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1. India Looks Forward to Active Participation of FAO to Meet Challenges in Agriculture – Radha Mohan Singh

Union Minister for Agriculture, Shri Radha Mohan Singh had a meeting with DG, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) on 8th September, 2014. Apprising FAO of the significant strides made by India in agriculture and allied sectors during last few years, he said that India has not only achieved self sufficiency in food but also did extremely well in horticulture, dairying, milk production, fisheries, post harvest management and development of cold chain infrastructure. Today, India produces over 260 million tonne of foodgrains, 269 MT of agriculture produce, 132 MT of milk, he said. Mentioning agriculture as main stay of the country he said that it contributes to 13.7% of the Indian GDP and a source of employment for 22% of total population. The Minister also apprised FAO of the Kisan Call Centres, which aim to provide information to farming community through toll free telephone number on all seven days of week and a SMS Portal for Farmers functioning since July 2013 for disseminating information, giving topical & seasonal advisories and providing services through SMSs to farmers in the local languages.

2. Farm Income Insurance Scheme to Provide Protection to Farmers Against Natural Calamities is on the Cards: Radha Mohan Singh

Inaugurating a Seminar on concept of farm income insurance scheme at Ahmedabad recently, Union Minister of Agriculture said that agriculture is largely dependent upon monsoon, which leads to uncertainty in production and price of agricultural produce. Government is considering to launch farm income insurance scheme so that these two important components i.e. production and price can be tackled under single policy instrument. The objective of this scheme would be to protect the farmers by giving them insurance cover for their production and market risks. The scheme aims to ensure continuous production, protection to livelihood and crops, encouragement to multiplicity of crops, which may promote competition from the angle of exports.

3. Massive open online courses for agricultural professionals launched

Opening unlimited opportunities for the less privileged in India to have an access to quality agricultural education, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for agricultural professionals were launched here at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) global headquarters. The MOOCs will be offered through the National Virtual Academy for Indian Agriculture, an online platform built on an open source software "Open edX," to meet the requirements specifically of India's agricultural education system, where available resources are scarce relative to the extremely large audience - in a country where more than 70 per cent of the population is involved in agriculture directly or indirectly, according to a statement by ICRISAT. The initiative in India specifically seeks to contribute to its agricultural education system, bringing systematic changes through strategic coalition of regional, national and international partners.

4. Pilibhit farmers encouraged to cultivate new paddy hybrid

Agriculture department officials are confident that Pilibhit can emerge as one of the highest paddy producing districts in the country, and contribute to national food security. Officials say the new variety of grain that they are attempting to popularise, the DRH 775, is capable of offering high yield even in adverse conditions. With this new variety of crop, the district can rival parts of Andhra Pradesh, considered India's rice bowl, officials said. The agriculture department has set up 112 demonstration nurseries of this hybrid variety of paddy in the district. DRH 775 has shown excellent resistance to diseases, besides offering higher yield, officials said. The Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) has initiated the popularisation of this variety of paddy, said joint director of the agriculture department in Bareilly division, Ram Lakhan Rajput. DRH 775 had been notified by the Indian Council of Agriculture Research, New Delhi in 2009 as a high-quality hybrid variety. It is resistant to diseases like 'brown spot' and 'sheath blight', common diseases in paddy crops, Rajput said.

5. Centre to boost 'makhana' cultivation

The high-yield variety of 'makhana' (gorgon nut, fox nut or lotus nut), called 'Swarnavaidehi' and developed by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), is expected to be accepted by interested farmers in Bihar on a large scale, and this variety is most likely to emerge as a major commercial crop in the state's nine districts, bringing immense cash flow to farmers engaged in its farming. Although 'makhana' is known to people in the country's 10 states, including Bihar, it is Bihar alone which accounts for 90% of its world production. The main nine Bihar districts where it is popular and cultivated by farmers are Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnia, Katihar, Sitamarhi, Saharsa, Supaul, Araria and Kishanganj. "The 'Swarnavaidehi' variety would help farmers opt for integrated farming by including popular crop like 'singhara' and even fish farming. Moreover, the farmers can cultivate it as any general crop like wheat or paddy. The method of cultivation of the new variety of 'makhana' would be the same," said Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh.

6. Department of science and technology starts women scientist scheme

A 3-day event 'Women scientist scheme', organised by the department of science and technology, government of India, began at Chandra Shekhar Azad Agriculture University here on Saturday. Ninety women from various states of India including Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and New Delhi are participating in the scheme in life science subject.

The 'Women Scientists Scheme (WOS-A)' is aimed at providing opportunities to women scientists and technologists for pursuing research in basic and applied sciences in frontier areas of science and engineering. It was initiated to encourage those women scientists who had a break in their career, and it is a launching pad for them to return to mainstream science and work as bench-level scientists in the field of science and technology.

7. India set to emerge as world's largest cotton grower

India is set challenge China's numero uno position in world cotton production. Thanks to genetically modified or BT cotton, India's cotton sowing has surged to record high led by sharp increase in cotton acreage in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. As per the latest data available from government departments and industry sources, total cotton sowing in the country stood at 122.5 lakh hectares this year (2014-15) against about 115 lakh hectares last year (2013-14). Farmer and trader sources peg India's cotton production at 403 lakh bales this year. India's biggest cotton producer, Gujarat's data on September 1 showed cotton sowing in the State has crossed 30 lakh hectares this kharif season against the three years average of 27.17 lakh hectares, showing an increase of 10.5 per cent. With rise in demand from yarn millers and new capacities coming to stream, cotton consumption in India has increased. This attracted more farmers to prefer the fibre crop over others.

8. Karnataka to promote neera tapping

Neera, the sweet sap tapped from coconut tree, could be the much-needed elixir for thousands of beleaguered growers who have been battered by pest attacks and droughts in recent years. After the recent success in Kerala, where the State Government amended the 100-year old excise laws and has come out with a policy to promote neera production through farmers' associations, the Coconut Development Board wants other major growing States such as Karnataka to emulate the same. Neera is considered a health drink on account of its high nutritive and medicinal value. "Neera could do to India what crude oil has done to Saudi Arabia," said TK Jose, Chairman, CDB, commenting on the economic potential. Freshly tapped neera, if not stored under controlled temperature or consumed within a couple of hours, turns into toddy with about four per cent alcohol on account of fermentation. And the sale of toddy comes within the ambit of the State excise laws.

9. Perishable truck drivers get a lifeline

Home to world's second largest basket of fruits and vegetables, India wastes an enormous amount every year because of lack of adequate and effective storage. Some of this could be addressed, thanks to an initiative by National Centre for Cold Chain Development (NCCD). On Thursday, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh launched the Reefer Vehicle Call-in-centre (RVC), which is designed to facilitate smoother transportation of perishable goods and to address the challenges faced by reefer van operators on highways.

The RVC is a joint initiative by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, National Centre for Cold-chain Development (NCCD) and Mahindra Logistics. The RVC will serve as a single point telephonic contact for recording all forms of in-transit bottlenecks during transport of perishables.