**Sustainable Agriculture: Punjab’s search for a less water-guzzling, yet high-yielding paddy**

A new variety maturing within 125 days, yet yielding nearly as much as those now grown over 135-160 days, could provide the ultimate solution to Punjab’s woes stemming from farming of water-guzzling paddy.

Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) has released a paddy variety PR-126 that gives an average of 30 quintals per acre. This is only marginally below the 30.5 quintals from PR-121 and PR-124 or the 32 quintals of the other popular variety Pusa-44.

But the real difference is in the duration, from the time of sowing seeds in the paddy nursery to harvesting of the ripened grain. This ranges from 135 days for PR-124 and 140 days for PR-121 to 160 days in the case of Pusa-44. PR-126 matures in just 123-125 days, including 30 days of nursery raising and 93-95 days after transplantation of seedlings.

“The average yield per day from the new variety, at about 24 kg per acre, is more than the 20 kg of Pusa-44 or 22 kg for PR-121 and PR-124. The shorter duration also means less water consumption. If farmers have to give, say, 26 irrigations for Pusa-44, this would be only 21-22 in PR-121/PR-124 and 17-18 in PR-126,” claims G S Mangat, head of PAU’s rice improvement programme.

PR-121 and PR-124 were released for commercial cultivation in 2013 and 2015, respectively. The PR-126 variety was officially released for planting in the coming 2017 kharif season at last week’s PAU Kisan Mela here. “Last year, about 400 quintals of seeds was made available on trial basis to select farmers. This time, we are distributing another 1,000 quintals. At 8 kg planting per acre, it will again cover only a limited area,” adds Mangat.

PR-121 has, within a span of three years, become Punjab’s most widely-cultivated paddy variety. Last year, it covered over 7.7 lakh hectares (lh) or 30.7 per cent of the state’s total non-basmati paddy area, with PR-124 accounting for another 9.8 per cent. In the process, Pusa-44’s share, which was 39 per cent in 2012, fell to 20.3 per cent.

“We have not recommended cultivation of Pusa-44 (developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi) in Punjab mainly due to its long duration. The nursery sowing has to be before April last week and transplanting by mid-May, to enable harvesting from October and timely planting of the next wheat crop. The water requirement will obviously be high during this peak summer period. Secondly, Pusa-44 is susceptible to bacterial blight. There is no chemical control available against the Xanthomonas oryzae pathogen causing this disease that can result in significant grain yield loss,” explains Mangat.
Released in 1993, Pusa-44’s main attraction was its yields. At 32 quintals per quintal, this exceeded the average 26 quintals of PR-106, a 145-day PAU variety that was till then Punjab’s workhorse paddy following its introduction in 1976. Being a medium-slender (‘fine’) grain giving higher head rice recovery than PR-106, which produced long-slender or ‘superfine’ grains, also made Pusa-44 a favourite with millers. The Union government’s decision merging ‘fine’ and ‘superfine’ paddy into a single Grade ‘A’ category from October 1997 — entitling Pusa-44 to the same minimum support price (MSP) as PR-106 — further tilted the advantage in favour of the former.

The last straw came from the Punjab government’s policy of supplying free power to farmers. “When water could be freely pumped out to allow transplanting even in May, the farmer had reason to grow a long-duration variety that gave him extra yield. But it came at the cost of the state’s water table,” points out Satinder Singh Brar, a retired senior extension specialist with PAU, who has advocated a ban on Pusa-44 cultivation.

According to latest official data for 2010-11, groundwater resources in 110 out of Punjab’s 138 blocks were “overexploited”, with average extraction rates from aquifers exceeding recharge levels. Underground water being overdrawn has been attributed to paddy cultivation area in the state rising from under 3 lh to over 30 lh between 1965 and 2016. It has led to the enactment of the Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act in 2009, barring any nursery sowing and transplanting of paddy before May 15 and June 15, respectively.

PAU vice-chancellor B S Dhillon believes that weaning the Punjab farmer away from paddy is impractical, as it is a crop entailing less production risk and with an assured market based on MSP procurement. The more sustainable solution is in breeding short-duration, but high-yielding, varieties that require less water. The new PAU varieties, from PR-121 to PR-126, can be comfortably transplanted after mid-June 15 or even towards the month-end with the monsoon’s arrival.

“We bred these mainly by crossing PR-106 and PR-116 (a high head rice recovery variety released in 2000). Further, the PR-106 parent itself incorporated three bacterial blight resistant genes Xa4, xa13 and Xa21 (sourced from traditional landrace cultivars and wild relatives of paddy). The transfer of these genes in pyramided combination lines (to confer durable resistance) involved use of molecular breeding and marker assisted selection techniques,” informs Mangat. The end-result has been reduced-duration paddy varieties having bacterial blight-resistance, and with yields and head rice recoveries comparable to Pusa-44.
“Last year, I sowed PR-126 on 20 acres and harvested 33 quintals per acre, despite undertaking transplanting only on June 27. This time, I plan to increase my area under the new variety to 25 acres,” says Kulwinder Singh, a 30-acre farmer from Mardanpur village in Patiala district’s Rajpura tehsil.

“For over a decade, we grew Pusa-44 because yields could even go to 35 quintals per acre. But with PR-126, I am getting around 31 quintals, while also saving money on running my diesel generator to ensure standing water for the transplanted paddy,” notes P P S Pangli, a progressive farmer from Ludhiana’s Panglian village, who grew PR-126 on 22 out of his 82 acres.

http://indianexpress.com/article/india/sustainable-agriculture-punjab-search-for-a-less-water-guzzling-yet-high-yielding-paddy-4591689/

West Bengal government to help farmers to grow 800 varieties of rice

Basmati export volumes seen reviving in 2017-18

Supported by higher paddy prices and resumption of imports by Iran, the basmati rice industry looks ahead to attractive growth in 2017-18, aided by export volume growth.

Ratings agency ICRA has estimated the export volumes in 2016-17 to be around 4 mt (about the same as in 2015-16), but lower realisations may keep the value of the exports lower at around ₹21,000 crore for 2016-17, against ₹22,718 crore in 2015-16.

“In fiscal 2017-18, the value of exports is expected to grow to ₹22,000-22,500 crore, with export volumes growing to around 4.09 mt and supported by an increase in average realisations. Resumption of imports by Iran will be keenly watched by the industry as it has the potential to provide an impetus to exports,” said Deepak Jotwani, Assistant Vice-President, ICRA, in a press release.

According to ICRA, the industry has witnessed moderation in recent years on the back of subdued international demand, owing to the delay in resumption of imports by Iran.

ICRA expects domestic demand to grow consistently, with companies expected to report 2-3 per cent growth in revenues and around 0.5-1.0 per cent growth in profitability.

After peaking at ₹29,300 crore in fiscal 2013-14, the value of basmati rice exports has fallen. However, volumes grown in recent years.

Average realisations fell from a high of ₹77,988 per tonne in 2013-14 to ₹56,149 per tonne in 2015-16 and further to ₹52,906 per tonne in the first 10 months of fiscal 2017.

In 2017-18, the industry is expected to benefit from rising paddy prices. After declining considerably during the procurement season in fiscal 2015-16, basmati paddy prices have firmed up by 20-25 per cent across various varieties in the October-December 2016 procurement season, primarily due to relatively lower production.

This is likely to push up basmati rice prices in the next financial year, noted ICRA.

http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/copyofbl30icra/article9606588.ece
Cultivation of traditional paddy yields results

An endeavour to promote cultivation of traditional paddy varieties which can withstand drought condition has yielded results in Pudukottai district.

A couple of farmers of Maangankollaipatti village near Mazhaiyur have not only registered a harvest of 1.2 tonnes an acre of paddy raised in their fields but also could market them immediately.

The farmers, R. Shanmugam and R. Veeraiah, who raised “Karunseeraga samba” on two acres, said that the variety could withstand the severe drought condition.

Although the harvest was below than their anticipation, the farmers are happy that they could immediately market it through the Pudukottai District Organic Farmers Producer Company, said K. Adhappan, founder of Rose Trust, which is reviving the conventional paddy varieties among the farmers in co-ordination with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for the past six years.

The farmers could market 20 bags for ₹ 36,000, at the rate of ₹1,800 a bag from one acre.

The farmers said that they incurred minimum cultivation expenditure for the 65-day crop, which was irrigated once a week.

It was free from weeds and pests, another advantage.

Mr. Adhappan said that 'Karunseeraga samba' was one of the traditional varieties known for its flavour. The other varieties being popularised were 'Thulasi seeraga samba' and 'karuppu kavuni' samba.

S. Somasundaram, District Development Manager, NABARD, said that so far 36 varieties had been popularised among the farmers in the last six years. There was a growing demand for such rice varieties, he said.

GI tag for Joha rice- 'Aroma distinct from Basmati'

Guwahati, March 29: Assam's aromatic Joha rice has finally got the GI (geographical indications) tag from the Union ministry of commerce.

Muga silk, Assam (orthodox) tea, Karbi Anglong ginger and Tezpur litchi are the other products from Assam with the GI tag.

Geographical indication is a mechanism employed to identify agricultural, natural or manufactured goods which possess

Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, and Seuj Satirtha, an NGO in Sivasagar, had moved the application for Joha rice.

An AAU official said the state government should go all out to promote Joha rice so that it becomes popular like Basmati rice. "We will have to increase the yield and the productivity of Joha rice," the official said, adding that producers of the rice variety need to be encouraged. "We will have to keep in mind that the attributes for which Joha rice is known is kept intact by the producers," the official said.

"The Joha rice varieties are genetically distinct from other classes of rice cultivated in Assam and elsewhere. A study on diversity analysis at DNA-level based on molecular markers clearly showed that Joha rice varieties were distinct from other rice varieties, as reflected in separate grouping from other varieties of Assam rice," the report published in the GI journal said. The Joha GI status will be for 43 known varieties of the rice which exist in the region.

The report said the uniqueness of Joha rice is attributed to particular climatic conditions prevalent in the area along with varietal characters and system of rice cultivation, adding to the best expression of aroma and flavour in the product. "The aroma of Joha rice is also considered to be distinctly different from Basmati rice," it said.

The report said there is a need to protect Joha rice as there is a legitimate concern among the farming community, academics and policy makers that its market potential may be jeopardised by unscrupulous trader/middlemen to sell other small grain aromatic rice developed elsewhere in the name of Joha rice.

https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170330/jsp/northeast/story_143489.jsp#.WN3P_PmGPIU
India to produce 107 million tonnes rice this year: CACP

This year, India is going to produce around 107 million tonnes of rice which is a plus point for the country, Vijay Paul Sharma, chairman, Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) said on Monday.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) along with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) had organised a technology, strategy and policy conference on Rice.

This year, India is going to produce around 107 million tonnes of rice which is a plus point for the country, Vijay Paul Sharma, chairman, Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) said on Monday. “In order to address pressing issues in the rice value chain we have to strengthen the four pillars – technology, institutional support, infrastructure and incentives. All the four pillars are important and there should be synergy amongst them,” he said at a CII meet on rice in Pune. He pointed out that private sector in collaboration with the government and research institutions can play an important role in bridging the yield gaps. Agriculture extension plays a key role in the dissemination of technology from laboratory to farm, he said.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) along with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) had organised a technology, strategy and policy conference on Rice: Emerging Trends & Future Prospects in Pune.

Shyam Khadka, FAO Representative in India, highlighted the adverse impact of the climate change on rice production and diversified rice yields in the country and said that technology has to be customised and not standardised for all problems.

According to V Shankar, conference chairman and MD and CEO, Rallis Indian Limited, although an all-time high production of 106.65 million tonnes of rice with a productivity of 2.39 tonnes per hectare was achieved during the year 2013-14, India needs to produce 120 million tonnes by 2030 to feed its one and a half billion plus population by then using less land, less water, less manpower and optimising all agri input usages.
Rice is the most important food crop of the developing world and also the staple food for more than 60% of the Indian populace, he said, adding that besides adopting cutting edge science and technology for increasing rice productivity, in India, for the sustainable rice cultivation, procurement and marketing, policy makers and stakeholders have to address issues related to quality seeds, crop protection, sustainable use of quality agri inputs, cost of production, price, procurement, regulatory aspects, fragmented land, forward and backward linkages, infrastructure, logistics, market and import-export policy related to rice.


**Higher paddy price expected to drive basmati industry growth in FY2018**

**House call for paddy price hike**

**Bhubaneswar, March 25:** The Assembly today passed a unanimous resolution to demand enhancement in the minimum support price (MSP) of paddy from the Centre.

The state will now ask the Centre to increase the minimum support price of paddy to Rs 2,930 a quintal.

Serious debates on the issue had been going on in the Assembly during the past few days.

Agriculture minister Pradeep Maharathy today said: "A House committee will be formed under the chairmanship of the Speaker taking MLAs of all the parties as its members. The committee will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and demand the increase in the minimum support price."

The Centre fixes the minimum support price for agricultural products.

The issue came to limelight when leader of Opposition Narasingha Mishra had submitted a notice to Speaker Niranjan Pujari planning to move a resolution urging the central government to revise the minimum support price from the existing Rs 1,450 as the cost of production of paddy has increased over the years.

Later, Maharathy had read out a statement in the House stating that the state government had recommended the Centre to hike the minimum support price to Rs 2,500 a quintal.

To put pressure on the government to pass a resolution, Mishra had also resigned from the business advisory committee of the Assembly accusing the government not to take up farmer's issues.

As the issue snowballed into a major controversy, it was also debated several times in the Assembly. Cutting across party lines, the MLAs said there was a need to increase the minimum support price of paddy.

The House witnessed a debate for three hours on this issue.

BJP MLA Pradeep Purohit said: "We support the move of the leader of Opposition. Earlier, the state had failed to pass a resolution on the issue of Mahanadi water dispute. Now, the time has come to be united for the farmers' cause."

Congress chief whip Tara Prasad Bahinipati said: "Leader of Opposition Mishra had earlier moved an amendment on this issue demanding that the minimum support price of paddy should be fixed at Rs 3,516 per quintal. The move of the Assembly to pass a unanimous resolution is a welcome step."

As all the parties have reached a consensus, government chief whip Ananta Das moved a resolution in the House demanding that the minimum support price of paddy be increased to Rs 2,930 per quintal. The motion was welcomed by everyone in the Assembly.

**Sources:** [https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170326/jsp/odisha/story_142694.jsp#.WNiTGvmGP1U](https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170326/jsp/odisha/story_142694.jsp#.WNiTGvmGP1U)
Odisha Assembly passes resolution on paddy MSP

**Seeks upward revision of price from ₹1,470 to ₹2,930 per quintal**

The Odisha Assembly on Saturday unanimously passed a resolution seeking upward revision of the minimum support price of paddy from ₹1,470 to ₹2,930 per quintal.

After hours of debate, it was decided that a House committee would be constituted under the chairmanship of Speaker Niranjan Pujari in which all political parties would have representations.

**House panel to meet PM**

The House committee would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to submit its demand.

Earlier in the day, State Agriculture Minister Pradeep Maharathy moved the resolution, stating that the State government had been repeatedly demanding a higher MSP for paddy from the central government to ensure adequate and fair returns for the farmer.

“The MSP fixed by the Union government is not commensurate with the rising costs of inputs such as seeds, fertiliser, manure, micro nutrient, irrigation charges and hiring charges of farm machineries being incurred by farmers in the State,” Mr. Maharathy said.

As per statistics of the State government, the cost of production of per quintal of paddy is ₹2,344.

The minister had proposed fixation of MSP at ₹2,500 per quintal in the resolution.

**Congress demand**

The opposition Congress, however, said the MSP at ₹2,500 per quintal of paddy was too low considering that a farmer spends ₹2,344 to produce a quintal of paddy.

The leader of the Opposition, Narasingha Mishra, had proposed the MSP at ₹3,516, or 150% of the cost of production. However, the House resolved to demand MSP at ₹2,930 per quintal paddy stating that it was an acceptable figure.
Farmers’ suicide

The State Assembly has been frequently disrupted over farmers’ suicide for several days. Opposition Congress and BJP members had been demanding constitution of a House committee which would probe the reason behind the suicides. The ruling BJD had rejected the demand.

**Rabi season paddy procurement from April 1**

In charge Collector G Ravi on Thursday asked millers to cooperate with the district administration in procuring rabi season.

**Yadadri-Bhongir:** In charge Collector G Ravi on Thursday asked millers to cooperate with the district administration in procuring rabi season paddy from the farmers in the district. Paddy procurement will begin from April 1.

The Collector conducted a meeting with the millers and issued guidelines in this regard.

He suggested that the millers should make arrangements for storage of more paddy as the crop was expected to be more than the kharif season on account of favourable weather conditions.

He also made it clear that the millers should not store the paddy in godowns, which do not have the required permissions. The millers should keep their representatives at the procurement centres that facilitate them to personally examine the moister percentage and shift the paddy to the godowns at the earliest.

He directed millers to submit the details of the crops in their possession to the officials concerned by March 31. Millers should pay income tax and electricity charges in time and help in the development of the newly-formed district.

District Rice Millers Association president Gampa Nagender assured all support to the administration. District Civil Supplies Officer Sandhya Rani also attended the meeting.

**Source:** [http://telanganatoday.news/rabi-season-paddy-procurement-from-april-1](http://telanganatoday.news/rabi-season-paddy-procurement-from-april-1)
**Strong rupee, logistics hurdles seen hurting non-basmati rice exports**

The strengthening rupee has added to the woes of Indian non-basmati rice exporters, who are battling logistics hurdles, mainly the non-availability of covered rakes in adequate numbers in the eastern region that has slowed down the shipments of the cereal. Non-basmati rice shipments in the April-January period of the current financial year stood at 5.21 million tonnes, down 2.6 per cent over the corresponding period last year.

The rupee has strengthened by about 4 per cent against the dollar since the beginning of the year till date.

“Non availability of covered rakes has been a big problem this season. This has impacted the movement of rice from Chhatisgarh region to the ports in Andhra Pradesh over the past three-four months. Transporting rice in open wagons increases the risks for exporters as insurers do not extend cover to such cargo,” said BV Krishna Rao, President of the Rice Exporters Association.

“The infrastructure hurdles like the non-availability of covered rakes are seen as a dampener on exports,” said S Venkatesh, CEO (Mumbai Operations) Agri Trade India Services Pvt Ltd. Though the shipments are a bit subdued now, the prospects look bright as they are expected to pick up ahead of Ramadan, he added.

India has steadily built a profile in the non-basmati rice market after exports were opened up in 2011. Africa has been a major destination for Indian non-basmati rice, where it competes with exporters from Thailand, Vietnam and Pakistan. In the past few years, India has been the largest exporter of rice — including both basmati and non-basmati — with the total volumes exceeding 10 million tonnes.

Rao said the strengthening rupee has further hurt the realisations of the exporters and made Indian rice, especially the whites, expensive in the world market.

India exports three varieties of non-basmati rice — white rice, parboiled and 100 per cent brokens. Parboiled accounts for some 30-40 per cent of the nation’s non-basmati shipments, followed by whites at 20-30 per cent.

**Uncompetitive prices**

“We are expensive by at least 10 per cent for white rice when compared to other origins such as Thailand, Vietnam and Pakistan. This is because of higher price due to rise in MSP and the strengthening rupee. As a result, we are uncompetitive in this category at the moment, which is hurting the demand,” Rao said. However, the demand is intact in parboiled and brokens categories.

Notwithstanding the logistics hiccups, Indian exporters expect to maintain non-basmati shipments at last year’s levels of over 6 million tonnes in the current financial year. Despite drought affecting the southern parts of the country, India is expected to produce a record 108.86 million tonnes of rice in the 2016-17 season, according to the second advance estimates.

Farmers advised against distress sale of paddy

**Kothagudem:** Joint Collector M Ramkishan has assured paddy farmers of establishing purchase centres within their reach and advised them against making a distress sale of paddy to the middlemen. He was reviewing arrangements for lifting paddy with officials of Civil Supplies department, rice millers, market committee secretaries, lorry owners and farmers here on Tuesday.

He asked Civil Supplies officials to equip the paddy purchase centres with instruments that measure moisture content in paddy, scales and adequate number of tarpaulins. The responsibility of testing paddy quality rested with the agriculture department officials, he said categorically.

He asked the rice millers to mill the paddy and supply fine rice to the social welfare hostels and government schools. In fact, 45 paddy purchase centres were being established in the district, he said. In addition, maize purchase centres will be set up at Illandu, Mulkalapali and Dammapeta.

Civil Supplies officer Amruta Reddy, Central Bank Deputy General Manager Naveen, Rice Millers’ Association president Jugal Kishore, Lorry Owners’ Association leaders and others were part of the meeting.

Raipur, Mar 21 (PTI) The main opposition Congress today staged a walkout in the Chhattisgarh Assembly alleging irregularities in paddy procurement at cooperative societies in Sarguja division of the state.

Raising the issue through a calling attention motion, Congress MLA from Bhatgaon seat (Surajpur district) Parasnath Rajwade said, paddy from the bordering state was illegally sold at procurement centres of Surajpur and Balrampur-Ramanujgaj districts in Sarguja division (northern part) of Chhattisgarh.

Against the state government's policy to procure paddy for a minimum support price for Kharif crop year 2016-17, managers of paddy procurement societies in several districts have showed paddy purchase from landless farmers, he said.

Citing example Rajwade said, Ram Uday Singh, son of Jagnarayan Singh and Shivkumari wife of Chunnilal Sahu, both from village Kamalpur, are marginal farmers and the paddy produced in their fields is used to fulfill their own needs, but in the society records 262 quintal paddy has been procured from Ram Uday while 50 quintal paddy was procured from Shivkumari.

The Congress member also cited several other similar examples to support his allegations.

He further alleged that the cooperative society manager from Raghunath Nagar, Balangi himself had sold 350 sacks of paddy to the society through two different registrations.

On a complaint from local people, the Tehsildar had seized a truck which was illegally transporting paddy at the behest of the said society manager, he alleged.

Besides, the societies had sanctioned loan to the tune of Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh to farmers but they were paid only Rs 10,000 to Rs 5,000 in the region.

Despite record paddy output, farmers in Ganjam suffer

Large-scale irregularities in procurement process alleged

Despite record paddy production in the last Kharif season, farmers in Ganjam, the home district of Odisha Chief Minister, are suffering because of large-scale irregularities in the government's paddy procurement process, peasants’ organisations -- the Rushikulya Rayat Sabha (RRS) and the Odisha Chasi Surakshya Abhiyan (OCSA) -- have alleged.

According to these organisations, the 2016 Kharif paddy yield in Ganjam district is the highest in the past 20 years. “Data from the agriculture department shows that during this Kharif season, paddy production was around nine lakh tonnes.

But ironically, the government target is to procure three lakh tonnes from Ganjam district.

This means that the farmers are being compelled to sell the rest of their produce to dubious traders at lower rates,” said RRS secretary Simanchal Nahak.

The convener of OCSA, Rabi Rath, said the government should have taken into account the real state of production before fixing the target of paddy procurement. Mr. Nahak and Mr. Rath alleged that because of this, farmers of Ganjam district are not going to earn much from their paddy yield despite a bumper crop.

Irrigated land

As per government norms, 18 quintals of paddy is procured per acre of irrigated land and 12 quintals from an acre of non-irrigated land. “At several places in Ganjam district, farmers have resorted to use of SRI or other scientific methods of agriculture due to which their yield is 25 to 28 quintals per acre. Due to lack of proper machinery, the farmers are unable to sell off their paddy at good rates and at many places stored paddy has started to germinate,” said RRS president Trinath Biswal.

The peasants’ organisations calculate that farmers in Ganjam district are losing income worth more than ₹20 crore due to irregularities in paddy procurement. They claimed that there were around six lakh farmers in Ganjam district and of them three lakh are share croppers. But for paddy procurement, only one lakh farmers have been registered.
“It means most farmers, especially share croppers, have been left out of the paddy procurement process,” said Mr. Rath. As the government is yet to provide official recognition to share croppers, they are unable to sell their produce in government mandis, said Mr. Nahak.

Delay in opening of the paddy procurement mandis is also said to be a reason behind the distress sale by small and marginal farmers.

No target fixed for paddy procurement in Bihar, says minister

Patna, Mar 15 (PTI) Observing that no specific target has been fixed for paddy procurement in Bihar this year, the state government today said that it was open to procurement as much paddy as farmers were willing to sell through cooperative agencies.

"We have deliberately not set a target for paddy procurement this year...we are ready to protect as much paddy as farmers are willing to sell through cooperative agencies like the Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) and other agencies," Cooperative Minister Alok Mehta told the assembly while replying to debate on his departments budgetary allocation of Rs 750.45 crore for 2017-18.

He said that out of 8464 PACS in Bihar, paddy procurement centres have been set in 7500 of them even as 521 Vyapar Mandalas too have set up procurement centres and added that the entire exercise has been decentralised so that the farmers in every nook and corner of the state can sell their produce and reap benefit of minimum support price.

Stating that paddy procurement has been made transparent through automation of the entire process beginning with procurement to transportation to rice mills and payments which the farmers can monitor online through Apps developed for integration of procurement process, Mehta said.

The Cooperative Minister said that the state government has the best interests of marginal farmers and sharecroppers in procurement process which guarantees them minimum available price in lieu of produces, paddy in this case, and make available funds in hands so that they could use the money for sowing next crop.

Recounting delay in starting paddy procurement process, he said the state government had expanded window by a month and launched exercise from December itself, but due to high moisture content the desired results could not be achieved initially as the Centre did not grant permission to increase moisture content limit in paddy by upto 17 per cent.

From January this year, the state government stepped up procurement containing 17 per cent moisture before it gave permission to procure paddy with 19 per cent moisture, Mehta said.

Paddy procurement centres at every 5 km

Following bountiful rains and expected bumper harvesting of paddy crop during this rabi season, the Karimnagar district administration will open one paddy procurement centres every five kilometers in the villages.

This facility will benefit of farming community by helping them sell their produce and procure minimum support price near their fields.

MSP centres

Collector Sarfaraz Ahmed said that they had decided to open 42 Indira Kranthi Patham (IKP) procurement centres and the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) of each village would open 250 centres to procure paddy from the fields.

Initially the district administration would open procurement centres in Ramadugu, Huzurabad, Chigurumamidi and Saidapur mandals and later extend them to remaining mandals, he added.

The Government will provide a minimum support price (MSP) of ₹ 1510 per quintal of ‘A’ grade quality paddy and ₹ 1470 per quintal for ordinary grade paddy. He informed the farmers to get the paddy to the centres after cleaning and drying it in the fields to ensure that they get the MSP.

He also instructed the officials to ensure that the farmers arrived in a phased manner to the procurement centres to avoid confusion.

Punjab Agricultural University unveils paddy, basmati, moong, sugarcane varieties

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, has released some varieties of paddy, spring/summer moong (greengram), basmati and sugarcane for general cultivation in Punjab. These include PR 126 of paddy; TMB 37 of spring/summer moong; CSR 30, Punjab basmati 4 and Punjab basmati 5 of rice; CoPb 92, CoPb 93 and CoPb 94 of sugarcane.

According to a press released issued by the PAU on Monday, these were approved during a meeting of the state variety approval committee held under the chairmanship of B S Sidhu, director of agriculture, Punjab.

The parmal rice variety PR 126 is an early maturing strain. Its average plant height is 102 cm and matures in about 123 days after seeding. It is resistant to seven of the ten prevalent pathotypes of bacterial blight pathogen in Punjab. Its average paddy yield is 30 quintal per acre.

The TMB 37 matures in 60 days as compared to 62 days for SML 832 and 61 days for SML 668. It has medium sized grains and possesses good culinary properties. The basmati rice variety CSR 30 is about 139 cm tall. It possesses extra long slender grains with excellent cooking and eating quality characteristics. It matures in about 142 days after seeding. Its average paddy yield is 13.5 quintal per acre.

The Punjab basmati 4 is a high-yielding, semi-dwarf, lodging tolerant variety, which is about 96 cm tall. It is resistant to all 10 pathotypes of bacterial blight pathogen, presently prevalent in Punjab. It matures in about 146 days after seeding and its average paddy yield is 17 quintal per acre. The Punjab Basmati 5 is a semi-dwarf variety, which is about 112 cm tall. It is resistant to all 10 pathotypes of bacterial blight pathogen, presently prevalent in the state. It matures in about 137 days after seeding and its average paddy yield is 15 quintal per acre.

The sugarcane variety CoPb 92 is tall, medium thick and purple green in colour. Its juice contains 16-17% sucrose in November and 18% in December. It is a good ratooner (second crop after harvest). It is tolerant to most of the prevalent pathotypes of red rot disease and frost. Quality of gur (jaggery) is also good. Its average yield is about 335 quintal per acre. The CoPb 93 variety is tall, thick and yellowish white in colour. Its juice contains 17-19% sucrose in January and March, respectively. It is a good ratooner. It is tolerant to the prevalent pathotypes of red rot disease. Its average yield is about 390 quintal per acre.

The CoPb 94 is tall, thick and yellow greenish in colour. Its juice contains 16-19% sucrose in January and March, respectively. It is a good ratooner. It is tolerant to the prevalent pathotypes of red rot and smut diseases. Its average yield is about 400 quintal per acre.

**Lukewarm response to paddy varieties**

Farmers purchase paddy seed at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute regional station in Karnal on Friday. Tribune photo: Ravi Kumar

Paddy growers from various parts of North India today gave a lukewarm response to ‘beej bikri divas’ at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) regional station in procuring paddy seed varieties developed by scientists of the institute.

Usually, farmers from Haryana, Punjab and other states throng the institute to procure quality seed of paddy varieties. This time, it has received a very poor response from farmers. The sale counters today wore a deserted look. Only a few farmers were here to procure paddy seed.

Sources in the institute claimed that it was the first instance that the centre has witnessed low attendance of farmers on the seed sale day. Earlier, the institute had to call the police to control farmers.

Last year, a large number of farmers from the region visited the event and procured seed worth more than Rs 20 lakh on the first day. The total sale for the season was more than Rs 70 lakh, said the sources in the department.

Last season, farmers from Punjab had preferred PUSA-44 while farmers from Haryana had chosen PUSA-1121 and PUSA-1509.

Compared to last year, seed sale was reduced to around Rs 7 lakh today due to low interest of farmers in paddy varieties. Farmers claimed that distress sale of paddy below the MSP last season the main reason behind it.

“Last year, farmers were forced to sell paddy below the MSP, resulting in losses to them and hampering the enthusiasm towards the paddy crop,” said Ajmer Singh, a progressive farmer of Karnal.

Jagannath, another farmer from Chirao village, said their produce was procured below the MSP last season, due to which farmers were hesitant to go in for the paddy crop.

However, the head of the IARI, Dr VK Pandita, was hopeful in an increase in sale of seed in the coming days. He said they had been providing paddy varieties of PUSA-1121, PUSA-1509 and PUSA-44.

“PUSA-1121 and PUSA-1509 is being sold at Rs 75 per kg and PUSA-44 at Rs 50 per kg. Keeping in view the response of farmers last year to quality seed varieties, we had increased the production of quality seed,” he added.

He further said last season they provided 25 kg seed to each farmer, which had now been increased to 50 kg per farmer.

**Poor quality rice supplied under PDS: Morcha**

Dehradun: Raghunath Singh Negi, president, Jan Sangharsh Morcha, has alleged that the quality of rice available in ration shops is extremely sub-standard. Negi alleged that rice was directly transported from rice mills without checking its quality by the Food Controller of India (FCI) and Regional Food Controller (RFC). He lamented that the beneficiaries were forced to consume poor quality rice supplied to them. Super quality rice is available at Rs 1,800 per quintal in the market, while the government procures sub-standard rice at Rs 2,260 per quintal from the rice mills.


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**Thrust on paddy farming, horticulture**

The Budget presented by Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac in the Assembly on Friday has outlined an ambitious proposal to increase the extent of paddy fields in Kerala by 10%, plant 3 crore saplings for drought mitigation and achieve self-sufficiency in vegetable production by next year.

The total outlay for agriculture sector has been pegged at Rs. 2,106 crore, up from Rs. 1,822 crore last year. Of the Rs. 160 crore earmarked for food production, Rs. 70 crore has been allocated for paddy and Rs. 85 crore for vegetables.

An amount of Rs. 700 crore has been set apart for paddy procurement.

Reclamation of wasteland for paddy farming, conversion of single crop to double crop and establishment of rice mills are other proposals.

In his speech, Dr. Isaac said suitable projects would be formulated for the special agricultural regions of Kuttanad, Onattukara, Pokkali, Kol, Palakkad, Wayanad and Kaippad.

Cultivation of hardy crops like ragi and millet would be promoted in tribal areas for distribution to the local families as ration.

The cluster approach would be adopted for self-sufficiency in horticulture.

Development of agricultural markets and processing of vegetable produce are other highlights. Crop health management, organic farming and processing of vegetable produce would be encouraged.

Indigenous variety
The budget proposes a new scheme for preservation of biodiversity and conservation of the germplasm of indigenous varieties of Kerala.

The Minister has allocated Rs. 500 crore for the rubber price stabilisation scheme and Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 crore for 14 agro parks.

Agro economic zone

An outlay of Rs. 10 crore has been proposed for the development of special agro economic zones for rice, vegetables, banana, flowers and coconut.

The outlay of Rs. 19 crore for the Wayanad package would be used for cultivation of pepper and original rice varieties ad soil and water conservation.

The budget proposes extension of cattle hybrid breeds, cross breeding schemes and assistance for fodder cultivation to achieve self-sufficiency in milk production.

Members across party lines on Saturday expressed concerns in the State Assembly that paddy procurement is not going on properly in the State and, hence, farmers are being forced to go in for distress sale.

However, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Sanjay Kumar Dasburma, who replied to the questions of the members during the Question Hour, refuted the charge, saying the procurement process is going on satisfactorily and farmers are being paid directly through their bank accounts.

While many members alleged that paddy is piled up at mandis for days, the Minister said more than 30 lakh tonne of paddy have been procured from at mandis across the State so far this season and Rs 4,579 crore has been deposited in bank account of farmers.

While the Government has set a target to procure 30 lakh tonnes of paddy by April end, 31,14,789 metric tonne of paddy has already been procured till date. He informed that the paddy procurement was done in 294 blocks as per the P-Procurement Automation System (P-PAS) mechanism.

He informed that farmers are still registering names to sell their paddy in Government Mandis.

Members like Kailash Chandra Kulesika and Tara Prasad Bahinipti (Cong), Dr Bibuti Bhushan Harichandan (BJP) and Pratap Jena, Ranendra Pratap Swain and Dibya Sankar Mishra participated.

Soaring rice price forces Kerala to eye Rs 100 cr worth buy from West Bengal

Kerala government, for instance, is set to shop for rice in West Bengal in order to supply the food grain to southern kitchens where rice is a staple diet. As price of rice in south India climbs northward, West Bengal grocers see a beeline of buyers. Kerala government, for instance, is set to shop for rice in West Bengal in order to supply the food grain to southern kitchens where rice is a staple diet. “We have formed a consortium of representatives from Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies to undertake procurement from West Bengal. The procurement will be completed by March 10,” Kerala minister for Cooperation K Surendran told the state Assembly here. The consortium has been entrusted with Rs100 crore for the rice shopping assignment.

The price of all premium brands in Kerala supermarkets have been shooting through the roof. Jaya rice costs Rs48 per kilo, matta rice costs Rs43 per kilo and surekha rice costs Rs37 per kilo. “Only in West Bengal, the rice is currently selling at a fair price. In southern states, there is huge shortage of the premium rice brands. ‘Suvarna’, the rice brand that’s popular in Karnataka is not relished in Kerala market,” Surendran said. Rice varieties from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab cost only around Rs32 per kg and Rs33 per kg in the retail markets. However, the consumer preferences in the south are yet to match to these varieties.

In northern Kerala, there is a slow switchover in taste preferences to ‘swarna’ rice from Bengal and ‘cherumani’ and ‘kurava’ rice varieties that are sold at price below Rs24 per kilo. Kerala has a history of buying rice and potatoes from West Bengal, whenever there is price letdown from the Andhra market. Traders say there has been over 26% increase in the price of the premium brand jaya. Kerala consumes about 40 lakh tonnes of rice per annum. Of this, jaya and surekha rice from Andhra account for consumption up to 22 lakh tonne.

“Since jaya rice is a brand with much demand, traders in Andhra might also be creating an artificial demand,” says Kerala food minister P Thilothaman.

The opposition Congress today created uproar in the Chhattisgarh assembly over the issue of alleged irregularities in paddy procurement in the state.

As many as 34 Congress MLAs were suspended after they trooped into the well in the House raising slogans against the government. However, their suspension was revoked later.

Due to the pandemonium, Speaker Gaurishankar Agrawal had to adjourn the House proceedings for 10 minutes.

Soon after the Question Hour, state Congress President and MLA Bhupesh Baghel while raising the issue through his adjournment motion notice, said as the state has witnessed high production of paddy (in the kharif crop year 2016-17) but in spite of that the state government had set a target of procuring 70 lakh MT in 2016-17.

The state has 37 lakh farmer families, out of which credit cards have been given to only 22.44 lakh. Due to administrative hurdles in the registration process for paddy procurement, only 14.51 lakh peasants get themselves registered with cooperative societies, he said.

Till January 31, 2017, 13.27 lakh farmers sold their paddy but 1.24 lakh farmers failed to do so as no prior arrangements were made for paddy procurement and large scale irregularity in the process, he said.

Baghel and other Congress MLAs further claimed that due to unavailability of gunny bags in Rajanandgaon Bilaspur, Bemetara, Kanker, Jagdalpur, Mahasamund, Durg, Dhamtari, Balod, Janjgir-Champa districts, the procurement centres were closed for 10 days.

Baghel also said the incidents of irregularities in weighing paddy at procurement centres were also reported at some places.

Another Congress MLA Dhanendra Sahu said, the state has recorded a high production of 1.30 crore MT paddy.

But the state government failed to make efficient arrangements for payments against paddy procurement, therefore farmers had to sale their 50 lakh MT paddy to traders and middleman at throwaway prices which caused a huge loss of Rs 3,500 crore to them, he claimed.

The opposition members also charged that the paddy from neighbouring states was being sold in Chhattisgarh.

In his reply, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Punnulal Mohile said no target has been set for paddy procurement under support price.

However, before the onset of marketing year, an expected assessment of quantity of procurement is being done which can be amended later. In the marketing year 2016-17, it was estimated to procure Rs 70 lakh MT paddy which was 10 lakh MT more than last year. The actual procurement was recorded 69.58 lakh MT which is within this assessment only, he said.  

AHMEDABAD: The state government told the state assembly that it has since September last year doubled the quantity of rice given under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

The state in the first nine months of the implementation of the act has distributed 16.20 lakh metric tonnes of rice and wheat.

State food and civil supplies minister Jayesh Radadiya said that the government was giving a maximum of 30 kg of wheat at Rs two per kg and five kg of rice at Rs three per kg. However, based on the complaints and requests received it was decided to make representation to the central government to increase the quota of rice. The central government agreed to give additional quota of rice to the state, and since September, the quantity of rice given to the families was doubled. In reply to a question, Radadiya said that earlier when the state used to supply 1.76 lakh metric tonnes of food grains under the act, the same since September has increased to 1.86 lakh metric tonnes. He said that against the allocation of 16.21 lakh metric tonnes, the state has till December distributed 16.20 lakh metric tonnes of food grains. In another reply, the government said that in Ahmedabad alone the government has given tur dal at Rs 60 per kg. In Ahmedabad city 89.16 metric tons of tur dal was distributed to 89,162 families.

House in Clonmel sealed off in Paddy Lyons murder investigation
Man in 20s being questioned over death of 90-year-old in rural Co Waterford home

Gardaí investigating the murder of 90-year-old man Paddy Lyons in Co Waterford have sealed off a house in Clonmel for a forensic examination.

Garda technical experts cordoned off the house on the Waterford Road in Clonmel, Co Tipperary, on Monday evening. On Tuesday, up to 10 technical experts began a forensic examination of the house.

The examination began as gardaí continued to question a man in his early 20s from Co Waterford who was arrested in the Clonmel area on Monday in relation to the death of Mr Lyons.

The man is detained at Dungarvan Garda station under Section 4 of the Criminal Justice Act which allows gardaí to detain suspects for up to 24 hours before they have to be released or charged.

Mr Lyons, a bachelor farmer, was found dead at his home outside Ballysaggart, some 11km from Lismore at about 5pm on Saturday by a neighbour and home help who called to check on him.

She had been alerted by a couple who had called to the house and found Mr Lyons slumped in an armchair in the single storey cottage and they called to the neighbour to alert her to the tragedy.

The emergency services were called and attended to Mr Lyons but he was pronounced dead at the scene and gardaí requested the services of the State Pathologist’s Office.

On Tuesday, Supt Michael Leacy of Dungarvan Garda station confirmed that gardaí were now treating Mr Lyons’s death as murder but he declined to disclose how the retired farmer had died.

However, it is understood that Mr Lyons suffered a number of head injuries during a burglary which gardaí believe happened sometime on Friday evening or Friday night in his isolated homestead.

Garda technical experts were on Wednesday continuing with an examination of Mr Lyons’s house which is located some 500m down a muddy track off the main Lismore to Mitchelstown road.

Gardaí on Monday confirmed that they had been contacted by the couple who first found Mr Lyons and called to a neighbour and it is understood that they have taken witness statements from them.