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New Initiative

Government to buy oilseeds from farmers to cut down imports

The government will buy oilseeds and pulses directly from farmers in addition to its existing purchases of wheat and rice, to boost production and close a supply gap that has driven its annual import bill up to \$12 billion. The FCI will start buying in October, with bigger purchases in March when farmers start harvesting winter-sown crops.

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e-Governance Initiatives Launched Under the Digital India Programme

MPEDA has launched new e- governance programs, namely, Shrimp Price Information over SMS by a missed call, and mKRISHI a mobile app for aquaculture operations providing digitally enabled services on demand to the aqua farmers in the country. Also to provide Single window solution to exporters and other stake holders two new websites namely Online MPEDA Registration portal for Exporters, and MPEDA Portal have been launched.

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Spices Board rolls out financial assistance to growers

The Spices Board will provide financial assistance to farmers for irrigation, land development, mechanization, replanting, soil conservation and organic farming of various spices. Under the new scheme, small cardamom cultivators in Kerala and Tamil Nadu will receive up to Rs 70,000 for replanting while farmers in Karnataka will get up to Rs 50,000. Further, the board will provide financial assistance up to

25 % of actual cost of acquiring irrigation equipment ; up to 50 % for water storage structure and up to 25 per cent for soil conservation. The board's plans also include assistance for post-harvest processing of spices.

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Agriculture Marketing

Surge in onion prices

Onion prices have doubled in July due to supply shortage owing to heavy damage to the crop following unseasonal rains. To meet the crisis, the government had allowed stock building to public sector trading firms Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India, of 10,000 tonnes and 2,500 tonnes, respectively. However, this proved insufficient and now the government has floated a tender to import 10,000 tonnes, possibly from Turkey, Pakistan and China, to control the price rise. Supply orders will be regulated in units of 500 tonnes, depending on requirement. The Centre has also directed all state governments to take immediate action against hoarding and black-marketing of onions. State Governments are also announcing a slew of measures to meet the crisis. The State Government of Odisha has announced setting up 300 cold storages in a bid to bring down the steep prices of onions. The Delhi government is also planning to start the supply of onions at controlled prices to provide some relief to consumers.

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National online agriculture market

Government of India has made an outlay of Rs 200 crore for setting up an online agriculture market place that will integrate 585 wholesale mandis across the country to give farmers better access to market prices for the produce. The portal that will be set up under the Central Sector Scheme for Promotion of National Agricultural Market got its funding through the Agri-Tech Infrastructure Fund (ATIF). Private mandis will also be allowed access to the e-platform for price discovery but they will not be supported with any funds for equipment / infrastructure. SFAC will be the lead agency to develop the national e-market and will implement it in three phases during 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18. The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation will also give a onetime grant with a ceiling of Rs 30 lakh per mandi for setting up equipment and infrastructure to connect with the e-market platform.

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Trade

Government allows bulk exports of rice bran oil, removes quantitative restrictions

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the Commerce Ministry's proposal to "allow unrestricted exports of rice bran oil in bulk" and has also removed the "quantitative restrictions of 10,000 tonnes per annum on exports of organic edible oils". The move is expected to help small rice millers realise better price as demand of this cooking oil remains limited in the domestic market. The exports will be subject to export contracts being registered and certified as 'organic' by the Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA).

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10 per cent duty reinstated on wheat import

The government has decided to introduce an import duty of 10 percent on wheat. The duty is reinstated after a gap of eight years and the objective is to curb overseas purchases when domestic stocks are ample.

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Iran imposes import duty on wheat, barley, hurting hope for fresh trade

Iran has imposed import duties on wheat and barley a move that will make imports commercially unfeasible. The new wheat duty (1,500 rials per kilo, or about \$45 to \$50 a tonne) has been imposed for the next year and the barley duty until Sept. 22, 2015.

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Partnerships

MoU to promote IT-based information for farmers

A tripartite agreement is signed between ICRISAT and two departments

Government of Telangana to implement Information and Communication Technology-based knowledge sharing platforms and other agricultural innovation initiatives to improve productivity and profitability of small-holder farmers. The partnership will explore areas of collaboration in the field of digital agriculture along agriculture value chain and also explore the possibilities of ICRISAT playing an active role in the 'T Hub' (an incubator launched by the Telangana government).

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Odisha Govt inks MoU to provide post-harvest & storage solutions

Government of Odisha has signed a MoU with a leading post harvest and warehousing solutions company to provide preservation, maintenance and security services for foodgrains at various locations in the state. This is the first time the state government has outsourced warehousing facilities of this magnitude (nearly 1.10 lakh MT) to a private organization. The objective is to increase the quality of stocks and make sure that they are at par with FCI standards. The state also plans to soon extend this model to other commodities as well and encourage more private depositors to use public infrastructure.

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