

SUGAR

Farmers turn to sugarcane in dry region

Marathwada farmers have gone back to sugarcane cultivation after the bountiful rainfall this monsoon, with the authorities expecting a 30% surge in the area under the water-guzzling crop.

After three consequent years of drought, the region received good rainfall this monsoon resulting in an increase in the groundwater levels and ample storage in the reservoirs. Considering the availability of water, more farmers have taken up sugar cane cultivation in the region.

In 2013, Marathwada witnessed sugar cane plantation on 2.25 lakh hectare, but the area under the cash crop came down by more than half to 94,000 hectare by 2015 due to deficient monsoons, agriculture department officials said.

Marathwada farmers had turned their back towards sugar cane because of the prevailing water crisis and switched over to soybean and cotton cultivation in several areas since 2013. With surplus rainfall in many areas this year, sugar cane plantation is on the surge again, a senior official said.

Sugar cane cultivation takes place under four-identified seasons, including Adsali that coincides with the kharif season, pre-seasonal plantation done in November and December, followed by Suru cultivated in January and February and the subsequent Ratoon season. Marathwada witnesses maximum sugar cane plantation during the last three seasons.

Last year, sugar cane was planted on around 1,113 hectare during Adsali season. This year too, very less plantation could take place owing to the delayed arrival of monsoon. The sugar cane plantation is expected to pick up momentum during the remaining seasons, agricultural officials said.

B Venkateswarlu, vice-chancellor of Vasanttrao Naik Marathwada Agricultural University, told TOI that farmers tend to cultivate water-intensive crops based on rainfall received in only one year instead of following any pattern.

“Considering the possibility of deficient monsoon in the coming years, farmers should go for sustainable cropping pattern. Mulberry and potatoes along with onion and turmeric can be effective alternatives,” he said.

Venkateswarlu also stressed on the need to freeze the area under sugar cane plantation in Marathwada for the larger good of farmers. “The freezing limit can be calculated based on five-year average of the plantation area. Once the freezing limit is defined, the government should ensure all area coming under it must be micro-irrigated to avoid water wastage associated with sugar cane plantation,” he said.

It is noteworthy that the study conducted by advocacy group South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) on sugar cane cultivation in Marathwada had found that drought-prone region consumed nearly 4,322 million cubic metre (mcum) of water, nearly

double the live storage capacity of Jayakwadi project, to irrigate sugar cane on 2.25 lakh hectare in 2013.

A senior revenue department official said the works carried out under the government's flagship water conservation scheme of Jalyukta Shivar have been further encouraging farmers to take up sugar cane cultivation.

Besides sufficient rainfall during monsoon, the work done under Jalyukta Shivar has recharged the groundwater level considerably. It is but obvious for farmers to think of taking up cash crop such as sugar cane, a senior official said.

Farmer activist Jayaji Suryawanshi said farmers can avoid sugar cane cultivation provided the government assures them good and assured prices for other yield.

"Financial security is the only reason for farmers planting sugar cane. They should not be criticised for it as they have to run their families. The fact that sugar cane plays larger role in overall economy involving sugar production cannot be neglected. Farmers are ready to switch over to other crop if they are rewarded for all the hard work they put in," he said.

(Source-<http://sugarnews.in/farmers-turn-to-sugarcane-in-dry-region/>, 2nd December, 2016)

Sugar trade expected to normalise in December

There has been a slight pick-up in sugar trade, which was affected due to the demonetisation drive, in the last three to four days in Maharashtra. Industry experts expect near normalcy in trade by the next week.

"Post demonetisation, demand was very poor because of currency shortage in the market and prices fell by R10-30 per quintal. Trade was also impacted to the tune of 30%. However, things have started picking up," Mukesh Kuvediya, said secretary general, Bombay Sugar Merchants Association.

On Thursday, S-30 variety was sold at R3,502-3,690 per quintal while M-30 prices ranged between R3,680-3,852 per quintal. Kuvediya said that price correction will happen and trade will also come back to normal by next week. On an average, usually between the first 10 days of the start of the month, some 600 to 700 tonne of sugar is traded on a daily basis and by the 15th to 25th of every month, trade drops to 400-500 tonne a day, he said.

Trade had dropped by nearly 30% in this period and it remains to be seen up to what extent the pick-up in trade happens, he pointed out. Sugar millers in Maharashtra had also complained about lack in demand from traders in November.

After remaining stable at R36,000 a tonne in September, sugar prices touched a five-year high of R36,200 a tonne in October. Post-demonetisation, it fell marginally to R35,500 a tonne in November.

Domestic sugar prices have remained firm, having increased from about R31,500 a tonne in March to R36,000 a tonne in August and have maintained the firm trend ever since on the back of lower sugar production estimate this year.

The expected decline in the sugar production during the 2016-17 sugar season (October-September), actual decline in the domestic sugar stocks during the 2015-16 season and a global sugar deficit scenario has kept prices up.

Kuvediya said the outlook for the commodity this season would largely depend on the crushing, the total amount of production and market demand.

According to government estimates, sugar production in India is estimated to decline by 10.27% to 225.2 lakh tonne in the ongoing season. The Centre in a series of measures in the last six months has imposed a 20% tax on sugar exports, withdrawn the excise duty concession on production of ethanol, imposed stock holding limits on sugar mills in addition to wholesalers and retailers as it felt that some mills along with few unscrupulous traders could further push up the prices. The state will begin the season with an opening stock of 32.7 lakh tonne.

(Source-<http://sugarnews.in/sugar-trade-expected-to-normalise-in-december/>, published on 3rd December, 2016)

CM launches sugarcane harvesters

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday launched high-tech sugarcane harvesters at Mastamardi village of Belagavi taluk on Wednesday. Twelve such units were handed over to the Krishi Yantradhare Kendra.

The Chief Minister said that these harvesters were an answer to the shortage of labourers. The government had decided to make them available at the kendras in hobli centres from where growers could take them on rent.

Mr. Siddaramaiah stressed the need for improvement in farm productivity to boost financial stability of farmers. "Agriculture could become a profit-making venture by improving productivity; taking advantage of scientific and technological innovations; and adopting government schemes. The growers need to come forward to install drip irrigation systems to save water and also boost yield. The government is providing 90 per cent subsidy for installing the systems," he said.

Earlier, Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said the government was providing 40 per cent subsidy for each sugarcane harvester costing Rs. 1.38 crore. The cost of manual harvesting of the crop was around Rs. 350 to Rs. 375 per tonne while the government wanted to bring it down to Rs. 300 through mechanised harvesters.

"Also, growers normally take a day to harvest sugarcane on a one-acre field. It could be done in just four hours by mechanised harvesters. Another advantage is that the machines cut the cane into billets and directly dump them into the trolley of a tractor or a lorry, which means enhanced sugar recovery percentage. Sugar mills can take mechanically harvested sugarcane to the crushers without making growers to wait in long queues. The cane leaves could be utilised for preparing organic manure which will boost crop yield from 4 tonnes to 5 tonnes per acre," the Minister added.

Government Chief Whip Ashok Pattan, Minister for Small-Scale Industries Ramesh L. Jarkiholi, and senior officials were present.

(Source-<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/CM-launches-sugarcane-harvesters/article16733906.ece>, published on 1st December, 2016)

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(Source-<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/aurangabad/Farmers-turn-to-sugarcane-in-dry-region/articleshow/55735098.cms>, published on 2nd December, 2016)

COGEN

KSEB confident of tackling power crisis

Though the new power minister, M M Mani, has been hinting at the possibility of power restrictions in the coming days, top Kerala State Electricity Board officials say that the situation is not that bad.

According to the officials, the chances of a load shedding or any other form of major power restrictions were remote now. "It's true that the power scenario across the country is bad at present. Kerala, being a state mostly dependent on power generated outside the state, will obviously suffer in the event of even a mild turmoil in the national power scene. But the situation, as of now, has not aggravated to a position that would force the board to impose load shedding or power cuts," said an official.

Sources said, the repair work in the Moolamattom power station was progressing satisfactorily and the work on the penstock valves would be completed by December 6. Three of the six generators in KSEB's biggest hydel station were out of action after a leakage was detected in the penstock pipe that carry water to the generators.

"The present crisis began with the central allocation from the Talcher power plant in Odisha coming down. One unit in Koodankulam atomic power plant is also out. The board is also not getting the power we have contracted with a private power generator. All this have contributed to a daily power deficit up to 500 MW," said a board director.

"However, we have made arrangements for purchase of power from outside the state. There will be price difference, but we are confident of facing the crisis without power cuts or load shedding," he added.

Meanwhile, the state government is learnt to have given KSEB the go ahead to honour long term power purchase agreements, the procedural correctness of which was questioned by the state power regulatory commission. The regulator had earlier refused to fully accept the agreement reached between KSEB and various power generating companies for purchase of 865 MW power for 25 years from December 2016.

The annual purchase of 6,440 Million Units (MU) power at an average rate of Rs 4.11 per unit would come to around Rs 2,650 crore. It would total to Rs 66,225 crore on completion of the 25 years of agreement period.

(Source -<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/KSEB-confident-of-tackling-power-crisis/articleshow/55718303.cms>, published on 1st December, 2016)

Parliamentary Panel asks coal PSUs to recover dues worth Rs 13,745 cr

A Parliamentary panel has raised concerns over Rs 13,745 crore in dues to coal PSUs - CIL, SCCL and NLC - and asked them to recover the amount, which can adversely impact their financial position.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Coal and Steel, chaired by Rakesh Singh, commended the work done on rationalisation of coal linkages, which helped in savings worth Rs 1,371 crore.

"The committee is concerned to note that large amount of outstanding dues of all coal Public Sector Undertakings (PUSs) -- CIL, SCCL and NLC -- remain unrealised from concerned ministries/parties," the report said.

As on March 31, 2015, outstanding dues of Coal India BSE -0.11 % Ltd (CIL), Singareni Collieries Company Ltd (SCCL) and NLC India Ltd (NLC) stood at Rs 11,032.20 crore, Rs 2,441.32 crore and Rs 272.04 crore (including disputed dues of Rs 129.09 crore), respectively, it added.

Coal Ministry informed the panel that it has taken a slew of measures for regular follow-up to realise outstanding dues.

It includes review of party-wise dues by General Manager and Chairman CIL with Chairman/Managing Director of defaulting power houses/parties, which are then taken up to the level of Chief Secretary of concerned state and Secretary (Energy) of respective defaulting organisation, the report added.

"The committee further emphasise that the Ministry/Coal PSUs should take elaborate steps for recovery of these outstanding dues lest these insurmountable dues adversely affect the financial position of the coal companies," it said.

The panel commended the ministry on the transparent auction of coal linkages, which will create a level playing field for all market participants.

"The committee are happy to note that as a result of review by an Inter-Ministerial Task Force to rationalise coal linkages, overall movement rationalisation of 29.5 million tonnes of coal has taken place with potential annual savings of Rs 1,371 crore of transportation cost," it said.

Other steps include automatic transfer of coal linkage granted to old plants, while scrapping and replacing them with new plants; opening two separate eAuction windows exclusively for power sector and a separate for non-power sector for quantity of 4 million tonnes, it added.

"The committee hope that these initiatives fructify into tangible schemes towards a more fair and transparent system of Coal marketing and Distribution," it noted.

(Source-<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/parliamentary-panel-asks-coal-psus-to-recover-dues-worth-rs-13745-cr/articleshow/55757310.cms>, published on 2nd December, 2016)

Quote of the day

'Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.' -John F. Kennedy