model forecasts. It would be at least another week before the ‘monsoon on retreat’ can set in over the South Peninsula.

This is so because the 'low' would most likely travel in a north-northeast track (farther away from India's coast) towards Myanmar, taking the rain with it.

Projections by the India Met Department (IMD) that the seasonal rains would materialise around October 26, at least six days beyond the October 15-20 timeline for normal onset.

Easterly wave

An 'easterly wave' with a rainhead upfront is forecast to cross in from the extreme East Bay of Bengal and head towards Sri Lanka/Tamil Nadu with associated easterly to north-easterly winds to bring in the rains.

Till then, a withdrawing South-West monsoon would set up thundershowers over extreme southern parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu as per an outlook by the US Climate Prediction Centre.

The week beginning October 24 during when the North-East monsoon is expected to set in would see below normal rain for most of the peninsula, except parts of North Kerala and Coastal Karnataka.

Hatsun Agro charts 850-crore expansion

Keen to tap new markets

Hatsun Agro Product Ltd has charted out a 850-crore expansion plan over the next two years through market penetration and exploring new horizons.

This is a key strategy for the 3,500-crore private sector dairy player, which has grown at 18 per cent CAGR over the last five years.

It has grown three times the industry average in this period, which it hopes to sustain over the next three years with investments in procurement and marketing infrastructure, said RG Chandramogan, Managing Director.

Wind farm

The company will commission a 22 MW-captive wind farm by the fourth quarter of the current year and add about 6 lakh litres of milk and curd processing units at Dharapuram, near Coimbatore and Ongole, Andhra Pradesh by March 2018.

This will add 20 per cent to its existing processing capacity.

The wind farm will meet over 80 per cent of its power requirement, he said.

The company is also investing in rapid milk chillers, which have been developed by it in collaboration with an US company.

The funding will be through internal accruals and bank debt, he said. Hatsun Agro, the largest private sector dairy company in the domestic market, has a 14 per cent share of the market of milk and curd in South India (excluding Kerala), which is estimated at 135 lakh litres a day.

Hatsun has set a target of 20 per cent market share in the next three years, Chandramogan said.

The flagship Arun Ice Creams brand, which is strong in Tamil Nadu and south Karnataka, will enter Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, North Karnataka, apart from Kerala and parts of Maharashtra and Orissa.

It will also be more aggressively marketed in its existing markets. The chain of 120 Ibaco chains will also be expanded by about 25-30 outlets, he said.

The company has informed the BSE that its feed mill capacity at its Palani unit is being augmented to 15,000 tonnes per month from 5,000 tonnes.

Financial performance

Hatsun Agro has announced a first interim dividend of ₹ 1 (100 per cent) a share of ₹ 1 for 2016-17.

For the quarter ended September 30, 2016, the company reported a net profit of ₹ 32.15 crore on a total income of ₹ 1,000 crore.

During the corresponding period in the previous year, it reported a net profit of ₹ 31 crore on an income of ₹ 852.95 crore.

The profit after finance costs and before tax has jumped 16 per cent to ₹ 45.83 crore (₹ 39.55 crore).

On the BSE, the company's shares closed 3 per cent higher at 351.70 over the previous close of 341.70.

‘Natural rubber supply, a matter of concern’

Natural rubber supply will be short of demand by 2020 despite the availability of a small surplus in the market for the next few years, Sheela Thomas, Secretary General, Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries (ANRPC), has said.

“The price of natural rubber is not determined by demand and supply alone, but strongly influenced by the general trend in commodity market, crude oil prices and exchange rate of currencies of manor rubber exporting countries. Owing to this, the rubber prices need not always reflect the imbalance between demand and supply,” she said at the ANRPC annual meetings and the 9th edition of annual rubber conference in Guwahati.

Ajith Kumar, Chairman, Rubber Board, attributed the prolonged slump in demand and price of rubber to supply-demand imbalances emanating from production cycles typical to perennial crops, deceleration in industrial activities globally and relatively low petroleum prices.

He emphasised the need to adopt strategies to sustain the rubber sector by assigning due emphasis on its basic characteristics like predominance of small and marginal growers, extension of cultivation to non-traditional regions, concentration of consumption in transport sector, etc.

The Rubber Board Chairman also released a new rubber clone – RR208 – developed by Rubber Research Institute of India for cultivation in the North-East. This is the first time Rubber Board is releasing an Indian clone for exclusive cultivation in North Eastern part of the country.

Earlier inaugurating the global rubber body meet, KK Mittal, Additional Chief Secretary and Agricultural Production Commissioner, Assam, called upon policy makers, experts and stakeholders in ANRPC to target at a paradigm shift in formulating and implementing development strategies to sustain NR sector.

Expressing concern on climate change and its impact on crop production, he pointed out that research in rubber plantation sector should focus on the impact of climate change on rubber cultivation and strategies to combat the possible adverse impact.

Kerala govt opposes RCEP agreement

‘Detrimental to interests of cash crop sector’

The Kerala government has opposed the Centre’s move to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, saying it would further worsen the crisis in the state’s cash crops sector.

Agriculture Minister VS Sunilkumar, while replying to a notice for an adjournment motion in the assembly on the problems faced by rubber growers, said the state had already written to Centre in this regard.

Import duty waiver

“We oppose the RCEP. We have asked the Centre to hold consultation with the state before finalising the commodity character in the agreement,” he said, adding that once the agreement comes into force, import of cash crops, including rubber, would be allowed without duty. The state would take up the matter with Centre again, Sunilkumar said.

He also blamed the economic policies of the previous Congress-led UPA government and the present BJP-led NDA for the crisis dogging agriculture sector.

RCEP is a mega trade deal which aims to cover goods, services, investments, economic and technical cooperation, competition and intellectual property rights.

Cooperation among rubber producing countries sought

Cooperation at multilateral level among like-minded countries can contribute substantially to the development of commodity sectors like natural rubber, said A Ajith Kumar, Chairman, Rubber Board.

He was inaugurating the 39th Assembly Session of the Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries (ANRPC) held at Guwahati. Co-operation in developmental activities with smallholder focus has been accorded due importance by the association, he observed.

San Vanty, Chairman of ANRPC, representing the Royal Government of Cambodia, chaired the meeting and delivered the introductory statement. Toms Joseph, Joint Director, Rubber Board, welcomed the gathering.

Salmiah Ahmad, Chief Executive Officer, International Rubber Consortium Ltd, said that International Tripartite Rubber Council (ITRC) and IRCo have established a regional rubber market named ITRC RRM, which started operations from September 26.

Edible oils slip on weak signals

Edible oils turned weak tracking bearish overseas futures amid increased selling pressure in domestic markets. On the BCE, soyabean, groundnut and sunflower oil gained by 5, while other edible oils ruled steady.

Tracking weak foreign reports, local refineries kept their rates unchanged. Ruchitradd palmolein at 590. Allana's rates: palmolein 600, soya refined oil 680, sunflower refined oil 732. Emami quoted palmolein at 575. At Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin was 1,590 (1,580) and loose (10 kg) was flat at 1,000.

Coonoor sale: 37% tea goes unsold



The average price dropped to 97.27 a kg at Sale No: 41 of the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association from previous week's 99.14. Still, 37 per cent of the offer of 14.37 lakh kg remained unsold for want of buyers.

Some buyers refrained from bidding contending that since the introduction of the new settlement bankers a month ago, there were software related problems for their getting the delivery orders even after they made the payment prompt. Homedale Estate's Pekoe Dust grade, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped the Dust tea auctions and the entire market when Benniel and Co bought it for 215 a kg.

Homedale Estates' Broken Orange Pekoe Fannings, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped the CTC Leaf auctions fetching 197 a kg. In the orthodox market, Kodanad topped at 208 a kg. No other grade crossed 200/kg.

Business Standard

Centre banks on kisan melas to reach farmers directly

These events would also showcase the govt's various pro-farmer policies and help in improving its negative perception among the farming class



To expand its direct outreach among farmers, the Narendra Modi government is banking on krishi or kisan melas (farmer's fair), to be held in small cities, towns and agriculturally important districts.

These events would also showcase the government's various pro-farmer policies and help in improving its negative perception among the farming class.

The move comes at a time when the country's two most agriculturally vital states, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, are expected to go to the polls in the next few months. Both the states have suffered in the last few years due to poor monsoon, a sharp drop in farm realisation, mounting sugarcane arrears (at least in western Uttar Pradesh) and repeated pest attacks, leading to an all-round negative perception against the ruling regime. A limited increase in the minimum support price (MSP) to farmers and controversies surrounding the land acquisition Act also did not help.

The Centre is also planning to increase its interaction with over 600-odd Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) across the country through regular monitoring and supervision. KVKs are a vital part of the agriculture extension scheme and are in direct touch with the farmers for dissemination and distribution of information.

Krishi melas not only provide a platform for direct interaction between farmers and agriculture scientists, but also provide a single platform for the government to publicise its schemes and initiatives. Officials said the Centre plans to hold at least five such kisan melas annually.

This year, the first such mela was held in Delhi after which it was held in Mathura, Gorakhpur and the Northeast. In the coming year, the Centre plans to organise four to five farmers fair, starting with Delhi.

Of the four kisan melas held in 2016, two have been in Uttar Pradesh. One was held specifically to showcase the Centre's initiatives for animal husbandry and livestock. In the Delhi event, the agriculture ministry claimed that more than 100,000 farmers participated. The mela had nine technical sessions and was telecast live in many blocks.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

No gunny bags to store paddy, farmers forced to sell crop at losses

In sheds and open spaces near the paddy purchase centres across Udham Singh Nagar district, several tiny mounds of golden husk crop up every day.

Bringing the day's harvest in trolleys, several farmers line up at the centres, calluses on their palms and creases on their foreheads after a hard day's labour. Only a few fortunate ones will go home with the satisfaction of having sold their produce. The rest will return tomorrow, hoping for better luck.

At the 86 paddy procurement centres run by the district cooperative department, only 1,710.8 metric tonnes of paddy has been purchased in the past 17 days. The US Nagar district, which has the largest paddy production in Uttarakhand and is called the rice bowl of the state, is facing an acute shortage of gunny bags which are arranged by district authorities for the farmers. The farmers can buy gunny bags at Rs 1.50 each from the paddy purchase centres. Each sack, which protects the crop from moisture and pests, can store 40kg of paddy.

The district administration, however, has only 1.5 lakh gunny bags against the requirement of 12 lakh bags at present. The centres have stopped purchase of the paddy, citing lack of gunny bags and proper storage as the reason. Bulk of the paddy crop is thus being kept in open spaces or under sheds near the purchase centres

Farmers are fearing that even a little rain or increase in moisture can ruin the crop and have been petitioning authorities to arrange for the gunny bags soon.

"I have been trying to sell my produce for the past two days. The paddy is dry and within prescribed moisture limits but if I don't sell it soon, it can get damaged," said Harbir Singh, a farmer at Rudrapur.

Farmers at Bazpur grain market criticised the district authorities for failing to provide them with gunny bags. "We have been told that the gunny bags are expected to arrive from Kolkata in a few days," said a farmer in Bazpur.

Some of the farmers said that they have been forced to sell their crop to private dealers for a price ranging between Rs 900 and Rs 1,000 instead of the minimum support price (MSP) of Rs 1,470 per quintal.

Jawahar Bathla, a farmer from Jafarpur village in Rudrapur, said, "I thought that the state agencies will buy the paddy at a good price. But no gunny bags were available and a long process to check the moisture content of the paddy forced me to leave and sell the crop for Rs 966 per quintal to a private dealer."

Another farmer from the district, Dilbagh Singh, said that he too had to sell his paddy for Rs 990 per quintal as there was no government purchase due to shortage of gunny bags.

The district authorities had begun procurement of paddy on October 1 and had announced an MSP of Rs 1,470 per quintal.

When contacted, additional district cooperative officer (ADCO) D S Napalchyal, said, “Shortage of gunny bags is hampering the paddy procurement process. The department has informed the Uttarakhand Cooperative Federation (UCF) and Regional Food Controller (RFC), which are responsible for sending the gunny bags. We hope the matter is resolved soon.”

The nodal officer for paddy procurement and additional district magistrate of US Nagar, Ravneet Cheema told TOI that she has held a meeting with the departments concerned and has asked for quick supply of gunny bags to all the centres. “I will visit the mandis and the centres to make sure that no farmer suffers financial losses,” she said.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

India's groundnut production to increase by 70%: SEA



Groundnut is one of the major crops in kharif season and Gujarat is the prominent state growing groundnut.

PUNE: The kharif groundnut crop of 2016-17 is estimated at 54.80 lakh tonnes against 32.30 lakh tonnes in 2015-16 up by 70%, according to the estimate of industry body Solvent Extractors Association (SEA).

Groundnut is one of the major crops in kharif season and Gujarat is the prominent state growing groundnut. Since last 9 years, SEA Groundnut Promotion Council conducting the Groundnut crop survey to assess the size and quality of the groundnut crop.

This year under leadership of Shri G.G. Patel, Convener, SEA Oilseed Crop Estimate Committee and Past President, a 20 members team visited the leading groundnut producing districts in Gujarat during 12th to 16th October 2016.

"Gujarat Government has reported that 16.44 lakh hectares under Groundnut crop sown during kharif season compared to 12.95 lakh ha in 2015-16, " stated the SEA release.

Average yield per hectare has increased to 1790 Kg. per hectare against 1155 Kg. per hectare last year. Gujarat is expected to harvest 29.40 lakh tonnes during kharif season. We have also worked out All India Kharif Groundnut Crop data based on SEA primary survey of Gujarat, GGN Research data and secondary survey.

Natural Rubber supply will be short of demand from 2020, says ANRPC secretary general



Projections by international agencies generally indicate that low commodity prices would prevail for some more time before recovering, he added.

Though there may be a small surplus of natural rubber in the market for the next few years, the supply will be short of demand from 2020 onwards, said Sheela Thomas, secretary general of Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries (ANRPC).

Speaking at the ninth annual rubber conference of ANRPC, an inter-governmental organization of major rubber producing countries, at Guwahati on Monday, she said the price of natural rubber is not determined by demand and supply alone, but is strongly influenced by the general trend in commodity market, crude oil prices and exchange rate of currencies of major NR-exporting countries. Owing to this, NR prices need not always reflect the imbalance between demand and supply.

Earlier inaugurating the event K K Mittal, additional chief secretary and production commissioner of Assam urged the stakeholders to target a paradigm shift in thinking, conceptualizing, formulating and implementing development strategies to sustain NR.

He said that there is a growing concern on climate change and its impact on crop production. Research in rubber plantation sector should focus on the impact of climate change on rubber cultivation and strategies to combat the possible adverse impact.

He also said that rubber product manufacturing sectors in India and abroad have not accorded due recognition for the environment-friendliness of NR while deciding on the raw material composition.

Rubber Board chairman Ajith Kumar said prolonged slump in demand and price of NR, currently being witnessed, can be attributed mainly to supply-demand imbalances emanating from production cycles typical to perennial crops; deceleration in industrial activities globally; and relatively low petroleum prices.

Projections by international agencies generally indicate that low commodity prices would prevail for some more time before recovering, he added. He released a new rubber clone, RRII 208, developed by Rubber Research Institute of India for exclusive cultivation in the northeast.

As India's "granary" exhausts groundwater, farmers eye new crops



The state accounts for only 1.5 percent of India's geographical area, over the past two decades it has contributed 35 percent of the nation's rice production and 60 cent of its wheat.

CHANDIGARH: It is hailed as India's granary, but the northwestern state of Punjab faces a drastic decline in agricultural output unless it halts the rapid depletion of its groundwater, experts warn.

Groundwater irrigates almost three-quarters of Punjab's agricultural land, but groundwater levels are dropping by 40 to 50 cm (16 to 20 inches) a year, according to Rajan Aggarwal, head of the soil and water engineering department at Punjab Agricultural University (PAU).

That has left farmers like Ajmir Singh struggling as their irrigation wells dry up.

"We are not able to find water even if we go down to 200 feet (61 m) or more at some places," said Singh, who has farmed for 35 years in Jalandhar, 150km (95 miles) north of Chandigarh, the state capital.

His neighbour, Pawanjeet Singh, said lack of irrigation water has forced him to sell part of the land that has been in his family for generations to a large-scale farmer who has the resources to drill for water at much deeper levels.

"I took this decision with a heavy heart after I realised that drawing water for all my land is beyond my means," Singh said.

According to Aggarwal, groundwater has been overexploited in 110 of the state's 138 administrative blocks.

"This is alarming given that more than 73 percent of irrigation is taken care of by groundwater," he said.

Experts say dealing with the problem, in the region that led India's Green Revolution in the 1970s, will require a rapid shift away from crops that require large amounts of water, such as rice and wheat, to less-thirsty pulses, maize, vegetables and sugarcane to safeguard the state's agricultural economy.

Rice and wheat make up 81 percent of Punjab's irrigated crops, according to a report by PAU. Although the state accounts for only 1.5 percent of India's geographical area, over the past two decades it has contributed 35 percent of the nation's rice production and 60 cent of its wheat.

LOW RAINFALL

According to Sunil Jain, regional director of the Central Ground Water Board for northwest India, groundwater started dropping in 1985 in Punjab, and has sunk to alarming levels in recent years.

Thirty years ago farmers in most parts of the state could draw water at a depth of 10 metres (32 ft), but by 2015 this was 20 metres, while farmers in some central parts of the state are unable to find water even at 30 metres or deeper, he said.

"There has been a substantial rise in groundwater utilisation, which has mainly happened because of the fact that Punjab gets less rainfall. Since paddy (rice) requires a lot of water, the farmers resort to heavy usage of groundwater for irrigating the paddy fields," he said.

Jain added that Punjab gets less than 700mm of rainfall annually. This compares to a national average of 1,083mm, according to the World Bank.

Amit Kar, an economist at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, attributed the groundwater shortage to government policies such as free electricity for irrigation, credit facilities and subsidies for digging wells and buying pumping equipment, as well as heavily subsidised diesel fuel for pumps.

The PAU report said annual demand for irrigation in Punjab is 4.76 million hectare metres (mhm) against a total annual supply of 3.48 mhm from canal and groundwater resources.

The deficit is met by overexploitation of deeper groundwater by farmers using nearly 1.4 million tube wells, which exacerbates the loss of more accessible groundwater.

According to the PAU report, 3.5 million of Punjab's 9.1 million workers make a living from agriculture or associated activities.

Jain said the statistics suggest Punjab's agricultural success may not be sustainable.

"Punjab's exports of rice and wheat to other regions literally mean the export of its groundwater to those regions," he said.

Amitabh Kant, chief executive officer of the government's National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), predicted "the present rate of withdrawal will lead to complete exhaustion of groundwater within a decade" in the region.

Kant said India, already water-stressed, is rapidly moving towards becoming water-scarce.

TIME TO SWITCH?

Switching to new crops is one way to ease the problem in Punjab, said PAU's Aggarwal. Rice requires about four times as much water as maize, pulses or oilseeds, for instance.

Vinod Kumar Singh, a scientist at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, said Punjab must make the shift at any cost.

"The government has to make some policy decisions like assuring the farmers it will procure their produce other than paddy (rice) and wheat. Only then will they be convinced to switch over to these crops," he said.

Under India's state-sponsored Public Distribution System, the national government buys staple foods like rice, wheat and sugar from farmers and sells them to citizens at fair or cheaper prices. Commodities worth \$2.25 billion, including rice and wheat, are sold annually to about 160 million families.

Jasbir Singh Bains, Punjab's director of agriculture, said that system makes farmers reluctant to cultivate other crops.

"We have started making efforts to popularise the cultivation of pulses, maize, vegetables and oilseeds," Bains said. "For example, we have appealed to the central government to increase the procurement of pulses and are urging the farmers to grow vegetables, which also have a good market."

Farmers like Shamsheer Singh, in Nokdar-Jalandhar, said they would switch to less thirsty crops with government help.

"We are ready for this, but the government should give the guarantee that it will procure our products like it is doing in the case of wheat and rice," he said.

After two years of drought, floods drown farm hopes in Marathwada

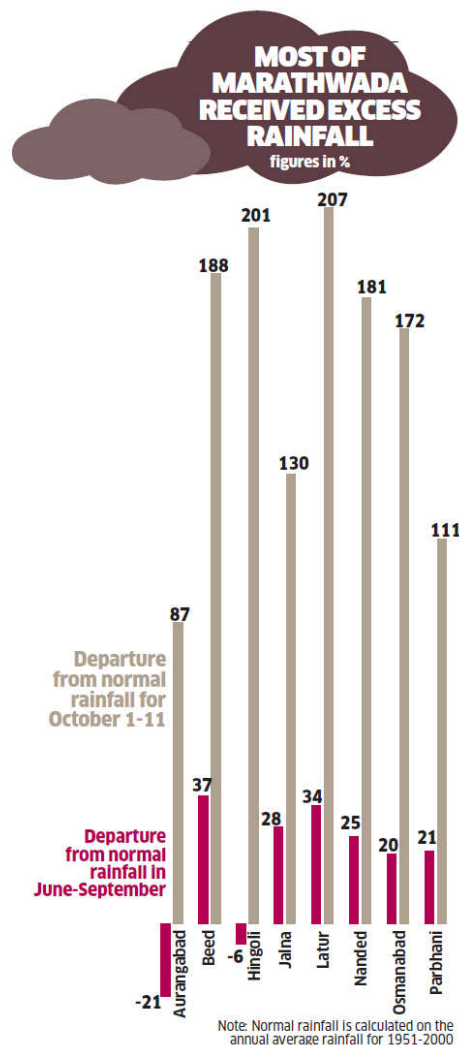


Yogesh Shelke planted cotton in 10 acres but the rains have damaged most of the crop.

It is hard to spot the soybean crop in Banshidar Shelke's farm. Except for some tiny patches of stunted plants with thin, brown pods, most of his 10-acre land at Morwad village in Beed district in central Maharashtra is covered with grass, some as tall as six feet, thanks to the unusually heavy rainfall in late September and October. Shelke did not expect such showers when he sowed the seeds in June, nor did the other farmers in the region.

They could hardly be faulted, for Marathwada, in which Beed is one of eight districts, is a semi-arid and droughtprone region. According to a study by researchers from the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), between 1871 and 2015, MarathwadaBSE 4.04 % saw 22 droughts, including five episodes of two back-to-back years of drought, the latest being in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

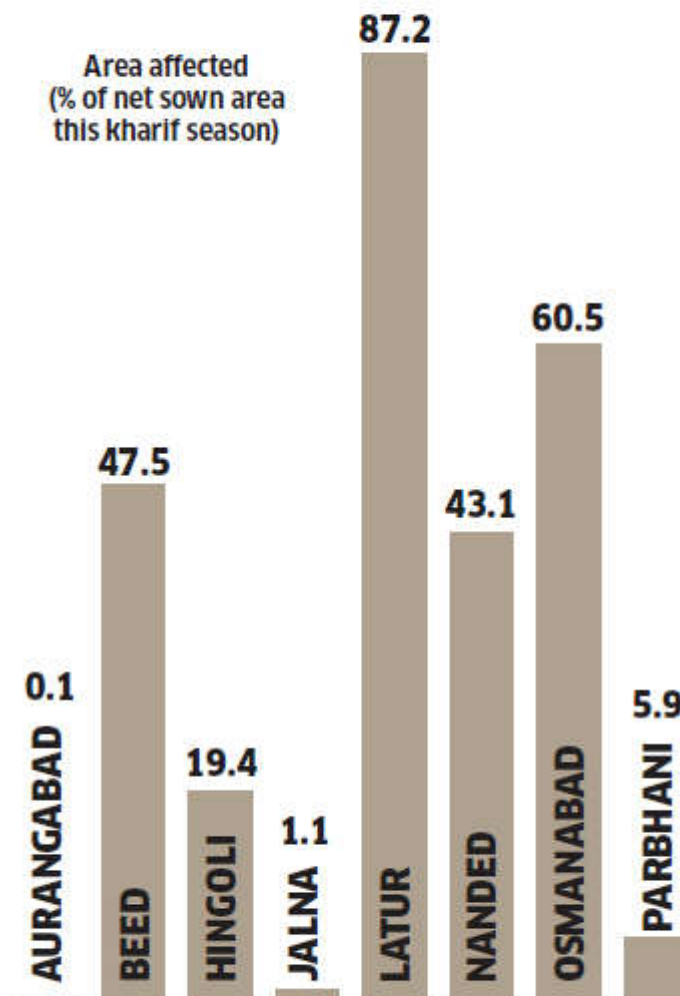
After a rainfall deficit of over 40% in 2014 and 2015, the farmers were very happy about forecasts of normal rainfall this year, and felt they could finally turn a corner. “After we planted the crop, there was a dry spell for a month and a half, then it rained so much in September and October that the entire crop was destroyed,” says Shelke, adding that labourers refuse to work in the fields because of the grasses.



When it Rains...

Between June and September, Beed received 778 mm rainfall, 37% above normal for the district, putting it in the category of excess rainfall. This month (till October 11), it has had showers nearly three times that of normal. The rainfall in the region as a whole in June-September was the highest since 2010. Rivers and dams have the kind of water levels not seen in years.

LATUR IS THE WORST AFFECTED BY THE RAINS

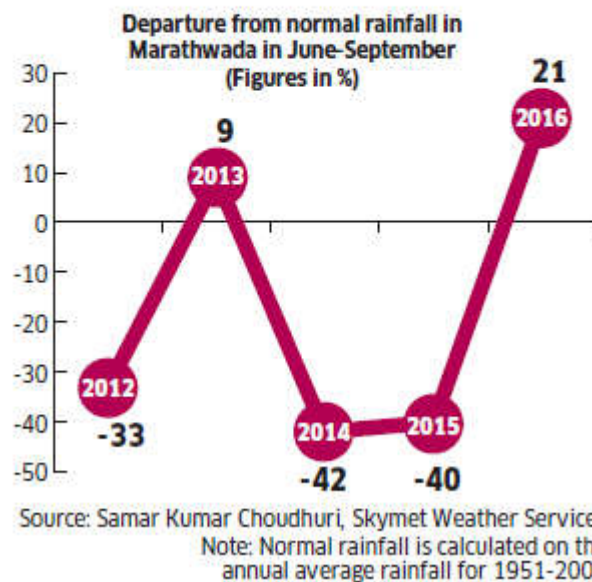


Source: Agriculture department, Aurangabad division

At a dam that irrigates lands in two blocks of Beed district, there are quite a few passers-by, taking pictures of a sight not common in the area: water from a dam gushing into a canal. This is a far cry from the acute water shortage in summer, when the government took water by train to Latur, another district of Marathwada, from 340

km away. Moreover, there were hundreds of fodder camps in the region for cattle; Beed alone had 260. Nearly 90% of the area under soybean cultivation in Beed alone had 260. Nearly 90% of the area under soybean cultivation in Beed this season has been damaged by the rains. A three-month cash crop which local farmers believed could be a good alternative to cotton, soybean costs a farmer Rs 10,000 per acre, which includes the cost of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and labour, and he can earn a profit of up to Rs 5,000 per acre. “Each pod is supposed to have at least 3-4 seeds but there are only two and some are damaged by worms,” says Shelke.

EXCESS RAINS THIS YEAR FOLLOW TWO YEARS OF DEFICIENT RAINFALL



Nearly half of the net sown area in Beed district this kharif season (June-October) has been damaged by the rains. Beed is the third worst affected district in Marathwada, after Latur (87.2%) and Osmanabad (60.5%). Soybean has borne the brunt of the rains, followed by bajra (pearl millet), cotton and tur dal (pigeon pea).

Besides soybean, Shelke, along with his younger brother Yogesh, also planted cotton on 10 acres, most of which is damaged too. “The yield will only be a fraction of what we expected,” says Yogesh. The brothers, like most farmers, have borrowed money to cultivate their land. “No one can survive here just on agriculture,” says Shelke, who also works in a sugar factory.

Babri Munde, who runs a cotton ginning and pressing operation in the district, says that in the past five years, only one of the three units in his factory has been functional, owing to supply issues. Marathwada is home to a third of the state's sugar factories. Around half an hour from Shelke's land, right by the road in Pahadipargaon village are Ganesh Andil, his wife Randavani and son Ramesh.

They are clearing up an acre of what could have been a good harvest of bajra, which is part of the staple diet here. "The crop is so spoiled we can't even feed it to our animals," says Andil. They borrowed Rs 9,000 from a bank for the cultivation.

"At least we will benefit in the future. Dams are full and groundwater will be recharged," says Banshidar Shelke. There have been several lost opportunities in the past to make the region less susceptible to droughts and the government would be well advised to learn from those. While water-conservation initiatives are a no-brainer, equally important is a cropping pattern that does not aggravate the inherent problems of the region.

With reservoirs full, Maharashtra on the way to plant record cane



Maharashtra is again on its way to planting sugarcane over a record area.

PUNE: After all the talk about drought and the propriety of growing the water-guzzling sugarcane in drought-prone areas, Maharashtra is again on its way to planting sugarcane over a record area as the water levels in the state's reservoirs have risen by about 40% over the previous year, while prices of most other commodities have declined.

Maharashtra's highest area under cane was 10.54 lakh hectare in 2014-15, when the state had produced 105.14 lakh tonne sugar, its highest ever.

The area under the water-guzzling sugarcane is mainly dependent on the reservoir levels. The total water storage in Maharashtra stands at 83.20% at present compared with only 44.28% during same time previous year. The reservoirs in the drought-hit Marathwada region have been filled up to 75% of their capacity, as against only 7% last year.

"The area under sugarcane can be higher than 10 lakh hectare. There has been an increase in the FRP of cane this year and it may go up further next year too," said BB Thombare, president, Western Indian Sugar Mills Association.

Prices of most kharif commodities such as soyabean, cotton and onion have dropped substantially, while prices of tur are also expected to come down when the harvest begins from November/December.

"After the harvest of the standing kharif crops are over, especially that of soyabean, farmers will go for planting of cane," said Thombare.

With a steep fall in the sugarcane production in the current 2016-17 year, mills and farmers are trying hard to get enough cane for sowing operations. The perennially drought prone Solapur district has the highest number of sugar mills in the state. Ujani reservoir, the lifeline of entire Solapur district along with its sugar mills, has more than 100% water storage this year compared with only 13/15% last year.