

AGRICULTURE

National Workshop on Rainfed Areas The National Workshop on *New paradigm for rainfed farming – redesigning support systems and incentives* in Delhi during Sept 27-29 made a plea to the govt to focus its resources in enhancing the productivity of rainfed areas. The Workshop was jointly organised by Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN), Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) and Indian Council for Agriculture Research. The workshop highlighted the need for allocating greater share of resources and having a separate National Water Policy for Rainfed areas, among other issues. It was shown that if govt support systems are developed to increase carbon content in the rainfed soils, it will help increase the use of rainfall as soil moisture, increase the productivity of the rainfed crops and at the same time help reduce the global warming. A presentation by Dr Rupela of ICRISAT showed how it is possible to attain a productivity of 5.1 T per ha (compared to national average of 1.1 T per ha) in rainfed soils consistently for 33 years, supporting 21 persons in the process (compared to 4.8 persons currently) and yet the productivity is still increasing. Among other reasons, this was possible due to sequestered carbon to the extent of 330 kg per ha a year upto the depth of 120 cm. ICRISAT's research has shown that legumes in general and pigeon pea in particular have the ability to sequester more carbon in tropical soils. 60% of India's net sown area continues to remain rainfed and considering that over 60% of irrigated area is dependent on groundwater, which too can be recharged through such measures, the National Workshop urged paradigm shift in National Water Policies, plans and programmes. (SANDRP, The Hindu 24x07)

AP tribal women's efforts Eleven tribal women of Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh have transformed a six acre land that was previously used as a dumping yard into one producing fruits and vegetables that is able to sustain all of them. Their produce is largely organic as they do not use chemical fertilisers or pesticides. (The Tribune 21x07)

Organic Subsidy in Vidarbha? Maharashtra govt has proposed to the Prime Minister's office to include a scheme to offer subsidy to small and marginal farmers in Vidarbha who are ready to adopt organic farming. The proposal is to waive the loans of such farmers over three years. It is expected to cost the govt Rs 150 crore and benefit 1 lakh of the region's 17.6 lakh cotton farmers. It is hoped that this will bring down the cost of cultivation and at the same time fetch higher price for the produce. In Dhule district, 700 farmers have taken up organic cotton cultivation since 2002 and are able to get Rs 22-23 per kg of cotton, compared to the minimum support price of Rs 18 per kg. However, it is doubtful if the Rs 2000 crore GM seed lobby of Vidarbha will allow this to happen. Ram Kalaspurkar heads the Yavatmal based

Vidarbha Organic Farmers Association, a collective of 120 farmers in Yavatmal, Amravati and Wardha districts, growing organic crops over 3000 acres. He says, the natural seeds are an endangered species in Vidarbha because the state pushed modified seeds and the state will have to support such efforts over longer period so that adequate quantity of seeds are available. (The Hindustan Times 23x07)

HC moved to hike cotton MSP The Nagpur bench of the Bombay high court will hear arguments on an application to hike prices of a crop, possibly for the first instance of its kind. The criminal application was filed by Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti, charging the state government of ignoring farmers community that led them to take the extreme step of suicide. The petitioner claimed that the government failure to increase 'minimum support prices' of cotton to a substantial level has led cotton-growers to suffer severe losses. Due to the advent of BT cotton variety, farmers have to invest more, as the new variety consumes more water, destroys quality soil and is costly. (The Times of India 22x07)

Drought in Bundelkhand 4 of the 7 Bundelkhand districts, namely Mahoba, Banda, Chitrakoot & Lalitpur figure in the list of 8 districts declared as drought hit in Uttar Pradesh this year. The best option for water conservation in this region is check dams and bunds, says state Agriculture Production Commissioner Anis Ansari. And yet the union govt is pushing the Ken Betwa River Link as the solution for this region. Out of net sown area of 20 lakh ha, rabi crop is grown in 17.48 lakh ha. Rabi wheat productivity is 1.911 T per ha compared to state average of 2.766 T per ha. (The Hindu 24x07)

Agro Ecologic Zones in Punjab According to Dr Inder Abrol, Director, Centre for Advancement of Sustainable Agriculture, Punjab can be divided into three distinct agro ecological zones as follows.

	Kandi Area	Central Zone	Western Zone
Characteristics	Largely rainfed, submontane zones, like the neighbouring Himachal Pradesh, J&K, Uttarakhand	Dominated by Rice Wheat cropping pattern	Dominated by Cotton based cropping pattern
Problems	Drought, wide spread erosion, migration, etc	Declining water tables & soil & water quality	Rising water table, saline groundwater and the adverse impact of agro chemicals/ pesticides

(Indian Express 24x07)

Flown-in organic food rule change Food flown into the UK will be stripped of its organic status unless it meets new stricter standards, the Soil Association said. This has been suggested keeping in mind the contribution to global warming by long distance transportation. The association, which certifies 70% of the UK's £1.9 bn organic food, says firms must show trade brings benefit to developing world farmers. (BBC 25x07)