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AGRI BYTES

E- Weekly Newsletter

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1. Shri Radha Mohan Singh urges Canada to invest in Indian agro infrastructure

Union Agriculture Minister Shri Radha Mohan Singh met a delegation from Canada led by Mr. Gerry Ritz, Canadian Minister for Agriculture and Agri-Food. Singh urged his Canadian counterpart to expedite finalization of the Work Plan paving way for the visits of Scientists from both countries to each other's institutions. He also requested Canadian side to explore possibilities for importing agricultural commodities such as tomatoes, grapes etc. from India to reduce trade imbalance between the two countries. He also requested for Canadian investment in Cold Storage Infrastructure and technology for ecologically sustainable cold chains. Agriculture Minister also evinced interest in the Canadian expertise and technology from production through processing, storage and distribution. Canadian Minister ensured that Canada would be happy to cooperate and collaborate with India to move forward the MoU signed by two countries in 2009 and would also like to share its technology for enhancing India's production and productivity in the Agriculture sector.

2. India, Israel extend agricultural cooperation action plan

India and Israel have agreed to extend their existing three-year action plan on agriculture cooperation beyond 2015. "Both the countries agreed that the present agreement (2012-15) will be renewed after 2015," said agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh in a meeting with Israeli ambassador Daniel Carmon. At present, the action plan 2012-15 is being implemented in 10 states-- Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and West Bengal. Under the existing plan, both the countries have been collaborating in agriculture, horticulture, dairy, water, irrigation, seeds development and many other sectors. Singh said, "Agriculture is a strong foundation for strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. Israeli has shown interest in establishing additional centre of excellence in India." On Carmon's submission that many Israeli companies were interested to work in India in the field of dairy under public-private partnership (PPP) mode, Singh assured him that the country would extend all possible cooperation.

3. Fresh lending to agri, MSME sectors improves in Gujarat

Besides opening 1.4 million accounts under the much talked about Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), the Gujarat banks have fared well in providing fresh lending to agriculture and MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) sectors during the first quarter of 2014-15. However, advances to weaker and agriculture sectors was a concern as it remained below the target along with housing and education loans. The State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) which met today informed that 14,18,432 accounts have been opened under PMJDY in all the banks in Gujarat till September 23. Ashwani Kumar,

chairman & managing director Dena Bank and Gujarat SLBC chairman said that out of the 12.2 million households in the state 9.3 million have been covered under banking services. “As on date we have opened over 1.4 million accounts under PMJDY covering 0.8 million households in Gujarat. With this 9.3 million households are now covered under banking services,” Kumar said.

4. Pepper rehabilitation project to be launched in Kannur Dist

Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Panniyur, here will start a participatory pepper rehabilitation project in the district in four panchayats soon and would launch a new initiative to encourage farmers to start mini nurseries in their homesteads to find a solution to the scarcity of pepper seedlings. Dr P Jayaraj, programme coordinator of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, said that the project would be launched very soon in Naduvil, Kurumathoor, Chengalayi and Sreekandapuram panchayats. The participatory rehabilitation of pepper aims at increasing the pepper production and ensuring technology dissemination with an active participation of farmers’ committees. “One of the major problems we face in pepper rehabilitation is the shortage of planting material. There is a demand for 20 lakh to 25 lakh planting material every year. But only less than 10 lakh seedlings are produced by public sector research centres and private nurseries altogether. To effectively address this problem, the project envisages starting mini nurseries in every farmer’s place,” Dr Jayaraj said.

5. September showers drive sowing to 97%

Fears of drought and poor rains have disappeared with the heavy September showers as 97% farmlands in Gujarat - 86.80 lakh hectares - have been sown and are ready for new crops. The usual rain-shadow zone of the state, Saurashtra, has become the envy of all agriculturists of Gujarat. This region has clocked 105.61% sowing, while rest of the state has struggled to achieve 95%. In Saurashtra, excess rains have gifted farmers with more work this year. In this region sowing usually takes place in 36.14 lakh hectares, while this year, the farmed area has grown to 38.17 lakh hectares. The state agriculture department officials said that sowing in Saurashtra began quite early since the region got good rains. In north Gujarat sowing began in August where finally, with some late showers, sowing touched 92.73% of the usual sowing area - 18.54 lakh hectares. In central and south Gujarat, sowing was 92.43% and 91.64% respectively. While farming activity was the lowest - 80.82% - in Kutch. The officials said that owing to intermittent rainfall in many other parts of Gujarat, only five crops - cotton, paddy, guvar seeds, sesame seeds and fodder - have achieved 100% sowing.

Groundnut crop sowing this year has dropped by 4.40 lakh hectares. Last year, the total area cultivated with groundnut crop is only in 16.68 lakh hectares. But, this dip in

groundnut cultivation has transformed into a gain for cotton. Cotton growers have increased with 30.07 lakh hectares being covered this time as against 26.86 lakh hectares in 2013.

6. Kerala govt. mulls policy change to attract investments in Agriculture

Buoyed by the enthusiastic response among young entrepreneurs ready to launch start-ups in agriculture and allied sectors, the government is keenly debating certain policy changes that would permit them use its fallow and unproductive land for long-term lease at concessional rates. The latest move is part of the continuing efforts to change archaic policies to encourage young entrepreneurs to invest their talents and skills in agriculture and food processing sectors. Senior officials who are part of the policy formulation told that a public-private-panchayat model is one among several ideas being discussed to develop a robust ecosystem for young entrepreneurs. As part of the proposal, the farmer entrepreneurs could tie-up with local bodies and utilise fallow and unproductive land under their possession for agricultural and related ventures. The government expects to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and delay in clearances by roping in panchayats as a key partner in these initiatives. The local bodies could also reap the benefit of increased revenue through such joint ventures. Other expected returns include enhanced food production and infrastructure development and increase in local commerce.

7. Andhra Bank launches 'Kisaan Vaani'

Andhra Bank on launched 'Andhra Bank Kisaan Vaani', a new facility which provides latest technical information on agriculture and allied activities to farmers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana through 'Green SIM'-based voice message, in association with Iffco Kisaan Sanchar Limited (IKSL). IKSL has developed a green SIM for transfer of voice messages in different fields of farmers interest. Green SIM can be used as a regular SIM since it has all the features of the normal SIM in addition to the value-added services. For getting the green SIM, the farmer has to produce a valid identity and address proof in addition to a passport-sized colour photo. According to an Andhra Bank press release, the cost of green SIM is Rs 86, out of which free talk time of Rs 82 is available. The cost of the SIM thus works out to Rs 4 and the farmer can use this free talk time for his regular purposes. The SIM is valid for lifetime. Andhra Bank and IKSL have entered into an MoU for transfer of latest technology on a continuous basis without any charges. The bank is also providing green SIMs to all its rural development officers and rural branch managers to help the farming community.