



BASAI News Updates

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Govt to brand fertiliser subsidy as PM scheme

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NEW DELHI: The Union government has decided to brand the Centre's fertiliser subsidy programme as a prime minister's scheme, naming it as the "Pradhanmantri Bharatiya Janurvarak Pariyojana", according to a notification by the fertilisers ministry on Wednesday, which HT has seen.

Packaging bags of various crop nutrients bought by millions of farmers across the country will also have a uniform new logo and design, according to the notification. Fertiliser companies will have to display the programme's new name prominently in their packaging.

Under the federally subsidised programme, the Union government reimburses fertiliser companies for selling their products to cultivators at lower-than-market prices. This subsidy stood at ₹1.62 lakh crore in 2021-22 and is projected to touch a record ₹ 2.50 lakh crore in 2022-23 due to spiralling international prices. India depends on imports to meet domestic demand for a bulk of key crop nutrients, such as DAP.

According to the notification, which contained standard operating procedures (SOPs) for fertiliser firms, the branding of



Packaging bags will also have a uniform new logo and design. HT

subsidised fertilisers will have the words "Pradhanmantri" and "Bharat".

Two-thirds of the area on the top half of a fertiliser bag will be used for the official branding of the subsidy programme as a prime minister's scheme, according to new packaging standards. A fertiliser firm can use the rest one-third area for its own logo and branding as well as printing other information relating to the product, the notification said.

The new fertiliser subsidy regime will also be known as "One Nation One Fertilisers (sic)", according to notification. Crop-nutrient firms will have a lead time till December 31 to exhaust all old packaging bags. "New bags will hit the market in October and the lead time should be sufficient to make the switch," a fertiliser company executive said, on anonymity.

The crucial interlinking of soil degradation and health

A recent global symposium by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) on soil and nutrition brought together scientists and policymakers to review the status and challenges of soil fertility in relation to crop, animal, and human nutrition. The urgency to protect soil was emphasised to build nutritious agri-food systems for enhanced human health while also protecting the environment. With the target date for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fast approaching, it emphasised the urgency to reverse soil degradation and tackle its effects on agri-food systems.

In India, the rapid degradation of topsoil is raising concerns about agricultural productivity and food security. According to the National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning, soil degradation is estimated in 147 million hectares of the country's land. Degraded soil lacks the ability to provide physical support as well as the chemical and biological environment for nutrient flow to plant roots, adversely affecting the mechanisms and quantum of crop nutrient uptake.

A primary reason for the decline in soil fertility is the rampant use of fertiliser and pesticides that have depleted the soil of organic matter, adversely impacting its capacity to store and supply essential nutrients. According to the CEO of the National Rainfed Area Authority, Ashok Dalwai, the organic matter in soil has reduced from 1% to almost 0.3% in the past 70 years.

Poor soil health directly impacts the nutrient content of the cereals, fruits, and vegetables grown in it. The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) found a significant decrease in the nutrition level of most food items between 1989 and 2017. The level of carbohydrates in wheat declined by 9.1%, whereas the protein in whole brown lentils and red gram decreased to the tune of 10.4% and 2.7%, respectively. NIN found a significant decline in other minerals including protein, calcium, iron, and phosphorus in various fruits and vegetables over this period.

Following the period of the Green Revolution in the 1960s, the focus of the food system has been on increasing the productivity of basic staples through rampant usage of fertiliser, while neglecting the health of the soil. As a result, most crops are grown on soil that

lacks organic matter and leads to the production of crops deficient in micronutrients. Such food crops can cause severe and invisible health problems known as hidden hunger. A 2017 Harvard University study raised alarming concerns for India as it stated that the country is likely to bear the greatest burden of such hidden hunger, with an estimated 50 million people becoming zinc deficient, 38 million becoming protein deficient, and 502 million women and children becoming vulnerable to diseases associated with iron deficiency. Even the last two rounds of the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) point to the falling nutritional status of a significant section of the Indian population. According to the survey, more than 35.5% of the country's children below the age of five are stunted and 67% suffer from anaemia. The cases of anaemia among women have risen to 57% as per NFHS-5 (2019-20), up from 53% in NFHS-4 (2015-16). Further, obesity among women has increased from 20.6% in 2015-16 to 24% in 2019-20. Men in the same age group have also experienced a rise in the levels of obesity.

While the government has initiated several programmes to tackle undernutrition, the connection of soil with nutrient deficiencies in crops, food, and humans is not so discernible. India has not paid adequate attention to the importance of soil to provide nutrients to support crop growth with the overarching goal of eradicating malnutrition. The need of the hour is to focus on the interconnection among soil, plant, and human health. Globally, regenerative organic agriculture has emerged as one of the most effective methods to combat malnutrition. With its core principle based on the preservation of topsoil through minimal tillage, planting cover crops, increasing biodiversity, and integration of livestock, regenerative agriculture has the potential to increase productivity and produce nutritionally dense food. With adequate training facilities and policy incentives, farmers could adopt regenerative farming to address issues of soil degradation and low productivity, and help reduce the problem of undernutrition in the country.



Prerna Terway



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GLOBE TROT



The pagodas on the Louxingdun island that usually remain partially submerged under Poyang Lake. It has nearly dried up due to a regional drought in China. REUTERS

Europe may see 3 more dry months: EU report
BRUSSELS: Parts of the European Union could face three more months of warmer and drier conditions as Europe weathers a major drought that has fuelled forest fires, dried up rivers and devastated crops, 27-nation bloc's Earth Observation Programme warns in a report. "Warmer and drier than usual conditions are likely to occur in the western Euro-Mediterranean region in the coming months till November 2022," notably in Spain and Portugal, said the report. AP

Apple growers to protest against Adani stores today

SHIMLA, AUGUST 24

Apple growers will hold a protest against the three Adani-owned controlled atmosphere (CA) stores in the district tomorrow.

After holding a protest against the government at the Secretariat on August 5 and courting arrest on August 17 over their grievances, the apple growers have now trained their guns on private CA stores, beginning with the Adani-owned CA stores, the largest of the 18 CA stores involved in fruit

WHAT THEY WANT

30% increase in the procurement prices of apple

- Weighing the produce in the presence of growers
- Transparency in the colour classification process



procurement in the state.

Despite the dharna, the stores will continue procuring apple tomorrow. "There are long queues of loaded vehicles outside our stores. If we

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Apple growers to protest...

don't buy, these growers will be inconvenienced," said an Adani spokesperson. The biggest grouse the growers have against the CA stores is the rate at which they are procuring apple. "In 2017, CA stores offered Rs 85 per kg for premium apple. Even the Adani-owned stores purchased premium apple at Rs 88 per kg in 2020. In 2022, the Adani store is offering Rs 76 per kg. While our input cost has increased sharply over the past couple of years, the procurement prices of the CA stores are going down," said Sanyukt Kisan Manch convener Harish Chauhan.

"We are demanding at least 30 per cent increase in the procurement prices of apple to partially offset the increase in our input costs," said Chauhan. The Adani spokesperson, however, said they fixed prices after several rounds of negotiations with

their customers. "This time too, the prices were fixed after negotiations. Besides, our prices are higher than what the growers are getting in open mandis," the spokesperson said.

Apart from an increase in rates, the other two major demands are weighing the produce in front of the growers and the presence of growers' representatives at the time when the colour sensors are calibrated. "The stores don't weigh the produce in front of the growers. Also, the colour classification is quite arbitrary. We want transparency on both these counts," said Sanjeev Thakur, president of the Chawara Apple Valley Society.

While agreeing that vehicles are not weighed as these enter the stores, which the growers are demanding, the Adani spokesperson claimed that they had a transparent system nonetheless. — TNS

2 swine flu, 12 dengue cases reported in one month

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

YAMUNANAGAR, AUGUST 24

Two swine flu and 12 cases of dengue have so far been reported in the district in the month of August this year.

The District Surveillance Officer, Dr Vagish Gutain, told that one of the swine flu patients was a 43-year-old woman, while the second patient was a three-year-old girl who succumbed to it. Both of them were tested positive for the flu at the PGL, Chandigarh, further said Dr Gutain.

Civil Surgeon Dr Manjit Singh said a ward had been made for taking in the swine flu cases at the Mukand Lal District Civil Hospital.

HEALTH DEPT TOLD TO RELEASE GUMBUJIA FISH IN PONDS



"A person experiencing swine flu symptoms must visit the nearest health centre at the earliest, get tested and try to stay put as per the doctor's advice", added Dr Manjit.

Deputy Commissioner Parth Gupta had directed the officials to conduct fogging in the district, covering both urban and rural areas, for prevention against dengue and malaria.

He added that Municipal Corporation and Municipal Committees would take the charge of conducting fogging in the urban localities, of the district while the Panchayati Raj Department would be responsible for the same in the rural areas. He even directed officials of the Health Department to release Gumbujia fish in ponds of the district and spray larvacide to kill mosquito larvae.