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1.NASA scientist adapts technology for farmers' benefit

Terrestrial Observation and Predicting System uses climatic data to secure Indian farmers from risks of climate change and ensure that crop insurance reaches the deserving. A senior Indian earth scientist from National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Ramakrishna Nemani, hailing from Hyderabad, has modified and adapted NASA technology to secure Indian farmers from risks of climate change like floods and droughts and ensure that crop insurance reaches the deserving farmer. Dubbed as Terrestrial Observation and Predicting System (TOPS), the project recently received 15 months extension, after testing it in real world conditions for the past two years on pilot basis, by the Maharashtra government. The earth scientist is also working with local authorities here to implement a similar system for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The NASA researcher has brought together a system of collecting weather and climatic data through satellite remote sensing, ground weather stations, human inputs and using climatic forecasting and ecosystem models to give risk determination of crop insurance, crop assessment, sampling of crop yield, early assessment of crop loss, categorising the risk regions and more significantly forecasting the climatic conditions in such zones.

2.Odisha approves plan for hybrid rice, maize seed production

The Odisha government plans to scale up hybrid rice and maize seed production in state under Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojna (RKVY) to boost productivity in the state. Cultivation of hybrid seeds is being done in Odisha for last few years under various state plans in small areas. This year the plan would be implemented under Union government's RKVY scheme for the first time. The scheme would provide a chance for seed companies to produce hybrid seed in Odisha and the state government would provide subsidies to farmers taking part in the scheme. "Incentives provided to the seed growers is Rs 20,000 per hectare (ha) for paddy and Rs 15,000 per ha for maize," the state agriculture department said in its approval letter. The Directorate of Agriculture and Food Production has floated an expression of interest (EOI) tender, inviting seed producing companies to provide seed and train farmers to grow the hybrid variety. "The producing agencies will buy back the entire seed produced by the grower at a pre-negotiated price. The training cost to seed growers will be borne by the seed producing agency," said some of conditions on the EOI advertisement. For rice, the state government has planned to cover an area of 12,000 ha for the upcoming rabi crop season. "Rice yield for hybrid seeds in Odisha is higher than its neighbouring state Telangana. We hope the seed companies would be interested to produce hybrid paddy seed in Odisha as the farmers would be subsidised for such effort," said R S Gopalan, agriculture director with state government. So far, about five companies including global seed producing agency **Syngenta** and domestic company Nirmal Seeds have shown interest for the project.

3. Contract farming can reap benefits if mechanization is speeded up: Report

The government's contract farming plan can reap benefits for stakeholders if mechanization is speeded up and other hurdles are quickly cleared to boost agriculture and arrest its further decline. Issues of fragmented land holdings and ownership, costly labour inputs, use of primitive and labour-intensive farming methods due to partial mechanization are some of the reasons for

the gradual slide in agricultural activities. The Goa Agriculture Tenancy (amendment) Bill, 2014 was passed recently to encourage contract farming. "All along, farmers did not allow their fallow land to be cultivated by others out of fear of losing it under tenancy act, but now they can let those who want to cultivate it, do so," Orlando Rodrigues, director of agriculture department, said. The government has provided attractive subsidies, but many see farming on a bigger scale with optimal use of machinery as a requirement for profitable farming. "Contract farming requires large tracts of cultivable land and fast mechanization is needed for timely operations and saving high costs of labour," says H R Prabhudesai, subject matter specialist (agronomy) ICAR, Old Goa.

4. Farm universities in Dharwad advised to transfer technology to fields

Governor Vajubhai Vala has urged the Universities of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) to launch pilot projects to help in the transfer of technology to the agricultural fields. Inaugurating the foundation day programme of the UAS-Dharwad, Vajubhai suggested that farm varsities select a few villages in their respective jurisdictions and guide farmers on adopting scientific methods of farming. "The agriculture scientists should go to the villages, spend time with farmers and guide them on enhancing productivity, reducing the cost of production and other such issues," he said. The government should be informed on such projects and their assistance too could be taken. Later, the models of the transfer of technology evolved through a pilot project could be extended to other parts of the state, he said. The governor highlighted the importance of soil testing to ensure an optimum yield. He said that soil testing helps bring down the unwanted expenses and regulate fertiliser usage in farm practices. In Gujarat the government's scheme to issue Soil Health Card (SHC) has helped streamline the cost of production, he said. Emphasising the importance of agricultural scientists in tackling the new problems cropping up, Vajubhai said farm scientists had played a key role in achieving the Green Revolution. "Now is the time they contributed to face the new age challenges haunting the agriculture sector," he added. Expressing concern over youngsters from agriculture families moving away from farming, Dharwad MP and state BJP president Prahlad Joshi said, the UAS should make efforts to ensure youths continue to practice agriculture. For this, agriculture should become a remunerative profession. The UAS should help with modern ways of overcoming the problems in achieving this task, he said.

5. Sugarcane research institute to be opened in Bihar

The state government will open Institute of Sugarcane Research and Technology at Madhopur in Motihari, declared at a meeting of 'agriculture cabinet' presided over by Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi. "It will be spread over 70 acres of land, and will work under Rajendra Agricultural University. It will provide a new dimension in sugarcane farming," said Manjhi. The institute will be a part of the 2012-17 agriculture road map prepared by the state government to give a boost to farming and farmers. Manjhi conducted an intensive review of agriculture in the state and considered 70 indicators to assess its progress. He directed the officials to bring development in this field to induce quantitative and qualitative improvement in the economic condition of farmers. The Chief Minister also said that Bihar has been suffering from irregular monsoon for the

past many years, which has been hampering paddy cultivation. "Bihar Agriculture University, Sabour has developed 'ardhajaal' variety of paddy, which gives good yield even if the rainfall is very less," said Manjhi and said the paddy variety will be provided to cultivators.

6. Karnataka moves to increase agricultural yield

Agriculture Minister Krishna Byregowda has said that the government will open 186 customised centres in the state to enhance yield and overcome the shortage of agriculture labourer. Through these centres, the government will rent out heavy machinery to farmers on a rental basis. He said this at the opening of the Krishi Mela at the University of Agricultural Science in Dharwad recently. Each centre would get a financial aid of Rs 75 lakh to purchase farm equipment and rent them out to farmers. The state has earmarked Rs 70 crore for this project. Today, a shortage of agriculture labourers has affected the growth of agriculture sector. Hence, farmers should take up mechanised farming. Accordingly, the customised centres would help the farmers get tractors, rotavators, tillers and other machinery at an affordable rent.

The government has also been asked to allot more funds for drip irrigation projects and the chief minister has promised to include this in the coming budget. Focussing on soil health, Krishna Byregowda stated that as farmers lack a proper knowledge on maintaining the health of the soil, the cultivable lands are being degraded very fast. If the health of the soil is protected, yield can be increased by 15%.

7. Farmers to get Rs 397 cr as crop insurance claim

The Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd (AICIL), the implementing agency of the National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS), has sanctioned Rs 397.23 crore towards crop insurance claim against crop loss in Kharif-2013. As many as 373,126 farmers of 1,397 gram panchayats in 143 blocks under 21 districts of the state would be the beneficiaries. Among the districts, Ganjam has the highest share of claim to the tune of Rs 132.75 crore, said BN Praharaj, chief regional manager, AICIL, Bhubaneswar region. While claims worth Rs 392.62 crore were sanctioned for paddy, Rs 4.61 crore was approved for maize and cotton crops. Around 1.3 million farmers are covered under the scheme with the sum insured being Rs 3,370 crore against premium collection of Rs 85.57 crore. During Kharif 2013, Odisha was severely affected by the Phailin cyclonic storm followed by devastating floods. Out of the total claim, the state and Central governments have paid 154.94 crore each, while the AICIL has paid 87.45 crore. The state government's contribution of 154.94 crore was deposited with different banks on September 26. Due to puja vacation, the contributions by the Central government and AICIL to the tune of Rs 242.39 crore was released on Tuesday, said Praharaj. Besides, the central cooperative banks (CCBs), the Odisha Gramya Bank and Utkal Gramya Bank have received Rs 7.53 crore and Rs 31.88 crore respectively. The nodal banks have been advised by AICIL to credit the claim amount to their respective loan disbursing offices within a week of receipt of claim and deposit the claims to the farmers' account within seven days of receipt of claims, sources said.