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# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## Cotton plucking gets easier and cheaper



Battery operated hand-held machines to cut labour cost by 20 per cent

Manual plucking of kapas (raw cotton) could soon become a thing of the past if cotton farmers take to the newly developed hand-held machines that run on batteries.

The device has been developed by SIMA-CD & RA (The Southern India Mills Association - Cotton Development and Research Association), in association with Point Industries, a sister concern of the Coimbatore-based Sharp Industries.

SIMA-CD & RA sources said that this indigenously developed machine, priced at ₹9,500 (inclusive of taxes), would pluck only mature bolls without trash and contamination. Reports show that the trash content is less than one per cent against the normal average of 2 to 3 per cent.

The farm varsity has tested and certified the SIMA kapas plucker.

B Lakshminarayana, Chairman, SIMA CD & RA, said that the machine would enable a farmer pick 60 to 80 kg of kapas a day against manual picking of 12 to 20 kg/day. Coming as it does at a time when the picking season is round the corner, notwithstanding the paucity of farm workers and high labour cost, this machine is expected to be a boon for the cotton farmer.

SIMA sources said that manual picking cost alone would account for one-third of the total cost of cultivation for the farmer. By using this plucker, the farmer would be able to bring down the labour cost by 20 per cent.

K Selvaraju, Secretary General, SIMA, said that the association has been persistently persuading the Ministry of Textiles, especially the Cotton Corporation of India, to extend support for the machine. Thanks to the efforts, the Union Textile Minister, Smriti Irani, directed CCI to place an order for 300 machines – 100 each for its branches at Akola, Ahmedabad and Warrangal.

“We have supplied and trained the farmers. The trials have proved successful. CCI is planning to place an order for 500 machines this year. Meanwhile, a demonstration is on for the farmers in Telangana today,” he added.

### **Offer by TN government**

The TN Government is said to be offering this machine at ₹8,500, with a 50 per cent subsidy to help farmers buy the equipment and strengthen the area under cotton cultivation.

Selvaraju said SIMA has invested around ₹2 crore on plant and machinery. “Sharp Industries makes the machine on our behalf,” he added.

To a query on requirement, he said “close to 20-million farmers are involved in cotton cultivation directly. This would go a long way in saving labour cost for the farmer, besides ensuring clean cotton as well. The agriculture ministry has various schemes, but we have not been able to persuade them to support this development.”

(This article was published on September 11, 2017)

### **Homedale creates new record at Coonoor tea auction**



As much as 90 per cent of the offer at Sale No: 36 of the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association was sold despite the average price raising by ₹4 a kg to rule ₹69.03 a kg, due to increased demand from upcountry buyers and exporters.

Homedale Tea Factory and Global Tea Brokers created a new price record.

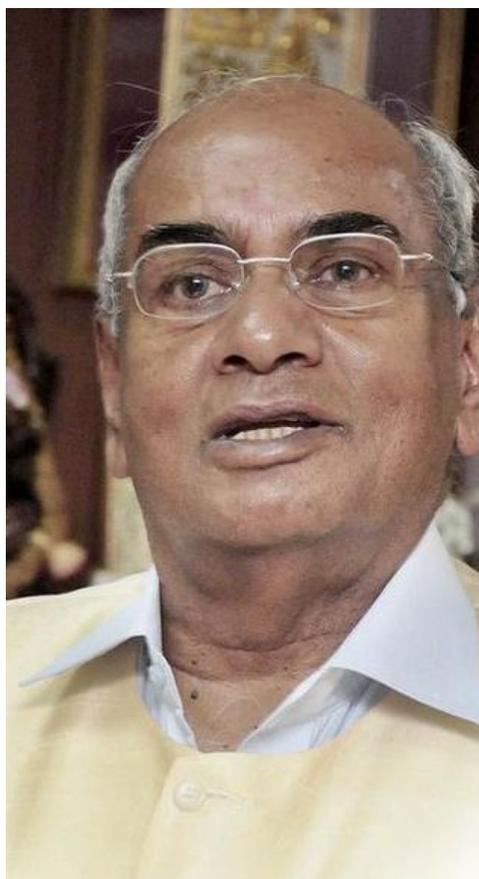
Homedale's Pekoe dust grade, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped not only the dust tea auctions, but also the entire CTC market when Oswal Tea Traders bought it for ₹256 a kg.

This was the highest price fetched by this grade from any factory in all the auctions held so far this year. This was also the highest price fetched by Homedale Tea Factory for this grade so far this year, making it the 'factory highest'.

In the leaf tea auction, Broken Orange Pekoe of Homedale Estate, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers and the same grade of Darmona Estate, auctioned by J Thomas and Co, topped at ₹220 each. Among orthodox teas, Kodanad topped at ₹245.

(This article was published on September 11, 2017)

**IFFCO's digital push a boon for farmers**



US Awasthi, Managing Director, IFFCO . - Kamal Narang

## Company plans to focus more on agricultural biologicals

With the Indian Farmer Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) going for a major online distribution push, farmers can now place orders for agricultural biologicals over phone or at the click of a mouse.

“As part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, culminating on November 3, we have launched a major digital initiative. Farmers who want to buy our biologicals, such as biostimulants, biofertilisers and biopesticides, can use this platform to get them delivered at their doorsteps,” IFFCO Managing Director, US Awasthi, told *BusinessLine*.

IFFCO, which is in the process of finalising courier companies in different States, will not charge delivery charges if the order placed is up to 5 kg, he said.

Called India Cooperative Digital Platform, this would also be used for procuring produce from farmers. So far, 1.78-crore farmers across the country have signed up. They can use this as an e-commerce site, said Awasthi.

### **Major campaigns**

Since November 3 last year, digital platform has been one of the major campaigns that IFFCO undertook after it kicked off a series of meetings with farmers across the country. Awasthi has already had over 100 meetings with farmers across the country so far, and also plans to hold at least 25 more in time for the 50th anniversary of IFFCO, which was formed by over 36,000 farmer cooperatives in the country.

“This is an experiment. But this picks up momentum and becomes a movement, the potential is enormous,” said Awasthi.

One of the major decisions taken by IFFCO – the biggest Indian fertiliser company with 25 per cent market share – is that it would be no more capacity addition in chemical fertilisers. Instead, it would be focusing more on agricultural biologicals.

In the long-run, the target is to have a revenue split of 50:50 from chemical products and biologicals, said Awasthi.

IFFCO, he said, was putting in a lot of money in research, particularly in new frontier areas of plant nutrition and plant protection.

“A couple of years ago, we roped in the Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun, to do research on neem. What we wanted was to reduce the number of years that neem takes to fruit. Currently, it takes about 10 years and farmers do not find it economically viable to go for neem cultivation. FRI, which has developed varieties that take just half the duration, has promised us that they will be able to provide the varieties for mass cultivation by 2018 or 2019,” the IFFCO MD said.

## Development of neem

This development would boost IFFCO's plan to develop neem as an economically viable crop for farmers. With the government recently deciding to allow the sale of only neem-coated urea under the subsidy scheme, the need for neem oil has shot up in the country.

Some reports even questioned how fertiliser companies in the country could actually meet the demand for neem oil when it was in short supply.

"We have been promoting neem cultivation in a major way. Last year, we planted 13-lakh neem trees, the number which doubled to 26-lakh this year," said Awasthi. The availability of new variety from FRI would work wonders for IFFCO, which has been procuring fruits of neem from farmers at ₹15 a kg.

"Neem also has many more applications other than for urea coating. It can be used in the manufacture of biopesticides and also in medicine," he added.

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## India brews world's most-expensive coffee



It is being made by a start-up in Coorg from the poop of civet cats

India, Asia's third-largest producer and exporter of coffee, has started producing the world's most-expensive coffee. It is being made on a small scale in Karnataka's Coorg district, from the poop of civet cat.

The civet coffee, also known as luwark coffee, is expensive because of the uncommon method of producing it. It is produced from the coffee beans digested by the civet cat – the feces of the cat are then collected, processed and sold.

### **Drink of the elite**

Civet coffee, a drink of the elite consumed widely in the Gulf nations and Europe, is sold for ₹20,000-25,000/kg abroad.

Here in the country's largest coffee-growing State, a start-up firm, Coorg Consolidated Commodities (CCC), has made a humble beginning by making the luxury coffee on a small scale, and has also decided to open a cafe to serve the brew locally.

“Initially, 20 kg of civet coffee was produced. After establishing the start-up firm, 60 kg was produced in 2015-16 and 200 kg last year. We hope half-a-tonne production from the new crop to be harvested from October,” said Narendra Hebbar, one of the founders of CCC.

The exotic coffee is being sold locally under the brand Ainmane; Hebbar said the company has only one outlet – at Club Mahindra Madikeri Resort – where it sells locally produced coffee, spices and other products.

### **Sourcing**

Hebbar said the company sources the poop from plantations located close to the forest from where the cats come to eat the ripest coffee-bean cherries.

“Civet cat eats the flesh of the coffee cherries and not the bean. Natural enzymes in civet's stomach enhances the bean flavor and that's why this coffee is unique,” he said.

Now, farmers are understanding the importance of this coffee, and “we produce it in natural form unlike other countries where civet cats are caged and forcefully fed with coffee beans”, he said.

It is being sold at ₹8,000 per kg here, while it is available at ₹20,000-25,000 per kg overseas, he said.

Asked if the company plans to export, Hebbar said it is not viable to export in view of the high certification costs.

“We want to promote this coffee locally. We will open a cafe soon. We will sell ‘Coorg Luwark Coffee’ along with other varieties such as Cappuccino and Espresso,” he said.

A senior Coffee Board official also confirmed that civet cat coffee is being produced in small quantities in parts of Coorg and Chamarajnagar districts.

“It is in very small quantity, done by individuals. They produce and market as a speciality coffee, a niche product which is very expensive,” he said.

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### **UPASI annual meet on Sept 13**

The 124th annual conference of the United Planters Association of Southern India (UPASI) is to be held at Glenview, Coonoor, on September 13. Giriraj Singh, Union Minister of State for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, will inaugurate the conference. According to a release, the conference would be preceded by a half-day session on commodities in the forenoon. The commodity outlook session is to be chaired by Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Joint Secretary (in-charge for plantations), Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. Chairpersons of the different commodity boards such as Tea, Coffee, Rubber and Spices would make presentations. Our Bureau

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