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NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD JANUARY 25TH TO JANUARY 31ST, 2016

PLAN FOR MAKING AGRICULTURE SECTOR ABLE TO MITIGATE IMPACTS OF NATURAL DISASTERS

Dawn, January 25th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of United Nations and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) have finalised an institutional assessment for the integration of disaster risk management and the agriculture sector of Pakistan in an attempt to make the agriculture sector capable of preventing and mitigating the impacts of natural disasters.

According to FAO officials in Pakistan, the assessment will serve as a key tool to further develop the capacity of the agriculture sector institutions to mainstream the disaster risk management with a special focus on disaster reduction in their planning and action, and to prepare and respond to emergencies.

As a result of interviews with all important stakeholders at federal and provincial levels, including members of vulnerable communities, disaster management officials at provincial, regional and district levels, members of civil society organisations and government officials responsible for the agriculture sector, strengths and weaknesses, as well as needs of disaster risk management systems of all relevant institutions have been identified.

The FAO and NDMA after a series of workshops with these stakeholders across the country finalised findings and recommendations of the assessment. The NDMA will work with all stakeholders to implement recommendations of the assessment study.

Each year Pakistan is struck by a multitude of natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, landslides and avalanches. Agriculture is one of the sectors most affected by these phenomena.

With a 21 per cent share of the national GDP and a 45 per cent share of Pakistan’s total workforce, it is crucial that the agricultural sector is able to prevent and mitigate the impact of disasters.

Between 2003 and 2013, disasters triggered by natural hazards caused $1.5 trillion in economic damage worldwide. In developing countries alone, these disasters cost about $550 billion in estimated damage and affected 2 billion people.

Such disasters often undermine national economic growth and development goals, as well as agriculture sector growth and sustainable sector development. However, there is no clear understanding of the economic impact of disasters on the agriculture sector.

Initial results of a latest FAO study says nearly a quarter of damages wrought by natural disasters on the developing world are borne by the agricultural sector. The FAO has launched a special facility aimed at helping countries better equip their food production sectors to reduce risk exposure, limit impacts, and be better prepared to cope with disasters.

Twenty-two per cent of all damages inflicted by natural hazards such as drought, floods or tsunamis are registered within the agriculture sector, according to FAO’s analysis of 78 post-disaster needs assessments in 48 developing countries spanning the 2003-2013 period.

These damages and losses are often incurred by poor rural and semi-rural communities without insurance and lacking the financial resources needed to regain lost livelihoods. Yet only 4.5 per cent of post-disaster humanitarian aid in the 2003-2013 period targeted agriculture.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1235211/plan-for-making-agriculture-sector-able-to-mitigate-impacts-of-natural-disasters

GREEN FIELDS RESURFACE AFTER CANAL LINING STARTS

Dawn, January 25th, 2016

MALIK TAHSEEN RAZA

MUZAFFARGARH: Though Muzaffargarh canal lining project is nowhere near its completion, the farmers whose land was earlier uncultivable have started benefitting from it as waterlogging has stopped since the launch of the project.

Lavish green wheat fields can now be seen on thousands of acres of land which had suffered waterlogging in the district.

“I have cultivated wheat on my land after two decades of waterlogging and the crop is in good condition as seeping of the canal water has stopped. Hundreds acres of other farmers are coming back to normal condition because water has receded,” says Malik Shabbir Hanss, a farmer from Mahmoodkot.

Ajmal Khan, another farmer from the area, says he is being called a Zamindar once again after a long time, adding his family faced poverty as waterlogging and salinity had damaged his 10 acres land.

"I was a good farmer in the 1980s before waterlogging destroyed my land. Now I have again cultivated wheat in my fields," he says.
Khan is grateful to the last PPP government for starting the project.
Many other local farmers claim their land value has increased and the project has brought back prosperity for them.
The Rs13bn mega project of canal lining will complete in 2017 and its two parts will be completed by April 30, says Project Manager Muhammad Khalid.
He says water will be released into the canal on April 30, adding that most of the work has been completed but the project will complete in 2017.
Chief Engineer Muhammad Hasan says though the project was approved by the PPP government, it started with a two-year delay.
Officials said the federal as well as provincial governments had stopped work in 2013 but it started two years later when the federal government released funds for it.
According to an estimate, canal lining project will bring 400,000 waterlogged land back to fertility. It was to complete in 2015 but now it will be completed in 2017 due to the delay in its start.
According to the original plan, the project was to start in March 2013 when the then prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and former foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar had laid its foundation.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1235220

DIP IN FERTILISER SALES

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 25th, 2016
FAUJI Fertiliser Company Limited with paid-up capital of Rs12.7bn is 44pc owned by the Fauji Foundation. On the last Thursday's closing price of the FFC stock at Rs110.90, the outstanding shares at 1,272m, produces the company's market capitalisation at Rs141bn.
The total assets of the company, according to the last released figures for Sept 30, 2015, stood at Rs80bn.
Major competitors in the fertiliser industry include Engro Fertiliser; Fatima Fertiliser; Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim and National Fertiliser Marketing Ltd (NFML) The. FFC has retained its position among the hundreds of listed companies represented by the fact that the company clinched an award among the 'KSE top-25 companies' consecutively for 20 years since 1994. It has earned well and paid generous dividends to the shareholders.
Yet, like the rest of the industry, in the recent times the company has been plagued by problems. Gas price hike together with the decline in farmers' income have put a dent in margins of fertiliser companies across the spectrum.
Analyst Tahir Abbas at brokerage Arif Habib Limited said in last week's report that as per the latest fertiliser offtake numbers urea sales in Dec stood at 778,000 tonnes which took the industry cumulative off-take for CY15 to 5,557 thousand tonnes, reflecting decrease of 1pc YoY.
Things do not appear to improve in the short term. Analyst Danish Ali Kazmi who follows the fertiliser sector for brokerage Alfalah Securities says: "The situation for urea players still looks bleak as urea prices are likely to remain on the lower side given lower demand in upcoming quarters owing to seasonality and decline in international urea prices which has limited the industry's pricing power.
For the latest three-quarters ended Sept 30, 2015, FFC posted after tax profit amounting to Rs11.946bn, down from Rs12.961bn in the corresponding period of the previous year. Chairman retired Lt.Gen.Khalid Nawaz Khan stated in the directors' report that the urea production from the three plants of the company stood at 1,818 thousand tonnes which was higher by 3pc YoY, due to improved operating efficiency.
However, substantial increase in feed/fuel gas prices with effect from Sep 1, 2015 led to escalation in urea selling prices. "However, the government announced its intention of reducing the feed gas price to lower the selling prices of urea, through the Prime Minister's 'Kissan Package'.
Non implementation of this decision resulted in uncertainty in the market, negatively impacting urea off-take. The chairman, however, affirmed that the board of directors remained focused towards sustained profitability and shareholders' return through cost economisation and improved efficiencies to increase productivity, besides augmenting company earnings through its diversification initiatives.
And what are those diversifications? Sector watchers say that FFC has partnered with Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation (TPDC); Ferrostaal Industrial Projects (of Germany) and Haldor Topsoe (of Denmark) to set up a 1.3m tonne fertiliser plant in Tanzania. The FFC board gave its nod to the project in the autumn last year.
In addition, FFC's wholly owned subsidiary, Fauji Fresh-n-Fresh's individually quick freeze project (QFP) is like to commence operations in the 1HCY16. In order to remain competitive, the company is also planning to install a coal fired boiler at Goth Machhi which will enhance urea production and lower the fuel stock price.

Analyst Muhammad Awais Ashraf at Foundation Securities in his research note issued last week showed concern that despite the strong brand name, weak agronomics made it difficult for FFC to pass on gas tariff hike. “Another probable gas price hike will make the situation worse for the company as we do not see any improvement in farmer’s cash position”.

Is there a threat of further hike in gas price? Market watchers remind that the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) had raised revenue requirements of gas distribution companies by 27pc, which was a prerequisite for determination of consumer tariff, making a strong case for gas price hike as the government was committed to reduce subsidies. However, the fertiliser companies could breathe easy after the Prime Minister delayed the hike till June 2016.

The directors of FFC in their report stated that for nine months to Sept 30, 2015, sales revenue was recorded at Rs54.3bn, marginally down by 1pc YoY owing to lower urea off-take during the third quarter whereas the financing costs increased by Rs357m, mainly because of higher borrowings for payment of withheld GIDC besides increased working capital financing caused by the decline in cash generation owing to uncertain market conditions. Incremental levies including 3pc super tax and 2.50pc higher dividend taxation, further pressurised company margins.

Sector analysts believe that until the situation in core business of urea takes a turn for the better, the company will have to augment earnings from investments. On Sept 30, 2015, the company carried sizeable amount of Rs28bn representing ‘long term investments’.

The FFC investment portfolio consists mainly of 43.15pc shareholding in Askari Bank; 49.88pc stake in Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim and 6.79pc holding in Fauji Cement. All of them together yielded hefty dividend of Rs2.9bn in CY14. Moreover, the company’s subsidiary, FFC Energy Limited (FFCEL) received its commercial operation date (COD) tariff on July 31, 2015 which will subsequently pave way for further increase in dividend income.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1235119

AGRICULTURE SECTOR: DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT DISCUSSED

The Express Tribune, January 26th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: A workshop at the Food and Agriculture Organisation office on Monday finalised institutional assessment on the integration of disaster risk management for the agriculture sector of the country.

It was jointly organised by FAO, Disaster Management Authority (DMA) and Civil Society Organisation(CSOs).

Francisco Gamarro, representative of the FAO, said, “This assessment is a key tool to further develop the capacity of the agricultural institutions to mainstream the disaster risk management, with a special focus on disaster risk reduction, in their planning and action”.

Every year, Pakistan is struck by a multitude of natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, landslides and avalanches, and agriculture is one of the sectors most affected by these phenomena. With a 21% share of the national GDP and a 45% share of Pakistan’s total workforce, it is crucial that the sector is able to prevent and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1034258/agriculture-sector-disaster-risk-management-discussed/

COTTON POWERHOUSE: PAKISTAN CONTINUES TO FACE DECREASE IN PRODUCTION

The Express Tribune, January 26th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: As expected, Pakistan faces a decline in cotton production by up to 33% with Punjab’s contribution going down by almost 44%, according to data available as of January 15.

The decrease in cotton production does not come as a surprise as a depressed commodities market and floods have taken their toll on farmers, with inadequate measures against pest attacks also contributing to the decline.

According to a consolidated statement released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners’ Association, Punjab was the worst-hit in terms of decrease in production. Sindh fared comparatively much better, with a 4% decline.

As of January 15, total cotton bales in the country amounted to 9.313 million compared to 14.25 million in the corresponding period of last year. Punjab’s share amounted to 5.74 million compared to 10.34 million the previous year. Sindh produced 3.73 million.

In Punjab, Multan and Lodhran faced a drastic reduction in cotton production, registering a 73% decline. Three cities of Sindh were most affected including Ghotki, Badin and Mirpurkhas with 43%, 42% and 31%, respectively.

Cotton Commissioner Khalid Abdullah said the department is taking various steps to stabilise cotton prices amid the shortfall. “There are multiple factors behind the shortfall in 2015, including climate change, insect attack and low prices of cotton,” said Abdullah. “Climate change implications are a major blow and that is beyond human control.” However, he said the department is closely working with the Pakistan Meteorological department to take appropriate steps to mitigate climatic implications.

In addition, he said that the department in coordination with provincial governments and other stakeholders has started awareness campaigns to educate farmers and enable them to take precautionary measures against insect attacks.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1034118/cotton-powerhouse-pakistan-continues-to-face-decrease-in-production/

PAKISTAN LEFT WITH HIGHER IMPORT OF COTTON

The Express Tribune, January 30th, 2016.
Peer Muhammad
ISLAMABAD: Import of cotton has shown a sharp increase during the first half of the current fiscal year 2015-16, against the corresponding period of last year after a slump in domestic production.
According to latest figures, Pakistan's cotton import jumped to 194,465 tons amounting to $310 million during July-December 2015 compared to 48,480 metric tons of cotton worth $113 million in the corresponding period last year.
Similarly, textile and clothing exports declined by 8.93% to $6.269 billion during the first half of FY16 from $6.884 billion in the same period of last year. The fall was witnessed despite duty-free access to the European markets under the GSP Plus scheme.
Cotton production in the country declined 33% with a decrease of 44% in the largest cotton producing province Punjab alone.
According to officials, climate change; including heavy rains, pest attacks and harsh weather across the cotton growing areas are to blame for the slump in production, due to which the crop in most areas of southern Punjab was badly damaged.
"Most of the cotton imports by Pakistani traders are being sourced from India, which is facilitating its cotton farmers by offering duty drawback facility, interest rate concessions and infrastructure schemes," said sources in the Ministry of Commerce.
Showing his concern, Council of Loom Owners Association Chairman Wahid Khalique Ramay said that yarn prices had increased significantly due to shortfall of cotton. "This has led to an increase in prices of cotton fabrics and garments.
"This will also affect the country's value added textile exports," he noted.
He further said that the costly raw material of textile products was a key hurdle in competing with the international market. "Such is not the case in India, Bangladesh and Thailand and this is why these countries are capturing Pakistani markets in the region and globally.
"Almost 20-25% of looms have been closed down, the ratio of unemployment has also risen," he added.
Furthermore, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) has expressed concerns over the situation and has opposed any proposal pertaining to the waiving off duty and tax on import of cotton from India.
"The cotton economy is passing through its worst crisis in history. We must support both the growers and small loom owners and avoid benefiting big cartels at the cost of the national economy," said the association chairman Nawab Shehzad.
He said that regulatory duty, sales tax and customs duty on the import of cotton should not be withdrawn and it must continue for the survival of local farmers as well as ginners.
He said India has been a major beneficiary of duty-free import of cotton yarn by Pakistan for about four years. This has badly hit the domestic industry and agricultural sector of the country under a well-planned conspiracy.
He said that farmers are now switching to other crops due to the injustice meted out to them, which would have long term implications on the national economy.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1036653/low-local-production-pakistan-left-with-higher-import-of-cotton/

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS: DELEGATION TO LEAVE FOR IRAN TO REMOVE EXPORT HURDLES

The Express Tribune, January 31st, 2016.
Peer Muhammad
ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani delegation, led by the federal minister of national food security and research, will leave for Iran soon to negotiate with the authorities there, particularly officials of the food ministry, in an effort to remove the hurdles in the way of export of agricultural products.
The visit was planned following a recent brainstorming session among officials of the ministries of commerce and food security, State Bank of Pakistan and Federal Board of Revenue in the backdrop of lifting of international sanctions from Iran, a senior officer in the Ministry of Commerce said while talking to The Express Tribune.

They discussed how Pakistan could capitalise on the trade opportunities in the neighbouring Islamic republic and boost its exports.

According to the officer, most of Pakistan's agricultural products have a good market in Iran, but the Iranian agricultural ministry is reluctant to issue necessary permits to its importers.
"To remove the obstacles, a high-level delegation is going to Iran soon to take up the challenges and help pave the way for favourable conditions for bilateral trade," the officer said.
The delegation will highlight all possible avenues for giving a push to bilateral trade and investment. It will discuss the possibility of rice exports as the commodity is hugely popular in Iran and Pakistan has a surplus produce, which can be shipped to the neighbouring market to meet its demand.
The officer said the State Bank of Pakistan, in collaboration with the Iranian central bank, would establish banking channels between the two countries shortly to put in place a payment mechanism that had been suspended after the imposition of international sanctions on Iran for its alleged nuclear programme.
"We have been told by State Bank officials that they have made all arrangements for establishing banking links with Iran," he said.
Apart from formal trade through banking channels, Pakistan will also allow informal trade under barter system to people living close to the border.
"Iranian border community gets import and export quotas from its government and we must tap that opportunity by encouraging our border community to engage in barter trade," he said.
Among agricultural commodities, Pakistan's rice has great demand in Iran. According to 2005-14 statistics, rice had a 63% share in exports and the remaining was held by other goods. Kinnow had the second largest share in exports to Iran.
Exports reached the maximum of $400 million in 2008-09, but they suddenly started falling in the face of added sanctions on Iran and in the very next year shipments dropped around 100% to $200 million.
Since then, exports had been falling rapidly and in 2013-14 they stood at just $53 million.
Exporters have cited the absence of payment mechanism in the face of restrictions on banking channels as the primary factor behind the falling trade as in such a scenario the business community was reluctant to make exports to Iran.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1037118/agricultural-products-delegation-to-leave-for-iran-to-remove-export-hurdles/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD JANUARY 18TH TO JANUARY 24TH, 2016

FARMERS FOR BRICK-LINING OF TRIMMU-SIDHNAI LINK CANAL

Dawn, January 18th, 2016
TOBA TEK SINGH: Scores of farmers belonging to Toba, Khanewal and Jhang districts on Sunday took out a rally demanding brick-lining of Trimmu-Sidhnai link canal to control water-logging in the area.
The protesters riding motorcycles and tractor-trollies started the rally from Shorkot Cantonment and reached Shahbaz Chowk here.
Addressing the rally participants at Shahbaz Chowk, leader of Pirmahal Farmers Action Committee Shafqat Rasool, district Awami Workers Party president Zubair Chaudhry and Kissan Committee president Chaudhry Sarwar alleged that Punjab irrigation secretary and other higher authorities were not accepting farmers' demand for the canal brick-lining.
They claimed that more than 80,000 acres of farmland at 200 villages in the three districts had been destroyed due to water-logging or overflow from Trimmu-Sidhnai link canal.
They added that chief minister had approved Rs7 billion for canal brick-lining but the irrigation secretary and other officials were creating hurdle in the implementation of the project which was recommended in a survey conducted by Nespak engineers.
Instead, they said, construction of a drain was being planned along the canal.
They said drains had already failed to control water-logging due to a heavy flow in the canal.
They said that because of the problem they were unable to cultivate crops on their lands while thousands of houses at the affected villages had developed cracks due to water-logging.
They urged Punjab chief minister to cancel the proposed project of construction of drains and restore canal brick-lining plan which was the only solution to the issue as per a Nespak feasibility report.
They announced if their demand was not accepted they would protest outside Chief Minister House in Lahore.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1233704/farmers-for-brick-lining-of-trimmu-sidhnai-link-canal

HIGH COST OF SUBSIDY IN SUGAR EXPORTS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 18th, 2016
ASHFAK BOKHARI

THE amount of subsidy given to sugar tycoons on their 2012 exports, whose 'justification' has been challenged by the National Assembly's standing committee on industries and got its payment stalled, pales in importance when compared with the latest figure of subsidy being paid to them on their current exports.

The rationale remains the same in both cases. The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet gave permission for sugar export in November 2012 and then in its meeting on March 6, 2013 approved an inland freight subsidy of Rs2.1bn at the rate of Rs1.75/kg on 1.2m tonnes and Re1/kg on 0.5m tonnes on grounds that the 'prices in the international market were on decline' and that there were 'abundant sugar stocks' in the country.

Similarly, on Dec 7, 2015, the ECC allowed 500,000 tonnes of sugar for export with Rs13/kg subsidy, amounting to Rs6.5bn, because of 'falling prices' in the international market and that production at home is expected to be in surplus in the wake of a bumper sugarcane crop.

The reason why the standing committee opposed the 2012 subsidy was that it provided 'benefits to sugar millers only and not the farmers'. But there is no share of farmers in the latest subsidy as well. Suggestions that a big chunk of surplus sugar be provided to low-income sections of population on lower prices through utility stores were rejected by the finance ministry.

The ministry of industries and production is reported to have opposed export of such a huge quantity and wanted it to be restricted to 120,000 tonnes, the leftover of the last season. The exportable surplus, it suggested, should be provided to the Utility Stores Corporation at the international market price and the price differential may be taken up by the federal government. But the ECC favoured the demand of Pakistan Sugar Mills Association for export of 500,000 tonnes of the commodity.

However, the federal government has this time been more sympathetic towards the cane growers, while offering billions of rupees in subsidy to the millers, by linking the export of sugar with payment of outstanding dues to the farmers up to the last season and having started crushing on full scale.

To know the exact basis of 2012 subsidy to sugar millers, most of whom sit in the assemblies and exercise great influence in matters of decision-making, the NA committee contacted ministries concerned to obtain relevant information in this regard but failed to get anything.

The committee chairman, Asad Umar, then asked the Ministry of Industries and Production and the Ministry of Commerce, or either of the two, to refer the matter to National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to find out the basis on which the subsidy decision was taken. But both the ministries refused to do so.

The commerce ministry said that no action as such has been taken by it and the reference to the NAB, if at all, is to be made by it and not by the standing committee. But an additional director, NAB, who was present in the committee's meeting on May 8, 2015 said NAB treats the instructions of the Public Accounts Committee and standing committees as executive orders and that the sugar subsidy case can be sent to NAB for probe by the standing committee itself.

Encouraged by his statement, the committee sent the case to NAB on May 19, 2015.

The commerce ministry has, meanwhile, directed the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) not to release subsidy to sugar mills till completion of the NAB inquiry. Asad Umar, who is actively pursuing the case, was informed by a NAB official during a recent meeting of the committee that the bureau has obtained the record from the ministries concerned and the TDAP and that the inquiry will be completed within one month.

Meanwhile, the government has decided in principle to deregulate the sugarcane prices from the new season this year so that the 'government's involvement and provision of subsidy' is eliminated once and for all.

The whole problem arises from fixing of support price by the federal government and difference in prices set by the provincial governments. The final decision would, however, be taken by the federal cabinet after consultations with the provinces.

However, while allowing export of 0.5m tonnes, the ECC also shifted half of the burden of subsidy to the provinces who will release over Rs3bn to the sugar tycoons. It was in this context that the commerce ministry, in its summary, sought subsidy on the export of 250,000 tonnes but the ECC ignored the proposal and allowed export of 500,000 tonnes.

Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal, who was present in the Dec 7 meeting, suggested that sugar mills should spend 10pc of the subsidy on research and development activities.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1233622

CORPORATE HEGEMONY OVER SEED SECTOR

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 18th, 2016

AZRA TALAT SAYEED

THE Standing Committee of the National Assembly approved the Plant Breeders' Rights Act on Jan 6. The story has taken 20 years in telling people that the current Plant Breeders' Rights Act lies in the corporate interest.

The country is in an extremely vulnerable situation be it the economic hardship faced due to shrinking productivity, escalating hunger and malnutrition, or the multiple faces of climate change in the form of heat wave, drought or floods. To these factors may be added the WTO trade-related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement.

The backbone of the economy is still largely agriculture not only for food security but for the livelihood of the most vulnerable people. Farming is also a crucial raw material provider to our industries particularly cotton for our most thriving textile sector.

The consistent interest of international aid agencies such as the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) and Australian Aid Agency (DFAT) is very visible in the agriculture sector encompassing the farm land, policy arena and universities. This interest is tied to their self interest as agriculture is a lucrative sector for their corporate businesses. And the seed sector is a critical area in this context. The amended Seed Act 2015 was part of the agenda to promote corporate interest in Pakistan's agriculture.

The Plant Breeders' Rights are similar to patent systems, meant to prohibit the unauthorised use of a plant variety that is 'owned' by a plant breeder. Specialists explain that the PBR laws as applied only to plants, and hence are among the class of sui generis systems, that is, special purpose systems. For a plant breeder to be granted PBR, the variety has to meet conditions of being distinct, stable in successive generations and with uniform characteristics. Plant breeders have to seek intellectual property (IP) protection in every country where they want to commercially produce their plant variety.

This is the crux of the matter. Giant seed corporations who now claim 'ownership' over genetic material are using it to produce new so-called GMOs, such as Bt cotton, golden rice or other hundreds of genetically modified seeds and plants.

The corporate seed sector, much of which is based in the rich industrialised North, and their powerful governments, has insisted that all WTO member-states comply with a harmonised minimum level of IP protection.

The International Convention (treaty) for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants was first adopted in 1961. This treaty in its earlier years basically catered to industrialised countries when IP on living things were forbidden. The treaty has been revised many times and the last time in 1991.

The treaty is considered highly dangerous to not only farmers but Earth's biodiversity as conditions of stability and uniformity rely on very few genes.

The vast array of genetic resources is critical to the survival of ecological zones and systems. The myopic intervention in the agriculture system can result in wide spread disease and disaster as seen in the Bt cotton harvest season in 2015.

According to the 1991 treaty, if a farmer has sown a field with protected variety, he/she is liable for infringement and can end up paying penalty as is specified in the PBR laws. It needs to be stressed that the PBR will take away the ability of farmers to save and exchange seeds and economise on costs.

For the small and landless farmers, the Plant Breeders' Rights Act will result in a fresh wave of financial hardships. The indigenous, traditional methods and systems of food production are all at risk.

However, there is still time. Agriculture is a provincial subject as per the 18th Amendment. It is critical that this PBR legislative process should be brought under the ambit of the provincial assemblies and opened for farmers' consultation. We cannot afford to have our seed sector governed by the giant corporate.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1233611

UNCERTAIN CROPPING PATTERN

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 18th, 2016

THESE seem to be uncertain times for Pakistan's agriculture. Climate changes are putting what agriculturists call farming upside down. In supposedly extreme winter weather, temperatures have maintained a pattern normally witnessed in the spring season, and are confusing the crop growers.

In December 2015, the base temperature rose by almost three to 4°C. The minimum temperature dropped to 5°C during the last year against around 9°C this year. What twisted the picture further was in the upper limit: against 12°C last year, it maintained a steady pattern of early 20°C – at 23°C. The fluctuation between both was 14°C for most of December against 6°C the preceding year.

The first two weeks of the current month maintained almost an identical pattern and the metrological officials are warning that mercury would start rising after mid-January as it normally does, almost skipping the much-needed winter spell that helps rejuvenate most of the fruit plants and wheat tillering.

The final hope of traditional winter weather died with last week's wet spell, which proved too little and too short to cause any major change; it only refreshed weather rather than bringing mercury down.
According to farmers, wheat tillering has suffered the most especially in case of an early sown crop. Many plants are now maintaining a single stem rather than a cluster. It is winter cold, helped by foggy and cloudy weather that aids plants multiply stems after the germination.
That process has now somewhat missing because of consistent high temperatures during December and first fortnight of January. This can bring the final yield down.
Similarly, the potato growers have delayed the harvesting owing to depressed prices and a relatively hot weather. Normally, cold frosty weather burns exposed parts of the potatoes and force farmers to go for harvesting.
This year, fields are still green and the farmers can wait, but it may result in lower market prices. While the central Punjab farmers are postponing harvesting to get benefit of increased weight, by allowing further growth of potatoes; their gains could be neutralised quickly when most of the crop is harvested in a short span of time.
The delay in harvesting may eat into the time of corn sowing. This would take the crop directly into hot days of March for early maturity. The crop matures on heat units rather than the time span.
Hot weather would also restrict vegetative growth, force the crop into an early pollination and affect the yield. If weather gets hotter, pollen may also get wasted.
The orchard owners, especially those of mango, have their own worries. Their plants have already started bearing flowers, which they normally do after mid-February, because of a relatively hot weather, which is creating spring conditions. They fear that if cold weather returns, the flowering would get burnt and plants would not be strong enough to have another bout of flowers after the cold spell.
If hot weather continues, the plants may start yielding much earlier than due time, hitting the entire natural cycle. The citrus plants are also in the same disturbed cycle, as have started bearing flowers quickly. The entire cropping pattern is thus in for uncertain times.
What makes the matter worse, no one is there to guide and remove the farmers' confusion because there have been no studies on changing climate pattern, leave alone its impact on individual crop cycles.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1233615/uncertain-cropping-pattern

DAMAGED KHARIF CROPS MAY AFFECT GDP GROWTH: SBP

Dawn, January 19th, 2016
KARACHI: Achieving the targeted GDP growth rate of 5.5 per cent has become challenging due to damage to all major kharif crops, said the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in its first-quarter report of this fiscal year.
"Preliminary estimates suggest below-target production for all major kharif crops (cotton, rice, and sugarcane) due to bad weather, virus attacks and sluggish agri commodity prices. More importantly, cotton and rice crops would not be able to achieve last year's production levels," the report said.
However, the SBP sees a ray of hope in the large-scale manufacturing (LSM) sector, which "has shown some signs of recovery on the back of a steep fall in global prices of key raw materials; robust growth in construction (mainly bolstered by increase in public sector spending) and auto sector; and better gas availability to fertiliser." But despite these positive developments, LSM needs further momentum to achieve full year growth target of 6pc.
Within the service sector, the State Bank expects transport, storage and communication, and finance and insurance subsectors (with combined share of 28.1pc in services) to grow strongly.
However, the outlook for wholesale and retail trade subsector (having 31.1pc weight) remains unclear: while a better performance by the large-scale manufacturing is positive for wholesale and retail trade, the overall trading of agriculture produce is likely to remain weak due to fall in production of rice and cotton crops.
The report finds it encouraging that a number of firms in cement, textile, iron and steel, and POL (petroleum, oil and lubricants) sectors are making investment for capacity expansions; debottlenecking of plants; balancing, modernisation and replacement (BMR); installation of coal fired or captive power plants, etc.
Budget deficit in the July-September quarter was 1.1pc of GDP, showing a marginal improvement over the same period last year. Though tax collection remained below expectations amid lower inflation, the reduction in the budget deficit was primarily due to moderate growth in current expenditures, said the SBP.
"The tax collection by the FBR [the Federal Board of Revenue] was about Rs40 billion less than expected during the first quarter, which was mainly due to sluggishness in sales tax," said the report.
The central bank said the burden of fiscal consolidation fell on government expenditures. On a positive note, the government managed a moderate growth in current expenditures and directed the flow of funds towards various development works.

Meanwhile, the financing pattern of the budget deficit saw heavy reliance on commercial bank borrowings which increased to Rs443 billion during the quarter, it added.
The sluggish growth in the current expenditures paved way for the government to increase its development spending. "As a result, the federal PSDP [Public Sector Development Programme] increased by 80pc during the quarter which was also complemented by 40.6pc rise in provincial PSDP," the State Bank said.
The federal government directed significant resources towards improving transport infrastructure, revamping of railways and improving water resources and distribution network.
In addition, marked improvement in security conditions, relatively better energy management, and persistently low global commodity prices, have positioned the economy to further improve on its performance.
Although budget deficit for the first quarter of FY16 was lower than the same period last year, tax collection could not post the required growth. In order to keep the fiscal deficit within target without compromising on development spending, tax efforts have to be increased manifold, particularly by widening tax base and effective enforcement.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1233861/damaged-kharif-crops-may-affect-gdp-growth-sbp

GINNERS REJECT PROPOSED RELIEF PACKAGE

The News, January 19, 2016
MULTAN: Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to over 9,475,729 bales has reached ginneries across Pakistan till January 15, showing a decrease of 33.51 per cent as compared to the corresponding period last year when ginneries received 14,250,972 bales.
Talking to The News after issuing the PCGA's fortnightly report here on Monday, association chairman Shahzad Ali Khan said that the shortfall of 4.7 million bales was equivalent to Rs 1 trillion. He said that each bale of raw cotton was sold at Rs 30,000 in the open market.
He said that the ginneries in Punjab recorded arrival of 5,742,486 bales with 44.46 per cent decrease while the ginneries in Sindh recorded arrival of 3,733,423 bales as compared to 3,910,962 bales which they received last year.
He said that the textile mills bought 7,679,236 bales while the exporters bought 357,878 bales. Thus, total bales sold out so far were calculated at 8,037,114 bales, he added.
He said that spurious pesticides and substandardseeds caused decline in the cotton production. He said that attacks of pink bollworm and mealy bug were responsible for decline in cotton production in Sindh. He said the persistent hot weather resulted in flower and fruit shedding in cotton crop in addition to dry spell encouraged sucking pests like thrips and whitefly aggravated the fruit shedding.
He said that the climate change and unfair weather had affected and destroyed the cotton crop largely. He said that the PCGA had rejected the proposed relief package for the revival of agriculture, terming it against the interests of ginners and growers. Criticising the ministry of textile, he said that it did nothing to support the stakeholders, particularly growers, and it failed to introduce a viable cotton policy.
According to the PCGA report the Punjab districts which witnessed decline in cotton production are: Lodhran 92,439 bales (73.52pc less), Khanewal 389,093 bales (58.95pc less), Muzaffargarh 256,873 bales (46.88pc less), Dera Ghazi Khan 291,105 bales (40.6 less), Rajanpur 404,526 bales (28.52pc less), Layyah 247,819 bales (38.89pc less), Vehari 303,129 bales (60.81pc less), Sahiwal 250,408 bales (56.17pc less), Pakpattan 66,478 bales (59.85pc less), Okara 22,148 bales (56.84pc less), Kasur 11,376 bales (46.47pc less), Toba Tek Singh 133,877 bales, Faisalabad 51,623 bales, Jhang 42,661 bales, Mianwali 319,770 bales, Bhakkar 81,515 bales, Sargodha 11,600 bales, Rahimyar Khan 1,090,598 bales, Bahawalpur 712,115 and Bahawalnagar 835,646 bales.
The Sindh districts which witnessed decline in cotton production are: Hyderabad 250,325 bales (5.56pc less), Mirpur Khas 272,561, bales (31.28pc less), Sangarh 1,333,692 bales (10.62pc less), Nawabshah 312,622 bales, Naushero Feroze 283,084 bales, Khairpur 265,022 bales, Ghotki 312,030 bales, Sukkur 446,908 bales, Dadu 35,309 bales, Jamshoro 133,000 bales and Badin 31,645 bales while Balochistan produced 57,045 bales. Total 278 ginning factories are operational in the country. Of them, 193 are in Punjab and 85 in Sindh.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/92143-Ginners-reject-proposed-relief-package

MILLS CONCERNED ON COTTON SHORTFALL

The News, January 20, 2016
KARACHI: Textile mills on Tuesday expressed concern on the one-third drop in cotton production, which affected the local industry.
Chairman Tariq Saud at the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma), in a statement, said the cotton production fall was of around five million bales.
As of January 15, the cotton arrival was registered at 9.47 million as against 14.25 million bales till the same last year.

"The industry is left with no option but to import cotton on import parity price for consumption," Saud said.
"Textile industry is heavily dependent on the domestic cotton, as it takes strength from it against the regional competitors."
He said the cotton relating institutions are responsible for supplying of spurious seed, ineffective role of agriculture extension and incredible cotton research.
Chairman Aptma said the government should take the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee, Punjab Seed Corporation, agriculture extension and other relevant quarters to the task for dragging the cotton economy into a problematic situation.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/92273-Mills-concerned-on-cotton-shortfall

GOVT URGED TO SET UP HARI COURTS TO PROTECT FARM WORKERS' RIGHTS

Dawn, January 21st, 2016

UMERKOT: Activists of various non-governmental organisations including the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (Piler), Participatory Development Initiative (PDI) and Rural Workers Group on Wednesday urged the provincial government to raise the wages of brick kiln workers in Sindh and bring them on a par with those of their counterparts in Punjab.
Speaking at a press conference at the Umerkot Press Club, Shujauddin Qureshi of Piler, Pahlaj Rai of the PDI and Rukma Kolhi, Abdullah Khoso and Mohammad Bukhsh Kumbhar of the RWG along with activists of some other NGOs said that in Punjab a kiln worker was officially paid Rs962 for making 1,000 bricks as against the official rate of Rs560 in Sindh.
They noted with concern that the rate had been fixed many years ago in Sindh and had never been revised considering the constantly rising inflation. They said the labour department must look into the matter on an urgent basis and evolve a mechanism under which the wage could be revised on an annual basis.
They said that the Sindh government had recently fixed the wage of an unskilled worker at Rs13,000 per month. Kiln workers should also get as much wage in a month, they argued. If the officially fixed wages were ensured, all unskilled workers including farm workers and labourers would be able to improve their standard of living to some extent, they said.
They also expressed their concern over violation of the Tenancy Act by agriculturists and landowners who would deny their haris due share in agricultural produce and other benefits enshrined in the law. Tribunals to settle disputes between landowners and their tenants did exist but peasants seldom got justice, they said. The peasants who dared to move the tribunals would ultimately be deprived of their livelihood, they added.
The activists called for setting up 'hari courts' at district level to provide relief to peasants and protect their livelihood. They recalled that the Sindh chief minister had promised to establish such courts but he was yet to fulfil the commitment.They suggested that the proposed hari courts be presided over by a judge and delegated the powers of a sessions judge.
They also demanded urgent and effective legislation against bonded labour which was rampant in the agriculture sector. At least the Pakistan Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1992 must be implemented in its true spirit, they stressed.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1234291/govt-urged-to-set-up-hari-courts-to-protect-farm-workers-rights

BODY TO FIX RESPONSIBILITY FOR DAMAGE OF OLIVE PLANTS.

The News, January 21, 2016

Mehtab Haider

ISLAMABAD: A parliamentary body will today (Thursday) discuss the reasons of a delay in olive plants' inspection by a state-run research institute, which caused millions of rupees losses to the government.
The National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research is all set to take up the issue of delay in the inspection of olive plants by the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) that caused fungus into plants worth millions of rupees.
The committee may fix the responsibility against those who showed negligence and caused losses to national exchequer.
Official documents, available with The News, suggested that Pakistan showed interest in the development of olive cultivation across the country and allocated Rs2.5 billion of fund for commercial olive cultivation after the successful completion of a three-year Olive project of Pak-Italian debt swap agreement. The Public Sector Development Program approved the project.

The recent situation surfaced when a company, RSS and Agri Allied Service, won the the bidding process for providing 400,000 imported olive plants worth Rs83.3 million.
When the plants reached Pakistan, the Plant Protection Department of the government provided certificate to these plants.
A company's representative, in a letter, complained that 200,000 plants were placed in open area at the NARC's car parking from November 11, 2015 and no proper arrangements were made to preserve these plants.
"No written communications have been received regarding acceptance or rejection of plants till January 5, 2015," he said. He added that the NARC sent out photocopies of inspection report of all shipments after 60 days by raising the issue of fungus in its report.
The NARC raised the size and fungus issue in their inspection, but the company got a release order from the Department of Plant Protection and other relevant documents, which showed that plants were good in heath at the time of delivery.
"After 60 days how can NARC justify this inspection report because these were not general items and the sensitive olive plants were not placed at the proper place," said the letter.
Now, the Standing Committee will determine facts that why proper protection was not provided to plants and who was responsible for this negligence that might have caused loss to national exchequer.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/92516-Body-to-fix-responsibility-for-damage-of-olive-plants

FLY ATTACKS, LOW QUALITY SEEDS CAUSE 33PC CUT IN COTTON

The News, January 22, 2016
Israr Khan
ISLAMABAD: Use of low-quality seeds and pink bollworm and whitefly attacks on the cotton have so far caused a 33 percent reduction in the crop output, said a government official on Thursday.
Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah informed the Senate Standing Committee on Textile Industry that 9.48 million of cotton bales have as yet arrived in the market as against 14.25 million bales in the same period of last year.
Abdullah attributed the decline to the abnormal weather, poor seed quality and pests and diseases attacks. Low prices offered to the common farmers in market also played a major rule in this dip.
The ministry of textile informed the committee that cotton production in Punjab declined 44 percent while the decline was four percent in Sindh.
The committee expressed serious concerns over the abrupt and phenomenal decline in cotton production.
Members of the committee also criticised the government for the poor policy response and indifference towards the country's top export oriented sector, which they said was one of the major bottlenecks to the development and growth of the sector.
Cotton and cotton products contribute around 10 percent to Pakistan's GDP and 55 percent to foreign exchange earning of the country. It is also a major input of the textile industry.
There are 400 textile mills, 1,000 ginneries and 300 oil expellers across the country. The industry provides livelihood to millions of farmers and labourers.
The Cotton Committee Crop Assessment Committee has already revised the cotton production estimates for the June to March period to 10.85 million bales (170-kilogram each) from the earlier estimate of 13.3 million bales as the whitefly attack wreaked havoc with the crop, already reeling from rainfalls and harsh weather.
The government estimated 7.5 million bales from the Punjab, which is the major producer of cotton, as compared to 10.5 million bales estimated earlier. Sindh was projected to produce 4.4 million bales, but it was revised down to 3.4 million bales due to the disease.
Abdullah said low price also eroded the interest of the farmers in the crop production. They got phutti price between Rs1,800 to 2,300/40 kg in the month of August-September.
Cotton production stood at 13.48 million bales in 2014 as compared to 12.8 million bales in 2013 with the existing cotton varieties, but favourable weather conditions.
During the current season, adverse weather, including high temperature and heavy rains affected the plant growth and development.
There was also inefficient weed management. Whitefly infestation remained higher during the months of July-September, which is usually a crucial cotton fruiting period.
The commissioner said pink bollworm severely damaged the crop. The boll damage was observed during the August-October period.

He further said the farmers could not control the pink bollworm infestation due to non-vigilance of farmers about the extent of pest infestation and unavailability of adequate pesticides.
If the cotton production is low, it will impact textile exports, and resultantly a serious crisis of balance of payment could occur.
In the July-Dec 2015-16 period, the economy sold abroad textiles and its products worth $6.27 billion, down 8.9 percent over the same period last year. Textile export proceeds amounted to $13.47 billion in the fiscal year of 2014-15.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/92753-Fly-attacks-low-quality-seeds-cause-33pc-cut-in-cotton-production

HORTICULTURE SECTOR: LOOKING FOR CUSHION AS COMPETITION BECOMES STIFF

The Express Tribune, January 24th, 2016.
Peer Muhammad
ISLAMABAD: Horticulturists of the country are facing challenges in competing with rivals in the international market as the government has not been able to develop an effective national agriculture and food security policy to provide a cushion to the sector in a sustainable manner.
The Ministry of National Food Security and Research failed to come up with the agricultural policy despite claims in this regard by the former secretary of the ministry, who retired recently after remaining at the helm of affairs for more than two years.
Talking to The Express Tribune, FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Chairman Ahmad Jawad disclosed that a World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting, held recently in Nairobi, had given developing nations another three years for continuing with agricultural subsidies.
“It is the right time for the government to give priority to agriculture and frame a workable food security policy so that the sector could make effective contribution to the gross domestic product,” he said.
In the WTO conference, it was decided that developing nations may end their agricultural subsidy by the close of 2018. “If we don’t consider ourselves among developing countries and fail to back the agricultural sector, then there will be challenges for our exports after 2018,” Jawad said.
He referred to the commerce minister’s statement that Pakistan’s agricultural exports would have a level playing field as the WTO, which represents 162 member-countries, had immediately eliminated export subsidies from developed countries.
The Nairobi package contains six ministerial decisions on agriculture, cotton and issues related to least-developed countries. These include a commitment to abolishing subsidies on farm exports.
Jawad called the decision on scrapping subsidies a significant development that would improve the global trading environment, but at the same time stressed that Pakistan should prepare itself for competing effectively in the emerging scenario.
“It looks difficult that Pakistan will be able to get benefit of the WTO move without putting in place required infrastructure and formulating policies for agricultural exports,” he said.
Highlighting the immense potential for Pakistan in the horticultural sector, Jawad pointed out that the country was the 13th largest producer of kinnows in the world, sixth largest producer of mangoes and fifth largest producer of dates. Not only this, the country also harvests big crops of cotton, sugarcane, rice, potatoes, onions and wheat.
“We are not only leading producers of these products but these have a unique taste due to favourable soil conditions, but still the country has failed to derive the benefits because of absence of a proper agricultural policy and an implementation mechanism,” Jawad said.
He suggested that the government could offer special tariff concessions and give basic subsidy in the form of seeds and fertilisers to all crops and landholdings up to 10 acres.
Apart from this, Zarai Taraqiati Bank should start providing finances to agro-based industries in order to give a push to value addition as well as agricultural exports of the country.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1033045/horticulture-sector-looking-for-cushion-as-competition-becomes-stiff/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD JANUARY 11TH TO JANUARY 17TH, 2016

19 BT COTTON SEED VARIETIES REJECTED IN PUNJAB

Dawn, January 11th, 2016
Jamal Shahid
ISLAMABAD: The government of Punjab has rejected 19 varieties of genetically-modified cotton seed due to their poor performance.

Sources said both the public and private seed producing companies were pushing the Punjab Seed Council (PSC) for approval of their Bt cotton seed varieties such as FH Lalazar, NIBGE4 and CEMB 66 etc.
“In their meeting on January 7, besides the 19 Bt varieties, the PSC also rejected two non-Bt varieties because they had failed to deliver good yield,” said an expert at the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC).
Bt or genetically engineered cotton seed varieties were introduced in the country in 2010 to control pests, reduce the use of pesticides and increase yield. Nearly 90pc of all cotton sown in Pakistan is genetically engineered.
However, the predominant two Bt cotton varieties – MNH886 and FH142 – sown across Pakistan since 2012 became vulnerable to diseases and could not tolerate impacts and extremities of climate change as claimed by their producer, Ayub Agriculture Research Institute (AARI), Faisalabad. The two varieties also failed to control pests such as Pink Bollworm (Gulabi Sundi) that has now developed resistance against Bt gene because of low toxin levels.
Bt cotton variety, FH Lalazar, failed to deliver high yield during trials conducted on a government farm. Documents show that government trials of FH Lalazar in 2014-15 produced 166 kilogrammes yield per acre against the expected 450 kilogrammes per acre.
Similarly, yield from MNH886 and FH142 also remained unexpectedly low. This year, cotton production wAS around 10 million bales, gradually declining since Bt cotton seed was sown in Pakistan.
Bt cotton has also failed to protect the crop from pink Bollworm in Indian states of Gujarat, Andhrasd Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra to mention some which are major cotton growing regions. In its report issued on January 4, the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) predicted how the average yield in Pakistan may decrease by 22pc due to the adverse weather, increased pest pressure from pink bollworm and whitefly and the high cost of inputs discouraging farmers from better crop management.
Farmers in countries that grow 100pc Bt cotton such as Bollgard II, Roundup Ready Flex etc., have started facing major concerns with the genetically engineered technology. A 13pc reduction in harvested area in the United States coupled with lower yields due in part to excessive rains in the autumn are expected to lead to a fall in cotton production of 18pc, the ICAC said. The sale of genetically engineered cotton has already been prohibited in many parts of the US such as Illinois, Nebraska, Michigan, and Indiana.
“The problem is with substandard Bt cotton seed being sold in the market. There are no checks and balances. There are more than 700 seed producing companies and all lack facilities and resources to produce quality seed. Pakistan’s cotton research departments conduct more than Rs1.5 billion worth of research every year but have failed to deliver quality seed,” said Chairman Pakistan Ginning Association Shahzad Ali Khan, who described the country’s cotton industry a dying sector.
He urged the government to do away with anti-farmer policies that were forcing farmers to give up cotton farming and was now growing sugar cane and other crops.
Punjab Minister for Agriculture Dr Farrukh Javed believed that crop failure this year was due to extreme weather conditions coupled with multiple other factors.
“We have never had such heat and rains in the past. The Bt varieties can tolerate weather abnormalities to some extent. Bt cotton has not failed entirely. In Sindh, Bt cotton crop has been spared. Bt cotton worldwide has suffered due to extreme weather causing losses of up to $1.5 trillion,” the official explained.
Dr Javed claimed that the 19 Bt varieties had not been rejected but suspended.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1232177/19-bt-cotton-seed-varieties-rejected-in-punjab

BREEDERS BILL RUSHED THROUGH NA PANEL

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 11th, 2016
Ashfak Bokhari
THE Plant Breeders Rights Bill 2015 was hastily approved by the National Assembly standing committee on cabinet secretariat on January 6 after incorporating a few amendments but without input of some stakeholders.
In its previous meeting held eight days ago, the NA panel chairman Rana Mohammad Hayat Khan had wanted to give a quick nod to the bill but was not supported by other committee members including officials of Sindh government who insisted on having input of other stakeholders before passing the bill.
He was unhappy over the delay in the passage of the bill although it was introduced in the house on November 27 which is less than two months. What he meant by ‘delay’ was not clear. The standing committee, however, decided to invite all relevant stakeholders such as farmers, private seed companies and provincial government officials to the Jan 6 meeting.

Before the bill was adopted, some committee members criticised the contents of the bill which, they said, only aimed at protecting breeders' rights rather than protecting farmers' rights. MNA Asad Umar suggested that some sections should be incorporated in the bill to ensure protection of farmers' rights and also price control over seed.
Federal minister Sikandar Hayat Bosan intervened to say that 'the main objective' of this legislation was to protect the rights of farmers and provide high quality seed to the farmers.
Rana Mohammad Hayat Khan criticised the 'failure' of the public sector agricultural scientists and researchers to produce quality seeds for major crops and bring the agriculture sector at par with the neighbouring countries, even after consuming state's billions of rupees. In his view, foreign private sector could play an effective role in boosting R&D in agriculture sector.
What is lacking, in fact, is an enlightened debate on the pros and cons of the plant breeders' bill as well as the Seed Amendment Bill 2014 which has by now been approved by the National Assembly and is waiting for approval in the Senate. These two bills are closely related to each other.
Plant breeders' rights, one may note, are specific intellectual property rights granted to the creators of new varieties of plants. Pakistan, being a member of the WTO, is required to provide protection to plant varieties under sui generis system under Article 27-3 (b) of the Trips law. The sui generis system for plant varieties must, under the law, comply with the basic principles of national treatment.
The regime in 2001 had intended to protect plant breeders' rights by issuing an ordinance but its status did not go beyond a draft. The basis of the law was treaties of 1978 and 1991 of International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (Upov).
Pakistan had consulted Upov on the conformity of its law (ordinance) with the Upov Convention but later decided not to join Upov. A prominent feature of the draft was acknowledgement of the farmers'rights under the new set-up. No protection was to be granted to varieties containing 'terminator' type genes.
According to a Grains study, intellectual property rights (IPRs) and plant breeding have, historically, had nothing to do with each other. The IPRs route, if adopted, leads to the privatisation of agriculture and the other route, which has been neglected, leads to farmer-led agriculture. One cannot travel both ways when it comes to IPRs. But most governments, Pakistan included, and the formal research sector do not, for the most part, recognise this conflict.
As a result, many countries in Asia are trying to fulfil their sui generis requirements under Trips 'in the hope of simultaneously attracting foreign private sector investment for domestic R&D and protecting the fate of the farmers, in addition to giving some boost to their own public research systems. It is obvious they are just deluding themselves'.
What is actually at issue is the question whose interests agriculture R&D should serve. IPRs are suited to the profit strategies of the global seed
companies which seek to dominate agricultural production worldwide. These companies are building 'vast industrial breeding networks in all major crops and, with their economies of scale and ownership over technology through IPR, they will drive local breeders, both in private and public sectors, out of the commercial market'.
The study notes that in Asia, patents were never allowed on life forms because of ethics and colonial legacies. By the mid-1900s, some industrialised countries began to offer limited forms of plant variety protection (PVP) to breeders of new crop varieties.
PVP was constructed as an 'alternative' to patents that would supposedly be attuned to the needs of agriculture. It guaranteed breeders a commercial monopoly on the use of their varieties while leaving loopholes open for farmers and other breeders.
Since then, however, those loopholes have been tightened. The industry is now putting pressure on governments to provide full scale patent rights on any form of 'tinkering with the very stuff of life'.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1232026/breeders-bill-rushed-through-na-panel

COUNTRY LOSING 40PC PRODUCE DUE TO POOR POST-HARVEST

The News, January 16, 2016
FAISALABAD: The value-addition, post-harvest management, best varieties and vibrant marketing system for onion, chilli and tomato will not only help meet the domestic needs but also fetch huge foreign exchange by tapping export potential of the international market, said University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice-Chancellor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan.
He was talking to a delegation of progressive farmers of the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project at Syndicate Room here. He said that the UAF scientists would help the Sindh Agriculture Department in production of best varieties and capacity building of the Sindh growers to avert the post-harvest losses. He said that the growers of Sindh were acing crisis this year for which modern marketing system needed to be formulated.

He said that onions helped prevent heat stroke and other ailments and it was rich in phosphorus, calcium and carbohydrates. He expressed his concern that the country had imported tomatoes worth Rs 26 billion from India last year. He was of the view that the country was losing 40 per cent produce worth billions of rupees due to poor post-harvest management. He called for developing the post-harvest mechanism to increase the shelf life of the agricultural produces.
Talking about rice, he said that the rice demanded excessive water and Pakistan had been listed in water scare countries. He said that the steps were needed to address the issue at the national level.
About cotton, he said that the cotton production had registered a decline of 35 per cent this year. He said that Pakistani dates were not getting their due share in the international market due to lack of the value-addition mechanism.
Speaking on the occasion, delegation member Dr Zulfiqar Yousfani said that normally chili was cultivated on 80,000 acres in Sindh but this year, it was cultivated on 200,000 acres and the surplus supply was creating problems for the growers. He said that the shelf life of onion and chilli was less for which the experts and researchers should come up with the viable solutions. Ghulam Mustafa Nagraj also spoke on the occasion.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/90718-Country-losing-40pc-produce-due-to-poor-post-harvest-management

GOVERNMENT URGED TO ESTABLISH NATIONAL HORTICULTURE

The News, January 17, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (FPCCI) Standing Committee on Horticulture Chairman Ahmad Ahmed Jawad has said that millions of people in the country, mostly women and children suffer from micronutrient deficiencies.
Horticultural crops can play a vital role in resolving the crisis, he said.
Besides, creating jobs on the farm, the sector also generates off-farm employment, especially for women.
Addressing a seminar, he said that promoting horticulture in the country can help convert large-scale cultivable wasteland into a huge economic opportunity.
Within agriculture, horticulture is a sector of unprecedented economic value, which accounts for 25 percent share in the national GDP and over 40 percent employments, he said.
Jawad highlighted that horticulture offers a promising role in improving the income of the rural people.
"Pakistan, earns over $150 million in foreign exchange annually from export of horticulture products, whereas worldwide horticulture trade stood at more than $80 billion."
"The income and exports can be increased significantly by further boosting the area under horticulture across the country," he said.
He called for need to utilise huge cultivable wasteland and bring it under orchard crops without curtailing the area under food crops.
Though the country has abundant sunshine throughout the year, surplus labour and widely varied agro-climatic conditions offer high potential for successful and profitable commercial horticulture, he said.
He urged the agricultural and horticultural scientists to introduce crop varieties, which are resilient to climate change.
Jawad also demanded the government to set up "National Horticulture Board" to develop this sector as an effective tool for the economy that may overlook from value addition to exports in all areas.
He also suggested following objectives for the board.
Development of hi-tech commercial horticulture in identified belts.
Development of modern post-harvest management infrastructure as integral part of area expansion projects or as common facility for cluster of projects.
Development of integrated, energy efficient cold chain infrastructure for fresh horticulture produce.
Popularisation of identified new technologies / tools / techniques for commercialisation / adoption, after carrying out technology need assessment.
Assistance in securing availability of quality planting material by promoting setting up of scion and root stock banks / mother plant nurseries, carrying out accreditation/ rating of horticulture nurseries and need based imports of planting material. Promotion and market development of fresh horticulture produce.
Promotion of field trials of newly developed/ imported planting materials and other farm inputs, production technology, PHM protocols, INM and IPM protocols, and applied R&D programmes for commercialisation of proven technology.
Promotion of applied R&D for standardizing PHM protocols, prescribing critical storage conditions for fresh horticulture produce, bench marking of technical standards for cold chain infrastructure etc.
Transfer of technology to producers / farmers / exporters and service providers.

Promotion of consumption of horticulture produce and products.
Setting up Common Facility Centers for horticulture products in industrial zones.
Strengthen market intelligence system by developing, collecting and disseminating horticulture database.
Carrying out studies and surveys to identify constraints and develop short and long term strategies for systematic development of horticulture and providing technical services including advisory and consultancy services.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/91575-Government-urged-to-establish-National-Horticulture-Board

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD JANUARY 4TH TO JANUARY 10TH, 2016

WHY AGRICULTURE WAS SIDE-STEPPED IN PARIS

Ashfak Bokhari, Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 4th, 2016
Recent research shows that one-third of global emissions are associated with the world food system
THE text of the global climate agreement adopted mid-December in Paris was conspicuous by lack of mention of two words: agriculture and trade.
IT became possible as the corporate giants having big stakes in these two sectors made it clear to the big powers that climate change must be kept separate from agriculture and trade. However, the absence of the word ‘agriculture’ does not mean that this sector was totally ignored by the negotiators; one can see its shadow in not only national-level climate plans but also in climate finance and new initiatives on soil.
But what is lacking so clearly is a roadmap for reducing agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and support for more climate resilient agricultural systems. Tackling carbon emissions from farming systems was not even on the table in Paris.
The negotiators avoided any debate on reducing agriculture-related emissions from industrial systems which are dependent on synthetic fertiliser use. A climate-resilient focus for agriculture will ultimately have to be integrated within national farm programmes, and regional and global trade rules which often limit climate policy. The challenge climate change poses to farmers and agriculture — particularly in global south where recurring extreme weather events destroy crops, livestock and humans — cannot be overcome unless climate negotiators become bolder enough than they were in Paris.
Ben Lilliston of US-based Institute of Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) who attended the conference (Nov 30-Dec 11) says the decision to sidestep agriculture, at least temporarily, within the climate agreement was not surprising. This is so because much of the ‘intransigence’ around agriculture lies in the enormous political and economic power held by global agribusiness corporations, who have little interest in new rules that don’t fit with their current business model.
There is strong resistance to new regulations among these corporations, which are incidentally great greenhouse gas emitters, particularly the big fertiliser and meat companies. After the agreement was reached in Paris, the meat industry immediately started aggressively lobbying governments to protect their interests. Recent research shows that one-third of global emissions are associated with the global food system. At least three corporations — Tyson Foods, Cargill and Yara — have a larger climate footprint than many countries.
As expected, big agribusiness will again be at the table in the next climate conference to protect their interests in any future climate policy although globally there is a growing support for the more farmer-centred approach to tackle climate change issues in agriculture. The climate deal in Paris has, at least, set the stage for a positive debate about the way forward on agriculture.
The absence of the word ‘trade’ in the text was possible for similar reasons. A growing disconnect between trade and climate change was in evidence during the proceedings of the Paris conference. Not only that, the text of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) does not mention anywhere the words ‘climate change’. And the latest version of a US Customs bill moved in the House of Representatives forbids the president from considering climate impacts in future trade agreements.
Ben Lilliston says that a leaked internal European Union document on climate negotiation priorities in Paris made it clear that the final draft of the global climate deal would not mention trade. Besides, a group of business associations including that of biotech industry wrote a letter to US Secretary of State John Kerry while the conference was nearing conclusion, warning him not to agree to anything that could impact trade rules established to protect intellectual property rights. Such pressures of powerful interests, it is obvious, restrict UNFCCC’s ability to draw up a strong climate policy in the future. That there is a trade elephant in the climate room was how civil society groups in Paris raised their concern at an official side event .
Meanwhile, it was of much interest to note that the term ‘climate smart agriculture’ which came into currency in 2010 after the failed climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009 was being widely referred to in the Paris negotiations and

official events. But what it actually means is anybody's guess or depends on who's talking. This ambiguity created room for corporations and some governments to use 'climate smart agriculture' as a marketing tool to serve their objectives.
The concept of 'climate-smart agriculture' was created by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) but civil society groups criticised the concept from its very birth. The FAO, World Bank, United States and some developed countries have since developed a more sophisticated approach to sell the concept, through a new initiative called the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture (GACSA).
However, many climate justice organisations are of the view that the Paris Agreement can be described as a failure as it doesn't bind countries to strong enough emission reductions; it doesn't provide enough public money to countries that most need it; and it continues to promote a carbon market policy approach that has largely failed.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1230671

PAKISTAN SECURES $400 MILLION RICE EXPORT PACT WITH INDONESIA

The News, January 08, 2016
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has concluded an agreement with Indonesia to export one million metric ton of rice, estimated at around $400 million over four years, a government statement said on Thursday.
The agreement for export of rice will be implemented by Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) and Indonesian government organisation BULOG (State Logistic Agency), a statement issued by the Commerce Ministry said.
The TCP has finalised the first tender of 15,000 metric tons of rice export to Indonesia, which includes 5,000 metric tons of basmati rice and 10,000 metric tons of non-basmati rice.
The finalisation of this tender has a positive effect on the rice prices in Pakistan and the prices have started to stabilise.
Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan said that the export order of one million metric ton would end the uncertainty prevailing in the domestic rice market and lucrative prices would prove to be an impetus for growers to expand rice production in the coming years.
Dastgir said the Commerce Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of National Food Security and Research will bring in new legislation for high yielding varieties of rice and law for Geographical Indication for Pakistani basmati rice.
Pakistan was the first country out of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to have rice export agreement with Indonesia.
Pak-Indonesia trade rose 215 percent to 2.2 billion in 2014 from 700 million in 2010 after the conclusion of Preferential Trade Agreement.
Earlier Indonesian government said it mulling to import rice from Pakistan amid low rice stocks following a prolonged dry season.
Indonesian Trade Minister Thomas Lembong said his government was preparing a government-to-government Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on rice imports with the Pakistani government. The
Indonesian rice planting season had been put back from October to November because of last year's prolonged El Nino. As a result, harvest time in several areas across Indonesia suffered delays, leading to depleted rice stocks in the first quarter of 2016. The government there calculated that it has only 1.35 million tons of rice in March. Normally, the government has 1.5 million tons of stocks. To fulfill the shortage of rice, the government was keen to sign import MoUs with Myanmar and Pakistan.
Indonesian officials said the agreements were a precaution measure to anticipate reduced rice stocks, which could in turn lead to surging prices of basic commodities.
The estimated domestic production of rice at the end of March this year will be 1.35 million tons in the Southeast Asian country.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/88651-Pakistan-secures-400-million-rice-export-pact-with-Indonesia

COTTON OUTPUT FALLS 33.5PC

Dawn, January 5th, 2016
KARACHI: The country has produced 9.279m bales so far this season, a shortfall of 33.5 per cent compared to 13.958m bales during the same period last year, according to official figures released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association on Monday.
As phutti (seed cotton) arrivals during the outgoing fortnight (Dec 15 to Jan 1) dismally remained low, cotton analyst Naseem Usman believes that the country is not going to produce more than 9.7m bales this season, significantly lower than last season's production of 14.9m bales.

The heavy rains and floods coupled with inferior quality seed and pesticides had their toll over the standing cotton crop in Punjab where production is currently lagging behind by 44.75pc (or 4.515m less bales) as compared to last season.
The spinning industry's annual consumption of cotton stands at around 14.5m bales. The industry has so far booked around 2.5 million cotton bales for imports, out of which two million bales have been imported from India. All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) Chairman Tariq Saud, the imports could touch 3.5 to four million bales.
However, cotton production losses in Sindh comparatively remained low this season. As of Jan 1, the province produced 3.704m bales, a shortfall of 4.23pc (163,422 bales) over the same period last season.
The crop failure in Punjab is not only going to hit GDP but would also increase unemployment and poverty level.
The ginners' report further disclosed that flow of phutti during the outgoing fortnight (Dec 15 to Jan 1) remained extremely slow at 244,987 bales compared to 724,461 bales produced in the same period last season.
Due to short crop, the spinning industry during the period under review could only purchase 7.271m bales compared to 11.457m bales in the same period last season. The ginners are also holding lesser stocks of unsold cotton at 1.652m bales as against 2.016m bales held in the same period last season.
Since very little cotton is left back in the fields for picking, only 280 ginning units are currently operating in Punjab compared to 799 functioned last year in the same period. Similarly, in Sindh 136 ginning factories are presently operating as against 156 last season.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1230800

CLOSURE OF TRACTOR INDUSTRY AFFECTS 50,000 WORKERS

The News,January 05, 2016
LAHORE: Pakistan Association Automotive Parts and Accessories Manufacturers (Paapam) said on Monday continuous closure close of tractor industry was adversely impacting 50,000 workers employed by tier one tractor vendors.
Paapam Chairman Mumshad Ali said the sector's tax contribution last year was over Rs6 billion and this was expected to drop to under 2 billion due to lower demand and therefore production. The drop in sales is due to the erosion of the buying power of the Pakistani farmer which was impacted by fall in commodity prices.
It is pertinent to mention here that no funds were allocated for tractor purchase in the 300 billion Kissan Package announced by the federal government and the tractor subsidy schemes announced by Punjab and Sindh have also been sidelined or cancelled.
Explaining the cause of gloom he said the GST regime changed many times in the last 5-6 years, ZTBL loaning was also erratic and mark up rates were also as high as 12-14 percent, where as current kibor was 6.5 percent . The tractor subsidy schemes from the provinces were also short term and this resulted in an artificial demand followed by artificial slump, so that the industry can have stable growth.
Former chairman Paapam and a premier radiator manufacture for the tractor industry Usman Malik said his business was heavily dependent on the tractor industry and if tractor sales did not pick up soon, layoffs at his plant would be eminent.
Mohammad Saleem, and Razzak Gohar running two leading forging industries associated with the tractor industry said the government should make long term plans to improve horsepower available per hectare, which was less than half of neighbouring India. The association reiterated its resolve to ask all the concerned quarters of the federal and provincial governments to take concrete steps for resolving the tractor crisis on a permanent basis.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/86347-Closure-of-tractor-industry-affects-50000-workers

EXCESSIVE DELAY: FERTILISER FIRMS AWAIT RS5B WORTH OF SUBSIDY PAYMENTS

Peer Muhammad, the Express Tribune, January 5th, 2016.
ISLAMABAD: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has not been able to pay even the first installment of subsidy worth over Rs5 billion to fertiliser companies importing diammonium phosphate (DAP) due to delay in clearance from the finance division.
A source in the Ministry of Industries and Production told The Express Tribune that the Ministry of National Food Security and Research had dispatched bills of fertiliser importing companies for October worth over Rs5 billion to the SBP, but despite several reminders the payment could not be made.
According to an agreement between the government and the fertiliser importing companies, the payments were supposed to be released within 15 days of the import of DAP, but even after two months, the SBP has failed to clear the bills.

An SBP source said the bank management had written a letter on December 13 and another on December 28 last year, seeking authorisation from the finance ministry, which was mandatory to clear the payments, but the reply was still awaited.
"We have received bills from the food ministry after due verification from the Federal Board of Revenue and we are now waiting to hear from the finance division to pay to the importers," said the official.
The officer said the bank could not pay the bills without written authorisation from the finance division that's why the central bank had written two letters, but there had been no response from their side.
Around a dozen fertiliser producing and importing companies had imported DAP fertiliser and sold it in the market at a subsidised rate.
Major fertiliser companies include Fauji Fertilizer, Fatima Fertilizer, Engro Fertilizers, Bayer and Pak Arab Fertilizer.
The sale of subsidised fertiliser is part of the government's subsidy worth Rs20 billion for the farmers, which was announced in the budget for 2015-16. Half of the share is borne by provincial governments according to their fertiliser needs.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1021890/excessive-delay-fertiliser-firms-await-rs5b-worth-of-subsidy-payments/

GOVT WEIGHS 60MMCFD GAS SUPPLY TO ENGRO FERTILIZERS

Jawwad Rizvi, The News,January 06, 2016
LAHORE: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet is consulting with the ministries to take a decision on 60 million metric cubic feet/day (mmcfd) of gas supply to Engro Fertilizers as the agreement with the company on a temporary supply expired in December last, sources said on Tuesday.
The sources added that the ECC is taking advices from the ministries of law and petroleum on whether to continue supplying 60mmcfd to Engro Fertilizers, the country's second largest urea manufacturer with a 2.3 million production capacity.
The government and the company reached an agreement on a temporary gas supply to its plant from Mari gas field in Balochistan till December 21, 2015.
The ECC, in its meeting in December 2014, diverted 60mmcfd gas from Guddu power plant to EFERT for one year due to installation of two gas boosters for 747MW Guddu thermal power plant.
A brokerage house report sees higher gross margins of Engro Fertilizers (EFERT) compared to its peers due to concessionary feed gas to its new plant.
"Government is still supplying gas [to EFERT] despite the fact that the agreement to provide temporary gas expired in December 2015," said Tahir Saeed at Topline Securities, in a report.
"Engro's subsidiary EFERT in our base case is assumed to operate its EnVen plant in 2016 on concessionary (US$0.7/mmbtu) feed gas with old plant to remain closed. However, gas supply to old plant is a potential upside to our estimates," said Saeed.
A source said the Ministry of Petroleum favours supplying 60mmcfd gas from Mari to Engro Fertilizers.
The source said the ECC has sought advice from the Ministry of Law on the proposal of the gas supply continuation. Industry officials said FFC and Fatima are expecting the government to give them gas quotas.
EFERT, FFC and Fatima account for more than 80 percent of the country's urea production.
Industry officials said fertiliser manufacturers are using only 10 percent of the total gas produced in the country.
"The government should not disconnect gas to anyone of the economic sectors, including fertiliser, compressed natural gas and textile sectors," the official said.
"If the government provides fertiliser makers with the needed quantum of gas then it will save right away three billion dollars per annum that it spends on urea import."
Additionally, he added that the government would save another Rs100 to 120 billion annually that it spends as subsidy to farmers on imported fertilisers.
Currently, Pakistan's gas demand of six billion cubic feet/day outstrips the country's total production by two billion cubic feet/day.
http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/86613-Govt-weighs-60mmcfd-gas-supply-to-Engro-Fertilizers

SENATE BODY APPROVES PLANT BREEDERS RIGHTS ACT

Peer Muhammad, the Express Tribune, January 7th, 2016.
ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Cabinet Division on Wednesday approved the Plant Breeders Rights Act 2015, giving protection to seed breeding companies with an amendment to protect farmers from the provision of substandard seeds.

The proposed law is aimed at establishing a viable seed industry in Pakistan, essential for food security and availability of high-quality seeds and planting material to the farmers.

It will also protect intellectual property rights of seed companies that introduce new varieties. The draft bill will now be tabled in parliament for its passage.

In the meeting, officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and provincial governments revealed that Bt cotton seeds were being illegally supplied in the market, particularly by a foreign company.

At present, there is no law to keep a check on poor quality seeds and also there has been no official permission for sale of Bt cotton seeds in the market.

The foreign company had been doing illegal trade in Bt cotton seeds in Pakistan and this was a factor behind the fall in cotton production, added the officials.

Committee Chairman MNA Mohammad Hayat Khan said he had himself purchased Bt cotton seeds for Rs10,000 per kg but these proved substandard and damaged his cotton production largely.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MNA Asad Umar, among many other amendments, also proposed to include a clause in the bill for punishing the companies involved in providing substandard seeds in the market.

The committee chairman, while agreeing to the proposal, said, "If you give rights to the plant breeders, then provisions must also be there for penalising those who are involved in illegal practices." Representatives of the Kisan Ittehad Council and Kisan Ittehad Board noted that the proposed law lacked any check and balance in terms of the price of seeds, which would encourage the companies to exploit the farmers.

Kisan Ittehad Board representative Sarfaraz Ahmed suggested a price evaluation and regulation committee to check and maintain seed prices.

According to the bill, there will be provisions for breeding new plant varieties and protecting the rights including exemptions. Under the law, a registrar office will be established in Islamabad with sub-offices in the provinces.

The registrar offices will facilitate registration of new plant varieties, issue certificates under the Act, ensure maintenance of the register of protected plant varieties and promote development of new varieties of plants.

Furthermore, the offices will also manage documentation of varieties protected under the Act to collect statistics with regard to plant varieties, including the contribution of any person to the development of any plant variety in Pakistan or any other country, for compilation and publication.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1023147/senate-body-approves-plant-breeders-rights-act/

FOOD SECURITY MINISTRY WANTS TO TAKE BACK CONTROL OF COTTON DEPT

Peer Muhammad, the Express Tribune, January 9th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: A tug of war seems to have started between the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and the Ministry of Textile Industry over ownership of the cotton department, which currently rests with the latter.

According to officials, the Ministry of National Food Security is seeking to take back control of the cotton department, arguing it has much relevance to the agricultural sector and it must be under supervision of the food ministry.

In this regard, the food security ministry has prepared a summary for approval of the prime minister. The cotton department, which coordinates with provinces in policy matters relating to cotton cultivation and other issues, was handed over to the textile ministry under the 18th Amendment to the Constitution.

It is argued that performance of the cotton department is deteriorating under the textile ministry and a major reason being cited, among other factors, is a sharp fall of 35% in cotton production in the current season.

Earlier, the cotton department was working under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture before the 18th Constitution Amendment, which led to devolution of the ministry to provinces and the department was given under supervision of the Ministry of Textile Industry.

Later in 2012, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research was established at the federal level to ensure food security in the country. It sent a summary to then prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani seeking to take back control of the cotton department, but the premier turned down the proposal after hearing arguments of the textile ministry.

Talking to The Express Tribune, senior official of the Ministry of Textile Industry, Qamar Muhammad Usman, said the food security ministry had sent a summary to the prime minister in 2012, but it was objected on the ground that cotton had much relevance to the textile ministry as almost 80% to 90% of it was consumed by the textile industry and it had nothing to do with the food ministry.

"We are not aware of the fresh summary, but we will give the same comments while recording our objections," he said.

According to Usman, average cotton production in Pakistan stands at 13 million bales per year and hardly 0.5 million bales are exported and the remaining is consumed domestically to churn out textile products.

This way, he said, it had more correlation with the textile ministry rather than the food security ministry and logically the cotton department must be with the textile ministry.
"Cotton has no future except for consumption in the textile and clothing industry," he remarked.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1024341/tug-of-war-food-security-ministry-wants-to-take-back-control-of-cotton-dept/

February 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 22nd TO FEBRUARY 28th 2016

LASER LEVELLER MACHINES: FARMERS DEMAND HIGHER SUBSIDY

The Express Tribune, February 22nd, 2016.
The procurement of subsidised laser land leveller machines for distribution among Sindh's farmers is allegedly being subjected to kickbacks which result in inflating the unit's price.
This was revealed by the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), a farmers' lobbying group, on Sunday where the agriculture department officials were accused of purchasing the units at higher rates. The government provides the technology, which enhances crop yield, to farmers with around 50% subsidy. "In Punjab, the machines can be bought for around Rs500,000. But the Sindh government is purchasing the same equipment for Rs650,000," said a statement issued after the meeting, held at SCA's Hyderabad office.
The last date for submitting the application along with a deposit of Rs347,000 is March 4. According to the farmers, the provincial government has not clarified how many subsidised units will be distributed. They also demanded higher subsidy on the units, as is the case in Punjab.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1051585/laser-leveller-machines-farmers-demand-higher-subsidy/

CPEC TO BOOST AGRICULTURE SECTOR, SAYS PARC CHIEF

Dawn, February 22nd, 2016
ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) has said that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will give a tremendous boost to agriculture in the country.
"The council is playing a leading role in educating farmers of Balochistan and Northern Areas to get benefit from the CPEC. Scientists and experts are providing training to the farming community of Balochistan in this regard," said Dr Nadeem Amjad during a meeting with scientists and experts on Sunday.
Attended by senior scientists working at the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC), the meeting discussed future strategy about the CPEC.
Dr Amjad said: "Farmers find it difficult to sell their produce in the market due to variety of problems. But after launching of the CPEC, growers in Balochistan and other parts of the country will be able to sell their produce at better prices."
He said the ultimate goal of PARC was to bring prosperity and alleviate poverty.
He urged the scientists to focus on making vegetable and fruit production more profitable and introduce value addition of major crops and livestock production.
NARC Director General Dr M Azeem Khan said, "Our focus is on research for productivity enhancement, development of research infrastructure, strengthening of existing establishment and strategic planning for a productive agricultural research system".
http://www.dawn.com/news/1241073

WORTHLESS SURPLUSES

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 22nd, 2016
KHALEEQ KIANI
PAKISTAN is sitting on a stockpile of surplus in three major commodities thanks to years of tilted agricultural and export policies and lower international prices but struggling to offload them.
Surplus stocks of wheat, sugar and rice are now creating numerous problems like lack of storage, liquidity crunch, increasing financial charges and price crash that are worrying for the farmers, exporters, the governments and the banking sector in the short term.
In the long term, all these issues together could potentially impact the country's poverty situation and lead to crop switching. And yet, there seemed to be little coordination among the stakeholders — federal and provincial governments, farmers, banking and sectoral institutions — to have a balanced, holistic approach on resolving the crisis.

The government interventions have mostly been inspired by political lobbies close to one government or the other. The rice farmers and industries have been crying for more than 18 months for government intervention without any response but stakeholders in wheat, sugard are provided support prices, subsidies and Kissan packages. But the end result for sugar, wheat and rice remains more or less the same — bumper crops and glut.

As a consequence, exports of these commodities are either stagnant or going down despite these surpluses. The exports of rice have fallen over 11pc in first six months of current fiscal year and that of Basmati by about 28pc. Sugar exports have also reduced by about 91pc while wheat exports have improved, but its value stood at a paltry $66,000 so far.

The country's wheat stock currently stands over 5.5m tonnes and wheat harvest in both Punjab and Sindh is just around the corner with over 25m tonnes output. Official record put the Punjab's wheat stocks at about 3.5m tonnes, followed by 1.6m tonnes with Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and 0.5m tonnes with Sindh.

After setting aside compulsory 1m tonnes of strategic reserves, the total exportable surplus stood at about 4.5m tonnes. The total value of the carryover stock is estimated at around $2.5bn.

With these stocks having financial costs, the provinces would have to arrange additional liquidity to lift fresh produce from the farmers at support prices already fixed by the government.

Requests by some exporters for allowing subsidised exports to Afghanistan were declined by the ECC as some quarters thought subsidised commodity would be dumped home after enjoying fiscal benefits. Afghanistan, traditionally a Pakistan market was, therefore, taken over by India.

But despite this glut, the wheat and flour prices did not benefit the local consumer as the provincial governments remained steadfast to hold on to their stocks.

A belated decision by the ECC in January to export 1.2m tonnes of wheat at $45 subsidy for Sindh and $55/tonne freight subsidy for exports from Punjab resulted in export of only 274 tonnes against Punjab's 0.8m tonne quota and Sindh's 0.4m tonnes.

The sugar situation is no different. The government decided in December to allow export of 0.5m tonnes of sugar with Rs7bn (Rs13/kg) export subsidy in a phased manner, with first export target of 200,000 tonnes by December 31, 2015. It was decided at the time that the export subsidy would be withdrawn if the local price increased by more than 10pc in the domestic market because some participants of the ECC insisted the surplus sugar be diverted to the poor population through Utility Stores.

The domestic market at the time stood around Rs53-55/kg. A recent meeting at the ministry of commerce noted the sugar price had increased from Rs57/kg to Rs62/kg and hence it was within the price range allowed by the ECC even though retail prices have already gone beyond Rs65/kg. Despite this, official data suggest the total sugar exports stood at around 20,000 tonnes by end December against a target of 200,000 tonnes.

While the sugar industry has been estimating surplus quantities at about 1.4m tonnes after domestic consumption, fresh estimates are putting 2016 production at more than 5m tonnes against domestic consumption of around 4.8m tonnes.

Rice exports have also been facing challenges. In first half of current fiscal year, total rice exports dropped by 11pc to $869m even though its quantities increased by almost 15pc to 2.03m tonnes.

Basmati exports suffered both in terms of quantities and export earnings. This could have serious repercussions for rice producers because of their comparatively smaller land holdings. Basmati exports dropped 27pc in dollar terms to $223m while quantities reduced almost 7pc to 238,000 tonnes.

From annual export earning of about $2bn, basmati exports are now struggling at around $500m as Indian basmati exports replace Pakistan. Traditional interventions by Passco, Trading Corporation of Pakistan and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan have not been forthcoming this year.

A half-hearted tender by TCP for 25,000 tonnes of rice export to Cuba was scrapped only recently for unknown reasons but was helpful in boosting domestic prices a bit. The rice exporters have been asking the government to allow zero rating status to rice exports on the pattern of textile, leather, carpets, sports and surgical goods but to now avail.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1241067/worthless-surpluses

'SUBSIDISED WHEAT FOR GB BEING SOLD ON BLACK MARKET'

Dawn, February 23rd, 2016

GILGIT: Activists of political and religious parties in Diamer on Monday alleged that subsidised wheat meant for Gilgit-Baltistan was being sold in Mansehra district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

They were speaking at a multi-party conference convened by Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-F at Chilas, the district headquarters of Diamer, to discuss public issues.
JUI-F local leader Abdul Hanaan, PML-N's Abdul Waheed, PPP's Mohammad Wali, PTI's Atiqullah, Diamer-Bhasha Dam-affected people committee spokesman Najeebullah and others spoke on the occasion.
They said GB people faced wheat shortage while their subsidised commodity was being sold in black market in Mansehra. They accused the concerned contractors and food department officials of being involved in the malpractice.
The leaders demanded that those involved in the black-marketing of wheat should be given punishment.
Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Hanaan said people of Diamer region were being ignored in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. He demanded that GB should be declared a tax-free zone. PPP leader Mohammad Wali said GB people should also be given benefits of the CPEC.
The speakers said a university should be established in Diamer to end educational disparities in the area. They said the government wasn't paying heed to the demands of the Diamer-Bhasha
http://www.dawn.com/news/1241326

MOU SIGNED TO BOOST PUNJAB'S HORTICULTURE, AGRICULTURE SECTORS

Dawn, February 23rd, 2016
LAHORE: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT) on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote investment in agriculture and horticulture sectors of the province.
"Through this partnership both sides will work together in promoting investment and creating jobs in livestock, dairy and horticulture sectors," said USAID Provincial Director for Punjab Dr Miles Toder while speaking on the occasion.
PBIT CEO Amena Cheema was also present.
Dr Toder said the combination of USAID and PBIT resources would help stimulate the business-enabling environment in the province to overcome investment and trade challenges.
Through this MoU, the USAID-funded five-year-long $15 million Punjab Enabling Environment Project (PEEP) and PBIT would promote investment opportunities for joint ventures, advocate public-private partnerships emerging from agricultural initiatives, and highlight trade and investment areas for international and domestic investors.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1241248

TRANSPORTATION OF FERTILIZERS: BAJAUR AGENCY FARMERS URGE GOVERNMENT TO LIFT BAN

Business Recorder,February 26, 2016
Farmers from Bajaur Agency have expressed concerns over the ban on sale and transportation of fertilisers and have asked the government to lift the restriction immediately. Talking to reporters on Thursday, farmers belonging to different areas of the agency strongly condemned the ban on transportation of fertilizers into the tribal agency, saying that it would hit their crop output, which was the sole source of their income.
Rustam Khan, a farmer from Salarzai area, said that the ban on sale and movement of fertilisers in the agency had created a lot of troubles for the farmers' community, as they were unable to get fertilizers in the local markets. "The decision to prohibit sale and transportation of fertilisers in the agency is a matter of serious concern for the farmers," he added. He further said that the farmers' were expecting a good crop of wheat this year, but the ban on fertilizers would badly hit the crop output.
Mursallen Khan, a farmer belonging to Mamond area told that the ban on transportation of fertilizers into the agency from the nearby districts was totally unfair and illogical, as Fertilizer was essential to achieve good crop production.
He termed the imposition of ban on fertilizers citing its misuse for making explosives as unreasonable and illogical.
"The farmers of tribal areas are already facing losses due to militancy and war on terrorism," he added.
They said that the authorities had slapped the ban at a time when wheat, tomato, onion, potato and other crops were in a crucial stage, where they required sufficient use of fertilizers. They also criticised the local legislators for not raising the issue with the officials concerned and said that the silence of the lawmakers had proved that they had no concern with the problems of the tribal people.
They demanded of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Acting Governor and senior officials of the Fata Secretariat and local administration to lift the ban so that the farmers could buy fertilisers without any restriction.
Meanwhile, an official of the local administration told this correspondent that the administration was likely to adopt a mechanism for the transportation of fertilisers into the agency in next few days.
The official said that a meeting of traders' unions from across the agency would be called soon in order to develop a strategy for ensuring supply of fertilisers to the farmers.

http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/industries-a-sectors/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/20129:transportation-of-fertilizers-bajaur-agency-farmers-urge-government-to-lift-ban/?date=2016-02-26

STEEP DECLINE IN COTTON PRODUCTION

Business Recorder, February 27, 2016

Pakistan's cotton output has declined by a whopping 34 percent in the current season – from 14.593 million bales last year to 9.687 million bales – according to the Pakistan Ginners Association. If the weight of a cotton bale is at 170 kilograms per bale then the actual output for the current season is projected even lower at around 9 million bales. Cotton crop accounted for 1.54 percent of Gross Domestic Product and 7.1 percent of agriculture value-addition during July-March 2014-15, with exports amounting to 10.22 billion dollars. The textile value chain consists of ten industrial sub-sectors, employing hundreds of thousands, which in normal circumstances should benefit from lower cost of doing business if the raw material is accessible domestically.

That the circumstances are not normal is evident from the fact that the decline in cotton output is due to a multiplicity of external as well as internal factors. The former includes the decline in the commodity's international price which is lower than the domestic price given the inability of the government to match the subsidies extended by governments of other cotton growing countries, including India and China.

Pakistan under the 6.64 billion dollar International Monetary Fund programme does not have the latitude to extend subsidies even to those sectors that comprise over 50 percent of our total export earnings like cotton. In addition, the cotton farmers are also reluctant to increase the acreage under cotton production because they do not get paid on time by their buyers necessitating in the current fiscal year an import of 3.2 million bales, with India accounting for 2.3 million bales, at a total cost of 434 million dollars.

The Economic Survey 2014-15 notes that growth in production and consumption of major cotton growing countries far outpaced Pakistan's in 2014-15. China's output grew by 6.4 percent, India's by 6.77 percent, the US by 3.5 percent and Pakistan's by only 2.3 percent. In terms of consumption China's grew by 7.9 percent, India's by 5.2 percent, US' by 2.3 percent and Pakistan's by 2.3 percent.

The Survey further notes, that "Pakistan has an inherent advantage of being the fourth largest producer of cotton in the world with a huge potential to further increase crop yield". It also acknowledges that, "resistance to grading and standardisation of cotton bales by ginners and spinners alike has consistently lowered the value of the Pakistani cotton by around 10 cents per pound in the international market… the value-added garments sector has grown marginally due to its limited product range, low usage of manmade fibres and inability of manufacturing units to restructure in order to meet changing international requirements."

The present scenario reflecting a shortage of domestically produced cotton has upped our import bill and is one of the sectors responsible for widening of the trade deficit. Besides Pakistani manufacturers continue to grapple with energy shortages, law and order problems, an overvalued rupee as well as heavy regulatory duties and delays in refunds and thus any additional impediment is simply exacerbating their capacity to compete internationally while impacting negatively on our major macroeconomic indicators.

Karachi Brokers Forum Chairman, Naseem Usman, stated that the most unfortunate part of the entire tragedy is that there is hardly any awareness or concern at the government level to deal with this sector's crisis – a charge whose validity is evident from the fact that textile ministry has no minister for over a year.

The Minister of Finance remains focused on raising revenue rather than promoting output and the Minister for Commerce is focused on signing free trade agreements rather than supporting this extremely critical sector of the economy. The textile policy 2014-19 remains unimplemented due to lack of timely releases.

To conclude, it is critical for the government to take cognisance of this sector's issues from the growers to the value-adders – and formulate a doable/implementable policy to meet the sector's concerns.

http://www.brecorder.com/editorials/0:/20411:steep-decline-in-cotton-production/?date=2016-02-27

`NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 15th TO FEBRUARY 21st 2016

BLAMING 18TH AMENDMENT FOR AGRICULTURE'S POOR SHOW

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 15th, 2016

ASHFAK BOKHARI

AT a time when the country's cotton economy is passing through a severe crisis, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research is seeking control of the Cotton Wing from the textile ministry with an assertion to put things in order. And the European Union wants Pakistan to look beyond textiles.

The crisis is being described as one of the worst in country's history. The cotton production has declined by 33pcc during the current season; textile and clothing exports dropped by 8.93pc and cotton imports jumped to 194,465 tonnes during the first half of 2015-16; duty-free import of Indian yarn in the past four years has badly hit the domestic spinning industry; almost 20-25pc of looms have been closed down and many farmers are switching to other crops promising better returns.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) has requested the prime minister to let it take back the Cotton Wing whose performance under the Ministry of Textile Industry has deteriorated. Once it was under its control, it claimed, the cotton sector's performance would improve. Besides, cotton crop must be looked after by the food security ministry as it does in case of other cash crops, giving an impression that it was a reincarnation of the defunct ministry of agriculture.

But the textile ministry has rejected the proposal saying cotton has nothing to do with the task of providing food security to the citizens and that it was closely related to the textile industry where it is almost totally consumed.

The Cotton Wing, which was originally a part of the former Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Livestock (Minfal) was handed over to the Ministry of Textile Industry when agriculture sector was being transferred to the provinces after the 18th amendment. A similar case is that of the Crops Wing and National Fertiliser Development Centre (NFDC) which were made part of the Planning Commission. The MNFS&R officials say both are directly linked to food and research areas.

While speaking at a meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Food Security on Nov 28, 2015, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a former federal minister and an agriculturist, said some functions of the defunct agriculture ministry had been transferred to the provinces, while other functions had been distributed among four federal ministries resulting in utter confusion and inaction.

On January 12, Federal Minister for Food Security Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan while speaking at a function in his ministry said the performance of agriculture sector had declined particularly after the 18th amendment. He did not elaborate. Similarly, Seerat Asghar, secretary of the ministry, told a Senate committee on December 28 that Parliament had done nothing for the agriculture sector in the last three years. Before the18th amendment, he said, the federal government used to spend Rs60bn on agriculture sector but now the provincial governments have become indifferent towards the rural areas.

Seed management has also became a provincial subject. To amend and replace the obsolete Seed Act 1976, the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governments introduced a seed amendment bill in their assemblies. But the process came to a halt after the federal minister for food security said that all the provincial assemblies have passed a special resolution authorising the federal government to amend the Seed Act 1976 and retain it as a federal subject. Taking seed affairs back to the centre was seen a development of great significance.

Meanwhile, European Union Ambassador to Pakistan Jean Francois Cautain says it is high time that Pakistan breaks away from past trade stereotypes and looks beyond textile and leather sectors and invests in other areas. With eight more years to go under the GSP Plus status, Pakistan's business community must develop value-added sectors.

But two years after the country gained duty-free access to the EU for certain products, there is little to applaud for. The industry has been unable to fully utilise the opportunity. Various factors have contributed to its dismal performance such as over-dependence on textiles and low quality of exports though economic slowdown in Europe is to be equally blamed for the situation. Consumer spending in the EU states is currently subdued, owing to the ongoing crisis in the eurozone.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1239683/blaming-18th-amendment-for-agricultures-poor-show

SINDH AGRICULTURE GROWTH PROJECT ON BACK BURNER

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 15th, 2016

MOHAMMAD HUSSAIN KHAN

SINDH'S contribution to the country's agriculture and livestock sector is quite significant, but some huge gaps hamper its much-needed development. The immense potential in sub-sectors like animal breeding, meat development and milk production remains unrealised.

The Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP), being executed with the World Bank's loan for the last couple of years, has yet to yield its desired outcome.

The project aims to install chilling plants for milk preservation and processing in nine districts of the province to increase shelf life of milk.

Some companies are engaged in milk processing business in the private sector. With SAGP's assistance, the Sindh government would replicate it in the public sector too. The livestock project is moving at a snail's pace though one year has passed since it was announced. Neither a milk producing group (MPG) has been formed nor any chilling

plant has been installed. The pace of the agriculture component that deals with onion, dates and chillies has, though somewhat, accelerated.
“We have hired a consultant who will verify each MPG’s credentials before associating it with our project. Social mobilisation of such groups is underway. Once verification is done, we will form MPGs and get them registered under the Societies Act. The objective is to promote community’s ownership instead of the monopoly of a few individuals,” says SAGP’s Livestock Project Director Nazir Kalhoro.
Considering the potential in the livestock sector, some 2,500 acres were identified near Bhambhore, Thatta five years back for developing a special livestock zone, but nothing has happened.
A considerable quantity of milk is wasted due to a lack of processing and preservation facilities. “That was why great importance is being attached to the livestock sector in the SAGP, particularly in the drought-prone Tharparkar district,” says a livestock officer.
A developed livestock sector could have a huge milk market in Karachi, which is currently dependent for much of its consumption needs on imported stuff.
MPGs are to be formed before installing of chilling plants. Their number in each MPG may vary, given the availability of milk. Each plant would process at least 1,000 litres of milk obtained easily from villages at an economical cost.
Roughly, 151 chilling plants would be set up throughout the province. The idea behind MPGs is to better manage vaccination, tagging and veterinary and treatment facilities for animals and even artificial insemination, if needs be as per this project’s requirements.
The SAGP is supposed to cover small- and medium-sized livestock farmers and seek community management-cum-oversight. The farmers would be trained for adopting ways of better livestock breeding.
While Pakistan stands fifth in world’s milk production, hardly 3-4pc of it is handled by the formal sector, which undermines its commercial value. The average yield of milk per cow ranges 8-9 litres.
Favad Soomro, an executive of a private milk processing company, says the size of herd is usually 1-3 animals required for the sustenance purpose alone. Milk is usually traded in rural and peri-urban markets through middlemen. “Hardly, 3-4pc of the milk goes to the modern dairy chains.”
http://www.dawn.com/news/1239681

COTTON GROWERS SWITCHING TO ALTERNATIVE CROPS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 15th, 2016
AHMAD FRAZ KHAN
AS the federal government and farmers mourn losses of the current cotton crop, the policymakers in Punjab are now more worried about the next one. According to some estimates, the province is running the risk of losing another 15-20pc area as growers are opting for alternative crops.
The fears were reinforced by a recent meeting where cotton growers counted the factors leading to current crisis and sought solutions from the provincial policymakers.
Out of five reasons for crop failure, according to farmers, the failing BT regime tops the list. Linked to this is the pest problem, especially pink bollworm, which caused up to 60pc of crop losses.
The pink bollworm problem is now limited to Pakistan and, to some extent, India, where research is almost non-existent. What makes the matter worse is that none of current chemicals is effective against it. Thus, the farmers are in a bind: vulnerable seed and, with no effective pesticide in case of pest attack.
For them, the next biggest problem is crashing international market and domestic prices. The federal government keeps adding to the cost of production through a set of faulty policies and stays out of trading when output hits the market.
The farmers are paying up to 22pc of taxes on pesticides, but price of produce is set by the industry, busy in maximising its own profits. That is why growers are losing interest in the cotton and are opting for alternative crops — even pulses.
The slide in international prices has rendered management of crop and export very, very difficult.
Persistent rains this season drastically restricted the pesticides resulting in sharp fall in output. Of all these problems, Punjab can help only in streamlining the seed business, but the final certification has to come from the federation. The problems of the marketing and pricing are mainly federal forte. The crop thus is challenging the policymakers like never before and they have to think afresh about its future and role in economy.
The pesticides industry adds another layer of problem when it claims that no chemical is effective against pink bollworm once it had attacked the crop — only preventive measures (the PB Ropes and Pheromone Traps) help.

A certain lobby is twisting the argument to favour new varieties; otherwise the pest is attacking advanced varieties of Bollgard with the same ferocity as it has done in case of Bollgard-II. The pink bollworm is thus turning out to be next the CLCV, which used to cost one to two million bales every year during the 1990s and the first decade of this millennium.
The situation puts heavy onus for a solution on Punjab which is a major host to the cotton crop. It should push the federation both at official and the party level to take care of the crop.
Apart from streamlining the seed sector, it has to plead for better marketing, where the price of the crop does not fall below at least officially calculated cost of production. It has to ensure a win-win situation for both farmers and the industry even if the federal government has to pick up part of price to maintain import price parity for the industry.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1239679

FAMILIES RECEIVE ASSISTANCE TO REVIVE FARMING IN FATA

Dawn, February 18th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Over 20,000 displaced families that have returned to Khyber and South Waziristan regions in the agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) have started cultivating wheat, vegetables and fodder, using quality seed provided by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations with funding from USAID.
By May, about 16,650 families will be able to harvest 800kg to1,000kg of wheat each from the seed. The growers also received vegetable seeds to produce food in the meantime.
Around 4,000 livestock owners received oat seeds and are harvesting fodder for their animals. “This will ensure that the returnee families in the two agencies have food and income as well as feed for their animals,” FAO Country Representative Patrick T. Evans said in a statement.
Recent instability and military operations as well as natural disasters across Fata damaged the local infrastructure and caused a massive exodus of population from the area.
Since March last year, the government has been working with various organisations to facilitate the return of the displaced population to their homes.
This effort required extensive support from the government and the donor community in order to ensure that the families had sufficient means to revive agricultural activities on their land, feed themselves and their livestock and made an income, an FAO statement said.
The FAO has partnered with USAID and the Fata Secretariat to implement a 16-month, $8.3 million project to be completed by December, which will help about 55,000 households.
The vast majority of Fata residents rely on agriculture for their livelihood.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1240318

SIX MILLION SAPLINGS TO BE PLANTED IN SWABI

Dawn, February 18th, 2016

SWABI: The Pakistan Tobacco Company (PTC) and district forest department have planned to plant 6 million saplings in a joint tree plantation campaign which would commence in Swabi district on Friday.
Officials in the forest department told Dawn on Wednesday that keeping in mind the climate change there was an intense need to plant more trees.
They said that PTC would distribute 4 million saplings among farmers in the tobacco growing areas and the district forest department had planned to plant 2 million saplings.
An official said that the company had grown these saplings in various nurseries in the country.
The forest department would lead the tree plantation drive, but the officials and staff of all public sector departments would also be involved in the campaign. It has also started a campaign to educate people on the importance of growing more trees for the environment and preventing soil erosion.
The sources said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa forest department had made it clear that about 123 million saplings would be planted across the province in the upcoming campaign.
Meanwhile, it has been learnt that the Tarbela Dam and Ghazi Barotha Hydropower Project authorities would also launch a tree plantation campaign in the areas of two dams.
The saplings would be planted in residential colonies and dam area by involving employees and students of the Wapda schools.
The district police and army officials in their meeting discussed security situation and visited the University of Swabi and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Swabi, here on Wednesday.
A briefing was given to them about security situation of the two universities.

They also checked the entire campuses and barbed wire installed around them, and expressed reservations about some areas. They asked the officials concerned to plug the loopholes.
“We told them to take more steps for enhancing security and letters have been sent to them,” said DSP Izhar Shah who accompanied the army personnel during visits of the two campuses.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1240318

USAID LAUNCHES BIOFORTIFIED MAIZE HYBRID SEED

Business Recorder,,February 18, 2016

United States is committed to working with Pakistan to increase productivity and income in the agriculture sector in order to improve the livelihood of the farmers. John Groarke, Mission Director United States Agency for International Development (USAID), said this while speaking at launching ceremony of Biofortified Maize hybrid seed in Pakistan and handover of Maize parental seed at National Agricultural Research Center (NARC) on Wednesday.
Groarke said that for the last 50 years, US and Pakistan have been working together to strengthen Pakistan’s agriculture and improve the productivity of crops including wheat, rice and maize. “Due to joint efforts of US and Pakistan, the production of wheat crop has increased by 25 percent during last few years,” he added.
He handed over new varieties of maize seed to Pakistani research organisations and private sector seed companies. The new varieties of maize were identified and provided by USAID agriculture innovation program in co-ordination with the NARC, in an effort to improve the production of quality hybrid maize seed in Pakistan. The USAID Mission Director said that maize seeds will benefit farmers and increase access to nutritious food to million of Pakistanis.
In addition to partnering together in the field, he said, “we are also collaborating in the classroom, so the next generation of scientists can find new ways to improve the lives of Pakistani farmers.” Through the Agricultural Innovation Program, USAID is providing graduate school fellowships to Pakistani scientists and researchers at leading US agricultural universities, he said.
Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai, Additional Secretary, Ministry of National Food Security and Research said that the new varieties seed would play pivotal role in increasing productivity of maize, wheat and rice as quality seed is one of the major challenge for Pakistan’s agriculture.
He said that the government is committed to strengthening agriculture sector in order to improve livelihood of farmers. Muhammad Sadiq Tahir, a farmer from Rawalakot, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, speaking on the occasion said that seeds will improve the quality of his harvest for years to come.
USAID Agricultural Innovation Program is a four-year $30 million initiative designed to increase productivity and incomes in the agriculture sector through the promotion and dissemination of modern production practices for wheat maize, rice, livestock , fruit and vegetable. The varieties of maize distributed are bred to resist drought and heat stress and have enhanced nutritional quality. They also have increased tolerance to insect attack and low soil nitrogen.
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/17497/

COTTON PRODUCTION PLUMMETS 34PC

Dawn, February 19th, 2016

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: Pakistan’s cotton production has shrunk by a third this season, falling by 34 per cent to 9.687 million bales from 14.593m bales a year ago, the Pakistan Cotton Ginners’ Association (PCGA) said on Thursday.
This shortfall, by some calculations, is going to inflict a loss of billions of dollars on the economy. These estimates, being put up by cotton experts, are based on cost of cotton, value-addition of textile products, oilcake, and, above all, the rising import bill in the wake of crop failure.
Naseem Usman, the chairman of Karachi Brokers Forum, said the production would further go down to 9m bales if the weight of a cotton bale is placed at 170kg as per the government scale. The PCGA calculates a bale’s weight at 155kg, he added.
He said that already around 3.2m bales have been imported — 2.3m bales from India alone.
According to the State Bank of Pakistan, the country spent $434m (Rs45bn) on cotton imports during the first six months (July-December) of this fiscal year.
The unfortunate part of the entire tragedy, Mr Usman said, was that there was hardly any awareness or concern at the government level which should have immediately started planning for next cotton crop (2016-17). The cotton was the most sensitive crop as it had far-reaching implications on the entire economy and exports, he added.
In Punjab, cotton production has declined by 44pc to 5.927m bales compared to 10.639m bales a year earlier. By contrast, Sindh’s output has suffered slightly as it has produced 3.759m bales this season, a fall of around 5pc compared to 3.954m bales a year ago.

The fortnightly flow of phutti also remained in the red as only 84,287 bales were received by ginneries during Feb 1 to 15, 2016 compared to 158,694 bales in the comparable period of last year.
The textile industry purchased 8.329m bales as against 12.938m bales last season. Similarly, exporters also booked less cotton at 358,418 compared to 463,162 bales.
Ginners are holding around 998,937 bales of unsold cotton as against 1.097m bales in the corresponding period of last season. Around 68 ginning units are operating in Punjab compared to 170 units last year, and only 11 units are functioning in Sindh compared to 32 units a year ago.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1240448

SINDH GROWERS FORM ALLIANCE TO PROTECT RIGHTS

Dawn, February 19th, 2016
HYDERABAD: Leaders of various organisations of growers, along with those of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), on Thursday announced formation of the 'Sindh Growers Alliance (SGA)' to protect the rights of growers belonging to Sindh.
Speaking at a press conference at the local press club on Thursday, Sindh Abadgar Action Committee convener Nawab Zubair Ahmed Talpur, SCA leader Mir Abdul Karim, Advocate Ali Palh, Mir Ghulam Mohammad Talpur and activists of other growers' organisations said the decision to form the alliance was taken in view of injustices being meted out to growers in Sindh.
Artificial shortage of irrigation water and denial of reasonable rates for different crops causing huge losses to growers were defined as some of the alleged injustices.
They also announced a plan chalked out to force the government to pay attention to growers' issues, saying that a token hunger strike would be held outside the National Assembly on Feb 23 and 24.
Nawab Talpur said that a meeting of various growers organisations was held on Feb 17 in Kamboh Shaikh town of Tando Mohammad Khan where formation of the SGA was given a final shape. The SGA, he said, would organise different events to raise the voice of growers.
He observed that the agriculture sector in Sindh was on the verge of destruction but the provincial government was paying no attention to its real issues and the plight of growers. The neglect, he said, was also bound to create the issue of food insecurity in the province within the next few months or years.
He stressed the need for addressing two major issues on an immediate basis. He identified the issues as fixing a fair price of sugar cane to be paid to growers and overcoming the prevailing water shortage in parts of Sindh.
According to him, Rohri Canal has been closed to protect the Bahria Town project land in Nawabshah from seepage. The closure of the canal has badly affected millions of acres of fertile land in lower Sindh, to be particular in Hyderabad, Matiari, Tando Allahyar, Badin, Shaheed Benazirabad and Sanghar districts.
Explaining the fear of a food shortage to hit the province in the coming days, the growers' leaders said many crops including wheat, banana, mango, as well as vegetables like okra and tomato might not attain the normal production targets owing to unavailability of water and the flawed policy being pursued by the government and its irrigation department. The current additional spell of canal closure this year could prove destructive both in terms of agricultural production and growers' earnings.
"Rohri Canal is closed from Jan 1 to 25 for annual de-silting and cleaning process but this time it has been kept closed till date to protect the Bahria Town project's land in Nawabshah," they said.
Regarding official prices of sugar cane, they said the provincial government was using delaying tactics in the issuance of the relevant notification fixing the rate at Rs185/40kg. It issued a notification reducing the rate to Rs172/40kg with an inordinate delay without the consent of cane growers, who eventually rejected it.
They said the SGA would mobilise lawmakers from Sindh on all issues being faced by growers during the protest outside the National Assembly.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1240398/sindh-growers-form-alliance-to-protect-rights

FARMERS DEMAND 'AGRICULTURE EMERGENCY'

Dawn, February 21st, 2016
LAHORE: Claiming that agriculture is facing a disastrous situation, the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has convened an 'all-party conference' on Wednesday in Islamabad for asking the government to "declare agriculture emergency" in the country.
According to PKI, it has prepared a charter of demands in consultation with all farmer bodies, including Farmers Associates Pakistan (FAP), Kissan Board Pakistan and Sindh Abadgar Board. According to the charter, farmers want

the government to declare agriculture emergency because prices of all commodities had crashed in the last three years, wiping off profitability, farmers resources and agricultural sustainability.
The crisis had also engulfed the inputs industry. Demand for goods and services had declined sharply in rural economy. As per a report of the Food and Agricultural Organisation, commodity prices would remain depressed in the next decade. All these factors justified declaration of agricultural emergency in the country, they demanded.
The farmers also demand rationalisation of cost of production because aggressive taxation on inputs led to higher food prices. The cost of production of all crops had skyrocketed, while prices of output plummeted by 40pc to 50pc creating disconnect. As an immediate measure, all taxes should be withdrawn, duty free import of fertilisers, including urea, be allowed, electricity prices be slashed to Rs5 per unit, “green diesel” voucher scheme be launched as is the case in other countries for tractor and tube wells operation at 50pc per cent of the market price.
Other demands included minimum market price for wheat, paddy, sugarcane, cotton, maize, potato and oilseeds be announced immediately; agriculture trade with India, especially through land route, was not acceptable until a level-playing field was provided to farmers in the form of similar support and subsidies; free export of live animal, grains and horticulture products be allowed; dairy farmers, especially small and landless, were receiving approximately Rs40 per litre milk whereas their cost of production was above Rs100 per litre.
The charter mentioned this year had witnessed crop disasters in price and production. Cotton farmer had lost $1.7 billion in lost production and $480 million in price drop; potato growers had lost $1.5 billion in price collapse and paddy growers $350 million due to price manipulation.
Farmers were at the mercy of the trader when crop arrived in the market and a glut situation was created. This year, the price of paddy jumped by 60pc within days after the farmer sold it. This caused a loss of over Rs35 billion.
Finally, development budget allocation for the sector should be increased from current 1pc to at least 20pc.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1240950

FARMERS SEEK HEAVY INCREASE IN SUBSIDY ON PURCHASE OF LASER LEVELLER

Dawn, February 22nd, 2016

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has expressed serious concern over government failure to provide 50 per cent subsidy to growers on the purchase of a laser leveller and demanded it should give 80pc subsidy for the machine like the Punjab government.
At a meeting held on Sunday with Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar in the chair, the SCA members said that the cost of laser leveller in Sindh had been raised to fill coffers of bureaucrats and officers.
It noted that the government had fixed cost of a leveller at Rs650,000 out of which growers were made to pay Rs350,000 while the government was contributing Rs300,000, which appeared to show the growers were getting 50 per cent subsidy but it was not true.
The cost of the machine had been deliberately increased to allow officers and bureaucrats to have their share in the pie because the cost of such laser leveller ranged between Rs480,000 to Rs500,000 in Punjab of which the provincial government bore 80 per cent of the cost and the 20 per cent were to be paid by growers.
The meeting appealed to the Sindh chief minister to provide 80 per cent subsidy for levellers on the pattern of Punjab and launch an inquiry into unjustified raise in its price in Sindh.
It said the government should also hold an inquiry to find out how many companies were importing rice’s hybrid seed from China because over 50 companies were selling it.
The meeting observed that there were reports that many companies were producing the seed locally and selling it with hybrid seed’s tag in the market for Rs1,000 to Rs1,200 per kg. It was a great injustice to farmers in Sindh, it said.
It said the hybrid seed was sold for $2 per kilogramme, therefore, it should be sold accordingly in Sindh considering its rate in the international market.
It said that a farmer spent Rs8,000 on an acre of rice cultivation with hybrid seed variety, but when the crop was marketed it was sold for Rs700 per 40kg which was certainly unjustified.
The meeting was attended by Syed Aijaz Nabi Shah, Nabi Bux Sathio, Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, Ghulam Mujtaba Unnar and others.
The Sunni Tehreek has lashed out at the Hyderabad Electric Supply Company and the Sukkur Electric Power Company for issuing detection bills to poor consumers and removing transformers from different areas as a collective punishment for power theft and default on payment.
A meeting of the party’s provincial chapter with Maulana Noor Ahmed Qasmi in the chair held here on Sunday noted that corrupt officers of Hesco and Sepco were bombing consumers with detection bills, which had added to their difficulties.

The meeting said the removal of transformers and disconnection of power supply of the poor would not solve the problem because consumers were not responsible for the electricity theft.
The meeting said the Hesco and Sepco staff themselves were to blame for power pilferage. The affluent and the influential who were real thieves of power never faced any action, it said.
The meeting called for purging power utilities of the thieves and the corrupt and demanded an end to injustices being meted out to consumers. Transformers that had been removed from different areas should be installed again, it said.
It said that corrupt officers who provided illegal connections only for Rs10,000 to Rs20,000 to mill owners were causing millions of rupees loss to the companies, which was passed on to consumers.
The meeting demanded the prime minister should reduce power tariff and order an end to the practice of issuing detection bills to consumers.
The office-bearers of the Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) employees' union (CBA) have warned the union will close down water supply and sewerage system on Feb 24 from 11am in its second phase of protest over non-payment of salary to workers.
In a joint statement issued on Sunday, the office-bearers Aijaz Hussain, Bahram Khan and Abdul Qayyum Bhatti said that employees of Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa) were protesting against non-payment of salary, arrears and pension.
They said that they would start the agitation on Feb 22 (Monday) in the first phase of protest by staging a rally from Tulsi Das pumping station. Then in the second phase, they would close down water supply and sewerage on Feb 24 at 11am for which they had written warning letters to the officers concerned.
But, they said, so far no officer concerned had contacted them for redressing their grievances. It appears the HDA management and Sindh were deliberately trying to create a crisis in the city after they closed down water supply and sewerage systems as a last resort, they said.
They said the provincial government owed Rs1 billion dues to Wasa, which if paid could solve the issue of salaries and dues of employees. They urged civil society to support their agitation for persuading the Sindh government to clear Wasa's dues.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1241027/farmers-seek-heavy-increase-in-subsidy-on-purchase-of-laser-leveller

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 8th TO FEBRUARY 14th 2016

SHRINKING SUNFLOWER CULTIVATION

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 8th, 2016
AHMAD FRAZ KHAN
AS sunflower sowing starts in Punjab, the situation appears grim for the crop. It has lost almost 65pc of area to other competitive crops, coming down from 242,000 acres in 2009 to 86,500 acres in 2016.
The drop occurred when officials planned to double the area during the same period from 242,000 acres to 480,000 acres. The sunflower acreage lost, has gone to wheat and maize, and, to a lesser extent, sugarcane.
The official plan of doubling the acreage in Punjab was aimed at controlling swelling edible oil import bill, which in the first nine months of last year, had crossed $1.37bn. In the entire 2015 the total bill was $1.93bn.
Another unintended effect, which may carry even bigger and long-term social and economic cost, is farmers' heavy dependence on wheat and maize for making some profits, and turning Pakistan's agriculture into two crop exercise.
Unfortunately, these are the only two crops, which are yielding some profit to the growers (wheat being a staple and enjoying official support price and maize because of high-yielding hybrid varieties and efficient industry).
In fact, wheat production and its stuck-up stocks both at federal and provincial levels are already testing official financial and administrative capacity.
The edible oil producing crops (mustard and sunflower) suffer from official neglect. Though running a pulses promotion programme, Punjab has almost conceded to the market forces which are dictating crop pricing. The province has now been asking the federal government to take other federating units on board and spare areas for oil producing crops because it cannot produce them at the nationally required level. Its plans for the oil producing crops have also gone awry, as shown by the exceptional drop in sunflower crop.
All these crops have huge unresolved marketing issues. The farmers have been sowing sunflower on soils either left over by wheat or in water-stressed areas. Now they are abandoning even that practice. The pulses' price, which doubled, even tripled in the last few years proves the point for pulses and drop in acreage for sunflower.
This situation calls for an integrated approach, which could ensure return on the crop for farmers and also add to yield and also absorb changes in weather.

For fiscal returns, a fair price is needed. In 2009, the then Federal Minister for Agriculture Nazar Mohammad Gondal announced support price of Rs1,600 per 40kg. In 2015, when the cost of production had almost tripled, the sunflower was traded at an average price of Rs1,500 per 40kg. This hardly augured well for the crop economics.
Apart from the declining prices, there has also been no breakthrough in technology. With climate change affecting the crop (like February rains last year), the yield plummeted.
Most of the farmers, who used to harvest around 20 maunds per acre which has dropped down 10 to 15 maunds per acre.
The farmers claim that unless price of sunflower sustains a level of double the price of wheat (at around Rs2,500 per 40kg) and yield go up to over 20 maunds per acre, the crop would not make commercial sense for them. The federal government never bothered to support price of the crop after 2009, defeating official efforts at reducing oil import bill and, diversifying crops.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1238151/shrinking-sunflower-cultivation

COTTON AND TEXTILES $4 BILLION TO BE SPENT ON COTTON IMPORT

Business Recorder, February 09, 2016
AAMIR SAEED
ISLAMABAD : Damage due to rains, prevailing low cotton prices, and high cost of inputs, led to lower area under cotton cultivation necessitating import of about $4 billion worth of cotton for domestic consumption, Cotton Commissioner revealed to Business Recorder .
Erratic rainfall, poor quality of seeds and drought in some cotton growing areas has resulted in low cotton output of 10.85 million bales against the estimate of 15.49 million bales. The sowing target of cotton was also missed as it was planted on 2.946 million hectares against the target of 3.122 million hectares. Cost of inputs including seeds, pesticides, fertilisers and sprayers have increased from 15 to 20 percent.
In some cases, low quality seeds, pesticides and fertilisers were also supplied to the growers with disastrous consequences on output. Dr Khalid Abdullah, Cotton Commissioner, said Punjab was projected to produce 10.5 million bales this year, but the projection was revised downward to 7.4 million bales following erratic rainfall in some areas and attack of pink bollworm and whitefly. Sindh was expected to produce 4.4 million bales however the projected estimate was revised downward to 3.4 million bales after pink bollworm and whitefly attacks.
The Cotton Commissioner further stated that the low price of the produce also resulted in low farmers' interest in sowing the crop. "The price of cotton remained between Rs 1800 to Rs 2300 rupees per 40 kilograms in August and September and this was too low compared to the previous years which led to lower area under cultivation then projected," he said. "Cotton production depends on favourable weather conditions, timely availability of inputs (fertilisers, agro-chemicals, quality seed etc), adequate crop management and sale prices," he said. Adverse weather conditions were observed during the current season including high temperature, heavy rains and more rainy days that affected plant growth and development, restricted pesticide spray and weed management.
The Cotton Commissioner said the pink bollworm severely damaged the crop in this season due to erratic weather patterns. The population built up unexpectedly at a later stage of the crop and severe boll damage was observed during the months of August-October. He added that the farmers could not control the infestation by Pink bollworm due to lack of vigilance and unavailability of adequate pesticides.
Pakistan is the fourth largest cotton producer in the world with the third largest spinning capacity in Asia after China and India. The sector also contributes 8.5 percent to the Gross Domestic Product and provides employment to some 40 percent of industrial labour force, according to the official figures.
The country also earns around $12 billion annually from export of cotton and cotton products. The sector is known as the backbone of the country's economy but for the last few years cotton production has significantly declined due to droughts, floods, and erratic weather patterns.
http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/625/14390/?format=pdf

UP-GRADATION: RICE INDUSTRY SEEKS SMEDA'S ROLE

Business Recorder, February 10, 2016
The business community of South Punjab has drawn the attention of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) to the difficulties faced by the SME rice growers, millers, processors and exporters and urged study and examination of the issues of the small industry and suggestions for remedial measures to the ministries of agriculture and commerce to save it.
President of Multan Chamber of Commerce & Industry (MCCI) Fareed Mughis A Sheikh said it is incumbent upon SMEDA to look into the predicament of the SMEs engaged in the different businesses, which is in jeopardy due to the

issues of the industry and unable to survive under such circumstances, especially when there is a global decline in the commodities market.
One important point which needs to be seriously looked into by the Pakistan Standard Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) is the substandard fertilisers and counterfeit fumigation medicines supplied for destroying insecticides and pesticides. The SME farmer is paying through the nose for these inputs and suffering losses because of its ineffectiveness or low potency.
The modern day logistic companies have a system of collateral management which is comprehensive and covers inspection at different stages, risk management with insurance, warehouse receipt financing, speedy movements and tracking, thus making banks comfortable in financing the SME rice traders before and after shipments.
Fareed said after cotton textiles, rice was the second biggest export industry, but due to lack of interest the industry has suffered loss and more than 1,000 rice units have closed down. Similar case was of textile industry which would have to import raw cotton from abroad. MCCI President said due to high farm inputs the prices of cotton, rice and other commodities have become non-competitive.
Secondly, primitive methods of cultivation and poor condition of the soil the yields per acre have fallen. It is high time the rice industry modernised, and SMEDA can play an important role in its up gradation and modernisation.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1238151/shrinking-sunflower-cultivation

IN SESSION: MUCH ADO IN PUNJAB ASSEMBLY ABOUT FARMERS' WOES

The Express Tribune, February 11th, 2016.
Aroosa Shaukat
LAHORE: Lawmakers from the Treasury and Opposition benches were unanimous in their criticism of the government's failure to address problems faced by farmers in a three-hour-long Provincial Assembly session on Wednesday, but failed to convince the chair to set up a commission in this regard. The low-attendance session also failed to pass two bills on the agenda.
The session was chaired by Speaker Rana Muhammad Iqbal. Several lawmakers urged the government to provide direct subsidies to farmers and do away with multiple taxes. The government was also urged to ease qualification criteria of subsidies on agriculture equipment.
Syed Waseem Akhtar pointed out problems in the Cash Payment Receipt system and said it could be replaced with cheques. Akhtar also criticised what he called uneven development spending by the government, comparing facilities available in Lahore to those in his Bahawalpur constituency.
The government was also criticised for import of vegetables and fruits from India. Lawmakers said Indian imports created greater challenges for local farmers.
Tariq Bajwa, from the Treasury, said fruits and vegetables worth Rs26 billion were imported from India last year. His comments were followed by anti-government sloganeering from the Opposition benches. Bajwa also spoke out against lawmakers who he had betrayed their constituents and had been presenting a false picture of the status of farmers in the House.
He next criticised the performance of the standing committee on agriculture.
He insisted that the chair establish a commission that should submit its report in two months. The Leader of the Opposition supported the idea, saying all opposition parties in the assembly would second the move.
However, Sardar Sher Ali Gorchani, who was chairing the session at the time, said a ruling would be made in this regard if the need arose.
MPA Amjad Ali Khan, another member from the treasury benches, called for the formation of a special committee, if not a commission, to address problems in policy-making.
"Experts must give their input to help us take our agriculture policy in the right direction," he said.
Sheikh Alauddin questioned the efficacy of a commission that was not empowered. He also criticised the lawmakers for not coming up with alternative solutions. He also challenged the agriculture minister's claim that most sugar mills had paid the farmers, saying that some sugar mills in his constituency still owed farmers Rs1 billion.
Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's lawmakers called for reducing the role of middlemen. Siddique Khan said the Punjab Agricultural Income Tax Act 1997 should be amended to provide relief from income tax to farmers. "Financial burden is not relieved by announcing Kissan Packages that lack supportive policies," said Nabeela Hakim Ali.
The question hour involving the Health Department was marred by two walkouts to protest answers provided by Parliamentary Secretary Khawaja Imran Nazeer.
Treasury member Mian Tahir said a time frame should be provided to address the shortage of medical facilities at the Faisalabad DHQ hospital. As Nazeer refused to do that, Tahir staged a walkout.

The Opposition, too, staged a walkout during the question hour when an argument between the parliamentary secretary and PTI's Mian Aslam broke out over shortage of dialysis machines in public hospitals.
The opposition leader said that the Punjab Institute of Cardiology had been operating without senior doctors. He said of the Rs22 billion allocated in the 2015-2016 budget, Rs8 billion had been released for far and Rs3 billion had been spent. "This government's priority is this Orange Line metro train. Everything else is being ignored," he said.
Nazeer responded by commenting on medical facilities in hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "This attitude is hypocritical. They [the Opposition] find excuse to criticise the Orange Train project because it bothers them to see the government working for the good of people".
He said 500 new doctors had been recruited and would soon be appointed where vacancies existed.
The session will continue on Thursday (today). The agriculture minister will conclude the discussion on agriculture. Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the House are also scheduled to be passed along with pending legislation from Wednesday's session.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1044499/in-session-much-ado-in-punjab-assembly-about-farmers-woes/
IN SESSION: 'AGRICULTURE SECTOR SITUATION NOT IDEAL BUT IT IS NOT TERRIBLE'
The Express Tribune, February 12th, 2016.
Aroosa Shaukat
LAHORE: Though there is frustration among farmers over the agriculture policy, the situation is not as dire as portrayed by the Opposition. The provincial minister of agriculture said while concluding the debate on agriculture policy in the Provincial Assembly on Thursday.
The session started with a three-hour delay. The House passed one of the two bills on the agenda. The Punjab Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (Amendment) Bill was passed but the House failed to take up the Punjab Forests (Amendment) Bill as well as the amendments to its own Rules of Procedure which had been on the agenda for the day.
The session was chaired by Deputy Speaker Sardar Sher Ali Gorchani. The two-day debate on agriculture which had not concluded on Wednesday owing to thin attendance was finally wrapped up by Agriculture Minister Farrukh Javed who gave a point-by-point response to concerns raised by lawmakers in the previous session.
"I can't say I will present a rosy picture but it is unfair to suggest that the situation is as hopeless as has been portrayed by some of our friends," he said.
He said lack of commitment to government's policies, the energy crisis and global food prices were only a few of the factors which had affected the agriculture sector.
He dismissed criticism of Indian imports, saying the same argument could be made about Pakistani exports to India. "If billions of rupees is spent on tomato imports, billions of rupees is spent by Indian on purchase of onions exported from here," he said.
The minister said the balance of trade was working in favour of Pakistan, adding that the government had enhanced duty on wheat imports.
The minister said it was incorrect to assume that there were no subsidies for farmers. He said the government had provided subsidies in electricity, fuel and agriculture equipment.
"There is a 50 per cent subsidy on tractors," he said. "For the last three years, a 50 per cent subsidy is also being provided on laser levellers in every district. Of the Rs550,000 cost of a laser leveller, farmers now pay only Rs100,000," he said.
Commenting on agricultural inputs, he said the department had always maintained that these should not be taxed for farmers.
He said sales tax on fertilisers had been lowered from 17 per cent to 7 per cent. He said tax for agriculture machines had dropped to 9 per cent from 43 per cent.
He said the World Bank had been facilitating farmers in a water supply project for the past three years. He said Potohar was now home to valleys of grapes and olives.
He said he supported the demand for raising the income tax exemption ceiling for farmers and bringing it at par with Rs400,000 for industries. He also reassured the House that legal proceedings were being initiated against sugar mills that had failed to make payments to farmers.
He also defended the Prime Minister's Kissan Package, saying it was unprecedented.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1045194/in-session-agriculture-sector-situation-not-ideal-but-it-is-not-terrible/Absence of the Opposition members at the concluding session was criticised by the chair as well as by the Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Culture Rana Muhammad Arshad.

Less than 40 members from the treasury benches attended Thursday's session.
During the question hour, Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering Tanveer Aslam Malik was grilled over the department's failure to ensure sewerage facilities and delays in inquiries against WASA officials since 2012.
The minister said the delay was partially because both the person under inquiry and the one conducting the inquiry had retired. The opposition rose to its feet in agitation when the minister said that a water supply scheme from the year 2011-2012 for Mianwali worth Rs4.33 million was not functioning due to low voltage in the area. The speaker instructed an inquiry into the matter and said that it should made functional at the earliest.
Two bills are on the agenda for the session on Friday (today).
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1045194/in-session-agriculture-sector-situation-not-ideal-but-it-is-not-terrible
GREEK FARMERS CLASH WITH POLICE DURING MASS PROTEST
Business Recorder, February 13, 2016
Thousands of Greek farmers demonstrated in Athens on Friday after earlier clashing with riot police in a protest against pension and tax reforms demanded by the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Some 10,000 farmers joined by worker unionists gathered in central Syntagma Square according to police, waving Greek flags and led by 20 tractors loudly blaring their horns.
"We have come to demonstrate peacefully," said Christos Georgakopoulos, a 42-year-old raisin grower from Nemea. "We are demonstrating against the pension reform and we want to be taxed fairly," he told AFP. Earlier in the day, farmers from the island of Crete had clashed with riot police outside the agriculture ministry after arriving by ferries at the port of Piraeus. They pelted the police with tomatoes and other items, broke windows in the ministry and set fire to dustbins. Police, who blocked their route, responded with teargas, and arrested four people.
"The first floor of the building sustained damage, it is fortunate that no staff were hurt," Agriculture Minister Evangelos Apostolou later told reporters. Apostolou called on the leaders to contain "extreme" elements in their midst, as officials said that far-right militants had joined parts of the protest. The junior interior minister for police, Nikos Toskas, said 10 police officers had been hurt, two of them requiring hospitalisation.
"The plan is for farm vehicles to be parked aside so the farmers can participate in the protest without causing confusion in the city," Toskas told state TV ERT. "We will safeguard the city centre and the protests," he said. Including the Cretans, farmers' groups descended on Athens from at least three sides. Police also confronted farmers from the Peloponnese peninsula who tried to break through barriers into the city centre from a western suburb with their farm vehicles. Police also fired teargas there after a hooded protester smashed the windshield of a squad car.
"Far-right elements are gathered in this area, trying to create confusion," Toskas told Skai TV.
http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/16118/
WEATHER BRINGS RELIEF FOR KHARIF SEASON
Dawn, February 13th, 2016
LAHORE: The country may start Kharif season (beginning March 1) with a historic carry-over of around four million acre feet (MAF) of water as changing weather patterns have brought short spans of extreme cold and high temperatures, improving hydrological conditions.
Over the past one month, hilly areas have witnessed heavy snowfalls, followed by high mercury which melted the snow quickly, improving river flow and increasing reservoirs' levels.
On Friday, the country held a record 5.7 MAF of water in both of its reservoirs, and the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) was supplying water to provinces according to their demand.
The improved health of reservoirs could be gauged from the difference between their planned level and actual position. According to the Irsa planning, the Tarbela Lake should have been at a level of 1,409 feet on Feb 12, whereas its actual level was 1,489, or 80 feet above the planned level. Last year, the lake was at 1,468 feet. The lake holds 3.16 MAF of water.
Similarly, the Mangla Lake had attained 1,165 feet against the planned 1,090 – an improvement of 75 feet. On the same day last year, the lake level was 1,150 feet. The reservoir is holding 2.59MAF of water and Irsa has increased releases to around 60,000 cusecs as Punjab is running all its perennial and non-perennial canals according to the demand.
"The hydrological conditions this year have improved vastly, and from the beginning of the season," said an official of the Punjab Irrigation Department. In the start of the current Rabi season, Irsa had feared some 14 per cent shortages in October last year. They were revised down to 8pc in November. By January (after the canal closure), they came down to nil and Irsa started releasing water to provinces as per their demand from the start of February.

Now, with water supply still much better than expected, the water watchers are hoping that both reservoirs would continue to improve during February because of the current spell of heavy snowfall in catchment areas. On the basis of these calculations, the country might be starting next irrigation season (Kharif) with around 4MAF of water, against traditional storages of half a million acre feet to one million acre feet, he hoped.

"Apart from the current temporary relief, the erratic weather pattern should also be a concern for policymakers," cautioned another official.

In the last two months, he said, weather changed in more ways than one — there was almost no cold during December and the first half of January before the extreme winter set in. Within next two weeks, cold gave way to high temperature before one week of heavy snowfall began in areas like Mansehra and Margalla hills, which traditionally hardly received any snow. Met officials are now predicting rise in temperature next week. "This pattern will only add uncertainties to supplies. To meet such a situation, country needs to have more reservoirs," he said.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1239239

UPGRADE REQUIRED : STRESS LAID ON USE OF MODERN EQUIPMENT

The Express Tribune, February 13th, 2016

FAISALABAD: Highlighting reasons behind the deterioratinghttp://tribune.com.pk/story/1045194/in-session-agriculture-sector-situation-not-ideal-but-it-is-not-terrible condition of the agriculture sector, University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said lack of machinery and skilled manpower are hurting the country.

He was addressing a seminar on tractor parts arranged by the WazirPak Group ATS and UAF.

"Farmers do not have sophisticated machinery – even for major crops," said Khan. "There is a need to introduce efficient and low cost farm machinery not only to increase productivity but to facilitate the farming community.

"Horse power of tractors are underutilised due to lack of trained manpower. Available planters and harvesters in the country are not up to speed on current technology."

Khan was of the view that reverse engineering of imported farm machinery will help in manufacturing low cost and durable machinery at the local level. "In the modern era, it has become the need of the hour to adopt state-of-the-art tools to increase productivity amid increasing population," said Khan. "Farmers must be trained on how to use the machinery in order to ensure its efficiency."

He said that we have 1.2 million tube-wells only in Punjab and only 0.2 million of them are being operated on electricity. The rest of them are being run through tube-wells that is the wastage of energy.

WazirPak Group ATS Chairman Amjad Wazir said that India's per acre productivity was more than Pakistan's due to usage of sophisticated machinery.

.http://tribune.com.pk/story/1045686/upgrade-required-stress-laid-on-use-of-modern-equipment/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 1ST TO FEBRUARY 7TH 2016

SUGAR PRICES RISE AFTER EXPORT SUBSIDY

Dawn, February 2nd, 2016

AAMIR SHAFAAT KHAN

KARACHI: The retail price of sugar has surged to Rs60-62 a kilogram after the government doled out a Rs6.5 billion (Rs13 a kg) export subsidy to millers in December 2015, when prices were Rs55.

The wholesale price has risen from Rs50-51 in December to Rs56.50 now, but retailers are charging consumers an extra Rs4 to Rs6 per kg.

On Dec 8, the government allowed 500,000 tonnes of sugar exports with a subsidy of Rs13 per kg till March 31, 2016. In the first phase 200,000 tonnes were allowed to be exported by Dec 31 and then 350,000 by Jan 31.

The government earlier allowed 650,000 tonnes of sugar exports with a subsidy of Rs10 per kg. Moreover, a 40 per cent regulatory duty on import of raw and beet sugar was also imposed to protect sugar millers.

Based on these subsidies and incentives, the retail price of sugar fluctuated between Rs50 per kg in January 2015 and Rs65 in the middle of the year.

Despite government's support to sugar millers regarding subsidies and imposition of 40pc regulatory duty on imports, the commodity's exports remained unimpressive in view of declining price trend in world markets. However, some companies and traders capitalised on the falling global prices by importing more quantities.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), sugar exports remained nil in November and December 2015. In July-December 2015-16, 20,117 tonnes of sugar exports fetched $9.1 million compared to $98m (204,448 tonnes) in the same period of 2014-15.

In 2014-15, exports stood at 708,968 tonnes ($322m) as compared to 647,333 tonnes ($283m) a year ago.

Imports in July-December 2015-16 went up to 8,153 tonnes ($4m) from 6,437 tonnes ($4.1m) in the same period last year.
In 2014-15, imports stood higher at 10,201 tonnes ($6.23m) compared to 9,824 tonnes ($6.1m) in 2013-14.
Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA) Chairman Anis Majeed said sugar prices actually started crawling up since the government announced subsidy of Rs13 per kg in December 2015.
As international price of sugar is already very depressed compared to local prices, the subsidy of Rs 13 per kg may not prove feasible for exports, he said.
He said some kind of speculation is also going on in the market that prices would rise further on the domestic market.
Sugar production in 2016 season is expected to reach over 5m tonnes while local consumption stands at 4.8m tonnes.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1236879

NO FOREIGNER IS DOING RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURE IN SINDH, PA TOLD

Dawn, February 2nd, 2016
KARACHI: Not a single foreigner is carrying out agricultural research in any government institute in the province owing to the country's security situation, agriculture minister Ali Nawaz Mahar told the Sindh Assembly on Monday.
He was responding to queries of legislators during the question hour — that pertained to the Sindh agriculture department — during the assembly session.
Answering a question by Muttahida Qaumi Movement legislator Heer Ismail Soho, the minister said that owing to security concerns foreigners did not come here to conduct research in agriculture.
Replying to her another question, he said 431 officials belonging to other provinces were working in agricultural research at various institutes set up by the federal government in Sindh at different locations, including Karachi, Thatta, Umerkot and Sakrand.
In reply to a question by Ms Soho if many new crop varieties having more yield had been developed in Punjab and why no new variety had been developed in Sindh recently, the minister said it was because very little amount of money was allocated for research in the province. He, however, added that he would try to get more funds so that more research, which was costly, could be carried out and varieties having better yield could be developed.
He said the federal government's Pakistan Agriculture Research Council had set up the Southern Research Centre at Karachi University and the Sugarcane Research Station in Thatta; and the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee had set up two cotton research stations, one at Sakrand and the other at Utmerkot; whereas the province had its research facilities at Tandojam, Mirpurkhas, Dokri, Sakrand and Larkana.
Responding to another of her questions, the minister said four fertiliser companies and 98 pesticide companies were registered. He said various unregistered companies also sold their pesticides etc in the market which was illegal and when caught those were prosecuted in court where people involved could be sentenced up to three years and fined up to Rs500,000.
In the written reply to a question asked by MQM legislator Moin Pirzada regarding sugar production, the minister said 13 million tonnes of sugarcane was crushed and 1.2 million tonnes of sugar was produced in the province during 2011-12.
Answering a question by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf legislator Seema Zia regarding export of mangoes, the minister said over 1.6 million tonnes of mangoes were produced in the country, of which 0.085 million tonnes were exported to more than 50 countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Belgium. He said that there were 148 varieties of mangoes.
There were conflicting questions from legislators as MQM legislator Sardar Ahmed said that rather than promoting export of mangoes and other food items which created shortages and increased prices in the country, their export be discouraged so that the poor who produced them could also afford their produce, while the PTI's Ms Zia and the MQM's Ms Soho suggested that efforts be made to increase exports. Speaker Durrani also suggested that exports be increased so that farmers got fair prices for their produce.
Replying to a question asked by Pakistan Muslim League-Functional legislator Nusrat Seher Abbasi regarding prices of fertilisers and if those companies recruited locals, the minister said that prices were controlled by the federal government and some locals were also employed but their number was very small.
Answering a question by PML-F legislator Nand Kumar why after the 18th amendment the Sindh government was not exercising its powers in the agricultural sector, the minister agreed that though after the 18th amendment agriculture had become a provincial subject, all the powers had not yet been devolved to the province.
MQM legislators Mohammad Hussain, Bilquees Mukhtar, Sumeta Syed, Ashfaq Mangi, Mohammad Kamran, Rana Ansar, Kamran Akhtar; PTI legislator Khurram Sherzaman and others also asked questions.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1236832

TCP SCRAPS RICE TENDER

Business Recorder, February 02, 2016

Following the directives of the federal government, the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) Monday announced that it has cancelled the rice procurement tender.

Last week, the state-run grain trader invited fresh sealed bids (under Public Procurement Rules, 2004) from companies/partnership/sole proprietors dealing in export of rice for purchase of 15,000 tons long grain white rice (IRRI-6) on Cost and Free on Board (C&FoB) basis up to the port of Cotonou, Benin, packed in polypropylene (PP) woven bags as per provided specification.

As per the TCP announcement, the tender was to open on February 3, 2016, however, the state-run grain trader Monday cancelled the tender without quoting any reason. Sources said the tender has been cancelled on the directives of the ministry of commerce.

The fresh tender for procurement of 15,000 tons IRRI-6 was issued on January 26, when first rice tender was scrapped as the quoted prices were significantly higher than the prevailing local prices.

The procurement was being made for Benin as gift from the people of Pakistan. Presently, several African countries are facing food shortage and two weeks ago Pakistan dispatched a consignment of 15,000 tons rice (10,000 tons IRRI-6 and 5,000 tons Basmati) to Cuba.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/12575/

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He said the federal government's Pakistan Agriculture Research Council had set up the Southern Research Centre at Karachi University and the Sugarcane Research Station in Thatta; and the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee had set up two cotton research stations, one at Sakrand and the other at Utmerkot; whereas the province had its research facilities at Tandojam, Mirpurkhas, Dokri, Sakrand and Larkana.

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Replying to a question asked by Pakistan Muslim League-Functional legislator Nusrat Seher Abbasi regarding prices of fertilisers and if those companies recruited locals, the minister said that prices were controlled by the federal government and some locals were also employed but their number was very small.
Answering a question by PML-F legislator Nand Kumar why after the 18th amendment the Sindh government was not exercising its powers in the agricultural sector, the minister agreed that though after the 18th amendment agriculture had become a provincial subject, all the powers had not yet been devolved to the province.
MQM legislators Mohammad Hussain, Bilquees Mukhtar, Sumeta Syed, Ashfaq Mangi, Mohammad Kamran, Rana Ansar, Kamran Akhtar; PTI legislator Khurram Sherzaman and others also asked questions.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1236832

RICE EXPORT TRADE FACING CRISIS, NEEDS GOVERNMENT ATTENTION: REAP

Business Recorder, February 03, 2016

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) said Tuesday that the second largest foreign exchange earner commodity's export trade is facing severe crisis and needs government's attention to avert them.
Reap representatives Chaudhry M Shafique, Chairman and Noman Ahmed Shaikh, senior vice chairman Reap, Abdul Rahim Janoo, Chief Patron of Reap and Rafique Suleman Chairman, FPCCI Rice Exports Committee 2016, called for subsidised rice seed, fertilisers, water, electricity/diesel, etc, for the farmers to reduce the cost of production.
They said that rice export trade is fetching US $2.5 billion foreign exchange annually for the country. However, during last two years, rice export trade is facing crisis owing to lower commodity prices in the world market.
"We are afraid that this year will also be very challenging for rice export trade, if the government will not take appropriate steps to resolve the rice exporters' problems," they added.
They said Reap is planning to organise its 8th Export Trophy Awards in Karachi/Lahore/Islamabad and requested the Prime Minister of Pakistan to spare time to preside over the function. "We are confident that the PM's presence will boost the morale of rice exporters.
We also intend to discuss certain proposals for the betterment of our trade with the PM," they added. Moreover, Reap would like to establish a latest 'Rice Zone' and a formal request has been sent to the federal government for a suitable piece of land along with the gas & electricity connections on subsidised rates.
"We are also mulling over taking the land of TCP godowns located at Pipri and becoming shabby due to non-utilisation," they said.
The government should allot TCP godowns to Reap on market rates, so that rice export trade could get full benefit of the proposed Rice Zone. This will also help achieve our vision of crossing $4 billion in rice exports during this business-friendly government's tenure, they maintained.
In order to promote Pakistani rice, Reap is also intending to arrange a "Grand Biryani Festival," in which all Karachi-based Consul Generals, Deputy High Commissioners, Honorary Consuls, Commercial Counsellors, heads of various government and non-government organisations will be invited.
Over 7-8 different dishes of Pakistani rice will be presented to them. "We believe that the Biryani Festival will be instrumental in uplifting the image of Pakistan and Pakistani rice," he added.
Reap always raised its voice for all stakeholders of rice and particularly for the rice growers. Input cost of rice cultivation is very high as compared to our competitors, as the Indian agriculture industry is heavily subsidised by their government.
The government has also been requested to provide rice farmers with subsidised seed, fertilisers, water, electricity/diesel, etc, so that the cost of production could be decreased and rice exporters able to compete in international markets.
The Reap representatives hoped that the government will consider these suggestions on high priority in the larger interest of the country and make Pakistan a real 'Asian Tiger'.
http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/industries-a-sectors/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/12944:rice-export-trade-facing-crisis-needs-government-attention-reap/

ANALYSIS: DARK CLOUDS OVER SILVER FIBRE

Dawn, February 3rd, 2016

AFSHAN SUBOHI

Last season Imtiaz Chaudhry, a young man from Khanewal, cultivated cotton on 76 of 96 acres of family land. The cotton grower from South Punjab said he would not sow cotton on more than 20 acres in 2016.
He is not an exception. Most farm experts asserted that in absence of immediate policy intervention many cotton farm owners in Punjab will do the same: switch from cotton to a crop that they perceive to be more rewarding.

If their assessment is taken to be true the future of the cotton economy of Pakistan does not appear promising. The acreage of cotton crop and its production in Punjab is set to shrink drastically. The prospects are clouded also because there appears to be no sense of urgency in the official circles. How would it portend for the massive textile sector and the economy beyond? My guess is as good as yours.

The story of Imtiaz, 34, was typical. He claimed to be tilling the land for the last 15 years, unlike his other brothers who decided to move to cities for a more predictable future.

A brief chat with him revealed that it was the romance associated with the land, instilled by his rural background that tempted him, an educated man, to pick a riskier future in farming. As expected the graph of his annual income has not been linear but he said he was content with it up till now. However, the ordeal and the loss he incurred this year shook his resolve.

"Right now I feel trapped and depressed. I cannot jump boats now as farming is what I have learned and can do with ease. I have no choice but to pull myself up and strategise for the next season," he told this scribe.

"The pain of losing a crop is not much different from loss of a loved one. In farming it is not enough to spend liberally. One has to tend and monitor a farm closely," he felt the need to explain to evoke empathy.

Continuing to tell his story he said, "Three months after sowing in August last year I knew that something was wrong as the growth of cotton plant was subnormal not only in my but all adjoining farms. My initial response was to apply more fertiliser and go for an additional spray but soon I realised that the problem was deeper.

"By mid August instead of attaining 4-foot height, plants were a foot and half tall and leaves were pale and curled inwards. The shape of cotton bud was twisted and when finally flower opened up brown stains were visible. Eyeing the low prices I gave up on plans that involved investment to salvage the crop and tried to dispose of the produce as fast as I could."

At the start of the season he expected a minimum return of Rs2.5 million on his investment of Rs3.5m. Sharing break-up of spending, he said the cost of cotton cultivation per acre comes to about Rs45,000. It includes cost of inputs like seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, water, diesel for tractors and electricity for tube wells but excludes spending on labour for cotton picking, transportation to the market and payment to the agent (broker).

The loss this year in volume and quality of the crop did not allow him to recover even the cost and at the end he incurred a net loss of over two million rupees.

Like others, Imtiaz contested the government's claim that changes in weather pattern and pink bollworm attack in the province were primarily responsible for the short crop. "I don't think more than 10 per cent of the loss can be attributed to these. Lack of availability of the right pesticides compounded the agony of farmers but I believe some genetic disease spread by substandard seeds is the real culprit," dejected Imtiaz said adding that other factors such as lack of guidance and timely intervention by the government aggravated the situation.

Cotton crop failure in Punjab left several hundred thousand rural families in deep distress. The small farm holders who raised capital cost from loans are worst hit. Many had to sell their animals and part of their land to settle their obligations towards lenders.

"I have seen ups and downs in the past. The closeness to nature tends to make us patient. The weather was harsh with too many rainy days and there was pest attack but it was the apathy of the government that sealed our fate," a leader of farming community Khawaja Shahab said when reached in his office in downtown Multan.

He said he was planning to replace cotton by sugarcane though cane requires much high water intake as returns are relatively higher and secured.

In 2015 area under cotton crop in the province fell marginally to 2,260,000 hectares from 2,300,000 in 2014. The production according to official data released on 15 January 2016 dived from 11 million bales last year to 5.7 million bales during the current year.

Dr Farrukh Javed, Agriculture Minister Punjab, said the government was not only alive to the situation but doing all in its power to assist the farming community. "The government has reduced the input cost significantly by providing subsidy on inputs and duty reduction in utilities. The Rs341 billion PML-N Kissan package announced in September last year for small farmers includes direct cash support of Rs5,000 for families and provision of soft loans," he said over phone from Lahore.

"We are not beggars waiting for charity. We want farming to get the respect and importance it deserves in Islamabad. The government needs to check price manipulation of inputs and dumping of agriculture products by India and China. We are asking for a fair deal," a local in the cotton belt reacted.

"The PML-N government has an urban bias. Let Dr Farrukh compare input cost in Pakistan to India or Bangladesh before he boasts of providing relief. There is urgent need to monitor inputs standards and price," said Shakeel Ahmed, a grower.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1237130/analysis-dark-clouds-over-silver-fibre

PARC AIMS TO TRAIN FEMALE OLIVE FARMERS

The Express Tribune, February 4th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) has embarked upon a plan to impart training to female farmers to make value added olive products by utilising their own fruit.

"To develop the cottage industry in target areas, female farmers are being trained. This would play an important role in poverty alleviation of respective areas," spokesman of PARC told APP here on Wednesday.

He said working in the olive sector at this massive scale would also generate a huge financial impact in the development of the economy.

He informed that as part of its mega olive project for olive plantation at 50,000 acres in the country till 2019, Parc would plant 700,000 new olive plants across the country during February and March.

"The project has already completed plantation at an area of 7,166 acres in Punjab, Khybe- Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, and Balochistan", he added.

The spokesman said the project had developed protocols of two olive varieties for propagation through tissue culture technology. Seven olive nurseries have been established so far and 13 specialised nurseries are in the process of establishment at different components.

He said the project had also been established and managed olive mother blocks at all provincial components which would be useful for propagation of olive plants.

"Parc is ready to purchase and install 11 oil mills of different capacity at suitable locations for quick processing of farmers produce," he added.

He said that Parc was going to complete the new olive plantation under the olive commercial project at 8,000 acres during 2015-16. Additionally, the official informed that 1,250 persons have been trained at different districts under provincial components for orchard lay-out, orchard management, olive nursery raising and management and post-harvest handling of olive fruit and value addition.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1039832/parc-aims-to-train-female-olive-farmers/

FARMERS WOES DOMINATE PA SESSION

Dawn, February 4th, 2016

LAHORE: Woes of farmers across the province dominated the Punjab Assembly proceedings on Wednesday despite a heavy agenda – four bills to be passed and one to be introduced.

Besides, the opposition walked out in protest against, what it called, "dictatorial attitude leading to the killing of PIA workers."

But it was agriculture that dominated the proceedings as one member after another, belonging to both sides of the divide, stood up to narrate financial plight of the farmers.

The debate was set in motion during the Question Hour, which included members' queries regarding the agriculture sector, in addition to youth affairs, sports, archaeology and tourism. But it was almost all about agriculture – farmers losing money on rice crop as prices crashed, growers running after the millers for sugarcane payments and potato farmers literally throwing their produce in markets as prices have fallen way below the cost of production.

Ahmad Khan of the opposition stood up to tell the House that farmers were on the verge of committing suicide as they are losing money on almost all crops. "Farmers can afford to lose money one crop, but investment on all crops means losing life, and that is precisely what is happening in the rural areas now," he insisted.

Demanding constitution of a house committee to determine reasons and extent of the plight, he asked the chair to notify the committee.

Mr Khan was not alone in his demand. Many from the Treasury side also stood up to seek solution to the crisis.

Mumtaz Kahloon of the PML-N was second to stand up and tell the chair that more than 80pc of the House belonged to the rural areas and had a lot to do with agriculture; they all were feeling the heat in the face of losing money on all crops and running after the sugar millers for recovery of dues.

The intense pressure created by the members left Farrukh Javed, the provincial minister for agriculture, with no choice but to concede on the issue: "The agriculture department is only mandated to produce commodities. The rest are marketing issues," was his defence against anger of his colleagues.

Sensing the emerging consensus, the Speaker agreed to fix a day for exclusive debate on agriculture issues and ensure that all ministers concerned – agriculture, food and revenue – would be present in the House.
Earlier, as soon as the Question Hour ended, the leader of opposition, Mian Mahmoodur Rashid, emerged in the House, only to stand up on a point of order and berate the “dictatorial attitude of the government which led to violence and killing of PIA workers.”
“The opposition condemns the attitude and walks out in protest,” he said before some members of the combined opposition left the House. After 30 minutes, the opposition returned to the house on the request of two ministers who had gone to bring them back but Mr Rashid stayed away.
Later, the Treasury took up the official agenda, which included four amendment bills. The bill on animal slaughter was introduced and referred to standing committee. The amendment bills regarding the Punjab Revenue Authority, the Punjab Food Authority, the Punjab Infrastructure Development Authority and the Punjab Pure Food were passed by the house.
Though the opposition pointed out incomplete quorum during the official business, it was found okay and the bills sailed through before the chair adjourned the house for 10am Thursday morning.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1237279

FARMERS ASKED TO INSULATE CROPS AGAINST FROST

Business Recorder, February 06, 2016
The Met Office has asked the farmers of upcountry to step up protection to their crops from frost amid dropping temperature. It forecast rains in coming days, saying that the rainy spells would benefit Rabi crops. It advised the farmers to stop irrigating crops keeping in view the expected rains in agricultural plains of the country.
It also said that the falling leaves from trees may have negative effects on standing Rabi crops especially wheat. Framers should collect leaves from the fields at earliest to help crops attain normal growth without getting disturbed. Farmers of irrigated areas should remove weeds from the fields to help the crops utilize the existing moisture fully. It warned the growers of negative impact of weeds on yield and suggested immediate removal of unwanted plants.
Mostly cold and dry weather is expected in Punjab till February 10. However, light to moderate rain with light snowfall over the hills may strike Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Faisalabad divisions from February 6 to 10.
Weather in Sindh is likely to remain dry. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected with light to moderate rainfall and light snowfall over the hills of Hazara, Peshawar and Malakand divisions from February 6 to 9.
Mainly cold and dry weather is expected in most parts of Balochistan with light to moderate rain and light snowfall over the hills of Quetta, Makran, Khuzdar and Kalat. In Gilgit-Baltistan, mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected with light to moderate rain and light snowfall over the hills of Gilgit, Skardu and Hunza from February 6 to 10.
Widespread rain-thunderstorm and snowfall over the hills of Kashmir is expected from February 6 to 10.
http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/industries-a-sectors/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/13862:farmers-asked-to-insulate-crops-against-frost/

March 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 28th TO APRIL 3rd 2016

FARMERS’ WOES: GOVT SUPPORT SOUGHT TO STRENGTHEN AGRO ECONOMY

The Express Tribune, March 28th, 2016
HYDERABAD: As Pakistan Peoples Partys (PPP) chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari makes a case against the alleged exploitation of farmers in Punjab by the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz’s government, agriculturists have decried similar treatment by the Sindh government.
Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), a farmers’ lobbying group headed by PPP MNA Syed Naveed Qamar’s brother, expressed grievances on Sunday in a press statement.
After a meeting, attended through video-link by farmers in Karachi, Hyderabad, Sanghar, Sukkur, Ghotki and Larkana, the chamber said the growers in Sindh are being continuously subjected to economic oppression. SCA senior vice-president Ghulam Hussain Chachar chaired the meeting.
“While expressing deep concern over the injustices being meted out to the farmers, the chamber requests the Sindh government to take immediate steps to support and strengthen the agro economy,” said the statement.
The meeting complained that despite Sindh food minister Nasir Hussain Shah’s assurances, wheat procurement centres have not been opened nor have gunny bags been supplied in many parts of Sindh. The farmers also expressed

worry over the loss to the growers of cotton crop due to shortage of irrigation water in the tail-end areas where cultivation has begun.
The sugarcane price row between farmers and sugar mills, with the government being perceived to be siding with the latter, is already being fought in the Sindh High Court. The farmers are demanding a rate of Rs185 per 40 kilograms while the government has fixed Rs172 per 40kg as the price for the sugarcane crop.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1073979/farmers-woes-govt-support-sought-to-strengthen-agro-economy/

PUNJAB'S SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 28th, 2016
Ahmad Fraz Khan
AS farmers' pressure and protests grow, the Punjab government, following the federal relief of Rs341bn for the community last September, has come up with a Rs100bn package of its own.
Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif convened the 'Punjab Agriculture Conference' earlier this month to announce the sketchy details of this package, which, he said, set the development agenda for the sector for the next two years.
The fine modalities of the package are yet to be finalised, but the money is guaranteed, as the CM claimed: "Even if it takes the entire budget to set things right for farmers and agriculture, Punjab would not be found lacking. The only thing it wants in return is a development payback timeframe and its immediate impact on agriculture."
The CM also announced his government would form a Kissan commission, which he himself would head, to suggest critical areas of intervention and oversee the spending. The entire amount of Rs100bn would be spent on purely 'development activity', and no recurring and regular expenditures or routine infrastructure development would be financed through this money.
The CM's decision got a cautious applause from farmers' bodies, academia and businessmen who made up the bulk of the audience on the day. Everyone cheered the setting aside of money and the concept behind it, but had some reservations on the execution side.
Most of the participants agreed that, if carefully spent, Rs100bn should bring a positive change in the provincial agriculture picture. So would be the formation of a commission if it lends representative voice to the farming community at the policy level. Headed by the chief minister, the commission would have both political and administrative teeth.
The farming community is of the view that, if given proper place in the policy formation, the commission can play a vital development role. The next door neighbour had formed such a commission in East Punjab. Now all Indian states have independent commissions — performing better than initially thought by their script writers.
Pakistan's peculiar circumstances necessitated such a commission long ago, especially after the Eighteenth Amendment, which made agriculture a purely provincial subject.
Citing from a long list of such initiatives, which were started with an equal fanfare, but soon fell out of political favour and lost utility and life, some people fear that the new commission may also take the same route if headed by a busy chief minister with too much on his plate..
The province started the Punjab Agriculture Marketing Company (Pamco), which is almost on clinical support for the last many years despite being rehashed and effort to pump some life into it.
The Punjab Agriculture Research Board (Parb) can be quoted as another example. The Punjab Economic Research Institute (Peri) is yet another dying initiative. All these initiatives have one commonality — despite having their own so-called independent board of directors — they are all working under the Punjab government and treated as extensions of its allied departments.None of them can raise voice independently or speak for themselves.
However, others maintain that it could be easier to implement the commission's recommendations since these would be approved with the provincial chief executive at the head of the commission.
The proposed commission will start with two positives — political backing, at least initially, and assured money.
The doubters, however, insist that the provincial chief executive should create a commission, which is independent, permanent and effective and, most crucially, free of political interference.
He should look around and see how the commissions, which actually helped the agriculture sector grow, have worked elsewhere and try to gain from their experience.
Given the nature of deep-seated problems of the agriculture sector and its vast potential, farming and livestock development needs to be placed at the centre of Punjab's economic growth strategy.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1248342

IMPROVING PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 28th, 2016

KEEPING in view the multiple stresses, the country's agriculture has been facing for a long time, the federal government has started working out a strategy for its long-term development.
The prime minister has directed the Federal Ministry of National Food Security and Research to immediately start a consultative process with provincial governments and other stakeholders for developing an integrated framework to expand agriculture production base. And a comprehensive incentive package for the farming community is expected to be announced in the coming federal budget.
The key irritant in resolution of the existing agriculture issues is the lack of synergy in policymaking between the food security ministry and the provinces.
Federal Minister for Food Security Sikander Hayat Khan Bosan had recently requested the prime minister to increase budgetary allocation of his ministry so that he could initiate steps for the long-term development of the agriculture. Bosan's contention was that since the abolition of concurrent list, his ministry's budget had been drastically cut down from multi-billion rupees to just millions, not enough to carry out critical tasks.
A senior official of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Ahmad Jawad was quick to hail the PM's 'timely intervention' to strengthen the agriculture sector which was overdue for long as the sector had continuously failed to achieve the required growth, resulting also in decline of the exports.
An underperforming agriculture sector accounts for 21pc of the country's GDP. An agricultural growth of 5pc could boost the overall GDP by 1.25pc. At current growth rate of around 1.5pc its share is a mere 0.30pc. Experts say meaningful efforts in the agricultural sector can increase GDP growth from projected 4.5pc to 5.5pc.
Meanwhile, the food security ministry has set up seven committees on various sub-sectors of agriculture to formulate proposals for evolving a comprehensive strategy. The committees have been given the deadline of April 24 to submit their recommendations. The financing requirement for the framework would be covered in the forthcoming federal budget and possibly shared by the provincial governments.
The Prime Minister's Secretariat has advised the ministry concerned to ensure that the consultative process should be completed without delay for approval and appropriate allocation of funds in the budget 2016-17. It lays stress on diversification by promoting new crops and modern techniques.
Besides, there are plans to revitalise research institutions, revive a national agriculture research system by synergising federal and provincial research bodies and put greater focus on development of better crop varieties in terms of yield and pest resistance.
A major challenge the government faces at the moment is how to minimise the cost of production of crops and also increase productivity to make farming an attractive enterprise for the farmers. Bosan says his ministry is working on various mechanisms to bring down the cost of production.
One such mechanism could be reduction in prices or taxes of farm inputs which the growers have been demanding for quite long. At present, the use of farm inputs in the country is below the desired levels because of their high prices, and, also in many cases, quality.
According to FAO, the farm productivity in the country remains lower than other countries in the region, some of which have increased output of major crops during the last 50 years. The per acre output of wheat in Pakistan is low as compared to Bangladesh, India and China although in 1960s its wheat yield was much higher than China and Bangladesh and slightly lower than India.
In 1980, the yield of both China and Bangladesh was higher than that of India and Pakistan. However, in 2014 Pakistan was at the bottom again as its per hectare wheat yield stood at 2,787kg, almost the same level that India achieved 20 years ago, the FAO statistics show.
The PM's agriculture strategy includes measures for mitigating the impact of climate change on the agriculture sector, long-term groundwater policy aimed at ensuring access as well as efficient utilisation of this scarce resource, a comprehensive framework for seed certification, availability of fertilisers at affordable prices and regulations for pesticide business.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1248337/improving-profile-of-agriculture-sector

KP WORKING ON NEW STRATEGY TO DEVELOP FARMING

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 28th, 2016
Mubarak Zeb Khan
THE Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, after identifying shortcomings of the 2005 policy, is now formulating a new policy framework for the development of its agriculture sector.
An official of the provincial agriculture department says the policy draft has been approved by the KP cabinet and would be made public soon.

KP's agriculture suffers from very low productivity given the agricultural landscape of the province. Nearly 80pc of KP population live in rural and peri-urban areas, whereas about 85pc directly or indirectly earn their livelihood from farming. Agriculture contributes a mere 14pc to the provincial income far below its potential.

Some of its major issues are: farmers are locked in production of low value crops; irrigation network is not expanding and there is a marked decline in land use intensity.

But the list of bottlenecks holding up agricultural progress is a long one. An official report of the KP Planning Department has listed several factors for the sector's poor performance.

Small landholding is one of the major hurdles in achieving higher yield growth. Over 80pc of the landholdings are below five acres. In India, China, and South Korea, the average size of landholding is even lower than it, but the productivity of major crops is much higher. This is because access to input-institutions, knowledge, and technology favour small farmers in those countries.

Contrary to this, institutional arrangements favour large and politically influential farmers in KP. Small growers do not have access to inputs and resources to participate in high value-added markets. While large and assured markets exist for the traditional crops like wheat but small farmers are big losers owing to fluctuating prices. Generally, the production is supply- driven and not demand-oriented.

Out of the total cultivable land of 2.96 million ha in KP, the area under cultivation is only 1.80 million ha. The remaining 1.16 million ha can be used for farming with marginal investment and something needs to be done in this respect. But the trouble is that both land use and cropping intensities have declined over time.

Farm productivity is also seriously hampered by inefficient irrigation system. Besides, 0.93 million ha (55pc) depend on timely rains exposing a large rural population to weather risks. It lacks modern technologies which could better conserve water.

The fertiliser use in KP has increased at relatively faster rate than in Punjab and Sindh, but it has turned out to be bane rather than a boon for the cultivators. The imbalance and unscientific application of fertiliser has not only decreased its efficiency, but also degraded land fertility.

The seed industry in the province lacks even the so much questioned national standard. Though there are some areas which are highly suitable for seed production, nothing is being done.

Market access is another challenge. Farmers with scattered small holdings are unable to have direct access to markets. The average distance for a farmer to reach the nearest market is 10 miles. This makes it difficult for growers to have accurate information about consumer prices. And the middleman benefits at the cost of farmers and consumers alike.

KP also lacks a proper system for storage of agriculture produce which results in sharp seasonal fluctuations in food prices. Agriculture R&D in KP also faces huge challenges such as poor research planning, prioritisation and poor linkages between farm and research bodies.

According to the planning department report, KP needs to improve agriculture performance by taking several steps including diversifying into high value crops, developing horticulture specialisation, managing irrigation, promoting certified seed nurseries and strengthening agriculture research.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1248332

NEED TO IMPROVE AGRI PRODUCTIVITY ON SCIENTIFIC LINES

Dawn, March 30th, 2016

RAWALPINDI: There is a need to improve Pakistan agriculture production system on scientific lines to enhance sustainable food production, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan said on Tuesday.

He was addressing the inaugural session of 'Agriculture Dynamics in Potohar Region 2016' conference and exhibition. The event was organised by the Office of Research Innovation and Commercialisation (ORIC) of Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi (PMAS-AAUR) in collaboration with the State Bank of Pakistan.

Mr Bosan said Pakistan's low agricultural productivity was a matter of grave concern.

The agriculture sector contributes 23 per cent to gross domestic product whereas around 45pc of the workforce is directly or indirectly dependent on it for livelihood, he added.

"There is a dire need for the promotion of agri-sector by concentrating on crop enhancement, livestock, fisheries and dairy sectors development by creating linkages with the industry," he said.

Highlighting the importance of water, the minister said development of reservoirs and dams is the need of the hour.

He informed that Pakistan is the 5th largest producer of milk and stressed the need for focusing on value addition of agricultural and dairy products for profit maximisation.

PMAS-AAUR, Vice Chancellor, Dr Rai Niaz Ahmad said there was great potential in Potohar area for fruit crops and government should pay special attention for its development.
"For better agriculture production we have to shift from conventional crops to olive and orchard farming," he said.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1248695

FEDERAL GOVT TO TRAIN 2,000 FARMERS: MINISTER

Dawn, April 1st, 2016
Saleem Shahid
QUETTA: The federal government will arrange and bear the expenses for capacity-building training of 2,000 farmers and cattle owners in Islamabad, said Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan here on Thursday.
Speaking at a livestock conference, Mr Bosan said the federal government was extending support and financial assistance to Balochistan for improving the agriculture and livestock sectors to strengthen the provincial economy despite the devolution of various responsibilities after the 18th Amendment.
According to the minister, there is scope to invest in agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors in the province. "In Lasbela and other coastal areas, fish farms should be established to promote business," he said, adding that the government also wanted to support women who owned livestock.
Mr Bosan said a tax amnesty would be given to local investors if they came forward to open industries that had been shut, including the Harnai Woollen Mills. He said the government would help provide medicines and vaccines for livestock.
Balochistan Chief Minister Sanaullah Zehri said that livestock had become a provincial subject but had been neglected despite the fact that more than 60 per cent of the province's population worked in the sector.
He said he had asked the secretary concerned for a detailed briefing so that measures could be taken to fix the problem. The chief minister said forests and trees which were essential for the livestock were vanishing. "Without planting trees and protecting forests, we will not be able to control the negative impacts of climate change," he said, adding that in European countries over 40pc of land was allocated for forests.
The chief minister announced a project through which women would be provided facilities for promotion of livestock and agriculture.The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's Country Head Patrick Evan, provincial ministers, officials and cattle breeders and farmers attended the conference.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1249227

'WE CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER COTTON CROP FAILURE'

Dawn, April 1st, 2016
LAHORE: Member organisations of the Task Force on Cotton reviewed on Thursday the causes of unprecedented decline in the commodity's production in 2015-16, and proposed measures to boost output in the coming season.
The Farmers Associate Pakistan, Kissan Ittehad, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association, All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) and Karachi Cotton Association participated in the meeting held at the Aptma Punjab office.
The participants observed that the sowing season of new cotton crop was just around the corner, and the country could not afford another damage of the only cash crop and a subsequent failure of related stakeholders in the supply chain.
They further pointed out that the retail business in the country was already witnessing a visible negative impact of dwindling farmers' income.
Speaking on the occasion, newly elected chairman of the task force, Seth Muhammad Akbar, said the government should immediately take necessary measures to strengthen cotton production this year.
He said all the taxes on water, electricity, seed, pesticides and fertilisers should be removed to enable cotton growers to compete regionally in terms of the input cost.
Similarly, the services of agriculture extension and the availability of agricultural technology should be made available to growers, right from the land preparation to the crop harvesting at the farm level, he said.
The spinning industry, already facing high cost of doing business, was unable to procure cotton at the import parity, he said, adding that the task force would strive for a free market mechanism while ensuring a level-playing field for all the stakeholders of the cotton economy.
Earlier, the cotton task force unanimously elected Mr Akbar of Aptma Punjab as its first chairman and Khawaja Tahir Mahmood of the KCA as vice-chairman.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1249138

TOWARDS AGRICULTURE-LED GROWTH

The Express Tribune, April 2nd, 2016.

Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif
Punjab is pursuing an aggressive growth agenda and agriculture is at the centre of this. The province not only provides food and nutrition, but also supplies the raw material for the agriculture-based industry. This industry caters to the domestic market and also generates goods for exports.
A large part of the country's foreign exchange originates from agriculture, in which Punjab has a reasonable share. Livestock contributes 11.8 per cent to the GDP and 55 per cent in the overall agriculture sector, of which Punjab is home to almost 40-43 per cent of the livestock population.
Punjab's food industry is the second-biggest industry in terms of GDP in Pakistan. Suffice to say that Punjab's agriculture is not only a source of livelihood for millions of people, but also serves as lubricant for our industry, especially textile, sugar, edible oil and rice husking, where millions of poor people find jobs.
The Punjab government has placed the rural economy central to its policy and implementation. Despite all domestic efforts, challenges to agriculture persist. There are a number of regional and global factors which have adversely affected the agriculture commodity prices.
For the past many decades, our agricultural yield per acre has been consistently decreasing due to old and outdated ways of cultivation and other problems. Our universities and agricultural research institutions have not paid enough attention to modern research in the agricultural field.
I am convinced that we cannot unlock our full potential unless we couple agriculture with research and consequently transfer modern technology to farmers at the grass roots.
Consultation with stakeholders is a hallmark of my governance. It is with this in view that I organised the Punjab Agriculture Conference 2016 a week ago, which assembled all the key players in agriculture development.
The working groups consisting of representatives of farmers, agriculture experts and government officials were formed to formulate concrete proposals and recommendations which will be included in the provincial Agriculture Policy.
On this occasion, I made the announcement of a support package of Rs100 billion to be spent on development of agriculture and welfare of the farmers over the next two years. This amount would be utilised on priority interventions that the conference has identified and recommended.
To keep a focused approach, I have decided to chair the Punjab Agriculture Commission, which would gather all the stakeholders and monitor the agriculture and farming sector on an on-going basis. Through this institutional mechanism, I want to ensure rigorous implementation.
The Punjab government is led by the vision to transform the agriculture sector into a science-based, vibrant and internationally linked sector that can not only meet food security challenges, but also compete in regional and international markets. The Punjab government is focusing on productivity enhancement, increasing input use efficiency and improving market connectivity with strong backward and forward linkages. For this purpose, the development budget for the agriculture sector is being increased consistently by the government.
My government is committed to facilitating farmers through the provision of technical input and services. To achieve this goal, Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif announced a revolutionary and unprecedented Kissan package worth Rs341 billion, for small farmers, which included direct cash support and the provision of soft agriculture loans.
The Kissan package was aimed at extending relief to the farming community, to encourage and promote progressive agriculture on scientific lines and reducing the input cost of crops.
The Punjab government is implementing Khadim-e-Punjab Rural Roads programme worth Rs150 billion, across the province, which aims to provide greater connectivity and accessibility between farms and markets. It will transform the rural economy by enabling the farmers to transport their goods to markets in a much more efficient manner.
The launch of the Land Records Management and Information System is a landmark initiative of the Punjab government, which has eliminated the age-old, corruption-ridden patwari culture across the province.
With this system in place, the land record of 55.5 million landowners has been computerised after the correction and thorough cleansing of complex documents. Now you can go to any Arazi Centre, where you will be served on a 'first come, first serve' basis. The 'fard' (land record) of your land will be delivered in 30 minutes and the mutation will be completed in 50 minutes.
Due to the vital importance of agriculture in the national economy, farmer friendly initiatives of the Punjab government have resulted in the achievement of a record production of major crops in Punjab, during the last few years.

Production of wheat has touched 19.282 million tonnes, cotton 10.277 million bales, rice 3.648 million tonnes, sugarcane 41.074 million tonnes, maize 3.689 million tonnes, while production of potato was recorded at 3.839 million tonnes.
I would like to convey this message to our farmers, that the present government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, is committed to helping and facilitating them in every possible way.
They are the linchpin of our economy. We recognise and acknowledge their services to the development of the country. It is because of their toil and hard work that the rest of the country gets to meet their food requirements.
A prosperous and happy farmer is at the heart of our national development objectives. Together, we will sail through some of the problems that our agriculture sector has faced of late.
The Punjab Agriculture Conference brought together all the stakeholders whose input, provided during the consultative sessions, will be helpful in the implementation of the growth strategy in the agriculture sector of Punjab.
I am certain that the deliberations and policy recommendations will lay the foundation for agriculture-led growth in the province. As the chairman of the Punjab Agriculture Commission, I would make sure that benefits of the support package are delivered to the farmers and that their welfare remains the central point of provincial Agricultural Policy.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1077265/towards-agriculture-led-growth/

GILGIT-BALTISTAN: GOVT TO DEVELOP LIVESTOCK, FISHERIES

The Express Tribune, April 2nd, 2016.
ISLAMABAD: The government is determined to develop the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors and a number of development projects are being executed in Gilgit-Baltistan, said G-B Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Janbaz Khan.
The projects included the establishment of 500 nurseries, 100 seeds forms, 500 model maize crop fields and repairing of 15 irrigation water channels. “Work on dairy and poultry development and establishment of model fish-farms projects is already in progress,” added the minister.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1077394/gilgit-baltistan-govt-to-develop-livestock-fisheries/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 21st TO MARCH 27th 2016

INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 21st, 2016
Mustafa Kamal Mufti
GRAIN wastages occur at every level across the food supply chain. However, in many developing countries, most of these losses occur at the post-harvest stage due to inadequate grain handling and storage.
According to the FAO report, up to 40pc of the total production in developing countries gets wasted due to lack of appropriate agriculture infrastructure.
In the case of agriculture infrastructure, Pakistan’s score at 40.7 is 14.6 points less than the world average of 57.9.
According to some reliable estimates, poor grain handling and storage alone results in 15-18pc loss of grains and 25-40pc loss in case of fruits and vegetables. This wastage results in financial losses that run in billions of rupees besides posing a threat to food security and causing environmental damage.
When the lack of infrastructure is combined with the prevailing inadequate market structure, the challenges facing the agriculture sector are compounded. With almost 65pc of the total farming households operating at subsistence level, their access to finance and yield enhancing technologies is very limited. This locks a big chunk of rural population in the vicious cycle of chronic poverty.
To elaborate further, the wheat crop is the single largest crop in Pakistan, grown at a national level by 6.9m of the 8.3m farming households in the country, with production exceeding 26m tonnes in FY15. As a dietary staple, the wheat crop contributes over 10pc to value added in agriculture and 2.1pc to GDP.
Given its strategic importance, the government has an elaborate policy for the wheat crop where the support prices are set at the federal level for domestic procurement while there is a restriction on inter-provincial movement and export of wheat.
In order to maintain strategic stocks of wheat for regulating price and ensuring food security, the federal government procures about 20-25pc of the total wheat production which is stored and handled by Pakistan Storage and Services Corporation (Passco). The government procurement target for FY15 was 6.6m tonnes at a support price of Rs1,300/maund.
Around one-third of the wheat produced is kept by farmers for seed and their own consumption. The total grain storage facility available is around 5.5m tonnes. Much of this outdated storage (1.7m tonnes) is controlled by the government and results in high level of pilferages and quality losses.

Besides directly posing a threat to food security, the interventionist policies of the government are causing significant economic and financial losses.
One estimate is that around 2m tonnes of wheat are lost every year due to bad handling and storage by government authorities. The economic losses as a result of current storage inefficiencies are estimated to be around Rs3,900/tonne per year.
Assuming that the government purchases around 6m tonnes of wheat, the losses amount to around Rs24bn per year because of inadequate agriculture infrastructure.
The purchase of wheat at the support price of Rs1,300/maund results in very high borrowing costs to the government. According to the SBP data, between 11-15pc of the total procurement cost is paid to the commercial banks in terms of interest.
Due to high incidence of corruption and systematic inefficiencies, most of the small farmers cannot sell their produce at the support price. Because of their immediate need for cash for sowing the next crop, these farmers are forced to sell their produce at discounted prices to the middlemen.
The existing government intervention programmes pose significant constraints to private sector-driven development, including to the much-needed investment in grain storage infrastructure.
Continuing the current costly support policies aimed at supporting farmers, stabilising consumer prices and subsidising all consumer groups (regardless of income) pose a significant financial burden, which may not be sustainable in the long-term.
An alternative to this system is making investments in grain storage facilities and introducing the warehouse receipt (WHR) financing system. Such a system would have significant advantages in terms of better resource efficiency through reduction of post-harvest losses.
Besides ensuring quantity and quality preservation, the system will also significantly reduce the expenses incurred by the government in wheat procurement and storage (a system can be implemented where only the differential between the markets price as indicated by the WHR and support prices).
Such a system will also provide collateral for landless farmers to obtain cheaper financing from banks (as opposed to private lenders) and will therefore help in the financial inclusion agenda as well.
Through increased transparency, the government will be able to monitor accurate level of strategic stocks in real-time. The increased transparency will also reduce price volatility and information asymmetry.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1247011

THE DARK SIDE

Dawn, March 24th, 2016
Farhan Bokhari
WHEN Pakistan's farmers venture out from late April onwards to reap their wheat crop, many will lament their sharply sliding incomes of the past year and dim prospects for the future.
For the moment, the officially sanctioned support price for wheat remains unchanged from a year ago, giving comfort to the finance ministry's 'baboos' with a history of opposing higher pay-offs to farmers on the pretext that this will further stretch an already out-of-control budget deficit.
The baboo school of thought will make you believe that wheat farmers are already well endowed given that they receive higher returns than their counterparts in other countries. Yet, the argument is clearly half baked, self-serving and detached from the overall reality.
The crisis surrounding farmers in the country has grown relentlessly in the past year, causing distress to the country's largest provider of income for its ever-growing population.
Agriculture makes up for just over 20pc of Pakistan's GDP and according to official figures accounts for employing more than 45pc of the workforce. Given the population bulge across Pakistan's rural heartland, the numerical size of the folks at the end of the receiving stick could be much larger.
In the past year, prices of key commodities crashed as a consequence of a global downturn following the sharp decline in oil prices. As farmers in country after country faced the brunt, Pakistan stood out as an exception among those who were not jolted enough to adopt emergency steps.
The price of the once-famed paddy used to make the world famous Basmati rice fell like a rock, down by 30 to 40pc from a year before. Meanwhile, the latest numbers from the Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association suggest a more than 30pc drop in the incoming stocks of cotton — once the symbol of identity for the cotton belt across southern Punjab.
A half-baked official cover-up will make you believe that farmers in part have already been compensated by reduced diesel prices. But diesel is just one component among a range of products that go into sowing a crop.

Criminality in Pakistan's rural areas is not just about matters pursued aimlessly by a dysfunctional police force. The farming community is equally hit by issues ranging from widespread adulteration of pesticides and fertilizers. Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence suggests that village folks have suffered from the wretched load-shedding more than their urban counterparts, as the ruling structure chose to keep large cities calm during the worst days of a continuing energy crisis.

Within this bleak outlook, Pakistan's farmers have a right to ask if there is indeed light at the end of the tunnel. For the moment, the answer must be in the non-affirmative.

In sharp contrast to the likes of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar often patting himself on the back on matters like the soaring foreign currency reserves of the State Bank, agriculture suffers from the virtual absence of a high-profile champion in the ruling structure. By now, it is amply clear that the much-publicised prime minister's farm package of last year has simply failed to stem the rot.

At the same time, the much-talked-about and high-profile infrastructure projects such as metro-buses or the Lahore 'Orange' train line, fail to convincingly answer two equally compelling questions.

First, isn't this just the wrong set of priorities as sectors including agriculture remain increasingly mired in possibly the worst crisis in the nation's history? Second, isn't it simply not wise to spend, spend and spend on infrastructure without a radical uplift to an increasingly crashing tax collection structure.

Ultimately, notwithstanding the utility of the motorways, metro buses and fancy trains, the country will be left more indebted while the suffering of almost half of its population will only continue.

For the moment, however, there is little hope of a radical shift in the focus from fancy urban projects to our sinking rural economy.

Though the farming community has the numbers, they have yet to vent their anger politically. The so-called representatives of the farmer community across the federal and provincial legislatures have yet to speak out forcefully for their constituents, reinforcing the impression that their voices have been subdued under the weight of partisan politics.

And yet, even without forceful voices to defend their cause, the crisis surrounding the farmers will eventually take its toll in one of a number of ways. To begin with, the present trends have naturally endangered the country's food security in an unprecedented way.

The images from just last year when potato farmers dumped their stocks in central Lahore to protest crashing prices are indeed a case in point. Maybe others at the receiving end will eventually be forced to emulate potato growers in the hope of being heard across our apparently deaf power corridors.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1247579/the-dark-side

HUMAN CAPITAL: RICE FARMERS ARMED WITH LATEST TECHNIQUES

The Express Tribune, March 24th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: Rice farmers in Sheikhupura were educated on latest techniques of cultivation in a bid to increase per-acre yield and reduce the cost of production. A capacity building workshop was held in Sheikhupura conducted by Rice Partners (RPL) in collaboration with Intercooperation.

More than 35 farmers were imparted training with precision land levelling and water conserving techniques. Rice experts from Pakistan Agricultural and Research Council (Parc) and district agriculture departments imparted technical knowledge to redress the crucial problems faced by farmers with small land holdings.

RPL Project Manager (WAPRO) Zafar Iqbal said that this was the time to support rice farmers in reducing cost of production and increasing yield by adopting better agricultural techniques.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1071431/human-capital-rice-farmers-armed-with-latest-techniques/

UBG DEMANDS REDUCTION IN UREA PRICES

Business Recorder, March 24, 2016

M Rafique Goraya

The ruling United Business Group (UBG) of FPCCI on Wednesday demanded cut in the price of locally produced urea to boost agricultural production as high price is beyond the capacity of poor farmers.

The difference in price of 50kg per bag of locally produced and imported urea is Rs 200 which should be rationalised in the interest of agriculture sector which is backbone of the economy otherwise it will cast negative shadow on troubled agricultural sector, it said.

In a statement issued, Chairman UBG Iftikhar Ali Malik said that producers must reduce profit margin to benefit growers. The Government can also think about revising sales tax and Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) to make locally produced fertilizer cheaper.
Prices of gas have been revised upward while GIDC on feedstock is being charged at the rate of Rs 300 per MMBTU which was Rs 197 in 2011 causing increased cost of production, he added.
The veteran business leader demanded that the claim of manufacturers that average gas price in Pakistan for the fertilizer sector is almost double of what is offered in the Middle East must be measured.
In a recent meeting of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Industries and Production it was alleged that urea manufactures would earn up to Rs 30 billion in profits due to overcharging which must be probed.
They said that manufacturers should demonstrate responsibility, government can consider rolling back GIDC and provide some relief to Urea industry otherwise cheap imported urea will flood the market very soon. Some traders have already initiated process of importing urea which warrants immediate action, he warned.
http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/industries-a-sectors/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/28649:ubg-demands-reduction-in-urea-prices/?date=2016-03-24

FARMERS ASKED TO ENSURE FIELD SANITATION

Business Recorder, March 24, 2016
The Met Office has asked farmers to ensure field sanitation and spray prophylactic fungicidal to protect vegetable crops from diseases. Wheat growers of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and upper Sindh were also asked to stop irrigating their crops keeping in view the expected rains in the agricultural plains of the country.
The office said that the weeds growth was expected, which would affect the standing crops with the continuing rains in the country. It asked the farmers to carry out weeds removal with manually practice or sprays.
Weather in Punjab is expected to remain dry with light to moderate rain in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Sargodha Divisions from Mar 24 to Mar 28. Dry weather is expected in Sindh till Mar 31 but light rainfall has been forecast at isolated places in Hyderabad and Sukkur divisions from Mar 24 to Mar 26.
With mainly dry weather in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the office predicted light to moderate rainfall and light snowfall over the hills of Bannu, Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Mardan and D I Khan Divisions from Mar 24 to Mar 28.
Light to moderate rain is expected at isolated places of Quetta, Zhob, Sibbi, and Kalat from Mar 23 to Mar 26 with overall dry weather in Balochistan. In Kashmir, light to moderate rain-thunderstorm and snowfall over the hills is expected from Mar 24 to Mar 28.
Mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected in most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan with light to moderate rain and light snowfall over the hills of Gilgit, Skardu and Hunza from Mar 24 through Mar 31.
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/28630/

ANNUAL IMPACT OF KBD DELAY TOTALS UP TO $5BN

Dawn, March 25th, 2016
FAISALABAD: Indus River System Authority (Irsa) Chairman Rao Irshad Ali has said that delay in the construction of Kalabagh dam is causing an annual impact of five billion dollars loss to the national economy.
According to a handout issued by the University of Agriculture Faisalabad on Thursday, the Irsa chairman said Kalabagh dam would cost $10 billion and its cost of the construction would be recovered in two years if its impact with regard to meeting the country's power and irrigation needs was calculated.
He said the dam would generate 1,200 billion units yearly that would reduce Rs144 trillion in cost being incurred on high-price electricity being generated by independent power producer (IPPs). He said one million acre feet (MAF) water generates economic benefits worth Rs60 billion.
However, Pakistan was wasting about $18 billion annually for the past 40 years by not utilising over 30MAF that was being discharged into sea due to lack of water reservoirs. "It is a matter of concern that we are heavily draining out groundwater and not recharging (water table), resulting in deterioration in water quality and lowering of water level."
He expressed his concern over the fact that 87 per cent of the water was not fit for drinking in Pakistan.
UAF Vice-chancellor Dr Iqrar Ahmad said: "Amid challenges of water scarcity, we (will) have to reduce cultivation of water-intensive crops like rice and sugarcane."
http://www.dawn.com/news/1247768/annual-impact-of-kbd-delay-totals-up-to-5bn

GROWERS HOLD PROTEST

Business Recorder March 26, 2016

Growers in Sindh staged protest over delay in setting up of wheat procurement centres by Sindh government despite fact that the season of harvest of crops has ended and wheat crop has started reaching the market where the growers were being exploited by traders by purchasing wheat at Rs 1100 per maund rather than Rs 1400 per muand.
The protest was held outside Hyderabad Press Club (HPC) on Friday where a large number of growers participated and chanted slogans against the Sindh government.
Leading the protest, Leaders of Sindh Growers, Nawab Zubair Ahmed Talpur, Ali Palh and others said that the season of wheat harvest almost ended but Sindh government could not set up procurement cells in the province.
Such situation created severe problems for growers where they are compelled to sell at Rs 1100 rather than rate of Rs 1400 per maund, they said.
They demanded from government to immediately open procurement centers and to supply Bardana (empty gunny bags) to growers so they can sell their commodity at government the rate of Rs 1400 per muand. If their demands were not met, they should stage a sit-in in Karachi, they threatened the Sindh government.
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/29096/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 14th TO MARCH 20th 2016

NEW DAMS, BARRAGES BOOSTING AGRICULTURE: EX-MINISTER

Dawn, March 14th, 2016
Ali Jan Mangi
DERA MURAD JAMALI: Former finance minister of Balochistan Mir Asim Kurd said on Sunday that the recently completed projects of dams and barrages were helpful in boosting the agriculture sector in Balochistan.
Talking to reporters here, he said about 200,000 acres of lands in the Kachhi Bolan district were irrigated from dams and barrages completed recently by the Balochistan government. These projects of dams and barrages included Mithri, Hairi, Haji Shehr, Tok, Ghazi and Khokhar, he added.
Mr Kurd, who is a sitting MPA of PML-N, said that in coming years theses projects would irrigate about one million acres of land in eastern Balochistan.
He said the government was taking practical steps for bringing improvement in the standard of live of farmers.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1245559/new-dams-barrages-boosting-agriculture-ex-minister

DECLINING FODDER PRODUCTION IN PUNJAB

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 14th, 2016
Ahmad Fraz Khan
Fodder production and marketing in Punjab is heading towards a deep crisis. Farmers and researchers, who gathered last week in the provincial capital, stated that fodder acreage is being lost to other competitive crops every year, having dropped from 5m acres to 4.3m acres in the province alone.
Invading pests and diseases and failing seed replacement plans have created a huge yield gap. In most research institutes, ten seed varieties of fodders that cover 98pc of acreage, on average, yield 60 maunds per acre, against 34 maunds in the farmers' field — leaving a gap of 26 maunds per acre. The gap is decisive in individual farmer's economy and life.
The falling fodder production is putting the animal population to huge risk of malnutrition. If commercial planting of fodder suffers, 30pc landless farmers, whose livelihood sustenance come significantly from livestock would suffer badly.
Their poverty is robbing them of capacity to purchase even normal fodders (Barseem, for that matter). The farmers want the government to press all four major research institutes into developing better-yielding seed vaierity so that more fodder is produced with current acreage. The demand is legitimate but their hopes are misplaced going by the performance of these organisations.
What farmers, however, need to understand is the basic context of their demand. The fodder demand, production and its marketing ares directly linked to the healthy livestock population and milk market If the livestock and milk market falter, no one would be able to rescue the crop..
The pattern of falling fodder acreage has its own answer; it is sporadic and restricted to pockets where milk market is dwindling. It has been thriving exceptionally well in and around Lahore because animal and milk marketing is profitable around provincial metropolis.
But the crop is certainly failing in other areas, where small livestock farmers are mostly landless and don't have enough finances to purchase fodder. If milk market is put back on its feet, the fodder is sure to have better future.
So, the farmers need to stress the pull factor, where market leads by creating demand, not push factor — where supply side can play any role. If dairy and meat markets remain robust, fodder marketing would not be a worry.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1245400/declining-fodder-production-in-punjab

AGRICULTURE SECTOR: SINDH GOVERNMENT URGED TO ANNOUNCE RS 100 BILLION BAILOUT PACKAGE

Business Recorder, March 14, 2016

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has demanded the Sindh government to announce bailout package of Rs100 billion for agriculture sector because it is also facing the same financial crisis as PIA and Steel Mills. The SCA at Hyderabad Club on Sunday organised a convention where a number of resolutions were unanimously adopted in this regard.

President SCA, Dr Nadeem Qamar said that agriculture sector employed up to 30 million people in Sindh but it was facing severe crisis in terms of increasing cost inputs and decline in support price of crops. He said that it was responsibility of the Sindh government after the 18th amendment to fix support price for major corps including wheat, rice, cotton and sugarcane.

"The support prices of these crops should be fixed before sowing in the province as the growers and peasants can get maximum benefits from it," he added.

He said that subsidy should be provided to growers on purchasing of tractors, solar tube wells and laser levellers for next three years where 80 percent of total cost should be provided by government while 20 per cent should be recovered from growers.

Qamar also demanded the Sindh government to make Sindh Seed Corporation (SSC) functional for producing new seeds for growers and also illegal encroachment on land of 10000 acres of the SSC should be vacated for this purpose.

Speaking on this occasion, General Secretary SCA, Nabi Bux Sathio said that sub-standard pesticide was being sold in the market and the government should take an action to ban the sale of substandard pesticide.

Besides, the committee should be formed to monitor and control sale of substandard pesticide in the province, he said.

"Special subsidy should be announced for small growers holding land of 25 acres and in addition to this, the subsidy of Rs20 should be provided on the purchase of one litre of diesel," he urged.

Sathio said that the committee should be formed to monitor the utilisation of funding being provided by international organisations in form of grant and loan to the Sindh government.

Such monitoring would make the utilisation of funds the most efficient and effective, he said.

He also demanded the Sindh government to set up wheat procurement cell where the growers and peasant can sell wheat at support price announced by government.

More than 50 per cent of wheat has been harvested in especially lower Sindh but growers are forced to sell at Rs1000 per maund because there is not wheat procurement cell set up by the Sindh government so far, he added.

Another representative of the SCA, Zahid Bhurgari said that the price of urea bag should be fixed at Rs800 because its price had been increased to Rs1600 per bag which was not justifiable and also increased inputs cost of agriculture sector.

He also appealed to PASSCO to set up wheat procurement cell in Sindh province as it did in Punjab province to procure wheat.

"The federal government should also announce financial assistance Rs5000 per acre on corps of rice and cotton for Sindh growers," he said while appealing the federal government.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/25444/

FERTILISER GRANT: CENTRE FAILS TO RECOVER SUBSIDY FROM THREE PROVINCES

The Express Tribune, March 15th, 2016.

Peer Mohammad

ISLAMABAD: Almost nine months have passed since the announcement in budget of a Rs20-billion fertiliser subsidy for farmers, but three out of four provinces have yet to contribute their due share.

As part of the subsidy programme, half of the share is borne by provincial governments according to their fertiliser needs, however, except for Punjab no other province has transferred its share.

Sindh's share in the federal pool to be spent as subsidy on the import of Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) amounts to Rs2.1 billion while Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's (K-P) contribution is estimated at Rs0.5 billion. Balochistan has to provide Rs0.4 billion.

According to officials, the federal government and Punjab have already released their share of Rs10 billion and Rs7 billion, respectively, and of these around Rs12 billion has been disbursed among 17 fertiliser importing companies.

Sources said representatives of the provincial governments had many a time reiterated their commitment during crucial meetings, but they did not fulfil their promise.

They added Sindh and Balochistan governments were ready to release the amount, but had not done so far. However, the K-P government has objected to its designated share, terming it quite high.
The finance ministry through the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has disbursed Rs5.7 billion as first installment to the companies for the import of DAP in October, Rs5.76 billion as second installment in November and Rs1.62 billion last week for imports made in December.
Additionally, the ministry has also adjusted Rs1.53 billion through the Federal Board of Revenue under the head of sales tax for the fertiliser importing companies.
The total requirement of DAP in the country is almost 1.7 million to 1.8 million tons annually and the local manufacturing companies hardly produce 0.7 to 0.8 million tons and the remaining one million tons is imported.
Sources said the Finance Division was facing difficulties in making payments to the companies due to delay in the release of outstanding amount by the three provinces.
At the same time, the Finance Division has faced criticisim from the Punjab government that has questioned the government's competence regarding release of the subsidy amount.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1065645/fertiliser-grant-centre-fails-to-recover-subsidy-from-three-provinces/

GROWERS BODY PLANS TO MOVE COURT AGAINST GOVT

Dawn, March 15th, 2016
HYDERABAD: The Sindh Growers Alliance (SGA) announced on Monday that it would file a petition in the Sindh High Court against the non-provision of gunny bags to growers, delay in opening procurement centres and acute shortage of water.
Leaders of the alliance were speaking at a press conference at the local press club after organising a rally outside the club. The participants in the rally shouted slogans in favour of their demands and the army chief.
The leaders called for enhancing to Rs1,500/40kg of wheat from Rs1,300/40kg. They said sugar cane production was reduced to 60 per cent while 60 per cent vegetables were destroyed for want of water in winter.
SGA president Nawab Zubair Talpur, office-bearer Zafarullah Talpur and others said wheat crop had been reaped, but procurement centres were not opened in the province so far. They complained that gunny bags were being given to sellers and traders instead of growers. They said wheat which was lying under the open sky could be ruined.
They said Rohri and Jamrao canals were closed for 15-20 days in any annual closure for desilting, but this year they were closed from Jan 5 to Feb 17. It was due to shortage of water that 60 per cent vegetables were destroyed, sugar cane was affected and wheat produce was being ruined, the added.
They said growers were facing severe economic problems because of improper rates of wheat, they could undergo a colossal loss of Rs2 billion. They demanded that the government ensure water supply to canals, availability of gunny bags and establishment of procurement centres for wheat immediately.
SGA general secretary Ali Palh said the growers body had already sent a letter to the Sindh minister concerned to apprise him of the problems.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1245687

COTTON ASSOCIATIONS UNITE TO GIVE PRODUCTION A BOOST

Dawn, March 16th, 2016
PARVAIZ ISHFAQ RANA
KARACHI: Stakeholders in the cotton economy and textile industry have urged the government to take necessary measures to help boost cotton production, which stands short by 4.7 million bales year-on-year during this season.
Speakers at a one-day cotton conference organised by the Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) on Tuesday criticised government's "apathy and lack of interest" towards issues facing the agriculture sector in general and cotton crop in particular.
The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma), Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association (PCGA), Farmers Associates Pakistan (FAP), officials from the Ministry of Textile Industry and cotton commissioner attended the conference.
The participants passed a unanimous resolution seeking strong marketing of cotton for ensuring fair price for growers to help raise production.
However, the most pressing point of the resolution was a demand that the government should declare an "agriculture and cotton emergency" so that a focused approach could be sought from all the government departments, the private sector and other relevant technical and research institutions.
The participants also sought a level-playing field for growers as compared to other countries by eliminating all taxes on agriculture inputs, including GST (general sales tax), to ensure growers get good price for their produce.

They also urged the government to remove exports subsidy on sugar and regulatory duty on its imports, besides seeking a ban on sugarcane growing in cotton areas.
Participants agreed that inferior quality seed was a major reason for crop failure, and urged the government to ensure supply of certified seeds to growers.
The conference also formed a taskforce with two representatives each from the KCA, Aptma, PCGA, FAP and growers associations.
The associations also demanded that for getting higher production of cotton crop, the provincial extension departments of Punjab and Sindh should be activated for optimal performance. Moreover, Cotton Control Act should be enforced in totality, they said.
KCA Chairman Khawaja Tahir Mahmood said only better cotton crop could ensure better economy by generating more jobs.
There was a greater need to produce exportable surplus so that growers could get international price for their produce and keep cultivating more and more cotton, he said.
Expressing his concerns over free-market policy for agriculture produce, he said it was allowing easy access to cotton and other farm produce from across the border which was hurting growers.
"Only if growers could buy the inputs and sell their farm produce at world prices would they be able to produce more and bring in prosperity for themselves and others."
He added: "When cotton crop fails, its fallout reaches urban areas as well because goods produced are not purchased by growers."
http://www.dawn.com/news/1245886

'INVESTMENT POTENTIAL OF AGRICULTURE SUPPLY CHAIN DISCUSSED'

Business Recorder, March 17, 2016
Chairperson, Sindh Board of Investment (SBI) Naheed Memon and President, Muller and PHIPPS Company, Raymond Simkins, in a meeting here, discussed in detail the avenues for investment in the supply chain of agriculture produce.
This system includes the procurement of agriculture produce from the growers, its movement to the markets (mandis) and to the retailers.
The meeting held in the SBI office mainly discussed the storage and logistics facilities for agriculture products, said an official statement.
Chief Executive Officer, Sindh Enterprises Development Fund, Mehboob-ul-Haq was also present.
SBI Chairperson spoke for the investment opportunities in the value-addition of agriculture products especially dates, mangoes, guava, bananas, papaya and tomatoes.
Raymond Simkins said the Muller and PHIPPS were operating in Karachi since 1912. It was providing services of distribution and marketing at more than 80 places in 36 countries of the continent of Asia.
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/26279/

PAKISTAN, BELARUS TO COOPERATE IN DAIRY FARMING

Dawn, March 19th, 2016
AMIN AHMED
ISLAMABAD: The second meeting of Pakistan-Belarus Joint Working Group on Agriculture concluded here on Friday with the signing of protocols which laid the negotiating platform for creation of joint ventures to produce dairy products in Pakistan using raw materials imported from Belarus.
The Belarusian ministry of food and agriculture organised an exhibition of milk and halal meat products produced in Belarus on the sidelines of the joint working group meeting.
As a follow-up to the decisions taken at the joint working group's first meeting, Pakistan has submitted to Belarus protocols for phytosanitary compliance for the export of kinnow, mango, rice and potato for consideration by Belarus.
The Belarusian side at the working group meeting shared with the Ministry of National Food Security & Research (MNFSR) phytosanitary regulations whose implementation would be needed to facilitate the export of Pakistani products to Belarus. The two sides agreed to further discuss the compliance issues bilaterally.
The Belarusian deputy minister of agriculture and food, Ihar Brylo, and the MNFSR's additional secretary, Mohammad Hashim Popalzai, were designated focal persons for implementation of decisions taken at the joint working group meeting.
At the joint working group meeting, the Belarusian delegation was led by Ihar Brylo and the Pakistani side by Hashim Popalzai. Ambassador of Belarus to Pakistan Andrei Ermolovich also attended the meeting.

The two sides agreed to hold the next meeting of the joint working group tentatively in August this year in Belarus.
During the working visit to Islamabad the Belarusian delegation held negotiations with Minister of National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, top management of research agencies and companies in the field of agriculture.
Mr Bosan during his meeting with the Belarusian deputy minister discussed the scope to expand cooperation between the two countries in the vast field of agriculture. In this regard, he sought Belarusian cooperation in strengthening farm machinery research institute in Pakistan, strengthening and capacity building of veterinary research institutes and disease diagnostic laboratories; integrated insect pest and disease management in horticultural and field crops; and aquaculture and shrimp culture with facilities of fish feed and its processing.
Secretary National Food Security Mohammad Abid Javed, Chairman of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Dr Nadeem Amjad and Hashim Popalzai assisted the federal minister during talks with the Belarusian delegation.
Mr Bosan briefed the Belarusian minister on the scope of livestock sector in Pakistan with particular reference to value addition products. He invited Belarusian investment in Pakistan to establish infant formula plants from Belarusian dry milk of European standard as well as production of dry milk powder and other dairy processed products from local milk production.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1246685

FARMERS TOIL IN CITIES AS WEATHER REFUSES TO SMILE

The Express Tribune, March 19th, 2016.
ISLAMABAD: Wheat farmer Nasir Tauqeer Khan would rather be home working in his fields. But since January, with Pakistan's rains failing, he has laboured instead at a construction site in Islamabad.
"Had I stayed behind in my village, my family would have been starving," the 45-year-old said. "I thought better to move to the city and try my luck."
An unusually warm and nearly dry Pakistan winter, with rainfall just a third of normal, has ruined crops and made life increasingly hard for the country's small-scale farmers, experts say.
Many farmers say they are struggling to adapt to increasingly unreliable weather, and in many cases have had to migrate to cities and towns to find jobs to help them survive.
"I feel really unable to keep pace with weather patterns that are shifting so rapidly," said Khan, who comes from Gujar Khan, a village about 55 kilometres (35 miles) from the capital.
Late season heavy rain in mid-February and scattered snow in the mountains of northern Pakistan have raised some hopes of recovery, but have also led to new problems, including a late surge of weeds, farmers say.
Now "we have to buy herbicides to fight weeds," bemoaned Karam Nawaz, a maize farmer in Sialkot district, in the lower north-eastern parts of the country.
Rab Nawaz Gujar, who grows mustard, pulses and barley on 78 hectares (192 acres) in the suburbs of Chakwal, in Pakistan's northeast, predicted harvests of winter crops would be down in his area by half.
Winter rains this year were two months late and rainfall has been nearly 65% below normal since January 1, said Pakistan Meteorological Department Director General Ghulam Rasul. "That can cut winter harvests of some crops by 30%," he predicted.
About a quarter of Pakistan's farmland is entirely dependent on rainfall to provide enough water, and in those areas farmers growing wheat, maize, mustard, pulses and vegetables may not be able to save much of their crop, said a former Pakistan agriculture secretary Sirat Asghar.
Pakistan's key wheat crop, sown between October and December and harvested in March and April, is likely to see a decline from an expected 26 million tons to 23 million tons, agriculture officials said.
"The worst impacts of dry and warm winter have come for wheat farmers," said Pakistan Agri Forum (a farmers' non-governmental organisation) Chairman Ibrahim Mughal.
"The expected decline in harvests could trigger a spike in wheat prices and some poor rural households would find it difficult to harvest or buy enough to meet their needs," said an agriculture scientist Khuda Buksh at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad.
"Sensing the precarious scenario of household food insecurity, many male family members have already headed towards nearby urban areas in search of jobs to tackle the emerging situation," he added.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1068452/farmers-toil-in-cities-as-weather-refuses-to-smile/

MINISTER ASSURES BALOCHISTAN FARMERS OF ASSISTANCE

The Express Tribune, March 19th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, on Friday, assured farmers that the government would not allow import of fruits and vegetables from neighbouring countries as long as local commodities were available in the market.
The minister was addressing the concluding ceremony of training course on 'Skill Development of Balochistan farmers' at the National Agricultural Research Centre (Narc).
"As long as fruits and vegetables are available in the market, we will not allow import from our neighbouring countries," said Bosan.
He assured the farming community the government's commitment and said the Iranian apples have not been imported through Balochistan; rather they came through the Turkham Border.
Highlighting the importance of water availability, the minister said the development of water reservoirs and dams in Balochistan was crucial; however, he added that after the 18th Amendment in the constitution; the resources have been shifted to the provincial governments, so they need to take measures to build such facilities.
The minister said that the federal government would definitely assist in building dams; however, it was the duty of provincial governments to take initiatives. "Provinces have adequate funds to build such facilities."
He said that the budget of his ministry had been reduced from Rs32 billion to just Rs1 billion after the 18th amendment. "Nevertheless, measures would be initiated to build tube-wells in the province to facilitate farmers," said Bosan.
While emphasising the need for providing training to farmers, he said that the government aimed to train as many as 1,000 local Balochi farmers through on-going training programme initiated by Narc.
He said 1,000 farmers would be provided training through the same programme in the next phase.
Narc has trained as many as 331 farmers of Baluchistan out of the total 1000 targeted under its training programme.
Speaking on the occasion, Narc Director General Dr Muhammad Azeem Khan said the agriculture projects worth Rs360 million were being carried out in the Balochistan province.
He said planting olive on about 20, 000 hector land and cultivation of pistachio in Balochistan was also on the cards.
The event, among others, was attended by farmers of Balochistan and senior officials of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council and Narc.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1068479/minister-assures-balochistan-farmers-of-assistance/

SHAHBAZ COMES UP WITH RS100BN `PLACATORY` PACKAGE

Dawn, March 20th, 2016
LAHORE: The Punjab government will spend Rs100 billion `purely on development` of the agriculture sector and form a `Kissan Commission` to suggest areas for official intervention and oversee spending during the next two years.
Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif announced the package on Saturday at the Punjab Agriculture Conference which was finally held after two earlier postponements.
The chief minister insisted this money would purely be spent on development activities, and rou-tine and recurring expenditure would not be part of the package.
The chief minister also asked the farmers to come up with critical areas, where the government should play the role.
`Come up with concrete suggestions, and you would not find the government lacking, either in money or political will,` he said and added: `Even if takes the entire budget of next two years, the government is still ready. The only condition is workability of the suggestions and their payback time. Money would not be a constraint.
The well-attended and muchawaited conference was participated in by all farmer bodies (Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Farmers Associate Pakistan, Pakistan Kissan Board), academia (University of Agriculture, Faisalabad and University ofVeterinary and Animal Science), ministers and secretaries concerned (agriculture, livestock, forestry and irrigation) and private sector.
He said agriculture is the backbone of national economy in the real sense and promotion of agriculture, prosperity of farmers and increase in per acre yield is our mission.
He said the Punjab government had taken a number of solid measures for the welfare and prosperity of the farmers and development of agriculture sector during the last seven and a half years and would continue such steps in future as well.
Shahbaz Sharif said representatives of farmers, agriculture experts and government members should fully participate in working groups and formulate concrete pro-posals and recommendations.
He said the agriculture conference was not a traditional convention but a serious forum through which a solid strategy had to be evolved for the promotion and development of agriculture.

He said full attention was paid to the promotion of livestock during last seven and a half years but desired results could not be achieved. `Our farmer is working day and night but there is no increase in per acre yield.
He said the agriculture extension service had ended and research institutions were not doing the desired work due to which the process of giving advice to farmers had also been stopped.
He said increase in per acre yield was not possible without transferring modern technology and results of agriculture to the farmers. Hesaid agriculture planners, government, agriculture research institutions and universities would have to work jointly.
He said Rs100 billion would be allocated for the prosperity of the farmers and development of agriculture in the budget of Punjab but the benefit of these billions of rupees should go to the farmers and agriculture sector in the real sense.
Punjab Minister for Agriculture Farrukh Javed threw light on the aims and objectives of the conference. He said new policies would have to be formulated for the farmers keeping in view the changing weather conditions and international slump.
Law minister Rana Sanaullah said it`s high time decisions were taken for the promotion of agriculture and empowering farmers.
http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=20_03_2016_004_005

INCENTIVE PACKAGE FOR FARMERS IN NEXT BUDGET

Dawn, March 20th, 2016
Amin Ahmed
ISLAMABAD: The federal government is expected to announce a comprehensive package of incentives for the farming community in the coming budget.
On the directive of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research has started work on developing an integrated framework for the agricultural sector.
The ministry has started consulting provincial governments and all stakeholders about the package, and has set up seven committees on various sub-sectors of agriculture with the mandate to come up with concrete proposals which can form part of the framework, the spokesperson for the ministry said.
Spokesperson Syed Moazzam Ali said the committees have been given the deadline of April 24 to submit their proposals.
The committees have been asked to identify the grey areas and bottlenecks in the development of agricultural sector, particularly measures to reduce the cost of production. The proposals would also encompass the financial package required for the declining agricultural performance.
The committees which have started working will deliberate on diversification of agricultural sector, agricultural research, climate change, water resources, agricultural inputs, livestock and fisheries, and the restructuring of the food ministry.
The spokesperson said the committees’ proposals would be reviewed and incorporated into the integrated framework before being forwarded to the prime minister for approval.
He said the financing requirement for the framework would be covered in the federal budget for the fiscal year 2016-17 for implementation.
The framework would then be finalised in consultation with the provincial governments and all stakeholders, including farmers.
The country’s farming community under the umbrella of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has been urging the government to declare agriculture emergency since commodity prices at farm level have collapsed for the past three years and profitability in all agricultural crops has been wiped out.
Farmers have exhausted their resources and agriculture was rapidly becoming unsustainable, they said.
The PKI has been asking the government to place agriculture on the top of its agenda, and is seeking provinces’ support at political and social levels.
The Ittehad held an all-party conference in Islamabad last month and presented a charter of demand to the government. Leading politicians of opposition parties and the federal and provincial governments, stakeholders, policymakers and researchers participated in the conference.
PKI President Khalid Mahmood Chowhan said aggressive taxation in farm inputs has led to higher food prices, whereas the cost of production for all crops has increased alarmingly. He demanded that the government should withdraw the aggressive taxation, including general sales tax (GST), on agricultural inputs like seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and farm machinery.

At the same time, the cost of electricity for the agricultural sector should be slashed since irrigation water was a critical input for crop production, he said.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1246784/incentive-package-for-farmers-in-next-budget

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 7th TO MARCH 13th 2016

FUNDS NOT APPROVED FOR ERADICATION OF PINK BOLLWORM

Dawn, March 7th, 2016
Jamal Shahid
ISLAMABAD: PML-N lawmaker Sardar Mohammad Shafqat Hayat Khan on Sunday said the pink bollworm attack has ruined Bt cotton growers in Punjab.
Mr Khan was responding to questions on why the National Assembly Standing Committee on Textile and Industry on March 4 did not approve funds for the 2016-17 fiscal year for the eradication of the pink bollworm, which has caused significant losses to the Bt cotton crop.
The committee passed budgetary proposals for the Pak-Korea Technical Textile Centre with an estimated cost of Rs60 million and Faisalabad Garment City, worth Rs850 million.
"More than four million bales have been destroyed after pink bollworm attack this season. Agriculture research organisations have failed to produce quality indigenous cotton seed. Cotton growers are forced to use excessive pesticides. Farmers are suffering across the country and switching to growing other crops. Government departments asking for more money will have to [show] us that research and efforts to save crops from pests and diseases are going somewhere," Mr Khan, a committee member, said.
Bt or genetically modified cotton seeds produced by multinational companies were introduced in Pakistan in 2010, to control pests and reduce the use of pesticides.
On Friday, the standing committee did not pass budgetary proposals for the 'Pink bollworm area wide integrated management in cotton growing regions in Pakistan' project.
The ministry has proposed an estimated Rs153.3 million for the project.
MNA Rana Omer Nazeer of the PML-N said the committee was not satisfied with the research into improving disease, pest and heat resistant crops that is going on in the country.
"We understand that agriculture needs the utmost support from the government to grow. But we would also like to know how best government money will be utilised," Mr Nazeer said.
According to sources in the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC), committee members had concerns regarding the substandard quality of genetically modified cotton seeds.
Committee members lamented how Bt cotton growers were losing interest in the cotton crop, and argued that the decline in Bt cotton production and fibre quality would be disastrous for the economy.
According to PARC, the pink bollworm emerged as a major pest in cotton growing areas in the current 2015-16 season, and caused the country around 4.5 million bales in losses.
A source told Dawn that funds for introducing better varieties of the cotton seed and other projects were not being utilised effectively.
He gave the example of fake studies – such as monitoring and population dynamics of the pink bollworm on Bt cotton – prepared over the last five years by the Ministry of Textile and Industry, the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee and the Central Cotton Research Institute Sakrand. The study was also somehow published in the International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Society and Culture in 2015.
Copies of the research available with Dawn show that the study on monitoring the pink bollworm population between 2009 and 2013 deviates from the topic to other subjects, such as basic sanitation problems facing households in urban slums.
"This is exactly why the next meeting will be held in Faisalabad, with all the concerned officials including those from the Agriculture University, Faisalabad will come to explain what Pakistani scientists have done to improve the cotton seed," Mr Khan said.
Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that the pink bollworm hit cotton growing areas hard, especially Punjab, where about 3.9 million cotton bales were affected. It also affected the crop in Sindh.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1244031

LEGISLATION FOR FOOD SECURITY, ANIMAL HEALTH

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 7th, 2016
Amin Ahmed

WORK on a 'National Sanitary and Phytosanitary Authority Act' is moving at a slow pace, while it is badly needed to provide an impetus to exports of agricultural products.
The proposed SPS authority will work to ensure food safety and protect animal and plant health.
An official of the ministry dealing with the subject was unable to give the timeline for finalisation of the act. However, he said the draft bill will be sent to the prime minister for approval before submission to the parliament for enactment.
It has been proposed that the federal authorities would be responsible for the overall design of the SPS control system, for international linkages, and for sampling and certification of all consignments.
Relevant officials say the proposed authority will separate the development and control functions in animal and plant health services, and improve coordination in areas that overlap between food safety, animal and plant health functions.
A concept paper spells out the mandate of the autonomous authority. It will take over functions of 'National Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service' and will be responsible to the prime minister's secretariat.
Current SPS-related regulations in Pakistan are based on the Plant Quarantine Act (1976), the Pakistan Animal Quarantine Act (1979), the IPPC, the OIE, Codex Alimentarius and the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM). These rules need to be upgraded and integrated.
The draft act, according to the official, will establish the governance mechanism and the principles on which it should operate. It would also define roles of the federal and provincial authorities and powers of inspectors, and adopt the principles set out within the SPS agreement.
Food safety: The act will set out the principles of food safety and official control in line with Codex, and will define recall and withdrawal systems.
Plant health: Rules will lay out the principles for surveillance and control of plant pests and diseases. The authority will apply plant quarantine measures for international and domestic distribution of products. It will define the institutional responsibilities at the federal level.
Pesticide: An updated framework for pesticide approvals and licencing; powers for technical regulations to control distribution and use at farm level to protect environment, uses and consumers.
Animal health: A new animal health act is required to update legislation to limit the spread of infectious diseases.
Veterinary Medicines: Procedures for approval and requirements for distribution of veterinary compounds are already established under the Drugs Act. However, there is a need to introduce legislation governing their distribution and use at farm level and establish responsibilities and procedures for residue monitoring.
Model technical rules: The federal government would take the lead in developing model technical regulations under the act, in collaboration with provincial authorities, to ensure that the rules meet the requirements of all the provinces so that any differences do not distort internal commerce.
Top short-term goals are: improvement of production methods and harvesting techniques and transportation and storage methods, better access to compliance resources, technical assistance, information resources, laboratories and quarantine stations.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1244094

DUTCH ENTER PAKISTAN'S DAIRY SECTOR

Business Recorder, March 07, 2016
Since Engro Foods Limited informed the national bourse that Friesland Campina International Holding BV, which is a Dutch dairy cooperative, has shown an intention to acquire up to 51 percent of Engro Corporation Limited's shareholding in the Engro Foods Limited (EFOODS), the excitement in the food sector of Pakistan is through the roof.
At this moment, Engro holds 87 percent or 667 million shares of EFOODS. After the complete accusation, the effective shareholding of ENGRO will reduce to 327 million shares in the Dairy Company.
Since the last couple of years food sector in Pakistan has experienced saturation to some extent. This point is further clarified when one looks at the declining foreign direct investment (FDI) in the food market of Pakistan along with unappealing growth in the number of food companies. The lack of FDI is quite alarming because urbanisation is in full swing in Pakistan and the population is hovering around more than 200 million and growing at a rate of 1.5 percent annually.
At the same time, half of the population is below 25 years of age, and the ratio of women workers in also on the rise.
In a recent interview with BR Research, Babur Sultan, the CEO of Engro Foods pointed out that poor law and order in the country is creating hurdles, and has put off international investments and overall growth in the country.
The current announcement came after late last year's plans by Coca-Cola Company to invest over $350 million in the country. It is early to say that the trust of foreign investors has restored, however significant improvement in law and order situation is evident.

The pricing of the deal is yet to be determined. At the time of the announcement, the price of EFOOD'S share was Rs136.35 per share, and it shows that Engro's 51 percent stake sale could fetch it Rs46.4billion or $442 million. It is worth mentioning here that Engro Corporation needs total equity of $167 million for coal power projects which include Engro Thar Power Limited and Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company, the required capital is much lower than the cash inflow Engro will get after it sells 51 percent stake in EFOODS. This is why some brokerage houses think that initially Engro will sell 25 percent of its stake with the agreement of gradual rise of up to 51percent in subsequent years.

This is the largest deal in the private sector of Pakistan has ever seen. Broker houses are quite divided on the pricing issue, but they all agree that the final acquisition price would be somewhere between Rs140 per share to Rs150 per share. Engro Foods stock has gained Rs6.81 since the announcement.

It has taken quite a while for EFOODS to take off financially. Up until 2013 Engro Foods has given mix performance and to some extent market has given up on the company. However, in 2014, the company surprised the market pundits and reported an earning of Rs890 million for the year 2014 as compared to Rs211 million in 2013. It continued this performance in 2015 as well and has given an earning of Rs3,162 million. Regarding market share in dairy and beverage, sector EFOODS holds 56 percent market share as of November 2015.

Going forward, this acquisition will be an excellent step for Engro Foods and the dairy industry of Pakistan. Friesland Campina International is one of the world's five largest dairy companies with annual revenues of 11.3 billion Euros, and if the deal goes through EFOODS should able to introduce new value-added products primarily infant nutrition segment and high margin other milk products.

http://www.brecorder.com/br-research/999:all/6345:dutch-enter-pakistana39s-dairy-sector/?date=2016-03-07

COMMISSION TO VERIFY 'SHIFTING' OF SUGAR MILLS

Dawn, March 8th, 2016

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court on Monday agreed to constitute a local commission to visit and verify alleged shifting of four sugar mills owned by close relatives of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Justice Ayesha A Malik had already suspended two notifications issued by industries secretary that allowed shifting of Ittefaq Sugar Mills Sahiwal, Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills Nankana Sahib, Abdullah (Yousaf) Sugar Mills Sargodha and Abdullah Sugar Mills Dipalpur to other districts.

The judge had ordered a status quo with respect to shifting or relocating of these mills. JDW Sugar Mills, owned by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf MNA Jahangir Tareen, and others had filed the petitions against shifting of the mills. Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif was also made party in the petition.

The petitioners stated industries secretary had issued impugned notifications on Dec 4, 2015 with mala fide intention to facilitate the relocation of these four mills. They said under Section 3 of Punjab Industries (Control on Establishment and Enlargement) Ordinance, there was a restriction on establishment of industrial undertaking without the provincial government's permission. Under this section, various notifications had been issued imposing restrictions on establishing new sugar mills in the province, they said.

The petitioners pleaded it was the government's consistent position that relocation amounted to establishment of a new industrial undertaking.

Allowing a request of the petitioner's counsel, the judge constituted a local commission to examine the status of respondent sugar mills and sought nominees from the government and petitioners. The judge would resume hearing on March 29.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1244291

PAKISTAN ADVISED TO INCREASE FOOD PRODUCTION BY 50PC

Dawn, March 8th, 2016

QUETTA: Experts at a workshop advised Pakistan on Monday to increase its food production by 50 per cent to meet the needs of a projected population of 221 million by 2025.

The daylong workshop on 'Technical Assistance: Balochistan Water Resources Development Project' was jointly organised by the federal and Balochistan governments and the Asian Development Bank in collaboration with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

The experts observed that water situation in Balochistan is worse than other areas of the country.

Akhtar Ali, Principal Water Resources Specialist, Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB, called for an urgent action to achieve water and food security. "Agriculture accounts for about two-thirds of the provincial domestic product, 60pc of labour force, and supports industry by providing raw material and consuming products by other industries. However, the agricultural sector suffers from

water shortage, frequent drought, and poor farming practices, and exposes the rural communities to high vulnerability, especially women and children."
The workshop was informed that to handle the challenges, the technical assistance of $1.1m, financed by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction has started, which will hold the government of Balochistan, assess basin's water resources and develop priority projects within the two selected basins.
Nadeem Shah, Honorary Consul General of Japan at Quetta, expressed happiness over Japan's commitment to improve water and food security in the region and reaffirmed Japan's continuous support to projects in Pakistan.
Rio Tanabe, Associate Senior Administrator, Satellite Application and Operations Centre, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, shared her agency's experience of utilising technology for water resources and river basin management.
The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency will provide technical assistance as adviser.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1244265/pakistan-advised-to-increase-food-production-by-50pc

DEMAND-ORIENTED: PARC CHIEF STRESSES NEED TO PLANT DIVERSE CROPS

The Express Tribune, March 7th, 2016.
KARACHI: Chairman of the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) has called for diversification of agriculture so attention is diverted from traditional crops towards other varieties.
Talking to journalists at a hotel here on Sunday, Dr Nadeem Amjad urged the media to play a constructive role for disseminating results of scientists' research to growers, to not only increase their crop yield but also help enhance earnings of peasants and strengthen the national economy.
The PARC chief pointed out that the country imports soya bean worth around Rs75 billion. Therefore, attention should be paid towards growing crops which have a demand in the local market.
He pointed out that the organisation is working for the promotion of agriculture and livestock. Their offices and research centres help guide growers. Sharing their work, Amjad informed that a virus had recently affected the banana crop in Sindh but due to PARC scientists' efforts, the disease was controlled.
He said in collaboration with Italy, PARC had grown olive saplings on 6,000 acres of land in various areas of the country. The yield has started and the standard is also good, he explained.
In view of the project's success, a five-year plan has been chalked out and olive saplings would be grown on 50,000 acres in various areas at a cost of Rs2.5 billion, he added.
He said PARC has also chalked out a plan to grow suitable crops along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and adjoining areas from Gwadar up to the border with China.
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1060643/demand-oriented-parc-chief-stresses-need-to-plant-diverse-crops/

NA COMMITTEE URGES BREAK-UP OF UREA 'CARTEL'

Dawn, March 10th, 2016
ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Industries and Production on Wednesday expressed its concern over inflated prices of urea, and directed the National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML) to play an active role in breaking the "cartelisation" in the industry by importing urea and sell it below domestic rates.
The committee's meeting, presided over by MNA Asad Umar, was informed by an NFML official that the total landed price of an imported urea bag in Karachi was Rs1,490.
Mr Umar said private manufacturers were fleecing the poor farmers by selling urea at around Rs1,900 per bag whereas the government could help reduce the price by importing urea in bulk.
He said the private producers of the commodity earned Rs30 billion during Rabi season and all this money was paid by the poor farmers.
"Farmers are already under stress due to decrease in prices of different commodities, including rice and cotton," he said.
Qaisar Ahmed Sheikh, a member of the committee, also endorsed the chairman's stance and said the committee should recommend the government to allow the NFML to import huge amount of urea in order to help bring down the prices of the commodity.
The meeting was informed that 2.287 million tonnes of urea worth Rs458.844m was sold during the current Rabi season from October 2015 to February 2016, and the total profit remained Rs11.486m.
Meanwhile, Managing Director of Pakistan Machine Tools Factory (PMTF) also gave a detailed briefing on its working.
He said his organisation, which had been a profitable entity, was currently facing some financial problems. He urged the National Assembly's committee to approve Rs2bn to bail out the factory.

Mr Umar said the PMTF had no proper business model, and directed its managing director to come in the next meeting with a historical background of the factory.
The committee was also briefed about the interim report of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on the issue of inland freight subsidy on export of sugar in 2012-13.
Committee members Sardar Mansab Ali Dogar, Syed Muhammad Asghar, Qaiser Ahmad Sheikh, Sahibzada Muhammad Nazeer Sultan, Sajida Begum, Maulana Muhammad Gohar Shah, Alhaj Shah Jee Gul Afridi, and Secretary of the Ministry of Industries Arif Azeem also attended.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1244619

PM KISAN PACKAGE: FARMERS FACE DIFFICULTIES, ALLEGE CORRUPTION
The Express Tribune, March 12th, 2016.
Shahram Haq
LAHORE: Rice and cotton growers in Punjab are encountering major obstacles in applying for the Rs5,000-per-acre cash support, extended under the Prime Minister's Kisan Relief Package, as they are being forced to pay kickbacks and get their CNICs verified with NADRA in a lengthy process, farmer lobbies have complained.
"The land department officials are demanding kickbacks and biometric verification from farmers, while the ones supporting Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) are getting cash-support effortlessly," they said.
"Moreover, many fake applicants are also being enlisted by land department officials to please the ruling party supporters," they added.
"The land department is under political influence and the ruling party leaders are handling the cash distribution affairs," said Ari-forum Pakistan Chairman Ibrahim Mughal, while talking to The Express Tribune.
"From each village, the ruling party leader picks three to four of his blue-eyed farmers, providing them with a task to enlist those farmers for cash-support who in-return are willing to support them during the by-polls and next general elections," he noted.
"This is not the end; farmers then have to pass-through the typical 'patwar culture process' where they get humiliated by land department officials. These farmers give bribes to get a small sum."
Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in September last year, announced the Rs341 billion Kissan Relief Package to support the rural economy; especially those rice and cotton growers who faced losses in agriculture produces due to high input costs.
The provision of subsidies on agriculture inputs like urea, cut in import duty on modern agriculture machinery, sales tax reduction and amputation of turnover tax on rice is also part of the package.
The most important part of the package, however, was to give Rs5,000 cash grant to farmers with 12.5 acre or less holding, though no mechanism was devised by planners to ensure transparent transfer of funds.
"We have witnessed many bribe cases and put them under concern authorities notice but no action has been taken yet," said Khalid Khokhar, Pakistan Kisan Ittehad president. "To get a small amount of money, farmers have to wait in long queues for many days."
Officials, however, maintained that the situation was "not that bad".
"The task of cash distribution is not as easy as it seems due to the system's incompetency," said Farmers' Association Pakistan Director Hamid Malhi.
"The government is vigilant but the system is geared to perform in a certain way. One cannot say that such complaints are false but the extent of it is not that bad," he said, adding that victims must be people who enlisted themselves illegally and are now demanding their share in return.
"Yes, the government gains some political mileage when they announce such packages; however, there is no political mileage at large. We heard a few complaints but they were tackled immediately," said Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed.
Concerning verifications, he said, "We have to take NADRA's help to match bio-metrics of farmers who have NICs made before 2005."
http://tribune.com.pk/story/1064196/pm-kisan-package-farmers-face-difficulties-allege-corruption/
PM DIRECTS STEPS TO UPLIFT AGRICULTURE SECTOR
Peer Muhammad
The Express Tribune, March 12th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: In an effort to boost the country's agriculture production, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday directed the Ministry National Food Security and Research to start a consultative process involving various provincial governments and other stakeholders for expanding agriculture production base.

A notice issued by the Prime Minister Secretariat here said that the ministry concerned shall ensure that the consultative process is finalised in due course for approval and appropriate allocation of funds in the budget for 2016-17.

The notification further said that various issues have been keeping the agriculture sector under pressure and the plan will help develop an integrated framework for agriculture, with a view to achieve positive outcomes.

The document underlined these aspects including diversification in the agriculture sector by promoting new crops and modern techniques. Secondly, revitalising agriculture research institutions and re-establishing a national agriculture research system by synergizing federal and provincial research institutions.

Additionally, the programme will also focus on the reorientation of agriculture research for development of better crop varieties in terms of yield and pest resistance.

The new system of research funding in the agriculture sector will focus on research output rather than investing in unnecessary employment. Likewise, the system will also look into measures for mitigating the impact of climate change on the agriculture sector and a long-term ground water policy aimed at ensuring available as well as efficient utilisation of this scarce resource.

Finally, the prime minister has also asked for consultation with stakeholders on a comprehensive framework for seed certification, fertiliser availability at affordable cost and regulation of pesticide business.

An official in the food ministry said that Minister Sikander Hayat Khan Bosan had earlier requested the prime minister to increase budgetary allocation so that it can take certain steps for the long term development of the agriculture sector.

The minister contended that since the devolution of the agriculture subject to the provinces, the federal budget had drastically reduced from multi-billion to just millions and provinces have shown their neglect towards this sector.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1064207/pm-directs-steps-to-uplift-agriculture-sector/

TRACTOR SALES INCH UP, STILL FAR BELOW LAST YEAR'S LEVEL

Dawn, March 12th, 2016

Aamir Shafaat Khan

KARACHI: Tractor sales are on the rise once again as growers have resumed buying after giving up hope of getting subsidy in Punjab and Sindh.

Sales rose to 3,045 units in February from 2,352 in January and 957 in December.

However, overall sales during July-February FY16 were still lower at 17,727 units compared to 28,412 during the same period a year ago.

In their latest budgets, Punjab and Sindh announced subsidy on 25,000 and 29,000 tractors, respectively, but they have continued delaying the scheme since then.

Punjab has already hinted suspension of scheme due to paucity of funds while Sindh has so far been quite about executing or shelving it.

Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (PAMA) Chairman Sohail Bashir Rana said growers were back to buying tractors from January this year despite facing financial problems.

He said the country would have very low cotton production this season followed by depressed prices of some big and small crops. The price of rice, potato, sugarcane, etc also remained low, especially for growers who now knew about the fate of such subsidy schemes as the fiscal year draws to a close in June, he said.

One reason behind the rise in buying was the start of wheat harvesting in some areas of Sindh while harvesting in Punjab would start from April, he said, adding this might slightly improve sales of tractors due to good wheat crop and support price.

The PAMA chief said that after a slow first half, tractor sales were showing a recovery in the second half of this fiscal year, though they were below sales target. Tractor sales in FY16 might remain far lower than 46,800 units sold in FY15, he added.

Millat Tractors sold 10,984 units in July-February FY16 compared to 17,400 a year earlier. Its sales in February rose to 1,806 units from 1,262 in January and 774 in December.

Al Ghazi Tractors' sales plunged to 6,139 units during the eight-month period from 10,526 a year ago. It sold 1,135 units in February, 984 in January and 144 in December.

Orient IMT Tractor's sales rose to 649 units in July-February FY16 from 486 in the same period of last fiscal year. It sold 104 tractors in February, 106 in January and 39 in December.
Industry sources said Pakistan's tractor sales fell 51 per cent compared to main players of the world in last five years. In 2010, the local industry sold 70,646 tractors, which went down to 49,125 in 2011 and 64,502 in 2012, 41,547 in 2013 and 34,796 in 2014. The other two countries with negative growth were Korea (-21pc) and Brazil (-2pc).
The countries whose sales increased were: Canada (23pc), the United States (26pc), Japan (28pc), China (64pc), India (14pc), Russia (78pc) and Turkey (62pc).
"This is very alarming because Pakistan, with 586,000 tractors sold, was ranked 13th out of 188 countries in the world in 2003," industry sources said.
Khalid Khokhar of Kissan Ittehad said, "Negligence of successive governments towards farm mechanisation has hurt the country's agricultural sector. The industry needs support from the government."
The government announced a package for farmers, namely Kissan Package, but it lacked anything for farm mechanisation, he said. There was acute shortage of farm machinery in Pakistan. The absence of mechanisation was one of the factors for low productivity in agriculture, he added.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1245082/tractor-sales-inch-up-still-far-below-last-years-level

COUNTRY LIKELY TO ACHIEVE WHEAT PRODUCTION TARGET

Business Recorder, March 12, 2016
ABDUL RASHEED AZAD
ISLAMABAD: The country is likely to achieve wheat production target of 25.8 million tons for Rabi crop season 2015-16 as the current countrywide rain spell will have a positive impact on overall agriculture production of major Rabi crops.
According to agriculturalists the ongoing rain spell will not only help achieve Rabi crop production targets but will also prove beneficial for upcoming Kharif crop season which sow cotton, paddy, maze and pulses.
Dr Aslam Gill, Crop Commissioner, Ministry of National Food Security and Research told Business Recorder that the rains would have a very positive impact on standing crops, including wheat, gram and orchards, in the country, especially in the rain-fed areas.
He said that the government has set a wheat production target for 2015-16 at 25.8 million tons and current rains will prove beneficial for not only wheat but for others Rabi crops too.
Gill said that rains will also improve per acreage yield as well as crop health.
"If a minimum temperature prevails till the end of March, production of wheat will be impressive, but sudden rise of air temperature in March would negatively affect wheat crop as it would reduce grain yield," he said.
Gill said that after current rains, the standing wheat crops will quickly shoot up and grow well.
He said that the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) had fixed wheat production at 25.8 million tons for Rabi season 2015-16, with Punjab targeted to produce 19.2 million tons, Sindh 4.2 million tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 1.4 million tons and Balochistan 0.9 million tons.
The government has fixed gram production target at 0.72 million tons from an area of 0.99 million hectares, he said.
According to Pakistan Meteorological Department, the forthcoming cotton season will receive normal rainfall. However, 20-25 percent above normal rainfall with a 0.8 C rise in temperature is expected from March to May. While according to Indus River System Authority (IRSA) around 28-30 MAF water would be available in water reservoirs for the coming crop season and an anticipated 5 percent shortfall in canal irrigation water during the season.
According to National Fertiliser Development Corporation (NFDC) there will be no shortage of urea fertiliser during the season, saying that due to provision of LNG to power plants, the fertiliser industry would be getting extra gas which will help produce additional fertiliser at cheaper rates even available for export.
Chief of Agriculture Policy Institute (API) Abdul Rauf Chaudhry confirmed that the recent rains will increase production of Rabi crops.
"Rains will help improve output of wheat as the crop is passing through a growth stage," he said.
He said that wheat, a major cash crop of the season which fulfills the domestic food requirements had been cultivated over 8.871 million hectares as against the set targets of 8.9 million hectares. Punjab has achieved 99 percent sowing targets set for the current season as wheat has been cultivated over 6.6 million hectare. Sindh province has achieved 100 percent of grain sowing as it has cultivated the crop over 1.1 million hectares as compared to the set targets for the season.
In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, wheat crop sowing has surpassed the targets and achieved over 101 percent of sowing targets by sowing the crop over 0.756 hectares and Balochistan province has achieved 83 percent of the crop sowing.

He said that crop sowing is expected to further increase in the province as details are yet to be received from the field formations.
Meanwhile, Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has predicted that an active weather system, presently causing rains in Balochistan, is heading towards Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and is likely to intensify within coming 24 hours in KP as a result National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued a flood warning in the northwestern parts of the country.
PMD has forecasted heavy to very heavy, downpours in upper parts of KP, including Malakand, Hazara, Peshawar, Mardan and Kohat divisions on Friday/Saturday which may trigger flash floods in the vulnerable areas of the province.
All concerned should take necessary measures to avoid loss of life and damage to property/infrastructure, PMD said. Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) KP is directed to take all kind of preventive measures.
http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/03/12/2-page/740077-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 29th TO March 6th 2016

DEMAND FOR 'AGRICULTURE EMERGENCY'

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 29th, 2016
Ahmad Fraz Khan
Last Wednesday, farmers convened an All Parties Conference at Islamabad. Almost all major parties — PML-N, PTI, MQM and PPP — came to share farmers' concerns and lamented the plight of agriculture.
They were able to exert pressure on the government to come up with more enduring solutions to the agriculture problems. All participants joined the chorus of demand. Sounds good.
They want the government to declare an 'agriculture emergency' and take a few steps immediately such as: abolish general sales tax on all farm inputs; defer trade of agricultural products with India till the government is able provide a level-playing field to the local farmers; slash diesel rates by 50pc; cut electricity rates to Rs5/unit for tube wells and take care of the rural marketing infrastructure.
Justifying their demand, the farmers claimed that crop output prices have fallen by 40-50pc in the last few years. They say cotton growers have suffered Rs170bn loss in production and another Rs48bn because of drop in prices. Only cotton has made the farmers poor by a staggering Rs218bn this year.
Potato growers lament they have lost Rs150bn because of price crash and paddy producers say they have suffered a loss of Rs35bn due to a similar trend.
What justifies their demand for market reforms is that as soon as growers sold paddy, the prices jumped by a whopping 60pc within days. What worries farmers still more is the forecast by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) which sees the low commodity price trend continuing for the next few years. This is, and would be even more, disastrous for farmers and farming economy.
The government, on its part, is in a bind, unable to understand what more can be done even if a historic Rs341bn Kissan Package has failed to ameliorate the situation.
It has already cut the GST on pesticides and machinery to 7pc and kept seeds' import duty free. The only area where the GST remains unchanged is fertiliser. But the government has announced Rs20bn subsidy on fertilisers, giving back more than what it collects. On top of it, it has paid Rs5,000 to each farmer who suffered price crashes. What else can be done? Officials and planners wonder.
There seems to be a huge disconnect between the farmers plight and officialdom's ability to address the crisis. The farmers' pressure, however, is growing immensely, for two reasons. Firstly, they have genuine problems of a high cost of inputs, going higher ever, making it more and more expensive to produce crops.
On the other hand, the price crash — either driven by international slump or engineered by local cartels — is robbing them of their investment and livelihood. So, they feel being driven to the edge. The emergence of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has brought in new activism among farmers.
Under its leadership, the farmers have blocked roads in Punjab over a dozen times in the last one year, held sit-ins in front of provincial and national assemblies and spilt milk on the roads of the federal capital. This mounting pressure forced the government to come up with Rs341bn package.
The major disconnect between the farming community and the federal and provincial governments is expressed in the absence of a long-term and sound agriculture policy. Authorities have been engaged in fire-fighting. Every time the farmers take to the streets on any particular issue, the official policy has been to deal with it as one-time event, deal with it through a combination of carrot and stick, without looking into deeper causes and solving them. The federal

government has so far distributed over Rs20bn in Punjab under Rs5,000 per acre package, but the buzz is more about the alleged malpractices.
The federal and provincial governments need to put their heads together and come up with policies governing entire spectrum of agricultural activity. Unless, they have sound policy parameters, which discipline everyone — the officials, farmers, markets, and cartels — the government, on all levels, will remain stuck in fire-fighting.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1242455

ALL PERVASIVE IMPACT OF LOW FARM PRODUCTIVITY

Mahmud Ahmed

ROUGHLY about 44pc of the country's population is engaged in agriculture contributing just 22pc to GDP, highlighting the low farm and livestock productivity.
Surpluses of wheat and sugar produced from costly cane are piling up as high domestic prices have made exports of these commodities virtually impossible despite liberal subsidy. And poor landless peasants are migrating to cities in search of jobs. The agricultural society is in the process of disintegration.
On the other hand, a 34pc drop in cotton output has forced the spinning mills to import the fibre from India. The yield per acre in farming and the crop price is directly linked to the cost of production of all traditional industries using agricultural raw material, whether it be sugar, textile, leather or ghee industry.
For a lack of synergy or harmonising development in the three broad segments of the economy — agriculture, industry and services — the structural imbalances are deepening. And the competing interests of the trio are making matters worse. There is a wide gap between the crop price at the farm gate and for the consumers in urban areas. The difference swells to more than five to six times in case of vegetable and fruits. The middlemen prosper at the cost of growers.
The first step towards ending the agricultural crisis and for supporting all segments of the economy is that all economic agents work for common good. For example, sugarcane growers must get a fair price for their produce and the industry must get its cane at a competitive price. The issue cannot be resolved through support price or export subsidies. Such policies may help in extraordinary times but cannot resolve the underlying and deep-rooted issue of low productivity which depends much on farmers' earnings, savings and investment in modernising agriculture.'The private sector is still shy from investing in building rural physical and social infrastructure to provide an impetus to agricultural growth, leaving no option for farmers to fend for themselves in an adverse environment.
While multiple reasons are advanced for maladies in the sector, the core problem is often forgotten. It is feudal cultural practice and the zamindari system (crop-sharing) that is a drag on agricultural progress, a system that has been done away with in fast developing and developed economies. Both Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did introduce reforms to reduce large landholdings, and to quote Ayub Khan, to promote investment. The process they initiated was halted by General Zia. And for one reason or another, the Sindh government has stopped distribution of state lands to the landless peasants instead of resolving related problems.
Agriculture production has not been organised on modern commercial lines. One cannot find much evidence of corporate farming in case of big cultivators or cooperatives required to pool resources of small farmers for adopting modern production and marketing methods.
With unabated resource transfer from rural to urban areas, so markedly visible in the fast-rising prices of farm inputs — fertiliser, seeds and pesticides — and falling prices of commodities worldwide, farmers' earnings, savings and investment are badly hit. Over decades, the industry and the service sector have grown much faster over time at the cost of agriculture.
The preferred segment of the urban-based market which gets subsidised wheat flour because the trade and industry would not pay labourers even the government-fixed wages.
In recent years, the pace of industrialisation has been outstripped by a much faster growth of the service sector contributing about around 55pc to GDP. It is not realised that farmers are both producers and consumers who (the latter) provide the industry and service sector the rural market. Industry, farmers and service sector need to grow in harmony for faster all round economic progress and the prosperity of the people.
The absence of right policy has not only hurt agriculture but also burdened the government with subsidy and heavy borrowing from the banking system to buy surplus stocks and keep reserves of grains to stabilise prices. Failure of agriculture has an all pervasive effect on the economy.
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 29th, 2016
http://www.dawn.com/news/1242454/all-pervasive-impact-of-low-farm-productivity

REPLACING COSTLY IMPORTED HYBRID MAIZE SEEDS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 29th, 2016
Amin Ahmed
PAKISTAN meets 85pc demand for hybrid maize seeds through imports costing the national exchequer about $60m every year. Its price ranges from $6 to $8 per kg making maize the highest priced imported seeds among all the cereals in the country.
Maize is the third most important cereal crop of Pakistan covering more than 1.2m hectares annually and the national average yield is about four tonnes per hectare. Maize productivity has increased by 75pc from its levels in the early 1990s. This can be attributed to the adoption and expansion of hybrid maize varieties particularly in the spring season.
The central and southern Punjab areas are the main 'maize belt'. However, the crop has the potential to be satisfactorily cultivated in all provinces.
Earlier this month, the USAID-funded Agriculture Innovation Programme (AIP) launched two of its bio-fortified maize hybrids identified and produced by National Agricultural Research Centre (Narc). These hybrids are two times more protein rich than the normal maize cultivars.
The USAID programme is a four-year $30m initiative designed to increase productivity and incomes of the farmers through the promotion and dissemination of modern production practices for wheat, maize, rice, livestock, fruits, and vegetables. The varieties of maize distributed are stated to resist drought and heat stresses and have enhanced nutritional quality. They also have increased tolerance to insect attacks and low soil nitrogen.
"We are seeing valuable and precious contributions from the maize programme of AIP which will help to lessen the import dependency on hybrid maize seeds," according to Dr Mohammad Azeem Khan, Director-General, Narc.
The two bio-fortified hybrids, better known as Quality Protein Maize (QPM) can offer about 90pc of the nutritional value of skim milk and many clinical studies also proved that malnourished children recovered by consuming QPM as the only source of protein.
The hybrids will serve as a cheap source of protein feed particularly for the poultry industry. The registration of these two hybrids, originally sourced from CIMMYT's Latin America breeding hub (CIMMYT Columbia), is now under process with Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department (FSCRD.
Based on a seed delivery road map, CIMMYT is allocating more varieties for inclusion in Pakistan's maize register, according to Imtiaz Mohammad, CIMMYT's country representative and AIP project leader in Pakistan.
The AIP maize programme is currently testing more varieties enriched with zinc and pro-vitamin A micro nutrients, and in addition, evaluating maize varieties that can tolerate low soil nitrogen and stem borer attack.
The AIP maize programme is linked directly with public and private sector partners by establishing germ-plasm testing network across the country. The programme, which started its field evaluation work in February 2014, is able to evaluate about 100 sets of trials consist of more than 1000 maize hybrids and OPVs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad and Jammu Kashmir.
After a thorough evaluation of maize germ-plasms in the past two years, local partners identified 36 hybrids and 13 open pollinated varieties (OPVs) suitable to grow in the diverse ecologies of Pakistan. These selected maize germ-plasms have an early maturity, enhanced nutritional quality and 'stay green' and farmers can use them as food and feed .
http://www.dawn.com/news/1242452

DECLINE OF BEES, OTHER POLLINATORS, THREATENS CROP OUTPUT: UN BODY

Business Recorder February 29, 2016
Many species of bees, butterflies and other creatures that are vital to agricultural pollination are threatened with extinction, posing risks to major world crops and global biodiversity, a UN body said on February 26.
"Many wild bees and butterflies have been declining in abundance, occurrence and diversity at local and regional scales in Northwest Europe and North America," said an assessment by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).
It said declines in pollinators – which also include a vast range of other insects, bats, birds and other animals – had also been detected elsewhere in the world.
The problem facing policy-makers is that scientists remain unsure exactly which factors are the biggest drivers.
The world's first assessment of its kind said possible causes include habitat loss, pesticides, pollution, invasive species, pathogens, climate change and the spread of vast farms dedicated to a single product, which suppresses biodiversity.
The IPBES was established under UN auspices in 2012 to assess the state of global biodiversity.

It said healthy populations of the creatures are critical to ensuring stable fruit and vegetable output, as concerns rise over the challenge of feeding the world's people in coming decades.

Among its findings, it said animal pollination is directly responsible for between five and eight percent of global agricultural production by volume, amounting to between $235 billion and $577 billion worth of annual output.

But more than three-quarters of the "leading types of global food crops" also rely to some extent on animal pollination for yield and quality. "Pollinator-dependent species encompass many fruit, vegetable, seed, nut and oil crops, which supply major proportions of micronutrients, vitamins, and minerals in the human diet," the IPBES said.

Pollination is the transfer of pollen between the male and female parts of flowers to enable reproduction.

The assessment is the work of nearly 80 scientists from around the world and was released at an IPBES meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

It is the first report by the four-year-old group, which is considered the biodiversity equivalent of the UN-organised Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In Europe, nine percent of bee and butterfly species are threatened with extinction and populations are declining for 37 percent of bee species and 31 percent of butterfly species for which sufficient data is available, the IPBES said.

In some places in Europe more than 40 percent of bee species may be threatened.

A "data gap" has frustrated efforts to assess the situation in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, but the same drivers are suspected to be at work in those regions.

Data is more solid for non-insect pollinators such as bats and birds, however, with the IPBES saying 16 percent of such species world-wide are threatened with extinction.

Some of the most important world food staples such as rice, wheat and other grains do not rely on animal pollination.

But vulnerable crops could include everything from apples and mangoes, to chocolate and almonds, and many other commonly consumed foods, said Simon Potts, co-chair of the assessment.

"Pretty much nearly all your fruits and many of your vegetables are pollination-dependent," said Potts, deputy director of the Centre for Agri-Environmental Research at Britain's Reading University.

Policy options could be as simple as planting more flowers, the group said.

But it also mentioned overall better protection of natural environments and ecosystems, limiting the scope of intensive agriculture, encouraging sustainable farming, and finding alternatives to pesticides, the IPBES said.

IPBES members stressed that the group's role was to provide evidence rather than specific recommendations for governments, and the report refrains from issuing any specific call for action.

The assessment said pollinator declines also could lower crop yields, raising prices for consumers and reducing agricultural profits.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/21036/

DEVELOPMENT: LIVESTOCK SECTOR CAN BOOST GROWTH, SAYS CM

The Express Tribune, March 3rd, 2016.

Development of livestock and dairy sector can improve the socio-economic conditions in rural areas and create job opportunities, Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif said on Wednesday.

He was addressing a meeting at Civil Secretariat through video link. The meeting considered several measures and proposals for the promotion of livestock and dairy sector. "Immediate measures are needed for the promotion of livestock and dairy sector," he said.

The chief minister said that a majority of rural population of the Punjab was linked to livestock and dairy sector. "There is a need to impart modern training to people so that meat and milk production can be increased. A skill development programme should be developed in this regard. It should effectively be implemented and no effort should be spared for achieving its goals. The livestock sector has key importance in strengthening the economy. There is a need to set the targets and move forward for its development," he said.

He said that solid measures had been taken for the promotion of livestock in the province. "However, more result-oriented steps should be taken to benefit from the vast potential in this sector," he said.

He said that the official agencies must plan a pro-active role for increasing Pakistan's share of global livestock and dairy development market. "The pace of socio-economic development will be accelerated if exports are increased," he said.

The chief minister said that the Livestock Department should continue the free vaccination programme for protecting cattle from diseases. "The Punjab government is bearing the expenses of this programme," he said.

Ministers Rana Sanaullah, Dr Farrukh Javed, Malik Nadeem Kamran, Hameeda Waheedud Din, Special Assistant Arshad Jutt and Senator Saud Majeed were present at the meeting.

The CM met a delegation comprising MNAs Sardar Mansab Ali Dogar, Mohsin Shahnawaz Ranjha, MPAs Sheikh Allauddin, Naeem Bhaba and Majid Nawaz and Manshaullah Butt.

Addressing them, the chief minister said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the country had started its journey towards peace, progress and prosperity. “Our future will become brighter when the government’s programme for the progress of the country is fully implemented. Projects costing billions of rupees have been started for the welfare of the common man. Elements criticising public welfare projects unjustifiably are enemies of the masses,” he said.

Sharif said that a number of power projects were being built to end energy crises.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1058078/development-livestock-sector-can-boost-growth-says-cm/

BALOCHISTAN SAYS ITS FARMERS BEING DEPRIVED OF LOANS

Dawn, March 5th, 2016

Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: The Balochistan government has claimed that farmers of the province are not being provided agriculture loans by the Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) and decided to take up the matter with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and management of the bank.

The decision was taken at a meeting presided over by Chief Minister Nawab Sanaullah Khan Zehri on Friday. The meeting was attended by federal Minister for Food Security and Research Malik Sikandar Hayat Bosan, senior officials of the federal government, Chief Secretary of Balochistan Saifullah Chattah and members of Zamindars Action Committee.

The chief minister said that denying agriculture loans to Balochistan’s farmers by the ZTBL was a serious matter and the provincial government would take up the matter with the finance minister.

The meeting also discussed other problems being faced by farmers in the province.

Members of the Zamindars Action Committee informed the meeting that their applications for agriculture loans were often rejected by the ZTBL which created a number of problems for them.

They also sought attention of the government towards other problems the farmer community was facing in the province.

The chief minister assured the members of committee that his government would take measures for solving farmers’ problems and would strongly take up the agriculture loan issue with the federal government.

Mr Bosan said that he was visiting Balochistan on special directives of the prime minister to consult with the provincial government and representatives of farmers for finding a way to solve problems of farmers in province.

A team of Zamindars Action Committee held a meeting with the prime minister in Islamabad shortly and presented him a ‘charter of demand’.

The federal minister informed the meeting that under the Prime Minister Kisan Package interest-free loans would be provided to Balochistan’s farmers. He said drip irrigation systems would be installed in Balochistan for which foreign support would be sought.

He said a team of experts of the Asian Development Bank and the federal government would visit Balochistan this month and prepare a feasibility report for the implementation of this project. He said the federal government was considering a proposal to allocate Rs1 trillion for providing loans to farmers across the country.

The meeting discussed proposals to convert tube-wells to solar power, import of apples from a neighbouring country and other issues of farmers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1243645/balochistan-says-its-farmers-being-deprived-of-loans

SUBSTANDARD WHEAT SEIZED IN DIR

Dawn, March 5th, 2016

TIMERGARA: The Lower Dir administration and anti-corruption department on Friday sealed the district food godown at Tarai here after finding substandard wheat supplied from the Bannu district.

Assistant Commissioner, Timergara, Mohammad Ayaz Khan Mohmand and anti-corruption in-charge Zafar Khan jointly raided the godown on a tip-off that wheat recently supplied to the district was not fit for consumption. They inspected the wheat bags and found them injurious for health.

Talking to reporters on the occasion, Mr Mohmand said 5,700 bags of wheat with 50Kg each were supplied to the district by the district food controller, Bannu, on Feb 29.

He said so far 680 bags had been supplied to local flour mills for grinding, adding the wheat had pests, other seeds and dirt and it was not fit for eating.

Anti-corruption inspector Zafar Khan sealed the godown and asked the Lower Dir food department not to supply the wheat to local mills. He said proper inquiry would be initiated and the report would be submitted to the provincial high ups.
District food controller, Fazal Bari, told Dawn that so far 266 tonnes of wheat had been supplied from Bannu, which was unfit for human consumption, adding Lower Dir had refused another 234 tonnes of wheat from Mardan.
Sources in the food department said substandard wheat was also supplied to Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda and Hangu districts from Bannu. They said the stocking protocol of wheat in Bannu was not properly maintained.
The sources said the food department authorities were aware of the fact, but they didn't take action as it would cost the government dearly.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1243617/substandard-wheat-seized-in-dir

April 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 25th TO MAY 1st 2016

TIME TO ADOPT PRECISION AGRICULTURE
Business Recorder, April 25, 2016

Speaking at a consultative meeting on precision agriculture the other day, Vice Chancellor of the University of Agriculture at Faisalabad noted the unhappy reality that inefficient farming methods are making our cost of production higher than in most other countries, creating difficulties for the farming communities. And, of course, poor farming techniques leading to poor crop outcomes threaten Pakistan's future food security.

Just across the border Indian Punjab boasts nearly double the rate of per acre yield than in this country after having embraced efficient agricultural practices and co-operative farming. Here too, as the participants of the consultative meeting noted, progressive farmers are getting 80 maunds per acre – for wheat crop – against an average per acre production of 28 maunds. The gap between the potential yield and what the small farmers manage to produce is much too large.

One of the prevalent misconceptions is that the higher use of fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides – all expensive inputs – is the only way to increase productivity, whereas variables like soil and crop characteristics also happen to be vital determinants. The practice also raises concerns about implications for human health.

In fact, critics of chemicals-driven high yield policy in the Indian Punjab point out that a particularly worrisome side-effect of the excessive use of cacogenic elements containing chemicals is the rise in various life threatening diseases among consumers.

In other words, too much reliance on artificial fertilisers or other toxic chemicals to destroy pests or unwanted vegetation without proper assessment is inadvisable. Hence the need to look for smart techniques that reduce the cost of production, increase yields, and are safer too. That is where precisions agriculture offers solutions.

It may not be possible at this point in time to introduce precision engineering technologies employed by farmers in advanced countries, such as GPS equipped crop yield monitors, and sensor systems to measure plants chlorophyll levels as well as water condition. But there are other simpler, low cost techniques that can help increase productivity, like smart sprayers and controllers suggested by discussants at the consultative meeting. Equally import is the need for better management of soil and crop variability.

For that the agricultural science community and relevant government departments in the provinces ought to get their respective act together. They need to address immediate issues first such as a common complaint that the seeds for various crops gradually lose quality while the experts fail to come up with newer answers.

And that even though on paper officials are supposed to be on hand to conduct soil testing for its suitability to a particular crop, help is not always forthcoming. Considering the looming threat of water scarcity and food shortages in the not too distant future, it hardly needs saying that necessary precision agriculture technologies and other methods ought to be adopted before it is too late.

http://www.brecorder.com/editorials/0:/40016:time-to-adopt-precision-agriculture/?date=2016-04-25

AGRICULTURE ISSUES: FARMERS DEMAND ACTION AGAINST IRRIGATION OFFICIALS
The Express Tribune, April 25th, 2016

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), a farmers' lobbying group, has asked the provincial government to take action against corrupt officials and staff of the provincial irrigation department. The farmers' leaders complained that corrupt officials and the irrigation staff's ongoing tool-down strike have created a water shortage.

The meeting on Sunday, chaired by SCA president Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar, was attended by farmers from Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Sanghar and Ghotki districts via video link.

The SCA asked the Sindh government to take its cue from the federal government's handling of the Pakistan International Airlines' (PIA) employees' protest. "The centre not only prevented PIA's protesting staff from foisting their demands on the government but also succeeded in making the PIA a private company," said Qamar.

The All Sindh Irrigation Trade Union Federation began the strike last week. The union has been calling for a job quota for the children of deceased workers, pay increases and removing encroachments from irrigation lands.

The SCA also drew the government's attention towards the allegedly substandard construction work being carried out at the Ghotki Feeder Canal of Guddu Barrage. The Rs2.9-billion project, funded through a World Bank loan, is being executed by Descon Engineering Company. The SCA claimed that the Descon has outsourced important work to local companies, which have failed to maintain quality. The chamber demanded an inquiry into the project.

Although the canal is designed to irrigate around 800,000 acres of land in Ghotki, Sukkur and Khairpur districts, its peak flows have been reduced by 30 to 40 per cent due to shrunken capacity. The National Accountability Bureau has also initiated an investigation into several multi-billion rupee irrigation projects and two irrigation officials have been arrested so far.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1091009/agriculture-issues-farmers-demand-action-against-irrigation-officials/

PERSISTING SEED PROBLEMS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 25th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

The shortage of quality seeds is a chronic problem in Sindh and growers' reliance on impure ones is affecting the province's overall crop productivity mainly cotton, rice and wheat.

The Sindh Seed Corporation (SSC) produces only 20pc of total seed requirements and the rest is met by the private companies registered at provincial and federal levels.

In the ongoing cotton sowing season, 9,900 tonnes of certified seeds are needed (15kg/ha) to meet the sowing target of 660,000ha. Of this, around 3,665.26 tonnes will come from the SSC and provincial private companies. The rest is to come from firms registered at Islamabad. Sindh mostly uses Bt cotton seed variety, which farmers say, is fast losing its efficacy.

Likewise, for paddy 37,500 tonnes of seeds (50kg/ha) are required for 750,000ha in the ongoing season. Of it, 6,238 tonnes (16.6pc) would be provided by the SSC and private companies. Rest is either sold by companies regulated by federal government or farmers use their easily available seed variety of Irri-6.

There appears to be no regulatory check on companies flooding the markets with impure seeds of different brand names to attract growers.

“No one checks whether the tag of the seed bag matches quality of seed,” says Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) General Secretary Nabi Bux Sathio. He adds that the Sindh government needs to invest in infrastructure and technology for seeds’ varietal development so that indigenous seed is preserved and farmers are not left high and dry in case of any major viral attack on crop (farmers usually keep their own seed for crop sowing).

The agriculture department officials claim that Sindh has better per acre productivity than the other provinces. This assessment is, however, based on production figures compiled by the department for major crops. Compiling production estimates the department doesn’t count area brought under cultivation of crops like wheat, cotton and rice in riverine area.

But the figures include the production obtained from the katcha area. Syed Zulfikar Shah, Member Board of Revenue (BoR) who is involved in automation of revenue record, says that Sindh has 1.74m acres of riverine area touching right and left bank of the River Indus.

“We strongly believe that if cultivation figures of the katcha area are included, the real statistics of crop production will come to the fore,” points out Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Vice-President Mahmood Nawaz Shah. He believes that ratio of certified seed availability in any crop varies between 12-15pc.

A safe assumption among farmers is that 50-60pc of riverine area remains under Kharif and Rabi crops cultivation with impressive per acre yields due to peculiar soil conditions.

Besides, onion has emerged as a major crop in Sindh and is being cultivated throughout the year on around 100,000-200,000 acres. Hardly anyone in the agriculture research department comes forward to disclose how seeds are provided or whether the onion research institute is doing something on it. Sindh DG Research couldn’t be reached for comments despite repeated attempts by this writer.

Farmers attribute the decline in the cotton yield to substandard seed. It is not giving required germination and with re-sowing growers end-up spending more on available seed or losing ideal sowing time. Technically, 70pc germination rate is to be achieved but that is not the case usually.

For addressing these issues, the agriculture department drafted the Sindh Act which has yet to be tabled in Sindh Assembly for legislation. Nothing has happened though.

The SSC continues to face financial and understaffing issues. It has thousands of acres to develop new seed varieties but it buys seed from the progressive farmers to meet growers demand. It is producing 40,000mds of wheat seeds, a sharp decline from 76,000mds it used to produce earlier.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1254157

KHARIF CROP: JI CHIEF FOR GRANTING INTEREST-FREE LOANS TO GROWERS
Business Recorder, April 26, 2016

Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan, Senator Sirajul Haq called for granting interest free loans to the growers for the Kharif crop so that they were able to cultivate cotton, maize and paddy on time. He suggested the fixation of raw cotton price at Rs 4000 per maund, Basmati rice at Rs 2500 per maund, and maize at Rs 1800 per maund to enable the growers to plan well in time.

He also urged the government to prepare a comprehensive policy to solve the problems of the growers and to stabilise the prices of major crops to help build the country's economy. While addressing the JI Advisory Council on agriculture at Mansoora on Monday, he said that in spite of repeated announcements by the government, the wheat growers were compelled to sell their produce to the middle man on low prices.

He said the government had announced procurement target at 40 lakh tons of wheat but the production this year was almost four times of the official estimate. He said the growers were constrained to dispose of their produce at lower rates because of their economic hardships and had to suffer heavy losses. He urged the government to procure every grain of wheat offered.

Sirajul Haq said that the production cost of the growers had heavily increased during the last couple of years because of the incompetence and corruption of the state institutions related to agriculture and the losses in the current wheat crop had ruined them further.

He said the export of rice had suffered tremendously due to the incompetence and corruption of the concerned institutions and warned that if arrangements for exports were not made in time, the exporters and rice mills owners would not be able to purchase the crop. He also urged the government to announce its strategy for stabilising the prices of raw cotton immediately failing which the produce would come down further and affect the local industry and exports.

http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/40177/

WHEAT PROCUREMENT TO START IN PUNJAB BY MONTH-END
Business Recorder, April 27, 2016

Fazal Sher

To meet the wheat procurement target of 7.05 million tons fixed by the federal government for 2016-17 at an estimated cost of Rs 218 billion, Punjab Food Department has decided to start wheat procurement by the end of this month while Food Department of Sindh and PASSCO have already launched a procurement campaign of the commodity.
An official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research said that the government has decided to enhance wheat procurement this year as compared to last year. Punjab will procure 4.50 million tons, Sindh 1.10 million tons, KP 0.3 million tons, Balochistan 0.10 million and Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) 1 million tons.

A senior official of the Punjab Food Department said that the distribution of gunny bags among farmers, the Food Department and PASSCO for wheat procurement will commence on April 30 in the province. "The food department had earlier planned to start distribution of gunny bags on April 15 and to launch wheat procurement on April 20 but it was delayed due to bad weather," he said.

He said that as many as 376 wheat procurement centers would be set up across the province to facilitate farmers. The official said that Sindh Food Department and PASSCO had started wheat procurement on March 31 at the rate of Rs 1,300 per 40 kg. Wheat procurement target has been set at 1.10 million tons this year, which is 200,000 tons more than the previous year, he said. He further said that 442 procurement centers have been set up in the province, while gunny bags have also been provided to farmers.

He further said that last year, PASSCO and provincial food department had procured 5.203 million tons against the allocated target of 6.6 million tons. However, farmers complained that the low level of public sector wheat procurement targets deprived them of selling wheat at the announced price of Rs 1,300 per 40 kg.

The official said that according to the first estimate received by the ministry, wheat production during the Rabi season was expected to be 25.45 million tons from an area of 9.17 million hectares against the target of 26 million tons. According to an aerial photographic survey conducted by Pakistan Space and Upper

Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) wheat production for 2015-16 was estimated at 27.526 million tons from an area of 9.576 million hectares area and average yield of 2874 kg/ha. The projected wheat production in Punjab province is 20.525 million tons, Sindh 4.604 million tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhaw (KP) 1.491 million tons and Balochistan 0.906 million tons.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/41092:wheat-procurement-to-start-in-punjab-by-month-end?date=2016-04-27

NEED TO ADOPT GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE TO HELP SOLVE LOCALS' PROBLEMS STRESSED
Business Recorder, April 27, 2016

Former Deputy Chairman Planning Commission of Pakistan Dr Nadeem-ul-Haque has said that the adoption of developed nations' uplift models sans innovative ideas as per locals needs would not address our problems. Addressing a public lecture on 'Agriculture and Economic Growth' at Iqbal Auditorium of the University of Agriculture Faisalabad(UAF), which was organised by the US-Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Agriculture & Food Security; Institute of Agriculture and Resource Economics and Public Relations and Publications, UAF.

He said that every country was facing its own problems and researchers, policy-makers and stakeholders devise the uplift strategy keeping its issues in view. The adoption of uplift models of other nations would not work until we work on local needs and circumstances.

He said that it was not a time to reinvent the wheels. We have to adopt global knowledge to fight locals' problems. He said that development comes from the changes in the mindset of people as they become innovative and work hard to changes their lives. He said that 90 million of the people are under the age of 20 years in the country.

If we provide them the good learning and health opportunities, the country would move towards the development and prosperity. Dispelling the concept that our majority is living in rural areas, he said the 70 percent was urban because despite concentration of population several areas lacked city functionality.

He said that urbanisation does not mean to establish big residential colonies but to make people well aware which lacks in Pakistan. He said that agriculture production as a share of GDP is about 21 percent. It is often stated that agricultural employment is 40 percent. Yet various surveys showed that half or more could be non-farm employment.

He called for branding the agricultural produces and to bring the vibrant policies to flourish the sector. He said that the universities are meant to bring the ground realities and give out-of-box solutions to the problems of the people that should be translated into goods and services. He said that the country was blessed with tremendous resources. There is problem of setting up the policies. He urged the students to develop the entrepreneurial skills.

UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that agriculture and rural development were interlinked. He said that agricultural development will help reduce the poverty from the country. He was of the view that the agricultural land was being converted into the residential colonies. Keeping in view, increase in per acre production was vital to ensure the food security. He said that it was the duty of the researchers to come up with the new ideas in order to face up to new challenges.

Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS) Chief of Party Dr Bashir Ahmad said that post-harvest losses, traditional way of farming, inefficient use of resources, lack of mechanisation, and other issue were aggravating the issue of food insecurity in the country. He said that share of agriculture in the gross domestic product (GDP) is 21 percent.

http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172:pakistan/41069:need-to-adopt-global-knowledge-to-help-solve-locals-problems-stressed/?date=2016-04-27

UREA PRICING ISSUE LINGERS ON, MANUFACTURES REFUSE TO BUDGE
The Express Tribune, April 29th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: The government’s impasse with fertiliser companies seems to be never ending as the latter has rejected yet another attempt to reduce urea prices.

At a meeting held in the finance division on Wednesday, fertiliser companies flatly turned down the government’s proposal to bring down prices of urea by Rs200, said a senior government officer who was part of the meeting.

The meeting was attended by officials from the finance division, Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Industries and Production, petroleum ministry and representatives from major fertiliser producing companies.

The government had proposed to reduce the urea prices by at least Rs200 for a 50kg bag, but fertiliser companies agreed to a cut of Rs60, which is less than the effect of a recent cut in gas tariff for the sector.

According to an officer, the government asked the companies to give relief to the farmers by reducing their profit margin.

Sources said that the move could not be successful due to the strong lobbying of manufacturers and special favours for the manufacturers by the ministry of industries and production. Presently, the price of urea in international market is at its lowest. equivalent to $203 per ton or Rs1,076 per 50 kg bag. After inclusion of freight and other incidental charges, ex-Karachi price of imported urea works out to be around $293 per tons or Rs1,554 compared to domestic market price of Rs1,850 per bag.

During the meeting it was established that in order to protect the local industry from cheaper imports it is important that the industry agree to reduce urea price per bag by Rs200. It proposed that the reduction in prices would benefit the agriculture sector and will also protect the domestic industry from competition with cheaper imports.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1093844/urea-pricing-issue-lingers-on-manufactures-refuse-to-budge/

JOINING HANDS: NETHERLANDS SEES PROSPECTS OF COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, April 29th, 2016.

Imran Rana

FAISALABAD: Netherlands Ambassador to Pakistan Jeanette Seppen has said that they are keen to enhance trade and investment relations with Pakistan, especially in areas of agriculture and agro-based businesses.

Talking to University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan on Thursday, Seppen said there were prospects for strengthened cooperation in livestock, agriculture and agro-based business, adding efforts were under way to encourage Dutch companies to invest in Pakistan.

She pointed out that the Netherlands had a population of about 20 million whereas it was producing food for 70 million people. “We are getting more yield from less agriculture land with the application of modern technologies.”

She said the Netherlands was helping Pakistan achieve food security that would alleviate poverty. Though the Netherlands is the fifth largest trading country in the world, its bilateral trade with Pakistan is just around $900 million.

The ambassador suggested that agricultural ties between the two countries would help them benefit from each other's experiences and cited the launch of a salt-tolerant potato growing programme in Pakistan with assistance of the Netherlands.

This can enable potato plantation in saline areas, which provides a great opportunity for Pakistan.

She cited water, agriculture and energy as the major areas for cooperation between the two countries. "Pakistan is one of the most populous countries, it has talented people and if we polish their skills, the country can develop rapidly."

Seppen also stressed that women should come forward and actively take part in economic activities in Pakistan.

She also pointed out that many Pakistani students were studying in the Netherlands as her country had one of the top universities of the globe. She was of the view that universities should provide policy recommendations to the government.

UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan underlined the need for undertaking food fortification measures to address malnutrition in the country.

He said the country had surplus food but bad eating habits and affordability and distribution issues were creating problems of food insecurity and malnutrition. "If we opt for value addition to our food produce, the country can develop at a rapid pace."

Saying that 40% of grains were being lost in the post-harvest process, Khan called for collaboration between the Netherlands and Pakistan that would pave the way for an increase in agriculture productivity and tackling malnutrition.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1093841/joining-hands-netherlands-sees-prospects-of-cooperation-in-agriculture/\

BOK TO LEAD RS11.4BN FINANCING FOR WHEAT PROCUREMENT IN KP
Dawn, April 30th, 2016

PESHAWAR: The Bank of Khyber (BoK) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Department for a syndicate financing arrangement of Rs11.37 billion for the procurement of wheat during the year 2016-17.

The MoU was signed by Mr Shams-ul-Qayyum, the managing director of BoK and Mr Asmatullah Khan Gandapur, the provincial food secretary.

A statement issued here said that the bank has been participating in the financing of wheat procurement since 2010.

This year, the food department had invited bids from banks to finance the procurement of 350,000 tonnes of wheat.

This syndicate financing is to the tune of Rs.11.37bn, which is led by the Bank of Khyber, and involves seven other banks including MCB, Bank Al-Habib, Habib Metropolitan Bank, First Women Bank, United Bank, Bank Alfalah and Meezan Bank.

Of the total amount, 50 per cent is being financed by the Bank of Khyber and the remaining will be shared by the other members of the consortium.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1255289/bok-to-lead-rs114bn-financing-for-wheat-procurement-in-kp

POLICY NEEDED FOR HORTICULTURE, AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, April 30th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: An effective and workable horticulture and agriculture export policy, similar to the textile policy, in consultation with all stakeholders needs to be introduced in the upcoming budget, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) stressed.

In his proposals, FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Chairman Ahmad Jawad said that government must formulate a feasible and workable horticulture export policy keeping in view the huge potential of the sector.

Moreover, he said that the government should allocate funds to promote the hybrid seed industry in Pakistan under private-public partnership to increase per-acre productivity. He urged setting up different projects including cool chain infrastructure, ripening centres, food processing and value addition industry, agro-processing industry and accredited testing laboratories at production hubs, particularly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, to ensure availability of good quality produce for exports.

Additionally, he said, the government should also identify new export markets and sign protocols and agreements to remove bottlenecks for enhancing exports. A loan scheme for rural youths for promoting agriculture services should also be government's priority.

Jawad also demanded that funds for Crop Insurance Scheme (CIS) for farmers may be disbursed to the areas affected by natural disasters/ calamities, wide-spread diseases and unpredictable weather conditions through proper mechanism and in transparent manner.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1094361/policy-needed-for-horticulture-agriculture/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 18th TO APRIL 24th 2016
GOVT STOPS SALE OF GM CORN SEEDS AS PRESSURE BUILDS
The Express Tribune, April 17th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: As pressure mounts from agricultural scientists and farmers, the government has stopped the commercial sale of genetically modified (GM) corn seeds, in an about-turn after its earlier permission to certain multinational companies to market their seeds, but without meeting the basic criteria.

A federal secretary, who was part of a recent meeting held at the Ministry of Climate Change, told The Express Tribune that the stakeholders present in the huddle decided that the green signal for commercial sale of GM corn seeds would be taken back until a new decision in order to appease the scientists and farmers can be reached.

"The meeting participants agreed to look into the matter again and consider all aspects including implications for the agriculture sector," a senior official said.

Already, the Ministry of Climate Change had awarded licences to different companies including prominent names like Monsanto and DuPont/Pioneer.

The government allowed the use of two varieties of GM corn seeds namely Insect Protection and Herbicide Tolerant. However, the ministry kept the matter secret and even minutes of a relevant meeting were not provided to the ministries and departments concerned because of fears that the information would be shared.

The move sparked criticism as the scientists and farmers asked how the government could give the approval without undertaking a large-scale open-field trial of the technology in Pakistan. They called it a violation of the national bio-safety laws and the international standard operating procedures.

Experts argue that no authority can approve the commercial sale of GM corn seeds or any other GM crop without a large-scale open-field trial and Pakistan has become a unique case where such approval has been given.

Commenting on the latest development, Monsanto official Aamir Mirza said the company had neither been invited to the last meeting nor had it been officially informed about the decision. “It may be their internal meeting and we have not got any information,” he said.

Mirza believes that the promotion of biotechnology will not only provide immediate benefits for the Pakistani farmers, but it will also send strong signals that the country is welcoming investments in research into cutting-edge technologies. “This will improve the agriculture sector’s international competitiveness over the long term,” he remarked.

Multinational companies claim that a monitoring sub-committee visited fields a number of times for the assessment of trial operations in every growing season in an attempt to collect data and evaluate compliance. The committee has been regularly submitting season-wise and yearly reports to a technical assessment body and relevant departments and ministries, they say.

However, the experts counter that GM corn or maize is a dangerous crop because of cross-pollination that can contaminate non-GM crops within a range of 500 metres.

The climate change minister came under pressure from certain companies and that led to the grant of licences in a clandestine manner, they say.

The scientists insist that instead of big field trials involving the farmers, small-scale tests in confined areas were conducted in certain government institutions and universities, which is entirely insufficient for meeting the standards for winning a licence for commercialisation of any technology.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1086260/appeasing-stakeholders-govt-stops-sale-of-gm-corn-seeds-as-pressure-builds/

PUNJAB BEGINS PROCUREMENT OF WHEAT AMID PRICE FALL FEARS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 18th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

WITH the field temperature rising close to 40 and the wheat crop maturing quickly, the Punjab Food Department should pull its socks up.

Setting a procurement target of four million tonnes — though the federal government had earmarked for the province a target of 4.5 million tonnes — it will start procurement from April 20.

All reports indicate a good crop, if not bumper, and it would be a tough job for the authorities. For the government, it would be a tight rope walk — balancing between procurement pace and ensuring a reasonable market price.

The current wheat price of Rs1,200 per 40kg is relatively reasonable given the high moisture content (10 to 15pc) in the early crop harvest. But once the crop starts drying, thrashing picks pace and supplies surge, price crash cannot be ruled out.

However, early estimates suggest that Punjab would be harvesting over 20m tonnes of wheat this season, leaving a tradable surplus of around 7m tonnes.Out of it, the formal sector would be procuring 5m tonnes (the Punjab Food Department 4m tonnes and Passco another million tonnes). The rest would be in the market.

The private sector, in all probability, would be waiting for the both official agencies to get out before joining the procurement drive to maximise its profits by encashing on possible price crash.

The department, on its part, would have two issues to deal with: managing massive carry-over stocks of 2.7m tonnes and the new purchase, and administrative issues of the procurement drive. It means that the entire indoor storage may not only have been consumed but around 400,000 tonnes may be lying in the open.

The entire new purchase would have to be stacked under open skies — a huge risk by any stretch of imagination.

Punjab would also know that at the end of the procurement, it would be left with 6.7 million tonnes of stocks, even if it does not have to raise the target. If the crop turns out be bigger than estimates, the provincial government has to increase the target and it would only be stretching itself to financial and infrastructural breaking point. That is why it is keeping the target on the lower side, but this low target would have psychological cost for the market.

Adding to its woes is the removal of patwari from the procurement trail this year. This low-rung revenue official used to play an all-important role in finalising the priority (for procurement purposes) list for gunny bags distribution and return of wheat.

Though there were lots of complaints against him, the department has had the benefit of his utility. In his absence, the fear factor, which he used to represent in rural areas, will also be gone, doubling pressure on the officials of the department.

Apart from these hiccups, the millers are bound to purchase a part of wheat because of some in-built profits that they make. With the Punjab government purchasing wheat at Rs1,300 per 40kg, it is bound to release it later in the year at least at Rs1,350 per 40kg to recover a part of its expense on loan servicing.

If the price crashes to anywhere between Rs1,100 to Rs1,200, it would create a cushion of Rs200 per 40kg for the private sector — which comes to Rs5 per kg. This is a huge incentive by any calculation for a few months of wheat storage. Most of the millers, especially smaller ones, don’t make that much money on their mill operations.

With all other commodities experiencing low cycle, wheat is a relatively sure business bet. The millers are thus bound to purchase whatever they could afford and lessen the load of the official agencies and political cost for the government.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1252682

NEGLECTED AGRICULTURE EXTENSION SERVICES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 18th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

SINDH lacks effective and quality agriculture extension services because the work of its related department is often described as either below par or non-existent. Outreach to farmers is handicapped by its unwilling workers coupled with a understaffed outfit also lacking required expertise and skills.

For many progressive farmers, the department has ceased to exist for all practical purposes despite the claim that it provides the best possible services to them. Background discussions with officers of the agriculture department reveal that not only extension but its research and engineering wings, too, work in isolation and without coordination for information and expertise sharing.

The extension department's anchor persons are agriculture officers (AOs) who are to be appointed through competitive exams by the provincial government. After 1998, no such examination is said to have been held. The Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) graduates turn to private sector or even opt for the post of lower scale like field assistants (FAs) and work under the few AOs in the payrolls.

Important posts like those of directors plant protection, coordination, crop reporting etc are lying vacant in the agriculture department. Same is the case with regional directors. Against five, one or two are working on an ad hoc basis.

Departmental promotion committees have not finalised cases of many BS-17 officers who are serving in the same scale for a long time. Some of the agricultural graduates are on the verge of retirement. But story doesn't end here. This has resulted in financial malpractices.

"Around 200 posts of AOs are lying vacant. For instance: I will mention only one district where four AOs are working against the 27 posts. This is how the extension department is making its presence felt," says an officer.

It is AOs who coordinate with farmers and share expertise or innovations that are introduced by the research and engineering departments. They also assist growers in sowing to harvesting of any crop wherever needed.

But they don't have vehicles to cover long distances. They are supposed to have a check on adulterated fertilisers and pesticides — the two crucial ingredients that play an important role in crop productivity.

The fresh SAU graduates are offered posts of FAs. Only those join the department who prefer government jobs. They eventually get promotion to become AOs.

Recently Director General Agriculture Extension Hidayatullah Chhajro informed a meeting of growers that the department was facing staff shortage and logistics limitations. Still, he says, Sindh's major crops' yield is the highest among all the provinces.

"How can we believe those unreliable statistics when we personally know that the [agriculture] extension department is practically non-existent," remarks Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Vice-President Mahmood Nawaz Shah. Despite lapse of five years, the Sindh government has not been able to come up with an agriculture policy after devolution of the ministry under the 18th amendment in 2010. "Can extension department tell us the Sindh's share in GDP with its own facts and figures?" he asks.

For the last few years the department has not been getting funds for holding exhibitions to demonstrate different crops to farmers. AOs and FAs are always reluctant to visit farms or market place for non-availability of vehicles. This hampers collection of samples of adulterated fertiliser/pesticides. "If anyone dares figure it out or lay hands on some storekeeper for selling substandard pesticides, he faces the music thanks to weak departmental writ," the SAB official laments.

"Farmers face issues of soil degradation, fast de-generating crop varieties or multiplication of quality variety itself, but we find agriculture extension nowhere. We strongly advise that this department should be closed down or at least present lot of officers should be replaced with qualified staff through merit-based hiring process as soon as possible," contends Nabi Bux Sathio, General Secretary Sindh Chamber of Agriculture.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1252680

SUKKUR GROWERS JOIN PROTEST OVER WHEAT PROCUREMENT 'MALPRACTICES'
Dawn, April 19th, 2016

SUKKUR: Hundreds of growers staged a demonstration outside the office of Thull assistant commissioner in Jacobabad district on Monday in protest against government's failure to provide them gunny bags.

The protesters blocked Thull–Jacobabad road by burning tyres and holding a sit-in.

Ghulam Hyder Sarki, Ishaq Khoso and Ghulam Ahmad Banglani who led the protest complained to journalists that the target for Thull was 60,000 gunny bags out of which a high official of the Jacobabad district administration and food inspector Chitho Jakhrani handed over to influential people about 50,000 including the 18,000 bags a local influential person, Liaqat Sarki, forcibly snatched away from staff after attacking the procurement centre.

They said that not a single gunny bag had been given to small growers. There were only 5,000 bags left in the procurement centre which were not being given to anyone.

They said that food inspector Chitho Jakhrani was arrested and put behind lockup just for a day and was later released at the pretext that the allegations against him would be probed by a committee and action would be taken in light of its report.

The protesters demanded the minister for food should conduct an impartial inquiry against the officials involved in misappropriation of gunny bags, take stern action against them and provide gunny bags to small growers and peasants.

Sindh Minister for Food Syed Nasir Hussain Shah has said the Sindh government cannot purchase all the six million tonnes of wheat the province has produced this year since it cannot keep that much grain in godowns.

The government had provided 11 million gunny bags to procurement centres for the purchase of 1.1 million tonnes target, therefore, there would naturally be complaints from growers, said the minister while talking to journalists at the Jacobabad Deputy Commissioner office on Sunday.

For such pumper production, the government would need at least 60 million gunny bags which it could not bear and it was quite difficult to provide gunny bags to all growers, he said.

He warned political and influential persons, who were forcibly taking away gunny bags from procurement centres, of legal action and said cases would lodged against them and they would be sent to jail.

He said that action had been taken against officials of the food department, including district food controllers and food inspectors, who were found involved in misappropriation.

If the officials were found guilty of corruption they would not be spared because the PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari as well as Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah had issued directives to distribute gunny bags in a fair and transparent manner.

Mr Shah said that price of rice and wheat in international market had dropped but the government fixed support price of wheat at Rs1,300 per 40 kgs only to benefit growers.

If the government had not fixed support price the traders might not have purchased wheat at Rs1,100 to Rs1,200 per 40 kgs and would have offered only Rs600 to Rs700 per 40 kgs, inflicting unbearable losses on growers, he said.

He said that he was still new to mechanism of food department and had formulated policies in consultation with experts to address growers' complaints from next year. He said the government was in talks with the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) and it had promised to lift 100,000 tonnes of wheat.

The PASSCO's target for purchase of wheat was 1.8 million tonnes and Sindh's share came to about two and a half to 400,000 tonnes, he said.

About the current political situation, the minister said the prime minister had gone broad for medical treatment and anybody could inquire after health of an ill person. If Asif Ali Zardari visited him to inquire after his health nobody should have any objection to it, he said.

He rubbished reports of any political change in Sindh and said there could, however, be changes in the cabinet.

Jacobabad Deputy Commissioner Agha Shah Nawaz Babbar, Mir Farooq Khan Jakhrani also accompanied the minister.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1252953/sukkur-growers-join-protest-over-wheat-procurement-malpractices

INNOVATIVE FARMING
The Express Tribune, April 19th, 2016.

Pakistan's economy might be heavily dependent on agriculture, but the sector has not made the giant strides expected of it and the effects of this are now being felt across the board. Hence, when news comes forth that a farmer is trying new methods and techniques to grow food, which normally would require a lot of effort and luck,one cannot help but wonder if these would be practised on a wider scale and in quick time.

The Punjab Irrigated Agriculture Improvement Programme, which was funded by the World Bank with a loan of $250 million, has enabled one farmer to grow grapes in an area known for wheat, according to a recent report. The farmer, Mohammad Niaz, is employing drip irrigation — a method known to save water and fertiliser — to grow grapes across nine acres of land and is pleased with the results.

Lack of education and technical know-how, coupled with a tendency to stick to traditions and the motto 'this is how our forefathers did it', has meant that the agriculture sector is still stuck in the past. It has not been able to keep pace with population growth and increase in per-acre yield. Water shortage has made things worse for farmers in Punjab and Sindh. The World Bank-funded programme might be meant for Punjab, but nothing is stopping Sindh from getting in on the action.

The sector keeps getting subsidised and Kisan packages keep getting offered, but these are not investments in human capital. These are meant to secure votes and do little for the uplift of the sector in meaningful terms. Prices of commodities continue to remain depressed and agricultural produce, for the time being, is not selling. Experts have long stressed the adoption of productive techniques to grow food crops.

Why Pakistan chooses to stay in the Stone Age is beyond comprehension when all one hears is how the sector is crucial to the economy. The programme launched in Punjab is now bearing some fruit and we hope that farmers break the shackles of outdated tradition and focus on modern efficient methods.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1087264/innovative-farming/

PRIORITY SECTOR: GOVT TO SPEND RS100B ON AGRICULTURE: SHAHBAZ
The Express Tribune, April 20th, 2016.

LAHORE: The Punjab government will spend Rs100 billion during the next two years for the development of agriculture sector, Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif said on Tuesday.

He was presiding over a meeting to review the recommendations made during the Punjab Agriculture Conference 2016.

"Full attention will be paid to agriculture research. The government is implementing a comprehensive programme for uplifting the agriculture sector. All out resources are being utilised for the prosperity of farmers. Provision of necessary facilities to farmers is essential for promoting agriculture," he said. The CM said that all government departments should take practical measures for the prosperity of cultivators.

The chief minister said that various programmes would be started to ensure the prosperity of farmers. "Progress and prosperity of farmers is the top priority of the government. We are moving forward in this direction by adopting a farmers-friendly policy," he said.

Shahbaz Sharif said that he would personally monitor the measures taken under the historic Rs100 billion package announced for the prosperity of farmers and development of agriculture sector.

"All steps will be taken for the progress of agriculture and farmers. Agriculture production and area under cultivation will be increased," he said.

The chief minister said that maximum efforts would be made to protect cultivators from the losses due to the recession in agriculture commodity prices at international level.

He said that financial, legal and administrative measures would be taken to curtail the losses suffered by farmers.

"Immediate measures are needed for the standardisation of agricultural machinery," he said.

The chief minister directed officials to take steps to activate the Punjab Agriculture Research Board. "Special attention should be paid to research to enhance agriculture production and the area under cultivation," he said.

He said that there was a need to share fruits of agriculture research with farmers. "The promotion of technology, research development and agriculture extension is essential for development of agriculture sector and progress of farmers," he said.

The CM said that all government departments had to play an active role for the development of the agriculture sector. The chief minister directed officials to submit a practicable and final plan for strengthening the agriclture sector.

He said that a committee, headed by the chief secretary, should be constituted to present a comprehensive roadmap within a few days for development of agriculture sector and welfare of farmers.

The agriculture secretary briefed the meeting on the measures proposed for the development of agriculture sector. Ministers Rana Sanaullah, Bilal Yasin, Dr Farrukh Javed, Mian Yawar Zaman, Dr Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, Muhammad Asif Malik, Special Assistant to CM Arshad Jatt, CM's Adviser Ijaz Nabi, Chief Secretary Captain (r) Zahid Saeed and the Planning and Development Board chairman were also present.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1087974/priority-sector-govt-to-spend-rs100b-on-agriculture-shahbaz/

COTTON PRODUCTION TO REGISTER HUGE DECLINE
Tahir Amin

Pakistan cotton production for the outgoing season (2015-16) is likely to be missed by 35 percent and it is expected at 10.1 million bales against the initial target of 15.49 million bales. Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah revealed this while talking to Business Recorder here on Tuesday.

"The official figures of cotton production are yet to be released; however, it is expected around 10.1 millions bales, said Abdullah, adding that abnormal weather, seed quality, pests & disease and low prices had negatively affected the cotton production. He said a survey conducted by the team of Entomologists during the crop season revealed that in Punjab highest boll damage (61 percent) by Pink Bollworm was observed in Lodhran, followed by Vehari (44.4 percent), whereas lowest damage was observed in Khanewal (7.8 percent). Percentage of live larvae in the damaged bolls was ranged from 68 percent to 97 percent in the districts surveyed.

During the current cotton season, he said, in Sindh province, pink bollworm remained as high as 31 percent in Tando Allah Yar district followed by 26 percent in Mir Pur Khas district. Minimum of seven percent was recorded in Sangher. Live larvae in the infested bolls remained 6-14 percent in different areas.

Punjab was projected to produce 10.5 millions bales; however, after the pink bollworm and whitefly attacks, cotton crop was badly damaged and the projection was revised downward to 7.4 million bales. However, officials revealed that Punjab is yet to present official figures to the Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) and the situations can be worse than as was projected. Sindh was projected to produce 4.4 million bales; however, the projected estimate was revised downward to 3.4 million bales after pink bollworm and whitefly attacks.

Officials said that due to low cotton prices ie opening phutti prices remained between Rs 1800 to 2300 per 40 kg in the month of August-September. The farmers lost their interest in crop management because they did not foresee any profit from the cotton produce. Damages due to rains coupled with prevailing lower cotton prices and high rates of inputs, and the farmers lost their interest in spending more on already damaged crop.

Cotton Commissioner said that pink bollworm severely damaged the crop. The population built up unexpectedly on later stage of the crop and severe boll damage was observed during the months of August-October. He further said farmers could not control the infestation by Pink bollworm due to non vigilance of farmers about the extent of pest infestation and unavailability of adequate pesticides.

The government had set a target of 15.489 million bales from 3.122 million hectares; however, cotton was sown on 2.946 million hectares and missed the target by 0.47 percent. The government has downward revised cotton production target as well as area and fixed at 14.1 million bales from three million hectares for the next season 2016-17 against 15.49 million bales from 3.11 million hectares estimated for the current season (2015-16).

http://www.brecorder.com/market-data/stocks-a-bonds/0:/37874:cotton-production-to-register-huge-decline/?date=2016-04-20

CONTROVERSIAL TRACTOR SCHEME: SINDH GOVERNMENT BARRED FROM PROCESSING
Business Recorder, April 22, 2016

Mushtaq Ghumman

National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Sindh has reportedly barred Sindh government from processing the controversial tractor scheme announced by Sindh Bank last week, official sources told Business Recorder.

Director, Agricultural Engineering Sindh Hyderabad in a letter written on April 15, 2016 has revealed that NAB, Hyderabad visited Directorate, Agriculture Engineering Sindh and asked to provide the following information/documents of the scheme “provision of assistance to farmers on purchase of 11000 wheel type tractors phase-III”: (i) copy of MoU signed with Sindh Bank during current year ; and (ii) copies of advertisement in the newspapers on April 15, 2016 for providing subsidy, assistance to the farmers.

Director General, Abdul Qadir Tareen in a letter to the Secretary Agriculture Supply & Prices Department, Sindh revealed the visit of NAB officials in the office of Director Agriculture Engineering Hyderabad, and further advised them to stop process of tractors’ scheme with reference to the advertisement that appeared in the newspapers on April 15 and Sindh Bank Limited may be informed to stop the process.

Insiders claim that the tractors scheme is non transparent as forms allegedly were distributed to the sugar mills which will give them to farmers who will purchase tractors from one company.

According to them, local tractors manufacturers and importers have been deprived of benefiting from the scheme which is being launched with the public’s money.

In an emergency meeting management committee of Pakistan Association of Automotive Parts and Manufactures (PAAPAM) also deliberated in detail on the pros and cons of such schemes and it was unanimously agreed that historically such schemes had been harmful for the industry.

According to Chairman Mumshad Ali tractor subsidy schemes had serious transparency issues in the past, in which level-playing field was not provided to all the assemblers of tractors. "Besides this, such schemes are money making opportunities for the influential people, who end up winning the balloting for such schemes and later sell the scheme tractors in the open market at lower rates," he added.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/38829:controversial-tractor-scheme:-sindh-government-barred-from-processing?date=2016-04-22

KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA REFUSES TO OFFER FUNDS FOR KISSAN PACKAGE
Dawn, April 23rd, 2016

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Pervez Khattak on Friday expressed his government's inability to provide resources for the federal government's Kissan Package saying the province's resources are being utilised for the promotion of agriculture sector in line with the priorities set by the provincial government.

He said this while talking to federal minister for food security and research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar, said a statement issued here.

Provincial agriculture minister Ikramullah Khan Gandapur, special assistant to CM for livestock and fisheries Mohibullah Khan, agriculture secretary and senior officers concerned were also present in the meeting.

The federal minister while demanding of the provincial government to provide resources for the Kissan Package said the provision of 50 percent funds for the package were committed by the federal government, while the provision of the rest was the responsibility of the respective provinces.

He said Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had yet to provide their respective share for the package.

Responding to the demand of the federal minister, the chief minister said the mentioned package had been announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif without taking the province into confidence and that was why funding of the package was the sole liability of the federal government.

The chief minister complained that the centre didn't consult small provinces on national issues.

He said the agricultural products being subsidised under the Kissan Package didn't 'fall in the requirements of the farmers of the province.'

Mr. Khattak informed the federal minister that the provincial government had already chalked out its own strategy for the promotion of agriculture and forest sector and that available resources were being incurred for the purpose.

He said the installation of tube wells, provision of free seeds and subsidisation of certain items were among the steps of his government being initiated for the welfare of cultivators.

He said it was the legal responsibility of the local government to spend 10 percent of its budget for the promotion of agriculture sector.

Responding to the 'demand of the federal government for taking steps to reduce the cost of production enabling farmers to compete international market,' the chief minister said his government would share its proposal in this respect with the federal government after consulting stakeholders.

Taking note of the dispute over the agriculture research station in Kaghan between the federal and provincial governments, Mr. Khattak set up a high-level committee headed by the chief secretary to devise a strategy to resolve the issue.

He also expressed reservations about the exclusion of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan from the representation in the CPEC committee and said such attitude was an injustice meted out to small provinces and that it was harmful to national integration.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1253926

QAIM CALLS FOR IMPROVED SEED VARIETIES
Dawn, April 23rd, 2016

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah on Friday said his government was making efforts to provide certified seed of improved varieties to growers at affordable price to improve per acre yield.

This he said while presiding over a meeting of the Sindh Seed Corporation (SSC) here at the CM House. Senior Finance Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Agriculture Minister Ali Nawaz Maher, Chief Secretary Siddique Memon and Agriculture Secretary Shahid Gulzar Shaikh were among those attended the meeting.

The agriculture secretary said there were eight basic seed farms of the SSC, including 2,898 acres Lodra (Shikarpur district) farm, 372 acre Pai Sakrand (Nawabshah) farm, 1,041 acre Setharja (Khairpur) farm, 122 acre Kotdiji (Khairpur) farm, 1,474 acre Ghotki farm, 112.27 acre Ruk (Ghotki) farm, 100 acre Sangi (Sukkur) farm and 110 acre Lakhi (Shikarpur) farm.

SSC Managing Director Dr Iqbal Saeed said different seed varieties had been provided to growers. The wheat varieties provided so far were TD-I, Kiran 95, Imdad 05, SKD-I and Benazir, IR -3701 of cotton and two varieties of paddy, Irri-6 and KS-282.

He said during the last four years (2011-2015), Rs140.266 million had been spent on all the eight farms for developing seed varieties against which Rs286.45 million was earned. Similarly, Rs507.48 million was spent on the marketing of the seed against which Rs638 million income was generated. During that period, the SSC utilised Rs647.75 million against which an income of Rs924.452 million was generated.

The chief minister urged experts to grow such seed verities which needed less water and survived in flood situation. Manila and Thailand had developed such varieties of rice which survived in flood situation.

The agriculture secretary said there was a Rs443.767 million liability against the SSC, including those of Hesco and Sesco bills, repair and maintenance of seed processing plants, damages sustained at Lodra and Ghotki farms due to heavy flood of 2010.

Mr Shah asked the chief secretary to look into the issues of the SSC and give him report.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1253806/qaim-calls-for-improved-seed-varieties

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 11th TO APRIL 17th 2016
SCA WORRIED OVER FOOD MINISTER'S 'HELPLESSNESS'
Dawn, April 11th, 2016

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has expressed concern over the alleged helplessness of Sindh Food Minister Nasir Shah before the food department's staff.

In its meeting held on Sunday under the chairmanship of SCA president Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar, the chamber noted that the food department was to procure 1.1 million tonnes of wheat from farmers for which 22 million bags were needed. Of those bags, 20 millions of 50kg (each bag worth Rs100) were sold by food officials by committing corruption of Rs2 billion.

The SCA appealed to the Sindh chief minister and provincial food minister to get the wheat bought from traders examined, adding that 15 to 20 per cent of the commodity was mixed with soil and garbage and it would lead to diseases among consumers.

It said the agriculture engineering department had received a World Bank loan of $185 million. The loan was to be utilised for strengthening the agricultural sector through lining of water courses, provision of solar-powered tube-wells and launching of high efficiency drainage systems' schemes.

The meeting said that the funding under this loan was made in March 2015 and the project was to be completed by 2021. It demanded that for ensuring transparency in utilisation of funds, expenditures of those schemes should be advertised and shared with the media and posted on the agriculture department's website for dissemination of information among growers.

The SCA said a publicity campaign should be launched as well so that more and more farmers were aware of this project. The new sugar cane crop in Ghotki and Sukkur districts was hit by an attack of white fly, therefore the government should instruct sugar mills of those areas to help farmers control this virus attack through biological measures.

It regretted that quality seed was not available for cotton crop. The research wing of the agriculture department as well as the Sindh Seed Corporation remained dysfunctional.

Both the organisations were not performing, therefore progressive farmers should be supported at the individual level with provision of basic seed so that they could establish their nurseries for multiplication of seed for different crops especially cotton.

It questioned the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP), stating that in the past two years, six project directors (PDs) of the SAGP were changed. Now once again a particular lobby was trying to get the incumbent PD replaced, which was condemnable.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1251292/sca-worried-over-food-ministers-helplessness

NEED FOR NEW AGRIBUSINESS MODELS TO SPUR FARM OUTPUT
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 11th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

AS the Punjab government plans to pour in more money into agriculture development, it may be time for it to focus on the difference between the performance and the potential of the soils.

Most of its lands have been under-performing for a variety of reasons, but fragmented holdings (up to 65pc held by small growers (less than 12.50 acres) with no meaningful financial and technological investment make any commercial sense. This problem of fragmentation is complicated further by the inheritance laws, dividing landholdings with every passing generation.

The issue was highlighted at Dawn's Food and Agri Expo last week where speakers pleaded for some kind of land integration methodology, not by changing inheritance laws but through introduction of business models that create economies of scale and these lands, in turn, are served by a strong service sector.

Provision of such services already exists in the rural areas. But the problem is that it revolves only around tractors due to an overwhelming presence of the machines with over 500,000 tractors servicing around 43m acres. Beyond tractors, only a few hundred thousand ploughs and plankers exist and that's it. Though these three varieties of basic machines still have a role, farm mechanisation leapfrogged beyond them decades ago.

The rudimentary form of service provision has traditionally revolved around almost defunct cooperatives. It is time to change the very concept and promote the services sector as a new business model, especially for small landholdings and unleash their potential.

For this, cooperative and corporate farming should be encouraged for creating economies of scale. Under the fresh initiative, the government should actively ask small farmers to join hands to work with production and marketing cooperatives.

It would not only strengthen their bargaining position against service and inputs providers (mechanisation, fertiliser, pesticides etc) and middlemen and other buyers, it could also improve their access to formal credit sources.

Parallel to this process, the government should start facilitating new service providers, both as landholding based cooperatives and as independent business models. Those interested in purchasing the entire line of machines (starting from bed-preparation to post-harvest storage of the produce) for serving their own lands and others should be enlisted and helped.

Instead of subsidising them, the government should help them secure loans (collateral for which has recently been computerised with the Punjab government) and machines.

According to experts, these service providing models could be especially successful in orchards because: essential pruning and picking machines - highly effective for better yield and returns but costly – are beyond the reach of small farmers.

The country's natural endowment can also facilitate such initiatives as most of its crops and fruits are grown in clusters – like kinno cluster in central Punjab, guava around Lahore and mangoes in the South.

If the Punjab government can pick three such tehsils of these orchards for rimplementing service providing models, the process could be emulated gradually in the rest of 131 odd tehsils.

The new money, which the Punjab government promised under Rs100bn package for development, should find a good avenue in the services sector. But the experts also warn that the new initiatives should not be flashy concepts borrowed from highly developed western economies and not applicable to prevailing conditions in the country.

Instead, it should be aimed at helping in solving problems of local land fragmentation; integrate them to make them viable for financial and technological investment and convince the farmers and service providers that their effort is worth trying for.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1251322

KP'S IRRIGATION PROJECT FOR RAIN-FED AREAS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 11th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa plans to extend the irrigation system to enhance water supply and agricultural productivity in Swabi and Nowshera districts along the right bank of Indus River.

The provincial government has asked the Asian Development Bank to unbundle the Pehur High Level Canal Extension project from the water resource sector project and process it as a standalone loan facility. An ADB loan of about $60m is currently being processed for the project.

About 96pc of the project area for enhancing the irrigation water supply falls in Swabi district and extends partially at the tail end into Nowshehra district. The whole area is spread in the form of two major chunks — Janda Boka and Indus-Ambar.

The irrigation components of the project include two separate command areas: Janda Boka-Malikabad area of about 1,317 ha and Indus-Ambar area of about 8,814 ha.

The project envisages extension of irrigation water supply to areas located at higher elevations and, therefore, not within the present commanded area of Pehur high level canal.

It is proposed to utilise the available head from Tarbela Dam through pressure pipes offtaking from the Gandaf Tunnel opening into cultivable land at higher elevations.

The proposed Janda Boka area lies near the Gandaf Tunnel outlet from Tarbela reservoir towards the right of Pehur High Level Canal (PHLC), while the Ambar area starts about 5km to the west of Swabi town, and is spread on the left side of Maira Branch. Similarly, the Indus area adjoins the Ambar area towards the west and extends to the left till the end reaches of Maira Branch.

A report prepared by the irrigation department for the ADB envisages increased water-use and on-farm management capacities through development of on-farm works including water courses; introduction of high efficiency irrigation systems in part of the area; establishment of demonstration centres and capacity development of farmers for efficient utilisation of available water resources; and, increased domestic water-supply capacities.

The existing cropping intensity in the project command area is estimated at a meagre 52.4pc (14.08pc in kharif and 38.32pc in rabi). The principal kharif crop is maize (10.36pc) and rabi crop is wheat (36.92pc). It is evident that with such a low cropping intensity, farming in the command area is below subsistence level and is unsustainable.

The yield level is quite low due to erratic and inadequate rainfall and required moisture.

With the project completed, there would be enormous improvement in the cropping pattern and cropping intensity with additional land coming under cultivation. The project is expected to improve cropping intensity to165.75pc.

Potential for hydropower generation exists at pressure pipe outlets before the pressure pipes discharge into the main canals. During detailed design, consultant will appraise hydropower potential, and if feasible, the project designs will make provisions for installation of a power plant.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1251321/kps-irrigation-project-for-rain-fed-areas

SINDH TO PRODUCE LESS MANGOES THIS SEASON
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 11th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

AN unusual drop in flowering and fruit setting in mango orchards is being witnessed in Sindh this season. Experts believe it is due to climate change affecting the all varieties, but Sindhri the most, which is grown in 75-80pc orchards owing to its export potential.

The problem has assumed a serious challenge especially for medium-size orchard owners due to lack of appropriate management. Single-digit temperature is essential for mango trees when they enter the dormancy phase — a factor crucial for bud formation, flowering and then fruit setting.

Mr L.K. Sharma of Research Wing of the Agriculture Department based in Tandojam and Mr Abdul Jabbar Memon of Sindh Horticulture Institute, Mirpurkhas, say mango trees didn't get the much-needed temperature of below 10°C this season which shot up to 30°C even in January at one point of time. Mercury did drop to 6-8°C only for a brief period not enough for trees to have ideal fruit bearing climate.

Other mango varieties — saroli, daseri, chaunsa, langra etc — are too witnessing an early flowering. Some farmers say months of April and May are still crucial and nutritional doses of potassium and nitro phosphate may be applied to retrieve some losses. It would help keep fruit healthy and increase its weight by around 200 grams or so. "Better quality can offset quantitative losses."

Researchers carried out a survey of different orchards of Tando Allahyar and Mirpurkhas districts in February where they witnessed an early flowering in langra, saroli and daseri varieties which indicate that they would be marketed early this season.

Mr Sharma points out that a 40pc drop in flowering and fruit setting was evident in orchards. Farmer Ghulam Sarwar Abro agrees with him saying normally 8,000kg of mangoes are produced on an acre. But this season, he reckons that 4,500kg to 5,000kg of the fruit may be obtained from an acre.

Sindh constitutes 35pc of Pakistan's mango production but it has 50pc share in exports.

Mahmood Nawaz Shah, who also exports mangoes, says if the drop in Sindhri output is less than 25pc of the total crop, supplies would still be enough to meet domestic demands. However, if production shortfall crosses 30pc the market price may go up.

"I feel price of Sindhri would shoot up to Rs100 per kg as this year's crop coincides with the holy month of Ramazan starting early June at peak of harvesting of the fruit," Abro observes.

Experts tell farmers that for lessening the impact of climate change they need to get engaged in tendering the orchards promptly after piecemeal harvesting instead of waiting for the picking up of entire crop.

Orchards should not fall prey to any kind of stress like over and under irrigational water supplies. It would result in timely flushing and ultimately leading to bud formation, flowering and fruit setting next year for a better crop.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1251320/sindh-to-produce-less-mangoes-this-season

EXPECTING MORE BUMPER CROPS, MORE PROBLEMS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 11th, 2016

Ashfak Bokhari

Pakistan is likely to harvest bumper crops during the kharif season, which starts from April-June and lasts until October-December in different parts of the country.

But under the conditions prevailing in the agriculture sector bumper crops are not so desirable. This time the hopes have been raised by ample availability of water throughout the season. Rice, sugarcane, cotton, corn and mash are some of the key crops of the season. The crops that may produce surplus commodities are sugarcane, rice and corn.

Cotton suffered a steep decline of 34pc in the outgoing season and its stakeholders say they cannot afford failure of another crop in the new season. Meanwhile, the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) in its monthly review has predicted cotton production in Pakistan to jump 35pc, as yields recover.

The new crops, if they happen to be bumper, would come at a time when carry-overs of previous crops have not yet been fully disposed of. These stocks of wheat, sugar and rice are already a source of distress to the authorities concerned owing to lack of storage facilities, continuing low prices on the international markets, delayed payments to sugarcane growers by mill owners, etc.

The country's wheat stock currently is over 5.5m tonnes and the new crop that has started coming is likely to be over 25m tonnes. After setting aside compulsory one million tonnes of strategic reserves, the total exportable surplus stands at about 4.5m tonnes. But only 274,000 tonnes could be exported so far.

Sugar stock stands at 5m tonnes and only 20,000 tonnes could be exported despite liberal subsidy. From annual export earnings of about $2bn, basmati exports have come down to $500m as Indian basmati has taken over Pakistan's space.

In this scenario, many farmers are likely to switch to other crops that are more paying. There are reports of shifting of some sugar mills to cotton cultivation areas in South Punjab and Sindh. To suppress such a trend that may affect cotton production, the chairman of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association recently demanded a ban on shifting of sugar mills to strictly protected cotton areas.

According to Indus River System Authority (Irsa), about 74.4 million acre feet (MAF) water would be available for distribution among the provinces during the kharif season. Besides, there have been enough rains during January to March. Irsa's advisory body has allocated 37.1 MAF to Punjab and 33.9 MAF to Sindh. Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would get a share of 2.6 and 0.82 MAF water, respectively.

About 16 MAF water would go into the sea. Under the Indus Waters Treaty, Pakistan was expected to build a large dam every decade but failed to do so after Mangla, Tarbela and Chashma in early years.

Meanwhile, sugar exporters have failed to clear the glut within the stipulated period which may further pile up as the likely bumper crop starts arriving after June. Sugar production in 2016 season is expected to reach over 5m tonnes while local consumption may remain at 4.8m tonnes. Pakistan Sugar Mills Association says that exporting sugar is no more attractive to its members. "We would have exported the entire approved quantity of 0.5m tonnes within the stipulated period, had the international market rates recovered from the lingering depression."

Meanwhile, the PSMA is seeking a three-month extension in the validity period of sugar exports along with the rebate that expired on March 31, 2016. The indications are that the government may give an extension for 45 days instead of 90 days fearing that a longer period validity may lead to increase in prices of the commodity during Ramazan.

The Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet on Dec 7, 2015, approved the export of 0.5m tonnes of sugar. But contracts for 253,000 tonnes have only been registered with the State Bank of Pakistan despite an export rebate of Rs13 per kg.

The meteorological department has forecast 3 to 4 rain spells in April and above normal rains in May and June. Irsa has, therefore, asked the provinces to get as much water releases as they desire in Kharif season. More rains would also help generate more power in summer season.

The recent rains had helped build reasonable carry-over stocks that currently stands at about 3.38 MAF.Because of persistent water shortages, Irsa had over the years adopted an ad-hoc three-tier distribution plan to determine provincial shares in three stages — early, middle and late watering. For the first time after a long period, this plan will not be applicable.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1251319/expecting-more-bumper-crops-more-problems

‘CORRUPTION’ IN WHEAT PROCUREMENT PROCESS TRIGGERS PROTEST BY GROWERS
Dawn, April 12th, 2016

DADU: Wheat growers in several towns of Dadu district have started a hunger strike, besides holding demonstrations, against the Sindh government and the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) claiming that their produce was not being lifted by the food department and, instead, stocks of hoarders and traders were being procured.

Scores of aggrieved growers have set up hunger strike camps in Dadu city, Khairpur Nathan Shah, Johi and other towns on Monday demanding supply of gunny bags to them in an adequate number and procurement of wheat at the designated centres in a fair and transparent manner.

Asif Ali Khoso, Nazeer Ahmed Chandio and Mohammad Usman, leading the protesting growers outside one of the camps set up outside the local press club, told the media that although wheat procurement and distribution of gunny bags had officially been started, as many as 23 food centres set up for the purpose within Dadu district alone had not been opened. “The food officials concerned are purchasing wheat stocks from traders, hoarders and front men of certain PPP leaders who have set up their delivery points away from the officially set up food centres,” they claimed.

The protesting growers said that this had caused great unrest among growers who were being made to suffer heavy losses. Most of the genuine wheat growers were still desperately seeking gunny bags supposed to be provided by the government, they added, apprehending that they might be left in the lurch until the closure of the procurement process.

Mr Khoso informed the media that not a single food centre had been opened in Khairpur Nathan Shah taluka as yet while food officials had already procured tonnes of wheat from “unscrupulous traders, hoarders and influential figures of different areas”. Alleging that gunny bags were being sold to such elements at a higher rate to make profits, he accused senior food officials of being involved in the racket.

He urged the higher authorities to hold an inquiry into the corrupt practices and include all senior officials right from the departmental secretary to the lowest-grade officers in the probe.

Growers belonging to other towns including Dadu city, Johi, Khudabad, Phulji Station, Jhalloo, Moundar, Kakar, Chhandan and Changlani started a hunger strike within their respective areas and made the same complaints.

Ghulam Qadir Rindh, who heads the action committee of the Small Growers Association, told the media in Johi town that unlike the routine practice, no senior food official including the secretary, director or deputy director visited any food centre in this area to supervise the gunny bag distribution and wheat procurement process.

Endorsing the protesting growers’ claims, he appealed to the apex court and National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to look into the massive irregularities and corruption on the part of food officials.

At the hunger strike camp outside the Dadu Press Club, aggrieved growers raised slogans against food secretary and director and deputy director of the department’s Hyderabad region accusing them of patronising the officials posted at food centres in their “corrupt practices” to cause heavy losses to wheat growers.

One of the protesting growers, Maqbool Ahmed, alleged that Dadu food controller Zahid Hussain Unnar was facilitating wheat procurement deals between big growers and traders at low rates in order to humble small growers in the procurement process.

He further alleged that only 200,000 gunny bags were issued by the local food officials in Dadu city and that, too, to traders and hoarders, and not growers. “Fake wheat transportation bills are being produced to show that the stocks were purchased from growers,” he claimed.

The wave of protests hit the area a day after the arrival of Food Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah in Dadu district to supervise the wheat procurement process. While on his way to Dadu city on Sunday, the minister received the report about scuffles between two groups of pro-PPP growers going on over gunny bags distribution and he had to hold a meeting with PPP MNA Rafique Jamali and the deputy commissioner to sort out the issue.

Speaking to the media on Monday, Mr Shah said he visited various areas of Dadu and Jamshoro district after receiving complaints from growers concerning gunny bags supplies and wheat procurement issues.

The minister noted with concern the complaints of alleged corruption and held out the assurance that action would be taken against any official found involved in such practices.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1251456/corruption-in-wheat-procurement-process-triggers-protest-by-growers

FOOD SECURITY: DUTCH POTATO SEEDS OFFERED AS SOLUTION
The Express Tribune, April 13th, 2016.

LAHORE: Private companies have been urged to launch a multiplication of Dutch potato seeds in Pakistan with a view to reducing input cost of farmers as well as establishing a vibrant seed industry in the country.

The relationship between Pakistani potato growers and Dutch seed producers is ‘decades-old’ and there have been good harvests in the country, especially in Punjab over the years, said Romke Wustman, a Dutch expert, who has over 30 years of experience in potato seed research and production.

“The use of Dutch potato seeds by local growers is in fact a partnership. I will not call it dependence on Dutch potato seeds when it comes to its import but rather, it is an association based on constant feedback of Pakistani farmers to which the Dutch seed producers respond in the shape of providing far better seed varieties every time,” he added.

Talking to a select group of journalists before concluding his visit to Pakistan, Wustman underlined the need for more proactive role of the private sector for provision of quality seed for growers at relatively affordable prices. Instead of importing seed in bulk, he observed, the local private seed companies should come forward and multiply Dutch seed in northern areas.

“The Netherlands is one of the world’s largest exporters of agriculture produces and biggest exporters of potato seeds,” Wustman remarked, adding that though the export of potato seeds to Pakistan from the Netherlands may get affected due to the multiplication of imported seeds locally, but it would be relatively better for the farmers and seed industry.

“In fact, it is a win-win situation for both,” he said.

According to Wustman, over 400 varieties of potato seeds have been registered in the Netherlands and out of about a million tons of potato seeds, 70% are exported to over 80 countries including Pakistan.

Highlighting the role of potatoes in ensuring food security in this part of the world, he said potato was the fourth biggest crop of Pakistan in terms of production. “It provides livelihood to hundreds of thousands of families of farmers besides partly meeting the food requirements of millions of people. It is one of the cheapest yet nutritious foods available to most Pakistanis,” he said.

“The potato consumption has grown significantly in Pakistan over the last decade and it has the potential to continue the upward trend in years to come,” he observed.

To further strengthen national food security, Wustman opined that Pakistan would have to adopt modern agricultural technologies especially in terms of seed development for achieving the goal of sustainable production.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1083599/food-security-dutch-potato-seeds-offered-as-solution/

PUNJAB GOVT DECIDES TO ESTABLISH PAFDA
Business Recorder, April 12, 2016

LAHORE: Punjab government has decided to establish Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drug Testing Authority (PAFDA) under the chairmanship of the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

This new authority will upgrade and coordinate the output of drug testing laboratory, Punjab Food Laboratory, pesticide laboratories and forensic sciences laboratories in a comprehensive manner.

This was disclosed in a meeting of steering committee of Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drug Testing Authority held at Civil Secretariat, today.

Additional Chief Secretary Punjab Shamail Ahmad Khawaja presided over the meeting. It was decided to table the draft law named Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drug Testing Authority Act-2016 before the Punjab Assembly during the current session on Wednesday 13th April, 2016.

The meeting reviewed the recruitment process for new DG, PAFDA and hiring consultant firms of international repute to perform advisory role.

Additional Chief Secretary informed the meeting that Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has allocated one billion rupees for uplift of the institutions meant for eradication of adulteration in daily use food items, life saving drugs, pesticides and chemical fertilizers besides allocating 500 million rupees to purchase analytic equipments for PAFDA.

It will be an automated IT-based paperless regime at drug testing laboratory and PAFDA which will be according to international standards of US and British pharmacopoeia, Shamail Ahmad Khawaja informed the meeting.

Secretary Food Punjab Dr Pervaiz Ahmad Khan, Secretary Agriculture Sheharyar Sultan, Secretary Primary Healthcare Ali Jan Khan, Members Planning and Development Board Punjab Dr Shabana Haider and Agha Waqar Javed, Director General Forensic Sciences Agency Dr Muhammad Ashraf Tahir, Additional Secretary (Tech) Secondary Health and Medical Education Dr Salman Shahid, Additional Secretary Law Mohsin Abbas Syed, Addiitonal Secretary Finance Mehmood Latif and Additional Secretary Welfare Mudasar Riaz Malik were present in the meeting.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/04/12/3-page/749430-news.html

GOVT SETS UPWARD TARGETS FOR KHARIF CROPS
Dawn, April 15th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) on Thursday set upward targets for Kharif crops mainly rice, sugarcane and maize in view of sufficient availability of water and agriculture inputs.

The target for sugarcane was set at 67.53 million tonnes from 1.12 million hectares for 2016-17 as compared to 65.03 million tonnes in 2015-16. Rice production target was fixed at 6.83 million tonnes from 2.8 million hectares, maize at 4.60 million tonnes and moong at 111,400 tonnes.

Addressing a news conference after the committee’s meeting, National Food Security Minister Sikandar Bosan said there would be no shortage of agricultural inputs during Kharif. The availability of urea and DAP would be normal.

He said surplus stocks of fertiliser would be available because several fertiliser plants have started production following improvement in gas supply after RLNG injection into the system.

The committee's meeting was informed that as many as Rs332.7 billion agricultural credit was disbursed during the first nine months of this fiscal year by various banks and financial institutions against the target of Rs600bn set by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The disbursement during the July-March period of 2015-16 depicted an increase of 15.3pc when compared to the disbursement of Rs288.7bn during the corresponding period last year.

The meeting was also informed that the availability of certified seeds of various crops was satisfactory and supply of pesticides and herbicides during Kharif would be normal.

According to the first estimate received by the ministry, the wheat production during the Rabi season was expected to be 25.45 million tonnes against the target of 26 million tonnes. Mr Bosan explained that the actual production would be measured when the second estimate is released next month.

In view of better prospects for wheat production, the government has enhanced the targets of its procurement. Punjab will procure 4.0 million tonnes against 3.2 million tonnes last year and Passco one million tonnes against 800,000 tonnes last year. While Sindh will procure 1.1 million tonnes against 900,000 tonnes last year.

Provincial governments held a meeting in Lahore last week to finalise arrangements to start official procurement from April 20, for which there will be no shortage of 'bardana', Bosan said.

Despite all these positive developments, he said, state of affairs of farmers in terms of profitability is not satisfactory. Since agriculture has been devolved, the provincial governments should earmark sufficient allocations for farmers under the annual development programme. He praised Punjab for earmarking Rs100bn for farmers development.

In response to a question, Mr Bosan said that his ministry was finalising a new framework for agriculture as directed by the prime minister. Reforms for the agricultural sector benefiting the farming community would be announced in the federal budget 2016-17. The ministry has already held consultative meetings with the provinces in this regard, he said.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1252142

IN WHEAT-DOMINATED AREA, A PAKISTANI FARMER GROWS GRAPES
The Express Tribune, April 15th, 2016

CHAKWAL: Chakwal is traditionally known for wheat and peanut farming. So when a grower decides to swim against the tide, sceptics are quick to dismiss him as being foolish.

Mohammad Niaz is not just growing grapes across seven acres of his land but also hoping for exceptionally good returns on his investment.

Just three years ago, the prospect of cultivating grapes in this northern part of Punjab was unimaginable but the trend changed when the World Bank and the provincial government joined hands to improve farming standards and usher in new farming technologies.

Niaz is among those lucky farmers who have been picked for the implementation of the first phase of the Punjab Irrigated Agriculture Improvement Programme, which was funded by the World Bank with a loan of $250 million.

The Punjab government has offered 60% subsidy to farmers for introducing new techniques. In order to qualify, the farmer has to contribute 40% to the cost, which alone makes most farmers ineligible due to the very high equipment charges upfront.

But the programme is meant to offer an opportunity to small farmers to adopt modern technologies in order to cope with growing water crisis besides increasing agriculture yield.

Grape cultivation through drip irrigation benefits the farmer, as well as the country, through 50% water saving, 45% reduction in fertiliser cost and almost 100% increase in per acre yield, said Niaz.

"Just four hours of water supply is sufficient to irrigate seven acres through drip irrigation, while even two acres of land could not be watered with four days of supply through the conventional flooding system," said Niaz.

Pakistan's food security is highly dependent on irrigated agriculture that is being affected due to abrupt climate changes. According to one estimate, over half of Punjab's share of water is lost in canals and watercourses.

Despite the heavy price that drip irrigation equipment carries, once installed, the technology can drastically change the farmer's life for the better, said Mohammad Iqbal, a former banker. Iqbal, taking caution, has installed the equipment on just two acres of land. He hopes to earn at least Rs1 million from one acre against roughly Rs50,000 earnings from the wheat crop.

Although modern irrigation technologies are becoming increasingly popular in other countries, farmers in Pakistan remain sceptical due to high costs and lesser-known results.

Niaz said he has concerns over high cost of the equipment supplied by the provincial government that, according to him, was double the market prices. He said the farmer could afford the new system, if the Punjab government gives 80% subsidy against the current threshold of 60%. The low-income small farmer cannot afford it, said Niaz.

Raees Ahmad Raees, director general of Punjab Irrigation Department, insisted that the major component of the cost was integrated drip pipes imported from India. Local ones, he elaborated, rusted within two years whereas these would last up to 12 years.

Raees was confident that once this technology is adopted by a wider margin of farmers, economies of scale would set in and the costs would substantially decline.

The core components of the project included installation of drip and sprinkle irrigation systems on 120,000 acres of land, provision of 3,000 laser units to farmers, up-gradation of 5,500 canal watercourses, completion of 1,500 acres of under-construction watercourses and rehabilitation of 2,000 irrigation schemes outside the canal commands.

Raees said that 3,000 lasers have already been distributed among farmers while additional funding has been sought for providing 6,000 more of such equipment. He said so far 5,000 watercourses have been upgraded.

Of the targeted 120,000 acre land, only 20,000 acre has been equipped with the new technology.

The gestation period of the project was five years, of which half has already lapsed.

However, Qaisar Yasin, deputy director of the irrigation department, said that the project's deadline was being extended from December 2018 to 2020 and the provincial government has sought $200 million additional funds for its execution. The request for extension is pending with the federal government..

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1084752/against-the-tide-in-wheat-dominated-area-a-pakistani-farmer-grows-grapes/

BE WARY OF WHAT YOU EAT

The Express Tribune, April 16th, 2016.

HYDERABAD: The use of pesticides not only has a detrimental effect on farmers who apply it but also those who use the end product as well as the environment.

A paper on pesticides and their effects was read out during the two-day national conference held at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology's Institute of Environmental Engineering and Management, which concluded on Thursday. It revealed how pesticides expose humans to toxins and highlighted its adverse effects on human and animal health, and the environment.

The study's author, Lakhra Coal Development Corporation mines manager Ashraf Mallah, said the most serious health hazard is to farmers owing to their direct exposure to chemicals. "Depending on the level of exposure, the effects may include skin irritation, birth defects, genetic changes, blood and nerve disorders, tumors, endocrine disruption and cancer," he said.

Although health risks for farmers are higher, food consumers are also vulnerable. For example, around half of some 36 chemicals sprayed on apples and pears are neurotoxins, which can cause brain damage.

Mallah went on to count a range of vegetables and fruits that contain varying amounts of pesticide residues by the time they reach the market. He said the use of hormones, antibiotics and other drugs has become a standard in animal husbandry. "All of these accumulate in the livestock's meat and get passed on to the consumers," he said, adding that milk, cheese and butter are also not spared from the adverse effect of chemicals.

"Cotton is sprayed with the largest amount of pesticides and sadly, farmers are neither educated about its dangers nor provided any safety gear," he lamented, concluding that as a result, women and children, who mostly engage in cotton picking, become easy prey.

Insecticides, a type of pesticide specifically used to kill insects, are available in liquid, solid and gas forms. Mallah argued that most insecticides are not pest-specific, explaining that they end up killing or harming other life forms, including humans.

In Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, the researcher has identified poor spraying techniques and excessive use of chemicals as reasons for increased resistance of pests in addition to higher levels of contamination. "Over 500 species of pests have developed resistance to insecticides – this requires excessive use of chemicals to kill the bugs," he said, citing a study.

Pesticides enter fresh water channels by drifting outside the sprayed field and leaching in the soil, among other ways. Rainfall also transports the chemical from agricultural fields to water bodies. This contaminated water is used by humans, livestock as well as the flora and fauna of the area, he revealed.

Describing their harmful effects on soil, he said pesticides degenerate soil quality, cause water retention, damage biodiversity and decrease land fertility. Pesticides in the air can rise to very high altitudes and travel long distances.

An overnight cessation in the use of pesticides appears impossible to the researcher, who believes sensitising farmers about damage to humans and the soil can help mitigate its harmful effects. He also recommended research to find less damaging alternatives to pesticides as well as strict enforcement of regulations on use of chemicals.

Speakers emphasised on adhering to stricter environmental protection standards for sustainable development. "For future generations, we have to create effective policies and adopt an environment-friendly attitude," said MUET vice-chancellor Dr Muhammad Aslam Uqaili at the conference.

The conference recommended regulating the use of pesticides, improving municipal solid waste recycling and disposal systems, addressing disaster-risk management, ensure proper handling of hazardous chemicals and reducing noise pollution, among other suggestions.

Experts from varsities across the country read over 30 research papers at the conference.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1085720/perilous-pesticides-be-wary-of-what-you-eat/

PUNJAB UTILISES 67.5PC OF AGRI CREDIT IN 8 MONTHS

Business Recorder, April 16, 2016

Fazal Sher

ISLAMABAD: Punjab utilized Rs 294.1 billon agriculture credit out of the total Rs 600 billion allocated by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) during the first 8 months of 2015-16 (July-February). The utilization rate is 67.5 percent of the assigned targets, according to an official document available with Business Recorder.

In Sindh province banks disbursed an amount of Rs 31.7 billion or 35.4 percent against their indicative target of 89.4 billion during July-February 2015-16.

According to the document, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province received Rs 6.1 billion or 15.3 percent of target allocated to banks for agricultural lending. Out of the total agricultural credit allocated by SBP, Balochistan and other regions collectively received a fractional amount of Rs 1.0 billion against the annual target of Rs 35.2 billion.

The SBP earmarked agricultural credit disbursement target of Rs 600 billion to the banks for the year 2015-16 to 36 participating institutions including 20 commercial banks, two specialized banks, five Islamic banks and nine microfinance banks which are engaged in provision of agriculture credit facility to farming community for promotion of agriculture sector in the country.

According to the document, the target was 20 percent higher than last year's target of Rs 500 billion. Out of the total target Rs 305.7 billion has been allocated to five major banks: Rs 102 billion to Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL), Rs 131.8 billion to 15 domestic private banks, Rs 12.5 billion to Punjab Provincial Cooperative Bank Limited (PPCBL), Rs 40.1 billion to nine microfinance banks and Rs 7.9 billion to five Islamic banks for current year.

During the July-February 2015-16 banks disbursed Rs 332.7 billion which is 55 percent of the overall annual target of Rs 600 billion and 15.3 percent higher than disbursement of Rs 288.7 billion made during the corresponding period of last year.

Five major banks as a group have disbursed Rs 174.9 billion or 57.2 percent of their annual target and two specialized banks (ZTBL and PPCBL) also disbursed Rs 50.2 billion or 43.9 percent of their targets of Rs 114.5 billion.

ZTBL alone disbursed Rs 447 billion or 43.8 percent against its target of Rs 102 billion while PPCBL disbursed Rs 5.5 billion or 44.2 percent against its target of Rs 12.5 billion during the period under review.

The 15 domestic private banks collectively disbursed Rs 72.3 billion or 54.8 percent against their target of Rs 131.6 billion. Nine microfinance banks have disbursed Rs 30.5 billion or 76 percent of their annual target; however, the five Islamic banks as a group have disbursed Rs 4.9 billion against the target of Rs 7.9 billion during the period.

Out of the total disbursements of Rs 332.8 billion during 2015-2016, Rs 163.5 billion or 49.1 percent was disbursed to farm sector and Rs 169.3 billion or 50 percent to non farm-sector.

During the corresponding period of last year, a total amount of Rs 288.7 billion was disbursed out of which Rs 148.3 or 51.4 percent was disbursed to farm-sector and non-farm sector received Rs 140.4 billion or 48.6 percent of total disbursement by banks.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/04/16/3-page/751601-news.html

GOVT STOPS SALE OF GM CORN SEEDS AS PRESSURE BUILDS
The Express Tribune, April 17th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: As pressure mounts from agricultural scientists and farmers, the government has stopped the commercial sale of genetically modified (GM) corn seeds, in an about-turn after its earlier permission to certain multinational companies to market their seeds, but without meeting the basic criteria.

A federal secretary, who was part of a recent meeting held at the Ministry of Climate Change, told The Express Tribune that the stakeholders present in the huddle decided that the green signal for commercial sale of GM corn seeds would be taken back until a new decision in order to appease the scientists and farmers can be reached.

“The meeting participants agreed to look into the matter again and consider all aspects including implications for the agriculture sector,” a senior official said.

Already, the Ministry of Climate Change had awarded licences to different companies including prominent names like Monsanto and DuPont/Pioneer.

The government allowed the use of two varieties of GM corn seeds namely Insect Protection and Herbicide Tolerant. However, the ministry kept the matter secret and even minutes of a relevant meeting were not provided to the ministries and departments concerned because of fears that the information would be shared.

The move sparked criticism as the scientists and farmers asked how the government could give the approval without undertaking a large-scale open-field trial of the technology in Pakistan. They called it a violation of the national bio-safety laws and the international standard operating procedures.

Experts argue that no authority can approve the commercial sale of GM corn seeds or any other GM crop without a large-scale open-field trial and Pakistan has become a unique case where such approval has been given.

Commenting on the latest development, Monsanto official Aamir Mirza said the company had neither been invited to the last meeting nor had it been officially informed about the decision. “It may be their internal meeting and we have not got any information,” he said.

Mirza believes that the promotion of biotechnology will not only provide immediate benefits for the Pakistani farmers, but it will also send strong signals that the country is welcoming investments in research into cutting-edge technologies. “This will improve the agriculture sector’s international competitiveness over the long term,” he remarked.

Multinational companies claim that a monitoring sub-committee visited fields a number of times for the assessment of trial operations in every growing season in an attempt to collect data and evaluate compliance. The committee has been regularly submitting season-wise and yearly reports to a technical assessment body and relevant departments and ministries, they say.

However, the experts counter that GM corn or maize is a dangerous crop because of cross-pollination that can contaminate non-GM crops within a range of 500 metres.

The climate change minister came under pressure from certain companies and that led to the grant of licences in a clandestine manner, they say.

The scientists insist that instead of big field trials involving the farmers, small-scale tests in confined areas were conducted in certain government institutions and universities, which is entirely insufficient for meeting the standards for winning a licence for commercialisation of any technology.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1086260/appeasing-stakeholders-govt-stops-sale-of-gm-corn-seeds-as-pressure-builds/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 4th TO APRIL 10th 2016

CONTROVERSY OVER COMMERCIAL USE OF GM CORN SEEDS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 4th, 2016

Ashfak Bokhari

A HEATED controversy is raging over whether or not the government has given a go-ahead to some multinationals to make commercial sale of GM corn seeds at a time when the Seed (Amendment) Bill, which allows it, has yet to be passed by the Senate.

The companies claim to have received a formal permission and licences from the Ministry of Climate Change. But in response to a point of order raised by an opposition MNA in the National Assembly a fortnight ago, two federal ministers Khurram Dastgir and Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan categorically denied that the government had given licence to any multinational company for commercial trial of GM (genetically modified) corn seeds. GM corn is stated to be a crop with serious side-effects because of cross-pollination that can contaminate other non-GM crops within a range of 200-500 metres.

The question that remains unanswered is which authorities have given permission to the seed companies. The National Bio-safety Centre, whose committee normally gives approval, is not functional these days and there is none to monitor the new technology and gather data.

However, the permission, if at all, has been given without conducting the required field trials of the GM seeds and this, the critics say, constitutes a clear violation of the national bio-safety laws and the international standard operating procedures. But Croplife, the industry’s representative body, insists that the authorities concerned have already given the go-ahead.

Croplife also claims that the Technical Advisory Committee’s sub-committee for field monitoring visited all trial sites in each growing season for collecting data and assessing compliance. The reports for each season and each year were submitted to the relevant departments and ministries.

Besides, it said, the sub-committee for GM corn commercialisation had thoroughly reviewed all the field trial reports to assess the risk and concluded that GM corn is as safe as non-GM corn.

Maybe, instead of field trials involving farmers, some observers say, small-scale tests in confined areas were conducted in certain government institutions and universities. No insect resistance management programme was considered and no proper Refugia was planned. Refugia means a 5-10pc area covered by a crop where non-GM seeds are cultivated to delay resistance.

Monsanto, a leading US seed multinational, claims that the government had recently allowed commercialisation of its GM corn in Pakistan after a long and rigorous process starting from 2009. Aamir Mirza, CEO, of Monsanto Pakistan says that “the government has accepted our two technologies namely Insect Protection and Herbicide Tolerant.”

He said that a monitoring sub-committee had visited fields for assessment of trials a number of times in each growing season and during this period, the company had followed a proper procedure for seeking approval from the National Biodiversity Committee and it went for seed imports and field trials only after the approval was received.

A former chief of Environment Protection Agency, Asif Shuja, says the decision had been taken in haste by the government with no proper procedure followed or risk assessment carried out. This could raise grave problems in future.

The country's laboratories, he says, are not in a position to handle the situation and its institutions are also not capable of monitoring and regulating the GM corn crop. There is need for a proper risk assessment of the new technology and to ascertain whether the manpower, institutions and system available at the moment could tackle the challenge.

Local seed industry officials are of the view that since the government has no option but to support the biotech industry because of political reasons, what is needed is a strong regulatory system to strengthen the biotech research and development activities.

According to the findings of the World Bank's International Agency for Research on Cancer made public in March 2015, glyphosate — a chemical in herbicides that are widely used on GM crops — is 'probably carcinogenic to humans'. Glyphosate is used in a US multinational's branded herbicide Roundup Ready, which can be sprayed on crops that have been genetically modified to tolerate glyphosate.

Many Pakistani NGOs and farmer organisations have been opposing the GM technology for its anti-farmer bias and health risks. Many of them have written to the Senate's chairman, asking him to reject the draft Seed Act 2014 and enact a new law in its place that protects the interests of small farmers who under the present bill could be fined and imprisoned for preserving, selling and exchanging seeds, a centuries-old tradition that has helped them produce grains in surplus.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1249740

EXPLOITING GB'S HORTICULTURE EXPORT POTENTIAL
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, April 4th, 2016

Dr Zuhair Hasnain

GILGIT Baltistan's horticulture presents a huge export potential but the region lacks the wherewithal to switch from subsistence to commercial farming for lack of required support. About 90pc of its population is engaged in agricultural related activities.

Pakistan is the sixth largest apricot producer in the world but its share in the fruit's export market is negligible. The Dry Fruit Project (AKRSP) has recognised market potentials for GB's dry apricot, apple and mulberry in the UK. While unprocessed apricots are bought at Rs6-7 a kg, foreign buyers purchase processed apricots at Rs300-500 a kg.

Around 16-57pc fresh fruit is wasted annually in GB due to traditional fruit cultivars. Limitations in fruit-processing include non-availability of sugar and thickening agents which must be transported from Lahore.

Most food processing units are small, lack vital market linkages and can process only a fraction of the total produce simultaneously. Fruit is commonly dried manually, thus risking it to dust and affecting its quality. Plantation is unplanned and scattered so traders/wholesalers do not get desired varieties and volume at the same location.

The global packaging techniques are unaffordable for the farmers having low production volumes and traders lack real-time access to market information. Diversification is required towards higher value crops and provision of easy credit facilities is essential for farmers' investment in production. Processing of packaged products, in compliance with international standards, needs to be prioritised.

Unmonitored introduction of global fruit cultivars under multiple horticulture development programmes has put traditional local varieties at risk of gradual disappearance.

Extension Departments must be geared for technology transfer, farmer training, technical advice and supply of crop inputs, and to adopt modern service delivery methods.

Marketing remains at the least-attended stage of value-chain development. The number of registered seed producers to multiply and market seeds is insufficient.

However, ample water, naturally well-drained soils, conditions favourable to organic farming, feasibility of commercial production of cross pollinated seeds, proximity to export markets (China and Central Asia), an embedded pest control climate, a mobilised community favourable to resource-pooling and collective service delivery are competitive advantages of horticulture industry of Swat, Kaghan and Neelum valleys.

There is a need to expand crop varieties in GB to ensure food security and produce export surpluses.

Community-run water management has led to over and under irrigation; water channels display low conveyance ability and demand recurrent maintenance because modern engineering concepts have not been deployed during construction of water channels.

A few policy recommendations to improve the potential of this industry could be: enhancing R&D capacity to produce pre-basic and basic seeds on commercial scale; synchronising extension services of provincial agriculture departments and the private-sector; upgrading the Gilgit Airport to an all-weather airport; prioritising construction and maintenance of Tajikistan Road and developing a centralised e-platform for marketing of locally-produced certified seeds.

Then there is a need for setting up of functional and equipped processing units in all seven districts. It must also be ensured that that the Department of Agriculture and relevant departments are have more of technical staff than non-technical support staff.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1249741

ENSURING FOOD SECURITY: AGRICULTURE SCIENTISTS URGED TO SPEED UP FIGHT AGAINST PLANT DISEASES
Business Recorder April 4, 2016

Professor Thomas L. Rost of University of California has stressed upon Agri Scientists to pace up their efforts to fight numerous plant diseases in order to increase productivity and ensure food security.

He was addressing a seminar on “pierce disease” at New Senate Hall arranged by US Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Agriculture and Food Security, University of Agriculture Faisalabad.

He said with the passage of time, new diseases were posing threats as a result of climate changes. He said that varieties having climate changes resistance was essential in the modern era. He said Pierce disease was discovered in 1892 by Newton B. Pierce (1856-1916; California’s first professional plant pathologist) on grapes in California near Anaheim, where it was known as Anaheim disease.

He said that agriculture was the backbone of Pakistan economy. He said that under the CAS, all measures were being taken in term of trained agricultural manpower, curriculum reform, climate changes and outreach initiatives.

http://www.brecorder.com/business-and-economy/189:pakistan/32408:ensuring-food-security-agriculture-scientists-urged-to-speed-up-fight-against-plant-diseases/?date=2016-04-04

ECC APPROVES RS218BN FOR PROCURING OVER 7M TONNES OF WHEAT
Dawn, April 5th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: The government on Monday approved Rs218 billion for procurement of 7.05 million tonnes of wheat this season and allowed oil refineries to continue enjoying generous financial benefits for another 18 months to upgrade their products instead of paying penalties for failures.

These decisions were taken at a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet presided over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar that also approved extending sovereign guarantees to the extent of 45 per cent of project cost for two power projects in Punjab based on regasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG).

A senior petroleum ministry official said that under the existing incentive package approved in March 2013, the PPP government had allowed major refineries — Attock Refinery, Pakistan Refinery, National Refinery and Byco Refinery — to charge 9pc deemed duty instead of 7.5pc on diesel to produce Euro-II fuels. This meant the sulphur content had to be reduced to 0.05pc from 0.5pc and 0.1pc of varying degrees prevailing at the time.

For this, the refineries were required to set up Diesel Hydro Desulpurisation (DHDS) by December 2015 and Isomerisation Plants for petroleum products of international standards and reduce import reliance. The PPP government at the time had also deferred the penalties until December 2015 on production of low grade diesel which was earlier put in place in February 2013.

Under the said decision, the refineries were also required to set up an Escrow account to park available cash balance amount of their special reserve fund to be jointly operated by the finance ministry and the refineries for modernisation and upgradation of refineries. Total expenditure for upgradation was estimated at Rs200 billion.

The petroleum ministry official said none of the refineries were able to meet committed deadlines even though they had already missed three deadlines. They also failed to open an Escrow account until February 2015 and even then could not deposit surplus funds in it saying they already had spent about Rs35bn against their original investment commitment of Rs150bn.

The ECC presided over by Mr Dar, took a lenient view of the violation of commitments and extended the deadline for completion of isomerisation and DHDS plants until June 30, 2017 instead of December 31, 2015 deadline set with agreement of refineries in early 2013.

The requirement of opening of an Escrow account was also withdrawn ab initio, despite the fact that the Planning Commission, finance ministry and the Ogra had proposed continuation of some sort of Escrow account.

The ECC also approved procurement of 7.05 million tonnes of wheat for the current year at a cost of Rs218bn by the public sector against last year target of 6.6m tonnes which was missed by 1.4m tonnes.

The ECC decided that Punjab would purchase 4.5m tonnes with Rs130bn, followed by Sindh's 1.1m tonnes with Rs36bn, 1m tonnes by Passco at Rs37bn, KP 0.35m with Rs11.4bn and Balochistan 0.10m tonnes with Rs3.25bn. These targets were agreed upon with consensus by the provincial governments at a recent meeting, the ECC was informed.

All the stakeholders were directed to complete the procurement process by Aug 31, 2016 at all costs. The procurement cost, commonly known as minimum guaranteed price (MGP), would remain unchanged at Rs1,300 per 40kg.

The ECC also approved a request of the Ministry of Water and Power regarding provision of GoP guarantee worth 45pc of project cost to open second letter of credit for setting up of two 1,000-1200MW power projects at Haveli Bahadur Shah in Jhang and Balloki in Kasur. The two projects are based on RLNG.

The ECC also approved a proposal of the Federal Board of Revenue to extend the period for reduced withholding tax rate of 0.4pc on banking transactions by non-filers till April 30, 2016.

The meeting also approved allocation of 100 mmcfd (million cubic feet per day) of gas to KP for use in power generation, either at its own or through partnership with the private sector. The proposal was based on the MoU recently signed between the federal government and the KP government.

On a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Water and Power regarding executing the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) by Central Power Purchasing Agency-Guarantee (CPPA-G) pertaining to imported RLNG-based power projects, the ECC accorded approval to authorise CPPA to develop and execute the PPA for the three RLNG-based power projects in the public sector.

The ECC also approved a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Water and Power regarding extension in grace period by Bank Alfalah under term finance facility from two years to four years in respect of Power Holding (Pvt) Ltd. Consequently tenure of the facility shall stand extended up to seven years.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1249992/ecc-approves-rs218bn-for-procuring-over-7m-tonnes-of-wheat

NFML STOCK: 5 CONTRACTORS EMBEZZLE RS1.6B IN UREA SUPPLIES
The Express Tribune, April 5th, 2016.

Riazul Haq

ISLAMABAD: Officials of National Fertilizer Marketing Limited (NFML) surprised parliamentarians in a meeting on Monday by revealing that around five contractors had misappropriated Rs1.6 billion from urea stock supplies.

The details were shared during a National Assembly (NA) Standing Committee meeting on Industries and Production at Parliament Lodges with MNA Asad Umer chairing.

NFML's acting managing director (MD) Qudratullah informed the committee that there were five cartage contractors who had failed to deliver thousands of tons of urea at the NFML designated godowns and that cases are being pursued against them.

One of the contractors, Bilal Ahmed Carriage had failed to deliver 7,948 metric tons of urea to the NFML's godowns. The cartage contractors have since been blacklisted and a reference against them had been forwarded to National Accountability Bureau.

"They got away with urea worth Rs1.6 billion yet nobody knew anything about it?" Umer questioned. The MD had no clear reply to which Umer added that it was a brazen case of corruption.

The MD said the general manager of the company was behind bars while the rest of the companies had been blacklisted and investigations were being pursued in NAB.

Mairvi Carriage had failed to deliver 3,064 metric tons of urea, while other contractors who misappropriated supplies include Salahuddin and Sons with 9,573 metric tons; Trans Global with 4,142 metric tons and Inam and Co with 13,666 metric tons unaccounted for.

Besides, some companies were involved in bogus acknowledgement of urea, its unauthorised booking and misappropriating the value of stock. The committee was informed that former officials were involved in the misappropriation and misuse of their authorities. Similarly, around five cases are being probed by Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) against dealers in debit balance and misappropriation of urea stock.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1078902/nfml-stock-5-contractors-embezzle-rs1-6b-in-urea-supplies/

DELAY IN OPENING WHEAT PROCUREMENT CENTRES TRIGGERS PROTESTS
Published in Dawn, April 7th, 2016

SUKKUR: The food department failed to open wheat procurement centres in many parts of the province even on Wednesday although it was scheduled to open the centres on April 1, triggering protests by frustrated growers who accused government officials of selling out gunny bags to traders.

No centre has so far been opened in Ghotki, Khangarh, Ubauro, Mirpur Mathelo, Khanpur Mahar, Yaroo Loond, Jarwar, Sarhad, Qadirpur and Dad Leghari towns of Ghotki district.

Sources said the food department had reportedly sold out thousands of gunny bags to two big traders of the district. Ghotki District Food Controller Anisur Rehman Mahar refused to comment on the report.

Growers demanded the government immediately open the centres and distribute gunny bags in a transparent manner, else, they would stage a strong protest.

Growers were forced to sell their wheat harvest at Rs300 less than the official price in the absence of procurement centres in the district and its adjoining towns.

A large number of growers and peasants protested outside the press club on Wednesday and claimed the delay in opening of the centres was being caused by efforts to get ‘favoured’ officials appointed as in-charges of the centres.

No centre has so far been set up in Khairpur, Kingri, Gambat, Thari Mirwah, Faiz Gunj, Kot Diji, Nara and Sobhodero talukas of Khairpur district.

Scores of growers held a demonstration outside Pasco godown of the food department in protest against unfair distribution of gunny bags.

The protesters accused district food controller of selling a large quantity of bags to traders and demanded the minister for food, secretary and director of food take immediate action and ensure fair distribution of gunny bags among growers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1250375/delay-in-opening-wheat-procurement-centres-triggers-protests

CAN PUNJAB’S FARMERS BE MADE PROGRESSIVE?
The Express Tribune, April 8th, 2016.

This past week, the chief minister of Punjab wrote an op-ed for this paper, elaborating on his vision for boosting agricultural productivity in Punjab. The need for focusing on the agriculture sector is undisputed, given that over half our population is not only still residing in rural areas, but is also involved in earning a living by working in the farming sector.

Trying to boost agricultural development in Punjab is particularly significant given that it is the most populous province, and one which contributes the largest share of overall agricultural productivity within the country.

Given this scenario, the convening of a high-profile agricultural conference, formulating an agriculture commission to monitor the farming sector, and the announcement of a hefty Rs100 billion agricultural package, do signal a newfound resolve to boost agricultural productivity in Punjab.

However, the Punjab chief minister’s hope that his renewed efforts will transform every farmer into a progressive farmer, is no more than wishful thinking, especially since his agricultural package is not designed to focus on the needs of poorer farmers, who do not have a sizeable amount of cultivable land.

If past lessons are anything to go by, increasing agricultural productivity does not imply that the lives of the multitudes of poor farmers will automatically improve. Consider, for instance, the impact of the Green Revolution which was essentially a strategy that increased agricultural production by patronage of large and medium size farmers, and their intensive use of high yield varieties, fertilisers and pesticides and farm mechanisation.

Such capital-intensive agricultural growth not only offers little opportunity to poorer farmers, but adversely impacts them instead.

Many sharecropping families have been driven off their land due to increasing mechanisation of farming, and the growing trend of leasing cultivable land by those who have some means to pay rents and purchase agricultural inputs on their own.

Poor farmers who still sharecrop remain highly exploited, since their rights as tenants are often not recognised in land revenue records, and they remain highly dependent on landowners for access to credit to purchase agricultural inputs and also to meet basic household expenditures, since they have to part with a significant proportion of their produce because they do not own land.

Instead of trying to support these landless sharecroppers by addressing the prevailing skewed land ownership patterns, and ensuring their rights as tenants, our policymakers, alongside major donor agencies which provide us with technical and financial support, remain adamant to enhance agricultural productivity, by focusing on efforts such as corporate farming and computerisation of land records.

The World Bank-funded attempt to computerise land records in Punjab has focused on digitising existing land records provided by patwaris, which mostly neglect to mention tenants at the behest of landowners, in the attempt to undermine their legal rights.

Computerisation of these records, without correcting their existing inaccuracies, can thus do little to improve the lives of sharecropping tenants, even if it enables commercial farmers to rent and purchase agricultural land with greater ease.

Similarly, the leading corporate farms in our country are producing impressive yield, but they are also exacerbating land scarcity by leasing large tracts of land in surrounding villages, which are being cultivated by capital rather than labour intensive means.

Corporate farms also do not offer many job opportunities to poor landless farmers, except low paid daily wage labour positions occupied largely by women or seasonal workers.

Thus, unless the chief minister of Punjab ensures that more targeted policies are put in place for landless farmers, which ensure tenancy rights, promote women's ownership of land, and ensure the provision of a minimum wage to multitudes of poor rural households who work as agricultural labourers, merely increasing agricultural yield in the province will do little to address the lingering problem of rural poverty and its associated deprivations.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1080617/can-punjabs-farmers-be-made-progressive/

May 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 23rd TO MAY 29th 2016

FARMERS' VOICE IN AGRI-BUDGET MAKING

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 23rd, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

IN the run-up to the federal budget due early next month, the farmers have more fears than hopes. Their representative bodies plan pre-budget protests to ensure that their problems are not conveniently ignored by the policymakers.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI), the most active of them all, has given a call for protest on May 23 in front of the Punjab Assembly to remind both federal and provincial governments of its long standing demands, which it has presented on more than one occasion. The PKI chief Khalid Khokhar, complaining some administrative pressure on him and his colleagues to abstain from protests, promises to be there 'because it is a matter of life and death for farmers'.

Elaborating their expectations from the next budget, farmer bodies demand: removal of GST on all agriculture inputs and support price for more crops in order to stabilise output prices, even for a temporary phase. The GST adds to the cost of production, deters inputs application and keeps productivity low.

Farmers claim that the official collection of around Rs43bn in GST pales to insignificance when compared with farm productivity losses. Only this year, the farmers say they lost Rs170bn in cotton production. The potatoes growers lost Rs150bn to both productivity and price crash and still another Rs48bn were lost by paddy growers, according to their respective claims.

The second demand of the farming community is to widen support price mechanism for all those crops that are in trouble, especially rice and cotton.

The Indian government, despite giving billions of dollars subsidy, also provides support price for 32 crops. Local farmers question that why Pakistan has restricted itself to support price of only wheat and indicative price for sugarcane. They stress that the government should not only announce in the budget the support price of crops but also spare money for the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) for market intervention.

For long term measures, they suggest that the government should set priorities for dealing with climatic change; last year, it literally swept the cotton crop off its feet, leaving the farmers poorer.

The government should deal with agriculture as an economic and business issue and not merely as a social one. So far, most of its policies and subsidies packages have targeted smaller farmers — less than 12.5 acres or less than five acres.

Smaller farmers are surviving on subsistence farming, and are not a significant part of the market or trade. Farming economics is the real issue that needs government's attention.

Finally, an independent Kissan Commission should be set up at the federal level that could continuously monitor production and trade issues and suggest corrective measures round the year. The commission should also come up with new rural development models.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1260092

TAX PROPOSALS FOR AGRI-BUSINESS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 23rd, 2016

Amin Ahmed

THE farmers' pursuit of cheaper inputs, for which they threw potatoes and splashed milk on the streets, is unlikely to be fully realised as the budget proposals by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research are more focussed on seeking benefits for the agro-based industry rather than addressing the agriculture problems.

The only serious proposal which may benefit the farmers is the reduction in the urea prices, if approved by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

The urea price is high due to a number of taxes including 17pc sales tax and gas infrastructure development cess. According to one estimate if these taxes are removed, the 50kg urea bag will become cheaper by Rs700.

The ministries of finance and national food security are believed to have jointly worked out a strategy to reduce the urea price. The current subsidy on phosphate fertiliser to the tune of Rs20bn, shared on a 50-50 basis, by the federal and provincial governments is likely to continue in the next fiscal year.

The food ministry has proposed that the GST on di-ammonia phosphate (DAP) and other fertilisers with the estimated impact of Rs14.4bn and Rs6.80bn, respectively, be removed.

Other proposals are: The existing import duty on poultry parent stock for broilers, day-old chicks and hatching eggs to produce broiler chicks be enhanced from 5-10pc in order to protect the local poultry industry.

A 15pc freight duty on export of livestock products including meat, poultry, egg, dairy products be levied or the maximum duty as permissible under FTA on chicken meat and its products.
Old customs duty and sales tax amounting to 5pc on the import of soybean meal and 'zero rating' status for the value-added (frozen and packed poultry products falling under PCT 0207, 1601 and 1602) be restored.
The poultry machinery should be treated on a par with agricultural machinery for tax concession at the rate of 2pc import duty and 7pc sales tax.
The duty on skimmed milk and 'whey powder' is 15pc on imports from SAARC member- countries and 20pc from other countries. These rates should be enhanced up to 50pc in order to discourage the import of skimmed milk powder and whey powder.
Extend the five-year tax exemption on the import of trout and shrimp feed with a view to promote commercial aquaculture.
Water quality test kits and meters be exempted from the import duty to promote commercial aquaculture. For small production area, water aerators being an essential source, should be exempted from taxes for the benefit of fish farmers.
The duties and taxes levied on import of farm machinery and equipment and the GST levied on locally-manufactured tractors be reduced from 10pc to 7pc to ensure supply of prime mover at affordable prices to the growers.
To ensure supply of quality tractors, duty-free import of Euro-II and Euro-III compliant tractors should be allowed irrespective of the horsepower.
The duties levied on import of tractors should be cut from 34pc to 20pc and the current 7pc GST on pesticides should be removed.
http://www.dawn.com/news/1260023

IMPORTED DRY MILK A GROWING THREAT TO LOCAL DAIRY FARMERS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 23rd, 2016

Ashfak Bokhari

SPEAKING on a calling attention notice in the National Assembly on May 11, the federal commerce and food security ministers agreed on the need for effectively curbing imports of skimmed powdered milk and whey powder to protect the interests of local dairy farmers.

But such a consensus has always been there and reflected in taxes and tariffs. But it is not enough as increasing imports indicate. Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan clarified that it was not merely 20pc, as stated earlier, but a total of 43pc tax which is being collected on the import of dry milk, whey powder and meat. And the breakup is as follows: 20pc customs duty; 17pc sales tax and 6pc withholding tax on their import.

Federal Minister for National Food Security Sikandar Hayat Bosan favours an increase in duty on the import of milk and whey powder rather than a ban on them as hinted at by the key mover of the calling attention notice Rana Muhammad Hayat Khan.

Mr Rana was of the view that the only way to bring to an end the growing use of imported dry milk, particularly among those from low-income groups, was to either ban it or subject it to over 100pc duty. Most of the milk and whey powder, he pointed out, were being imported from India. But the dry milk produced locally is not enough to fill the vacuum if imports are stopped or slashed drastically.

It is interesting to note that the calling attention notice was moved by members of treasury benches who appealed to their own government to take measures to protect interests of dairy farmers.

Mr Bosan said he had requested the government last year as well to increase the import duty on the whey and milk powder, but it was not accepted. The movers of the notice claimed that India has imposed 68pc import duty, Turkey 120pc, Morocco 60pc while in Pakistan it is only 20pc.

The dairy sector, which is trying to come out of the age-old methods of production, had long been urging the government to enhance duty on import of skimmed milk powder and whey powder which was badly hurting their business because commercial buyers prefer to buy imported milk which is much cheaper than the fresh milk.

Although the farm gate price of fresh milk is higher than the dry milk it is still much in demand which is increasing by 10pc on annual basis. The problem arises from the fact that fresh milk has been unable to catch up with the growing demand over the years for its production does not exceed beyond 4-5pc per annum and thus leaves ample space for dry milk to enter the market in a big way.

Meanwhile, the cost of production of fresh milk has increased because of soaring prices of buffaloes and cows and also of fodder making it hard for small farmers to feed their animals. “If the trend of growing cost of production continues, the livestock sector and small farmers will not be able to survive,” Mr Bosan said.

Over 50m people earn or supplement their livelihood from livestock sector. The government must introduce farmer-friendly policies to help dairy workers overcome their predicament, he says.

The National Assembly speaker has set up two-member committee, consisting of Mr Bosan and Mr Dastgir, and also directed the standing committees of the two ministries to hold a joint meeting to prepare recommendations on the issue. .

Separately, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is reported to have proposed to the government to withdraw zero-rating status of the milk sector, besides imposition of 10pc sales tax on branded milk and increasing the tax on other dairy products to 17pc in the budget 2016-16.

If approved, these measures would force consumers to pay an estimated additional Rs250bn to milk producers — packaged and fresh. Dairy people say any such changes in the tax structure will not only stop tax refund payment, but will also push up milk by Rs8 per litre.

In the outgoing budget, the Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had imposed 10pc sales tax on yogurt, cheese, butter, cream, desi ghee, whey and cream claiming that only rich class consume these expensive dairy products.

On the budget eve last year, hundreds of dairy farmers staged a protest in Islamabad against the government’s flawed policies by pouring thousands of litres of milk in front of parliament. The protesters were seeking reforms in official policies to save the dairy sector from being ruined by import of dry milk. A spokesman of the protestors pointed out that milk is produced by millions of farmers but it is cheaper than water for the industry as farmers are unable to sell their milk at a reasonable price.

Last few years saw a rise in skimmed milk’s imports as some big shopkeepers began using it in the manufacture of confectionery, sweetmeat, biscuits and other dairy-related products which they previously did by using fresh milk. Though Pakistan happens to be one of the world’s largest milk producers, it spent $341m on import of dry milk and whey powder in the years from 2012 to 2014.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1260019

NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBSIDY SCHEMES HITS TRACTOR SALES
Dawn, May 24th, 2016

LAHORE: Punjab government's failure to implement the Rs5 billion tractor subsidy scheme and delay in the launch of Sindh tractor scheme are major factors behind declining tractor sales in the country, Pakistan Association of Auto Parts & Accessories Manufactures (Paapam) said on Monday.

In a press release, Paapam Chairman Mumshad Ali said tractor sales have dropped to 25 per cent in the current fiscal year.

Drop in prices of farm produce, non-implementation of the Punjab tractor scheme – which sought to subsidise 10,000 tractors by Rs200,000, delay in the launch of the Sindh tractor scheme due to corruption allegations, scandals related to such schemes in the previous years and high interest rates of the Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited's recovery based loans for tractors have contributed to the drop in tractor sales.

"While tractor assemblers are able to take the beating, the 300 odd SME auto part makers cannot carry on if such bouts of boom and bust continue," Mr Ali said.

"100pc vending units associated with the tractor parts will be closing this year. So far 10pc have been forced to close down their facilities," he claimed.

He urged the federal and provincial governments to replace the erratic short-term tractor subsidy schemes with long-term interest free loans for farmers to buy tractors.

Sales are expected to close at 30,000 tractors in ongoing year compared to over 40,000 tractor sales in the previous year, Paapam said.

Despite being an agri driven economy, farm mechanisation in Pakistan ranks fairly low when compared with global standards.

"Pakistan produces the best value for money tractor in the world with 95pc local content, creating 300,000-500,000 direct and indirect jobs, and contributing to the national exchequer," the press release added.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1260209

FROM CRISIS TO DEVELOPMENT: BOOSTING AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, May 24th, 2016.

Jose Graziano Da Silva

With increasing frequency and magnitude, disasters and conflicts are causing untold human suffering in many parts of the world. These are as diverse as Typhoon Haiyan, Ebola, the civil war in Syria, to name but a few of the more recent. We need more concerted efforts to end conflict, alleviate suffering and reduce risk and vulnerability conditions facing millions of people, most of whom are poor and live in rural and marginalised areas of developing countries.

This, essentially, is the aim of the World Humanitarian Summit convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It seeks to build on the momentum of an extraordinary series of commitments by the international community.

The recent adoption of a sustainable development agenda to end hunger and poverty and to “leave no one behind”, a universal climate agreement, and a new framework to reduce disaster risk and enhance resilience are important steps in the right direction.

But we must go much further and radically transform how we perceive and implement humanitarian efforts. Crises are not only humanitarian emergencies. Many are also about neglect and lack of development and as such cannot be solved by humanitarian action alone.

In practical terms, it means moving beyond responding with short-term relief measures and investing much more in tackling the root causes of crises. It means building resilience and strengthening the livelihoods of people in ways that not only drive recovery from war, disease, floods and other shocks, but also help to reduce the impact of these crises and, where possible, prevent them from taking place altogether. Agriculture and rural development are key to strengthening livelihoods of the most vulnerable, including hundreds of millions of small-scale family farmers who are responsible for producing an important share of the world’s food. And it is they who are most at risk.

The damage is there for all to see. Extreme weather events, such as those associated with El Nino, wreak havoc across wide swathes of the rural areas of the developing world, animal diseases disrupt food chains and wars force millions to abandon their homes, fields and livestock, and become migrants at a scale not seen since the Second World War.

Meanwhile, the agricultural sector, which bears almost 22 per cent of damages and losses caused by natural disasters and up to 85 per cent in case of drought receives on average less than four per cent of the total in humanitarian aid. This provides a stark measure of the widening chasm between needs and the magnitude of response.

In this context, it is crucial to stress that investing in livelihoods is not only the just thing to do, but it also makes sense from a cost-effectiveness point of view by helping to address the root causes of conflict, reduce the impact of future shocks and prevent a deepening of vulnerabilities and the onset of a vicious circle.

Expanding access to social protection systems is crucial to underpinning resilience — in humanitarian response as well as in development.

In the case of natural hazards, it is four to seven times more cost-effective to invest in disaster risk reduction than to rely on emergency response. Yet only 0.4 per cent of official development assistance is spent on this aspect.

Moreover, in armed conflict and protracted crises, protecting, saving and rebuilding agricultural livelihoods to save lives and create the conditions for longer-term resilience is a key step towards ensuring peace and stability. However, the role of the agriculture sector in crises is too often overlooked and the necessary investments are not made.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation provides both humanitarian and development assistance. It believes in prioritising early warning, prevention and preparedness to safeguard livelihoods, especially in rural areas. Around the globe, plenty of evidence exists on the benefits of this and on how it reduces the need for emergency interventions.

More generally, we see how investment in agriculture helps strengthen the self-reliance and dignity of vulnerable rural communities reducing the need for food assistance. It has been found that $200 in support enables a Syrian farmer to produce two tonnes of wheat, enough to feed a family of six for a year and provide seeds for future planting. This is a fraction of the economic cost of food aid, not to mention the dramatic human costs.

If we want to address growing humanitarian needs, we need to move beyond business as usual and manage crises differently. We need to acknowledge that the interventions made must have a long-term impact on the beneficiaries, especially those in rural areas, and then act accordingly. It is the only way we can ensure that nobody is left behind.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1108870/crisis-development-boosting-agriculture/

GM CORN SEEDS TO GENERATE ADDITIONAL RS100 BILLION

The Express Tribune, May 24th, 2016.

LAHORE: The recently approved genetically modified (GM) corn seeds will soon be available to farmers for planting and will generate an additional income of over Rs100 billion annually, said the industry representatives.

"The government's recent approval for the Insect Protected and Herbicide Tolerant corn is a landmark decision," said Croplife Pakistan Executive Director Dr Muhammad Afzal, adding that the GM corp would not only help boost productivity of corn but also enhance confidence of technology providing companies, both local and foreign to make further investment in Pakistan's under-performing agriculture sector.

According to Afzal, the GM corn approval decision was taken after a rigorous process spread over seven years. "It involved extensive regulatory assessments which reaffirmed the safety of a technology. The approval process involved monitoring of field trials and evaluation of risk assessment submissions by designated committees of the government as required by the country's biosafety laws," he said.

"Almost all of the corn, soybeans, canola and cotton GM varieties planted worldwide are demonstrating value the farmers had been expecting to see in the technology, even during tough seasons," said the Croplife Pakistan official.

"We should continue to use all the tools at our disposal, including biotechnology, to improve farmers' lives and ensure that we meet the community's expectations of producing quality food and fibre in a safe and sustainable way," he stressed.

He said farmers globally had embraced the GM crops faster as compared to nearly any other technology because it allowed them to produce more while using fewer resources.

A new report reveals that 2 billion hectares of GM crops have been grown globally since its introduction in 1996 which has increased farmer income worldwide by an extraordinary $150 billion over time," said Afzal.

He also urged the government to play a proactive role in educating farmers about biotech crops so that the country could quickly benefit from the technology in both developed and developing countries.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1108969/gm-corn-seeds-generate-additional-rs100-billion/

COTTON CROP: DEARTH OF SEEDS, DISEASES EAT AWAY UP TO 15M BALES
The Express Tribune, May 24th, 2016.

Imran Rana

FAISALABAD: One of the country's key crops – cotton – is in trouble, according to Australian expert Dr Neil William Forrester, who said inadequate seed provision and spread of diseases, especially cotton leaf curl virus (CLCV), were causing a loss of 10 to 15 million bales worth $4 billion every year.

Speaking at a special lecture on cotton crisis in Pakistan at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), he said cotton production in Punjab dropped 44% and in Sindh it fell 5%. Overall, output in Pakistan has gone down 34%.

He pointed out that Pakistan had imported 2.2 million bales worth $434 million from July to December due to the production shortfall, adding the cotton-producing districts of southern Punjab and northern Sindh were among the poorest in Pakistan.

According to Forrester, modern seeds can raise cotton output from 10 million to 15 million bales per year. This can bring $3.1-4.6 billion into pockets of the country's 1.7 million cotton farmers.

Cotton-breeding in Pakistan largely did not existent, he said and underlined the need for a strong government regulatory framework for the seed industry.

"It is also important to establish a professional cotton seed company that can breed new varieties and produce pure seeds with high germination."

Talking about the threat posed by weeds in the fields, he said these were causing a loss of one million bales every year and added manual weeding required a large labour input that could be better utilised elsewhere. Broadleaf weeds are a reservoir for white flies and CLCV.

The expert called for introducing transgenic herbicide-resistant cotton varieties and a strong, functioning biotechnology regulatory authority.

Speaking on the occasion, former National Assembly speaker Syed Fakhar Imam said the agricultural research budget in the country was negligible that must be enhanced to support researchers, which would help strengthen the sector.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1108965/cotton-crop-dearth-seeds-diseases-eat-away-15m-bales/

NEW TECHNIQUES DOUBLE GROWTH OF TOMATO CROP IN DIR, BAJAUR
Business Recorder, May 24, 2016

The application of new techniques has doubled the growth of tomato crop in Dir and Bajaur areas. The availability of tomato for five months in the market is beneficial alike for the consumers and farmers. The vertical or structured tomato farming technique offers a possible solution for the shrinking land and areas under water stress.

The experimental trials on vertical tomato farming technique and its on wards replication by 80% small farmers of Talash area in Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Arang area in Bajaur agency, in FATA, has shown promising results and provided a way forward for adoption in other areas where farmers are facing the problems of land and water scarcity. The story began back in 2014 when Inter-Cooperation sponsored Livelihoods Program Hindukush, funded by the Swiss Government initiated a joint venture with Agricultural Extension Department KP, Association for Behaviour and Knowledge Transformation (ABKT) a local NGO and Syngenta, a multinational private seed Company operating in Pakistan.

For the very first time the vertical tomato framing was introduced to small farmers in water stressed mountainous belt of Talash and Arang. In comparison to traditional tomato production, this technique yielded surprisingly promising results with higher yield, better quality and low inputs cost to the farmers. Inter-Cooperation, a Swiss NGO, technically supported the project from the beginning. KP and FATA are endowed with diverse climatic zones and are highly suitable for off season vegetable production which brings good profit to the farmers.

Subject to climate suitability and consumer demand, up country produce and down country markets have a crucial interplay. In Talash and Arang Valleys 80% of the farmers grow tomato from June to October on approximately 2000 Acres of cultivable land. This is the time when tomato remains off-seasonal for most parts of the country.

Therefore, it has potential to fetch additional income for growers, seasonal labour comprising women and men, transporters and local investors trading in the province and out of the province markets. Despite this edge and growing off season tomatoes on large scale, the farmers in these two valleys were never able to take full advantage of this potential.

The under lying causes were, small landholdings (4-6 kanals per farmer only), use of conventional farming techniques, water scarcity and high input costs, pests and disease infestations(mainly nematodes), information gap and poor linkages with technically qualified staff of Agriculture Extension department.

The farmers tried some of the high yielding tomato varieties but not the varieties specifically suited to Talash valley. To this end, LPH taking along technical support of the AED in Timergara tested and demonstrated seven different tomato hybrids and varieties with 12 farmers in 2011. Tomato variety T-1359 performed very well with an average 60% recorded increase in yield.

The information was disseminated among the farmers of the valley. The following year, 80% of the farmers got good yields from the variety. In this method of cultivation the crop is too close to the soil and more prone to insect pest infestations and fungal diseases during rains which decreases production and quality.

Another frequented problem was hailstorms. This is a rather new phenomenon which causes huge damage to the crop for the last few years. In 2014-15, LPH took this up again and investigated best option to deal with all the problem chains (e.g. pest attack, leading to low yields and frustrations not being able to find good advice and pesticide in time and so on). In search of an integrated solution, vertical farming was tried out in the project areas.

The package included practical training to the farmers, timely and proper application of external input and decision making with technical group on which variety is best for vertical farming. Demonstrations and field days were conducted. The experience sharing meetings and exposure visits for farmers from other places were also organised. The farmers recognised that by adopting vertical farming technique they could get premium quality produce.

Recorded data revealed that the vertical demo plots produced 70% higher average yield when compared to the horizontal cultivation. Being exposed to proper sunlight and aeration, fruits produced were of exceptional size and colour and even less susceptible to diseases and pests. The tomato plants creeping on nets were easier to spray and hence made it possible to control diseases and insect pests in much lower quantity of input.

The rotten tomato count was also lower due to less contact with soil. Hail storms were less harmful for these tomatoes since crops were saved at least from one side even if the other was directly affected. Vertical tomato growing technique is best suited for the farmers with small land holdings in water stress conditions. The farmers can get almost double yield from the same area when compared to the traditional techniques.

In traditional tomato farming the farmers get tomato produce for three months (July-September) whereas by vertical technique, if the farmers raise nurseries in the end of February instead of May, then they can enjoy yield for five months. This method also encourages crop rotation resulting in low infestation of soil borne diseases and nematodes.

After achieving successful results in Talash valley, the same model of partnership and technique was replicated in the Arang Valley of Bajaur agency and results were reassured. Average yield recorded through this vertical technique was 14,000 KGs/acre when compared to 9,000 KGs/acre in case of horizontal farming. Similarly cost benefit ratio of vertical technique was 2.30 which is higher than 1.8 in case of traditional practice. Muslim Khan, a farmer of Talash valley shared that on vertical tomato demo plot, he was able to get a yield of 82 bags worth PKR47, 880. He go t50 bags worth PKR 22,950from similar size of horizontal tomato plot.

Resultantly with more farmers resorting to vertical tomato farming technique, the farmers' demand for associated inputs also increased in both the valleys. Hence the local input suppliers were identified and trained by the respective departments and Syngenta, Pakistan.

Through Market System Development Approach the systems were developed for the input suppliers which enabled them not only to develop respective micro enterprises but also readily provide good relevant and quality inputs in required quantity on reasonable prices to the farmers at their door steps.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/48569:new-techniques-double-growth-of-tomato-crop-in-dir-bajaur/?date=2016-05-24

AGRICULTURE SECTOR NEEDS CPEC-LIKE ATTENTION AND IMPORTANCE: FPCCI
Business Recorder, May 24, 2016

N.H. Zuberi

Chairman, Regional Standing Committee of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Ahmad Jawad has urged the finance ministry to facilitate the country's agriculture sector in the coming budget through Ministry of National Food and Security and Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) and give the same importance to it that was attached to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

He stressed on the need to understand that economic renaissance in Pakistan is totally dependent on agriculture growth hence Pakistan urgently needs an agricultural infrastructure to improve the balance of trade and put the economy back on the track. "Farmers are an engine of growth for the agro-based economies such as us and those countries who invested on their farmers they actually invested for an increase the GDP growth," he said talking to media.

He said that for the first time in decades, the output in agriculture sector that was the backbone of the economy contracted in the current fiscal year, instead of showing growth. "Federal and provincial governments may disburse massive budget allocation for agriculture sector in their coming budgets in true spirit, so that farmers of this country may contribute their due share instead of protesting every day on roads," he proposed.

The FPCCI Standing Committee Chairman said that in last three budgets, there were no concrete allocations which might help reduce the post-harvest losses and increase the exports. He lamented that the PSDP had money to support Afghanistan it didn't have a concrete allocation for the agriculture which was unfortunate, as in last three years government allocated around Rs 9000 million against the head of Grant "for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. "Finance Ministry may allocate at least Rs15 billion to this sector in the upcoming budget through the PSDP to establish required agriculture infrastructure and give due subsidy for fertiliser, pesticides and diesel to make farmers produce competitively," he said. He said currently the agriculture sector suffered huge post-harvest losses of 40 percent as compared to the global benchmark.

He said Pakistan's sugarcane yield was 40% lower against the global benchmarks; wheat yield was 20% lower that adversely affected the farmers' earning capability. However, he added, export of Pakistani dates, if properly processed and packaged, could fetch between $200 and $240 million/year.

On exports, Ahmed Jawad said, Pakistan horticulture sector was contributing only around 0.3% in global exports due to lack of infrastructure and research issues but on the other hand more than 250 varieties of dates were being produced every year but export was meager. He said India imported dry dates amounting to Rs 2 billion almost every year.

He said similarly, only 90,714 tons of mangoes were exported in the last year against a normal target of 150,000 tons. He said mango exports could exceed to as much as $100 million. "Balochistan annually produces more than a million tons of various varieties of fruits including grapes, cherry, almonds, peach, pomegranate, apricot and apples.

The province is the fifth largest producer of dates with an estimated production volume of 583,000 tons but, again, its exports suffer because of non-availability of infrastructure," he pointed out.

http://www.brecorder.com/business-and-economy/189:pakistan/48607:agriculture-sector-needs-cpec-like-attention-and-importance-fpcci/?date=2016-05-24

MOVE TO CHECK ADULTERATED FERTILISER
Dawn, May 27th, 2016

LAHORE: The Steering Committee of Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drugs Authority has decided to introduce `Punjab Fertilizer Control Act 2016' to abolish the business of adulterated fertilizer and spurious pesticides.

The PAFDA's meeting was held at Civil Secretariat on Thursday with Additional Chief Secretary Punjab Shamail Ahmad Khawaja in the chair.

The meeting was briefed that the Punjab government had released a grant of Rs186 million for land acquisition in Thokar Niaz Baig while the scientific and logistic equipment in the proposed new food testing laboratory would be installed till January 2017.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1260849

CUT IN COST OF PRODUCTION: AGRICULTURE SECTOR TO GET MORE RELIEF: BOSAN
Business Recorder, May 27, 2016

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikandar Hayat Bosan, Thursday asked the federal government for several cost-cutting measures for agricultural sector in the next fiscal year budget aimed at providing more relief to the farmers.

Addressing a seminar on "Awareness of Mango Exporters" organised by Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchant Association (PFVA) here, Bosan also stressed the exporters of mango for exporting quality fruit as per the required standard of international markets.

He said growers should ensure implementation of good agricultural practices in the country for production of qualitative mango. Exporters should also support growers, especially small farmers, who are unable to survive in the present state of high cost of production, he said. "The federal government is also going to provide maximum relief to the agricultural sector to reduce their cost of production," he added.

Bosan said as the production of cotton is also being slashed by 30 percent due to reduction in international price and non-cooperation on the part of textile industry, the exporters of mango should provide better rate to farmers and jointly work to improve quality of fruit.

The minister also lauded the efforts made by PFVA for improvements in quality and increase in mango exports. He appreciated the association for avoiding threat of ban on the imports from Pakistan by the European market by meeting the international market standards.

He also offered every possible support to the association for holding national conference which is planned and aimed at preparing a grand strategy for development of horticultural sector.

The minister sad Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has approved the formation of Citrus Development Board for quality production of citrus fruit. Addressing the seminar, Waheed Ahmed, Chairman PFVA said his association was extending all possible support to the horticulture sector for increase in exports besides improvement in quality of fruits and vegetables.

He said the association has already presented a roadmap for increasing the export of the sector to $10 billion in next six years. The roadmap was presented to the prime minister and a detailed presentation has also been made to President Mamnoon Hussain. He also informed the participants about the challenges faced by exporters in exploring new markets for lack of co-ordinated efforts.

The difficulties in registration of farms were also one of the problems being faced by the exporters. Chairman PFVA said global warming is likely to pose serious threats to the production of fruits and vegetables in the country. An effective strategy was needed to address the threat in time.

He said with focusing on research and development and new varieties the citrus export could be increased to one billion dollar during next 10 years. He also thanked the federal government, USAID, Plant Protection Department, TDAP and the minister for making the seminar a successful event.

Addressing the seminar, SM Munir, Chief Executive, TDAP said that the authority was to provide all-out support and co-ordination to PFVA for development in the horticulture sector. He also lauded the efforts of Waheed Ahmed and his association for increase in exports. Head of AMD Project of USAID, Peter Dickrel also shared the details about ongoing projects of USAID in the agricultural sector.

He also stressed on research and good agricultural practices for the development of horticultural sector. The seminar was also addressed by PARC Chairman Dr Nadeem Amjad, Plant Protection Department Director Azam Khan and others. Later, an MoU of co-ordination was also signed between PFVA and the USAID.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/50149/

DASTGIR CONCERNED OVER DWINDLING COTTON PRODUCTION
The Express Tribune, May 28th, 2016.

Owais Qarni

MULTAN: Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan, while expressing concern over the sharp decline of 5.1 million bales in cotton production during the current season that caused a loss of Rs200 billion, has said Pakistan cannot afford huge losses and cannot import cotton due to limited resources.

Talking to a delegation of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), led by its Chairman Nawab Shehzad Ali Khan, the minister appreciated the interest of ginners in cotton production and said cotton was the backbone of economy and “we should work like a team to motivate growers to cultivate the crop over a maximum area.”

Dastgir announced that the commerce ministry would work in collaboration with provincial governments in an effort to enhance cotton production in the country.

Participants of the meeting discussed the role of Trading Corporation of Pakistan and the impact of cotton imports.

The minister said the prime concern of the government was to protect the interest of farmers besides boosting textile exports. He urged PCGA representatives to launch a campaign for educating farmers so that they could grow more cotton in a proper manner.

It was decided that a meeting of all stakeholders would be convened to prepare a comprehensive strategy to address the issues of cotton production, quality and import mechanism.

The PCGA chairman suggested that support price of seed (raw) cotton should be fixed at Rs3,000 per 40kg and it must be announced immediately to encourage the growers.

He said the national cotton policy was being delayed and sugar mills were being shifted to the core cotton zone by people belonging to the ruling party, adding all the three major political parties – PPP, PML-N and PTI – were violating the restriction on setting up sugar mills in the cotton zone.

He stressed the need for imposing a complete ban on the import of cotton and its thread from India till the end of current season and disposal of unsold stock kept in the ginneries.

The association chairman urged the government to announce a bailout package for the ginning industry, saying conspiracies were being hatched to harm Pakistan’s agriculture. He also asked the government to launch a vigorous drive and take urgent steps to achieve the production target of 20 million bales.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1111695/dastgir-concerned-dwindling-cotton-production/

LOCAL FERTILISER MANUFACTURERS: SC RESERVES VERDICT ON SUBSIDY BENEFITS
Business Recorder, May 28, 2016
Reserving its judgement in a matter relating to discrimination in subsidy benefits to local fertiliser manufactures the top court Friday observed that in order to ascertain phosphate percentage, the government should conduct a laboratory test of imported and local fertiliser production.

Agritech Limited, manufacturer of Single Super Phosphate (SSP) in Haripur Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), had challenged the notification of Prime Minister's Kissan Package 2015 before Peshawar High Court (PHC) on grounds that the company being local manufacturer of the fertiliser has been deprived of the subsidy benefits of the package.

The PHC on December 23, 2015 accepted the Agritech Limited's plea to declare notifications of 15 October, 2015 and 3 November, 2015 in the matter discriminatory, issued without lawful authority.

The federal government challenged the PHC verdict before the Supreme Court with a plea to declare the High Court's verdict null and void contending that the federation was not properly heard in the matter. Appearing on behalf of the Agritech Limited before a two-member bench of Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan and Justice Qazi Faez Isa, Salman Akram Raja rebutted the federation's arguments saying the federation failed to prove its stance through any technical report before the PHC that Agritech was producing substandard fertiliser.

He said his client was targeted in a subsidy matter as government extended a subsidy to imported SSP; to which Justice Qazi Faiz Isa observed that the government should equally treat imported and local fertiliser manufactures while giving subsidy, adding that the decision makers should value the taxpayers' money while giving any subsidy.

Expressing dismay over the absence of legislation regarding a law on subsidy, Justice Isa observed "then what is the need to present annual budgets if a substantial amount is being released through administrative orders?" Deputy Attorney General Sajid Ilyas Bhatti said the government has no objection to a lab test of the local fertilisers, adding that instead of testing the end product of fertiliser there must be laboratory test of the manufacturing process as well. After hearing both the parties, the court reserved its verdict in the matter.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/50458/

SAVING SEEDS FOR HARVESTING
Dawn, Sunday Magazine, May 29th, 2016

Zahrah Nasir

The home production of vegetables — with emphasis on organic — is progressively becoming more popular throughout the country; yet, despite the number of garden supply stores having multiplied, gardeners are still finding it difficult to source a decent range of seeds.

It has long been common practice here for garden stores to import bulk tins or packets of seed from just a handful of international companies and then to repackage them under their own name without adding planting instructions, let alone details of source and expiry date of the seeds.

These international companies have, on the whole and particularly over recent years, concentrated on supplying F1 hybrid seeds which produce, under optimum growing conditions, beautiful to look at fruits and vegetables, with tough skin to protect them from easy bruising and damage.

However, they are deficient in the taste department and, for obvious reasons, produce 'inferior' seeds which are not worth the trouble of harvesting. If the seeds germinate, the resultant crops have a tendency to be very poor indeed.

Such international companies — our seed stores too — want gardeners to purchase new seeds each and every season as, naturally, they make no profit if you harvest and save your own from what are termed 'heritage varieties'. Heritage varieties are open-pollinated (naturally pollinated by insects) and, as long as certain guidelines are followed, produce extremely tasty fruits and vegetables, generation after generation, without any deterioration in quality.

Gardeners and local farmers were, in days not so very long ago, the guardians of seed stocks with, for example, seeds of an especially sweet melon or wonderfully productive tomato being swapped around among growers — "I'll swap you a handful of excellent tomato seeds for a handful of seeds from those melt-in-the-mouth melons you grow, and which your grandfather grew before you" — without resorting to an exchange of cash.

Now, however, with just a few international seed companies basically controlling available seed choices, indigenous heritage varieties are disappearing fast and, unless we all do something about it, they will soon be nothing but a vague memory.

Going out of your way to track down what are often localised heritage varieties and saving them from extinction is a wonderful thing to do and, once you have built up reasonable stocks, you can exchange them with like-minded people for other heritage varieties of fruits and vegetables you wish to grow.

Some fruit / vegetable seed is easier to save than others but it is important to remember the following:

Open-pollinated means that the flowers preceding the fruit or, in the case of many vegetables, appearing once the vegetable is past its edible best (for instance, seed lettuce or cabbage), are pollinated by the wind or a variety of beneficial insects such as bees, hover flies, beetles, and butterflies. These hard-working insects transfer pollen from one plant to another and, as is often the case, also from one variety to another.
The latter, especially visible with pumpkins and close relatives, usually means that, having been what is known as 'cross-pollinated' — perhaps a cross between a red pumpkin and a green one — seeds so produced will, when their time comes, bear neither a red nor a green pumpkin but something which is a mix of the two. The same cross-pollination can occur between cabbages and cauliflower, if they are allowed to flower and set seed at the same time.

To make life simple for yourself and to avoid cross-pollination issues — and the complicated / tedious task of hand pollination to conserve purity of variety — it is advisable to grow just one open-pollinated variety of, for instance, pumpkin unless you have a very large garden and can grow a different varieties of pumpkin at opposite ends of the growing area.
Pumpkins are members of the large Cucurbita family of plants and open-pollinated varieties will also cross with zucchini, marrows, squash, etc. It is important for seed saving purposes that these are not grown close together — although you can do nothing if your neighbour decides to grow a variety that will cross-pollinate with your own unless you are prepared to hand pollinate. This will be covered in a separate column sometime in the future.

Fruit — capsicums, chillies, aubergines, tomatoes, etc are formed after flowering and contain seeds inside themselves.
Vegetables — turnips, radish, carrots, mustard, cabbage, cauliflower, Swiss chard, etc, produce flowers once the vegetables are past their 'eat by' date and these flowers, once pollinated, form pods with seeds inside.

Save seeds only from the strongest, healthiest, best-producing, best-tasting plants.
Fruit must be allowed to fully ripen — overripe is best — on the plant if seed is to be extracted, dried and saved.
Vegetable seed pods must be completely dry on the plant before harvesting. Seeds should be taken out of the seed pods, dried some more, packed in airtight containers and, as with all seed, labelled, and stored in a cool dark place until the next planting time comes around.
More seed saving details will be included over the coming weeks, as the subject is too complicated to be dealt with all at once.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1261097/saving-seeds-for-harvesting

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 16TH TO MAY 22ND 2016
FAILURE TO ARREST AGRICULTURE'S DECLINE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 16th, 2016

Ashfak Bokhari

WHILE briefing the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Food Security on May 4, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan admitted that both the federal and provincial governments have failed in taking appropriate measures to arrest a decline of the agriculture sector.

This is for the first time that the minister has also held his ministry equally responsible for the worsening condition of the sector. Earlier, he had been blaming the provinces only, directly or indirectly, sometimes by saying that after the 18th amendment, the performance of agriculture sector has declined. He conceded that the living conditions of the farming community were deteriorating day-by-day due to largely indifference of the federal government towards this vital sector.

As a result, small farmers are shifting from rural areas to cities in large numbers to earn livelihood for their children. There are about 8m small farmers, holding less than 12.5 acres.

The federal government has not been paying the kind of attention to the sector that it deserves. Farm inputs are costlier than in India. A recent comparison shows that urea is 25pc and DAP 40pc cheaper in India than Pakistan. Under the prevailing circumstances, the federal minister does not think that agriculture can still be called 'backbone of Pakistan's economy'.

Of late, some farmer organisations have been asking the federal government to declare an 'agriculture emergency' since the commodity prices at farm level have been at their lowest for the past three years and the gains one expects in crop farming are virtually being wiped out.

According to an FAO report, the prices of primary commodities are likely to remain depressed on the global markets till 2019. To face lower prices for another three years may be unbearable for small cultivators. For many, farming is rapidly becoming unsustainable.

Dr Hafeez A. Pasha, a senior economist, expects farm growth rate in the range of just 0.3-0.5pc for the current fiscal year. He is of the opinion that the livestock sector, which usually performs better than the crop sector, might not be able to compensate the deficiency in farm growth up to the desired level.

Bosan informed the NA standing committee that the Pakistan Agriculture Services and Storage Corporation (Passco) godowns at Karachi having a capacity of 17,600 tonnes had been under illegal occupation of private parties for the past 22 years. However, these godowns have now been vacated but after a protracted legal battle.

Why all regions in the country have much less per acre yields than the global average? One reason for this anomaly has been identified as small farm size in Punjab. Sindh has larger average farm size and better per acre yield of wheat, cotton and sugarcane than Punjab.

For instance, in 2013-14 Punjab cultivated wheat on 17,5235m acres and its average yield was 29 maunds. The wheat area in Sindh was 2.7703m acres and per acre yield was 36 maunds.

In March, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to start a consultative process with provincial governments and other stakeholders for working out a joint strategy to put the sector back on the right track.

A note sent by the Prime Minister Secretariat said the food security ministry shall ensure that the consultative process comes to an end in due course for approval and appropriate allocation of funds in the budget 2016-17.

There is a dire need for diversification in the agriculture sector by promoting new crops and modern techniques, reorientation of agriculture research for development of better crop varieties in terms of yield and pest resistance.

Mr Bosan had earlier requested the prime minister to increase budgetary allocation so that his ministry could take certain steps for the long-term development of the sector. But no increase was granted.

What has happened over the years is that since the devolution of the agriculture to the provinces, the federal budget had drastically been cut down while the provinces, although having their own budget, have become somewhat indifferent towards this sector, the minister claims.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1258554

CASE FOR AGRICULTURE TAX
The Express Tribune, May 16th, 2016.

Asim Bashir Khan

KARACHI: The agriculture sector in Pakistan contributes around 21% of total gross domestic product (GDP), but the cumulative collection of agriculture tax is less than 1% of the total.

As per the Agriculture Census of Pakistan, 2010, there were 8.26 million farms in Pakistan with an area of 21.41 million hectares. The average farm-wise tax collection for the year 2014-15 amounted to Rs270 per acre per annum, which is meagre as compare to the annual farm income.

Apart from its significant contribution to the GDP, the sector receives a massive amount of subsidy every year in form of support prices and input subsidisation. Since the federal and provincial governments have persistently faced fiscal stress therefore, introducing progressive taxation to agriculture sector is more relevant in today's context.

Agriculture income tax is a provincial subject under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 and therefore, exempted from federal taxation under Income tax Ordinance, 2001. Every attempt of bringing direct taxation to the agriculture sector has proven to be unsuccessful yet, partially due to lack of political will, institutional capacity and data limitations.

The dominance of indirect taxes and low tax-to-GDP ratio highlight the need for more direct taxation specifically at sub-the national tier, because provincial governments tend to substitute intergovernmental federal transfers over their own source fiscal effort.

However, many scholars on the subject believe that land revenue (tax on land) is a good taxation system on the basis of efficiency argument i.e. land is readily observable and all land records are well documented with respective provincial Boards of Revenue.

Ongoing computerisation of land records would further facilitate collection. However, the land tax is primarily regressive in nature and a flat rate system doesn't take into account the vertical and horizontal equity argument.

Many research studies have attempted to estimate the potential of direct taxation in the agriculture sector and come up with ambitious results. Specially, the Taxation Enquiry Committee Report, 1960 and Report of Prime Minister's Task Force on Agriculture, 1993 emphasised the need for imposition of direct taxes in agriculture sector with optimal degree of progressivity and fairness.

The existing agriculture tax legislations and structure are defective. The two taxes – land revenue and agriculture income tax – in their present form are inelastic with respect to prices and production. The issue of horizontal inequity is also an important deriving force for advocacy of agriculture income tax.

For example, the upper income group (those who own large farmlands) in agriculture pays much lower taxes as percentage of income than their counterparts in non-agriculture sector. So this argument paves the way for imposition of agriculture income taxation to bring equity and fairness to the system.

The taxation of agriculture sector is much more complicated in comparison with taxation of business income, corporation tax etc. Worldwide the agriculture tax can be classified into three types. (1) land tax with at least four variants the flat acreage tax, progressive acreage tax, the flat capital value tax, the progressive capital value tax. (2) output tax with flat gross produce tax and progressive gross produce tax, and the (3) is tax on agriculture income.

The calculation of agriculture income taxation on the basis of Produce Index Unit (PIUs) is an attractive proposition. But the major defect of this approach is that existing PIUs are based on outdated settlements.

Working an alternative mechanism for calculation of agriculture income is different and far more difficult specifically when it comes to data aggregation from number of different sources and agencies.

The data of crops are periodically recorded under Crop Reporting System (CRS) by agriculture department of provincial governments and provincial BORs are custodians of record of farm holdings.

Assessing individual farmer's income over and above the exemption ceiling requires at least four important pieces of information. 1) ownership record of land with National Identity Card (NIC) numbers. 2) details of crops cultivation during the year, output, yield. 3) details of inputs used for cultivation with their respective cost and 4) farm gate prices of crops.

The available extensive data sources in agriculture sector are Agriculture Statistics of Pakistan (annual) and Agriculture Census of Pakistan (after every 10 years). The census record comprises of holdings and relevant details of agriculture households and not individuals therefore, crude estimates of farm based taxation may be generated from this record but for income assessment for tax purpose this data is not appropriate.

BORs data on tenure classification is the most appropriate and may be synchronised with the data of prices as recorded by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), though PBS does not provide farm gate prices, therefore, any use of market price would overstate farmers' income.

Once at aggregate level, when issues in data availability are sorted out, then individual owner, tenant, sharecropper's income against his/her NIC may be calculated. To ensure inter-sectoral horizontal equality, the tax rate on taxable income derived from business under Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 may be applied to calculate tax liability of the individual farmers.

A number of studies have estimated farm based potential of agriculture income tax in Pakistan and come up with ambitious results. Given the present strain on exchequer it is high time and most viable to think for direct taxation in agriculture sector.

The writer is a PhD Scholar at IBA Karachi

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1103860/case-for-agriculture-tax/

AGRICULTURE LOANS UNDER PM RELIEF PACKAGE: SUPREME COURT ISSUES NOTICE TO AGP ON ZTBL PETITION
Business Recorder, May 18, 2016

The apex court on Tuesday issued notice to Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) in response to plea of Zari Taraqiati Bank Limited against Peshawar High Court, Mingora Bench Swat order for implementation of Prime Minister relief package 2009 to write off agricultural loans in Malakand Division and FATA. According to the State Bank of Pakistan circular notification SMEFD No 01 of February 4,2011, "In pursuance of Prime Minister's announcement of Relief Package and subsequent release of budgetary allocation by the Ministry of Finance on account of total write off of loans in Malakand, Swat, Buner and Chitral Districts, following procedure has been devised for reimbursement of write off loans outstanding as of December 31,2009 of said districts".

Appearing before a three-member bench of Chief Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali, the ZTBL counsel Salman Akram Raja pleaded that the SBP loan write off policy has affected the financial institutions of the country. To which bench decided to issue notice to the Attorney General for Pakistan due to the nature of the case which it termed as a policy matter. Issuing notice to the AGP in the matter, the bench adjourned the hearing till first week of June.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/46942:agriculture-loans-under-pm-relief-package-supreme-court-issues-notice-to-agp-on-ztbl-petition/?date=2016-05-18

FARMERS, PRSP STAFF HOLD PROTESTS
Dawn, May 19th, 2016

LAHORE: Farmers and employees of Punjab Rural Support Programme lodged separate protests at Faisal Chowk on The Mall on Wednesday to press the government for acceptance of their demands.

The protests, which lasted for several hours, caused inconvenience to motorists.

A large number of doctors and paramedical staff of PRSP gathered on The Mall against the expected lay-offs. They demanded confirmation of 802 doctors and 5,500 paramedical staff. Opposition leader in Punjab Assembly Mahmoodur Rasheed also joined the protest and blamed the provincial government for anti-worker policies.

Around 200 farmers from all parts of the province also gathered on The Mall on the call of Kissan Ittehad to record their protest against power tariff and high fertiliser prices.

PPP leader Manzoor Wattoo, who joined the protest, alleged the government was implementing anti-farmer policies as it not only imposed a ban on wheat export but was also providing expensive electricity to farmers.

In a late night development, an agreement was reached between the PRSP protesters and the provincial health department.

According to the agreement, a summary requesting one-year continuity of PRSP will be forwarded for approval, if approved the present advertisement about new induction will be suspended, preference will be given to current employees.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1259319

FARMERS PROTEST BAN ON PADDY CULTIVATION IN BADIN
Dawn, May 19th, 2016

BADIN: Leaders of farmer associations on Wednesday strongly reacted to the Hyderabad commissioner's decision to ban cultivation of rice in all areas irrigated by Akram Wah canal system and its outlets in Badin district.

Khalil Ahmed Bhurgari, a former chairman of Area Water Board Left Bank System, termed the decision a cruel joke with farmers since paddy had already been sown over 80 per cent land, nearly 300,000 acres, in the canal's command area.

He suspected sugar mills owners might be behind such arbitrary directive and said that banning the crop in one of the biggest rice zones of the country was beyond his comprehension. He would move the court if the already sown crop was destroyed, he said.

Nawaz Memon of Sindh Abadgar Board and Allah Bachayo Rahookro of Sindh Abadgar Tanzeem called it an insane decision.

The commissioner wrote a letter to DC Badin on Tuesday directing him to ban rice cultivation in four irrigation sub-divisions including Qazia in Badin, Shadi Large in Tando Bago and Kadhan.

In pursuance of the directive, the DC had written to the XEN of Akram Wah to implement the orders, according to sources.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1259198

KHARIF 2016: UREA'S OFFTAKE TOO SLOW
Business Recorder, May 19, 2016

Urea's offtake is reportedly far behind prospects in Kharif 2016 as the economics of growers have worsened due to low price of commodities against the cost of production. Urea consumption is estimated at around 3,000,000 tons against 2,424,000 tons in the previous season showing an increase of 23.8 per cent over last Kharif 2015.

DAP offtake is expected to increase by 25.9 per cent over Kharif 2015. The total offtake of all fertilisers in the previous year was 2,849,000 tons against 3,535,000 tons estimation for forthcoming Kharif 2016 with 24.1 per cent projected increment. In Punjab, urea offtake was recorded at 2,100,000 tons whereas the consumption of DAP was 350,000 tons.

In Sindh, urea consumption was 570,000 tons and DAP 105,000 tons. Khyber Pakhtunkhawa's (KP), urea offtake was recorded at 210,000 tons while DAP was 40,000 tons. In Balochistan, urea offtake was 120,000 tons whereas DAP consumption was 25,000 tons. The sources said that Kharif 2016 started with inventory of 771,000 tons of urea.

Total availability of urea will be about 3,471,000 tons of domestic production. Urea offtake is expected to be around 3,000,000 tons. Total availability of DAP will be 709,000 tons against expected offtake of 520,000 tons.

According to sources opening inventory of urea in Kharif 2016 (April -September) was 771,000 tons while DAP was 288,000 tons totalling 1,078,000 tons sans imported supplies (which are zero per cent). Domestic production of urea and DAP was 2,700,000 tons and 421,000 tons respectively totalling 1,078,000 tons.

Total availability of urea in Kharif will be 3,471,000 tons and DAP 709,000 tons. "All the domestic fertiliser plants are operating at full capacity due to availability of RLNG and domestic natural gas," the sources said, adding that import of urea in public sector is zero for the last 9-10 months. The stock with the National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML) is sufficient but its offtake is too slow due to which the commodity's stock condition is worsening with each passing day.

The sources said, Pak Arab Fertiliser and Dawood Hercules are operating on Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) whereas other fertiliser plants are operating on natural gas. The sale of DAP was better after the government extended subsidy aimed at farmers' purchasing the commodity as per requirements. Chairman National Assembly Standing Committee on Industries and Production, Asad Umar recently wrote a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, requesting him to import urea through NFML to provide relief to the farmers.

Umer added that total annual consumption of urea fertiliser in Pakistan is approximately six million tons. Price reduction of Rs 250 per bag will put approximately Rs 30 billion in the farmers' pockets without any cost to the government or an offer of any subsidy. The documents also indicate that the profit of Engro fertiliser increased by 87 per cent to Rs 15.02 billion in 2015 from Rs 8.02 billion in 2014. Likewise the profit of Fatima Fertiliser has increased by 147 per cent to Rs 22.84 billion in 2015 from Rs 9.25 billion in 2014. However, profit of Fauji Fertiliser declined from Rs 18.17 billion in 2014 to Rs 16.76 billion in 2015.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/47184:kharif-2016:-ureas-offtake-too-slow?date=2016-05-19

FARMERS, PRSP STAFF CONTINUE SIT-INS
Dawn, May 20th, 2016

LAHORE: Farmers continued their sit-in outside the Punjab Assembly for the second consecutive day on Thursday, forcing Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif to listen to them.

The chief minister promised to resolve their problems.

Right next to the farmers' sit-in, the employees of the Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) continued their sit-in to press the government to regulrise services of about 5,500 paramedics and doctors. Law Minister Rana Sanaullah met them and assured them that their issues would be resolved.

However, despite assurances from the chief minister and law minister, the farmers and PRSP employees did not end their sit-in till the filing of this report (at 12 mid-night).

Braving the scorching heat, a large number of farmers and PRSP protesters stayed on The Mall throughout the day and vowed to go to any extent to force the government to accept their demands.

The farmers' demands include Rs5 per unit electricity for them, security regarding payment of sugarcane, procurement of wheat, maize, potato, cotton and rice, subsidy on fertilizer, withdrawal of general sales tax (GST) on all agricultural inputs and involvement of Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) in procurement and export of surplus produce.

One of the protesting farmers died of heart attack during the sit-in and the protesters offered his funeral prayers at the protest site on The Mall. The emotions ran high when the news of the death broke and the farmers became more vocal while raising anti-government slogans. Catch phrase 'Go Nawaz Go' echoed in the sit-in as the framers' leaders criticised the PML-N government for spending billions on Orange Line train and metro bus projects but completely ignoring farmers' problems.

Former prime minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf also joined the sit-in on the direction of PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and assured the farmers that his party would support them until the government was forced to accept their demands.

Addressing the protesters, he said the farmers were backbone of the economy.

"The PPP will be on the roads with the farmers," he said, adding the PPP was a party of the poor.

Ashraf asked Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to step down as he had failed to resolve the people's problems.

"Panama-tainted leaders cannot solve problems of the people as they are busy making money," he said.

As the mercury was high, tents were erected to save the farmers from the blazing sun and fans were also arranged. The farmers set potato on fire, saying "today we are setting our crop on fire, tomorrow we will set ourselves on fire if the government pays no heed to our demands".

"I have come from Pakpattan to demand the government show some mercy on us and do not force us to commit suicide," Raja Rajab Ali, a farmer in his 50s, told Dawn.

“In addition to other problems, we want the government to immediately announce Rs5 per unit electricity (for farmers),” he said, adding the government must announce the price of each crop before its sowing.

Muhammad Shahzad, a young farmer from Multan, said he was determined to go to Islamabad to hold a sit-in there if the Punjab government did not accept their demands.

Kissan Ittehad leader Chaudhry Anwar said the government would have to pay attention to the plight of the farmers if it cared for economy.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, in a statement, asked the Punjab government to stop strangling the poor economically and diverting public resources to wasteful projects.

“It is shameful that the Punjab government has pushed the peasantry into unending protests and compelled more than 6,000 employees of the Rural Health Support Programme (RHSP) to hold dharnas in Lahore and elsewhere amid scorching heatwave by depriving them of their livelihood,” Bilawal said while expressing solidarity with the farmers and the RHSP employees.

As traffic remained suspended on The Mall, the adjacent roads were also clogged, causing inconvenience to the motorists. However, the sit-in provided the vendors with an opportunity to set up their eatery stalls.

A group of farmers also manhandled some journalists over the coverage issue. However, their leaders controlled the situation.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1259524

SENATE CHIEF REFERS OKARA FARMERS’ ISSUE TO HUMAN RIGHTS BODY
Business Recorder, May 20, 2016
Chairman Senate Raza Rabbani on Thursday referred the issue of use of brutal force against the peasants of Okara military farmlands to the Human Rights Committee with directives to look into the matter and report back to the House. The directives from the Senate Chairman came on a motion moved by Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) Senator Farhatullah Babar.

Senator Babar said that the farmers were suffering and agricultural sector was declining because of the state’s callous attitude towards the farmers. He lamented that the state has not only neglected the farming community but is also doing nothing to stop the powerful sections from dispossessing farmers from their lands. He recalled the use of brute force against the farmers of Okara military farmlands last month.

He said that Okara peasants only wanted to highlight their grievances by observing the International Peasants Day on April 17, 2016 but the state fearing that it will expose how their lands are being grabbed retaliated by arresting the unarmed villagers and charging them with terrorism. “It is sad that anti terror laws have been used to stifle dissent and curb farmers’ voice, he said and asked how can farming prosper in such an environment,” he added.

Babar also expressed apprehensions that the villagers may also be tried in military courts. If the anti terror laws have been pressed against the villagers there is serious apprehension that the farmers may even be tried in military courts. The PPP Senator said his apprehensions were based on reports that the General Secretary of the Anjuman Mazareen Punjab (AMP) has been shifted from Sahiwal jail to a military cantonment and demanded his release. He called for revising the wheat support price and giving incentives to farmers to increase production and save them from ruination, adding in a similar situation during the days of Benazir Bhutto when the potato growers were facing crippling losses the former prime minister had announced that she will purchase the entire crop from farmers at official price and throw it into the sea if needed but not let the farmers suffer in any way.

He said the upward revision of wheat support price during the previous PPP government led to the injection of nearly three hundred billion rupees in the national economy. He said that this requires empathy towards the agriculture sector and farmers and realisation that food security was linked to the prosperity and well being of farming community which the ruling elite is incapable of demonstrating. The chair then referred the matter to Human Rights Committee.

http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/47491/

RISKING AGRI-OUTPUT: BIOSAFETY BODY APPROVES GM SEEDS WITHOUT CONSULTATION
The Express Tribune, May 20th, 2016.

Shahzad Anwar

ISLAMABAD: Commercialisation of genetically modified (GM) seeds, which could cause cancer according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), has been approved without consultation with key stakeholders such as farmers, environmentalists and consumers.

The National Bio-safety Committee (NBC), which examines seed varieties for approval, gave the go-ahead to GM seeds of wheat, peas, sugarcane, potato, mustard, corn and cotton three weeks ago in its 14th meeting.

According to documents available with The Express Tribune, most of the cases approved by the NBC were submitted by the institutions whose representatives were also members of its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

These institutions include National Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, Faisalabad, Central Cotton Research Institute, Multan and Forman Christian College, Lahore. Multinational companies such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Dupont also sought approval for their GM seeds.

In the meeting, Ministry of Climate Change Secretary Sayed Akif Ahmed told the NBC that they had been criticised for not following proper procedures and taking hasty decisions due to growing commercial interest in genetically modified organisms (GMO).

Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency Director General Irfan Tariq recalled that the committee had approved 70 GM seeds out of the 119 under scrutiny in its previous meeting. The committee had permitted Monsanto and Dupont to commercially use GM corn without conducting large-scale trials and risk assessments and by by-passing biosafety laws.

The government has now reversed this decision.

Despite the criticism, the committee approved 49 cases of laboratory genetic manipulation, import, field trials and commercialisation of GM crops in the 14th meeting and also gave the green signal to 22 varieties of BT cotton.

The NBC also allowed some companies exemption from field trials of their GM seeds.

According to the documents, the NBC granted approvals according to TAC’s recommendations.

However, anti-GMO lobbyists are questioning the composition of TAC.

“It was a deliberate attempt by the National Bio-safety Committee to engage in low-profile discussions and proceedings on GMOs to avoid any outcry from the farmers and conscious citizens,” a source privy to the matter said.

He added large-scale cultivation of GM corn and BT cotton, a genetically modified variety of cotton which produces an insecticide for bollworm, could potentially threaten local seed varieties through cross-pollination. On the other hand, GMO lobbyists argue that genetically engineered seeds are high yielding and insect resistant.

However, their argument has not withstood the test in countries such as India, China and Australia where the per-acre yield has gradually dropped and new pests have emerged.

These countries have now banned cultivation of GM corn or other transgenic food crops.

The source said there were similarities in agro-climatic conditions between some Indian states such as Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan, and Pakistan where BT cotton was being cultivated.

He said more than 86% of BT cotton was cultivated in Sindh and Punjab where pink bollworm infestation had been reported since 2011.

He said Pakistan had failed to meet its cotton production target of 15 million bales in 2015-16 and had only harvested 9.5 million bales.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1106701/risking-agri-output-biosafety-body-approves-gm-seeds-without-consultation/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 9TH TO MAY 15TH 2016
LOWER UREA PRICE TO HELP BOOST CROP OUTPUT
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 9th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

AT the start of May, farmers received good news: the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority notified reduction in feed gas price ranging between Rs77 per million British thermal unit and Rs123 per mmbtu for fertiliser industry, which translated into reduction of urea price by Rs60 to Rs70 per bag.

The new notified price has thus come down from Rs1,850 per bag to Rs1,790 per bag.

However, in days to come, the market forces might push the prices further down. Some of the analysts see it below Rs1,700 per bag in next few weeks because of huge inventory that the industry is holding amid depressed sales.

The country is now holding some 1.2m tonnes of unused stocks, including around 250,000 tonnes with the National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML). These stocks have been built in the last few months for two reasons: the government has been very liberal with gas diversion to the fertiliser sector, even at the cost of power sector in some cases (like Guddu Power Plant’s gas allocation was diverted to a urea manufacturer for many months).

With the induction of regasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG) into the system, the fertiliser sector has been receiving additional supplies of 80m cubic feet per day (mmcfd), thus exploiting its full production capacity and building stocks.

On the other hand, the urea consumption went down during these months because of the dwindling purchasing power of farmers. Between October-March 2015-16, when the urea manufacturing was in full swing, its consumption dropped by 13pc on a season-on-season basis. This happened during the wheat season when urea usage is normally at its peak.

At the most propitious time, its off-take of only 1.7m tonnes was even less (15pc) when compared with last three year’s average. This drop in usage contributed to the huge inventory, which might push the prices further down in weeks to come. The next cotton crop might benefit.

Another factor, which may also help bring down the prices, is the international scenario. The importers are pushing the government to assure them against any levying of duty at the last moment for them to import urea and let them provide urea at a rate of less than Rs1,300 per bag. The only deterrent for them is possible duty regime change during the import process, gobbling up their profits.

Such change of duty regime feeds on two factors: the industry actively spreading these rumours and the government keeping an ambivalent silence over the issue. The farming community is naturally standing besides these importers. It insists if the government wants free market mechanisms to take reign of the market, where farmers are paying world prices for most of the products, why not urea as well?

If world prices are down to Rs1,300 per bag after all expenses (freight and in-land transportation included), why is the government protecting the local industry by around Rs500 per bag. Instead, it should help import urea by assuring the importers there would be no policy change (slapping of duty) at the last moment, as being feared by them and facilitate the imports for further benefit of the farmers.

The debate is still going on and the government does not want the domestic industry to sink under its own weight and is protecting it by keeping an ambiguous silence over the issue of possible import duty.

The farmers always complain that such benefits are always lost among manufacturer and dealers. The dealers raise their profits to pull the benefit towards them. This time, it would be in the interest of the industry to ensure price reduction is passed on to farmers which helps clearance of stocks. The benefit, thus, is sure to reach farmers, at least the one notified now if not more.

With diesel prices already down, the DAP experiencing almost 25pc price slashing, any reduction in the urea prices is a welcome step for its impact on overall cost of production. The Punjab Agriculture Department's calculation of cotton's cost of production substantiates the point; against last year's figure of Rs3,182 per maund, it stands at Rs3,000 per maund for this season.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1257104/lower-urea-price-to-help-boost-crop-output

FOOD SECURITY: USPCAS-AFS, OTHERS APPROVE 15 AGRI-BASED RESEARCH PROJECTS
Khalid Abbas Saif

Business Recorder, May 09, 2016
The US Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Agriculture and Food Security (USPCAS-AFS), University of Agriculture Faisalabad; University of California Davis, USA and Washington State University USA have approved 15 agriculture based research projects to work jointly in order to ensure food security in Pakistan.

It was decided at the second steering committee meeting of the USPCAS-AFS held at the syndicate room, UAF with Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan in the chair. University of California Davis' professors Dr Jim Hill, Dr Thomas Rost, Dr Nancy J Allen, Dr Chris Pannkuk, USPCAS-AFS Chief of Party Dr Bashir Ahmad, Farmer Associates Pakistan's CEO Afaq Tiwana, Progressive farmers Manzoor Thakar, Muhammad Faisal Shah, and other experts also attended the meeting.

The Vice Chancellor said that they have received over 280 agricultural research proposals out of which 30 potential research proposals have been short listed in eleven priority areas of the agriculture sector which is directly linked to the food insecurity. He said that the 30 proposals have been further short listed for the approval of 15 projects.

He said that the research was themed in 11 priority areas including stressed tolerant varieties of cotton and wheat; vaccine development for foot and mouth; pest management strategies; control of tree dieback; increasing health and nutrient value of food, biotechnology, water security and policy matters. He said that food security was the challenge for the world. He said that heat tolerant varieties; adaptive measures for the climate changes; value addition, reduction in post-harvest losses and policy measures were the prerequisite to fight the challenges of food insecurity and modern era.

He added that the researches would provide solution to the problems of farming community and food security. Dr Jim Hill said that besides the research grants, 250 scholarships are being given under the USPCAS-AFS in the five years. He said that one third of the scholarships are for the thematic areas; one third need based and one third are on the open merit. He said that the work under USPCAS-AFS would come up with the viable solutions for the problem of the farming community.

Dr Bashir Ahmad said that under the faculty exchange programme, 9 UAF faculty members were sent to the universities of the United States to exchange the benefits from each other's experiences. He said that 7 of them had returned and another batch of 7 professors had been sent to the University of California Davis, USA and Washington State University, USA.

http://www.brecorder.com/business-and-economy/189:pakistan/44217:food-security-uspcas-afs-others-approve-15-agri-based-research-projects/?date=2016-05-09

ASSEMBLY SESSION: FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF GUNNY BAGS DEMANDED
The Express Tribune, May 10th, 2016.

LAHORE: Opposition in the Punjab Assembly on Monday demanded that the distribution of gunny bags among farmers be made more transparent. They claimed that middlemen were manipulating the situation in south Punjab.

Speaking on a point of order, Sardar Shahabuddin of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) complained that gunny bags were not being distributed in south Punjab. Minister for Mines and Minerals Sher Ali Khan said the government had formed a foolproof mechanism to distribute gunny bags. "Farmers having less than 12 acres are being given gunny bags in the first phase," he said. Khan assured the House that Shahabuddin's complaint would be investigated.

Opposition members staged a walk out after PPP member Faiza Malik exchanged harsh words with Parliamentary Secretary for Auqaf Saqlain Sipra during the question hour. Malik had said that Sipra was not familiar with the assembly proceedings being a first-term member. Sipra had responded that he had returned to the House for a third term. He then added that he was a directly elected member, and not a reserved-seat member. Malik protested and Opposition members walked out in her support. They, however, returned after the Speaker sent a member to bring them back.

Speaking on a point of order, Leader of the Opposition Mian Mehmoodur Rasheed said that his adjournment motion should be entertained out of turn and a debate should be allowed in the house on the Rs430 million renovation of the Punjab House in Murree. "A FAFEN report has listed the Punjab at top in terms of bribery and corruption. I congratulate Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif on this," he said.

The Speaker did not accept the request for out-of-turn debate. The Opposition members then left the House after pointing out the [lack of] quorum. The session was then adjourned till Tuesday morning.

An ordinance and a bill were scheduled to be presented in the House on Monday. However, no government business was taken up.

Earlier, speaking to reporters outside the Punjab Assembly, Rasheed had said that all those who had not declared their assets should be held accountable. "However, the prime minister should be the first to be held accountable. If the PM does not accept the opposition's terms of reference, a movement will be started," he said.

Talking to reporters, Law Minister Rana Sanaullah said that many people accused of corruption were giving statements these days about accountability. He said that this included Aitezaz Ahsan. "Some people are attacking the system in the name of accountability. If Opposition is really interested in eliminating corruption, then it should support strengthening of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). Political leaders should sit down together to legislate on it," he said.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1100169/assembly-session-fair-distribution-of-gunny-bags-demanded/

‘UNDERGROUND WATER EXTRACTION CAN AFFECT AGRICULTURE’
Dawn, May 11th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: At a workshop on climate change, Dr Patrick Shea said that Pakistan needs to categorise its water resources on an emergency basis.

He said continued extraction of underground water could cause the surface of the ground to sink and would affect agriculture.

He added that the melting of glaciers can lead to depletion of water resources.

Dr Shea is a research professor of biology at the University of Utah and the former director of the Bureau of Land Management.

He was speaking at a workshop on the ‘Relevance of Environmental Laws to Coping Climate Change’, organised by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on Tuesday.

Dr Shea said technological advancements have made it possible to understand and predict water quantity.

“Three basic things which need to be analysed are availability of drinking water, amount of healthy water and predictions about the quantity of water in future,” he said.

Using the metaphor of five blind men defining an elephant each according to his own understanding, he likened the Himalayan range to the ‘elephant’ and governments and policymakers in South and Southeast Asia to the ‘blind men’ describing their part of the elephant.

“There is need for an integrated approach to move forward. China, Vietnam, Burma, Pakistan, Indian policymakers are not sharing information, so there is little integrating of information.

“There is need of bringing educated people of the region together, as 95pc of the water [from this region is shared],” he said.

Former ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel said Pakistan started out as a water affluent country, with 5,500 cubic metres per person per annum. Per capita availability has receded by 1,000 cubic metres since.

“The major reason behind this is the increase in population, as we were 32 million in 1947 but now population of the country has reached to 190 million,” he said.

There was protection on the drawing of water until the 1960s and 1970s. Under the Indus Water Treaty, 3,000 tubewells were installed in Pakistan to compensate for the loss of water coming from the eastern rivers.

Since then the use of tubewells has grown exponentially, reaching more than 1 million today.

“There is no regulatory mechanism. Landlords believe that groundwater belongs to them and they have the right to mine it,” he said.

Tariq Banuri, the economics professor at Utah University, said Pakistan needs to protect its available surface water, protect and preserve groundwater and develop institutions for policy framework and regulations.

The secretary of the climate change ministry, Syed Abu Ahmad Akif, said Pakistan is among the top seven countries most vulnerable to climate change.

Pakistan is also falling short of its water requirements, and does not have the resources to convert seawater to drinkable water.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1257639

CALL FOR ADOPTING NEW TECHNIQUES, GOOD AGRICULTURE PRACTICES
Business Recorder, May 11, 2016

Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam (SAU) Vice Chancellor Dr Mujeebuddin Sehrai emphasised the need to educate farmers about the new techniques in good agriculture practices so the farmers may get more products of their crops. He was speaking at an inaugural session of four-day training of trainers (ToT) started on Tuesday, mostly farmers and government officials from the two districts, Dadu and Mirpurkhas participated. The event was organised jointly by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam. The farmers hailing from rural areas of the two districts attended the training.

The VC said there are much challenges, facing farmers in Sindh province, especially those residing in the areas, like Mirpurkhas and Dadu, which are at the mouths of disaster in shape of droughts and flooding. The ToT titled "Improved crop production and management systems and approaches under the project of livelihood restoration, protection and sustainable empowerment of vulnerable peasant communities in Sindh province.

He said Sindh province is rich in natural resources and it is up to all the stakeholders, including government, educational institutes, researchers and farmers to utilise their efforts to use the same in sustainable way. He appreciated farmers in remote areas for showing interest in learning new techniques and urged upon them to transfer knowledge to new emerging farmers to avoid impacts of climate change and other issues they face in the fields.

The VC also asked faculty members and farmers to get knowledge from the neighbouring countries and the world and apply the same here to get more input and benefit the agriculture communities. He said there is more work being done in the agriculture sector, water resources mapping and livestock management in the world and we have to take it for our own learning and replicate the same here.

FAO project co-ordinator Mumtaz Mangi, giving introduction of the project and importance of this training, said it will benefit farmers and relevant officials of government departments of two districts, Dadu and Mirpurkhas, where this project is being implemented. The objective of this training is to enhance the capacity of government departments, working in these two districts.

He said FAO is leading technical agency in the world, involved to bringing change in attitudes, enhance the skills of participants, and transfer innovative knowledge to agriculture workers. He expressed the hope that farmers and officials of government departments of these two districts may learn more and replicate the same in their areas. Mumtaz Mangi further said that ultimate benefit will go to the peasant's community in these two districts. He asked participants to do something innovative, something new and prove themselves being a model for the farmers, who are facing challenges in their fields.

He said when there are threats of disasters, climate change, depleting resources, FAO with technical support of Sindh Agriculture University is working to avert the losses and protect the crops through imparting knowledge to farmers. He appreciated the role of SAU, saying "we have to tell the world that there are parallel institutes like universities working for the cause". Professor M Ismail Kumbhar sharing highlights of the event said these trainings are must to transfer knowledge to farmers, regarding using safe seed, land management and using water sources. This is the key to increase per acre product.

The training covered subjects like good agriculture practices, seed variety selections, land preparation and taking care of sowing season, crop water requirement, insects pest and disease management, production of high value vegetables, green manure techniques and others. The organisers have engaged leading trainers of the Agriculture University to continue interactions with farmers and government department officials.

http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/44760/

REHABILITATION: HORTICULTURE COMPANY NEEDS TO BE RESTRUCTURED
The Express Tribune, May 11th, 2016.

KARACHI: The All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) has urged Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir to immediately restructure the Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC) for giving a boost to the sector's exports.

In a letter written to the commerce minister, PFVA Chairman Waheed Ahmed said the PHDEC had been dormant and was wasting a considerable administrative budget without any output. It should be revitalised and strengthened expeditiously as announced in the trade policy framework for 2015-18, he said.

Ahmed noted that a decision on appointment of a regular CEO had yet to be made by the ministry and it should be taken without any delay to enable the PHDEC to function effectively. The PHDEC is a federal body with the objective of developing horticulture and taking care of distinct exportable products in all four provinces. "Therefore, the PHDEC's head office should be in the federal capital with field offices in provincial capitals as well as production clusters," he suggested.

Ahmed was of the view that the PHDEC should develop a horticulture strategy in collaboration with federal and provincial institutions and in consultation with the PFVA, which was an important stakeholder and familiar with ground realities, trends in international markets and demand-supply issues that affected exports.

During the tenure of previous government, he alleged, many people were appointed in the company on political considerations including the chief executive officer.

Last year, he said, the ministry tried to rectify the situation by terminating services of the CEO and reconstituting the board of directors comprising a group of motivated stakeholders.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1100852/rehabilitation-horticulture-company-needs-to-be-restructured/

PLEA FOR EARLY HEARING OF SUGAR CANE PRICE CASE TURNED DOWN
Dawn, May 13th, 2016

HYDERABAD: A division bench of the Sindh High Court, Hyderabad circuit, comprising Justice Sadiq Hussain Bhatti and Justice Mohammad Junaid Ghaffar on Thursday turned down sugar cane growers' plea for an early hearing of their case pertaining to the fixing of cane price.

The court fixed the next hearing for Aug 17 (after summer vacation) but the petitioners moved an application praying for a shorter date, May 19 or any shorter date, pleading urgency of the issue.

Barrister Blosch Ahmed Junejo filed the urgency application on Thursday after the bench adjourned the hearing of three identical petitions, challenging the Sindh government notification fixing the cane procurement rate at Rs172/40kg, to Aug 17.

The counsel filed the application on behalf of Nabi Bux Sathio which was supported by the applicant's affidavit in the constitutional petition (198/2016).

The counsel submitted in court that the matter required its immediate indulgence in view of extreme urgency of the matter.

Declining the request, the bench observed that the matter had already been adjourned to Aug 17 after hearing the petition [filed by Mushtaq Nizamani] on May 11.

Mr Nizamani through Barrister Junejo had filed a separate petition urging the court to direct the provincial government to revise its Jan 4 notification to a more reasonable price, i.e. Rs185/40kg, keeping in view the economic parameters, written representations and assessments forwarded by sugar cane growers during the current season.

He prayed to the court to direct the Sindh government to disclose the documents, written assessment, criteria and reasoning, relating to the cost of production and market evaluation, making the basis of the fixing of Rs172/40kg price.

He described it as an illegal, unlawful and arbitrary notification and called for its suspension.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1257947/plea-for-early-hearing-of-sugar-cane-price-case-turned-down

HORTICULTURE COMPANY GETS ONE-YEAR LIFELINE
The Express Tribune, May 13th, 2016.

KARACHI: On the request of fruit and vegetable exporters, the Ministry of Commerce has put off the closure of Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC) for one year.

Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) had requested Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir to give a one-year extension to the PHDEC – the only body working for the development of horticulture with primary focus on exports – to improve its performance.

Earlier, the ministry had decided to close the PHDEC because of its poor performance.

The minister took the decision during a meeting with PFVA Chairman Waheed Ahmed in Islamabad on Wednesday, according to a press release.

They agreed to fully revive the horticulture company to enable it to resolve issues faced by the horticulture sector and promote exports.

Ahmed briefed the minister about other issues related to the horticulture sector, especially the difficulty in tapping Iranian markets after the withdrawal of international economic sanctions from the neighbouring country.

He said despite the opening of Iranian markets to exporters all over the world, commercial banks in Pakistan were hesitant to issue E-Form to the exporters. “The reluctance on the part of banks will deprive Pakistan of the lucrative Iranian market where other competitors are already stepping up efforts to make inroads,” he said.

He also outlined the challenges for exporters in European markets, especially in the way of mango exports. A full-time competent CEO should be appointed and its head office should be in Islamabad with field offices in provincial capitals. The company should develop a horticulture policy in collaboration with federal and provincial institutions and in consultation with the PFVA, which is an important stakeholder.

The association is of the view that horticulture exports can be increased to $1 billion in the next two years and $6 billion in 10 years, if a comprehensive horticulture development strategy is developed.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1102443/horticulture-company-gets-one-year-lifeline/

FACILITATING FARMERS: FOOD MINISTRY FOR CONTINUING FERTILISER SUBSIDY NEXT YEAR AS WELL
Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of National Food Security and Research has expressed interest in continuing with the di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) subsidy for farmers with deduction at source of the provincial share from the divisible pool of taxes.

According to sources, the food security ministry has forwarded a proposal to the finance ministry seeking allocation of funds for the DAP subsidy for next year as well.

The federal government, in the 2015-16 budget, had set aside Rs20 billion for DAP subsidy with 50% share from the four provinces as per their consumption needs.

Under the scheme, a 50kg bag of DAP fertiliser is provided to the farmer at Rs500 less than the market price, which has helped them reduce the cost of production.

However, the Finance Division and the Punjab government have expressed their reservations about the provincial share as except for Punjab no other province has contributed its due share, despite scores of reminders and meetings with the authorities concerned.

Under the formula, 50% share of the Rs20 billion budget was to be contributed by the federal government and the remaining by the provinces with Punjab having the highest share of Rs7 billion.

The federal government and Punjab have already contributed their shares, but the other three provinces have yet to release the subsidy. Sources said Sindh and Balochistan have agreed, in principle, to provide the amount.

However, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government has refused to credit the amount to the joint account at the State Bank of Pakistan.

In order to avoid the controversy in future, the food ministry has suggested that instead of requesting the provincial governments to release their share, the federal government should deduct the amount at source from the divisible pool so that it could be easy to implement the subsidy scheme.

Under the scheme, the subsidy is given to the fertiliser manufacturing companies that import DAP and provide it at Rs500 cheaper than the market price.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1102999/facilitating-farmers-food-ministry-for-continuing-fertiliser-subsidy-next-year-as-well/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 2nd TO MAY 8th 2016
MANGO — BEST MARKETING PRACTICES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 2nd, 2016

Mubashir Mehdi

PAKISTAN is the fifth largest producer and the fourth-biggest exporter of different varieties of mangoes. While production is dominated by two major varieties — Chaunsa and Sindhri — other varieties such as Langra, Anwar Ratool, Dosheri, Bangan Palia and Neelum are also cultivated.

Mango marketing is in private hands and the role of the public sector is to provide an enabling environment: provision of physical infrastructure, regulatory measures, market intelligence and market promotion.

Well-organised ‘superior’ retail markets are growing particularly in the country’s big cities and retail outlets are setting quality trends. However, the high end markets procure mango from the traditional sources such as wholesale fruit and vegetable market.

The traditional wholesale market lacks a value-oriented approach to feed the supply chain handicapped by the systematic impediments to the post-harvest handling of crops. Consequently, the overall performance of the mango business does not match its potential.

"If mangoes are sweet in taste, nice, neat and clean, then no worry about price," according to a consumer. Major export markets of Pakistani mango are the Middle East and European countries which require certified 'best practices' from the exporting countries.

Since Pakistan is a major mango exporter it is facing issues of quality, grading and pricing.

A joint Australia-Pakistan project — Mango Value Chain Improvement — was initiated in 2006. The 'best practices' if applied correctly, can deliver superior quality mango to the market on a sustained basis. These practices involve: harvesting fruit at the correct stage of maturity; modified harvesting practices; careful de-sapping to avoid sap burn.

And pack house operations should include: washing, hot water treatment, sponge dryer and hot air drying, grading, open air drying and sizing, packing in cardboard boxes, ripening with ethylene gas, and careful handling in transporting to local and foreign markets.

The outcomes of best practices indicated that the growers were able to earn 30-40pc more. Similarly, traders on the value-oriented supply chain earn 5-10pc more profit. The high-end retailers can ensure premium quality mangoes to their high-value customers at 30pc premium price.

However, there is a regular need to support the packaging industry to ensure supply of the reliable packaging material to the premium quality fruit and vegetable traders.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1255616

DAIRY SECTOR FEARS LOSING ZERO-RATING STATUS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 2nd, 2016

Ashfak Bokhari

PAKISTAN'S dairy sector is seeking continuation of zero-rating regime for what it calls the sector's healthy growth and opposes being put in the tax exemption category.

This is one of the five key budget proposals made by a spokesman of Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) before the National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance on April 19. Other proposals include re-transposition of dairy products form 8th Schedule to 5th Schedule of the Sales Tax Act 1990, payment of Rs20bn pending sales tax refunds and implementation of minimum pasteurisation laws.

Most of the MNAs including those from the opposition parties supported the dairy industry's demand which, they said, was necessary for its smooth growth. The association builds up pressure against the sector's likely removal from the zero-rating regime every year as the budget date draws nearer. And its fears arise as the FBR tries to convert the sector's zero-rating regime to exemption mode but the finance ministry has not yet accepted its recommendation. The FBR chairman told the standing committee that this year, too, the board will make the same recommendation because the dairy sector is enjoying too many concessions.

Why the dairy producers insist on the zero-rating is that under this regime they pay no taxes and can also claim refunds on input taxes. If their products are placed in the category of exemption from GST, they will lose this facility. As a result, their cost of production will escalate which they will pass on to the consumers. What may follow is the decrease in the sale of packaged milk and reversion of many consumers to unprocessed milk.

The PDA spokesman also sought abolition of sales tax on by-products such as cheese, butter, flavoured milk and cream sold in packing as these were essential part of a healthy diet. Taxing them can discourage their consumption in middle-class families who prefer to buy unprocessed milk which may not often be of good quality.

Despite being every household's essential item, the production of milk and its marketing is one of the least commercialised enterprise. Although Pakistan is the fourth-largest milk-producing nation, it is still dominated by informal sector and remains undocumented, disorganised and entrenched in age-old production and marketing practices. Only 5-7pc of the country's total milk production is marketed through formal channels.

Meanwhile, a leading Swiss multinational in dairy sector and a Norwegian mobile phone company's banking facility have joined hands in a unique experiment to provide financial access to thousands of dairy farmers and to make disbursement of milk collection payments swift, easy, and transparent. The phone firm ensures delivery of the payment to the farmer's mobile account that they can withdraw from the nearest retailer. Apart from speedy payment, it opens the doors for mobile financial services to them.

Earlier, most of the dairy workers received their payments in cash from the supply agent. Every year, the milk multinational pays over Rs22bn for obtaining milk from various sources in Pakistan.

The cellphone company has, at present, 36m customers and its banking facility, being the country's first and largest branchless banking solution, has 20m customers. While more than a 100m people still do not have a bank account and banks do little for their financial inclusion, this facility, in a way, fills the vacuum.

The dairy sector is at present facing a myriad of critical problems, a major reason being the governments' apathy towards this sector. A recent study shows that the policymakers have always been 'more concerned about the development of the crop sector than the dairy sector'.

This is despite the fact that livestock's contribution to GDP -11.8pc in 2014-15 - remains higher than the contribution made by the entire crops sector. In fact, the study says, the policy-makers 'never had faith in the development of the dairy sector'.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1255612

COSTLY INPUTS REDUCE COTTON SOWING
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 2nd, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

A 5-7pc drop in cotton cultivation was reported from most districts of Sindh in the ongoing crop sowing season up to last week of April. The trend may be attributed to non-availability of quality seeds and high prices of farm inputs.

It is only the DAP fertiliser whose price has come down by Rs500 a bag under the Prime Minister's Kissan Package announced last year, while the urea rate remains unchanged at Rs1,855 a bag.

The Federal Committee on Cotton (FCC) has projected the sowing target for 660,000ha for the province with an estimated production of 4.5m bales. Even if the sowing target is achieved with marginal difference, the desired output figure is unlikely to be achieved. Sindh has not been able to meet the targets set by the agriculture department except for 2009-10 when 4.2m bales were produced.

The initial sowing figures indicate that cotton has been cultivated on 70pc of the area by April 26 as compared to 82pc of last year's corresponding period in Tharparkar:, Mirpurkhas 70pc against last year's 75pc; Umerkot 75pc against 87pc; Matiari 45pc against 50pc; Badin 18pc against 33pc; Tando Mohammad Khan 6pc against 35pc.

It is only in Benazirabad, Jamshoro and Hyderabad where more area has been cultivated against last year's corresponding period. It is 42pc in Benazirabad against last year's 15pc; Jamshoro 40pc against zero acreage; Hyderabad 52pc against 27pc. The sowing, however, would continue till end of June or early July in the upper Sindh.

The agriculture department says the loss in cotton production despite increased acreage last year was caused by rains.

Growers in areas like Sanghar — the country's largest cotton producing district — and also other parts in the upper Sindh are reluctant to grow cotton owing to a number of issues of quality seeds, price, cost of picking, timely availability of water and frequent pest attacks.

They are switching to — among other crops — short-duration vegetables like onion and hybrid variety of green chilli fetching them better returns.

"I will grow sugarcane instead of cotton this season. I expect to get over Rs200/40kg regardless of the cane rate controversy," said Amir Ali Shah from Naushahro Feroz, who last season cultivated cotton on 200 acres. "I am also thinking of cultivating sesame which could fetch me Rs3,000-4,000/40kg too," he adds.

Cotton producers are concerned that the Bt variety has become susceptible to pests like jassid, thrips, pink bollworm and whitefly. They are demanding of the government to take serious measures to help control diseases and reduce spending on pesticides. The unbridled sales of substandard pesticides must be checked, they stressed.

"My crop is one-and-half months old and it is under the whitefly attack. I am forced to control it through expensive sprays," says Zahid Bhurgari of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture. He adds that growers like him don't find any attraction in Bt variety.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1255611

PUNJAB'S RECORD WHEAT HARVEST
Ahmad Fraz Khan

PUNJAB would harvest a record 20.525m tonnes of wheat this year, according to the estimates of the Space and Upper Atmospheric Research Commission. Earlier the food department has been insisting on a figure well above 20m tonnes.

However, the Crop Reporting Wing of the Punjab Agriculture Department has put the figure at 19.541m tonnes, in the revision of an earlier report of 19.20m tonnes.

The wing, which has always been over-cautious, is regularly accused of rigging the crop size. Its estimates, if healthier, create internal pressure on the government to raise the procurement target correspondingly.

Now there is a difference of almost 1m tonnes between its estimates and that of Suparco's.

The grain gained its health for two reasons: massive usage of phosphatic fertiliser and relatively cooler March.

The Di-Ammonia Phosphate (DAP) and NPK saw their usage increasing from the targeted 600,000 tonnes to over 1m tonnes — up 33pc.

The figure represented 54pc improvement over the last three years' average consumption. This led to vigorous grain filling and increasing the yield strongly. The government takes the credit for facilitating the phosphate usage by subsiding it.

The DAP, which used to sell at Rs3,900 a bag before the Rabi season, was brought down to Rs3,400 by the federal subsidy of Rs500 and the market forces dented the price by another Rs200-300, bringing the final cost to around Rs3,000 a bag by the time its usage started. The previous record of fertiliser off-take stood at 780,000 tonnes.

Interestingly, the usage of urea dropped by 13pc during the same period. The reported off-take between October and March remained at 1.7m tonnes, which is 15pc less than last three years' average utilisation. Most of the farmers' investment went to phosphatic fertiliser this year which also helped the crop survive the rust attack in some wheat growing areas.

Another factor, which helped the crop yield was early sowing — up to 80pc in November. Farmers from the cotton belt went for an early termination of their crop and wheat sowing. This gave the wheat crop a good 130-135 days in the field, leading to fuller maturity.

Though the crop suffered early setback in relatively hot December and the first half of January — at the tillering stage –mild March temperatures, with rains at regular intervals, compensated the early stress.

Although January and February had less than average rains ample supply of canal water — 19.75m acre feet, which also matches its historic usage of the province — kept the crop out of pressure for its entire four-month life cycle and helped it gain strength.

Any improvement in crop, which is bartered for a wide spectrum of services at the village level, should provide the much needed socio-economic relief to the stressed farmers.

However, the government needs a strategy to diversify the crop base. This year the wheat acreage increased by almost 4pc. Against the targeted 16.50m acres, it was planted on 17.143m acres.

If only wheat continues to yield better returns, the country and especially Punjab would soon start having unmanageable glut. Its financial and administrative reach would be tested this year as well as when the impact of huge carry-over conflates with a bumper crop.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1255614/punjabs-record-wheat-harvest

IMPORT, SALE OF UREA THROUGH NFML: NA BODY CHIEF URGES PRIME MINISTER TO PROVIDE RELIEF TO FARMERS
Business Recorder, May 4, 2016

Chairman National Assembly Standing Committee on Industries and Production, Asad Umar, has urged Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to provide relief to farmers through import and sale of urea through National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML), a subsidiary of Ministry of Industries and Production. Well-informed sources in Ministry of Industries and Production told Business Recorder that Chairman Standing Committee made this demand in a letter to the Prime Minister, a copy of which has also been sent to the Industries Minister.

NFML has severe governance issues with imported urea of Rs 1.96 billion having been stolen or missed due to connivance of NFML staff mostly hired during the tenure of the previous government and carriage contractors. Presently, two former senior officials dealing with imported urea have been arrested by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). According to sources, Asad Umar, in his letter referred to a meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Industries and Production, wherein the issue of urea came under discussion. The meeting was attended by the representatives of NFML.

He quoted the officials of NFML as saying that urea fertiliser can be imported and sold in mid-country, inclusive of freight cost at Rs 1490 per bag of 50 kg. When a question was asked from the representatives of NFML about urea sale price, they informed the committee that the current price in the market was more than Rs 1700 per bag.

“If NFML imports and sells urea at the lower price currently prevailing in the international market, it will substantially reduce the price of all urea being sold in the country. The total volume of imported urea required to effect this change will not be large. Even a few imported consignments will ensure a change in price by all the sellers in Pakistan due to competitive market forces,” he added.

The total annual consumption of urea fertilizer in Pakistan is approximately six million tons. A price reduction of Rs 250 per bag will put approximately Rs 30 billion in the farmers” pockets without any cost to the government or offering any subsidy. Farmers are going through a very difficult period. They have suffered heavily due to low crop prices, impact of weather and also high cost of farm inputs such as urea fertilizer.

Local urea producers” margins will drop by Rs 250 per bag but their margins will still remain very healthy. Their annual profit after tax is still substantial, even after the price drop. Documents attached by Asad Umar with the letter indicate that the annual profit of local urea manufacturers has increased by 53 per cent in 2015 as compared to 2014.

These documents also indicate that the profit of Engro fertilizer increased by 87 per cent to Rs 15.02 billion in 2015 from Rs 8.02 billion in 2014. Likewise, the profit of Fatima Fertiliser has increased by 147 per cent to Rs 22.84 billion in 2015 from Rs 9.25 billion in 2014. However, the profit of Fauji Fertiliser declined from Rs 18.17 billion in 2014 to Rs 16.76 billion in 2015. “If the government wants, it can provide relief to the urea manufacturers directly but making the farmers pay this additional amount is unjust,” the letter argues.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/42728:import-sale-of-urea-through-nfml:-na-body-chief-urges-prime-minister-to-provide-relief-to-farmers?date=2016-05-04

SOUTH KOREA OFFERS HELP TO IMPROVE RICE CULTIVATION
Dawn, May 5th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: South Korea has offered to cooperate with Pakistan to improve rice cultivation through the exchange of germplasm, hybrid rice production techniques and development of high-yielding salt, drought and pest-resistant varieties of rice.

The offer was made by Tae Seon Park, the Director-General of Korea’s Rural Community Corporation, during a meeting with Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan here on Wednesday.

The Korean official, leading a delegation, said that the two countries can learn much through joint project implementation in hybrid rice production, water management and other resource conservation technologies in rice fields.

The delegation also offered to share their knowledge and experience in designing and manufacturing small- and medium-sized agricultural machinery, which is suited to small farmers.

On the other hand, Pakistan offered to train Korean scientists in “Integrated Pest Management” as it has rich experience in the IPM of cotton and rice crops.

The minister for national food security informed the Korean delegation that agriculture in Pakistan was going through a difficult phase as the international prices of agri-products were declining with improvements in farming technologies and other factors.

In the backdrop of these developments, the government has to support the farming community to make use of all available help and technology to ensure high yields.

South Korea can assist Pakistan in adding value to vegetables, fruits, dairy products and meat, and develop equipment for water reservoirs and high-efficiency irrigation systems such as sprinkler and drip irrigation.

Mr Bosan asked the ministry's officials to prepare a comprehensive plan for export of Pakistani rice, mango, kinnow and dates to South Korea, so that Pakistani farmers could improve their income.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1256253

GROWERS' ORGANISATION DEMANDS GRANT OF SUBSIDY
Business Recorder, May 05, 2016

The office bearers of two growers' organisation have demanded the grant of subsidy on agriculture adding that Kisan Package will be made effective which could provide benefits to growers of the agriculture based country.

Addressing a joint press conference here at Hyderabad Press Club on Wednesday, the President Pakistan Kisan Itehad Khalid Mehmood Khokhar, General Secretary Umair Masood, President Sindh Abadgar Itehad Nawab Zubair Talpur and General Secretary Ali Palh Advocate said that Pakistan is an agro based country and its economy depended on the development of agriculture.

However, they said that since last decade the agriculture produces have been reduced and not at the par which was witnessed in the past. It because of no sufficient research in agriculture sector as being done in other agro based countries and the growers have no choice except to apply foreign study and formula for their agriculture produces, they added.

They said that because of reduction in agriculture produces, the fruits and vegetables are being exported from other countries including India and China. It is the responsibility of the government to provide maximum facilities to growers so that they could be able to get new research and technologies in enhancing yield per acre and make the country self sufficient in agriculture produces he said and added that the growers of neighbouring countries have developed their agriculture sectors as their respective government provided subsidy, research outputs and exempted GST.

The growers of Pakistan could not compete with the growers of India until they not received special attention from the government, therefore, the trade with India is harmful for the growers of the country, they opined. They alleged the commitment of fraud with the growers of Sindh in Tractor Scheme as the provincial government provided benefits to blue eyed landlords in this scheme; they alleged and demanded an enquiry into the matter from National Accountability Bureau.

They also alleged injustices in distribution of gunny bags to growers as the bags were provided to blue eyed persons on the recommendations of elected members of National and Sindh Assemblies. The investigation into the matter will definitely bring the corruption out from the box, the claimed.

They termed Kisan Package of the Prime Minister Muhammad Mian Nawaz Sharif a good step for the betterment of growers but said that its fruits could not reach to their doorsteps. The government should review the package and ensure the provision of benefits to growers, they demanded.

They informed that GST has not been imposed in other countries of the world therefore; it should not be applicable also in Pakistan. The prices of seeds, pesticides and fertilisers should also be reduced so that the same could be reachable at the hands of growers; they demanded adding that the sale of fictitious pesticides should be stopped with immediate effect.

They also demanded the judicious distribution of water and start of work on those water reservoirs which are pending despite approval of feasibility. They also condemned the closure of water in Rohri Canal adding that it caused losses of billions of rupees to growers in 13 districts of Sindh. They demanded the government to take notice of such atrocities of the provincial irrigation department and strict action against the involved persons.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/43126/

PADDY CULTIVATION IN VIOLATION OF BAN
Dawn, May 7th, 2016

MIRPURKHAS: Many influential landlords have cultivated paddy on their land in violation of official ban on sowing the crop in the district but authorities concerned turn a blind eye to them and take action only against small growers.

The government had imposed the ban in view of acute shortage of water in tail-end areas of Nara Canal command area which fall within the district.

According to a handout issued on Friday, the district administration destroyed paddy crop on 25 acres in Khaan area with the help of a poisonous spray.

The handout said Ghulam Hussain Kanio, assistant commissioner of Hussain Bux Marri taluka, DSP Atiqur Rehman, sub-engineers of Jamrao Canal, deputy director of agriculture extension Mirpurkhas and other officers concerned were present during the action.

Last year, the taluka administration had taken action only against some small growers of paddy and did not touch the influential landlords who had committed the same crime.

Office-bearers of Tail Abadgar Welfare Association of Nara Canal have urged the administration to take legal action against all paddy growers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1256773/paddy-cultivation-in-violation-of-ba

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June 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 27TH TO JULY 2ND 2016

EXTREME WEATHER: OUTLOOK FOR AGRICULTURE

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 27th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

WITH monsoon becoming more erratic, in both location and timing, farmers and planners in Punjab are in a fix: what would it mean for agriculture a few weeks down the line if the current pattern holds or, as forecast by the metrological officials, worsens?

High temperature, heavy rain spells and humid-hot conditions replace each other in quick succession.

In the last eight weeks, the weather has touched two extremes; after six weeks of unprecedented scorching heat in the plains of the country in May and first half June, untimely and heavy rains (upper Punjab received over 60mm rains in few hours last Wednesday) have started lashing the fields at short intervals during the last one week.

For the time being, these showers are concentrated in upper and central regions of Punjab, where it is benefitting crops. Rice, being the crop of the area, is at the nursery stage and plantation has not still started. Here, the rains would only help land preparation and provide additional water for plantation stage.

In some cases, it could force farmers to re-do the land preparation exercise — a negligible expense and effort when compared with the benefit that additional water would bring. Fodder and orchards would be next beneficiary of these rains.

Since rains have not lashed South Punjab so far, cotton has largely escaped harmful impact. In the central region, where relatively small acreage of cotton exists, it is at vegetative growth stage and the rains would only help it gain plant health. In addition, it will also wash away white fly, which of late had created scare in the cotton circles. In Punjab, thus, the case is: so far, so good.

But the metrological forecasts generate more fears, especially for cotton crop, when they predicted 20pc more rains this year, mainly in south Punjab — the core cotton belt. More rains, would come over an extended period of time: up to end of August. It means, cotton would keep farmers on their toe right through its life cycle.

Last year, 29pc dent in cotton production brought the national GDP down by 0.5pc.

Punjab has already lost around 1m acres in sowing against a reduced sowing target of 5.7m acres. The crop came under severe white fly attack. The relevant officials of the agriculture department were sent to the field and told to stay there till situation came under control.

Over the last one week, the province had received three unusual spells of rains, and is being ruled by hot and humid conditions between those intervals.

Rains are now expected in southern Punjab (cotton zone) and stay there till end of August. The provincial government convened a meeting last week to take stock of the situation and take preemptive measures. The meeting underlined the need for immediately streaming the seed sector, finalising legal formalities (like Plant Breeders Right etc.). It asked the government to start research programme for which it had already set aside Rs3bn in the current budget.

However, the farmers also maintained that research requires a long-term effort, which would take time to mature. In the meanwhile, the federal government must ensure that relief provided in the budget on import of pesticides reach farmers, and that timely imports make sufficient and quality pesticides available in the country.

On top of it all, the government must announce an indicative cotton price of not less than Rs3,000/40kg so that farmers could invest on their cotton crop with confidence of recovering it at the later stage. Unless and until an indicative price is announced, no other measure could save the crop from further erosion.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1267389

UN UTILISED FUNDS A CRITICAL ISSUE IN DEVELOPMENT
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 27th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE Sindh agriculture department aims to meet important development targets it missed this fiscal year. The department sources said it faced different kinds of issues in the execution of projects like the installation of solar powered and conventional tubewells and provision of bulldozers to every division of the province.

Problems marred tractors' promotional schemes as well, leading to an inquiry by a federal government agency.

As a result, according to official sources, the provincial agriculture department would be surrendering around Rs1bn to the Sindh finance department by the end of the fiscal year owing to the non-utilisation of funds. "But we will included this Rs1bn in our Annual Development Programme (ADP) 2016-17 that is pitched at Rs5.8bn against Rs4.5bn of 2015-16", said an official.

An official source said the department got Rs2.46bn from the finance department in 2015-16 till May, and from it, by June 30 Rs1.5bn would mostly likely be spent. Apart from delayed financial releases, the procedural formalities of the Sindh Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (SPPRA) contributed to the delays in the tendering and procurement process so that eventually the provision of different implements was affected.

The scheme of solar powered pumps/tubewells has not been initiated as the question of subsidy was being finalised. The agriculture department had recommended a cost sharing formula of 50-50pc, 70-30pc and then 80-20pc. Eventually the 80-20pc formula was approved by the government, according to an official source.

It is stipulated that 100 such tube-wells, in addition to conventional ones, would be provided subsidy to farmers.The overall cost of this agriculture engineering wing's scheme is estimated at Rs1bn. A sum of Rs248.14m has been earmarked in FY2016-17.

Mahmood Nawaz Shah of Sindh Abadgar Board says the government should increase the number of total solar powered tubewells as the figure announced in the budget speech is just a peanut.

Likewise, two separation allocations of Rs1,002.15m and Rs1,500m have been made for the subsidised purchase of wheel type tractors for farmers in two on-going schemes. The on-going scheme of installation of tubewells with 50pc subsidy has been allocated Rs133.58m out of the estimated cost of Rs198.58m. Supply of power sprayer scheme with 50pc subsidy has been earmarked as Rs42.78m against the total cost of Rs51.07m.

Growers believe that instead of providing conventional tube-wells the government should promote solar powered tube-wells by diverting funds subsidy allocated for conventional ones.

“Currently, prices of diesel are somewhat affordable but nobody knows when they might start showing a steep rise. If the government can promote solar tubewells in every district of the province it will encourage growers to switch over to this source of energy”, argues Nabi Bux Sathio, general secretary, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture.

The delayed releases, according to a senior agriculture officer, also affected the procurement of six bulldozers for which Rs120m were allocated in this year's budget. “We were first given an installment of Rs60m out of Rs120m in October 2015, but the remaining 50pc was released in the last week of May. The inadequate releases. affected procedural formalities. We need around a 90-day delivery time for such procurement”, he disclosed.

The Sindh government plans to provide 5,000 tractors on subsidy to farmers, but it is alleged that the Sindh government, had earlier specified a particular type of tractor in a clear departure from past policy of leaving it to the growers' choice to buy a tractor of any brand.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1267391

HOT WATER TECHNOLOGY: MANGO FARMERS BRIEFED ON TREATMENT
The Express Tribune, June 28th, 2016.

MULTAN: Mango farmers and exporters were given a briefing on hot water treatment technology and how it adds value to the fruit before it lands in the international markets by Agriculture Information Assistant Director Naveed Asmat Kahlon.

He said in this process the fresh harvested crop was subjected to hot water at a specific temperature for a specific time period for disease control, fruit fly control or disinfestation from other insects.

The process is a prerequisite for exports. The extended hot water treatment is a post-harvest quarantine treatment generally used for fruit fly disinfestation in which the commodity is subjected to hot water at 48 Celsius for 60 minutes which is a prerequisite for export of mangoes to Australia, China, Jordan, South Korea, Mauritius and other countries.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1131514/hot-water-technology-mango-farmers-briefed-treatment/

HOLLOW FERTILIZER GROWTH
Business Recorder, June 28, 2016

Urea off-take in May 2016 was at a 15-year low for the monthly figure at just quarter million tons. That for the first five months of CY16 was at a slightly better 14-year low. For the eleven months starting July 2015, it records another decade low. And surprisingly, it is not even surprising, as urea sales for June are expected to be even weaker.
Much of it owes to delayed buying in anticipation of relief package in the budget. And it sure did come in the form of 'subsidy' on urea and DAP. Another story how the budget documents do not talk about any direct subsidy to urea or DAP. The subsidy is going to be in form of reduced GST, which is set to reduce prices substantially, and part of it is also going to be shared by the local players.

Yes, the urea off-take will surely pick come July, but new lows may well have been found already. Recall that Pakistan has been recording a decline in urea off-take annually for five consecutive years. Pakistan is an agri-based economy, so we are told. Static yields, declining fertilizer application, bad crops, and poor farm economics is what the agriculture sector has been reduced to of late.

It is not all about lows in the fertilizer numbers – the inventories are at an all-time high of 1.77 million tons, or nearly average three-month off-take. That will surely go down as prices go down and pricing clarity arrives – but it would require nothing short of a miracle to beat or even get closer to previous year annual urea off-take number – subsidy or no subsidy.

All this while, we have been told how the fertilizer sector has contributed greatly to the GDP via its contribution in the LSM index. And so it has. The plants have been made more gas available for much of the period, and increased production followed.

Only ironic that it coincided with horrid farm economics and dwindling fertilizer off-take. Fertilizer's was the second largest contribution of around 0.71 percentage point in the 4.7 percent LSM growth for the outgoing fiscal year. If there was ever an apt description of 'hollow' growth – this fertilizer production-offtake mismatch is right up there.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/06/28/2-page/772716-news.html

US ENVOY CALLS FOR REVAMPING AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, July 1st, 2016.

Imran Rana

FAISALABAD: US Consulate's consul general Zachray Harkenrider has stated that USAID is making all out efforts to alleviate rural poverty by helping Pakistan reinvigorate its agriculture on modern scientific lines.

The Lahore based consul general was talking to a delegation of the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) that met him under the leadership of its President Chaudhry Muhammad Nawaz.

Harkenrider said that sustained agriculture growth is imperative for a country like Pakistan to resolve its diverse socio-economic problems. He said that the USAID programme has provided energy efficient pumps at subsidised rates to the farmers.

The US Consul General further stated that the USAID is organising conferences on the importance of solar energy and possibilities to launch joint-ventures in agriculture sector. "These conferences will also help Pakistan stabilise its economy on a sustained basis," he added.

FCCI President Muhammad Nawaz expressed satisfaction over the bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries and said that there was a need to explore new avenues of cooperation to give quantum jump to mutual trades.

FCCI Senior Vice President Syed Zia Alamdar Hussain termed rural poverty as the number one problem in Pakistan.

He said that earlier USAID's energy efficient pump helped Pakistan save 400 megawatts of electricity.

On "Power pilferage in Faisalabad is mainly attributed to agriculture tube wells, which could also be checked by providing solar tube wells at reduced market rates."

Hussain also underlined US role in enhancing the country's agriculture production. However, he stated that production has become stagnate and we need high yielding and disease resistant crops to increase our farm production.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1133812/us-envoy-calls-revamping-agriculture/

MOTORWAY CONSTRUCTION: LAND OWNERS CHALLENGE PROPERTY ACQUISITION
The Express Tribune, July 1st, 2016.

Hyderabad: The Sindh High Court has put the National Highway Authority (NHA), Frontier Works Organisation and other respondents on notice in a petition challenging forced acquisition of a private property for the M9 Motorway project. The petitioners, Baqar Khan and Ashok Kumar, also alleged that they are being harassed.

The petitioners claim ownership of a piece of land, bought in 1997 in Thano Bula Khan taluka some 61 kilometres from Hyderabad on Super Highway. They operate a fuel station, hotel, service station and some shops on the land.

According to the petitioners, the federal ministry of communication and NHA served them a notice to remove the construction but they challenged it in court. During the proceedings the ministry and NHA assured that the notice would be withdrawn and no action would be taken for removal of property on the assurance that he would withdraw the case, they added.

"From 1999 to September 2016, the petitioners have been peacefully running their business," the petition reads. However, on September 10, the M9 Motorway project director again served a notice to the petitioners for the demolition of structures due to alleged encroachment.

The petitioners alleged that the project director and Masood Anwar, an official working for a private company which is part of the projects, are harassing them. They pleaded the court declare the notice null and void, order that the respondents cannot acquire the property without paying due compensation and to stop harassment.

The court ordered the respondents to stop harassing the petitioners and asked them to submit reply on July 21.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1133686/motorway-construction-land-owners-challenge-property-acquisition/

NEED FOR A COHERENT AGRI POLICY
Asad Ejaz Butt

An agriculture exhibition in Lahore a few weeks ago attracted academics, development practitioners and industry experts associated with the agriculture sector to exhibit entrepreneurial agri products, talk about the menaces prevalent in the sector and conduct a policy dialogue to reach a conclusive agenda aimed at a potential transformation.

Agriculture policy has been an area of much debate in Pakistan and understandably so, given the country's reliance on its primary produce for both exports and domestic usage. However, despite the arguably exaggerated claims that the sector contributes around 25% to the GDP, it hasn't been receiving the attention it once garnered or one that it usually requires. Attribute some of that to the burgeoning services and tertiary sector in South Asia, read with Pakistan where the service sector presently contributes 55.5% to the GDP, and the rest to the low value propositions and over-complicated supply chains involved in the agri export business.

National revenues lost to capital imports exceed revenues earned from agricultural exports by a fair margin. The wastage and handling issues involved in the logistical component of the agricultural export process make the entire venture less profitable and eventually less viable.

Evidence is surfacing that productivity in the sector is declining creating a pressing need for policy formulation, dialogue and rigorous implementation in the field. In addition to low productivity, the sector is also threatened by the existence of multiple bottlenecks that sabotage the pre-production, production, processing and post-processing phases of the agri-supply chain.

As part of the expo conference proceedings, Shahid Najam, Vice Chairman of the Shahid Javed Burki Institute of Public Policy at NetSol (BIPP) gave a presentation. He conducted a diagnostic test on the value leakages existent in each of the aforementioned phases of the agri supply chain.

The leakages, as identified by Najam, were resulting from a number of contributory factors. They included lack of economies of scale due to absence of bargaining power, low quality farming inputs, ineffective crop rotation and water mismanagement resulting in salinization and perpetual water shortages, lack of skilled workforce and advanced processing capabilities, and inadequacy of eco-designs, product diversification and consumer traceability.

Najam utilised the agri expo forum to propose what he called the 'intervention model' to forge a structural and developmental transformation in the sector. The model outlined a territorial participatory and value chain development approach to making the agro transition.

The approach hinged on four distinct pathways to attainment of the envisaged structural and developmental transformation. These pathways also contribute toward the removal of the value leakages identified during the diagnostic testing process. The four pathways are; (i) Finance, (ii) Physical Infrastructure, (iii). Marketing Intelligence and Information Systems and, (iv) Capacity Development.

From a financial perspective, the model recommended innovative financial services for small and medium sized farmers and SMEs. This included mobile and branchless banking services where input providers reach out to rural customers at a low cost to transfer funds and pay for purchases. Rural leasing and value chain financial services could be another area of financial intervention where government and donor agencies could perform financial advisory and intermediary services to jumpstart operations.

Upgradation, maintenance and capacity enhancement of the existing physical infrastructure including warehousing and storing apparatuses are key to waste minimisation and efficient and timely delivery of products to the markets. The concept of Agri malls that provide storage and warehousing facilities for fertilisers, seeds, grains and pesticides, machinery and farming equipment and infrastructure for diesel and lubricant sales could be introduced and advanced by both public and private stakeholders involved in the agriculture sector.

The sustenance of the agriculture sector is largely dependent upon the institutionalisation and streamlining of the marketing and supply chain processes. Agri malls definitely provide a platform that enables rural farmers to trace/profile their target markets, enact market competitive products and come up with processes and mechanisms that simplify the supply chains to minimise wastage and lead times.

Criticism is usually meted out to the agriculture sector and people involved with it for declining yields and productivity. The model reckons that the sector is extremely vulnerable to external supply shocks such as the ones emanating from weather fluctuations.

Recurrent flooding with poor disaster management protocols that includes inadequate hazard warning and response systems can be held responsible for the part of the declining productivity and increasing exit trend of farmers from the market.

With effective market intelligence systems in place, the government aided by local agriculture market committees, can evolve early warning and response mechanisms and record client feedback for timely and efficient grievance redressal.

Matching skills with capacities have been another issue arousing much concern within the sector. Rural centers that have been prioritised by the government for provision of agricultural inputs and infrastructure facilities either don't require such an intervention or don't have the basic skill set to benefit from incoming governmental assistance.

http://www.brecorder.com/articles-a-letters/187:articles/62375:need-for-a-coherent-agri-policy?date=2016-07-02

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 20TH TO JUNE 26TH 2016
ADDRESSING THE SEED CRISIS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 20th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

THE government will soon unveil its national seed policy that will set up goals, directions, actions and responsibilities and provide a level playing field for the private and public seed sectors for meeting quality seed needs of the farming community. The policy draft is now awaiting final approval.

All activities pertaining to research, seed production, distribution, processing, storage, seed certification, seed quality control, marketing, import, export, seed regulations, training and human resource development will be governed by the national seed policy.

The focus of the 'National Seed Policy' will be to provide highest quality of seed having genetic and physical purity of the prescribed seed standards. Only five classes of seed: pre-basic, basic, certified-I, certified -11 and approved seed would be recognised in the certified seed production programme. The seed standards currently in vogue will continue.

An official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research stated that raising the quality of seed is undoubtedly a highly important area of thrust for achieving efficiency and productivity.

To encourage seed production by the farmers, seed crop insurance scheme will be launched. The government recognises that the role of the public sector is necessary for open pollinated crops like wheat, cotton rice and pulses.

The public sector seed corporations will be run on commercial lines and will have complete control over their operations with no interference from the government. Their operations will not be subsidised to provide a level playing field for the private sector.

To encourage investment in crop variety development and research and to protect the interests of the plant breeders, the government would provide conducive environment under a suitable regulatory framework. This framework will facilitate the breeder to benefit financially from his investment while serving the farmers' needs and the nation's agriculture and food security agenda.

The government will also announce incentives to encourage private sector to invest in research and variety development, seed production and distribution.

National seed companies, joint ventures with foreign companies or foreign seed companies bringing technology, investing in local research and seed production will be eligible to receive special incentives such as: import and export tax exemptions, remittance of profits and dividends and availability of state land for 50 years lease extendable for another 49 years.

Exemption of local 'taxes' will be allowed for at least 10 years on investment in research and on quantities of hybrid seed produced by the private seed sector.

The amended seed law 2015 and the Plant Breeders' Rights law would protect technologies and investments made by multinationals etc.

Public sector research results will be freely available to the private sector. A good understanding between the public and private sectors will be nurtured to identify needs for research and exchange of data and information.

Germ-plasm is the basic building block for evolving new varieties. It would be freely available for crop research programmes.

Currently, there is no research institute in the country to carry out research in seed science and industry.

To ensure timely supply of the required quantities of pre-basic seed by the public research, an agency independent of the breeders which may be called as 'Foundation Seed Cells' will be established at the provincial research institutes. Each cell will work under the direct control of the respective director general (research). These cells will handle production of seed of all crops for one or more research institutes and will be fully equipped to handle and store seed for a long time.

The provincial research institutes would be provided with necessary financial, infrastructure and human resource support to establish Foundation Seed Cells for various strategic crops on a sustainable basis.

To encourage local hybrid seed production, multinational seed companies will be encouraged through various incentives like duty-free import of parental lines and exemption of 'taxes' at least for ten years.

A pilot project may be started to support small scale farmers to boost the use of certified seed for achieving higher productivity of strategic crops.

Over 760 seed companies including five multinationals have been allowed to do seed business in the country to date.They meet about 23pc of the country's total seed requirement.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1265938

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: PLANT BREEDERS RIGHTS BILL STUCK FOR PAST 10 YEARS
The Express Tribune, June 20th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: The involvement of a huge annual business of agriculture seeds valuing Rs40 to Rs60 billion is a key hurdle to passage of the Plant Breeders Rights Bill, which has been stuck in parliament for the last more than 10 years.

In the absence of this law that safeguards intellectual property rights of seed companies, existing producers market not only expensive seeds for agricultural crops, but they are also substandard. This has largely hurt the interest of farmers and the national economy at large.

A powerful lobby, associated with the seed business, is erecting stumbling blocks in the way of passage of the bill that, if passed, will break monopoly of the local seed companies and protect rights of new innovative companies.

For the time being, no respectable foreign seed company looks willing to pour capital into Pakistan where only 10% to 15% of certified seed needs are met annually.

At present, around 750 seed companies are operating in the country. Many MNAs and MPAs, among other influential people, are running these companies and are lobbying to block the legislation process, says an official of the Ministry of Textile Industry.

According to sources, the substandard seeds, besides implications of climate change, are primarily responsible for the 30% fall in cotton production in the current season. Consequently, growth of the overall agriculture sector fell in the outgoing fiscal year 2015-16.

In a bid to increase cotton production, a key cash crop on which the entire textile industry depends, the Ministry of Textile Industry has drawn up scores of recommendations.

It suggests that no compromise on quality and seed germination should be tolerated and quarantine rules should be amended in order to allow import of hybrid cotton seeds in a joint venture arrangement and on technology transfer basis.

It also calls for speeding up amendments to the Seed Act 1976 and promulgation of the Plant Breeders Rights law that was approved by the National Assembly standing committee on national food security and research last year.

There is wrangling over control of the relevant department as the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and the Intellectual Property Organisation are vying to bring it under their fold.

“If the bill is passed, it will ensure intellectual property rights of foreign companies and they will come and invest in Pakistan’s industry,” says the textile ministry official.

Statistics show India produces more cotton than Pakistan, but it has only 220 seed companies that produce high-yielding varieties.

In 2013, India produced 36 million bales of cotton compared to an output of 13.1 million bales in Pakistan. India needs 2.5 kg of seeds for cultivation over a hectare of land with certified seed supply at 98%.

However, Pakistan needs 12.5 kg of seeds for a hectare with availability of only 13% certified seeds.

India enacted the Plant Breeders Rights Bill in 2001 under which hybrid and open-pollinated seed varieties were available. On the other hand, Pakistan supplies only open-pollinated seed varieties in the absence of Plant Breeders Rights Act.

Compared to cotton yields in countries that depend on the irrigation system such as China, Australia, Israel, Turkey, South Africa, USA and Egypt, it is the lowest in Pakistan.

The productivity in Pakistan is 700 kg per hectare against 2,100 kg in Australia. For this and other reasons, cotton production in Pakistan has been stagnant for the past 18 years.

The output of cotton and other major crops can be enhanced manifold through supply of quality seeds and adoption of latest technology, which is possible if the country frames stringent laws with an effective implementation mechanism to ensure transparency.

There is also a need to register seed companies, growers, retailers and distributors for keeping a track record.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1125896/intellectual-property-plant-breeders-rights-bill-stuck-past-10-years/

KISSAN PACKAGE IS WORTH RS 30B, NOT RS 341B
The Express Tribune, June 22nd, 2016.

Shahbaz Rana

ISLAMABAD: A recent document of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exposes the government's false promise of setting aside over Rs300 billion for peasants when it never intended to spend even 10% of the amount on them.

While the government announced Rs341 billion in Kissan package last year, documents sent to the global lending agency promise about Rs30 billion in actual spending.

A Letter of Intent and an attached Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) that Finance Minister Ishaq Dar sent to IMF Managing Director on March 10 reflects what actually the government wanted to spend.

"Budgetary spending as a result of new agricultural spending package (0.1% of GDP) will be absorbed within the existing expenditure envelope, including at the provincial level," the MEFP states.

Pakistan's 0.1% GDP comes to around Rs30 billion. While there were concerns about the budgetary impacts of the Rs341 billion package, the government told the IMF the spending will not affect the deficit target of 4.3% of GDP.

The written assurance to the IMF highlights the deceptive policies of the government, which has been severely criticised for ignoring the agriculture sector in its three years in power. This eventually resulted in the negative growth in the sector that employs about 45% of Pakistan's total labour force.

When asked to comment on the report, Finance Ministry spokesperson Dr Shujat Ali promised to respond but did not call back until the story was written.

Over three dozen ruling party lawmakers are said to be united against the government's economic policies, threatening to revolt against the party. Almost every third parliamentarian in his budget speech highlighted the miserable condition of the country's farming community.

The federal government has also announced a Rs50 billion cash package for the farmers in the upcoming fiscal year in the shape of subsidies on fertiliser and electricity. However, the budgetary allocations for the new fiscal year are not sufficient to meet these expenditures.

Last September, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif unveiled the Rs341 billion Kissan package, boasting it would bring prosperity in the lives of 1.2 million farmers. The package was intended to alleviate the sufferings of farmers, who suffered massive losses due to slump in commodity prices and growing input costs.

However, the IMF document clearly shows the government's aim was never to give such a big bounty to the poor farming community.

The Kissan package is the second initiative of PM Nawaz that has failed to fully materialise following the miserable outcomes of Prime Minister Youth Loan package due to alleged mismanagement by the National Bank of Pakistan. Against the initial estimates of giving Rs100 billion loans under the scheme, so far disbursements remain in the range of Rs8 billion.

A food and agriculture official said about Rs15 billion have already been disbursed in the shape of subsidies on phosphate fertiliser. Cotton and rice growers of Punjab got about Rs24 billion in assistance out of which the federal government's share was roughly Rs12 billion.

The government had promised ensuring the banks disburse Rs616 billion agriculture credit but between July and April, the credit amount stood at Rs368.7 billion, according to the State Bank.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1127838/kissan-package-worth-rs30b-not-rs341b/

HIGH IMPORT DUTY ON TRACTOR PARTS TO HURT LOCAL MAKERS
Dawn, June 23rd, 2016

KARACHI: The import of completely built up (CBU) tractors is now allowed at 5 per cent duty while parts for local tractor production are subjected to 17pc general sales tax and 10pc duty.

Al-Ghazi Tractors CEO and Managing Director Mohammad Shahid Hussain said this is not logical and it clashes with the policy of localisation. He urged the government to implement a zero rate on parts or levy a 5pc duty in line with CBU import.

He said a cut in GST to 5pc from 10pc would revive the tractor industry and support farm mechanisation.

He pointed out that an anomaly between input and output tax. The new sales tax would create cash flow problems for the manufacturers. He further added that since input tax is levied at a much higher rate against output tax, considerable refunds from the government are increasing on a regular basis.

The industry was already suffering from a GST blow and a stoppage of substantial refunds. The GST revision only on tractor makes it difficult for the industry to sustain its operations.

He said the budget proposal by tractor makers called for a reduction in the rate of input taxes on the purchase of components (local and imported). The proposal, if implemented would help the cash-starved industry to attain yearly refunds of up to Rs700 million which would enable manufacturers to innovate further and provide more useful and cost-effective options to local farmers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1266615

COTTON FARMERS ADVISED
Business Recorder, June 23, 2016

Cotton farmers have been told to take timely measures to save their crops from possible pesticide attacks. A warning issued by the Punjab Agriculture Department on Wednesday also said its Pest Warning Wing had identified the hot spots of various pests in the province.

A report by the wing it had identified three spots of the jassid attack in Faisalabad, 13 of jassid, 11 of white fly, 14 of thrips and six of army worm in Khanewal and four of white fly in Sahiwal. Experts have advised farmers to consult their local Agriculture Department to use new pesticides and rid their crops of weeds because of the post-rain spell.

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185:pakistan/59520:cotton-farmers-advised/?date=2016-06-23

POOR QUALITY OF SEED BEHIND DAMAGED COTTON CROP: CM
Business Recorder, 24 June, 2016
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif presided over a meeting at Committee Room of Punjab Assembly, here Thursday, which reviewed damage caused to cotton crop and precautionary measures for next crop.

Addressing the meeting, the Chief Minister said that government is fully aware of the loss caused to the cultivators due to cotton crop. He lamented that farmers suffered a loss and the agriculture research institutions did not pay any attention in this regard. He said that loss was caused to cotton crop due to poor quality of seed and the economy affected.

He said it is intolerable that the farmers have to bear the loss due to negligence or laxity of research institutions. Shahbaz Sharif said that concerned institutions did not take solid steps for preparing new variety of cottonseed. He said that action will be taken as per rules and regulations against the officials of the institutions that did not discharge their duties in preparation of quality seeds. He directed that work should be started immediately on emergent basis for quality cottonseed.

He directed to immediately evolve a plan for pest management system and added that production can be increased by timely use of pesticides in an effective manner. He stressed upon the need to take immediate steps for eliminating spurious agri medicines. He said that agriculture department should present a comprehensive plan in this regard.

The Chief Minister directed that immediate steps should be taken for the preparation of Plant Breeders Rights Act. Provincial Minister for Agriculture Dr. Farrukh Javed, Members National & Provincial Assembly, Syed Sajid Mehdi, Syed Hussain Jehanian Gardezi, Sajjad Haider Gujjar, Secretary Agriculture and concerned officials attended the meeting.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/06/24/23-page/771623-news.html

CM PUNJAB SAYS RS 100 BILLION WILL BE SPENT ON AGRICULTURE
Business Recorder, June 25, 2016

Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif has said that Rs 100 billion would be utilised on the development of agriculture sector and welfare of farming community during next two years. He said that out of this amount 50 billion rupees will be spent in the coming financial year whereas 50 billion rupees will be utilised in the next fiscal year.

He said that the purpose of this historic agriculture package is uplift of agri. sector and betterment of farmers. He said that farming community will fully benefit from the splendid agri package of billions of rupees. He said that reduction in prices of fertilisers, power tariff of agri tube-well and agri implements will provide relief to the farmers in the real sense.

He expressed these views while talking to Assembly Members belonging to various districts in Punjab Assembly Chamber, here Friday. The Chief Minister said that federal and provincial governments have given a glorious package for the prosperity of farmers and its implementation will change the destiny of farmers while agriculture will flourish.

He said that Punjab government will give interest free loans to small farmers having up to 12.5 acre of land. He said that Punjab government will pay mark-up on these loans and no burden will be put on cultivators.

Shahbaz Sharif said that a sum of five billion rupees has been allocated for cotton research as production of quality cotton seed is need of the hour to increase agri production. He said that a comprehensive strategy is also being adopted for provision of quality seed to cultivators.

The Chief Minister said that a historic agri package of 100 billion rupees has been announced first time in the history of the country and its implementation will result in uplift of agri sector and prosperity of farmers. He said that it will be ensured that the benefits of agri package should reach the farmers.

The Chief Minister said that the target of the government is to increase per acre yield and prosperity of small farmers. He said that the agri package will also make up the losses caused by recession at the international level.

He said that agriculture is the backbone of national economy and Punjab government has taken revolutionary measures for the development of agriculture sector and prosperity of farmers. He said that the goal of national prosperity can be achieved through development of agriculture, livestock and dairy farming. He said that promotion of agri technology can help in strengthening of these sectors.

He said that development of agriculture, livestock and dairy farming is essential for elimination of poverty and unemployment form the country. He said that besides research and development, transfer of the results of agri research to farmers is of vital importance.

Assembly members while paying tributes to Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif for given a historic agri package for the welfare of cultivators and development of agri culture sector said that that they have won the hearts of farmers.

Those who met the Chief Minister included Munawar Ahmad Gul, Sajjad Haider Gujar, Malik Ahmad Saeed Khan, Syed Muhammad Mehfooz Mashhadi, Lieutenant Colonel Sardar Ayub Khan (Retd), Raja Abdul Hanif, Chaudhry Zahid Akram, Naeem Ullah Gul, Qaider Iqbal Sandhu, Amant Ullah Khan Shadikhel and Chaudhry Muhammad Ashraf. Mansha Ullah Butt MPA was also present on the occasion.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/60113/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 13TH TO JUNE 19TH 2016
MOVE TO SOOTHE FARMERS' NERVES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 13th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

AS promised, the federal budget has gone far to sooth farmers' nerves. It has met almost the entire range of growers' demands for cutting production costs.

The electricity rate was reduced to Rs5.30/unit. The price of urea was cut by Rs400/bag, a bag of DAP by another Rs300, and the mark-up rate by 2pc.

The budget added Rs100bn to the credit tally and abolished special general sales tax on pesticides import. The steps are truly historic, given the earlier meagre budgetary allocations for the sector.

However, the post-budget debate in agricultural circles revolves around whether the government has gone far enough to revive the sector. Some farmers' bodies and experts, however, accuse the government of a bad bargain; providing temporary relief at the cost of the long-term health of farming.

They do acknowledge that if the urea is sold at Rs1,400/bag, instead of over Rs1,800, the DAP costs Rs2,500 rather than Rs3,900 and the electricity rate is brought down to Rs5.35 instead of Rs8.85/unit, the farmer would get some relief. But the question remains, how would this relief outlast any further deterioration in the cost of output?

Beyond this debate, everyone is happy for one thing: the federal government, for the first time, has acknowledged that the performance of the agriculture sector is pivotal to the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP).

Farmers are happy that the government has realised the centrality of the agriculture sector in development planning. This certainly augurs well for the sector in the long run.

The farmers say that the problem concerning their economy is two-fold; the cost of inputs as well as the price of output. The government has focused on only one side — the cost of inputs, leaving the other one in the cold.

Without ensuring the market price of output through support price mechanism, no amount of relief would help the sector. The farmers protest only when commodity prices fall below their cost of production, otherwise they have been surviving with the prevailing cost of production for the last six year.

By bringing the cost of farm inoputs down, without allied steps for market stability, the government will only increase the farmers' problems as well as its own. These price reductions would only lead to additional usage of all these inputs, increase productivity, create market gluts and lead to further, and regular, price crashes.

That is why farmers have been insisting on two things simultaneously: bring down cost of production as well as fix bottom line for commodity prices through support prices.

Farming is hit by low productivity and climate change. The low productivity is the result of a combination of many factors — bad seed, poor farm practices and poorer technological base — all of which need new research. The recent cotton debacle only clarified the length and of depth of a disaster climate change could wreak.

The farming community, along with other demands, has also been asking the government to invest in research and development. The budget completely ignored this part due to its invisible and intangible nature. The budget, as expected, only touched those areas that could keep farmers off the streets.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1264523

SINDH MEETS ITS WHEAT PROCUREMENT TARGET
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 13th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE Sindh Food Department has met its 1.1m tonnes of wheat procurement target for the 2015-16 season, with its stocks rising to 1.48m tonnes from 0.38m tonnes carried over from 2014-15.

Simultaneously, the provincial borrowings from the State Bank of Pakistan swelled to Rs82bn, inclusive of Rs47bn of previous years.

The food department sources say for procuring wheat stocks this season, the provincial government borrowed Rs35bn from the State Bank of Pakistan. During 2014-15, 0.9m tonnes of wheat were procured.

To reduce its stocks, Sindh has been allowed to export 0.3m tonnes of wheat, with a 50-50pc subsidy to be shared by the federal government. A source confides that the food department has, however, proposed to the provincial government that it should ask the federal government to share 60pc of the subsidy; as the crop from the province is mostly exported to Afghanistan through a land route which becomes expensive for Sindh's traders/exporters. Last year, the province exported 93,500 tonnes of wheat against a target of 0.4m tonnes. In this regard the food department has moved a summary to the Sindh chief minister.

Locally, Sindh releases 100kg wheat in a jute bag for Rs3,340 and in a plastic bag for Rs3,275; inclusive of subsidy."Technically, another subsidy of Rs800 per bag is included in the issue price of Rs3,250. This is for fumigation, bardana, transportation, incidental charges and SBP's mark-up," argues an officer. If the government does not pay this Rs800 subsidy, he says, the issue price will go up to Rs4,050 per 100kg wheat bag.

While billions go into subsidy, farmers' complaints about availability of bags and irregularities in distribution of gunny bags are common, delaying setting up of procurement centres. Even Sindh Food Minister Syed Nasir Shah recently conceded that the procurement process was hit by unusual delays and needed significant improvement.

The growers have to go through a cumbersome procedure to acquire gunny bags. It starts with an application to the district food controller (DFC) along with required documents – attested copies of form-VII to prove ownership of land, receipt of 'dhull' paid to revenue department), etc. A landowner gets a limited quantity of bags. If he has cultivated 200 acres of wheat, he would get bags for 50 acres, i.e. eight bags per acre or 400 bags in all. It is in line with official policy to procure 25pc of the total crop.

For 2015-16, the food department had fixed a procurement target of 1.1m tonnes, against the targeted production of 4.4m tonnes.

Growers pay a refundable cost (security deposit) for the bag. These expenses include delivery of crop to the procurement centre or godown, cost of loading and unloading, transportation, etc. According to farmers they pay Rs8,000 for the transportation of 120 bags from Matiari to Hyderabad, Rs50 for loading and unloading plus miscellaneous expenses that take the overhead cost to Rs108.33 per bag. This cost is to be deducted out of the support price.

"Influential individuals don't even pay the cost of gunny bags, yet they are able to get the official wheat price in many cases," says Haji Nadeem Shah, who didn't get any gunny bags for wheat he cultivated in Matiari. Timely payments, he adds, are delayed deliberately to force growers to withdraw their demand for gunny bags and sell their produce to traders, who then sell it to the food department to make a quick buck.

For the last two years, says an officer, the support price was higher than the open market and therefore everyone was poised to sell their wheat to the food department. The Open market price varied between Rs1,050 to Rs1,100 per 40kg against the government's rate of Rs1,300.

"Of course, in any political government every parliamentarian wants to sell wheat to the food department; even those growers who usually keep a certain quantum of crop for seed purposes preferred selling their crop to us," he adds.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1264522/sindh-meets-its-wheat-procurement-target

PROTESTS ACROSS SINDH OVER 'COLOSSAL LOSS' FEARED DUE TO ROHRI CANAL CLOSURE
Dawn, June 13th, 2016

HYDERABAD: Alarmed by the heavy losses feared to be incurred by each and every grower whose land is fed through the irrigation channels offtaking from the main Rohri canal, various growers' organisations and other stakeholders, as well as the Pakistan Peoples Party-Shaheed Bhutto (PPP-SB), Sindh Abadgar Board and Sindh United Party, on Sunday organised rallies and demonstrations in different parts of Sindh against the provincial government for failing to get the Phull fall regulator repaired so as to avoid the situation.

The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), held a meeting in Hyderabad on Sunday to take stock of the situation and expressed its grave concern over the continued closure of the canal since the damage to the regulator was noticed.

The meeting was chaired by SCA president Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar.

It apprehended that the closure would cause a loss of crops on 2.9 million acres. "The closure is largely due to incompetence of the irrigation department which did not check the regulator's maintenance during the annual canal closure in January," it observed.

The organisation called for exposing the negligent officers bringing them to justice. It noted that the Rohri Canal closure could cause a collective loss of Rs900 billion to growers.

It urged Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah to take stern action against the irrigation officers found responsible for the colossal loss.

The meeting was attended by Nabi Bux Sathio, Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, Syed Aijaz Nabi Shah, Mohammad Khan Sarejo and others.

The PPP-SB organised rallies and demonstrations in Hyderabad, Sukkur, Jacobabad, Nawabshah, Naushahro Feroze, Dadu, Badin, Khairpur, Ghotki and several other districts on Sunday to demand immediate repair of the regulator and release of water into Rohri canal to save growers from heavy losses.

Carrying banners and placards inscribed with slogans against the Sindh government and irrigation department, the protesters marched through the streets of various cities and towns. Hundreds of farmers, growers and tillers, as well as activists of nationalist groups, took part in the protests.

They alleged that the regulator sustained damage due to criminal negligence of the officials concerned and indifferent attitude towards the problem by the irrigation minister and secretary.

They warned of a massive movement to be launched if immediate attention was not paid to the problem and the officials responsible for negligence were not punished.

In Malkani Sharif town of Badin district, several hundred growers whose lands are fed through the irrigation channels linked with the Khairpur Gumboh subdivision continued their days-long protest over unavailability of water.

Led by leaders of the Sindh Abadgar Tanzeem and various associations of traders, they announced an indefinite closure of businesses in the town from Monday.

Pir Fayyaz Hussein Rashdi, Malik Tariq Mehmood Arain, Haji Ali Bux Malkani and others told journalists that they along with affected growers would hold a march up to the damaged regulator to register their anger and indignation.

They said the CM himself should encamp himself at the regulator to supervise the repair work at the site and ensure immediate completion of the work as it was an issue that could lead to a big crisis.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1264377

CENTRE'S INTERVENTION SOUGHT: PUNJAB GOVERNMENT UNVEILS RS 3,000 INDICATIVE PRICE OF COTTON
Business Recorder, June 14, 2016

Tahir Amin

The Punjab government has sought federal government's intervention by announcing Rs 3,000 indicative price of cotton per 40-kg for 2016-17 and the procurement of two million bales to address the issue of low price, it is learnt.

A letter, written by Minister for Agriculture, Punjab Dr Farrukh Javed to Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, a copy of which is available with Business Recorder, states that it is feared that even 50 percent sowing target may not be achieved if some farmer-friendly intervention from the government in the form of an indicative price of Rs 3,000 per 40-kg (Phutti/seed cotton) is not announced.

It states that cotton is Pakistan's main foreign exchange earner and is the life line for the agrarian economy of Pakistan as it feeds vital raw material for all value addition industry of cotton. Cotton farmers across the country have suffered huge loss during the previous two consecutive years. Last year due to untimely rains and pest attacks, farmers did not even recover half of the price viz-a-viz their cost of production.

Keeping this scenario in view, farmers are generally reluctant to sow cotton during the current crop season. Government of Pakistan undertook measures to procure cotton during crop year 2014-15 through Trade Corporation of Pakistan (TCP), though this was not a well planned and timely intervention as they entered the market belatedly and bought very poor quality lint from ginning factories.

This lint is still lying with TCP and it has become almost impossible to sell the stock at reasonable prices, although the middlemen (ginners) are getting fair prices and selling the same quality of lint at higher rates.

The provincial government urges the federal government to announce indicative price now and to direct the TCP to make advance arrangements to buy at least 2 million bales of good cotton at appropriate stage starting from the first picking of the cotton.

http://www.brecorder.com/market-data/stocks-a-bonds/0:/56400:centres-intervention-sought-punjab-government-unveils-rs-3000-indicative-price-of-cotton/?date=2016-06-14

FARMERS DON'T FIND AGRI PLANNING IN PUNJAB BUDGET
Dawn, June 15th, 2016

LAHORE: Farmers on Tuesday termed the provincial budget an effort to "supplement and complement" the federal budget rather than an exercise into new ventures, which are badly required at the provincial level to restart the agricultural sector.

The entire chief minister's relief package worth Rs45 billion, which was supposed to be spent on development of the sector at provincial level, seem to have gone into supplementing federal subsidy instead of development, they insist.

Khalid Mahmood Khokhar of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad is the most ardent critic when he says: "One fails to locate provincial budget – planning for the next year. All that one can see is subsidies going into same areas announced by the federal budget. Out of Rs45 billion package, Rs11.6bn would be spent on fertiliser subsidy, which was announced in the federal finance bill.

"Sharing credit markup with the federal government would cost Punjab another Rs17.7bn and so would be its contribution of Rs7bn to electricity rate cut. Take these Rs35 billion out of provincial package and what kind of development it can undertake is hard to imagine."

The package was never meant to provide relief, but purely for development of the sector, says an official of the Farmers Associates Pakistan (FAP).

The federation had been promising relief and has been preparing packages and claiming political mileage, whereas Punjab had been pledging taking care of the development of the sector.

It was meant for strategic intervention that could put the sector back on its feet. Research and development was supposed to be major component and so was climate change. With the Met department already threatening 20 per cent more monsoon rains, rainwater harvesting could have been another component.

There is no way one can ignore seed development, and seed development does not mean any one crop but the entire range of crops. However, it does seem to be the case and the provincial government seems to have fallen off the beaten track; go for politically convenient areas and then term it an exercise in strategic intervention to put the sector back on track.

The Punjab failed to meet its agriculture targets this year, and with this kind of strategy, it was planning to fail again, he regretted."Same money would count on both sides," explains Sarfraz Ahmed Khan of Kissan Board Pakistan, who had also been member of Federal Board of Revenue.

The federation and Punjab both could take credit for the entire money being spent on relief. But their effort could run into trouble if Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh refuse to contribute their part and instead go for their own packages to placate their own farming constituency.

The KP did it last time when the federation came out with its relief package last September. This time Sindh may also join the fray, hiding behind the same logic of not being consulted before hand. If that happens, the federal effort could run into trouble. But, Punjab, on its part, has not performed as per farmers' expectation.

It has not been judicious with money and has thrown everything into temporary relief rather than long-term planning and health of the sector, he concludes.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1264918

RS3.97BN ALLOCATED FOR 45 AGRI PROJECTS
Business Recorder, 15 June 2016

PESHAWAR: The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has allocated a fund of Rs.3.97 billion for 45 development projects in agriculture sector under annual development programme (ADP) for financial year 2016-17.

Targets set for the fiscal year in agriculture sector are included bringing of 163,000 acres of land in districts D.I. Khan and Tank under Gomal Zaman Command Area Development Project. The project is aimed to bring positive change in the economy of the province.

During next year beside the installation of 786 drip and furrow irrigation system, 393 water courses will be constructed and 600 water courses will be repaired and maintained while 260 water tanks will also be constructed.

For the next financial year, the provincial government has also set a target of the installation of 163 solar tube-wells while the establishment of a corporation is also included for the production of seed at provincial level.

Similarly, a back yard farming project for the cultivation of vegetable and fruits is also planned for the socio-economic uplift of women while beside the provision of agriculture machinery for small farmers, land development projects are also included in the ADP for the year 2016-17.

Furthermore, the status of Kaghan Agriculture Research Station will be up-graded and a sub-campus of the Agriculture University Peshawar will also be established in Nowshera while several new steps and projects will also be introduced for bringing increase in the production of poultry and livestock to alleviate poverty.

During next financial year 5 million olive plants will also planted while orchards on an area of 3,220 acres area will also be grown. Similarly, he said that 0.1 million plants of fruit bearing and olive plants will also be distributed in the farmers while 26800 metric certified seed of wheat will also be distributed for increasing wheat production.

The provincial government will also establish 603 technology transfer centre for production of the seed of wheat, maize, rice, peanuts and grain in the province while beside treatment of 1,921,000 cattle, 1,745,000 cattle will be vaccinated and artificial insemination will be carried out in 325,000 cattle.

Besides, 195 check dam, 80 protective walls, 30 spell way, 45 out-let and 60 reservoirs for the storage of rainy water, 40 diversions walls will also be constructed. A total of 137 reservoirs will also be constructed for water storage while 30 old livestock dispensaries will be rehabilitated and Insaf Veterinary Clinic will also be established. Fish aquariums will also be established in all public sector schools in the province.

The provincial government is also taking special measures for development of trout fish hatcheries, which are the identity of cold water and areas and a source of livelihood to develop it on the modern lines.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/06/15/12-page/769291-news.html

NA PANEL FOR UREA IMPORT BY PRIVATE SECTOR
Business Recorder, 15 June 2016

Zaheer Abbasi Islamabad : The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Finance has recommended to the government that the import of fertilizer (urea) should be opened for private sector to provide immediate relief to farmers and subsidy on DAP (fertilizer) be maintained at Rs500 instead of Rs250.

The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Finance which met under the chairmanship of Qaiser Sheikh, invited representatives of various sectors to listen to their viewpoint on the budget for the next fiscal year and how it was being viewed by them.

After listening to the viewpoint of various sectors of the economy during the last two meetings of the committee, the committee recommended that differential in income tax may be reduced to 4 percent income tax as final tax on import of raw materials by commercial importers and 2 percent adjustable income tax on the import of raw material by the industry.

The committee recommended that 10.5 percent excise duty should be maintained on Carbonated Soft Drinks (CSDs).

The committee also recommended to maintain zero rating on dairy and milk products, reduce custom duty on Phthalic Anhydride from 16 percent to 11 percent as it is a raw material for paint, buttons and plasticizers industries.

The committee asked the government to ;(i) exempt sales tax on agriculture machinery and waive off 10 percent GST on purchase of tractors;(ii) rice export should be maintained on zero rating and sales tax exemption should also be provided on import of machinery, adding that rice being second largest export sector has been badly hit for last two years; (iii) increase of tax duty (55 paisa per kg) on cement industry may be reviewed; (iv) educational stationary should continue to be zero-rated from sales tax and their inputs should also be zero-rated from customs duty by placing.

The committee was informed that some industries are misusing this facility. The committee members also expressed concern that the government decision regarding audit of industries will not resolve the matter, rather it will create cumbersome problems and delays.

The members further informed the committee that the said proposal has already been recommended by the four federal ministers that 100 percent of the running Basic Pay may be granted to the officers and staff of the above concerned Sections & Offices in order to enhance the performance of the Parliamentary Business.

The committee recommended to Ministry of Finance & Revenue to consider the matter.

The committee decided to hold a meeting with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar today (Wednesday).

Those who attended the meeting were Saeed Ahmed Khan Manais, Rana Shamim Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Pervaiz Malik, Sheikh Fayyaz-ud-Din, Mian Abdul Mannan, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Ms. Leila Khan, Dr Nafisa Shah, Jehangir Khan Tareen, Asad Umar, MNAs as well as senior official of Finance Division, the FBR and Finance Ministry.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/06/15/5-page/769206-news.html

FOUR INJURED AS TENANTS, MILITARY FARM MEN CLASH
Dawn, June 18th, 2016

SAHIWAL: Four people, including two women, were injured seriously in a clash between the Bail Ganjh Military Farm administration and Anjuman Mazareen representatives, Pakpattan district, over a wheat harvesting issue on Friday.

Reports said the personnel of the military farm, Elite Force and Chak Badian police baton-charged mazareen, resorted to aerial firing and fired teargas shelling to disperse them from Bail Ganjh Military Farm. Consequently, Mian Khan Wattoo, Mukhtar Ahmed, Kulsoom Bibi and Fazain Bibi suffered injuries. They were shifted to the RHC in Bunga Hayat.

Anjuman Mazareen Pakpattan President Basir Ahmed said they had taken a stay order from the Lahore High Court against the wheat harvesting in the military farm. "But the military farm administration forcibly want to cut wheat from their farms", he claimed.

Sources said the clash occurred when the military farm administration brought heavy harvesters. At this, the mazareen gathered there and did not allow them to cut wheat. Hot words were exchanged which led to skirmishes.

The farm administration called Chak Badain police which along with Elite Force personnel resorted to baton charge to disperse around 30 representatives of the AMP.

It is learnt the farm administration continued the harvesting of wheat after the law enforcers dispersed the mazareen.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1265647

FERTILISER SUBSIDY: CENTRE, PROVINCES ON SAME PAGE
The Express Tribune, June 19th, 2016.

KARACHI: Finance Minister Ishaq Dar on Saturday urged all provinces to continue their cooperation in the issue of providing fertiliser subsidy, in a bid to support the agriculture sector.

Dar had announced massive reduction in prices of fertiliser – urea and DAP – and urged all provinces to contribute in helping farmers who have suffered through the contraction in agriculture sector.

The budget measures are part of the government's efforts in helping the sector that employs roughly 40% of the country's workforce and contributes around one-fifth to GDP.

Dar said this during a meeting which he convened to discuss the modalities for implementation of relief measures announced for the agriculture sector.

The minister said that the government had given due priority to the agriculture sector and hoped that the measures will be complemented by the provincial governments.

He referred to the decrease in fertiliser prices and said that it was made possible after lengthy negotiations with the manufacturers, according to a press release of finance ministry.

The provincial ministers welcomed the measures announced by the federal government and said that they were equally keen to provide support to the farmers who had been facing a difficult situation due to falling commodity prices and high cost of inputs, the release said.

It was decided that the subsidy would be provided through a joint federal and provincial package for farmers.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1125432/fertiliser-subsidy-centre-provinces-page/

TRACTOR PRICES TO DROP BY UP TO RS80,000 AFTER CUT IN SALES TAX
Dawn, June 19th, 2016

Aamir Shafaat Khan

KARACHI: The government’s decision to cut sales tax on imported and locally-manufactured tractors to five per cent from 10pc will bring down prices by Rs35,000 to Rs80,000 per unit, depending on the power of the engine, the industry says.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced the cut in ST while addressing the National Assembly on Friday.

Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (PAMA) Chairman Sohail Bashir Rana said the price of a 50 horsepower (HP) tractor would come down by Rs35,000, followed by 50,000-54,000 in 75-85HP, whereas four-wheel drive 85HP tractor price would decline by Rs80,000.

He said market reports suggest the government was likely to implement the ST decision either from June 24 or from July 1. Cut in ST coupled with incentives to the agriculture sector in Budget 2016-17 would augur well for farmers, and the tractor and allied industry.

On possible increase in sales of tractors in the upcoming fiscal year after 5pc reduction in ST, he said much would depend on production of various crops, their prices in the local and global markets, and prospects of exports.

However, there may be slowdown in sales of tractors during the current month as farmers may wait for the implementation of budget decision to avail price benefit on farm machinery. He urged the government to quickly implement its decision by issuing notification.

He recalled tractor makers had a tough current fiscal year due to poor agriculture sector performance coupled with farmers’ wait-and-see attitude over tractor subsidy scheme announced by Punjab and Sindh governments in Budget 2015-16.

After losing hope over non-execution of subsidy scheme, farmers resumed tractor buying from January 2015 onwards pushing up sales every month. But the sales for July-May FY16 remained lower compared to the same period of the last fiscal year, he said.

Fiat sold 11,653 tractors in the 11-month period compared to 15,703 a year earlier while Massey Ferguson sold out 18,208 units compared to 26,155.

According to Economic Survey 2015-16, the agriculture sector as a whole witnessed a negative growth of 0.19pc against 2.53pc growth during the same period of the last year. The growth of sub-sectors including important crops, other crops and cotton ginning posted a negative growth of -7.18pc, -0.31pc and -21.26pc, respectively.

During 2015-16, the cotton crop was sown on an area of 2.92 million hectares, showing a decrease of 1.5pc over last year’s 2.96m hectares. Cotton production for the year 2015 stood at 10.074m bales against 13.96m bales last year, reflecting a decline of 28pc.

Sugarcane production for the year 2015 increased to 65.5m tonnes from 62.8m tonnes of last year’s production, up by 4.2pc. Rice production remained 6.8m tonnes, showing a decline of 2.7pc over last year’s record production of 7m tonnes.

The production of wheat stood at 25.48m tonnes during 2015-16, up by 1.6pc over the last year’s production of 25.09m tonnes.

Maize crop production stood at 4.9m tonnes during 2015 showing a decrease of 0.3pc over the last year’s production of 4.94m tonnes.

Gram crop, one of the largest Rabi pulse crops in Pakistan which accounts for 76pc of the total production of pulses in the country and occupies about 5pc of the Rabi cropped area, witnessed a decline of 17.7pc. The production of barley and rapeseed and mustard witnessed decline in production by 3.2pc and 1pc, respectively, during 2015-16 as compared to the same period last year. The decrease in production is due to decreased area of cultivation.

During FY16, the production of potatoes, chillies and onions grew 3.4pc, 2.1pc and 0.2pc, respectively, compared to a year ago.

In pulses, the output of maash, masoor (lentil) and moong fell 15.6pc 4.4pc and 0.8pc, respectively.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1265768/tractor-prices-to-drop-by-up-to-rs80000-after-cut-in-sales-tax

MEASURES FOR AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT REVIEWED
Dawn, June 19th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Ishaq Dar on Saturday chaired a meeting to discuss the modalities for implementation of relief measures for agriculture sector announced in the budget 2016-17.

The meeting discussed in detail the subsidy on fertilisers announced in the budget and the mechanism for its disbursement, and it was decided that the subsidy would be provided through a joint federal and provincial package for farmers.

The meeting also discussed other agriculture related measures and decided to continue close liaison and coordination for country-wide impact on the agriculture sector.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, provincial finance and agriculture ministers and senior officials of relevant ministries attended the meeting.

Mr Dar said that the government had given due priority to the agriculture sector in the budget, and hoped that the measures announced by the federal government will be complemented by the provincial governments with a view to ensure that the decline in agricultural growth is reversed and the sector achieves a healthy growth rate in accordance with its potential.

He referred to the decrease in fertiliser prices by the industry and stated that it was made possible after lengthy negotiations with the manufacturers. He emphasised that the provincial governments should continue to demonstrate the spirit of cooperation for the promotion of the vital agriculture sector.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1265767

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 6TH TO JUNE 12TH 2016
THE POLITICS OF AGRICULTURE
Dawn, June 6th, 2016

Umair Javed

THE announcement of sector-wise growth numbers provides confirmation of some of the problems facing agriculture in Pakistan. A negative growth rate of 0.19pc, on the back of a 28pc drop in cotton production, is worrying not just because it chops off nearly 0.4pc from overall GDP growth, but because nearly 40pc of the labour force is associated with the farm economy.

Crisis in Pakistan’s agriculture sector is not a new development. In the last 15 years, the sector has grown at an average of 2.2pc per annum. A slump in global food prices since 2008 along with weak demand of agricultural exports shoulders some of the blame for the stagnation. In the same time period, production of cotton, the country’s most important crop, has fluctuated rapidly.

Part of this is because it faced exogenous challenges in the shape of pest attacks and bad seed quality, but partly because of an incentive problem — led by sugar mills — that pushes farmers to switch cotton producing acreage to sugarcane.

This persistent, decade-long slump in the farming sector has invoked several reactions. The PPP, during its time in government, responded by consistently raising support prices for wheat and sugar. This had the impact of shifting the urban-rural terms of trade in favour of the latter, thus increasing cash flows towards producers (while making commodities expensive for non-land-owning households).

The PML-N, in the face of protests by organisations representing medium and big farmers, such as the Abadkar Board and the Kissan Ittehad, first announced a farmer package, and has now announced a bundle of pro-farmer measures in Friday's budget. This includes input subsidies, a reduction in the electricity tariff for tube-well use, removal of sales tax on pesticides, and removal of duties on imported feed.

It is not difficult to understand why the PML-N, otherwise a party led by urban industrialists and businessmen, jumped into action with this budget. Last year's local government election results in Punjab highlighted the importance of independent candidates and their electoral panels, who ended up winning nearly 45pc of all rural seats. Most, if not all, of these candidates belong to the market-oriented landed class, and hold diversified interests in cash crop farming and agro-processing.

In rural Punjab, mid-sized landowners play an important role as political intermediaries. They are responsible for organising vote blocs, known as dharras, and negotiate with parties and candidates for specific goods and services.

While they are mostly self-serving in their demands, they cannot ignore the interests of fellow farmers while making political decisions. In a similar vein, large landowners, who may have political ambitions as candidates themselves, cannot ignore the interests of these intermediaries if they intend on doing well come election time.

In a scenario where the agricultural commodity crisis continues, it is completely plausible that rising disaffection with the incumbent government's inaction pushes many political landowners — who've just joined the PML-N — to try their luck with other parties.

While traditionally, the PPP has represented rural interests in the province, the PTI currently acts as the more attractive option for the politically aspirational. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, in its new role as the predominant opposition party, it is in a better position to capture anti-incumbent votes.

There is countrywide recognition of the PTI as a staunchly anti-PML-N option. Secondly, a segment of their leadership has strong roots in rural areas, with leaders such as Shah Mehmood Qureshi being former office-bearers of several farmer associations.

With general elections just two years away, and a number of other image-damaging problems currently afflicting the government, PML-N cannot afford to alienate the rural elite and middle class. What this likely means is that support to agriculture will go up, and in the next year or so the government will pour in money into constituency-based development schemes to keep its candidates, brokers, and integral supporters on board.

More broadly, the government providing subsidies and exemptions to farmers further confirms the importance accorded to the elite and the middle class in political calculations. To put this into some perspective, it is worth looking at a much bigger rural crisis plaguing the country for the past many years: During the last four decades, an inter-generational reduction in farm sizes at the bottom of the land pyramid has pushed many small cultivators, tenant farmers and share-croppers into rural wage work.

Nearly 85pc of all farms are now smaller than 10 acres, and approximately 80pc of the rural population is now landless. As a result, rural poverty — which is highly correlated with asset ownership — remains above the 50pc mark, according to the new headcount methodology.

The long-standing condition of crippling rural poverty has not received even half as much attention as the recent slump in farm prices. Apart from some social protection measures, such as the BISP, there is little that this or any previous government has done to help out landless workers in rural areas.

In fact, there has been no concerted agenda to document and ameliorate the conditions faced by an overwhelming majority of rural dwellers, which are disorganised and unable to voice their concerns effectively.

If farmer packages and the sort of measures introduced in the budget are successful, the main advantages will be accrued by large- and medium-sized landowners who produce for the market. In the process, maybe some benefit will pass down to the perpetually ignored landless artisans and rural wage workers.

From a social justice perspective, however, this is an inadequate strategy. If the government is serious about resolving the agricultural crisis, it needs to move beyond a narrow political calculus and broaden its attention to include the rural poor. Otherwise, the structural condition of rural poverty will continue to persist as it has for the last so many years.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1263018/the-politics-of-agriculture

PUNJAB TRYING TO ADDRESS FARMERS' CORE ISSUES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 6th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

AS Punjab prepares for presenting its budget 2016-17 by the end of this week, the provincial officials concerned are optimistic about sizeable allocations being proposed for priority areas like farm mechanisation, seed development and subsidised credit for small farmers.

Around Rs5bn is expected to be earmarked for development of cotton seed.

Similarly, the provincial government has held a number of meetings with the State Bank of Pakistan and commercial banks to evolve a mechanism where Punjab can pick up the entire mark-up amount for loans to small farmers. Another Rs3bn might go to farm mechanisation.

Market development and building of warehouses would also figure in the budget document. This would be on the top of huge array of programmes (wheat seed replacement, certified seed distribution for vegetables and pulses, and development of Olive Valley in the Pothohar region etc) already under execution.

Apart from these initiatives, Punjab is pressing the federation to abolish the General Sales Tax (GST) on agriculture inputs and also withdraw the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC). It is offering to contribute 50pc of tax collection loss from the provincial coffers.

Punjab, which has announced Rs100bn relief package for two years, could afford the money. Out of Rs100bn, Rs10bn would go to the livestock sector and equal amount to irrigation. The province can thus afford up to Rs40bn for agricultural development or relief this year.

Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has been particularly perturbed over the cotton debacle this year. He has formed a number of teams to inquire into the causes and possible pre-emptive measures to escape the disaster in future. Almost all of them stressed the need of certified genuine seed.

Thus, Punjab plans to set aside a huge amount for the seed development. But the crucial question of how to do it is still being debated. Whether the province will go for research and development through its own institutions or private sector or an international player would be invited.

The next big effort will be to boost farm credit. Having computerised its land record, Punjab now wants to utilise the system for e-credit. It wants all commercial banks to extend credit to farmers holding up to a certain ceiling of land, bill the mark-up amount to the provincial government that it would foot. Such moves need a lot of push since banks avoid retailing for smaller farmers and coordination with the State Bank of Pakistan; working out things have not been easy.

Though Punjab is reportedly setting aside over Rs3bn for farm mechanisation, it says that money should not be a problem if the plan takes off. The province could afford as much more if the system can absorb the money.

Under the plan, the province wants to subsidise the entire range of implements for farm development. Both service providers and individual farmers could benefit from the scheme and anyone planning to purchase any implement or replace the old one could avail the scheme.

Fertiliser prices are also on the provincial radar in a big way. Punjab hopes that the urea prices would fall close to Rs1,200 per bag if the GST and GIDC are withdrawn. While contributing half of shortfall in federal collection, it also plans to continue with subsidy on phosphatic fertiliser this year.

The prices have fallen because of official subsidy. Punjab hopes to make huge dent in fertiliser market along with the federal government and meet the major demand of protesting farmers to keep the cost of production down.

These are some of the major areas where officials claimed to have worked hard and hope to see it reflected in the final budget document for next fiscal year.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1262956

SINDH’S AGRICULTURAL UPLIFT HAMSTRUNG BY SLOW FUND UTILISATION
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 6th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE Sindh Agriculture Department has sought policy changes in the upcoming budget for efficient, competitive and sustainable development of the farm sector to help reduce rural poverty and ensure food security.

It plans include value-addition in fruits and vegetables and improvement in farm productivity. On its proposed priority agenda is: the development of hybrid seed; conservation of available water resources by promoting drip/sprinkler irrigation system; lining and construction of water reservoirs; tapping underground water through tube wells, provision of subsidised solar pumps to farmers, and strategy to face climate change.

The development outlay for the next financial has been proposed to be jacked up by 6.4pc to Rs4.79bn from Rs4.5bn in the outgoing fiscal year. But official sources do not rule out an eleventh hour increase in the ADP’s size considering possible changes in the development schemes.

Until last week of May, according to a provincial finance source, the Sindh Finance Department released Rs2.4bn, or 55pc, of the total Rs4.5bn allocated for agriculture sector. An amount of Rs1.3bn was spent on various schemes by May 27. More releases were in the pipeline until first week of June.

According to the source, if the released amount is not fully used or wasteful expenditures have occurred, fiscal discipline will be enforced. Utilisation figures show that 75pc of the released amount was used by the agriculture supply and prices wing and 74pc by the mechanisation department whereas three other sectors reported below 50pc spending on their schemes, ranging from 42-47pc up to May.

The agriculture sources argue that the moot point is not huge allocation but actually the pace its releases by the finance department. According to them, Rs1.7bn was released against Rs4.5bn by April 2016 or a mere 38pc against allocated funds. And out of Rs1.7bn, Rs1.025bn was spent.

For the next year's budget, the agriculture department has proposed 17 new schemes with a total outlay of Rs967.196m. Of these, three are for research sector (Rs90m); five each for agriculture extension projects (Rs145.500m) and farm mechanisation (Rs590m); and four water management schemes (Rs141.696m). Besides, the ongoing schemes are to be completed at a cost of Rs3.8bn.

The proposed Rs4.7bn, allocated for the agriculture sector in Sindh's ADP 2016-17, will provide: 1,200 agriculture implements; subsidy on purchase of 5,000 tractors. In all, 73 solar tube wells would be installed on a cost-sharing basis with farmers bearing 20pc and the government 80pc of the expense..

About 236 tube wells will be installed with a 50pc subsidy. Additional lining of already improved 219 watercourses is to be carried out. Around 300 farmers would be trained and 120 farmers' field schools would be established by the Agriculture Extension Department.

The World Bank-funded Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project will help install 715 tube wells; improve 1,000 watercourses; drip irrigation on 5,000 acres on a cost-sharing basis with farmers meeting 40pc and the government 60pc. A total of 300 laser land-levelling equipment and 100 deep ripping (chisel ploughs) would be provided (on a cost sharing-basis) and 71 community flood shelters would also be set up in different districts.

The slow pace of project execution is attributed by the agricultural department to the fact that the first quarter of allocated funds are usually released sometime in October-November instead of August, if not July, when the department calls bids for works. "There has to be a final date every year when funds should be released so that money is spent accordingly.," says a senior agriculture officer.

The Sindh finance department had linked funds' releases with spending on projects/schemes in the outgoing fiscal year through automated procedure. Under this mode the second installment of funds was released only if 60pc utilisation of released funds was confirmed. "But in case of agriculture department, until May it couldn't even utilise releases of Rs2.4bn," says a Sindh finance source.

The finance officer points out that this year the provincial finance department didn't have any issue of finances and departments were given adequate releases subject to satisfactory utilisation. The Sindh finance department did withhold releases only in those cases in which the planning and development department didn't find performance in tandem with pace of releases. He disclosed that releases of agriculture department remained slow throughout the year.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1262957

PRODUCTIVITY CRISIS IN FARMING
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, June 6th, 2016

Muhammad Ashraf

FOR the first time in decades, the agriculture output shrank 0.19pc in 2015-16. This is significant in view of 2.9pc growth last year and the target of 3.9pc for the current year. The contraction has reduced the share of the sector in GDP to 20.5pc from 20.9pc this fiscal year.

Agriculture is commonly termed as the backbone of Pakistan's economy as, apart from its significant share in GDP, it provides livelihood to 43.5pc of rural population and contributes to 73.1pc to the national export basket.

The secular decline in farm output is spearheaded by a plunge in cotton production from the targeted 15.1m bales (170kg each) to 10.78m bales. Cotton provides raw material for the textile sector which constitutes nearly 60pc of export earnings and employs 40pc of the industrial labour force.

On the other hand, the predicament in wheat is that of surplus rather than scarcity. Due to unsustainable procurement price ($360 per tonne), almost double the international rates, the surplus stocks cannot be offloaded because the combined organisational effort of the federal and provincial governments has been insufficient to counterbalance the market forces.

Sugarcane crop has the analogous problem of contrived overproduction, induced by inflated support price. The surplus sugar is to be exported with subsidy, that too, quite often turns out to be insufficient.

Rice, the only crop with major part shipped abroad, is facing crunch on the international market. The premium quality basmati rice has drastically lost market share to Indian extra-long-grain basmati look-alikes, precipitating the crunch in farm incomes which have been halved during the last two years.

Horticulture, the second largest non-textile export product, is heavily dependent on three fruits (kinno, mango, date) and two vegetables (onion and potato). All these products are facing critical issues — kinno orchards are infested with canker; mango exports face frequent voluntary export bans due to ubiquitous quarantine pests; dates are marketed with low value addition; onion and potato become competitive on the international market only when the domestic market crashes.

Consequently, despite being an agrarian economy Pakistan is a net food importer with $5.03bn imports and $4.56bn exports of food products in the outgoing fiscal year.

The agriculture crisis is not only endemic but systemic as well. At the core of the predicament is the dual problem of low productivity and avoidable market interventions.

Crop yields in Pakistan remain significantly lower than other countries with comparable agro-climatic conditions. According to FAO, “The agro-ecological potential for irrigated wheat in Punjab suggests that yields of about six tonnes/ha could be attained, compared with current yields of 2.5-3 tonnes/ha”. The yields of all other major crops, for example, cotton, rice, sugarcane and maize show a similar picture.

The commercialisable agricultural research in development of indigenous high yielding varieties has long been lacking in the past. The Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan rightfully complains that “Since the approval of Super Basmati in 1995, no high-yield, short-duration, disease-resistant and extra-length rice variety has been developed by Pakistani scientists whereas during the same period India has developed 21 varieties of basmati and its hybrids”.

The Bacillus Thuringiensis (Bt) cotton, developed abroad, accounts for around 90pc of cultivated area in Pakistan. Similarly, almost all the cultivated varieties of sugarcane, maize and potato are developed abroad and adopted in Pakistan. The foreign varieties, developed for different agro-climatic conditions, cannot provide optimum yield. Thus Pakistan’s productivity is bound to remain low.

While ensuring food security, the government is expected to protect farm incomes, which can be secured through either increased price or enhanced productivity/yield or a combination of both. The preferred policy so far has been market intervention through (a) procurement of produce at a higher than real price (for wheat), (b) enforcement of minimum purchase price (for sugarcane).

The increase in price without enhancing yield renders Pakistani produce uncompetitive on the international market and even the domestic market is to be protected through high import tariffs, at considerable cost to the consumer. Conversely, the increase in yield leads to higher returns for the farmers without additional cost to the consumer.

The cyclical price variations driven by open market are intrinsic to the agriculture sector and are not worrisome unless market mechanism is interfered. The price and production cycle in agriculture works naturally — price-boom benefits farmer while consumer pays; higher price encourages over-supply which in turn causes price depression; lower prices benefit consumer while farmer loses; price slump discourages production which pushes the prices upward again, thus completing the cycle.

The cycle is disturbed if the attractive domestic market, during price escalation phase, is opened for foreign producers to bring down the prices. Consequently, the farmer is unable to recover his loss and the government has no choice but to advance outright farm subsidies which are usually insufficient to compensate the loss of farmer's potential gains from the price tide. The farmer, therefore, remains at a perpetual economic disadvantage.

The turnaround of agriculture sector and consequent food security, depends on productivity increase rather than market interventions. To make farming effective in supporting sustainable economic growth trajectory, a policy framework is needed to boost yield of major crops and shift focus to high value agriculture that includes horticulture, livestock and fisheries.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1262954

POLICE TORTURE VILLAGERS PROTESTING SPUR CONSTRUCTION
Dawn, June 9th, 2016

MUZAFFARGARH: Tension gripped the localities of Shehr Sultan town on Wednesday where police resorted to baton charge to disperse a crowd protesting the construction of a spur along the Chenab River.

Protesters say the spur will divert floods towards their hundreds of acres and dozens of villages.

Police registered a case against 200 people, of them 56 nominated, and arrested four people.

Protesters belonging to Mauza Shakir Bela and Darigh resisted the contractor working on the spur by the funding of the Irrigation Department.

The spur has long been a bone of contention as the villagers blocked traffic on the Shershah Bridge last month in protest at the plan. At that time, District Coordination Officer Hafiz Shaukar Ali had persuaded them to disperse with a promise that the spur would not be built there.

The villagers allege the spur is being built only to save the farms of provincial minister Haroon Sultan Bukhari.

As soon as the villagers gathered in Mauza Shakir Bela, District Police Officer Awais Ahmad sent police teams of different police stations to the site. Police tortured the people, including women,

Protesters Jam Manzoor and Ghulam Ali told Dawn that mauzas of Shakar Bela and Darigh had already five embankments along the river but the Irrigation officials had received Rs200 million from the chief minister funds through Mr Bukhari to construct another 7,000-foot long spur at the place where the river slightly changed its direction.

The spur, according to them, will divert the water to the farms and villages located in Shakir Bela and Darigh. They estimate 2,000 acres and 500 villages will be flooded when the river has the peak water flow during the monsoon season.

The people chanted slogans against the government and threatened to commit self-immolation on roads if the irrigation officials did not stop the construction of the spur.

Talking to Dawn, Irrigation Executive Engineer Chaudhry Zahid said the project had been granted from the provincial minister who took special funds from chief minister.

He said he was helpless as the senior officials were taking interest in the project. He said the project would save the land and villages from flooding.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1263692/police-torture-villagers-protesting-spur-construction

BUDGET MEASURES: 'SUPPLY GLUT TO PERSIST DESPITE SUBSIDY PACKAGE'
The Express Tribune, June 9th, 2016

KARACHI: The urea price cut announced during the budget speech bodes well for the industry – as an exorbitant surge in sales volume is expected – but the supply glut is expected to persist, Engro Fertilizers CEO Ruhail Mohammad said on Wednesday.

"In addition to the current price cut, it is necessary that the government takes steps to export surplus inventory to earn foreign exchange," Mohammad told The Express Tribune. On the other hand, a BMA Capital report stated that with the arrival of the Kharif sowing season, along with low prices of fertiliser, the inventory glut problem is expected to ease.

The government, in the proposed budget for 2016-17, announced that urea fertiliser price was to be brought down to Rs1,400 from Rs1,800 per bag, in an effort to bolster the agricultural sector that underwent a negative growth in the outgoing fiscal year.

Of the Rs400 reduction, Rs182 cut is from general sales tax, Rs168 is direct subsidy, and Rs50 retention 'premium' cut from manufacturers, as per the BMA Capital report.

Higher retention price is at which retailers sell fertiliser bags, while the lower selling price is at which the fertiliser manufacturers sell them to retailers, the difference – Rs50 – will be absorbed by manufacturers.

While there will be a negative hit on urea margins of Rs50, it will be partially offset by the increase in volumes.

The price cut is expected to ease the current depressed sales and the industry demand is predicted to escalate.

In reply to a question on short term challenges, the CEO said that the margins of the industry have been squeezed due to the continuous price cuts since September 2015. This was due to a combination of factors such as pressure due to low international prices and poor crop economics. The local inventory glut is another challenge.

However, with continued support from the government through measures such as the current subsidy package, the local industry is expected to be in a stable position, he added.

"We will maintain reduced prices till the subsidy continues. Once the subsidy is exhausted, due to the already squeezed margins, manufacturers will have no choice but to increase prices," said Mohammad.

He added that gas availability for fertiliser plants remained a long-term challenge for the industry..

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1119108/budget-measures-supply-glut-persist-despite-subsidy-package/

UAF SCIENTISTS URGED TO HELP INCREASE FARM YIELD
Business Recorder, June 12, 2016

Punjab Agriculture Secretary, Muhammad Mahmood urged agriculture experts to find solutions to increase farm yield and help solve problems faced by farmers keeping in view new challenges. Muhammad Mahmood was chairing a meeting of University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) and attended by the vice-chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan and all deans and directors of UAF.

He said 'High Efficiency Irrigation System' is not taking off in the country and sought opinion of agriculture experts to make it a success story. He said, they were launching an interest-free loans scheme for the farming community under which Rs 25,000 loan will be granted in the Rabi season and Rs 40,000 for the Kharif season and added that in the future, increases in per acre yield would be linked to the loans.

A huge gap between the yield of progressive and ordinary farmers exists, and added, that awareness and affordability of modern farming methods will help small farmers increase yield and for this they will soon be using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to disseminate agriculture related information which would include weather forecasts, market news, and know-how on input and seed use etc, to enable farmers increase per acre yield.

He said, the government had currently reduced farm input prices by 17 percent and also waived General Sales Tax (GST) on pesticides and hopefully in the future there will be further reduction of input prices to benefit farmers he added.

Punjab Agriculture Secretary further said, the government was planning to establish Agri Hi Tech Machinery Service Centre and directed the UAF to draw business plans in this regard. He further mentioned, that cotton yield deteriorated in the fields due to stagnant rain water owing to a lack of proper drainage. He also urged UAF scientists to devise strategies for agricultural problems, policy making and rural development issues.

He highlighted, that the government was working on drip irrigation system on 20,000 acres run on solar energy and farmers will pay only 20 percent cost and stressed upon the need to devise a strategy to fight the mealybug pest and other crop diseases in order to increase yield.

UAF vice-chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that cotton yield was down since the last 20 years due to climate change. He said that the UAF had developed a short duration of cotton variety called PB 896 this year, and ten varieties of mango with excellent aroma and taste. He said that citrus greening was heavily damaging the citrus crops and steps were being taken by UAF to control the disease. He said that the UAF Department of Entomology was leading the Punjab Dengue Programme. He said that the UAF was the only institutions in the country which was is ranked in the top 100 universities of the country.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/56043/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 30TH TO JUNE 5TH 2016

FARM LOANS UP DESPITE LOW CROP OUTPUTS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 30th, 2016

Mohiuddin Aazim

DESPITE multiple issues including a 7.2pc drop in major crops' output, the bank lending to the agriculture sector remained strong during the current fiscal year.

In the first 10 months (July-April) of 2015-16, banks lent Rs441bn to farmers against the full fiscal year target of Rs600bn. This gross lending is 19.6pc higher from a year-ago period. On net basis, however, farm loans totalled just Rs13bn in 10MFY16 as banks' credit recovery stood around Rs428bn.

A majority of bankers, who oversee lending to farmers, say given the seasonal credit flows pattern, the target is still achievable while some of them don't rule out a slippage.

“In May lending to wheat millers and livestock sector remained strong and in June, too, we hope to make new loans in these and other sub-sectors of agriculture including fish farming, rice and sugarcane crops,” says head of farming credit division of one of the leading local bank..

In May and June rice and sugarcane growers borrow substantially from banks for the two crops whose harvesting is done in winter. Fish farmers also borrow for capacity building for fish hauling that picks up pace immediately after the summer, he says.

Microfinance banks (MFBs) and Islamic banks (IBs) reported a big year-on-year increase of 56pc and 47pc respectively in lending to farmers. “The MFBs lending is significant in that all of their agricultural lending goes to the small farmers and reduces reliance of unbanked farmers on traditional informal lenders,” says a senior central banker.

In terms of volumes, too, MFBs lending of Rs38bn constituted 8.6pc of the total agricultural loans in 10MFY16. “This percentage needs to be doubled in a few years. Only then we’ll be able to make an impact on small farmers’ productivity,” says a senior executive of Khushhali Bank.

Islamic banks’ agricultural lending at Rs6.7bn in 10MFY16 is not too big. “What keeps IBs from lending liberally to farmers is that their branches are too concentrated in urban areas and their ability to develop Shariah-compliant farming loan products is still very limited,” according to a former director of Islamic banking department of SBP.

“Besides, instead of reaching out to the farmers who need money for development, they find it easier to offer agricultural development loans for purchase of machinery and tools.”

Commercial banks extend both development and non-development production loans.

But during 10MFY16, some of them reported a net decline in their agricultural lending more due to structural problems rather than for a fall in loan demand. Four out of 20 banks that reported a fall in farming loans are: Allied Bank, Bank Al-Habib, Bank of Punjab and Standard Chartered Bank.

The first two banks were too focused on expanding their consumer finance base and the third one ran in troubles because it undertook overhauling of agricultural loan portfolio to improve the asset quality, bankers say. Standard Chartered also played safe.

The development loaning to farmers remained at just 8pc of the total (Rs35.5bn vs Rs441bn) in 10MFY16. Normally, development loans account for no more than 10pc of total agricultural credit but given the fact that during this year two credit schemes were in operation, this percentage should have been a bit higher.

The agricultural development scheme announced in the budget and special incentives scheme announced later were aimed at not only boosting productivity through larger production loans but also via investing in farm mechanisation.

The small-scale vegetable and fruit growers and fish farmers got very little. Even rice growers in Sindh continue to wait for the promised concessional loans, agriculturists in the province say.

Many growers also blame some big banks did not make timely loans to small cotton growers for purchase of quality seeds and branded pesticides.

Bankers admit that the net lending to major crops sector declined in FY16 because of historic fall in cotton production that made bankers shy of lending to growers on fears of loan defaults.

Lending to the livestock sector expanded also due to big appetite for loans showed by clusters of dairy farmers that form part of supply chain of food processing companies.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1261509

ADDRESSING LIVELIHOODS OF MOST VULNERABLE

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 30th, 2016

José Graziano Da Silva

AGRICULTURE and rural development are key to strengthening livelihoods of the most vulnerable, including hundreds of millions of small-scale family farmers who are responsible for producing an important share of the world's food.

With increasing frequency and magnitude, disasters and conflicts are causing untold human suffering in many parts of the world. These are as diverse as Typhoon Haiyan, Ebola, the civil war in Syria, to name a few of the more recent crises.

We need more concerted efforts to end conflict, alleviate suffering and reduce risk and vulnerability conditions facing millions of people, most of whom are poor and live in rural and marginalised areas of developing countries.

This, essentially, is the aim of the World Humanitarian Summit convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It seeks to build on the momentum of an extraordinary series of commitments by the international community.

The recent adoption of a sustainable development agenda to end hunger and poverty and to 'leave no-one behind', a universal climate agreement, and a new framework to reduce disaster risk and enhance resilience, are important steps in the right direction.

But we must go much further and radically transform how we perceive and implement humanitarian efforts. Crises are not only humanitarian emergencies. Many are also about neglect and lack of development, and as such cannot be solved by humanitarian action alone.

In practical terms, it means moving beyond responding with short-term relief measures, and invest much more in tackling the root causes of crises. It means building resilience and strengthening the livelihoods of people in ways that not only drive recovery from war, disease, floods and other shocks, but also help to reduce the impact of these crises and, where possible, prevent them from taking place altogether.

Agriculture and rural development are key to strengthening livelihoods of the most vulnerable, including hundreds of millions of small-scale family farmers who are responsible for producing an important share of the world's food. And it is they who are most at risk.

The damage is there for all to see. Extreme weather events, such as those associated with El Nino, wreak havoc across wide swathes of the rural areas of the developing world, animal diseases disrupt food chains and wars force millions to abandon their homes, fields and livestock and become migrants at a scale not seen since World War II.

Meanwhile, the agricultural sector, which bears almost 22pc of damages and losses caused by natural disasters and up to 85pc in case of drought, receives on average less than 4pc of the total humanitarian aid. This provides a stark measure of the widening chasm between needs and the magnitude of response.

In this context, it is crucial to stress that investing in livelihoods is not only the just thing to do, but it also makes sense from a cost-effectiveness point of view by helping to address the root causes of conflict, reduce the impact of future shocks and prevent a deepening of vulnerabilities and the on-set of a vicious circle. Expanding access to social protection systems is crucial to underpin resilience — in humanitarian response as well as in development.

In the case of natural hazards, it is four to seven times more cost-effective to invest in disaster-risk reduction than to rely on emergency response. Yet only 0.4pc of Official Development Assistance is spent on disaster-risk reduction.

Moreover, in armed conflict and protracted crises, protecting, saving and rebuilding agricultural livelihoods to save lives and create the conditions for longer-term resilience is a key step towards ensuring peace and stability. However, the role of the agriculture sector in crises is too often overlooked and the necessary investments are not made.

FAO provides both humanitarian and development assistance. We firmly believe in prioritising early warning, prevention and preparedness to safeguard livelihoods, especially in the rural areas. Around the globe, plenty of evidence exists on the benefits of this and on how it reduces the need for emergency interventions.

More generally, we see how investment in agriculture helps strengthen the self-reliance and dignity of vulnerable rural communities, reducing the need for food assistance. We have found that $200 in support enables a Syrian farmer to produce two tonnes of wheat, enough to feed a family of six for a year and provide seeds for future planting. This is a fraction of the economic cost of food aid, not to mention the dramatic human costs.

If we want to address growing humanitarian needs, we need to move beyond business as usual and manage crises differently. We need to acknowledge that the interventions made must have a long-term impact on the beneficiaries, especially those in the rural areas, and then act accordingly. It is the only way we can ensure that nobody is left behind.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1261504/addressing-livelihoods-of-most-vulnerable

IMPERATIVES FOR AGRI-BUDGET
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 30th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE Punjab agriculture budget this year has assumed an added significance because it is the first budget in provincial history where farmers' agitation would also play some role.

The farmers have been on the streets twice over the last one week in the run-up to the next budget; they held the Punjab Assembly hostage for 72 hours in the first stance and 18 hours a few days later, blocking the main artery of the city (The Mall) for as many hours and vacated the place only after protracted negotiations with the provincial government.

As per their claim, they are waiting in the wings to repeat the performance if the finance bill does not meet their expectations in the light of the promises made by the Punjab authorities.

It would also be the first budget after the recently announced development package of Rs100bn by the Punjab's chief executive.

Since the package was for two years, it can be assumed that it will provide a development outlay of Rs50bn for this year alone — a historic figure for a sector where the entire spending has never crossed 10pc of the newly allocated amount. Thus, the challenges and opportunities are big in equal measure for this year's budget making.

While the farmers' protests were mainly directed against the cost of production and the entire taxation regime (GST on farm inputs, gas infrastructure development cess) falling in the realm of the federal government, there are problems where Punjab cannot escape the responsibility and it must address them in the budget.

Marketing is one such area. The farmers also protested against price crashes. Currently, around 136 markets in the province lack even basic facilities like flooring, water supplies and washrooms. One can hardly wade through the market roads when it rains during any part of the year.

It is a combination of collapsed infrastructural facility and human resource/skills shortage that makes everyone helpless in regulating quality and trade in these market places. Many countries have used the trained middle man for ensuring quality and supply assurance because he is the first, and the most influential contact between farmers and the market. It is time for Punjab to invest heavily in developing human and infrastructural resources.

Similarly, the farm mechanisation and its up-gradation should purely be a provincial headache. The provincial budget should encourage old machinery replacement. Most of the service providers lack resources to buy new machinery.

The Punjab government can certainly develop criteria (like for how many years a service provider has been in the business, what kind of machinery he owns and how much clientele he serves) for meriting official help. This will result in a jump in productivity and increased efficiency.

The third crucial area is seed sanctity. Punjab should ensure through administrative steps and market incentives that only certified seed (packaged, tagged and labeled) is sold in its territory. Here again, it can develop guidelines for doing business and seed development for over 800 registered companies and encourage those that meet a certain requirement of wherewithal for seed development such as fields, machinery, labs and scientific base.

The fourth area, which has proven its utility this rabi, is subsidy on phosphate fertilisers. The DAP prices dipped because of Rs20bn subsidy; they dropped from Rs3,900 to Rs2,600/bag. The subsidy should continue. Punjab would certainly do better to keep its word with the farmer and help the agricultural sector grow.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1261501/imperatives-for-agri-budget

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY SET TO GET SPECIAL PACKAGES: AHSAN
Dawn, June 1st, 2016

Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Ishaq Dar in his budget speech later this week will announce a special relief package for reduction in input costs for agriculture and industrial sectors to boost exports and economic growth rate, Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal said on Tuesday.

Speaking at a news conference, Mr Iqbal also said the army had been assigned the responsibility of spending Rs100 billion allocated for 2016-17 for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of tribal region. The army would continue to look after the job for the next three years, he said.

The minister was caught off guard when asked if crash in cotton production was also contributed, among other factors, by setting up of sugar mills in the southern Punjab’s cotton-producing region by the Sharif family and friends as farmers gave up cotton sowing for sugar-production.

The minister said the Sharif family did not add any sugar mill in the last two years. However, when informed that a new sugar mill had recently been completed in Muzaffargarh, the minister said he had no knowledge.

“The prime minister has directed that farmers be provided relief through fertilisers and reduction in other input costs to turn the economy around,” the minister said. The prime minister issued these directives during a special cabinet meeting on budget he presided through a video link from London.

He said it was government’s responsibility to support farmers and reduce their input costs. “The finance minister will announce special relief measures in his budget speech for farmers,” he said.

A government official said the federal and Punjab governments were currently going through a consultative process to provide around Rs200bn package on a fifty-fifty sharing basis for the agriculture sector, which contracted 0.2 per cent during the current fiscal year and played a critical role in pulling down the country’s economic growth rate to 4.7pc this year against the targeted 5.5pc.

Mr Iqbal said the country achieved 4.7pc growth rate that was highest in eight years but was marred by problems in the agriculture sector. "Had cotton crop not been affected, the economy would have grown by 5.5pc," he said.

He said the country's agriculture sector was in crisis but some people were trying to create gains for their politics. He said farmers were facing tough conditions in many countries including much serious crisis in India and Thailand because international commodity prices have crashed.

One of the key priorities of the government would be to increase agricultural productivity because it would also revive the export sector which itself was suffering because no transformation was allowed over the last 10-15 years for value-added products, he said. "These are the two challenges the government would focus in the budget."

He said the next year's development plan of Rs1.675 trillion approved by the National Economic Council (NEC) would have three priorities — energy, infrastructure and human resources development. He said the Rs800bn federal public sector development programme included Rs655bn for development projects of the ministries and divisions, Rs100bn for development of security and rehabilitation of the displaced people, Rs20bn for youth development and Rs25bn for gas development fund.

He said it was a challenge to squeeze development demands of Rs1.8tr in budgetary ceiling of Rs655bn. Of this, Rs468bn was allocated for infrastructure including power, roads, water and physical planning.

A big chunk of Rs157bn was allocated out of budget for the power sector while corporations would spend another Rs250bn out of their own resources for power projects.

The transport and communication sector would follow with Rs260bn while Rs125bn was allocated for China-Pakistan economic Corridor (CPEC)-related projects.

He said the Planning Commission had closed Rs774bn worth of 600 projects in the last three years and saved Rs570bn by rationalising projects costs. He said that under the prime minister's orders, the western route of the CPEC was given special focus and a 650-kilometre Quetta-Sorab road would be completed by December 2016 and Gwadar-Khuzdar-Ratodero road that would allow Gwadar port's opening to central Asia, Afghanistan and China.

He said the NEC also directed all the ministries concerned to update their outdated policies like maritime policy and industrial policies of early 2000 and the Planning Commission would monitor the process for completion in six months.

The minister said that out of Rs875bn provincial development plans, Punjab would lead with an allocation of Rs460bn, followed by Sindh Rs211bn, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rs143bn and Balochistan Rs61bn.

The NEC took all decisions with consensus and some reservations shown by Sindh and KP were subsequently settled amicably, the minister added.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1261897

20 PERCENT CUT IN UREA PRICE: MOF WEIGHS DIFFERENT OPTIONS
June 01, 2016

Mushtaq Ghumman & Fazal Sher

The Ministry of Finance has reportedly started working on reducing price of urea by 20 percent or Rs 350 per bag in federal budget 2016-17 in the light of directions given by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, well-informed sources told Business Recorder.

The reduction in urea prices will be made possible by slashing percentage of GST on domestic urea and Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) collection from fertiliser plants, the sources said, adding that domestic urea manufacturers are also being asked to contribute to this effect. On Tuesday, the Finance Ministry deliberated on different options at a meeting with different public and private sector stakeholders.

The sources said domestic urea manufactures have assured the government that they were ready to contribute to lowering the price of urea despite the fact that the domestic industry was in trouble because of low sales due to farmers' worsened financial condition. On one hand the government extended subsidy of Rs 20 billion on phosphate and on the other price of gas feed was increased from Rs 123 to Rs 200 MMCFD which implies whatever relief was given to the farmers in phosphate sales was taken right back by increasing price of feed gas which is ultimately passed on to the farmers .

Farmers of Punjab recently held protest demonstrations and sit-ins in Lahore against the policies of the incumbent government, the sources said, adding that Chief Minister Punjab Mian Shahbaz Sharif who is currently in London to be with the Prime Minister during his scheduled open heart surgery requested the Prime Minister to extend a special package for farmers – a request that sources said has been accepted. "Whatever the relief government announces, domestic industry will pass it on to the farmers," said a representative of one of the urea manufacturers.

The impact of taxation on one bag of urea fertiliser is around Rs 700-750. According to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, currently, the urea fertiliser prices are very high due to imposition of number of taxes including GST at the rate of 17 per cent and GIDC. The overall tax quantum of both taxes is (i) GST- Rs 32.05 billion and (ii) GIDC- Rs 41.04 billion.

Ministry of National Food Security and Research estimates that if GST and GIDC are removed then prices of 50 kg urea bag will be reduced to around Rs 700 resulting in substantial reduction in cost of farm production – from Rs 1850 at present to Rs 1150 per 50 kg bag. However, insiders in Finance Ministry argue that maximum reduction in urea prices will be around Rs 350 or 20 per cent per bag which implies that price will be brought down from Rs 1850 to Rs 1500 per bag.

The sources said Ministries of Finance and National Food Security and Research have jointly developed a proposal to reduce urea prices in view of sharp decline in the international urea prices. Ministry of National Food Security and Research has also proposed that the current subsidy on phosphate fertiliser to the tune of Rs 20 billion on 50 per cent share basis picked up by the federal and provincial governments should continue in the forthcoming budget.

It has also proposed that GST on Di-Ammonia Phosphate (DAP) and other fertilisers with an estimated impact of Rs 14.4 billion and Rs 6.80 billion respectively may be removed.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/51985:20-percent-cut-in-urea-price-mof-weighs-different-options/?date=2016-06-01

HORTICULTURE SECTOR: FPCCI FOR SPECIAL INCENTIVES FOR GB IN BUDGET
Business Recorder, June 1, 2016

PESHAWAR: Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) demanded the special incentives for horticulture sector of Gilgit-Baltistan in upcoming budget.

The demand was made by Chairman Regional Standing Committee, FPCCI Ahmad Jawad while speaking to the members of a delegation of growers from Gilgit-Baltistan here on Tuesday.

Jawad said that horticulture sector of GB have a huge export potential but the region lacks the latest technology to switch from subsistence to commercial farming which needs special incentives in the upcoming budget for exports.

“We could earn billions of rupees through fruit exports from GB if federal government will assist and also started daily cargo flights which the PM promised with the people of GB in its two recent visits, he added.

Jawad said Pakistan is the sixth largest apricot producer in the world but its share in the fruit’s export market is negligible. The Dry Fruit Project of Aga Khan Rural Support Programme had recognised market potentials for GB’s dry apricot, apple and mulberry in the UK. While unprocessed apricots are bought at Rs 6-7 per kg, foreign buyers purchase processed apricots at Rs 300 to 500 per kg, and it also helps to increase our horticulture export share globally which is currently at the merge of only 0.3 percent approximately,” he added.

Around 16-57 percent fresh fruit is wasted annually in GB due to traditional fruit cultivars, most food processing units are small, lack vital market linkages and can process only a fraction of the total produce simultaneously.

FPCCI committee chairman said the extension departments must be geared for technology transfer, farmer training, technical advice and supply of crop inputs, and to adopt modern service delivery methods. The number of registered seed producers to multiply and market seeds is insufficient, he added.

Thus, ample water, naturally well-drained soils, conditions favourable to organic farming, feasibility of commercial production of cross pollinated seeds, proximity to export markets (China and Central Asia) particularly, are competitive advantages of horticulture industry, but there is also need to expand other crop varieties in GB to ensure food security and produce export surpluses, he mentioned.

FPCCI standing committee chairman advised to the government that concise policy to improve the potential of this industry is required for enhancing R&D capacity as well as produce pre-basic and basic seeds on commercial scale, synchronising extension services of provincial agriculture departments and the private sector including prioritising construction and maintenance of Tajikistan Road and setting up of functional and equipped processing units in all seven districts for value addition.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/06/01/13-page/764345-news.html

BANK SCROLLS PRODUCED IN COURT TO PROVE SUPPLY OF GUNNY BAGS TO GROWERS
Dawn, June 2nd, 2016

HYDERABAD: A division bench of the Sindh High Court, Hyderabad circuit, on Wednesday directed the food authorities to provide bardana (empty gunny bags)to petitioners as per their entitlement within 10 days time if not supplied earlier, and submit compliance report before June 23, the next date of hearing.

Assistant Advocate General (AAG) Ashfaq Nabi Qazi submitted bank scrolls of nine districts of Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas regions in court.

He stated the petitioners had been provided bardana and their names were mentioned in the bank scrolls placed before the bench.

The court was seized with six different identical petitions on the issue of bardana distribution in various districts of Sindh. After submission of bank scroll and the AAG’s assertion, some petitioners through their counsel insisted before the bench that they did not get gunny bags. They said their produce was getting destroyed. The court ordered provision of bardana to any of the petitioners entitled to receive the sameas per the prescribed policy if he remained deprived of it.

Representing the petitioners, Abdul Rahim Dars, Dr Shakeel Ahmed Palh and Bashir Ahmed of the Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI), Advocate Ali Palh prayed to court that his clients would obtain copies of the bank scroll at their own cost so that they could be tallied with the ground reality. The court allowed his request and directed the office of the court that petitioners be provided the same at their own cost.

The bench observed that the petitioners could file objections to bank scrolls, if any, before the next date of hearing.

The counsel submitted in court that in fact it was a question of Rs1.5 billion transaction involving wheat procurement during the year 2015-16. He said that committees were to be formed as per the guidelines issued by the Sindh government but the proposed committees were not formed. He said he needed time to verify data of the bank scroll.

AAG Qazi argued that respondent authorities had complied with the court directives and names of petitioners who were provided gunny bags were accordingly highlighted in the scrolls.

The AAG produced the bank scrolls in compliance with the court's May 25 order giving him a final chance to produce the deta showing details of the recipients of bardana along with their CNIC numbers and other details.

The SAI representatives in their joint petitions had stated that it was the responsibility of food department to establish procurement centres and distribute gunny bags among growers. Practically, they said, food department would always delay the process so that growers could have no other option but to sell away their produce to traders at a price lower than the official rate. They claimed that gunny bags were provided to traders instead of growers. They stated that the department had not established procurement centres and did not provide bags to growers to enable them to dispose of their produce. They informed court that small growers had already harvested their crop and had to sell the produce in open market at Rs1,020/40kg to Rs1,050/40kg.

The petitioners prayed to court to direct the food secretary and director to announce a clear and transparent procurement policy and establish procurement centres. They urged that the respondents be directed to include small growers and their representatives in the proposed committees supposed to oversee the procurement process.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1262165

GOVT SET TO PLOUGH BIG MONEY INTO AILING AGRICULTURE SECTOR
Dawn, June 3rd, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: In the wake of negative agricultural growth recorded during the outgoing fiscal year, the government is set to announce a comprehensive package of measures in the FY17 budget on Friday to give the sector a boost, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said on Thursday.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2015-16, the performance of the agriculture sector, which accounts for 21 per cent of the economy, remained dismal as its growth fell 0.19pc, with the growth of crops dropping by 6.25pc.

The production of cotton, rice and maize decreased by 27.8pc, 2.7pc and 0.3pc, respectively, whereas sugar production increased by 4.2pc. Wheat production is expected to rise marginally to reach 25.48 million tonnes.

"We can't afford a setback to the agriculture sector and will take collective measures. It's a very big challenge for us," Mr Dar told a press conference while unveiling the economic survey. He blamed low global commodity and oil prices for Pakistan's negative agricultural growth.

The finance minister said that the decline in cotton production alone reduced half a percentage point from the gross domestic product growth and led to the overall fall in the agricultural sector. Against the production of 13.96m bales last year, this year the country produced 10.07m bales of cotton. This resulted in a decline of 21.6pc in ginning as compared to last year.

The production of rice also suffered as 6.81m tonnes of rice were produced this year as compared to 7m tonnes last year. Likewise, the production of maize was recorded at 4.92m tonnes as compared to 4.93m tonnes last year.

Other crops also registered a mild decrease of 0.31pc as compared to the growth of 3.09pc last year. Important crops having a share of 23.55pc in the agricultural value-added sector has witnessed further negative growth of 7.18pc during the outgoing fiscal year.

The survey said that with a drop in cotton production by around 27.83pc this year, the cotton ginning having a share of 2.32pc in value-addition of agriculture has suffered badly and posted negative growth of 21.26pc compared to 7.24pc growth during the same period of last year.

The livestock sector performed better during the current fiscal year and it recorded a growth of 3.63pc. The production of livestock products, milk, poultry products and other livestock items increased 2.93pc, 3.21pc, 7.59pc and 1.33pc, respectively.

Fisheries recorded a moderate growth of 3.25pc against the growth of 5.75pc last year. The sub-components of fisheries such as marine fishing and inland fishing contributed to an overall increase in the value-addition of this sub-sector.

The survey pointed out that the share of forestry reduced during the current fiscal year, and for this reason the country has become vulnerable to climate changes.

This necessitated increasing forest cover in the country to overcome environmental degradation and ensure sustainable development.

The survey noted that domestic production of fertilisers during the first nine months (July-March) of the outgoing fiscal year surged 14.4pc year-on-year. The total availability of fertilisers surged by 9.7pc, but total off-take of fertiliser nutrients fell 10.1pc.

Nitrogen off-take decreased 14pc while that of phosphate increased 2.9pc.

Prices of all phosphatic fertilisers dropped during FY16 as a result of a farmers' package announced by the federal government with the start of Rabi season.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1262401

July 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 25TH TO JULY 31ST 2016

SUBSIDY ON FERTILISER

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, July 25th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

The significant reduction in cost of subsidised urea and DAP fertiliser, coupled with improved seed cotton rate in lower Sindh for the initial one to two pickings, has increased farmers' demand for urea.The subsidy took effect on July 1, but by that time growers had at least applied one doze of urea each to cotton and paddy crops. The two crops still needed some doses of fertiliser.

The sugarcane crop had taken almost all the required fertiliser doses until June.Normally it gets five doses of fertiliser. Many apply seven doses as well to get maximum yields. Current sugarcane crop would be ready for harvesting in October. Until June for sugarcane — sown in autumn season of October-November last year — growers had bought fertilser at a rate of Rs1800-Rs1900 per bag before it was reduced to Rs1400 in July. The crop, sown in February 2016 (spring sowing), would still need some doses of fertiliser.

It is helping farmers use more fertiliser for their crops as well as build stock for Rabi sowing. However, there are some complaints that a urea bag is being sold for Rs1,450 instead of Rs1,400 in districts like Tando Allahyar as dealers are adding transportation charges to the post-subsidy price.

Urea is applied after each picking of crop. Cotton crop gives multiple picking until October-November.

Around 70pc of paddy cultivation target has been met and agriculture officers expect the sowing to exceed the target. Ameer Bux Pahore from Shikarpur says if weather conditions permit the reduced urea prices would help raise per acre productivity by 20pc in an acre.

The federal and Sindh governments share fertiliser subsidy, the provincial government contributing Rs1.63bn (19pc) against the federal government's share of Rs8.58bn for urea fertiliser as per official figures of ministry of national food security and research. An agriculture officer while quoting National Fertiliser Development Center (NDFC) said its opening inventory stands a 1.2m tonnes and domestic production for the current season is estimated at 2.80m tonnes. Summer crops off-take in the country is estimated at 2.9m tonnes. Around 1.10m tonnes of stock would be carried forward for Rabi crops.

Sindh Abagdar Board president Abdul Majeed Nizamani and Nabi Bux Sathio of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture consider the drop in urea prices will improve farmers' income. Nizamani roughly calculates that if cotton field is gets 1.5 bag an acre, it would result in a saving of Rs600.

Paddy crop would get at least two doses of urea now. Growers also tend to give right doses of urea to onion crop for improved productivity. The crop is now being sown in riverine area as well.

"Growers are set to get due advantage of the subsidy. Theyy are willing to buy urea as much as possible because of improved cash flows in shape of adequate prices of cotton crop that is being paid to them now", contends Nadeem Shah, a paddy and cotton grower.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1272874/subsidy-on-fertiliser

SC ENDORSES BAN ON NEW SUGAR MILLS IN PUNJAB
Dawn, July 26th, 2016

Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court declined to interfere in executive decisions when it held on Monday that the Punjab government had rightly banned the setting up of sugar mills or expanding the installed capacity of the existing ones.

"Since the government has issued the impugned Dec 6, 2006, notification, which is based on valid reasons, we do not think there will be any point to give reasons for declining an application seeking establishment of a new sugar mill or expanding an existing one," said a verdict authored by Justice Qazi Faez Isa.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Ejaz Afzal had taken up a set of four appeals against the Feb 26, 2013, Lahore High Court judgement on the petitions filed by Punjnad Sugar Mills, Tariq Khan Mazari, Begum Syed Iqbal and Arshad Javed Ahmed. They had challenged the provincial government's authority to ban installation of sugar mills under the Punjab Industries (Control on Establishment and Enlargement) Ordinance, 1963.

The Punjab sugar industry includes 46 mills of which 45 are functional with a sugarcane crushing capacity of 2.9 million tonnes per year and surplus production of 0.76m tonnes. The mills have never utilised 100 per cent of their crushing capacity because of unavailability of sufficient sugarcane.

Dismissing the appeals, the judgement said that the notification was undoubtedly within the executive authority of the government but it would not be immune from a challenge if it could be demonstrated that it was issued for mala fide or ulterior purposes and thus against the public or national interest.

The verdict also touched upon the state of affairs in Punjab and regretted that the cherished objective of transparency in governance had been obfuscated.

"Unfortunately Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has continued on the path of favouritism as it has transpired that despite ban, a number of sugar mills were given permission to be set up in Muzaffargarh and Rahim Yar Khan districts."

Alarmingly, two sugar mills were allowed to be set up after the issuance of the notification, the judgement said. Since those facts came to the fore incidentally and were not subject matter of the appeals, it would not be appropriate to state anything further as the same may be subject matter for investigation and litigation.

The judgement also referred to the April 8, 2011, recommendation of a committee constituted by the chief minister and comprising the chief secretary, secretaries of industries, agriculture and food and representatives of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Punjab Sugar Mills Association.

The committee had recommended a ban on the establishment of sugar mills and enlargement of existing ones throughout the province.

The industries secretary had told a committee meeting that the imposition of the ban on establishment of sugar mills was in line with the federal government's position that the promotion of sugar cane production was not in the national interest in view of its substitution effect on cotton and wheat crops and being a water intensive crop, its harmful role, particularly in depleting groundwater resources.

Similarly, the chief secretary had said that applications for setting up new/mini sugar mills mostly came from cotton growing belt of Punjab. The attraction of this area for the investors is mainly on account of high sugarcane recovery but if this trend is encouraged, the demand for additional sugarcane would come at the expense of cotton crop when sugar requirements of Punjab can easily be met from the existing capacity of sugar mills.

The agriculture secretary had expressed the fear that the lifting of the ban on the establishment of sugar mills would affect cotton production which was around 10m to 13m bales against the demand of 15m to 16m bales.

Supporting the contentions of the experts, the judgement also cited a number of ecological, environmental, agricultural, industrial and financial reasons like: Punjab has an arid climate but sugarcane consumes far more water than other crops by tapping into groundwater/aquifers inducing water scarcity by depleting aquifers.

Moreover, sugarcane stubble remains rooted in the soil after the crop has been harvested and, therefore, the second (wheat) crop cannot be grown on such land whereas it can be grown on the land from which cotton has been harvested. Thus sugarcane adversely affects food security.

According to the committee report, textile industry is being starved of locally available cotton and, as a result, cotton has to be imported by using scarce foreign exchange because textiles are a major foreign exchange earner. Besides, the international price of sugar is lower than the local price and, therefore, sugar does not have export potential.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1273260

WHEAT SUBSIDY
Business Recorder, 25 July 2016

It has been reported in a section of the press that the federal government and provinces have failed to agree on a formula to enhance wheat subsidy. It maybe recalled that Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced during his

3rd June budget speech that “from 1st July 2016, the government has decided that the price of urea is further reduced to Rs 1400 per bag.

In this instance, just as in the past, the federal and provincial governments will pay the cost of subsidy which will be Rs 36 billion in equal shares… the government has decided that with effect from 1st July 2016, the price per bag of DAP will be Rs 2500. In this instance, just as in the past, the federal and provincial governments will pay the cost of subsidy which will be Rs 10 billion, in equal shares.”

A well-informed official revealed that the Centre and two provinces – Sindh and Punjab – did not agree with the federal government’s subsidy-sharing formula and added that the Centre has given more time to the provinces to reconsider their decision. This is yet another example of the extremely unfortunate trend where the Federal Ministry of Finance takes decisions that involve provinces without first taking them on board.

The other recent example of such high-handedness on the part of the Centre was witnessed when the Centre designated the provincial governments as withholding agents; in the words of the Finance Minister during his budget speech “a large number of persons are filing sales tax returns with the provincial revenue authorities but are not filing income tax returns, it is proposed that such non-filers may be required to pay advance income tax monthly, to be collected by provincial revenue authorities along with sales tax returns, at the rate of 3 percent of turnover.”

Subsequently the onus of paying tax was put on the taxpayer and not on the province with the addition of the following provision: “Every provincial sales tax registered person; who is a non-filer (for income tax purposes); to pay 3% of the turnover declared before provincial revenue authority as monthly advance tax; at the time when the provincial sales tax return is due.” This additional provision defies logic as why a non-filer who has not filed his/her income tax returns but has filed sales tax returns would because of this provision volunteer to file his income tax returns.

There are other instances where the federal government has opted not to get provincial input prior to announcing a policy measure that, subsequent to provincial opposition, required a withdrawal and/or amendment. The Council of Common Interests (CCI) is a forum provided by the constitution, requiring at least a meeting once in three months that could have been used by the Centre to get the provinces on board; however sadly this forum has rarely been used since the Sharif administration took over the reins of government more than three years ago.

And with Punjab also not on board in several instances, where the PML-N has formed a government, the trend to bypass provinces in decisions which would have implications on their budgets is all the more inexplicable.

Reports indicate that the federal government’s decision to extend support to the farm sector in budget 2016-17, which included the subsidy for fertilizer, was due to the insistence by the Punjab Chief Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, that the farm sector was suffering considerably from the Centre’s economic policy measures and that unless and until some relief was provided the PML-N would lose support of this large sector in Punjab.

Other federal budgetary measures in support of the farm sector focus on credit and its availability, which is a challenge to procure for the poor and subsistence farmers and include: (i) an enhancement in target of agriculture sector; (ii) a reduction in cost of credit by 2 percent may be insufficient inducement for poor and subsistence farmers to procure loans; (iii) a credit guarantee scheme through which the federal government would share the risk of non-payment of credit by small farmers by guaranteeing up to 50 percent of financing by participating financial institutions; and (iv) a concessional electricity tariff for tubewells that again are owned by middle income and rich farmers.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/25/16-page/779164-news.html

AGRICULTURE GROWTH PROJECT: FARMERS POINT TO LACK OF TRANSPARENCY
The Express Tribune, July 26th, 2016.

Z Ali

HYDERABAD: The alleged mismanagement in the World Bank-funded $88.7 million Sindh Agriculture Growth Project has invited the ire of a leading lobbying group of farmers in the province – the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA).

Accusing project officials of nepotism, misplaced priorities and lack of transparency, the chamber has requested the Sindh government to conduct an investigation and sack Project Director Shahjahan Hashmani.

"We condemn the conduct of Hashmani and ask Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah to remove him," the chamber said in a statement after a meeting in Hyderabad, which was attended by the farmer representatives from Sanghar, Sukkur, Ghotki and Larkana.

The SCA is headed by Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar, who is a brother of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) MNA Syed Naveed Qamar. He was, however, not present in the meeting.

The farmer body also blamed Project Coordinator Fateh Mari, consultants Tahira Syed and Malik Saifullah Khokhar for conniving with Hashmani to push the project towards failure.

"An impartial inquiry should be undertaken into the conduct of these individuals and the embezzled money should be recovered," the SCA demanded.

The five-year Sindh Agriculture Growth Project, which received World Bank's sanction in July 2014 with a credit of $76.4 million (the remaining $12.4 million is being contributed by the Sindh government) is aimed at supporting the small and medium farmers.

It has selected crops like onion, chilli, rice and dates in addition to livestock as its areas of support.

A focal group, headed by a convener, has been formed for each of the four crops. The support comprises training of farmers in modern farming, breeding methods and distribution of 70% subsidised tools and equipment.

The recent distribution of agricultural tools in Kunri town of Umerkot district, which is the largest market of chillies, has come under focus.

"In the name of chilli farmers, friends and relatives of Mian Saleem (convener of the chillies focal group) were given agricultural tools and equipment in Kunri on July 21," the SCA alleged. "Even the distribution of equipment took place at Saleem's factory."

The SCA general secretary claimed that Hashmani had a stake in Saleem's business.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Project Director Hashmani acknowledged that chilli drying sheets worth Rs6.5 million had been handed over to around 35 farmers in Kunri and another Rs6.5 million worth of sheets would be distributed after two weeks. He, however, refuted the allegations.

He termed the SCA's accusations conspiracy of an individual named Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, a Mirpurkhas-based farmer who is a member of the SCA and represents the chamber in the chilli focal group.

He approached me to give his son a job in the project but I refused, Hashmani claimed.

Bhurgari on his part insisted that the SCA represented a large number of farmers in Sindh and the meeting was attended by 100 to 150 farmer representatives from many districts. "Any statement issued after the meeting reflects the opinion of all the participants," he said.

According to him, the project's progress remained poor before he joined it in April this year. "In December 2015, the World Bank wrote a letter describing the project's progress as unsatisfactory, but in another letter this month the bank has termed the project satisfactory," he said.

Bhurgari alleged that under the project $24 million had been utilised so far and a large sum was squandered on visits, offices, vehicles and commission.

"They completely lack transparency and do not follow World Bank standards when it comes to selecting beneficiaries of the support programmes," he said.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1149212/agriculture-growth-project-farmers-point-lack-transparency/

INDUSTRY RESENTS DUTY-FREE IMPORT OF SPARE PARTS FOR BELARUS TRACTOR MAKER
Dawn, July 27th, 2016

LAHORE: The local tractor industry has resented the Engineering Development Board's (EDB) permission to Minsk Tractor Works Pakistan Ltd to assemble Belarus model MT 510 and import spare parts duty free.

The 9th Auto Industry Development Committee (AIDC) meeting held on June 9, 2016 granted the status of new entrant to Minsk Tractor and also approved its localisation plan.

Terming it as a violation of the Auto Policy 2016-2021, the local industry urged the federal government to review decision as incentives to import tractor parts at zero rated custom duty has already generated uncertainty for future of local manufacturers.

One of the representatives told Dawn that the tractor industry has raised many questions regarding the timing of the AIDC and the motive behind this move, adding the Sindh tractor scheme that was primarily availed by MTW Pak Pvt Ltd is a subject of NAB inquiry.

"Why wasn't meeting held earlier to deliberate on the ramifications of this move on the local tractor industry? And why are approvals being sought for new entrant status to MTW under the outgoing auto policy and not the new one, despite reservations from the industry. The EDB CEO was also invited to Belarus earlier in the year to discuss business modalities with MTW", the industry expert questioned.

The EDB CEO also reportedly turned down the request by the tractor industry to postpone the meeting.

He said many parts for this tractor were developed locally when this brand was being assembled in Pakistan by Fecto Belarus. "What is the wisdom of letting the company import these parts when local capacity is available to produce them?"

The prices of the local tractors are competitive making it very difficult for the world players to sell their products in the Pakistani market, he added.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1273356

BUSINESS COMMUNITY URGED TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR AGRICULTURE-BASED TV CHANNEL
Agricultural contents need to be made an essential part of electronic media headlines to guide people especially from rural area about the latest trends in agriculture as majority of our population is living in villages.

This was stated by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Chairman Absar Alam while addressing a seminar on "role of electronic media in economy and agriculture sector in Pakistan" as the chief guest. The session presided over by UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan was organized by Public Relations and Public Relations Department, UAF.

He urged the media to dedicate time for agricultural content that will help farming community to increase the productivity. He said media is the fourth pillar of the state and have the power to influence masses' mind and opinion building. He said that 70% economy of the country depends on agriculture as the sector dominates economy by providing food, employment, income and foreign exchange.

He said that electronic media can play a pivotal role by assisting in the delivery of accurate and timely information for agri sector. Electronic media is the most reliable and quick source of information to get updates on weather, and knowledge about new techniques and technologies. He said that world ranked universities like Howard University , Cambridge University etc are having the Endowment Fund in which business men are providing the funds for research and development and other facilities.

He urged the business class of Faisalabad to fund an agricultural based TV Channel at the UAF for the farming community of the country.

He said: "the media groups are not highlighting the real issue of the public. The focus of all programs was revolving around the politics and sensitization. Whereas, real issues of public remains at the distance.

He said that Indian and Pakistan media were the most difficult which depend upon the sensitization. He said that Pakistani media among the freest in Asia when it comes covering politics. He was of the view that it was not only the fault of the media persons but also of the public who want to watch such things. He said that media didn't give the proper time to Indian Held Kashmir issue. He said that out of 91, only four channels are going in profit and rest of them are facing the loss.

He said that the PEMRA was a revolutionary body and all possible steps are being taken. He said that according to article 19 of constitution of Pakistan, the Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, [commission of] or incitement to an offence." He said that there were 91 total satellite TV channels out of which only five are educational, one agriculture based whereas 50 entertainments and 35 news channels. He said that the 60,000 cable operators are working in the country.

He said that Frequency Allocation Board (FAB) has also been requested to allot a specific frequency for FM Radio stations in Tehsils of Agriculture zones of the country. He said that the Qandeel Baloch was murdered due to sensitization of his scandal with Mufti Abdul Qavi. He urged to media persons to shun sensitization journalism and divert their attention towards the real issue of a common man. He said that the PEMRA was first working on regulating.

UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan urged the media to give proper time for agriculture sector. He said that time specific for agriculture sector on the electronic media is negligible. He said that the country was having the abundant food but 40 percent of our population is food deficient mostly comprising rural population.

He said that usage of electronic media would help the people to get aware with the modern trends as the TV is being watched in every village of the province. He said that the UAF research and development budget has exceeded to Rs 2.5 billion which is highest in the Pakistan. He said that this year the cotton production has faced decline in the production worth billions of rupees. He said that the UAF has developed a new variety of cotton which is climate tolerant. He also said that the UAF had developed ten varieties of mangoes also and heat tolerant hen.

In the welcome address, Principal Officer Public Relations and Publications Dr Jalal Arif said journalism plays an important role for the development of the country appreciated. He said that UAF was the only institution in the country ranked among the top 100 varsities of the globe. He said that during last 8 years, the UAF was opened up new golden chapters of the history.

He said PEMRA has improved the standards of information, education, entertainment and elegance to enlarge the choice of Pakistan's people including news, current affairs, culture (etc and a lot more). He said that the university has paced up its outreach program and community service to address the problem of the farming community.

He said that UAF was providing the suggestions to the government for the uplift of agricultural sector. The suggestions are being applauded at the government level. He said that it is the first ever university of the country ranked among the top 100 universities of the globe.

http://www.brecorder.com/business-and-economy/189:pakistan/69243:business-community-urged-to-provide-funding-for-agriculture-based-tv-channel/?date=2016-07-27

SHORT-TERM FISCAL AGRICULTURE PACKAGES NO SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS: FPCCI
Business Recorder, July 27, 2016
Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) has said agriculture policy has been an area of much debate in Pakistan and understandably so, given the country's reliance on its primary produce for both exports and domestic usage. However, despite the arguably exaggerated claims that the sector contributes around 25 percent to the GDP, it hasn't been receiving the attention it once garnered or one that it usually requires. Attribute some of that to the burgeoning services and tertiary sector in South Asia, read with Pakistan where the service sector presently contributes 55.5 percent to the GDP, and the rest to the low value propositions and over-complicated supply chains involved in the agri export business.

Unfolding the details, in a statement issued here on Tuesday, FPCCI Regional Standing Committee, Chairman Ahmad Jawad said the average annual growth of agriculture sector in Pakistan dropped from 5.4 per cent during 1980-90 to 2.2 per cent during 2011-16. The growth during the past fiscal year (2015-16) plummeted to -0.2 per cent mainly contributed by -6.3 per cent decline in the crop sector.

Prime Minister's Agriculture Package of Rs 341 billion and also to extend some fiscal incentives in the federal budget 2016-17 for the agriculture sector were not the solution, "we must admit that such short-term fiscal packages cannot be an answer to structural problems faced by agriculture"; he added. He said Public sector's capacity to invest in agriculture has been on the decline. Due to lack of modernisation in agriculture, average growth in yields (kg/hec) for cotton and wheat declined from 9 and 2.6 per cent respectively between 1980-90 to -2.2 and 1.4 per cent respectively between 2011-16.

These problems include: a) rising input costs faced by the farmers; b) indirect taxes on inputs and farm operations; c) subsidies and support price benefits not reaching the poorest of the poor in the farming sector; d) lack of innovation in seed varieties; e) missing technology to modernise the crop harvesting, cultivation, storage and marketing; f) weak access to agriculture credit; g) and water shortages threatening the irrigated lands.

"In order to reverse this dismal situation, it is important to put in place a carefully formulated long-term plan for the revival of this sector. The Planning Commission, Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR), provincial agriculture and agriculture extension departments, and provincial planning and development departments are best placed to collaborate and put forward a comprehensive national plan on agriculture for the approval of Council of Common Interests and the Parliament". Jawad remarked.

Similarly timely and formal credit to farmers remains a challenge. The government will need to review the mark-up rates faced by farmers on a regular basis. Private commercial banking sector also needs to be encouraged through interventions from Ministry of Finance and State Bank of Pakistan to increase micro credit in agriculture extension.

http://www.brecorder.com/business-and-economy/189:pakistan/69241:short-term-fiscal-agriculture-packages-no-solutions-to-problems-fpcci/?date=2016-07-27

MOU SIGNED: TEVTA, MNSUAM TO OFFER PRE-AGRI PROGRAMME
Business Recorder, 28 July 2016

LAHORE: Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) in collaboration with Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture Multan (MNSUAM) will offer two-year pre-agriculture programme at TEVTA Institute Multan.

In this regard, MoU was signed between TEVTA and MNSUAM here on Wednesday at TEVTA Secretariat which was signed by Chairperson TEVTA Irfan Qaiser Sheikh and Vice Chancellor Muhammad Nawaz Shareef University of Agriculture Multan (MNSUAM), Prof Dr Asif Ali.

Director External Linkages Dr Shafqat Saeed, TEVTA officers Akhtar Abbas Bharwana, Amir Aziz, Umer Farooq, Azhar Iqbal Shad, Hamid Ghani Anjum, Maqsood Ahmed, Sarfraz Anwar and others were present on the occasion.

Chairperson TEVTA Irfan Qaiser Sheikh while addressing the ceremony said that at present, TEVTA has introduced demand driven short courses to implement the vision of chief minister Punjab so that youth of the province may get respectable job opportunities immediately.

Both departments will devise a mechanism for fixation of quota and admission of TEVTA pass outs in agriculture based higher degree programmes at MNSUAM through mutually agreed terms of both the parties.

TEVTA will also offer short courses for gardener and tunnel farming from September this year.

The agreement will also provide better opportunity for the students, faculty members of MNSUAM and TEVTA to contribute in the development and promotion of agriculture sector in 21st century.

Vice Chancellor MNSUAM Prof Dr Asif Ali in his address said that there is a great potential in agriculture sector in the province and necessary steps will be taken for fully benefiting the potential in this sector. Our university is a premier and reputed hub of agricultural knowledge in southern Punjab.

University will share technical expertise with TEVTA for the development/revision of Agriculture based courses in line with national and international standards.

MNSUAM will conduct examination for pre-agriculture programme and will facilitate TEVTA in connection with conduct of the examination through providing technical human resource in a mutually agreed manner. The certification will be done by the MNSUAM.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/28/13-page/780733-news.html

CHINESE DELEGATION SHOWS INTEREST IN FLORICULTURE
Business Recorder, July 29, 2016

Muhammad Riaz

A delegation from Shandong province of China on Thursday expressed interest in importing cut flowers from Pakistan following rapidly increasing demand of floriculture variety in China. The delegation that met President of Pak China Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) Shah Faisal Afridi comprised Alex Pan from Kalon Daily Use Products International, Michael Wan from Ruidalong Agricultural science and Technology Company, Yuan Lee from Shandong Shifeng Co, Ltd and Peter Mu from Shandong Baishengyuan Group Co Ltd.

While speaking at the meeting, Alex Pan said that change in life style and better standard of living in China has increased the demand for the floriculture products. This increase in demand of cut flowers is also due to increase in celebrations of different ceremonies in the society like weddings and birthday parties. However to support this international industry and earn foreign exchange, it is necessary to promote floriculture in every potent country including Pakistan. He said that currently, the major cities Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Hong Kong are the most important consumption markets. Hong Kong has the highest expenditures of € 6.85 per capita; second best is Shanghai (€ 3 per capita), he revealed.

The delegation member said that due to only 10 percent arable land available and high labour cost in China, it has become a need of China to transfer production facilities to the developing world where the resources are sufficient and labour is cheap. He said that such ventures are beneficial to both countries.

According to his observation, unemployment is the biggest challenge being faced by Pakistan and such projects will provide employment to the Pakistani labour on massive scale. Speaking on the occasion, the PCJCCI President Shah Faisal Afridi said there is vast scope of joint ventures between Pakistan and China in the field of floriculture. He said that the proposed ventures in floriculture industry could be very prolific for Pakistan as the country is blessed with favourable agro climatic conditions, cheap labour and easily available variety of soils, it has the potential to develop a resilient floriculture sector.

While apprising the delegates of this potent sector, Faisal Afridi explicated that in recent years, flower production has increased in Kasur, Sheikhupura, Chunian, Okara, Faisalabad, Sahiwal and Gujranwala. Over hundred varieties of flowers are being produced in these cities; the most prominent are carnations, jasmine, tulips, poppies and roses in dozens of colours, he added.

He further said that an investor in the floriculture sector of Pakistan can get maximum profit by making the product value added for supplies to hotels as flower baskets, bouquets and bunches for direct export. Northern Areas have very rich flora and germplasm which still is not exposed. The available natural resources can be exploited commercially.

According to him, the prospects are bright for the export value to double in a very short time and if quality standards are maintained, the exporter will be able to command a premium price for these products. The value added products from non-conventional floricultural crops like essential oil of rose, tube rose, jasmine etc, and plants extracts used in medicines and pharmaceutical industry are unique and have great potential for export and import substitution, Afridi said.

He told the delegates that currently floriculture in the country is in embryonic stage. There is lack of resources and skilled persons to develop the industry up to international standards; therefore, Chinese stakeholders could be helpful in producing skilled personals and explore new means to ensure survival of our farmers and explore new marketing ways to save our economy as well as increase export.

He suggested the interested investors to establish training centres and model nurseries in Pakistan with latest planting technologies. Pakistan direly needs a "cool chain" which would ensure flowers/plants to be kept in suitable environment .He said that the "cool chain system" covering the whole country could save about the 40 percent production that is wasted due to absence of proper cold storage facilities and improper handling.

It is notable that Pakistan has negligible share in world-wide floriculture trade despite having fertile lands and best irrigation system to venture in this enterprising business which not only generates rural employment, but also fetches precious foreign exchange. "Currently more than 50 percent of the floriculture products come from the Netherlands and if we compare the resources of Pakistan with the Netherlands, we have 20 times larger area, manpower 9 to 10 times bigger and better climate, soil and irrigation system. What we are lacking is modern production technology," he said.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/69877:chinese-delegation-shows-interest-in-floriculture/?date=2016-07-29

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 18TH TO JULY 24TH 2016

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, July 18th, 2016

Dr Zuhair Hasnain

ORGANIC agriculture is a holistic production management system which upgrades and promotes the health of the agro-ecosystem, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and the biological activity of soil.

Besides ecological concerns, conventional agriculture has caused economic problems associated with over production of crops, increased costs of energy-based inputs and decreased farm incomes.

The approach of organic agriculture is to minimise the adverse impacts on the environments and is a real-time answer to climate change vulnerabilities.

Currently more than 90pc farmers are working on the conventional methods established during the green revolution of the 60's era that gave better crop production. But inputs unluckily pollute the environment and contaminate human food along with underground water.

It is a fallacious assertion that organic farming cannot feed the entire population. By adapting organic agriculture technologies the need of chemical inputs can be gradually minimised. The use of organic products i.e. organic fertiliser, organic pesticides, organic herbicides and nutrients can reduce the capital investment and result in the better crop output for the sustainable livelihood of humans.

No doubt there are problems in both production as well as consumption/marketing. Barring some exceptions producers do not participate in organic agriculture either due to the lack of information or owing to lack of financial support.

There are marketing problems related to the supply of organic food, its promotion and distribution. Consumers are required to contact producers of organic products directly to obtain the product from specialised retail outlets and a limited number of supermarkets. They are not familiar with the specific attributes that distinguish organic products from non-organic ones, as well as their certification standards.

Prices of organic products are much higher. To replace the current mode of farming with organic farming, research infrastructure should be strengthened and organic certification system introduced.

There should be an alliance with international organisations to ensure food security and better livelihood for humans on the basis of sustainable organic agriculture. Rules and regulations should be formulated for the development of organic farming.

More than thirty farming organisations and small entrepreneurs are reportedly working in our country with the organic system of production/and mode of trading. The government needs to take the lead in developing incentive-based friendly policies for research and adoption of organic farming. All such efforts will ensure the safety of the environment and ecology under changing climates.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1271383

PERSISTENTLY LOW REVENUE FROM FARM INCOME TAX
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, July 18th, 2016

Ashfak Bokhari

QUITE often, the provinces, especially Punjab and Sindh, are subjected to severe criticism mostly by urban taxpayers, for their poor collection of agriculture income tax; and also accused of sparing landowners from this tax which, if enforced effectively, can significantly raise the revenue figure.

Punjab, whose agriculture income tax (AIT) collection fell short by 33pc in the last fiscal year, blames the court stay orders against the tax for the fall, although revenue collected through this tax was officially expected to reach only 60pc of the target of Rs2.3bn. The AIT collected in Sindh since 2002, when it was levied in the province, has also been quite unimpressive.

However, to silence the growing criticism, the Punjab government intends to tackle problems in the proper implementation of tax collection on agriculture income from 2017-18;a year later, after having developed mechanisms and put in place efficient systems, Provincial Finance Minister Ayesha Ghaus Pasha said on the 2016-17 budget eve.

The AIT, which was introduced in its new form on July 1, 2015, has been challenged by some big landowners in the courts claiming it was unnecessary and frivolous because they were already paying agriculture-related taxes such as abiana, malia and income tax.

Some farmers associations in Punjab have described it as double taxation which compelled many to avoid the tax for the 2015-16 fiscal year. Board of Revenue member Asad Islam Mahni has rejected the charge of double taxation and said court stay orders were becoming irrelevant because the BoR has got relief from the superior court in AIT's favour.

The tax is payable by farmers having 25 acres of irrigated land or 50 acres of un-irrigated land and they are required to submit their tax returns under the amendments introduced in 2001.

The Sindh government also intends to introduce new slabs in the agriculture income tax in a move to take strict action against tax evaders and financially protect the poor growers. The government's priority at the moment is what the finance minister calls 'rationalisation of agriculture income tax'. But he would prefer consultations with the farmers' bodies to find a new way to help expand the revenue base.

The issue of tax on agriculture income keeps raising its head in the media and parliament from time to time particularly when the taxpayers in big cities experience the travails of paying several taxes which keep increasing every year and often exceeding their paying capacity as far as the middle class is concerned. They feel being discriminated when they find landowners community paying no taxes in lieu of land revenue, or much less than what they do.

Speaking at a meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Finance in June 2014, Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar did not agree with a proposal of some of its members that collection of tax on agriculture income be transferred to the federal government because, he said, it would be a violation of the constitution. However, it could be done only when the provinces authorise federal government to do so. He lamented the extremely low tax collection by the provinces from a sector that has 21pc share in the GDP.

What has been happening in Sindh is quite shocking to learn. The Sindh Assembly was informed in March this year that not a single landowner had paid AIT in Sukkur district during 2012-13 fiscal year although there were 157 such individuals in the district falling in the tax net. Similarly, in Ghotki district only four landowners out of 141 paid the AIT. Across the province, out of 7,366 rich farmers only 1,343 (roughly 18pc) paid the AIT during the year.

Sindh Senior Minister Nisar Khuhro, who provided this information to the house, acknowledged the fact that the agriculture income tax collection had been very low since there had been no 'focus' on the collection of this tax by the provincial government.

The injustice here refers to the change in the taxation mode on agriculture. The change came after the Income Tax Ordinance 1997, was amended in 2001. The difference between the two is that the 1997 tax on agriculture was in fact on the size of the landholding and was hence called ‘land tax’ or land-based tax which often remained unchanged unless there was expansion in its size. It is an old tax imposed in the undivided India by the British. The 2001 tax, now effective, is a tax on income drawn from crops and other agricultural activities by the landowner.

According to Dr Tariq Bucha, director, Farmers Associates Pakistan which represents the interests of big landowners, all policymakers of the world agree that collection of tax on small business, services and agriculture is very difficult but tax on agriculture income is even more difficult to collect because in under-developed countries most of the transactions of income and expenses are done without receipts.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1271382

FLORICULTURE IN PAKISTAN
Business Recorder, July 19th 2016

As the traditional Pakistani exports have continued to nosedive, the exporters have started to focus on other sectors with export potential, and floriculture is one of them. In the last five years, Pakistan has witnessed significant development in its domestic flower industry. Every small or large city has one or more flower markets. Thanks to the economic growth, improved living standards, urbanisation and higher demand from the growing hospitality industry, the flower growers in the country have seen a massive surge in the demand for cut flowers, especially roses and tulips.

According to the industry sources, the local production of cut flowers is around 12,000-15,000 tons per annum. Interestingly, the small landholding that has been considered a problem for the agriculture sector plays a central role in floriculture due to its ‘low volume, high value’ character. Similarly, experts point out that the non-arable land can also be put to agricultural use.

The diverse agro-climatic conditions in Pakistan are very suitable for all kinds of floriculture crops, including cut flowers and pot plants throughout the seasons. Additionally, the country is also bestowed with more than ideal temperature conditions for commercially-oriented floriculture throughout the year in different parts. It should help the entrepreneurs and growers in realising the potential of floriculture as an export value business.

The favourable climatic conditions in Pakistan also allow many different species of cut flowers to be grown, which can be significant for export purposes. Sindh and Punjab are two primary producers of these flowers, but KP and Balochistan are quickly catching up. However, the Pattoki market is the biggest cut-flowers selling and buying market in Pakistan.

The global floriculture trade is highly concentrated by products and sources. Close to 90 percent demand comes from developed countries in Europe, Asia, and America. However, the export of cut flowers took a hit in 2013 when the total exports of cut flowers fell from $21.1 billion in 2011 to $20.6 billion in 2013, as per the global industry report.

But despite domestic success, the Pakistani flower exports have remained unimpressive so far. At the moment, Pakistan’s share in global floriculture trade is quite negligible, but the country as of late has shown major potential to turn itself eventually into a significant exporter of flowers to not only the Middle East but also to Europe, United Kingdom, and the United States.

During the last few years, the government has begun several initiatives to increase the export of floriculture products, particularly in Sindh and Punjab. But still, the floriculture sector lacks global industry standards, which have become a major barrier in the progress of this sector. For export quality cut-rose or any other flower production, both government and the farmers have to optimise the growing conditions and standardise production techniques.

There is also a need for the government to establish centres for technical assistance, which should include skill training for crop management, grading, and packing.

The farmers should be trained in post-harvest techniques, and legal and financial marketing aspects. Also, the establishment of cold storage facilities and introducing proper transportation modes are some of the major issues that the government needs to deal with.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/19/2-page/777689-news.html

COMMODITY EXPORT: CENTRE, PROVINCES DISAGREE ON SHARING WHEAT SUBSIDY
The Express Tribune, July 20th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: The federal government and provinces have failed to arrive at a consensus on the formula for enhancing the subsidy on wheat export.

The planned increase from the current $100 per ton of wheat to $130 per ton is at the centre of contention as the proportion to be shared between the centre and provinces has yet to be determined.

"The centre and two provinces – Punjab and Sindh – failed in a recent meeting to reach a consensus on sharing the increase in wheat subsidy," said an official who was part of the meeting.

He said the centre wanted the subsidy to be shared on an equal basis by the provinces and the federal government whereas the provinces suggested that 60% share should be contributed by the federal government and 40% by the provinces.

"This difference of opinion between the two stakeholders is the key hurdle to finalising the new subsidy formula," said the officer.

Earlier, the federal government had suggested that the wheat export subsidy must be enhanced from the current $100 per ton to $125 per ton to attract buyers in the international market.

It called a meeting with the governments of Sindh and Punjab, where a huge stock of surplus wheat was lying with no demand in the international market.

However, the provinces did not agree on contributing the equal share of subsidy to dispose of the surplus stock.

The officer said the federal government again gave time to the provinces to reconsider their decision and take a step towards resolving one of the most serious issues amidst a global commodity glut.

The officer said the federal government had already prepared a summary on the increase in subsidy for consideration of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC).

Background

At present, Pakistan has a wheat stock of 9.923 million tons with provinces and Passco stores.

The ECC in its decision in January 2015 had allowed export of 800,000 tons of wheat by the government of Punjab at the transport rebate of $55 per ton and 400,000 tons by the government of Sindh at a rebate of $45 per ton.

Due to a substantial decrease in wheat prices in the international market, Punjab and Sindh could only export 252,650 tons and 164,000 tons, respectively.

In a summary submitted by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research in April 2016, recommendation was made to allow an additional rebate of $30 per ton on exports.

It was proposed that the additional $30 rebate would be shared by both the federal and provincial governments on 50% basis. The proposed quantity allowed to be exported is 600,000 and 300,000 tons for Punjab and Sindh, respectively. The export will be allowed till November 30, 2016.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1145158/commodity-export-centre-provinces-disagree-sharing-wheat-subsidy/

RISING COTTON PRICES TO HELP GROWERS GET HIGHER RETURNS

Business Recorder, 21 July 2016

Rizwan Bhatti

KARACHI: Rising cotton prices have created new opportunities of better margin for growers and they are expected to get higher returns for their crop, arriving next month.

Cotton traders said that higher production cost and low prices of the cotton were eroding crop sector profitability for past few years, thereby putting pressure on farmers' income.

They said pressure on the income also discouraged growers from using farm inputs including fertilizer and pesticides that resulted in lower cotton output last year. Cotton production fell by 28 percent at the end of last season and hence the target was missed by a wide margin.

As per Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) statistics, the country produced some 9.7 million cotton bales against the target of 15 million bales and 14.9 million bales production in 2014-15. Cotton production during last season was lowest since FY04.

However, for the last 10 days, domestic cotton prices are on the rise touching six-year high of Rs 7,000 per maund, mainly due to shortfall in the crop.

Cotton prices have gained Rs 1,000 per maund in the domestic market and were being traded at Rs 7,000 per maund Tuesday compared to Rs 6,000 per maund a week earlier.

Previously, cotton prices in the domestic market touched this level in 2010-11, when the demand was higher than production, they added.

Official rates of Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) have surged by Rs 700 per maund to Rs 6,450 Tuesday compared to Rs 5,750 per maund on July 11, 2016.

"Excessive rains and pest infestations, especially pink-bollworm had a detrimental effect on the last cotton crop," said Naseem Usman, a leading cotton trader. In addition, growers were unwilling to pour more money into expensive pesticides as return on their investment was very low due to lower raw cotton prices in the domestic market, he added.

The lower production and rising cotton demand in the domestic market may increase cotton import, resulting in a burden on the country's import bill, Naseem added. He said Pakistan imported some 3.5 million bales last year and it is expected to import over 4 million cotton bales now.

Following increase in raw cotton prices, phutti and cotton yarn prices are also on the increase. With an increase of Rs 300 per maund, phutti prices have reached Rs 3,600 per maund in Punjab and Rs 3,500 per maund in Sindh. Cotton yarn prices have increased by around 25 percent to Rs 11,500 per bag of 100 pounds from Rs 9,950 during last one and a half months.

As the market is expecting worldwide cotton shortfall this year, cotton prices are likely to remain stronger in coming days, he said and added that the rising cotton prices will benefit growers, which were facing losses or lower profitability for last few years due to lower commodity prices and higher crop inputs.

“We are expecting the with higher cotton prices, growers will focus on the crop to gain better cotton yield,” he maintained.

Ihsan-ul-Haq, Chairman, Cotton Ginners Forum said international cotton prices gained some 13 percent in last one week to reach 2-year high mainly due to lower inventory levels predicted by the USDA in its recent report. The USDA has lowered its forecast for global cotton stockpiles in 2017 to 91.3 million bales, down from 94.7 million bales projected in June. The latest inventory number would be a five-year low, he added.

He said the higher rate is good news for growers as they will get more profit on their crop with lower cost. Presently, urea and other inputs including pesticides prices are on the lower side and this factor will also help growers gain improved margins on cotton crop, he added.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/21/2-page/778143-news.html

NATIONAL ‘TALENT FARMING’ SCHEME LAUNCHED
Business Recorder, 21 July 2016

Tahir Amin

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday launched National Talent Farming Scheme (STFS) with initial funding of Rs1.5 billion to groom students from middle class to become future scientists.

Addressing the launching ceremony and orientation session of STFS, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Rana Tanveer Hussain said that science and technology sector development needs hefty allocation of budget for Research & Development (R&D) as without it national targets could not be achieved. Prioritizing the science and technology sector will bring progressive future prospects for the country, he added.

Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms, Fazal Abbass Maken, Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology, Prof Dr Muhammad Ashraf, Chairman Pakistan Science Foundation and STFS Project Manager Hasnat Ahmed Qureshi were also present. The ceremony was attended by the first batch of STFS 300 students, STFS Management, and Heads of S&T organizations.

The minister said that the construction of National Science School building and allied facilities will begin soon, as after hectic efforts of the federal government, the Punjab government has offered land free of cost. Although there was a budget allocation for cost of land in fiscal year 2015-16, the Chief Minister Punjab, due to personal intervention, has provided the land free of cost, he added.

The minister further said that most important aspect of STFS is the establishment of the “National Science School” which will be a boarding school having facilities on the pattern of Cadet Colleges for the continuous support and grooming of the capable students having aptitude towards science education.

After the establishment of the “National Science School” the selection of the students will be made on regular basis from 8th Class which presently is being done after Matriculation.

Ahsan Iqbal said that since inception of this scheme he had been associated with it as it is part of Pakistan Vision 2025.

He said that in today's modern world, when the entire world is converting into a global village, every country is indulging itself in the never ending race of inventions and innovations by investing more and more towards capacity building of its individuals.

The countries with huge natural resources have been compelled to go at secondary positions by the drivers of the new world, which are equipped with skilled and scientific human capital, he said, adding that is why the term of "knowledge based economy" has been coined, he added.

Fazal Abbas Maken said the extraordinary development in science and technology during the last two centuries has made the science education a necessity and with technology evolving every minute, there is a dire need to develop skilled manpower to cope up with the latest trends.

He said in this backdrop, the initiative of STFS is a step in the right direction. "This scheme is an endeavor to popularize science among the young generation, to motivate them to adapt science as their career and to invite the students towards "Learning by Doing" instead of "Rote Learning", the Federal Secretary said.

Fazal Abbas Maken said this initiative of the government as part of Vision 2025 is also in consonance with the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (ST&I) which presents a roadmap of aims and objectives under the areas of socio-economic development, human resource development, R&D infrastructure, and promotion of ST&I in the society.

PSF Chairman Prof Dr Muhammad Ashraf said that knowledge based economy was need of the hour while education in general and scientific education in particular were drivers of such economies. Dr Ashraf said that number of researchers in Pakistan as compared to other countries is very low, which is main reason that the country is lagging behind in the field of S&T as compared to other countries.

He said that only four percent girls and seven percent boys' schools have fully equipped labs. He said this project will help in improving the R&D needs by producing quality researchers.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/21/13-page/778262-news.html

HOW HEALTH-BOOSTING CROPS COULD BENEFIT 1 BILLION PEOPLE
Business Recorder, July 23, 2016

Megan Rowling

Food economist Howarth Bouis is a man with a very big mission: to get staple foods fortified with health-improving vitamins and minerals to 1 billion people in the developing world by 2030. US-based HarvestPlus, the programme he founded to kick-start that process in 2003, has so far reached an estimated 20 million people in poor farming families in its eight target countries in Africa and Asia – an achievement that won Bouis the World Food Prize earlier this month.

He shared the $250,000 award with three scientists from the International Potato Center, for their work to develop the most successful example of "biofortification": a variety of orange-fleshed sweet potato that is rich in vitamin A. Vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children, and increases the risk of disease and death from severe infections, including diarrhea and measles.

Malnutrition caused by a lack of vitamins and minerals in the diet, commonly known as "hidden hunger", affects the health of more than 2 billion people around the world, especially in poorer nations. To help combat the problem, HarvestPlus has developed, using conventional plant-breeding techniques, varieties high in micro-nutrients, which it promotes in developing countries: from zinc-rich wheat in Pakistan to high-iron beans in Rwanda, cassava with enhanced vitamin A in Nigeria and iron-rich pearl millet in India.

The Thomson Reuters Foundation spoke with Bouis after the prize was announced about his work and where he hopes to take it next. TRF: In the 1990s, you realised malnutrition wasn't just about not having enough to eat – how did that happen? BOUIS: The barometer for the economists was always calories, energy – if you could increase calories, that was going to improve nutrition. But when I analysed my data… it didn't seem that calories were nearly as important.

I did some work among the economics community to say, we shouldn't be so much looking at calories, we should be looking at dietary quality. That's when I got interested in mineral and vitamin deficiencies.

TRF: Why did it take a decade to turn your research into action?

BOUIS: When I first started talking to plant breeders, they said, 'Our job is to increase yields, improve productivity, reduce poverty… Why should we breed for better nutrition as well?'

Then we discovered that the plants needed the minerals, in particular, and they could get higher productivity.

The nutritionists said, 'If you put it in the staple food crops, only a low percentage will be absorbed (by the body)' – and we have been able to show that wasn't true. And partly it was funding – funding for agriculture research at the time was declining.

It was trying to bring the agriculture and the nutrition communities together and get them used to the idea that agriculture had a role to play in improving nutrition, and vice versa.

It took a long time, it was a difficult road. But the big breakthrough was (when) I went to the Gates Foundation… and there were a couple of people there who said, 'This is thinking out of the box.' And they gave us a $25 million grant over four years.

TRF: How did momentum build once you were able to get HarvestPlus off the ground?

BOUIS: It is fundamentally a no-brainer – as long as you can organise the financing and get the scientists to cooperate with one another.

Five hundred million vitamin A capsules are given out each year, and they cost $1 per capsule – not because of the manufacturing. It's because you have to have an organisation in place in each country to distribute the capsules in a responsible way. So you have recurring costs… After a decade you have spent $5 billion, and you still haven't fundamentally addressed the underlying cause.

With agriculture research, you develop the varieties, you spend the money on the research upfront – far less than $5 billion – and then you make the seeds available in various countries around the world.

They get those varieties into the food system and the farmers grow them, and people eat them. You don't have recurring costs. It's like putting fluoride in the water – you are piggy-backing on an existing system.

It's a cheaper way of addressing the problem. (But) for the time being, we need all of these approaches.

TRF: Where do you see HarvestPlus going from here?

BOUIS: We have released biofortified crops in 30 countries, and we are doing the testing for release of the crops in another 25 countries. So we have a lot of breadth around the world; now we need to deepen – in each of those countries, the big job is to capture a high percentage of the total staple food production, to make it go from non-biofortified to biofortified varieties.

As it expands over time, a billion people will be buying and eating fortified crops.

TRF: How do you get local people to adopt the new varieties?

BOUIS: We're not trying to change people's eating habits – if they are growing and eating maize, it's maize that we're trying to substitute.

With the pro-vitamin A crops, you are changing the colour (to yellow or orange), so if you don't give them information, they won't switch… You have to get information to the mothers, in particular. Once they like the taste, and they see the price, they say, 'This makes sense for my family.'

TRF: What impact will climate change have on your work?

BOUIS: It is an opportunity and a risk at the same time. The CGIAR (an international agricultural research network) is breeding heat-tolerant beans… they can go to lower altitudes now because of the heat tolerance, so we piggy-back on that climate-smart trait. We make sure that the heat-tolerant beans are also high in iron, and as the heat-tolerant beans become more popular, then automatically, the high-iron beans are adopted.

If we don't do it, our high-iron beans are going to be replaced by the heat-tolerant beans.

http://www.brecorder.com/weekend-magazine/0:/68354:how-health-boosting-crops-could-benefit-1-billion-people/?date=2016-07-23

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 11TH TO JULY 17TH 2016
PRESERVING GREEN FODDER
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, July 11th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

WITH almost all crops hit by various levels of price crashes, Punjab's silage initiative seems to be taking shape.

Since 2012, when the first big silage making machine arrived in the province, the number has risen to 16 working ones with more are on the way. This is in addition to countless imported, smaller and even local versions, mainly copies of imported ones that now swarm Punjab. Meanwhile, maize acreage, the main ingredient of silage, has expanded by 300,000 acres in the last few years as well.

One can only hope that the process will be sustained and extended to help solve the fodder problem in the province.

The fodder fluctuations are now proverbial; one finds it difficult to find a buyer in the summers and one does not find a seller in the winters. Between October and February, fodder is almost missing from the field and the market. The availability is reduced to wheat husk diet — a far less nutritious option. It is hard to digest and is devoid of required proteins. It badly affects milk yield and animal health.

Some other countries preserve green fodder when it is at its nutritious best and use it round the year. The process arrived in Pakistan a bit late, or, at least, took time to gain momentum. But, of late, it is there because all major crops have failed to fetch money for farmers at one stage or another, owing to regular price crashes; and created vacuum for silage to flourish.

Since the arrival of the first big (with capacity of around 20,000 tonnes) machines, the crop has expanded by almost 300,000 acres — from 13 lakh in 2008-09 to 16 lakh acres in 2015-16 — and is rising. It is because silage makers entered the maize market as big stakeholders and expanded business. More machines are on their way as business expands.

The bigger machines, with a packaging capacity of one tonne, benefit bigger livestock farmers, while the smaller ones package right down to 60kg. With import of these machines being a costly option, many local versions have also been fabricated.

The fodder crisis is blamed for a number of problems. Persistent poverty, low milk yield, bad animal health, slow and healthy expansion in population, all are placed at the doors of bad animal diet. Silage provides a solution to many of them.

With the maize taken off the field after 80-85 days, when it is at the second milking stage, is considered the most nutritious for animals as it contains corn oil, proteins and easily digestable foliage. With its nutrition preserved through processes and additives, it can last up to five years and continue benefitting animals and farmers for years.

After climatic changes causing flooding almost every alternate year, silage production assumes added advantage. In every flood, massive human and an equally big animal population, is displaced. In that crisis situation, animals are the worst sufferers; everyone (the official agencies, the NGOs, international institutions) is busy saving people. For animals, butchers arrive to get them at much reduced rates when people are forced to sell animals because they cannot be taken care of. Pre-prepared and long-life silage provides options in such crises.

All this sounds good because fodder acreage, which used to be 20pc of the total sown area in 1947, has dropped to 11pc after 68 years of independence. The animal population then was 12m against almost 200m right now. The country needs more and more fodder options to feed its ever growing animal population. Animal population growth is certain because of a national preference for milk and meat, so would be requirement of fodder options.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1269914/preserving-green-fodder

8,000-TONNE CAPACITY SUGAR MILL TO BE SET UP IN DI KHAN
Dawn, July 14th, 2016

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KPEZDMC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Alman Seyyam Sugar Mills (Pvt) Ltd to establish a new industrial set-up in Dera Ismail Khan.

“This is indeed another milestone achieved by KPEZDMC to promote industrialisation and sustainable economic development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,” said a statement issued on Wednesday.

Alman Seyyam is setting up a mill on an area of 100 acres with a daily production capacity of 8,000 tonnes. It will directly employ 700 skilled and unskilled labour, with around 3,000 indirect jobs from the district, the statement said.

The MoU was signed considering the agreement that the KPEZDMC will provide Alman Seyyam its consultancy services from inception till the project completion, including arrangement of regulatory approvals from relevant authorities.

Under the agreement, the KPEZDMC would be initiating their case for province’s first-ever private-sector Special Economic Zone Authority (SEZA) Enterprise application, which upon approval would enable it to avail certain customs duty and income tax exemptions for a period of 10 years.

The KPEZDMC has lately also been able to process and obtain approval of special economic zone (SEZ) status for Hattar phase-7 economic zone, the first ever SEZA-approved zone in KP.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1270590/8000-tonne-capacity-sugar-mill-to-be-set-up-in-di-khan

SECRETARY WANTS BAN ON CULTIVATION OF SUGAR CANE NEAR RIVER DYKES
Dawn, July 14th, 2016

SUKKUR: Sindh Secre-tary Irrigation Zaheer Hyder Shah has said that four to 10 points along Qadirpur Loop dyke are very sensitive and directed the officers concerned to complete work on their reinforcement on a war footing.

He instructed the managing director of the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (SIDA), Babar Ali Effendi, to impose a ban on cultivation of sugarcane in riverine area near Qadirpur loop bund because such high delta crop could damage the dyke.

The secretary was talking to journalists during a visit to Qadirpur Loop dyke and Qadirpur shank dyke in Ghotki on Wednesday to monitor the protective dykes and take precautionary measures to avert possible losses from the impending flood.

He said that work on the dykes was being carried out on a war footing after the Sindh government released funds to the irrigation department in this connection.

At the Qadirpur Loop dyke, the secretary expressed dissatisfaction over quality of repair work and said the dyke was very sensitive at four to 10 points and warned slackness in repair work would not be tolerated.

He directed the MD of SIDA to impose a ban on cultivation of sugarcane in the riverine area near the loop dyke as such high delta crop could damage the dyke. In this regard, necessary help could be sought from the district administration, he said.

He directed the MD of SIDA to arrange flood fighting material and assign duties to staff concerned for monitoring the dykes round the clock so that any untoward situation could be tackled in time.

Mr Shah directed the contractor to speed up pace of repair work and complete it within 10 days.

During the secretary's visit, a group of villagers suggested to him to extend stone stud inside the river near Qadirpur shank dyke so that pressure of water on the dyke could be reduced.

The secretary promised to consider the villagers' request and issued directives to extend 50 foot stone stud inside the river near the shank dyke.

The secretary was accompanied by Sukkur Division Commissioner Abbas Baloch, MD SIDA Babar Ali Effendi, director of SIDA, DIG of Sukkur range Feroze Shah and officers of Pak Army.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1270657/secretary-wants-ban-on-cultivation-of-sugar-cane-near-river-dykes

LHC ORDERS SALE OF BROTHERS SUGAR MILLS STOCK TO CLEAR FARMERS' DUES
Dawn, July 13th, 2016

LAHORE: Lahore High Court Chief Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah on Tuesday directed the Punjab cane commissioner to sale sugar stock of Brothers Sugar Mills, owned by a close relative of the Sharif family, to make withheld payments to farmers against supply of sugarcane.

Previously the chief justice had ordered the officer to seal the sugar mill for defaulting on Rs840 million payments of farmers. He had also directed the management of the mill to come up with a payment plan.

No one turned up on behalf of the sugar mill's management during Tuesday's hearing of the case.

Cane Commissioner Waqas Ahmad told the court that Brothers Sugar Mills had pledged a stock of 400,000 sugar bags with the office of the commissioner and 209,000 bags with banks. He said the sugar stock pledged with the cane commissioner office was worth approximately Rs10 million. However, he said, the mill owed the payment of around Rs840 million to the farmers.

Justice Shah observed that the court would not let anyone deny hard-earned money of farmers. He expressed dismay over non-appearance of the mill's management and summoned its Board of Directors (BoD) members on next hearing.

At one point, the petitioner's counsel told the court that Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif also had some shares in the mill.

The chief justice ordered the cane commissioner to sale the pledged stock of the sugar mill and deposit its amount with the court account. The judge adjourned further hearing till Aug 15 and directed the counsel for the petitioners and government side to advance arguments on auction of other assets of the mills.

A number of farmers had approached court against non-payment of their dues. They alleged that the mill's administration was using its relations with the Sharif family to delay payments.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1270473/lhc-orders-sale-of-brothers-sugar-mills-stock-to-clear-farmers-dues

COTTON & SUGARCANE: GROWERS WARNED OF PEST, VIRAL ATTACKS
Business Recorder, 13 July 2016

KARACHI: The Met Office has warned the cotton and sugarcane growers of pest and viral attacks at the crops during the hot and humid monsoon conditions, asking them to take timely steps to ensure yield growth.

Farmers should take timely precautionary measures to protect their crops, livestock and other property from heavy rains during the season, it warned, adding that stagnant water from heavy monsoon rains was fatal for the standing crops like cotton and therefore farmers should take suitable measures to cope with the problems.

It said farmers depending on tube wells should schedule irrigation their crops according to the expected rainy weather in the next 24 hours. It also alerted the farmers to threats of growing weed in standing crops, suggesting steps to remove them at earliest to help ensure a better production.

It said that mainly dry and hot weather was expected in Punjab till July 20 with chances of rain-dust storm/thunderstorm at isolated places in Bahawalpur, D G Khan, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Gujranwala divisions from July 12 to July 16.

In most parts of Sindh, it said that a very hot and dry weather was expected with a possibility of dust-storm due to the heat. It said that light rainfall was likely at isolated places including Hyderabad, Karachi, Mirpurkhas and Sukkur divisions from July 12 to July 15.

A very hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of Balochistan with rain-dust storm/thunderstorm at isolated places in Zhob over the period and light rainfall at isolated places in Makran, Sibbi and Quetta divisions from July 13 to July 17.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/13/21-page/776043-news.html

POWER TARIFF CUT FOR AGRI SECTOR: EFFECTIVE MECHANISM REQUIRED TO ENSURE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT
Business Recorder, 13 July 2016

Fazal Sher

ISLAMABAD: The government's decision to reduce electricity tariff by Rs 3.50 per unit for agriculture sector would not help lower the cost of production until the government devises an effective mechanism to trickle-down the effect of the package to small farmers.

A senior official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) on condition anonymity said that the reduction in power tariff notified by Ministry of Water and Power is part of the Prime Minister's Agriculture Package but it would only benefit progressive farmers who have installed their own tube-wells; and not give any relief to small farmers who buy water from tube-well owners for irrigation purposes.

"The government should formulate a policy to force tube-well owners to reduce the rates of agriculture water to provide relief to small farmers," he said.

He added that currently, there is no law to compel tube-well owners to decrease rates of agriculture water following a reduction in electricity tariff for agriculture tube-wells.

Mian Muhammad Umair Masood, secretary general Pakistan Kisaan Ittehad (PKI) while talking to Business Recorder said that currently, tube-well owners sell water to farmers at Rs 400 to 450 per hour and if the package announced by the government is properly implemented, it would decrease water rates by up to Rs 150 per hour, which will reduce cost of production.

He said that the PKI has written a letter to the government, requesting that the agriculture extension departments be directed to ensure reduction in water rates following cut in electricity tariff for agriculture sector. He said that the PKI would also make an announcement in mosques regarding new rates of tube-well water.

Muhammad Tahir Anwar, Director General (DG) Federal Water Management Cell (FWMC), an attached department of MNFS&R, said that the package will benefit 17 percent tube-well owners as only 17 percent tube-wells in the country operate through electricity and 87 percent are on diesel. He also said that currently, there is no regulation to force tube-well owners to reduce water rates after decrease in electricity tariff.

However, he said that the MNFS&R has recommended to the government to formulate a regulatory framework for sustainable use of ground water as well as to regulate rates of tube-well water.

He said that the reduced power tariff will be available to the agriculture sector throughout the country except Balochistan as Quetta Electric Supply Company (QESCO) is already charging agriculture tube-well owners a flat rate.

According to a notification, power consumers in the agriculture sector will now be charged Rs 5.35 per unit in off peak hours against the previous rate of Rs8.85 per unit.

However, there will be no change in the peak hour per unit rate and it will remain Rs10.35 per unit.

The notification further says that the difference between National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's (NEPRA) tariff and subsidised tariff for peak and off peak hours will be budgeted as tariff differential subsidy would be borne by the federal government.

Rs10.35/unit will continue to be the rate during peak hours i.e. (from 6pm to 10pm in winter and from 5pm to 11pm in summer); agriculture tube-wells will not be entitled to the power supply, while General Sales Tax (GST) will be paid by the respective provincial governments.

In case of non-payment of GST by a provincial government, the consumers of the respective distribution company will be charged for GST in addition to the agreed fixed rates.

The notification also states that in case of positive adjustment, Fuel Price Adjustment (FPA) will be picked up by the federal government.

This facility will be passed on to those agriculture tube-well owners who have settled their outstanding dues with their respective DISCOs either through complete payment or agreed installments.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/13/13-page/775983-news.html

ORCHARD EXPERTS WARN GROWERS OF 'CITRUS GREENING'
Business Recorder, 13 July 2016

LAHORE: Citrus orchard experts have warned growers of "citrus greening" which is primarily spread by a small insect called Asian citrus psyllid, feeding on citrus tree leaves and stems.

The experts believe the disease spreads fast because of monsoon rains and affected tree stems turn pale. It dries stems and branches and reduces the number of leaves to an alarming scale which ultimately leads to death.

They have now urged the growers to save their orchards and plants, such as jasmine, which play the role of host for the bacteria.

A department spokesman has told them to get rid of weeds after rains.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/13/5-page/775893-news.html

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND DRUG CONTROL AUTHORITY FORMED
The Express Tribune, July 16th, 2016.

LAHORE: The provincial government has issued a notification regarding configuration of the Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drug Control Authority (PAFDA). Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has been notified as chairman and nutritionist Faqir Muhammad Anjum vice chairman of the authority responsible for coordinating upgrade of drug testing laboratories, fertiliser and pesticide laboratories and food testing laboratories on a par with international standards.

The authority will monitor the samples on more than 250 parameters. On Friday, Steering Committee on PAFDA Chairman Shamail Ahmad Khwaja, the additional chief secretary, chaired a meeting of nominated PAFDA members.

He apprised them of progress made on the initiative. The meeting discussed the establishment of PAFDA Secretariat adjacent to the Punjab Forensic Science Agency at Thokar Niaz Beg. The secretariat will be set up on 64 kanals. It was agreed that the Steering Committee and the PAFDA members would submit their recommendations to the chief minister in a week or two.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1142797/agriculture-food-drug-control-authority-formed/

AGRI MECHANIZATION PROGRAMME TO BE LAUNCHED IN PUNJAB
Business Recorder, 17 July 2016

Sialkot: Punjab government has mapped out a plan for the promotion of agriculture mechanization programme for enhancing productivity, profitability and to track agriculture sector on modern line in the Province.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Saturday that under the plan the Punjab government will provide agriculture implements on 50 percent subsidy to the growers across the Punjab. The promotion of agriculture mechanization programme will be implemented in all districts of the Punjab with the concept of enhancing productivity and profitability for mechanization of various farm operations. The Agriculture department had finalized necessary arrangements for the implementation of the programme in transparent manner in the province.

Under the programme home made set of agriculture machines and implements like disc harrow, rotavator, seed drill, chisel plough, sugarcane ridger will be provided to farmers on 50 percent subsidy for one set of implements to a farmer. The programme will be carried out through balloting in rural union councils and in this regard committees had been constituted to supervise the allotment of machines and implements in each district of the Punjab.

Meanwhile, Agriculture department had finalized necessary arrangements for undertaking the promotion of agriculture mechanization programme in 92 rural union councils of Sialkot and to monitor the implementation of the plan.

The process of balloting will be transparent for handing over the set of agricultural machines and implements to the farmers Sialkot district. The Sugarcane Ridger machine and implements will be provided only in Sugarcane growing districts of the Punjab sources pointed out..

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/07/17/5-page/777307-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 3RD TO JULY 10TH 2016

GOVT ASKED TO SET UP PROCESSING UNITS, COLD STORAGES
Dawn, July 4th, 2016

PESHAWAR: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) has urged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to set up processing units and modern cold storages under public-private partnership to take advantage of the rich potential of horticulture and agriculture resources in the province.

FPCCI's standing committee on horticulture and food exports chairman Ahmad Jawad in a statement here on Sunday said that horticulture sector had a significant export potential, particularly off-season fruits and vegetables that had a high demand in certain regional markets. "There is a need to adopt latest technology for enhancing export of these high value products," he added.

Mr Jawad said that Pakistan had certain geographical advantages and it was considered a backyard farm of the Central Asian States and the Middle East with remarkable potential for export of agriculture products.

He said that he had written a letter to the provincial agriculture minister to pay proper attention to improvement of the agriculture infrastructure and allocate sufficient funds in budget for the purpose but he did not respond to the suggestions.

Mr Jawad said that provincial government allocated only Rs8.63 billion for the development of agriculture sector in the budget for 2016-17. "We have to understand that small landholdings have adversely impacted crop yields and productivity in the province. Small scale farmers do not have access to sufficient resources to participate in high value-added markets," he said.

According to Jawad, the production process in the province is "supply-driven instead of demand-oriented". "Farmers with small holdings are unable to gain direct access to markets," he said, adding farmers had to travel at least 10 miles to reach the nearest market.

Mr Jawad said that only 1.8 million hectares out of 2.96 million hectares of cultivable land in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were being used to grow crops. He said that diversification into horticulture and rural-based agriculture processing units offered promising avenues for increasing the income of rural households.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1268980/govt-asked-to-set-up-processing-units-cold-storages

CAPITAL INVESTMENT: AGRO MACHINERY TO ENJOY 50% SUBSIDY
The Express Tribune, July 5th, 2016.

MULTAN: Agriculture department Multan has invited applications for provision of agriculture machinery to the farmers at 50% subsidised rates. Agriculture machinery is being manufactured in the country and of the price paid for the machinery, 50% would be paid by the Punjab government, said a press release issued by Punjab Agriculture Department on Monday.

Machinery including Disc Harrow, Rotovator, Rabi Drill, Chiesel Cultivator and Sugar Cane Ridger would be provided at union council level while Sugar Cane Cutter and Hollow Cone Nozzles at village level. A set of machinery would be given to one farmer at each of the union councils in Punjab through a process of draw.

Farmers who own six acre cultivable land or engaged in cultivation as peasant or contractor can apply for the set, however, they must own a tractor so they can operate the machinery.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1136474/capital-investment-agro-machinery-enjoy-50-subsidy/

KCA SAYS SHORTFALL IN COTTON CROP LIKELY
Business Recorder, July 05, 2016

The Karachi Cotton Association has expressed its concern over the devastating cotton crop failure in cotton season 2015-16 and expected shortfall in cotton crop 2016-17 season. Keeping in view the situation, the local textile industry is compiled to import row cotton from abroad to meet its requirement of basic raw material and ensure its contribution towards achieving the target of export fixed through exports of value added products as well as earning much needed foreign exchange for the country, said a statement on Monday.

However, due to payment of three percent Custom Duty and one percent additional duty on import of cotton, cost of the basic raw material of the textile industry ie imported cotton is considerably increased due to which the local textile industry is unable to compete in the international markets.

Reiterating its firm stand to ensure free trading policy in cotton that is free export and free import of cotton without any quantitative and qualitative restrictions, the KCA strongly urges upon for waiving all duties and taxes on import of cotton immediately in order to provide an opportunity to the local industry to meet their requirement of raw material from abroad in the backdrop of shortage of cotton crop at home and make their business competitive.

The KCA also urges for taking concrete measures in all directions to increase cotton production in the years to come so as to meet the rising requirement of the local industry as well as leave adequate surplus cotton for exports to keep presence of Pakistan cotton in the international market and earn much needed foreign exchange for the country.

The provision of export surplus will ensure international price of cotton to the Pakistani growers.-PR

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185:pakistan/63012:kca-says-shortfall-in-cotton-crop-likely/?date=2016-07-05

FERTILIZER: MECHANISM NOTIFIED FOR PAYMENT OF ST
Business Recorder, July 09, 2016

The government has decided that the subsidy on fertilisers like urea and DAP shall be paid after the sale of bagged fertilizer on the basis of sales tax invoice and sales tax returns submitted to Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) by the manufacturers/importers. Sources told Business Recorder here on Friday that the decision has been taken by the Ministry of National Food Security & Research in consultation with the FBR.

Details revealed that in consultation with all the stakeholders, a mechanism has been devised for disbursement of subsidy on Urea and DAP announced in the Federal Budget 2016-17. Ministry of Finance has also accorded concurrence to the proposed mechanism. The relevant clauses of the notification pertaining to FBR revealed that subsidy shall be paid after the sale of bagged fertilizer on the basis of Sales Tax Invoice and Sales Tax Returns submitted to FBR by the manufacturers/importers.

Moreover, the manufacturers of urea shall provide to FBR invoice wise details of the subsidised fertilisers sold, specifying name of buyers, NTN/ CNIC, description, number of bags sold, and other relevant information as declared in the filed sales tax return.

The fertilizer companies shall also forward this information electronically bifurcating the information on provincial basis. Thirdly, the FBR after verifying the records with sales tax return of manufacturers, shall forward claims to the State Bank of Pakistan within 15 working days under intimation to the said ministry

The State Bank of Pakistan will ensure payment of due subsidy claim within 15 working days. To streamline process of disbursements and address the issues and concerns of the stakeholders, it is imperative to discuss the matter in an exclusive meeting at the highest level, sources added.

Sources said that pursuant to the announcement in the Federal Budget, 2016-17, the Federal Government, after consultation with the provincial governments, has decided that the farmers will be provided urea fertilizer @ Rs 1400/bag. The estimated annual off-take of Urea is 110 million bags. Cash subsidy will also be available to Calcium Ammonium Nitrate (CAN) manufacturers @ Rs 88/- per bag.

The estimated amount of subsidy for urea calculates to Rs 17.160 billion which will be shared by the Federal Government and the provincial governments on 50:50 basis. For the purpose of the scheme, a non-lapsable Special Account titled “Subsidy on Urea Fertilizer” will be opened in the State Bank of Pakistan. Initially, the Federal and the Provincial Governments will deposit 50% of their respective shares of subsidy in the Special Account. The remaining 50% share will be deposited after utilisation of 80% of the funds initially deposited.

Alternatively, the Provincial Governments may indicate their consent for at source deduction of their share by the Federal Government. The amount so deducted will be deposited in The Special Account. The scheme will remain in force till the amount deposited in the Special Account by the Federal and Provincial governments is exhausted.

The eligibility criteria disclosed that all manufacturers of urea fertilizer registered with the Federal Board of Revenue under Sates Tax regime will be eligible for receiving cash subsidy under scheme. The manufacturers will pack fertilisers according to the design given by the Government showing clearly retail price and subsidy.

Cash Subsidy Disbursement Mechanism: The cash subsidy will be disbursed @ Rs 156/50 Kg bag to the manufacturers of urea fertilizer and @ Rs 88/50 Kg bag to CAN manufacturers by SBP. Cash subsidy shall be paid after the sale of bagged fertilizer on the basis of Sales Tax invoice and Sales Tax Returns submitted to FBR by the manufacturers.

The manufacturers of urea shall provide to FBR invoice wise details of the subsidised fertilisers sold, specifying name of buyers, NTN/ CNIC, description, number of bags sold, and other relevant information as declared in the filed sales tax return. The fertilizer companies shall also forward this information electronically bifurcating the information on provincial basis.

FBR after verifying the records with sales tax return of manufacturers, shall forward claims to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) within 15 days under intimation to the Ministry National Food Security & Research, sources maintained. The manufacturers will submit their subsidy claims on monthly basis. The State Bank will ensure payment of due subsidy claim within 07 working days.

Necessary details comprising names of manufacturers (place of business) quantities, destinations and value etc will be maintained by SBP and reported to Ministry of National Food Security and Research, they added. As far as monitoring mechanism is concerned, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research will co-ordinate implementation of the scheme with the assistance of provincial governments.

Provincial Governments will be responsible for strict monitoring to ensure that the fertilizer is sold on the reduced prices to the farmers by exercising powers under respective provincial laws and the benefit of the subsidy is transferred to the farmers. Necessary details comprising names of manufacturers and amounts paid will be maintained by SBP and reported to Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Finance and provincial governments.

The entire process will be monitored through electronic monitoring and data maintained on the respective websites of the provinces with complete inventory of fertilizer. Fertilizer manufacturers in conjunction with the provincial governments will ensure wider public awareness about the fertilizer prices. They will also launch mega media coverage through print and electronic media for this purpose.

The manufacturers would immediately cancel dealership of a dealer or sub-dealer found to be overcharging on the recommendations/directions of the provincial governments and shall be liable to fine of 20% of the total sales receipts.

The disbursement mechanism for subsidy on dap fertilizer revealed that pursuant to the announcement in the Federal Budget, 2016-17, the Federal Government, after consultation with the provincial governments, has decided that cash subsidy of Rs 300/- per 50 kg bag on Di Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertilizer will be provided.

As per Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the average retail price of DAP on 16th June 2016 was Rs 2,858/bag. After provision of cash subsidy of Rs 300/ per 50 kg bag and an expected discount of Rs 50/bag by importers and manufacturers, the retail price of DAP will decline accordingly

The estimated annual off take of DAP is 36 million bags. The estimated amount of subsidy @ 300/bag works out to be Rs 10.8 billion which will be shared by the Federal Government and the Provincial Governments on 50:50 basis. For the purpose of this scheme, a non-lapsable Special Account titled “Subsidy on DAP Fertilizer” will be opened in the State Bank of Pakistan.

Initially, the Federal and the Provincial Governments will deposit 50% of their respective shares of subsidy in the Special Account. The remaining 50% share will be deposited after utilisation of 80% of the funds initially deposited. Alternatively, the Provincial Governments may indicate their consent for at source deduction of their share by the Federal Government.

The amount so deducted will be deposited in the Special Account. The scheme will remain in force till the amount deposited in the Special Account by the Federal and Provincial Governments is exhausted. All manufacturers/importers of DAP fertilizer registered with the Federal Board of Revenue under Sales Tax regime will be eligible for receiving cash subsidy under the scheme.

http://www.brecorder.com/market-data/stocks-a-bonds/0:/63491:fertilizer-mechanism-notified-for-payment-of-st/?date=2016-07-09

STAY ORDERS PULL AGRICULTURE TAX COLLECTION DOWN IN PUNJAB
Dawn, July 10th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: Punjab’s agriculture income tax (AIT) collection fell short by 33 per cent, or Rs750 million, in the outgoing fiscal year, apparently because of increasing number of court stay orders against the levy.

The Punjab Board of Revenue (BoR) collected Rs1.55 billion against the target of Rs2.3bn during 2015-16. The target for 2016-17 has again been set at Rs2.3bn.

However, the collection was 51pc higher than Rs1.028bn collected in 2014-15.

The agriculture income tax, which went effective in its new form on July 1, 2015, was challenged by a number of land holders in the last fiscal year on the ground that they were already paying different taxes, such as income tax, abyana, malia and other indirect taxes. They also said that the government had not consulted them before imposing AIT.

The tax is payable by farmers having 25 acres of irrigated land (equivalent to 50 acres of un-irrigated land) and they are required to submit their tax returns under the amendments introduced in AIT Act 1997 in 2001.

A farmer belonging to the Sahiwal district, who declined to be named, told Dawn that he received AIT challan of Rs7,500 for 2014-15 a few months ago but did not pay it after hearing that the tax was in litigation. “The tax is unjustifiable as income from agriculture has already dropped. We are facing the wrath of high input costs,” he groaned.

He said different agriculture associations have already taken up the matter of double taxation with the relevant government departments.

Even many land owners who fell in the ambit of AIT have yet to declare their agriculture income in their returns submitted to the Federal Board of Revenue.

BoR Member Tax Asad Islam Mahni rejected that the tax in question was leading to dual taxation. “The department has been collecting AIT from around a million farmers throughout the province since 1997.”

He said that more than a thousand farmers might have got stay orders from courts, but the BoR has already got relief from the superior court in AIT’s favour.

However, he acknowledged that some leakages in the tax administration were also hampering better tax collection, adding that setting up of a Management Information System was under consideration to enlist all land owners with the help of the World Bank.

The official said BoR was already using the data of Land Record Management Information System to collect AIT from deserving land owners.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1269763/stay-orders-pull-agriculture-tax-collection-down-in-punjab

BUDGET 2016-17: DAR REITERATES STANCE TO SHORE UP AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY
The Express Tribune, July 10th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: A strong foundation for achieving overall inclusive growth has been laid in the budget for 2016-17 through strong incentives for all sectors of the economy including agriculture and industry, said Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

Dar, while reiterating the government’s resolve for uplift of agriculture sector, said the government announced a special agricultural package last year and, keeping up with the spirit of helping out the farmers, has also announced a number of measures in the 2016-17 budget.

He said there has been a significant reduction in prices of fertilisers. Prices of fertiliser were brought down by Rs250 a bag during the last few months and have now been further reduced by Rs400 a bag. Prices of DAP have also been reduced by Rs300 a bag with effect from July 2016, he said.

Dar added that seven per cent duty on pesticides has been withdrawn while off-peak rate of electricity for agricultural tube wells has been lowered from 8.85 rupee a unit to 5.35 rupee a unit.

Additionally, the agricultural delivery chain, which includes warehousing facilities for storage of produce, would get a three-year tax holiday.

The companies that set up `halal' meat production plants and obtain `halal' certification by December 31, 2016, will be exempted from income tax for four years. In order to promote farm mechanisation and raise productivity, it has been decided that non-adjustable sales tax at a reduced rate of seven per cent, instead of the existing 17%, may be charged on the local supply and import of certain agricultural equipment used for tillage and seed-bed preparation, seeding or planting, irrigation, drainage and agro-chemical application.

Customs duty, sales tax and withholding tax on import of agricultural machinery will be reduced to nine per cent from the current aggregate of 28% to 43%. Farmers with landholdings up to 12.5 acres will receive interest-free loans for setting up solar tube wells. Dar said that the government will actively pursue the objective of economic growth and development under leadership of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with renewed vigour.

He added that functionalisation of Pakistan Development Fund and Exim Bank of Pakistan would be among his priorities in the first quarter of 2016-17. He hoped these two institutions would help spur infrastructure development and promote exports.

Dar also hinted at the next phase of reforms aimed at improvement in the financial sector.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1138586/budget-2016-17-dar-reiterates-stance-shore-agriculture-industry/

August 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 29TH TO SEPTEMBER 4TH 2016

RICE: THE GROWER-EXPORTER CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, August 29th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

With the rice season just around the corner, farmers might fare better with an initial indication of improved prices for their crop.

The hybrid coarse varieties, which were sown in April in the central Punjab area, have gained an almost 50pc price increase — from Rs600 to Rs900 per 40kg — in the last two weeks. This is despite the fact that early paddy always fetches a lower price as it contains more moisture.

For basmati, the Punjab government has been engaged in marathon sessions with the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (Reap) and farmers to arrive at an agreed and reasonable price. Reap is offering Rs1,500 per Kg. The farmers, however, are sticking to Rs1,700 per 40kg. Even if the Reap offer is accepted by farmers, it would represent a 36pc increase over Rs1,100 per 40kg average price last year.

The context for better rice price was set this year by two factors. Firstly, Iran opened its market after a hiatus of three years and helped clear the rice glut with exporters. According to Reap, almost 250,000 tonnes were sent to Iran before July 22, when it slapped a ban on imports because its own crop was arriving in the domestic market.

Secondly, the Punjab government held a number of trilateral meetings (involving the agriculture department, exporters and farmers) to ensure that basmati price does not hurt farmers. The provincial government arrived at the price of Rs1,700 per maund, after including a 25pc profit for farmers. The cost of production has come down by almost Rs150 per maund this year because of various official interventions, including subsidy on fertiliser, reduced diesel prices and reduced rates of electricity for tube-wells.

All these factors have created conducive business environment — especially because rice trade, particularly the basmati variety, has been in a crisis for the last few years; in which all major stakeholders — farmers, shellers and exporters — were hit. But last year, exporters made some money when domestic prices crashed.

However, exporters still maintain that it might be a tough year for exports. Iran has banned import from Pakistan, initially for four months, but it can be longer than that if their crop turns out to be a healthy one. In the largest market for rice — the Gulf region — the Indian dumping of rice is a major problem. Exports to other regions are almost negligible and do not offer much hope.

However, farmers and government officials think that exporters are painting a gloomy export picture for some reason. Otherwise, the situation is not that bad. Iran's ban will soon be lifted because only two Iranian provinces are allowed to sow rice, which cannot cater to their own demand of 3m tonnes. So, one cannot rule the market out for the rest of the season. The Gulf might have had its financial crisis, but ethnic clientele, the main consumer of basmati rice, is still big enough, and rich enough, to help sustain imports from Pakistan.

Pakistan exported 3.2m tonnes in 2014-15 and was able to increase it to 3.7m tonnes next year, earning $1.86bn. On average, basmati export prices sustained a level of $900 per tonne, which translates into Rs2,500 per 40kg for paddy.

Farmers are demanding only Rs1,700 per 40 kg, leaving a healthy margin for exporters. If an exporter still concedes that export figures will not be less than last year, they could cross the $2bn mark due to international price trends.

The government sponsoring negotiations between farmers and exporters is a healthy sign, but only offers a seasonal solution. The huge subsidies that the government has offered in the last one year, is also not sustainable model. Farming still needs to be modernised.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1280523/rice-the-grower-exporter-conflict-of-interest

GOVT EYES 13 M COTTON BALES THIS YEAR
Dawn, August 30th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is expected to produce around 13 million bales of cotton in the coming season, the fourth meeting of the Federal Textile Board was informed on Monday.

This recovery in the cotton out was the outcome of "sustained efforts of the federal and provincial governments in the last year", the meeting, chaired by Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir, was told.

An official statement issued after the meeting said that both Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association and Cotton Commissioner informed the stakeholders that through close coordination between federal and Punjab governments, pink bollworm, which had damaged the cotton crop last year, have largely been controlled.

Furthermore, a large number of farmers have been trained to drain their fields properly so that their crops can be safeguarded.

All the stakeholders across the value chain beginning from ginners, weavers, spinners, bed-sheet manufacturers and garment manufacturers made detailed presentations on current state of exports in their sectors and gave suggestions for improvements in the policies.

The meeting noted that the government has already facilitated the exporters through zero-rating, cuts in exports financing rates, uninterrupted supply of electricity and gas and repeated reduction in electricity prices.

Mr Dastgir expressed confidence that in spite of challenging international environment, Pakistani exporters have the ability to rise to the challenge and grow Pakistani exports.

The cotton crop failure of last season wiped out billions from the rural economy and was feared to reduce the demand for summer cotton fabric.

Earlier reports from the lower Sindh region suggested that cultivation on 640,000 hactares this season exceeds the cultivated area of 621,000 hactares of last year while the crop was also stated to be healthy.

The last season's cotton crop failure was particularly severe in Punjab where the year-on-year shortfall crossed 40 per cent.

Pakistan's economic growth suffered a decline of 0.5pc in the previous fiscal year due to a 28pc decline in cotton crop. "If this was not the case, our GDP growth would have been 5.21pc," Finance Minister Ishaq said in his latest budget speech in June.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1280793

COTTON PRICE SOARS ON SHORT SUPPLY
Dawn, August 30th, 2016

KARACHI: Further slowdown in phutti (seed cotton) arrivals and fear of quality owing to new spell of rains in many cotton-growing areas in Sindh and Punjab surged up cotton prices to a seasonal high on Monday.

The current spell of rains has also badly affected the working of ginning units which are not getting sufficient supply of phutti to process, brokers said.

Moreover, cotton grown in Kacha area of Sindh is reported to be confronted with quality issues; this has caused fear amongst buyers who have slowed down their buying activity, they said.

Due to rains, the arrivals of phutti in Punjab were feared to be further delayed because shortage of transport due to Eidul Azha was disrupting phutti haulage, they added.

Since there is a wide gap between demand and supply in the domestic cotton market, prices generally remained on higher side. However, world cotton markets remained under pressure. The Karachi Cotton Association left its spot rate unchanged.

Deals on the ready counter were: 300 bales from Hala (Rs6,750), 400 bales Sanghar (Rs6,750), 400 bales Shahdadpur (Rs6,750 to Rs6,850), 200 bales Tando Adam (Rs6,850), 200 bales Chichawatni (Rs6,950), 400 bales Khanewal (Rs7,000), 200 bales Gojra (Rs7,000) and 200 bales Pak Pattan (Rs7,000).

http://www.dawn.com/news/1280775

AGRI WOES
Business Recorder,August 30, 2016

The decline in the growth of agriculture sector by 0.19 percent during FY16 has caused a lot of anguish among various circles, prompting them to offer various kinds of suggestions to the policymakers. Talking to this newspaper, Chairman, FPCCI's regional standing committee, Ahmed Jawad said that there was an urgent need for post-harvest technology in the agriculture sector because adequate application of recommended post-harvest treatments would not only minimise post-harvest losses but also maximise producer prices.

However, public sector's capacity to invest in the agriculture sector was on the decline and average yields for cotton and wheat had declined due to lack of modernisation in the sector.Prime Minister's Agriculture Package of Rs 341 billion was not the solution and it was important to chalk out a viable long-term plan for the revival of the agricultural sector.

All relevant departments of the government need to collaborate and put forward a comprehensive national plan for agriculture for the approval of the CCI and the Parliament.

The government also should review the mark-up rates on a regular basis and increase micro-credit for agriculture extension. FRDL Act needs to be revisited with a view to protecting expenditures for food security and directing these protected expenditures towards poorest districts in the country.

Problems of agriculture at present include rising input costs being faced by farmers; indirect taxes on inputs and farm operations; subsidies and support price benefits not reaching the poorest in the farming sector; lack of innovation in seed varieties; lack of technology to modernise the crop harvesting, cultivation, storage and marketing, weak access to agriculture credit; and water shortages threatening the irrigated lands.

We appreciate the concerns of Chairman of FPCCI's regional standing committee about the overall stagnation in the agriculture sector of the economy and for suggesting ways to improve the situation.

His concerns are particularly welcome because he is supposed to largely defend the interests of commerce and industry and his ideas about the welfare of the agriculture sector seem to be motivated by national interest and the plight of the poor and ordinary farmers of the country though it could be easily argued that the fortunes of industrial, commercial, services and other sectors are also closely linked to the growth in agriculture sector in Pakistan.

For instance, the prospects of sugar and textile industry would largely depend on the level of output of sugar and cotton in a particular year. Coming to the suggestions of Ahmad Jawad, there is nothing unusual about them.

For example, everybody would be underscoring the need to minimising post-harvest losses, reducing indirect taxes and input costs, improving quality of seeds, modernising technology, increasing agricultural credit, reviewing mark-up rate and doing away with water scarcity. All these steps could go a long away in improving the prospects of agriculture sector and it is difficult to imagine that the relevant authorities do not know about the positive impact of these measures.

However, Ahmad Jawad must be aware that most of these steps would involve a change in the fiscal and monetary stance of the country and some of the measures are already in place. A reduction in input costs and provision of more subsidies, for instance, would necessitate higher public expenditures and increase the budget deficit. So far as access to agriculture credit and review of mark-up rates is concerned, the State Bank has been quite active in extending these incentives to the agriculture sector by prescribing mandatory targets to the commercial banks.

The FRDL Act was passed by the Parliament after a great deal of persuasion to contain overall indebtedness of the country within reasonable limits and ensure price stability. Not only would any unwise or imprudent revision of it threaten financial stability of the country, it would also open the floodgate of more requests from other sectors to also exempt their credit from the provisions of FRDL Act.

Obviously, Ahmad Jawad has not thought through the consequences of his proposals seriously. Overall, however, the suggestions of the Chairman are very well-intentioned but these need to be examined with an open mind and from a broader perspective.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/08/30/56-page/789893-news.html

ZERO WHEAT IMPORTS HELP SAFEGUARD GROWERS
Dawn, August 31st, 2016

Aamir Shafaat Khan

KARACHI: The government's decision to increase regulatory duty on wheat imports twice this calendar year — once from 25 per cent to 40pc and then to 60pc — has kept the wheat imports zero while managing to safeguard wheat growers.

According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data, wheat imports remained zero in 2015-16 as compared to 686,650 tonnes imports worth $185 million in 2014-15.

The first month of the current fiscal year also started with nil imports of wheat while there were no imports in July 2015.

A miller said the government had succeeded in protecting the interests of wheat growers by pushing up regulatory duty to discourage imports.

Patron Islamabad Chamber of Small Traders Shahid Rasheed Butt said the regulatory duty would save farmers from the negative impact of wheat imports from Central Asian states and falling prices in the international market.

In a statement, he said, Pakistan already has surplus stock and all efforts to export wheat have backfired. Wheat imports at this stage are against national interest, he added.

He said the federal and provincial governments have almost ten million tonnes of surplus wheat but a large quantity of this stock is under threat due to rains and inadequate storage facilities.

Surplus wheat could not be exported due to low prices despite frequent extension of dates and upward revision in the export rebate which hit almost 90 dollars per tonne, he noted.

The business leader said the federal government allowed Punjab and Sindh to sell 1.2m tonnes of wheat. However, the two provinces could barely manage to sell one third of the target.

Lower prices have cast gloom on wheat exports as only 86 tonnes were shipped fetching just $29,000 in July 2016 as compared to zero exports in same month of 2015.

In 2015-16, wheat exports fell to 1,145 tonnes costing $335,000 as compared to 8,286 tonnes which earned $2.9m in 2014-15.

Pakistan Flour Millers Association (Sindh Zone) said the federal and provincial governments provided rebate to boost wheat exports but it failed due to disparity between international and local market rates.

Currently, only Khyber Pakhtunkhwa could export some wheat as its territory borders Afghanistan. On the other hand, Sindh was unable to export due to global market competition at low rates, the association said.

PFMA said Sindh Food Department's reserves wheat stocks are 1.4m tonnes of current crop of 2015-2016 plus 0.4m tonnes carryover stocks in hand of 2014-15 crop.

PFMA has suggested the Sindh government to extend 60 dollar rebate as a subsidy on entire wheat stocks of 1.4m tonnes and 0.4m tonnes so that people can get flour on cheaper rate during this season and wheat stocks could be consumed rapidly within the local market.

Flour millers and traders are alarmed over the depressed wheat export scenario in coming months despite additional rebate on surplus wheat.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1280999

COTTON BODY MEETS AFTER TWO YEARS

Dawn, August 31st, 2016

ISLAMABAD: The governing body of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) met on Tuesday after a lapse of two years, which speaks volume about the government's seriousness towards the cash crop — the country's agriculture mainstay.

This was not enough, senior provincial representatives also skipped the meeting which was chaired by Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan.

The minister expressed his utter displeasure for holding the meeting after a gap of two years, and asked the secretary of the PCCC to call an explanation of the members absent from the meeting which was held after a long delay.

"Cotton crop is a pivotal entity and a backbone of our national economy. Neglect in attending official affairs relevant to cotton growing, picking and production is unacceptable, especially on part of provincial government superiors," Mr Bosan observed.

Private audit under the PPRA Rules and inquiry on condition of Sakrand facility, among other issues, were discussed at length during the meeting.

The minister directed to take strict action against the director Agricultural Research Sub-committee (ARSC) for not submitting the report.

Mr Bosan directed to form a committee to look into the matter of bale weight as per international practice. It has been brought to his notice that the international set practice is to export cotton bale of 170kg. However, some factions in cotton export sector have been providing bales with 150kg to 160kg.

This erroneous and bad-intended practice will ultimately malign the whole sector on international level. The minister took notice of this matter and directed the committee to submit its report in next meeting to be held before end of this calendar year.

The meeting reviewed the committee's three-year performance (2013-16).

http://www.dawn.com/news/1280990

KBP URGES GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE FARMERS' PROBLEMS

Business Recorder, August 31, 2016

The Kissan Board Pakistan (KBP) has warned the Punjab government of resuming protests if the government did not fulfil its promises to solve farmers' problems within next 15 days. This ultimatum was issued by the newly elected KBP President Chaudhry Nisar Ahmad while talking to media persons here on Tuesday after the Board's General Council meeting. The Board would utilise all its resources and energies for resolving the multiple problems of the agriculture sector.

"The government had assured immediate payment to sugarcane growers by the millers, exemption of growers having less than 12 acres of land from levy of agricultural income tax, fixing of flat electricity rates for tube wells installed for agricultural purposes.

The General Council meeting was attended by the Board representatives from all the four provinces including Rizwan Ullah Khan Mohamand (KP), Abdul Samad Safi (KP), Chaudhry Manzoor Ahmad Gujjar (Punjab), Malik Ramzan Rohari, Haji Muhammad Ramzan and others. The outgoing KBP president Sadiq Khan Khakwani took oath from the new president and also announced full support to the new team. He urged the government to formulate an action plan to end looting of growers by the millers and hold an inquiry by a judge of the Supreme Court about non-payment of outstanding dues to the growers by sugar millers and lesser payments of their produce.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/81185:kbp-urges-government-to-solve-farmers-problems/?date=2016-08-31

'WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR AGRARIAN ECONOMY?'
The Express Tribune, September 1st, 2016.

LAHORE: "It is unfortunate that despite having fertile lands, abundant water, a suitable climate and hardworking farmers, the agriculture sector has not made the desired progress," Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif said on Wednesday. He was addressing a seminar on GM Cotton Technology at Chief Minister's Office.

"All institutions which should be playing a positive role for strengthening the agriculture sector have neglected it," he said. "Negligence on part of the government towards development of agriculture is also a factor."

Sharif said billions of dollars had been spent on the import of machinery that could have been locally manufactured.

"It is time for scientists to pay attention to their responsibilities and adopt a serious attitude."

"Had our agriculture institutions performed well, the situation would not have been so dire. There need to identify those who have not performed their responsibilities and hold them accountable."

The chief minister said interest-free loans were being provided to farmers. "With the help of modern technology, every penny of Kissan Package will reach the farmers. A huge subsidy is also being given on agriculture machinery. The federal government is also providing subsidy on fertilisers," he said.

"Power tariff has also been reduced to facilitate farmers," he said.

He said the Punjab Agriculture Commission and several subcommittees had been set up to devise an agriculture policy and to dealing with matters related to livestock.

"Pakistan was one of the strongest agrarian economies. What has happened to this sector now?"

The chief minister said that Australia and China had made a lot of progress in agriculture.

"Pakistan, despite being an agrarian country, is forced to import cotton, wheat and sugar," he said.

Shahbaz said China and Australia also faced climate change but their agriculture sector was doing better.

"Cotton-based industry is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, but the cotton yield per acre has not increased," he said. The chief minister said agriculture production could be raised through provision of quality seeds, medicines and with the help of modern technology.

"Experts and officers of government departments are always ready to participate in seminars and to attend training workshops abroad but they have never shared with the nation what they have learnt. Vice chancellors attend conferences abroad but they have never told me what they gained in terms of knowledge."

"I would have been happy if they had given proposals for uplift of agriculture but they did not make a single suggestion," he said. Minister for Agriculture Farrukh Javed also addressed the seminar. He said the cotton crop had suffered a loss last year but this year crop yield was better.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1173718/happened-agrarian-economy/

KHARIF CROPS: FARMERS TOLD ABOUT ON-TIME SOWING BENEFITS
Business Recorder, September 03, 2016

The Met Office has asked the farmers of upper half of the country to finish sowing of Kharif crops on time in a bid to utilise fully the present soil moisture especially maize crop in rain-dependent areas. It warned that pest and viral attacks were expected to strike cotton and sugarcane crops during hot and humid monsoon conditions. It said farmers should be very careful and take timely precautionary measures to avoid yield loss.

It said farmers obtaining crop water through tube wells should schedule irrigation as per weather conditions. The Met Office also asked the farmers to control further weeds growth to stop any negative impact over the crops. Weeds removing practices should be started soon after expected rains.

Farmers should take timely precautionary measures to protect their crops, livestock and other property from any heavy rains. Farmers of cotton belt should be aware of the adverse effects of stagnant water in the fields, it said. In Punjab, rain-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sargodha and Faisalabad till September 3.

In Sindh, light rainfall is expected at isolated places including Hyderabad, Karachi, Mirpurkhas and Larkana Divisions till September 10. Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of the province with a possibility of light rain along coastal belt. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, rain-thunderstorm is expected at scattered places in Mardan, Malakand, Hazara and Peshawar Division till September 3. In Balochistan: Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of the province. In Gilgit-Baltistan, rain-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places in its most parts. In Kashmir, rain-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places including Muzaffarabad, Kotli, Neelum and Rawalakot.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/82090/

SWAT’S VARIETY OF PEACHES EXPORTED, APPRECIATED ACROSS THE WORLD
The Express Tribune, September 3rd, 2016

Shehzad Khan

MINGORA: More often than not, the mere mention of Swat Valley evokes a picturesque image of snow-capped mountains, stunning green meadows and azure rivers. However, this picture would be incomplete without some of the most luscious fruits on the planet which are grown in the region.

Historically, the valley is billed as one of the cradles of ancient civilisation. In a world that has changed tremendously through advancements in science and technology, farmers still use traditional methods and tools to make the most of the valley’s fertile soil.

Swat produces apples of 20 different kinds and 18 varieties of peaches, which are exported and appreciated across the world.

Ihsanullah, a peach grower and farming expert, tells The Express Tribune he can recall the varieties of peaches grown in Swat on his fingertips.

“The first kind of peach starts growing in May,” he explains. “May 25 is the date when Jaitay becomes available in the market.”

Ihsanullah adds the second kind of peach is locally named Ali Green and it hits the markets in the first week of June. Comparing the two, the farmer points out the second kind of peach, Ali Green, is preferred as it is sweeter.

Talking about the other varieties that come a little later into the season, Ihsanullah says the locally called Doyam Haray is produced in the third week of June and is also available in the market. The fourth form of peach is Soyam.

He adds the growing of Soyam and onward production mark the beginning of a difficult time in the market for peach growers.

“The farmers try to reach the market earlier with the aim of maximising sales,” he says. “Any delay can be costly and will deprive the peach growers of a healthy income.”

Ihsanullah tells The Express Tribune the fifth produce is named the Golden. However, there is another breed within this kind of peach and it is called the China Panjam.

”Both the Golden and China Panjam simultaneously reach the market and are available by the start of July,” he adds.

The sixth kind, called Shasham, is available in the second week of July.

”There are another three breeds within Shasham and all are different in their physical appearance, but their taste is almost identical,” he says.

Ihsanullah highlights that the seventh is called Spin Pakhay and is the most expensive, not to mention delicious, produce of the peach season. It starts production in the third week of July and is available by the last week of the same month.

“The Hashtam reaches the market in the first week of August and remains till the third week,” he adds. It marks the end of the season. However, some mountainous areas in the upper parts of Swat keep producing peaches which are available till September 15.

Ihsanullah adds the entire peach producing season is a great time for income generation. The farmer states much of their daily income is generated from the process of peach plucking and packing.

“Those plucking peaches from the trees are locally called Shokmar and their daily income is Rs500,” Ihsanullah says. “Packing is done skillfully and labourers involved in such a process earn Rs700 daily.”

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1175017/fruits-labour-swats-peaches-still-draw-takers/

TRACTOR FOR MODERN FARM FEATURES EVERYTHING BUT THE FARMER
Dawn September 4th, 2016

Mario Parker

AS Detroit car makers and Silicon Valley tech giants vie to bring driverless cars to US roads, one of the world’s largest tractor makers is looking to do the same down on the farm.

Case IH, the agricultural-machinery unit of CNH Industrial, this week unveiled a sleek, aggressive-looking red-and-black machine at the annual Farm Progress Show in Boone, Iowa.

This tractor – CNH calls it the Autonomous Concept Vehicle – has one obvious difference compared with more conventional models: there’s no cab for a driver. Instead, it comes equipped with cameras, radar and GPS, allowing a farmer to remotely monitor planting and harvesting via an app on a tablet computer, the company’s Brand President Andreas Klauser said in an interview on Wednesday as crowds gathered around the machine to snap photographs.

Agricultural-machinery companies like Case, Deere & Co. and Agco Corp. are keen to add the latest technology amid growing interest in the use of big data analysis, drones and satellite imaging. But this brave new world isn’t without its challenges. The US Justice Department said on Wednesday it is suing Deere to stop the company buying a business that it argues would eliminate competition in high-speed planting, a young and developing segment of farming.

While offering efficiencies, technological advances promise to reduce a farmer’s traditional reliance on gut instinct. Some have expressed anxiety about corporations holding onto data gathered from their fields. London-based CNH would face headwinds in getting row-crop farmers to adopt its new technology, but it could gain a foothold in horticulture, Ann Duignan, an analyst at JPMorgan Chase in New York, wrote in an Aug 30 report.

Dealing with the legal implications of self-driving tractors is one reason why it could take three years before they're commercially available, Klauser said. An example he gave is how a farmer would go about moving the tractor from one field to another that may be across a road, since no one is physically driving it.

He declined to disclose how much it has cost to build the tractor on display in Iowa, or how much such a machine might sell for, if it ever moves beyond the concept stage. Case will analyse farmer feedback on its prototype.

The 419-horsepower machine has a maximum speed of 31 miles per hour (50 kph), according to Case. That's much bigger in scale and power than other autonomous concepts, said Sara Olson, a Boston-based analyst at Lux Research who studies farm technology.

"You're not doing it just to be a novelty," Klauser said. "You're doing it to increase the efficiency for your customers."

http://www.dawn.com/news/1281889

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 22ND TO AUGUST 28TH 2016
COTTON CROP: LACK OF INNOVATION KEEPS YIELD LOWER IN PAKISTAN
The Express Tribune, August 22nd, 2016.

Zia Banday

ISLAMABAD: In 2015-16, China is expected to lose its position as the largest producer of cotton to India. Unfavourable weather conditions and reduced government support have contributed to this Chinese downgrading.

Still China remains the cotton powerhouse that holds 62% of world's cotton stocks of 104.1 million bales. The Chinese government is taking a mix of policy measures to cater for the cotton requirement of its large textile industry, which has a 37% share in world's textile exports of $766 billion.

It remains cautious enough for price stability in cotton markets in order to ensure that its growers are not hurt. For the purpose, it is releasing targeted quantities from its cotton reserves and allowing limited cotton imports.

With the exception of Australia, all major cotton producing regions have recorded a decline in production in 2015-16. In terms of the fall in percentage, Pakistan remains the worst hit. Numerous factors such as pest attack, insufficient inputs and limitation of varieties contributed to the drastic decrease in Pakistan's production.

Despite being the fourth largest cotton producer, Pakistan remains at the bottom ladder of productivity. Its average per hectare yield of 560 kilogrammes is better than Indian yield of 516 kg.

However, a caveat remains here that says India grows bulk of its cotton from rain-fed areas as opposed to irrigated land that reduces its production cost. In contrast, Pakistan grows most of its cotton in the irrigated land of southern Punjab and Sindh.

If the cotton yield is compared with China, then the productivity picture appears bleaker. With a 1,460kg yield, China is extracting 2.6 times more cotton from the same piece of land than Pakistan.

Now the question arises how did China with smaller landholdings per farmer and with substantial rain-fed areas reach the highs of cotton productivity? The answer is in adoption and application of technology and related innovations.

China remains a fervent follower of intensive cotton farming technologies. It allowed the introduction of Bt cotton in the 1990s. Local agricultural research institutes have developed hybrid Bt cotton seeds that now cover 45% of cotton growing areas in China. These varieties have proved themselves more resilient to pest attacks than local varieties.

On the negative side, China is facing higher soil pollution due to excessive plastic and chemical usage and shortage of labour. However, these problems are being overcome with more rational usage and greater mechanisation.

Besides economic benefits, double-cropping of wheat and cotton has reduced competition for land in China. By using short-season cotton varieties, farmers are alleviating plant diseases and pests. Seedling transplantation facilitates double-cropping through better plant management and reduces risks for the farmers.

Plastic mulching for cotton crop in China was introduced in 1979. At present, over 70% of cotton field is covered with plastic film each year.

Seedling transplantation is used in combination with plastic mulching, whereby cotton seedlings are transplanted to plastic-mulched field rather than planted in open field. It helped in improved water usage and temperature maintenance. These two techniques have resulted on average in over 30% improvement in lint yield.

Plant training is another intensive cotton farming technique. It includes removal of vegetative branches, old leaves, empty fruit branches and plant toppings. It reduces the nutrient consumption by surplus organs, hence enhancing cotton yield and fibre quality.

The point to ponder is to explore the mechanism for improving the learning of Pakistani farmers through Chinese collaboration. Economic and technological benefits of the CPEC need to expand its tentacles in different directions, especially in the largest economic sector of cotton. In our opinion, Pakistan’s cotton growers will more than agree with this assertion.

The writer is a director in a research institute in Islamabad and was previously working as an entrepreneur in China

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1167179/cotton-crop-lack-innovation-keeps-yield-lower-pakistan/

ISSUES OF AGRI SECTOR: SCA SEEKS EARLY NOTIFICATION FOR COMMITTEE
Business Recorder,August 22, 2016

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has welcomed the announcement of Chief Minister Sindh regarding forming a ministerial committee for resolving the issues of agriculture sector and demanded to notify the committee at the earliest.

The meeting of SCA held here on Sunday with senior vice president Syed Ajaz Nabi Shah in chair and participation of members via video link from Karachi, Hyderabad, Sanghar, Sukkur and Ghotki, further demanded of extending the dates for receiving and submitting the applications forms for subsidised tractor scheme so that growers could avail the scheme.

They said that the CM Sindh during his visit of Hyderabad and meeting with growers promised to constitute a committee comprising the ministers of agriculture, irrigation, livestock and revenue departments for determining the issues being encountered by the agriculture sector in co-ordination with representatives of the growers and later they had to submit the detailed report to the CM for remedial actions.

They demanded immediate formation and notification of the committee so that issues of agriculture sector could be resolved on priority.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/78186:issues-of-agri-sector-sca-seeks-early-notification-for-committee/?date=2016-08-22

WHEAT IMPORT: FOOD MINISTRY WAITS FOR INPUT ON DUTY INCREASE PROPOSAL
The Express Tribune, August 23rd, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Finance have yet to give their response to the proposal of enhancing the regulatory duty on wheat import from the current 40% to 60% floated by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Last week, the food security ministry wrote letters to the commerce and finance ministries, seeking comments on the proposal of further increasing the regulatory duty on wheat import in a bid to discourage the inflow of cheap commodity, particularly from Kazakhstan, and to protect the domestic produce.

However, a food security ministry official told The Express Tribune that they were waiting for the input of the two ministries before preparing a summary for approval of the Economic Coordination Committee.

The food security ministry is concerned about the surplus wheat stock in the country due to high prices and fears that import of the commodity, particularly from the Central Asian countries, will further aggravate matters.

Earlier this year, the regulatory duty on wheat import was increased from 25% to 40%.

In order to reduce the surplus, the government had announced an encouraging subsidy on wheat export, but international buyers were reticent because of lower prices in the world market.

It is unlikely that the government will offer more subsidy on exports. “Therefore, it is seeking to push up the regulatory duty on imports by a further 20% to shield the local produce,” the ministry official added.

Under the World Trade Organization (WTO) regime, a country cannot ban the import of any commodity and regulatory duty is the only choice to protect a local product. Pakistan has had surplus wheat and has undertaken various steps lately to dispose of the stock by exporting it to the international market. However, all efforts have so far proved fruitless because of weaker prices.

At present, Pakistan has a stock of 9.923 million tons with provinces and Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco).

The ECC in January 2015 had allowed export of 800,000 tons of wheat by the government of Punjab at a rebate of $55 per ton and 400,000 tons by the government of Sindh at a rebate of $45 per ton. Later, the subsidy was increased by $30.

Until now, Punjab and Sindh could export only 252,650 tons and 164,000 tons, respectively.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1167964/wheat-import-food-ministry-waits-input-duty-increase-proposal/

SPEAKERS URGE FARMERS TO PRODUCE VEGETABLE SEEDS
Business Recorder, 23 August, 2016

FAISALABAD: Speakers have called for tangible steps to pave the way for production of indigenous on-farm vegetable seeds as the country is spending a huge foreign exchange of 6 billion rupees annually on imported vegetable seeds.

They were addressing at one-day seminar titled “Dissemination of Seed Production Technology of Vegetable Crops” arranged by Vegetable Seed Lab, Institute of Horticulture Sciences University of Agriculture Faisalabad at New Senate Hall.

The session was chaired by Vice Chancellor University of Agriculture Faisalabad Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan whereas Director Institute of Horticulture Dr Muhammad Amjad Aulakh and others also spoke on the occasion.

Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that the country was producing plenty of surplus food grains, fruits and vegetables but around 35 percent women and children are malnourished due to bad eating habits and food preference.

He expressed his concerns on various environmental hazards of producing vegetables by sewage and untreated industrial water and said that using such vegetables may cause health problems to the consumers.

He said that due to lack of awareness, affordability issue and other factors, farmers were left with no option to grow vegetables with impure local vegetables seeds that resulted in huge economic loss to them.

He said that vegetables coupled with grams were an essential element of a quality life that would enrich the human body with iron, minerals and vitamins.

He said that despite growing vegetables at rural areas, 67 percent rural population used to purchase vegetables from urban markets.

He added that the country was endowed with a diverse and fertile agro climatic zones that enables the farmers to sow vegetables on early, timely and later stage that enables the consumers to use the vegetables for longer time period.

He urged the farmers to produce their on-farm vegetable seeds that would save a huge amount of using imported seeds adding that if they organize themselves as small seed cooperatives that would enable them to flourish the business.

He was of the view that during the half decade, the campus has been transformed as a university of resonance which equips the students as well as the farmers with relevant entrepreneurial skills.

Earlier, Director Institute of Horticultural Sciences Prof Dr Muhammad Amjad Aulakh shed light on various aspects of the project and said that his team is working in Faisalabad and Depalpur districts and so far distributed thousands of packets of vegetable seeds among the farmers.

He said that besides distributing vegetables seeds, they are providing the farmers training how to prude their own seeds.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/08/23/9-page/788077-news.html

SHAHBAZ REVIEWS IMPLEMENTATION OF KISSAN PACKAGE
Business Recorder, August 25, 2016
Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif presided over the first meeting of Punjab Agriculture Commission, here Wednesday which reviewed the pace of implementation of Kissan package and the steps for the welfare of farmers.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that he had promised to establish agriculture commission for the farmers which has been fulfilled like other promises and Punjab Agriculture Commission has been constituted by the government for the uplift of agriculture sector, prosperity of farmers and evolving of agriculture policy.

He said that Punjab Agriculture Commission will be autonomous and its separate secretariat will be set up. He said that government, in accordance with its promise, has given effective representation to farmers in agriculture commission.

He said that this commission will be a milestone in welfare of cultivators and solution of their problems and decisions will be taken with the consultation of representatives of farmers' organisations which will be immediately implemented. Shehbaz Sharif further said that the role of the commission is of vital importance for the protection of rights of small cultivators.

The Chief Minister also issued instructions for setting up sub committees for making the commission active and purposeful and said that sub-committees will be established with regard to food, livestock, irrigation and agriculture. He directed that the most suitable persons should be selected for these sub-committees as this commission has to be made vibrant and active while agri policy is to be evolved on the recommendations of these committees.

The Chief Minister directed to set up a committee under the chairmanship of Vice Chancellor Agriculture University Faisalabad for devising agriculture policy and said that maximum representation will be given to the representatives of farmers associations in the committee on the pattern of agriculture commission so that consultation of all stakeholders should be ensured in the preparation of agriculture policy.

He further said that historic Kissan Package has been given for the prosperity of small cultivators and increase in per acre yield and provision of every penny of Kisan package to deserving persons will be ensured. He said that interest free loans will be given to small cultivators under Kisan Package and for the first time interest free loans will also be given to such small cultivators as are not the owner of the land.

He said that agriculture is the backbone of national economy and package of billions of rupees has been given to the farmers first time in the history of the country. Shahbaz Sharif said that all out measures are being taken for the uplift of the farmers.

He said that construction of modern silos is necessary for controlling wastage of grain worth billions of rupees. Issuing instructions for a crackdown against the elements involved in the trade of spurious agri medicines, the Chief Minister directed that elimination of this heinous trade be ensured.

He said that farmers cannot be left at the mercy of such elements and complete eradication of spurious agri medicines should be ensured in the province within next four months. Shahbaz Sharif appreciated the proposal of setting up Small Farmers Development Corporation for the welfare of small cultivators and said that final recommendations be presented in this regard.

President Kisan Ittehad (Khalid Khokhar Group) Khalid Khokhar and representatives of other farmers' organisations thanked Shahbaz Sharif for fulfilling the promise of setting up Kissan Commission and also appreciated the measures taken by him for the uplift of agriculture sector and welfare of small cultivators. Provincial Ministers Rana Sanaullah Khan, Dr Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, Dr Farrukh Javed, Yawar Zaman, Chief Secretary, Secretaries of departments concerned and representatives of farmers associations were present in the meeting.

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/78960/

AGRICULTURE 'MOST PROTECTED, LEAST INTEGRATED' SECTOR IN SOUTH ASIA
Dawn, August 26th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Agriculture has been the most protected sector in South Asia, and at the same time is also the 'least integrated' in terms of intra-regional trade and investments, results of a joint study carried out by the Asian Development Bank and UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) say.

The study, titled 'Food Security in South Asia', in Pakistan as in other South Asian countries generally, the agriculture sector is still more protected than the industrial sector on an average. This was, however, not the case before 2000. Until 1998, the average tariff for industrial products was closer to 50 per cent while that for agriculture products was around 40pc.

After 2001, the industrial sector in the country was liberalised much faster, resulting in an average of 13.4pc in 2009 while the average for agriculture is 17pc.

Amongst the most protected products in Pakistan, beverages and spirits have the highest tariffs – around 75pc. The products with the lowest tariffs include cereals and oil seeds, miscellaneous grains.

If all South Asian countries fully liberalise agricultural trade among themselves, the welfare effect is equivalent to $811 million. Pakistan gains the most, with 60pc of total welfare gains in the region going to it, the study notes.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have a minor decline in their welfare equivalent.

The lack of regional integration has led to resource constraints, limited the size of potential markets and lowered productive capacities in individual countries, the changing economic structures in many countries in South Asia and the growing demand for agricultural products have increased the potential for regional trade and investments in this sector, observes the study released by ADB.

Many countries have tried in vain to stimulate the growth of agriculture in their economies. The performance of agriculture vis-à-vis of the economy in most South Asian countries has remained poor, especially in the last decade.

The growth rate of per worker value-added in agriculture has been much lower in the last decade as compared to the previous decades in most countries, whereas the growth rate of per capita GDP has been much higher in the last decade than the decades before.

The prospects for increasing agricultural production through area expansion also look bleak. The percentage of area under cultivation has remained almost stagnant during the last two decades showing lack of scope for area expansion. Declining investment in agriculture, particularly public investment, is reflected in the almost stagnant percentage of area under irrigation.

About agricultural trade policy in the South Asian countries, the study points out that historically, the South Asian countries in general have followed inward-looking trade policies, both in terms of trade within the region and in terms of trade with rest of the world.

Trade policies in South Asian countries are quite varied, from being highly restrictive in India to being very liberal in Pakistan. The maximum decline in agricultural tariffs since 2000 has taken place in Pakistan from 43 per cent to 17 per cent in 2011.

Intra-regional agricultural exports grew at a much higher rate of 13 per cent than total intraregional exports of 5 per cent in the period of 2000-2010. Intra-regional trade has a greater share in total agricultural trade for the least-developed countries of the region.

India and Pakistan together contribute more than 85 per cent of the region's agricultural exports, while India, Pakistan and Bangladesh together contribute more than 85 per cent of the region's agricultural imports, study says.

Food products, processed rice, crops, and vegetable oils are the major exports of the region, while imports consist of mainly vegetable oils, vegetables and fruits, and sugar.

On the basis of 3-year averages, India is found to be a net exporter of rice, vegetables, eggs, meat, milk, and sugar. Pakistan is a net exporter of rice, fruits, eggs, and meat. Bangladesh and Maldives are net importers in almost all food commodities, while Sri Lanka has small positive net trade in fruits and Nepal in meat.

According to the estimates, almost all South Asian countries have the potential to increase their agriculture exports to the region, with India having the maximum potential, followed Pakistan.

The maximum potential for trade is found between India and Pakistan, which can increase from around $200 million per annum to around $600 million.

Out of the identified 112 potential agriculture export products, in 74 products there is no other competitive producer in the region. These products can be potential exportable products to the region. Pakistan has 102 potential exports, while Sri Lanka has 83.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1279988/agriculture-most-protected-least-integrated-sector-in-south-asia

GOVT FINALISES SUBSIDIES ON UREA AND DAP
Dawn, August 26th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: After the lapse of two months, the government has finally chalked out a formula to provide fertiliser subsidy to end-consumers, reducing the price of urea by Rs390 on a bag and that of diammonium phosphate (DAP) by Rs300.

The Ministry of Food Security and Research has issued a notification (dated Aug 23, 2016) in this regard after the price module was finalised by the finance ministry.

The price of a 50-kilogram urea bag will now drop to Rs1,400 from the existing Rs1,790, whereas the price of DAP will come down to Rs2,558 from Rs2,858. Urea manufactures and DAP makers and importers have been directed to clearly display the revised retail prices on new packing.

With the estimated annual off-take of around 36 million bags, the federal and provincial governments are likely to spend Rs10.8 billion in terms of subsidy on DAP, which will be divided between the Centre and provinces.

As for urea, Rs50 reduction will be borne by manufacturers while the impact of reduced general sales tax from 17 per cent to 5pc is Rs184. Besides, the subsidy by the government amounts to Rs156.

Since the estimated annual urea off-take in the country is 110m bags, the total subsidy for urea has been calculated at Rs17.16bn which will be equally shared by federal and provincial governments.

The provincial contributions based on the traditional off-take pattern of urea will be: Punjab 73pc (Rs6.23bn), Sindh 19pc (Rs1.63bn), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 5pc (Rs42.9m) while the share of Balochistan will be 3pc (Rs25.70).

Meanwhile, a special account titled ‘subsidy on urea fertiliser’ will be opened at the State Bank of Pakistan. The federal and provincial governments will deposit 50pc of their respective shares of subsidy in this account. The remaining 50pc share will be deposited after utilisation of 80pc of the funds initially deposited.

All urea manufacturers registered with the Federal Board of Revenue under the sales tax regime are eligible for receiving subsidy under this scheme. The cash subsidy of Rs156 per bag will be given to manufacturers by the State Bank on the basis of sale tax returns, while Rs300 subsidy will be given to DAP manufacturers and importers.

Provincial governments will monitor the scheme while the food ministry will be responsible for its implementation.

The government has also announced a subsidy of Rs117 per bag on single superphosphate, which is used in certain cases as an alternative to DAP.

Moreover, a subsidy of Rs88 per bag has been given on calcium ammonium nitrate and other nutrients at similar terms as that of urea and DAP.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1279997

PUNJAB INCREASES SEED PRODUCTION TARGETS
Business Recorder, August 27, 2016

In order to support the agricultural sector, the Punjab government has increased production targets by 20 per cent of quality certified seeds of strategic crops and vegetables for the year 2016-17.

It has set wheat seed production target for next year at 60,000 metric tons, cotton at 2400 metric tons, paddy at 2600 metric tons, seed of different lentils at 691 metric tons, maize at 600 metric tons and seed for different vegetables at 244 metric tons.

The Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed issued these directions at the 107th budget meeting of the Corporation which approved its annual budget of Rs 3.33 billion for the financial year 2016-17.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/79612:punjab-increases-seed-production-targets/?date=2016-08-27

IMF FOR BETTER TAXATION OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR
Business Recorder,August 28, 2016

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recommended that the tax policy reforms must introduce presumptive taxes on agricultural turnover and land-based tax rates for better taxation of agricultural sector, common rate schedule of Capital Gains Tax regime (CGT) for all financial assets and integration of GST regime (goods and services) with a single statutory rate under one collection agent to increase revenue collection.

This has been proposed in an IMF paper, titled ”””’Unlocking Pakistan””””s Revenue Potential”””” prepared by Serhan Cevik. According to the paper, despite a significant progress in recent years, Pakistan””””s tax revenue remains low relative to comparator countries and the tax effort expected for the country””””s level of development.

The empirical findings indicate that a tax system with low elasticity cannot take full advantage of economic growth. Accordingly, unlocking revenue potential is dependent on broadening the tax base, strengthening administration, and rationalizing tax policy across all levels of the general government.

The paper states that the tax revenue-to-GDP ratio increased by 2.4 percentage points over the past three years to 12.4 percent of GDP in 2016, but it is still significantly below Pakistan””””s tax potential. This reflects a plethora of factors including narrow tax bases, generous tax concessions and exemptions, weak and fragmented revenue administrations, and structural features of the economy.

Relative to comparator developing countries, Pakistan’s tax system is complex and fragmented. Although Pakistan’s constitution assigns significant revenue responsibility to the provinces, provincial governments”””” own revenues contribute only about 8 percent of total tax revenues. The composition of tax revenues is highly skewed towards indirect taxes, which accounts for about 63 percent of federal tax revenue, while the extensive use of tax concessions and exemptions results in a distortionary and unfair tax regime. Consequently, while Pakistan’s estimated tax effort-the ratio between actual revenue and tax capacity-improved from 0.43 in 2011 to 0.56 in 2016, it is still significantly below the average of comparator developing countries (0.64) and high-income countries (0.76).

The paper maintained that Pakistan’s tax system with low elasticity fails to take advantage of economic growth to a greater extent. Without continued reform efforts, Pakistan cannot realistically raise its tax revenue to around 15 percent of GDP in the foreseeable future.

While Pakistan has the potential to double its tax revenue-to-GDP ratio over the long term, the empirical findings presented in this paper indicate that realizing the country’s tax revenue potential requires further concerted and well-defined efforts at the federal and provincial levels aimed at broadening tax bases, strengthening tax compliance across all sectors of the economy, and eliminating distortionary tax concessions and exemptions, and addressing structural challenges of fragmented tax administrations. These fundamental changes would not only boost the country's tax revenue-to-GDP ratio and thereby create resources for growth-enhancing priority spending, but also improve the perceived fairness of the tax system.

Strengthening tax administrations across all layers of government is key to sustainable revenue mobilization. To improve taxpayer compliance and curb tax avoidance and evasion, reform efforts must aim to modernise and bolster the effectiveness of tax administrations at federal and provincial levels by reorganising along functional lines, integrating databases and information technology, and requiring a tax identity number in all financial and immovable property transactions. This would also help deal with the potential problem of using remittance transfers as a mean of tax evasion. Cross-country figures indicate that there is also a strong relationship between the tax revenue-to-GDP ratio and business climate and corruption.

The paper recommended that FBR and provincial revenue administrations should fully implement a risk-based auditing system focusing on taxpayer non-compliance risks, defined as the likelihood of yielding large amounts of audit adjustments and penalties, and increase tax fraud penalties and make tax evasion a criminal offense. Fighting tax evasion should initially focus on a comprehensive list of high-wealth individuals and corporate entities they control and prohibit the so-called "benami" transactions, which are commonly used for tax avoidance and evasion. It is also important for the Ministry of Finance to enhance analytical capacity by establishing a tax policy research and analysis unit-outside the FBR-to improve revenue forecasting and upgrade the quality of fiscal policymaking.

The paper recommended that tax policy reforms must aim to increase revenue yield, while improving the fairness of the tax regime. Direct taxes can be designed better for enhancing efficiency and equity. In the case of PIT, with the tax exempt income threshold set at almost four times per capita income, a significant share of employed people does not pay any income tax at all. Accordingly, reducing the tax exempt income threshold, widening tax brackets, adopting more progressive and lower tax rates, and rationalizing concessions and exemptions would not only reduce distortions and increase revenue yield, but also improve the fairness of the tax system. This sense of social justice is key to boosting tax morale and thereby tax buoyancy. In this context, while the FBR has made improvements in the capital gains tax regime, there is still a need to adopt a common rate schedule for all financial assets and eliminate exemptions.

It further recommended that simplifying the CIT regime and reducing concessions and exemptions are necessary to pave the way for lower rates while enhancing revenue yields, which would also help in improving the economy""""'s international competitiveness. Introducing presumptive taxes on agricultural turnover and land-based tax rates adjusted according to productivity characteristics of agricultural land can facilitate better taxation of the agricultural sector on a progressive scale with an appropriate threshold to protect low income farm households.

Modernising recurrent property taxes, on the other hand, can be achieved by establishing a central fiscal cadastre and a central valuation agency and adopting a market-based valuation methodology. The paper further recommended integrating the GST regime (goods and services) with a single statutory rate under one collection agent, and eliminating GST exemptions, zero-ratings, and special schemes to attain greater efficiency in indirect taxes.

Changing the structure of federal and provincial excises to ad valorem rates in a unified manner for domestically produced and imported goods can maximise the revenue yield and better address negative externalities associated with some products such as tobacco and petroleum products, the paper recommended.

http://www.brecorder.com/money-a-banking/198:pakistan/79865:imf-for-better-taxation-of-agriculture-sector?date=2016-08-28

RECENT RAINS TO BE BENEFICIAL FOR COTTON CROP
Business Recorder, August 28, 2016

The current monsoon rains may negatively impact on cotton crop if they are sustained for a long period, but would have a positive impact over other standing major Kharif crops including rice, sugarcane and maize. According to senior officials of the Ministry of Food National Security and Research (MNS&R) and Ministry of Textiles, sugarcane, rice and maize are water loving or high delta crops therefore rains would have a positive impact on their output.

However, according to officials excessive rains would lead to different diseases to cotton crop and presence of large quantity of water does not suit the cotton crop as it is a water sensitive crop. Therefore excessive monsoon rains may have a negative impact on cotton output, they said.

Khalid Abdullah Cotton Commissioner in the Ministry of Textiles while talking to Business Recorder said that recent rains are well-distributed or intermittent; therefore it would be beneficial for cotton crop. However, he said that it will have negative impact on the crop's production if rains continue for a long period as above normal rainfall causes various diseases in cotton crop.

Cotton sowing in the country registered a significant decline of 15 percent in 2016-17 as compared to the year before, he said, adding the crop has been cultivated on 2.86 million hectares of land in the country against its proposed target of 2.9 million hectares for 2016-2017.

Cotton is grown mostly in the Punjab and Sindh with the former accounting for 79 percent and the latter 20 percent of the nation's cotton growing area. A senior official of MNSF&R said that the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) had fixed sugarcane crop production target for 2016-17 at 67.5 million tons from an area of 1.13 million hectares, compared to last year's production of 65.1 million tons from an area of 1.1 million hectares.

The committee fixed rice production target for 2016-17 at 6.9 million tons from an area of 2.8 million hectares, he said.

According to weather advisory issued by Pakistan Metrological Department farmers must control weed growth at the present growing stage to stop any negative impact on crops. Pest and viral attacks are expected on cotton and sugarcane crops during hot and humid conditions. Farmers are also advised to be very careful and take precautionary measures on time in this regard, it said.

Metrological department predicted good monsoon rains along with thunderstorms at a number of places in the country particularly on Saturday and Sunday.

Spokesman of weather department stated that strong monsoon currents are penetrating the country and a westerly wave is also expected to grip upper parts of the country. Under the influence of these meteorological conditions rain along with thundershowers with isolated heavy falls are expected at a number of places in Punjab, KP, Sindh and Kashmir.

He further said that rain and thundershowers with isolated heavy falls are expected at scattered places in FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan and parts of Balochistan. Heavy downpour may trigger flash flooding and landslides in the vulnerable areas of Punjab, Balochistan, KP, GB and Kashmir. The concerned authorities are advised to remain alert during the period, he said.

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185/79945/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 15TH TO AUGUST 21ST 2016
BANK CREDIT TO AGRI SECTOR
Business Recorder, August 15, 2016

The State Bank has always been trying to encourage the financial institutions to increase the level of bank credit to the agriculture sector and has largely been successful in its efforts over the years.

The latest report issued by the SBP on 8th August said that banks disbursed Rs 598.3 billion in agricultural credit during FY16, which were almost equal to the target of Rs 600 billion fixed for the year. The amount disbursed during the year was also 16 percent higher when compared with Rs 515.9 billion extended during FY15.

The outstanding portfolio of these loans also rose by Rs 32.3 billion from Rs 313.3 billion as of end June 30, 2015 to Rs 345.6 billion at the close of June 2016. The number of farmers served by banks also went up from 2.2 million to 2.4 million during the year.

A detailed review of banks' agriculture loan performance showed that five major banks collectively disbursed Rs 311.4 billion or 101.9 percent of their annual target of Rs 305.7 billion which was also much higher than Rs 262.9 billion disbursed last year.

Among the five major banks, while NBP, HBL and MCB surpassed their targets at 109.2 percent, 102 percent and 101 percent respectively, UBL met its target and ABL could achieve only 87 percent of its target. Under specialised banks, ZTBL disbursed Rs 90.97 billion or 89 percent of its target of Rs 102 billion and PPCBL achieved 82 percent of its target by disbursing Rs 10.3 billion.

Among other banks, the group of 15 domestic private banks achieved 93.4 percent of their target, nine microfinance banks surpassed the target by a huge margin of 34.4 percent and five Islamic banks also exceeded the target by disbursing Rs 8.5 billion as against the target of Rs 7.9 billion.

Although agriculture credit targets fixed by the State Bank were not mandatory but only notional, the mere fact that most of the financial institutions have been quite serious in meeting their targets speaks about the sincerity of their approach towards promoting agriculture sector of the economy.

There is no denying the fact that agriculture sector is a vital component of Pakistan's economy as it provides raw materials to down the line industries, contributes about 20 percent of GDP; and it is by far the largest employer absorbing 42.3 percent of the total labour force of the country and caters to the food requirements of the growing population besides earning valuable foreign exchange for the country.

Realising the importance of agriculture sector in the economy, the government is also trying to focus on systematic application of better inputs and advance technology, provision of high quality seeds, etc.

A major relief package of Rs 341 billion was also announced by the Prime Minister of Pakistan for small farmers, including direct cash support and provision of soft agriculture loans. The overall objective of both the government and the SBP is to sustain a reasonable agriculture growth rate to support self-sufficiency and enhance overall GDP growth trajectory.

It needs to be noted, however, that though provision of adequate finance is a prerequisite to promote agriculture sector, it is not the only factor to affect productivity in this vital sector.

There is a strong relationship between agricultural growth and weather conditions in Pakistan and pest attacks of various kinds have been quite common to harm the crop yields. Besides, quality of seeds is generally not up to the mark and extension services to guide the farmers are not up to the required standards.

It means that agriculturists have various limitations in their farming practices translating into the fact that yield levels in Pakistan have been generally lower than in most of the other countries. Overall, it is encouraging to see that the financial sector is doing a good job by providing adequate credit to the agricultural sector despite various challenges, including low prices of major crops, depressed output, high risk perception about agricultural financing and recovery issues but much more needs to be done to increase the per acre yields of various crops.

SBP's initiatives in the areas of financing agricultural sector, Credit Guarantee Scheme, Warehouse Receipt Financing and Value Chain Financing, though appreciable, are obviously not enough for attaining the desired objectives. It is about time that the government in particular took a holistic approach to the subject in order to remove most of the limitations impinging upon the productivity of agriculture sector.

While the government and the banking sector are devoting their energies and resources towards uplifting the agriculture sector, it is also incumbent on farmers, particularly those whose incomes are above the minimum prescribed tax threshold, to contribute to the government exchequer by paying their due taxes.

http://www.brecorder.com/editorials/0:/75355:bank-credit-to-agri-sector/?date=2016-08-15

NEGATIVE AGRICULTURE GROWTH DESPITE SURGE IN CREDIT
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, August 15th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

BANKS last week released agriculture loan data for 2015-16, which claims to have achieved an 'almost 100pc' target — disbursing Rs598.3bn against the annual target of Rs600bn.

The disbursement was 16pc higher than the Rs515.9bn loaned during 2014-15. As per data, the number of benefiting farmers also grew from 2.2m to 2.4m during the same period.

This is certainly an achievement of the State Bank of Pakistan, which has been able to push reluctant banks into lending more liberally to the farm sector. Banks maintained that factors such as low productivity of major crops, climate change, wild price fluctuations and poor market linkages make agriculture a high risk area for them.

The small amounts, spread far and wide among farmers, add an unbearably prohibitive administrative cost to the effort. Banks have often paid fines to the SBP instead of venturing into rural Pakistan.

The SBP, however, now also needs to look into the anatomy of the loans: whether all this money has really gone into the agriculture sector or just issued in the name of the sector. Last year's agricultural picture provides a contrast. It was a year when the sector registered a negative growth of 0.19pc. Major crops' productivity fell by 6.25pc and important crops (cotton, rice, maize) jointly showed a decline of 7.25pc.

Normally, these loans are divided into production and development lines, with the former claiming a disproportionately large share because it is used for input purchase. However, input usage also provides a contrasting scenario. The drop in input application was one of the major reasons for the lower share of major crops' in the sector.

For example, the urea off-take during the rabi (2015) was 2.06m tonnes in Punjab against a target of 2.13m tonnes. In 2014, the actual consumption of urea was 2.18m tonnes. The same was the case in the kharif season when only 1.5m tonnes were consumed against a target of 1.9m. In 2014 kharif, consumption was 1.7m tonnes.

Kharif usage of DAP was half of the target (0.267m tonnes against target of 0.468m tonnes) till the government announced a subsidy of Rs500/bag and sale picked up a bit, though still only achieving the previous year level. Tractor sales have been almost negligible for the last three years, with the begrieved industry claiming an over 70pc sale loss and fearing collapse. Similar has been the case with pesticides.

With the inputs sector suffering a massive drop in sales and crops failing countrywide, where this money is going needs some kind of probe. These loans may not directly and proportionately reflect the national crop productivity because productivity is a combination of many variables; climate change, for example, can destroy a crop at the last moment, taking down all the investment and the farmer's labour.

The faulty management could also hit crops. But these loans must reflect in sales-purchase of inputs because that is what they are largely meant for. If inputs are dropping, the case needs to be probed by the SBP, to see where this loan money is actually being invested

It is also a reality, as pointed out by many bankers, that most of the farmers are not a rich lot and they may not spend the entire loan on inputs; they also meet social obligations out of that money. The bankers' argument that new avenues (like value chain financing and warehouse receipts financing) also consumed part of the money is an equally valid point.

But still, with nearly Rs600bn pumped into the sector, it should reflect in the overall health of the farming sector. With this money, the government had targeted a growth of 3.25pc. Instead, what it actually got was a negative growth, that too for the first time after 2001. It is necessary to see how much money is going into which areas of the sector and be redirected into vital areas if necessary.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1277475/negative-agriculture-growth-despite-surge-in-credit

HOPE FOR REVIVAL OF COTTON CROP IN SINDH
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, August 15th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE cotton crop in Sindh is, by and large, doing well these days. Cotton picking in lower Sindh was in full swing until it rained in the first week of August.

A couple of moderate to heavy spells of rainfall may have a negative impact on cotton quality and affect market rates for a short while. Prices, otherwise, have been attractive for growers ever-since picking started this season.

In Sindh, sowing was done on 629,000ha against a target of 660,000ha, set by the agriculture department for the 2016-17 season. Since 2011-12, Sindh has been missing the sowing target owing to various reasons.

While farmers in the upper Sindh region still have some time before picking starts, their lower Sindh counterparts have taken full advantage of their early bird status to secure a price of Rs3,200 to Rs3,400 per 40kg. It is only in the second week of August that cotton producers started complaining about a drop in prices, owing to the crop's quality being affected by rains. Rains, which offset the impact of shortage of irrigation water reported in the lower Sindh areas, have also made farmers miss one healthy picking at least.

Ginners are adding to the crop's weight by 2kg per 40kKg, taking 42kg of crop while making payment to growers for just 40kg. Ginners claim that due to rain the crop contains a higher level of moisture and has become discoloured.

Progressive cotton growers told this scribe that the crop's per acre yield is satisfactory as it remains free of pest. Last year the pink bollworm was widespread and affected productivity, forcing farmers to terminate crops and go for an early sowing of wheat.

"We feel that if the situation remains the same, picking will continue until November," says farmer Mahmood Nawaz Shah. He says presently around 24 to 25kgs of seed cotton an acre have been obtained from a couple of pickings. But, he says, the agriculture research department needs to come up with its findings on the ups and downs of the crop so that suitable policies can be evolved.

Nadeem Shah, a grower from Matiari, says that the cotton price has dropped by Rs600 per 40kg and ginners are paying Rs2,800 instead of Rs3,400 per 40kg, arguing that the crop's quality has been affected ever-since it rained.

He asserts that ginners exploit small farmers, especially in the Badin, Thatta and Mirpurkhas districts, where growers sell their produce almost on a daily basis for they lack the capacity to hold the crop. Those who have holding capacity remain in a better position to bargain with the ginners.

Since rains have not yet proved damaging for crops, a safe assumption is that the cotton price will again go up in lower Sindh, provided international prices remained stable. This year the growers applied preoper doses of urea, taking advantage of the subsidy to get a couple of initial healthy pickings. Correspondingly, farmers got a price of Rs2,200 to Rs2,500 per 40kg for last year's crop.

Mahmood Nawaz Shah considers the present situation as a sign of the revival of the cotton crop in Sindh, as growers had earlier started switching over to other crops with a shorter growth period, like sugarcane and paddy. But, he says, growers are at an advantageous position price-wise due to an international market where China is importing crop.

Ginners also subscribe to the growers' view that it is the international market that has largely benefited farmers while at the same time cotton crop across the country witnessed lower acreage. In Sindh too, acreage dropped by four to five per cent, says a ginner from Sanghar. Thus the price of seed cotton has improved to Rs1,500-1,550/40kg this year as compared to last year's average price of Rs1,200 per 40kg.

Reports from upper Sindh do indicate that rains have caused some damage to cotton crop that was at the flowering stage. Besides, breaches have also been reported in the command area of Ghotki Feeder canal of Guddu barrage, where cotton is also largely grown.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1277474

STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE THROUGH DRYLAND FARMING
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, August 15th, 2016

Dr Zuhair Hasnain

A DRYland or barani area is characterised by low, highly erratic rainfall of 100-600mm annually, where crops are cultivated without irrigation.

The arid areas of the developing world presently occupy over 40pc of the earth's land surface and are inhabited by around 2.5bn people.

These regions struggle to provide enough food for their growing populations and face a series of disconcerting physical and demographic challenges such as land degradation, severe water scarcity, high poverty levels, unemployment and rapid urbanisation.

Dryland agriculture has received less attention compared to irrigated agriculture. Most of the land area of Pakistan is categorised as arid to semi-arid, and there is a need to increase productivity of barani areas to meet the needs of an increasing population.

The major issue in the barani areas is an inadequate supply of water, falling short of the requirements of the specific crops. Sometimes the long dry weather conditions cause near famine conditions as heat and wind increase the evaporation of water.

Dryland communities are usually remote from markets, and tend to be ignored by decision makers. Dryland issues are not on the government's list of priorities.

These areas differ in their agro-meteorological conditions, production systems, socio-economics and demographic features. Thus, their development potential cannot be grouped broadly for strategy planning. Even within a respective agro-ecological zone, the strategies have to be specific to local conditions.

The potential for improving productivity per unit area is linked to rain-fed research. Measures for enhancing dryland productivity include: adequate credit facilities; assured market demand; minimum support price for rain-fed commodities like oilseeds, pulses, and peanut; land consolidation; effective rainwater harvesting, conservation and utilisation; provision of good quality seed; effective nutrient management and weed control.

The real job is to judge and adopt known and proven technologies: site-specific technologies for water harvesting, moisture conservation, soil management, crop production, range management, agro-forestry, and livestock.

There must be an effective spread of agricultural technologies for the end users and an effective support price mechanism must be introduced for specific dryland crop produce. Intermingling of fragmented holdings will help manage farm lands more effectively. Agro-based, labour-intensive industries should be developed with education and training of women in the relevant agro-based enterprises.

Other measures include controlled grazing, construction of check dams, re-afforestation and ground water recharge etc. The mode of farming should economise on water use and promote conservation.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1277473

WHEAT IMPORT: GOVT MULLS INCREASING REGULATORY DUTY BY 20%
The Express Tribune, August 16th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: The federal government is considering enhancing the regulatory duty on the import of wheat and flour by another 20% to avoid inflow of the commodity and to protect local farmers.

“The regulatory duty has already been increased on wheat import from 25% to 40% earlier this year and now it has been decided to further push it to 60% so that local traders cannot import cheap wheat from different countries, particularly Kazakhstan, at a low price,” said a senior officer in the Federal Secretariat.

“Despite a huge subsidy on wheat export, there is no encouraging signal from any country to import Pakistan’s commodity due to lower prices in the international market,” the officer said.

“We therefore have decided to jack up the regulatory duty once again by 20% to further protect our product,” added the officer.

In this regard, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research will soon present a summary to the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet for approval.

Under the World Trade Organization (WTO) regime, a country cannot ban the import of any commodity and the regulatory duty is the only option to protect a local product.

Pakistan has had surplus wheat and the country has taken various steps lately to dispose it of by exporting to the international market. However, due to sharply lower prices in the world market, all strategies to sell the harvest have proved fruitless.

“Despite giving a substantial subsidy, we have failed to export our wheat and now we are concerned about the cheap wheat coming into the market,” said the officer.

At present, Pakistan has a wheat stock of 9.923 million tons with provinces and stores of the Pakistan Agriculture Supplies and Services Corporation (Passco).

The ECC in its decision in January 2015 had allowed export of 800,000 tons of wheat by the government of Punjab at a rebate of $55 per ton and 400,000 tons by the government of Sindh at a rebate of $45 per ton.

Later, the government increased the subsidy by $30, which has also proved ineffective.

Owing to a substantial fall in wheat prices in the international market, Punjab and Sindh could only export 252,650 tons and 164,000 tons, respectively.

It was proposed that the additional $30 rebate would be shared equally by the federal and provincial governments. The proposed quantity allowed to be exported is 600,000 and 300,000 tons for Punjab and Sindh, respectively. The export can be made till November 30, 2016.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1163135/wheat-import-govt-mulls-increasing-regulatory-duty-20/

BOSAN HIGHLIGHTS STEPS TAKEN TO SUPPORT MARKET
The Express Tribune, August 16th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: The government, through its initiatives, is looking to support the dairy market that caters to the consumers of processed milk, said Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan.

"Pakistan is the world's fifth largest milk producing country and has a very vibrant market," he said while speaking during a visit to Engro Foods' plant in Sahiwal. He said Engro Foods had undertaken a great initiative by supporting the local farmers and dairy market of Pakistan with the supply of quality products to the consumers.

Bosan appreciated the role the company had played in a span of just over 10 years in developing the processed dairy industry, which has translated into achieving a major market share in the dairy consumer market. Syed Saud Ahmed Pasha, Director Agri-services, briefed the minister on the company's efforts to revolutionise dynamics of the dairy industry.

He said the company had targeted the bottom-of-the-pyramid farming community and was improving their economics through agricultural and livestock extension services that had directly resulted in increased yields and better incomes. The minister was given a tour of the plant. He was also apprised of the dairy value chain of the company and deployment of world-class quality controls and checks, which guarantees provision of safe, healthy and nutritious products to the consumers.

Engro Foods CEO Babur Sultan highlighted the company's future expansion plans to further its mission of developing the processed dairy industry in the country. He said the trip of the minister was yet another positive step for the dairy industry.

"With our plans for a strategic collaboration with Royal FrieslandCampina we look forward to a more dynamic dairy market," Sultan said, adding it would translate into increased product offerings for the consumers while also positively impacting the dairy farming community. This visit portrayed the trust that the government bodies had in the private sector.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1163150/bosan-highlights-steps-taken-support-market/

ZTBL, AGTL TO FACILITATE FARMERS' ACCESS TO MACHINERY
Dawn, August 18th, 2016

KARACHI: Zarai Taraqqiati Bank Ltd (ZTBL) will extend cooperation to Al-Ghazi Tractors Ltd (AGTL) for allowing farmers' access to new machinery and help increase yield.

In a meeting between ZTBL CEO Talat Mahmood and AGTL Chairman and President Al-Futtaim Automobile Division Dubai Len Hunt, it was agreed to introduce brand new combine harvesters in the market and facilitate farmers in acquiring new machinery.

AGTL sought ZTBL's support in launching and financing the new harvesters. AGTL suggested the loan markup be made more attractive for farmers by diverting the Green Tractors funding towards reduced mark up.

The ZTBL delegation said the institution would also look into the possibility of bulk financing to facilitate service providers for buying and renting out the agriculture equipment including harvesters. .

The meeting was attended by Executive Vice President ZTBL Farhat Karim Hashmi, ZTBL board member Majyd Aziz Balagamwala and CEO AGTL Mohammad Shahid Hussain.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1278184/ztbl-agtl-to-facilitate-farmers-access-to-machinery

POWER TARIFF SUBSIDY FOR FARMERS YET TO BE ENFORCED
Dawn, August 21st, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: Farmers in the country continue to receive 'exorbitant' power bills as the federal government has yet to implement its own announcement of providing power tariff subsidy on tubwells used for irrigating crops.

The case of the Punjab government is no different from the central government as it has also 'failed' to fully implement the Khadim-i-Punjab Kissan Package 2016-17. The government had announced allocation of Rs20 billion for tariff subsidy under the package.

The federal finance minister in his budget speech had announced a concessional power tariff for agriculture tubewells from July 1 by reducing current off-peak rate of Rs8.85 per unit to Rs5.35 per unit.

For the concession, he had said, the government would have to pay around Rs27bn.

The Punjab government had announced in the budget that it would provide subsidy under the head of General Sales Tax payment on electricity-run tubwells to the benefit of 200,000 agriculture tubewells and farmers owning land up to 25 acres.

But copies of power bills for July collected from Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by Dawn show that farmers have not received any relief as far as power tariff for tubewells is concerned.

"I have received my electricity bill for July with the same tariff and have been told by officials of the Multan Electric Power Company (Mepco) that it has received no notification about the subsidy from the ministry of water and power," said Dilshad Ali, a farmer from Lodhran.

He criticised the government for failing to provide relief to farmers and leaving them at the mercy of "corrupt officials" of Mepco known for issuing inflated bills.

Khilari Khan, a farmer from Kahror Pacca, said that growers of rice, sugarcane and maze were already bearing heavy cost of water and now non-implementation of subsidy had dealt them a financial blow.

He also accused Mepco officials of issuing inflated bills to offset the impact of line losses and power theft.

Shahid Khan from Nowshera in KP said that the Peshawar Electric Supply Company was yet to provide relief to farmers, who ran 1,300 tubewells in the district.

“We are suffering huge losses in vegetable cultivation as a result of high tariff. A vegetable grower pays up to Rs40,000 monthly bill as he has to run his tubewells for longer hours because underground water level has fallen to 400 feet,” he added.

Agri Forum Pakistan Chairman Dr Ibrahim Mughal said that farmers’ exploitation through power distribution companies (Discos) was currently at its peak as neither had they implemented the subsidy nor stopped issuing inflated bills to growers.

He said that tariff for tubewells had recorded a perpetual increase from Rs3.28 per unit during the tenure of the PML-Q government to Rs10.67 per unit under the current government.

Mr Mughal said that around 170,000 tubewells out of total 1.1 million throughout the country were run on electricity and farmers’ annual consumption of underground water had increased from five million acre feet (MAF) to 40MAF.

He called upon the government to provide promised subsidy in tariff and make adjustments of July bills in those of coming months.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed admitted that the ministry of water and power and Discos had yet to reduce tariff for tubewells under the subsidy.

But he claimed that the ministry had issued a notification in this regard and expressed the hope that Discos would start adjusting subsidy in August bills.

He said that the matter had been taken up at the high level after protest of the Kissan Ittehad and meeting of a Kissan Board delegation with him a couple of days ago.

A meeting of a delegation of growers with Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif was expected soon to sort out the matter, the minister said.

He claimed that the provincial government’s subsidy in the last fiscal year had helped reduce the tariff from around Rs10 to Rs8.

Federal Minister for Water and Power Khawaja Asif could not be contacted for comments despite repeated attempts.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1278989/power-tariff-subsidy-for-farmers-yet-to-be-enforced

NAB PROBES AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT: SINDH GOVERNMENT’S TRACTOR SCHEME UNLIKELY TO MATERIALIZE
Business Recorder, August 21, 2016
Sindh government’s tractor scheme is unlikely to materialise after the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) initiated an inquiry against Sindh Agriculture Department. Last week, Executive Board Meeting (EBM) of NAB presided over by NAB Chairman Qamar Zaman Chaudhry authorised inquiry against officials of Sindh Agriculture Department and others.

In this case, accusations of embezzlement of funds of subsidised tractor scheme which caused loss of millions of rupees to the national exchequer have been made. However, insiders claim that the loss was of billions of rupees. The NAB had raided Directorate of Agriculture Sindh and taken the record of tractor scheme into custody to check transparency of subsidy scheme.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that tractor subsidy scheme was used to extend financial benefit to only one group of companies and individual farmers were totally ignored. Sindh government has also launched a new scheme without adopting any proper mechanism and again the amount of subsidy was being misused due to which NAB has started an inquiry.

Last year, Director, Agricultural Engineering Sindh Hyderabad in a letter revealed that NAB, Hyderabad visited Directorate, Agriculture Engineering Sindh and asked to provide the following information/documents of the scheme "provision of assistance to farmers on purchase of 11000 wheel type tractors phase-III": (i) copy of MoU signed with Sindh Bank during current year; and (ii) copies of advertisement in the newspapers on April 15, 2016 for providing subsidy, assistance to the farmers.

Director General, Abdul Qadir Tareen in a letter to the Secretary Agriculture Supply & Prices Department, Sindh revealed the visit of NAB officials in the office of Director Agriculture Engineering Hyderabad, and further advised them to stop processing under tractors' scheme with reference to the advertisement that appeared in the newspapers on April 15 and Sindh Bank Limited may be informed to stop the process.

Pakistan Association of Automotive Parts and Manufactures (PAAPAM) also raised concerns on the dubious implementation of tractor scheme which was negatively impacting on local tractor industry. Chairman NAB said that NAB is committed to eradicate corruption from the country by adopting zero tolerance policy through awareness, prevention and enforcement strategy.

He reiterated the NAB's firm resolve to come up to the expectations of Pakistan for corruption free Pakistan by using all possible resources. He directed all officials of NAB to put forward their best efforts in conduct of complaint verifications, inquiries and investigations against corruption in accordance with laid down laws/SOPs of the NAB and on merit.

http://www.brecorder.com/market-data/stocks-a-bonds/0:/77905:nab-probes-agriculture-department-sindh-governments-tractor-scheme-unlikely-to-materialize/?date=2016-08-21

UAF HOLDS SEMINAR ON SEED PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY
Business Recorder, August 21, 2016

Speakers have called for tangible steps to pave the way for production of indigenous on-farm vegetable seeds as the country is spending a huge foreign exchange of 6 billion rupees annually on imported vegetable seeds. They were addressing at one-day seminar titled "Dissemination of Seed Production Technology of Vegetable Crops" arranged by Vegetable Seed Lab, Institute of Horticulture Sciences University of Agriculture Faisalabad at New Senate Hall.

"The session was chaired by the Vice Chancellor University of Agriculture Faisalabad Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan (SI) whereas Director Institute of Horticulture Dr Muhammad Amjad Aulakh and others also spoke on the occasion. Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that the country was producing plenty of surplus food grains, fruits and vegetables but around 35 percent women and children are malnourished due to bad eating habits and food preference.

He expressed his concerns on various environmental hazards of producing vegetables by sewage and untreated industrial water and said that using such vegetables may cause health problems to the consumers. He said that due to lack of awareness, affordability issue and other factors, farmers were left with no option to grow vegetables with impure local vegetables seeds that resulted in huge economic loss to them.

He said that vegetables were an essential element of a quality life that would enrich the human body with iron, minerals and vitamins. He said that despite growing vegetables at rural areas, 67 percent rural population used to purchase vegetables from urban markets.

He added that the country was endowed with a diverse and fertile agro climatic zones that enables the farmers to sow vegetables on early, timely and later stage that enables the consumers to use the vegetables for longer time period. He urged the farmers to produce their on-farm vegetable seeds that would save a huge amount of using imported seeds adding that if they organize themselves as small seed cooperatives that would enable them to flourish the business.

He was of the view that during the half decade, the campus has been transformed as a university of resonance which equips the students as well as the farmers with relevant entrepreneurial skills. Earlier, Director Institute of Horticultural Sciences Professor Dr Muhammad Amjad Aulakh shed light on various aspects of the project and said that his team is working in Faisalabad and Depalpur Districts and so far distributed thousands of packets of vegetable seeds among the farmers.

He said that besides distributing vegetables seeds, they are providing the farmers training how to produce their own seeds. He said that until partition of subcontinent, Quetta remained a hub of vegetable seeds but if we provide them training of producing quality on-farm seeds, they would catch the old glory. Progressive farmers Mr Mehmood, Mr Watoo also spoke on the occasion.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/77970/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 8TH TO AUGUST 14TH 2016
GROWING FOR EXPORT — HIGH VALUE AGRICULTURE
Muhammad Ashraf

The agriculture sector, with around 80pc contribution to the national export base, is the mainstay of Pakistan's exports.

Out of nearly $19.2bn export proceeds from agro-based products, 28pc are from primary commodities like rice, fish, meat, fruits, vegetables and raw cotton, 22pc from intermediate products — yarn, fabric and molasses — and the remaining 50pc from value added products: knitted and woven garments, made-up textiles and leather products.

The current edifice of Pakistan's agro-based exports is anchored on cotton, rice, horticulture and livestock with intermittent exports of sugar and wheat. The production of all these commodities is inward looking rather than export-led — exporting the surplus left from domestic consumption instead of producing what the market demands.

Cotton provides the raw material base for the textile sector, whose share in national exports has regressively increased from 56pc to 60pc during the last two years. Despite being the 4th largest producer of cotton, Pakistan relies on imported long staple cotton for producing better quality fabrics for the export market and specialised products for the domestic market.

With 57pc of production shipped abroad, rice is the only crop 'grown-for-export'. However, being water intensive in ever-increasing water scarcity, it faces an existential threat in the cropping scheme; the substitution of rice with water-efficient crops would be ultimately inevitable unless drought-tolerant varieties are expeditiously developed. An alternative means of earning $2bn forex will have to be explored — the sooner, the better!

The exports of wheat and sugar has been erratic and uncompetitive. Surplus stocks accumulated by the provincial governments during the last two years could not be offloaded as the wheat purchased at an unsustainable procurement price can only be offloaded in the international market with a 50pc subsidy — selling at half the cost means assured insolvency.

The sugar economy is significantly lopsided. There is a contrived over-production of sugarcane to ensure capacity utilisation of an over-capacitated industry with excess commodity. The water-intensive crop has been cannibalising the land and water resources of other vital crops, especially cotton. The unwarranted surplus is to be exported at an unsustainably high subsidy.

Production of all the four major crops i.e. cotton, rice, wheat and sugarcane is globally uncompetitive, and domestic-focused rather than export-led. The gradual reduction in farm size over the past few decades has rendered the production of grain crops uneconomic. Small size farms are optimally suited to high-value agricultural (HVA) commodities e.g. horticulture, livestock, meat and poultry which increase farm incomes and have a strong export focus.

According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, 'an important strategy for increasing the incomes of small-scale farmers in developing countries is to help them diversify from low-value staple food commodities into higher-value commodities'.

Currently, Pakistan produces a rich variety of horticulture products but the export basket is quite narrow. The production of 'international' fruits i.e. banana, apple, orange, grape, strawberry and cherry is hardly sufficient to meet domestic demand.

Kinnow and mango, cumulatively constitute 50pc of fruit exports, but remain in the category of exotics instead of mainstream fruits. Onion and potato constitute 60pc of vegetables exports but due to a high cost of production become competitive in the international market only when the domestic market crashes; almost all fresh vegetables produced have a less than 20-days shelf life and can't survive the voyage to premium price markets; air-shipment becomes uncompetitive due to the exorbitant airfreight.

Though livestock constitutes around 59pc of agriculture GDP, its contribution to national export proceeds is merely 5pc. Pakistani meat products are barred entry into the world's largest meat import market i.e. EU, because of its inability to meet the stringent traceability requirements.

The poultry sector, which has phenomenally grown during the last decade, is currently revelling in the domestic comfort zone with very little motivation to court challenges of the export market.

The production of export-led high value agriculture products is the antidote to the malaise afflicting the agriculture sector. Exports provide significant stimulus to the ex-farm prices of HVA products. The export market is expanding because the consumption of these products is growing rapidly in both developed and developing countries as incomes increase and diets become diverse.

According to the gravity model of trade, perishable products are more amenable to gravitational force of geography and spatiality than non-perishables.

HVA products from Pakistan, therefore, have a significant potential in regional markets especially the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Due to inherent climatic conditions restraining the agricultural production, GCC countries are reliant on food imports and currently have tolerant SPS standards — Pakistan is the backyard farm.

To conclude, HVA products constitute the major part of agriculture exports of the leading agricultural exporting countries — New Zealand 84pc, Philippines 79pc, Indonesia 77pc, Malaysia 71pc, Israel 69pc, Netherlands 61pc, Australia 58pc and India 47pc; in Pakistan it's merely 32pc.

Optimising the potential of Pakistan's agriculture sector is contingent upon a paradigm shift from supply-led production of staple food crops to demand-driven high value agriculture through (a) export-focused cultivation of products and varieties, (b) adoption of good agriculture practices, (c) improvement of SPS standards, international certifications and traceability regimes, (d) development of cool chain, (e) value addition, and (f) market development of Pakistani specialty — horticulture products — in the mainstream export market segment.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1276079/growing-for-export-high-value-agriculture

NA STANDING COMMITTEE APPROVES PLANT BREEDER'S BILL
The Express Tribune, August 10th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research on Tuesday unanimously passed the 'Plant Breeder's Rights Bill 2016' aimed at encouraging the development of new plant varieties. This is being done to protect the rights of breeders of new varieties.

The committee, chaired by MNA Malik Shakir Bashir Awan, approved the plant breeder's rights bill 2016. The bill would now be presented in the National Assembly. The draft Bill has already been passed by the NA standing committee on cabinet division.

However, some lawmakers expressed serious objection over giving the responsibility of issuance of certificates for GMO variety to the national bio-diversity committee of Ministry of Climate Change.

They believe that the ministry is incapable of handling such a responsibility and may prove disastrous.

Federal Minister for Ministry of National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan said that the bill would ensure breeders rights and help in establishment of a viable seed industry for food security in Pakistan.

He said that once the law is enacted investors will come to Pakistan as it would provide legal cover.

"It will resolve numerous challenges the farmers are facing due to substandard and unverified seeds," he maintained.

Food ministry's federal secretary Muhammad Abid Javed said that it would ensure availability of high quality seeds and planting material to the farmers. The objectives of the Bill also includes encouraging plant breeders and seed organisations to invest in research and plant breeding, development of superior varieties of field, vegetables and ornamental crops, facilitate in access to protect foreign varieties and new technologies, he said.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1159071/na-standing-committee-approves-plant-breeders-bill/

FPCCI DEMANDS INTEREST-FREE LOANS FOR KP FARMERS
Dawn, August 11th, 2016

PESHAWAR: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Wednesday urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to disburse interests-free loans to small farmers to help them overcome the financial crisis.

The demand was raised in a meeting of the FPCCI's regional standing committee on horticulture. The meeting, chaired by committee chairman Ahmad Jawad, proposed loans for farmers who own ten acres of land.

"If we look around, the average farmers' owns land area of below ten acres which need special attention and it is the responsibility of the state to take care of their financial needs. In this regard we suggest necessary instructions should be passed on to the banks for interest-free loans of up to Rs500,000 to small farmers. The interest should be borne by the government," Mr Jawad said.

The FPCCI standing committee also realised the importance of post-harvest technology. It recommended that post-harvest treatments not only minimised losses but also maximised profits, and hence resulted in more nutritious fruits and vegetables on consumer plates.

Mr Jawad gave the example of US citrus sold for $2000 per tonne. "Pakistani citrus is price at $500 per tonne in the international market despite the fact that Pakistan produced best quality citrus. The only reason for this dismal situation is that we are lacking in latest technology," he said.

Due to lack of technology, cotton, wheat, rice and mangoes remains below their potential, he added.

The FPCCI leader observed:

“Despite passage of 18th Amendment, provinces have failed to introduce new agriculture, environment and food security policies. This shows the lethargy and slackness on the part of the government.”

http://www.dawn.com/news/1276763

MAJOR KHARIF CROPS: CURRENT MONSOON RAINS WILL HAVE POSITIVE IMPACT
Business Recorder, August 11, 2016
The current monsoon rains would have a positive impact over the standing major Kharif crops including rice, sugarcane, cotton and other minor crops cultivated over large areas of the country. According to senior officials of the Ministry of Food National Security and Research (MNS&R) and Ministry of Textiles, production of major Kharif crops including rice and sugarcane may increase as these crops require more water relative to other crops.

Recent rains would also have a positive impact on cotton crop but excessive monsoon rains may have a negative impact, they added. Cotton Commissioner in the Ministry of Textiles Khalid Abdullah said that recent rains would be beneficial for cotton crop but it will have negative impact on the crop’s production if rains are sustained for a long period as heavy rains or above normal rainfall causes various diseases in cotton crop.

He further pointed out that large standing water in cotton crop for more than 24 hours is not good for crop as cotton is water sensitive and stagnant water is fatal for the crop. Cotton sowing in the country registered a significant decline of 15 percent in 2016-17 as compared to last year, he said, adding the crop has been cultivated on 2.86 million hectares of land in the country against its proposed target of 2.9 million hectares for 2016-2017.

In Punjab, he added that cotton has been cultivated on 1.776 million hectares of land while in Sindh province, it has been cultivated on 0.063 million hectares of land. The country witnessed 30 percent decline in cotton production in year 2015-16 due to abnormal weather, seed quality, pests, diseases and low prices. Cotton is growing mostly in two provinces of the country (Punjab and Sindh) with the former accounting for 79 percent and the latter 20 percent of the nation’s cotton growing area.

A senior official of MNSF&R said that the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) had fixed sugarcane crop production target for 2016-17 at 67.5 million tons from an area of 1.13 million hectares, compared to last year’s production of 65.1 million tons from an area of 1.1 million hectares.

The committee fixed rice production target for 2016-17 at 6.9 million tons from an area of 2.8 million hectares, he said. According to weather advisory issued by Pakistan Metrological Department farmers accessing water through tube wells are required to schedule irrigation water according to the expected weather system.

It further advised farmers to control weed growth at the present growing stage to stop any negative impact on crops. Pest and viral attacks are expected on cotton and sugarcane crops during hot and humid conditions.

Farmers are also advised to be very careful and take precautionary measures on time in this regard, it said. The advisory said that standing water due to heavy monsoon rains is not good for crops like cotton and farmers should take suitable measures to resolve the issue, it said.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/74083:major-kharif-crops-current-monsoon-rains-will-have-positive-impact/?date=2016-08-11

FARMING COMMUNITY: GOVT STRIVING TO REDUCE COST OF PRODUCTION: UAF VC

Business Recorder, 11 August 2016

Faislabad: Director General Pest Warning Punjab Khalid Mehmood met Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan of University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) at his chamber. Chairman Entomology Department Prof Dr Jalal Arif and Dr Mansoor Sahi also attended the meeting.

The Vice Chancellor said that the government was striving hard to reduce cost of production for farming community by taking plant protection initiatives. He said that last year, cotton production had reduced up to 35 percent due to pest and climate changes issues. He added that foolproof measures were being adopted to bring the cotton production back to foot this year.

Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that only fruit fly was causing $ 200 million annual loss to the country and termed it a serious threat to export of fruits and vegetables. He said that plant protection measures helped increase per hectare yield by protecting crops from diseases and controlling the pests. He said modern practices like integrated pest management must be promoted and practised in the fields to reduce the hazardous usage of pesticides.

He said that the Department of Entomology was mapping out a national plan on palm weevil, fruit fly, and wheat aphid. He pinned hope on experts to solve the issue at national level would come up with solution to issue that will be made national address to increase its productivity.

Khalid Mehmood said that Directorate of Pest Warning and Quality Control of Pesticides is contributing to address the issue of quality pesticides which is a big threat to human life and business of farming community. He also pointed out that there was very few accredited lab to monitor the quality of pesticides in the country.

He said the number of accredited labs is being raised by establishing more labs in the province to address the issue. He said that bollworm issue should be addressed in August otherwise it will be difficult to manage in September. He added that they had developed pink bollworm prediction model for monitoring the bollworm in the province.

With the help of Entomology Department, they will further enhance their work on the management of pink bollworm and fruit fly.

Talking about the dengue, he pointed out that dengue virus was targeting only male human whereas it had not killed any female till now. He said that little work had been done on such aspect of the dengue behavior. He also pointed out that cases of dengue fever were common in the cities compared to villages. He urged the scientists to look into the matter and come up with tangible results.

Prof Dr Jalal Arif said that they had initiated systemic and comprehensive work on the management of pink bollworm, fruit fly, and wheat aphid which is the big issue for economic crops. He said the department was running the Research and Development projects worth 100 million rupees under the leadership of Vice Chancellor. He said that they had developed a protocol for the Maximum Residue Limit for the registration of pesticides.

The Director General also visited the Department of Entomology's different labs and appreciated the work being done by the researchers. He also gave them the suggestions and tips about the research and discussed the area of mutual concerns.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/08/11/13-page/784907-news.html

LHC STAYS RECOVERY OF TAX ON AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS
Business Recorder, August 12, 2016
The Lahore High Court Thursday stayed recovery of tax on agriculture outputs and sought reply from the Punjab government within a fortnight. Earlier the petitioner Mehmood Muzaffar through his counsel argued that the government on one side was announcing Kissan packages for farmers and on the other side was issuing notices for recovery of tax on agriculture products.

The petitioner submitted that officials of the district governments across the Punjab were issuing notices to the farmers and demanding of them to pay tax on agricultural products. He requested the court to bar the government from issuing these notices for recovery of the tax.

http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/industries-a-sectors/taxation/181:pakistan/74295:lhc-stays-recovery-of-tax-on-agriculture-products/?date=2016-08-12

FARMERS WARNED OF PEST, VIRAL ATTACKS ON COTTON, SUGARCANE

Business Recorder, August 14, 2016

The Met Office has warned the farmers of pest and viral attack at cotton and sugarcane during the hot and humid monsoon conditions, asking them to take measures to protect their standing crops. It said those farmers depending on tube-wells should schedule crops irrigations in line with the expected rainy weather. It suggested the growers to remove weeds to help the standing crops yield maximum. “Weeds removing practices should be started soon after expected rains,” it said.

It said growers should drain out the stagnant rainwater from their fields to scale down production loss. “Stagnant water due to continuous rains is fatal for standing crops like cotton. Farmers should take suitable measures to resolve the issue,” it advised. It said rain-thunderstorm was expected at isolated places in Central-Upper Punjab including Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sargodha, and Faisalabad divisions till August 20.

Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of Sindh with a possibility of drizzle/light rain along Sindh-Makran coast and isolated places in Hyderabad, Karachi and Mirpurkhas divisions over the period. Rain-thunderstorm is likely to hit the scattered places in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa including Mardan, Malakand, Hazara and Peshawar divisions. Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of Balochistan.

Largely hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan with a possibility of drizzle/light rain at isolated places. Rain-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places including Muzaffarabad, Kotli, Neelum Valley and Rawalakot during the period.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/74896/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 1ST TO AUGUST 7TH 2016
CM URGED TO INTRODUCE REFORMS IN AGRICULTURE, IRRIGATION DEPTS
Dawn, August 1st, 2016

HYDERABAD: Expressing concern over water shortage in the tail-end areas of Rohri and Naseer canals, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has urged Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to restructure the agriculture department.

In its meeting held here on Sunday presided over by Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar through video link, it urged the newly-appointed CM to introduce reforms in the irrigation and agriculture departments.

The meeting appealed to the CM to rid the agriculture department of black sheep and ensure availability of water in the tail-end areas. Junior officers who were holding senior positions should be removed, it said. The meeting expressed surprise over the fact that 100,000 cusecs of water is being released downstream Kotri barrage, but the canal system downstream Rohri canal, that emanates from Sukkur barrage, is witnessing water shortage.

The meeting said Rohri canal’s subdivisions, including Tando Mohammad Khan, Sanjar Chang, Naseer and other distributaries, were witnessing serious water shortage. The shortage caused economic losses to farmers who had cultivated cotton and other crops, it said.

The meeting congratulated newly-appointed CM Syed Murad Ali Shah and said he was fully aware of the performance of the irrigation department. Now being the chief executive of the province, he should play his role in bringing about reforms in these two departments to produce better results in agro-economy, it said.

The meeting said he (Murad Ali Shah) had played his role previously to protect the rights of Sindh when the federal government mistreated Sindh over the issues of NFC and water.

It said that now when he himself was the CM, he was burdened with this task. The people of Sindh hoped that he would bring about revolution in the agriculture sector, it added.

It said 70 per cent population was dependent on agriculture, therefore, due attention should be given to improving performance of the irrigation and agriculture departments. It said the government should make the two departments people-friendly by introducing reforms.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1274509

FARMERS SEEK WIDER SCOPE OF FERTILISER SUBSIDY
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, August 1st, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

PAKISTAN Kissan Ithehad last week came up with some interesting facts about fertiliser subsidy. The subsidy amount on DAP used to be around Rs2,200 per bag till 2008 and came down to Rs300 in 2016.

Similar is the case of nitro-phosphate, which was subsidised by Rs950 per bag and single super phosphate (SSP) by Rs860 per bag till a few years ago, where now the subsidy has come down.

In 2015, when the PML-N government came up with its first subsidy package, DAP got only Rs500 per bag, nitro-phosphate Rs217 per bag and SSP Rs195 per bag. In the 2016 package, DAP got Rs300 per bag, nitro-phosphate Rs130 while the SSP was excluded.

Potash (fertiliser) has not figured in the package at all. All nitrogenous fertilisers have also been ignored, except for urea, which has received a subsidy of Rs400 per bag. Others varieties have not been included. The ammonium-nitrate was given Rs80 per bag, but the GST on it has not been reduced, from 17 to 5pc as promised, Ammonium-sulphate has also been completely ignored.

What makes the comparison more interesting is that Sikander Hayat Bosan has been heading the sector on both occasions. He was the federal minister for agriculture till 2008, when the huge subsidy plan was executed. Currently, he holds the charge of Federal Minister for Food Security and Research — still in-charge of the sector at the federal level. The subsidy amounts, however, differed wildly in both his tenures.

“The package has twin problems: non-professionalism in agricultural sense of bureaucracy, and the government’s inability to keep its promises,” says Khalid Khokhar of the PKI. Instead of considering the entire range of fertiliser based on one essential ingredient (phosphate and nitrogen), the bureaucracy is locked in semantics — looking for exact names that the prime minister used. It has only added to the farmers’ problems.

Despite repeated requests and explanations by the growers that all these fertilisers belong to the same family of one generic name, no one relents, they said, accentuating problems for farmers.

In his budget speech, the federal minister for finance had promised to sell DAP at Rs2,500 per bag, but local manufacturers and importers have now formally announced at least Rs200 higher than that. What should farmers do if the government cannot keep even those promises it makes in the parliament? the PKI chief wonders.

The PKI analysis has only pointed out a basic flaw of the official package, where the government, instead of committing a fixed subsidy amount, promised a fixed sale price, which it should have known it could not uphold due to market forces. Only 40pc of DAP is manufactured locally and the rest is imported.

Global world prices fluctuate wildly — from $350 to $650 per tonne, depending on the global consumption at a particular point of time; the price averages around $500 per tonne. Right now, it is $340 per tonne, which according to the industry, means Rs2,660 per bag in the domestic market. The price will start rising shortly as global consumption begins to increase.

On the other hand, the subsidy amount is capped at two levels: per bag and total amount. It is Rs300 per bag, Rs125 each from federal and provincial governments and Rs50 relief from the industry. The other cap on subsidy is of the total amount, which is Rs11bn. Once the amount is consumed, the subsidy package will expire.

With total amount and per bag subsidy fixed, how the government could promise a particular sale price is anybody's guess.

Urea is being sold at the officially promised price of Rs1,400 per bag only because the international prices have either been at par or lower than that. In the last instance, when the subsidy amount went up Rs2,200 per bag, the then government capped the sale price and let the subsidy amount fluctuate.

In the given situation, the PKI demands subsidy on potash fertiliser because of its role in soil health and on import of other phosphatic and nitrogenous fertlisers, especially the imported ones. Local manufacturers of these fertilisers don't have as compelling a case because of less quantity of active ingredients and mixing of fertiliser to make one particular variety.

The government, on its part, thinks that world pricing trend was sliding and that it is still maintaining a low drift. At that point in time the world price of DAP was Rs2,850 per bag, which has only come down further in the last two months. The calculation was: Rs50 relief coming from the industry and Rs300 by the government. The government is still pressing the industry to provide its share of relief and cut its profits a bit.

The government, on its part, has devised an elaborate mechanism to ensure price through a robust monitoring mechanism so that whatever subsidy is announced, reaches the. It has already created a cell phone application, where companies and official monitors are uploading real time sale prices in different areas. Any dichotomy is immediately brought in the notice of the district administration, which moves instantly. As an additional layer, it has created tehsil, districts and provincial level complaint cells to monitor fertiliser prices.

That is why, both urea and the DAP are being sold at, or very close to, officially declared prices. As far as expanding the cover to smaller fertilisers is concerned, the government is in negotiation with farmers' bodies and the industry to look into possibilities and mechanisms.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1274536

BIOMASS POTENTIAL FOR POWER GENERATION
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, August 1st, 2016

Amin Ahmed

The World Bank has published a 'Biomass Atlas' of Pakistan which presents the potential for setting up power plants at biomass producing sites such as sugar and rice mills, municipal solid waste landfills and dairy farms.

The atlas also identifies scope for greenfield power plants fed by the residue feedstock of crops.

Bagasse offers the highest potential as fuel for cogeneration plants at the existing sugar. The new high-pressure cogeneration plants at the country's 84 sugar mills could have a combined power capacity output of 1,844MW based on bagasse of about 17.1m tonnes a year produced by these mills. These potential cogeneration plants could produce a trade surplus of about 4,944GWh per year, if only bagasse is used, or 10,759GWh/year if an additional biomass feedstock of around 12.9m tonnes per year is used as fuel for the cogeneration plants.

Municipal solid waste (MSW) can also be used for large-scale grid-connected power plants. With a total MSW amount of around 27,000 tonnes/day at 12 surveyed landfills, around 360MW of gross power capacity can be generated based on the anaerobic digester-based power generating technology. These potential MSW-based power plants could sell about 2,687GWh/year to the grid.

However, rice husk and cattle manure, with a limited energy potential can be used to set up captive power plants for running rice mills and livestock farms.

The report does not include all the existing MSW landfills, rice mills and livestock farms in the country due to the lack of data. The potential for Greenfield power plants using crop harvesting residues was assessed based on their site suitability indicators, the feedstock sourcing area size, the road network density in the region and the distance to the grid.

The site suitability maps were produced for 21 different combinations of energy conversion technologies and power plant capacities.

The theoretical generation potential of crop residues was estimated at 25.3m tonnes per year with an equivalent energy potential of 222,620 tonnes per year. Bagasse accounts for 66pc of this energy potential, followed by rice husk with 20.3pc, maize cobs with 8.8pc and maize husk with 4.9pc.

The theoretical potential of crop harvesting residues was estimated at around 114m tonnes per year with an equivalent energy potential of 448,990GWh per year. 45.8pc of the total energy potential comes from cotton stalk, 30.8pc from wheat straw, 13.0pc from rice straw, 6.1pc from sugarcane trash, and 4.3pc from maize stalks.

Based on the existing uses of the residues by the farmers, the technical potential of crop harvesting residues was estimated at about 25.1m tonnes per year with an equivalent energy potential of 95,065GWh (342,236 TJ/year).

Rice straw accounts for 30.4pc of this energy potential, followed by wheat straw with 27.3pc, cotton stalk with 26.4pc, sugarcane trash with 12.9pc and maize stalks with 3.0pc. It can be seen from these percentages that large amounts of cotton stalk and wheat straw are being used by farmers in the form of cooking fuel, animal fodder and fertilisers, or sold to industries.

In case the farmers' willingness to sell their biomass residues is taken into account, the technical potential becomes 280,177 TJ/year. Rice straw and wheat straw then account for a majority of this energy potential with 29.2pc each, followed by cotton stalk with 27pc, sugarcane trash with 11.5pc and maize stalk with 3.2pc.

There is a potential use of MSW for energy generation at the landfills. The industrial survey covered 16 landfills in major cities. However, only 12 landfills provided adequate data for the analysis. The combined amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) collected at these landfills is around 29,000 tonnes per day. However, MSW is being sold out for fertiliser production, and the remaining amount of around 27,000 tonnes a day is currently dumped at the 12 landfills. This amount of MSW could generate around 360MW of gross power capacity in the anaerobic digester-based power plants.

The industrial survey covered large-scale livestock farms with a minimum of 1,000 cattle heads. This led to the survey of five dairy farms. Only three of them provided the required information on their GPS coordinates and the production of livestock manure. The combined manure production of these farms is 100 tonnes/day which could support 0.36MW of gross power capacity for anaerobic digester-based power plants.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1274535

'GOVT MONITORING PRICES OF CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS, PESTICIDES'
Business Recorder, August 3, 2016

LAHORE: Secretary Agriculture Punjab Muhammad Mahmood has assured the growers' community that the government is continuously monitoring the prices of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to ensure their availability on appropriate and prescribed prices.

He was speaking to the participants of a meeting which held at the Agriculture House here on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by the high ranking officers of the agriculture, meteorological office, representatives of farmers' organizations, APTMA, Pakistan Cotton Ginners, Sugar and Flour mills Associations, fertilizer companies and Crop life. The meeting discussed the issues being faced by farmers especially marketing of the agricultural commodities, fertilizer and pesticides, water availability at tail and efforts to increase production of cotton and lentils.

Secretary Agriculture directed the department to keep the farmers update with weather forecast and ensure presence of field staff to guide the farmers.

He hoped that Kisan package announced by the provincial government would result in decreasing input cost, increasing per acre yield and income of the farmers.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/08/03/23-page/782918-news.html

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September 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 26TH TO OCTOBER 2ND 2016

THE PRICING OF SUGAR

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, September 26th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

A HEALTHY sugarcane crop is now ready for harvesting but the cane price for the 2016-17 crushing season is yet to be fixed by the Sindh government.

The Sindh Sugarcane Commissioner's office has already written to the provincial agriculture minister to hold a meeting of the Sugarcane Board to fix the support price.

However, the board will meet in Karachi on Sept 21 to discuss the issue of cane quality premium payment to growers under the orders of the Supreme Court.

According to the agriculture department, there has been an increase of 1.68pc in sugarcane growing area i.e. 318,060ha (target 320,000ha), up from 312,815ha of 2015 against the target of 320,000ha.

"The increase in the cane-growing area is attributable to growth in the sugar industry, in upper Sindh, and low cotton prices", says an agriculture department officer. The cotton area in Ghotki district is now under sugarcane cultivation, as the four sugar factories set up there offer better price to farmers as compared to other sugar mills in the province.

Sindh Abadgar Board's President Abdul Majeed Nizamani says the current sugarcane is pest-free. He hopes cane crushing will commence on time and pricing will be fair to help the growers get reasonable returns.

Currently, sugarcane producers are demanding Rs250-300/40kg. Last year, the pricing decision was announced as late as January, instead of September or October.

The SAB is demanding a price of Rs250/40kg and Mr Nizamani understands this rate won't be fixed. Still, he argues, a justifiable rate should be set, given the market price of sweetener and the cane's cost of production.

The government's notification for downward revision of rate Rs172/40kg in 2015-16 from Rs182/40kg in 2014-15 has been challenged by the growers before the Hyderabad circuit bench of the Sindh High Court.

According to a wholesaler, Sikandar Rajput, the current wholesale price of sugar is Rs68/kg, though it was Rs52-53/kg three months back.

Sindh's sugar factory owners argued last year that per kilogramme cost of sugar production did permit them to settle for a cane price of Rs200/40kg or even Rs182/40kg. The provincial government pitched in a subsidy of Rs1/40kg to millers to make up for a price of Rs172, as the millers were paying Rs160/40kg to growers.

SAB's Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah argues that millers in their own litigation had admitted to Rs48/kg ex-factory sugar price and agreed to the cane price of Rs172/40kg in 2015-16. So, won't it be logical with the current retail sugar price being Rs70/kg, the cane price should also be revised accordingly.

Sugarcane crushing is to commence from October 1 as per the Sugar Factories Control Act but this does not happen. Last year, the crushing started around December. According to an officer of the Sindh agriculture department, "We are waiting for Punjab to fix sugarcane price for upcoming season to determine our own position."

Sindh's sugarcane price is fixed at a higher rate because of higher sucrose recovery as compared to Punjab.

Sucrose recovery in Sindh's cane is usually over the 8.7pc benchmark. There is a 0.50 paisa quality premium on per 40kg of cane. Millers expect, says an officer, the Sindh government to revise this benchmark, but Mahmood Nawaz Shah contends the growers are demanding payment of accumulating quality premium dues from millers which they had denied owing to litigation.

"We will discuss benchmark's revision in meeting on Sep 21 but right now we are concerned more about the pending dues of quality premium which have been accumulating since late 90s, after we won the case in high court", he says.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286037

SHORTFALL OF FOUR MILLION BALES FEARED
Business Recorder, 26 September 2016

Tahir Amin

ISLAMABAD: The country is likely to face a shortfall of 4 million bales in cotton crop production in the current season (2016-17) which may cause loss of about 0.5 percent to GDP growth rate, sources revealed to Business Recorder.

According to official sources the prospects of cotton crop for the current season (2016-17) are not very bright and the Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) has already slashed cotton production estimates by 20 percent ie to 11.27 million bales against the initial estimates of 14.1 million bales.

According to the economic survey 2015-16 agriculture sector growth declined by 0.19 percent, primarily on account of decline in cotton crop production by 27.8 percent, which according to Finance Minister had caused 0.5 percent to

GDP growth. The situation in the current season is not much different from that of last year as the country is likely to produce around 10 million bales cotton in the current season, sources added.

Ashfaq Hasan Khan, former economic adviser to Finance Ministry told Business Recorder that cotton makes a major contribution to GDP which is evident from the fact that whenever cotton crop production was missed GDP growth rate did not cross the 3 percent growth rate mark.

According to estimates one million bales of cotton contributes about 0.5 percent to GDP, however last year the government fudged the figures and despite a 30 percent shortfall in cotton crop only 0.5 percent impact was shown to achieve the desired 4.7 percent growth rate, Khan added.

The government has revised cotton production target downward as well as area and fixed it at 14.1 million bales from 7.4 million acres for the season 2016-17 against 15.49 million bales from 7.7 million acres estimated for 2015-16.

The country has missed cotton sowing target by a wide margin of 15 percent in the current crop season. Further due to uncertainty about cotton prices, increased sugarcane cultivation in the cotton areas and shortage of certified seed significant decline in cotton sowing was registered.

Punjab was expected to produce 9.5 million cotton bales from 5.9 million acres, Sindh had to cover 1.6 million acres and was estimated to produce 4.5 million cotton bales, Balochistan had to grow cotton on 0.12 million acres and was targeted to produce 0.04 million cotton bales, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was targeted to cover about 74000 acres and produce 0.0015 million cotton bales.

CCAC revised downward cotton production estimates for Punjab to 7.5 million bales against the initial estimates of 9.5 million, Sindh 3.73 million bales against 4.5 million, Balochistan 0.038 million bales against initial estimates of 0.098 million bales and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 0.001 million bales against 0.0015 million bales.

According to sources sugarcane crop has overtaken the cotton rich areas of the province including Rahimyar Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargar and Lodhra. Cotton sowing also declined due to lower prices of cotton nationally and internationally during the last three years that discouraged growers who opted to cultivate maize, sugarcane and rice crops in some districts of Punjab due to their better market returns. Upto 50 percent certified cotton seed was available in the market and growers faced difficulties in getting certified seed, hence affected sowing target, official maintained.

http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/pakistan/319771-shortfall-of-four-million-bales-feared.html

WORLD MODELS TO HELP DEVELOP AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, September 27th, 2016.

MULTAN: Business and farming communities have hailed the steps taken by the Punjab government for developing and stabilising the agriculture economy, optimum consumption of water resources and an agreement of cooperation with the World Bank.

Farmers have called the steps “far-reaching”.

Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) President Fareed Mughis Sheikh said in a statement the World Bank would provide technical assistance to the Punjab government for promoting agriculture, increasing per-acre yield, stabilising agri-economy and tapping water resources in the province.

The World Bank will also extend cooperation for adopting modern technology for the promotion of agriculture on a long-lasting basis.

“The agreement between the Punjab government and the World Bank augurs well for the agriculture economy and will promote prosperity of villages,” he said.

Sheikh added the agreement was a milestone in the development of agriculture sector. He hoped that the lender would cooperate in introducing successful world models, especially of Brazil, for the development of agriculture sector in Punjab.

He believed that the country would become prosperous with the success of farmers.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1188905/world-models-help-develop-agriculture/

BILAWAL DIRECTS PARTY WORKERS TO JOIN KISSAN ITTEHAD RALLY

Business Recorder, September 27, 2016
Chairman Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has instructed the party workers to join the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad rally tomorrow (Wednesday), said party sources. "A delegation of the Kissan Ittehad had called on Bilawal Bhutto last week which was followed by an instruction to the party workers in Punjab to join the rally," said the sources.

The delegation had informed the chairman about the problems being faced by the farmers even after the announcement of government's 'ridiculous package' for them, they added. They further told that the opposition leader in the National Assembly, Syed Khurshid Shah, will arrive in the city today (Tuesday) to hold a few important meetings in Lahore before addressing the Kissan Ittehad rally tomorrow.

The party sources said Bilawal had desired from Chaudhry Manzoor, a member of the Punjab co-ordination committee, to organise the party workers for the farmers' rally. Chaudhry Manzoor had convened a meeting of the party ticket-holders at the party's Punjab Secretariat to chalk out a strategy on Monday evening. The participants decided to take out a considerable number of party workers in the rally. "We have decided to assemble on The Mall Road at 12 noon," said one party leader who attended the meeting at the party secretariat.

Faisal Mir, the party's former secretary information for Lahore city, said no one can take the credit of announcing support price of Rs 1,200 per 40 kg of wheat in 2013 by the PPP government which was Rs 950 per 40 kg in 2008 when the party took charge of the government affairs.

It may be noted that the PPP had also approved a flat rate of Rs 8 per unit of electricity on March 7, 2013, which many took as a political gimmick. However, it failed to finalise a mechanism for the payment of the subsidy which had been estimated to cost around Rs 16.5 billion per annum. Before the PPP government's decision, the farmers had been getting electricity at a flat rate of Rs 10 per unit for tube wells.

http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/88310/

'600 DETAINED' ACROSS PUNJAB TO STOP FARMERS' MARCH
Dawn, September 28th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: Amidst hundreds of detentions across the province, a good number of farmers, under the banner of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI), marched from Data Darbar to Charing Cross and staged a sit-in against `anti-farmer policies' of the PML-N government outside the Punjab Assembly on Tuesday.

Armed with canes and sugarcane sticks and carrying placards, the farmers blocked The Mall for traffic. Skirmishes between the farmers and motorists also occurred over blockade of the road.

The provincial administration, following a carrot-and-stick policy, looked confused in tackling protesters. It detained hundreds of members of the PKI but allowed some farmers to hold a march and sit-in in the provincial metropolis.

Police began a crackdown on PKI leadership and members from Khanewal on Monday night and extended it to other districts like Pakpattan, Sahiwal, and Vehari.

The PKI had announced symbolic funeral procession of agriculture sector from the Punjab Assembly to the Governor's House for Wednesday (today) and march on Islamabad on Sept 29.

Through advertisements, it had invited opposition parties leadership, including Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf chief Imran Khan, PPP's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, JI's Sirajul Haq besides Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to take part in the its march.

In the provincial capital, police kept raiding various places, including the office of an opposition party's Kissan wing, to detain farmers.

PKI's central president Khalid Mehmood Khokhar told Dawn by phone that police had detained their 600 members, including office-bearers, across the province. He condemned the detentions and demanded immediate release of the detained farmers.

After the farmers started converging on Data Darbar to march towards Charing Cross, police started arresting them. Some protesters ran away to avoid detention. Farmers, however, managed to hold the rally from Data Darbar to Charing Cross.

Official statistics from the Punjab police claim that around 70 people were detained from the districts of the province, namely 24 in Okara, 15 in Multan, 13 in Khanewal, 11 in Vehari and seven in Lodhran.

Police received 18 surety bonds in Sahiwal and 14 in Pakpattan. In Okara, the local leadership assured the district administration that nobody would go to Lahore to participate in the march.

Deputy Inspector General of Police (Operations) Dr Haider Ashraf said the capital city police had detained 200 farmers from The Mall and adjoining areas. He said police were detaining the protesters under 16 MPO and the detained farmers were being sent to their respective districts.

Meanwhile, PPPs leader Khursheed Shah and Manzoor Wattoo, PTI's Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Mehmoodur Rasheed, JI's Siraajul Haq, and Tehrik-i-Istaqlal's Rehmat Vardag condemned the detentions of the farmers and demanded their immediate release besides the acceptance of their demands.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286648/600-detained-across-the-province-to-stop-farmers-march

PEASANT ALLEGES WIFE TORTURED BY LANDOWNER
Dawn September 28th, 2016

UMERKOT: A peasant woman was subjected to inhuman torture by a landowner on his agricultural lands near Dhoronaro town on Tuesday when she asked him for a leave and payment of her dues for treatment.

Her husband, Bhugro Mallah, other family members and residents of the area told officials at the Sufi Faqir police station that the landowner, Tayyab Mangrio, beat up the woman, Hajra Mallah, so brutally that she fainted and had to be rescued and taken to the Umerkot district headquarters hospital for emergency treatment. They said the woman was admitted to the hospital for further treatment. They said she had already been suffering from malaria and wanted the landowner to make payment of her dues so that she could get medicines.

Bhugro Mallah, a resident of 7-Mile Tharwah, a village near Dhoronaro, get a report against Mr Mangrio registered at the police station.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286504

KHURSHID DEMANDS RELEASE OF KISSAN ITTEHAD'S LEADERSHIP, WORKERS
Business Recorder, 1 October, 2016

LAHORE: The Opposition leader in the National Assembly and central leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Syed Khurshid Shah, has demanded immediate release of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) leadership, workers arrested ahead of Tuesday's rally on The Mall Road.

"PKI's central president Khalid Mahmood Khokhar and Punjab president Rizwan Iqbal besides thousands of farmers have been arrested ahead of the rally and I am unable to understand why the government has carried out this action before the rally," he said.

He was addressing a press conference at a local hotel on Tuesday where he was joined by the party leaders including Qamar Zaman Kaira, Ch Manzoor, Naveed Ch Aziz-ur-Rehman Chan and Allama Yusuf Awan.

He supported the PKI's demands, saying its leadership was in touch with the PPP. "We had been conveying their concerns to the government, which announced a relief package of Rs 343 billion but to no avail," he added.

Finally, he said, the farmers have decided to carry out a rally but the government has clamped down on the PKI leadership to worsen internal situation when alarm bells are bring rung on the borders.

He criticised the PML-N leadership for retaining a dictatorial mindset which is not ready to tolerate any sort of protest.

"The chief minister Punjab was himself fanning protests during the PPP regime but we abstained from crushing protests forcefully. Instead, we preferred to listen to adverse voices and tried to meet their demands," he recalled.

He claimed that the PML-N government was hand in glove with the Modi government to aggravate the farmers' worries. "Agriculture commodities are being imported from Indian in a big number. Also, the price of urea is Rs 450 per 50 kilogram bag in India while Pakistan is yet claiming kudos by fixing it at Rs 1400 per bag," he pointed out.

He said the Punjab government also dealt harshly with the protestors of Pakistan Awami Tehreek.

"The PPP had saved democracy by strengthening the Parliament in 2014 and today I have demanded to convene a joint session of the Parliament to discuss the government's failure on external front," he said.

He also criticised Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar for showing hurry in directing the departments to take action on Bahamas Leaks while toning down a similar demand on Panama Leaks. "The opposition cannot tolerate this kind of double standard," he warned.

He also castigated the Indian PM Modi, saying he was known for his atrocities against the Muslims of India despite holding the office of prime minister. "His threats cannot influence Pakistan," he warned.

He said the PPP would start mass contact campaign in the month of October.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/28/5-page/797665-news.html

FARMERS' PROTEST GETS POLITICAL PARTIES SUPPORT
Faisal Ali Ghumman

Dawn, September 29th, 2016

LAHORE: Framers kept their feet on the ground at the Faisal intersection on The Mall for the second consecutive day on Wednesday.

They were reinforced by the presence of PPP and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) leaders and activists in the demonstration. Police and the civil administration, however, restricted the protesters to The Mall by barricading The Mall, Queens Road and connecting arteries. They did not allow the farmers to hold a symbolic funeral procession of the agriculture from the Faisal intersection to Governor’s House.

Gathering here at the call of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI), Farmers were, however, not short of ideas. They set on fire crates of tomatoes and husk in protest at, what they said, anti-agriculture policies of the government. They also poured out anger on the effigy of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and burnt it to express their resentment for aggression in India-held Kashmir. They also performed the symbolic burial of agriculture at the intersection.

Farmers have gathered in Lahore to press the government to accept their demands.

The Mall is the main road of the city. Motorists suffered a great deal of inconvenience due its closure. A couple of clashes between protesting farmers and motorists also took place.

Police released central PKI president Khalid Mehmood Khokhar and Punjab president Chuadhry Rizwan Iqbal; majority of the farmers taken into the custody from Data Darbar and other parts of the city, were however, not released.

Mr Khokhar told Dawn by phone that Rizwan and PKI’s Sahiwal president Muhammad Hussain were kept at Wagah police check-post for about 12 hours and released after farmers blocked Faisal intersection late on Tuesday.

He said around 3,000 farmers were still in different police stations of Punjab and without any police reports, adding that farmers detained at Pattoki police station were not even given meal and water.

Mr Khokhar said a delegation of the top police and civil administration officers visited the spot and discussed law and order with him, adding that the capital city police officer called him to join a cabinet committee meeting to negotiate the demands.

He said the PKI would hold its executive body meeting at Faisal intersection on Thursday morning to discuss their planned Islamabad march.

Deputy Inspector General Dr Haider Ashraf told Dawn that 200 farmers had been dispatched to their districts.

He said the government’s policy was to control the protesters and convince them to negotiate their demands with the government.

Protesting farmers complain of lack of support price for crops and canal water.

“We’re not getting support price of our produce and due share of canal water for standing crops,” said Habibullah, of Toba Tek Singh.

“The government is also not withdrawing taxes on fertilizers and is not fully applying power tariff subsidy on agriculture tub-wells.”

He said farmers had to yet to reap benefits of Kissan packages by the federal and Punjab governments, adding several sits-in in Lahore and other districts by farmers had yet to deliver any results.

Mr Habibullah says he owns five acres. Despite having land, he said, he could not get agriculture loans in the past and those who had got loans had yet to payback such loans with interests because of poor crop production.

Another farmer, Muhammad Aslam, arrived from Kasur to take part in the protest. He grows sugarcane and peddy rice. He said he would travel to Islamabad for their “Zarrat Bacahao March” or save the agriculture sector to force the government to accept their demands.

He said Kissan packages and subsidies were just eyewash; farmers had failed to get their payments of sugarcane from sugar mills. The government did not provide tractors and laser-levelers to poor farmers.

“Who is getting subsidized fertilizers and power bills is a million dollar question”, Mr Aslam said.

He said the insensitivity of the PML-N government could be well-judged from the fact that not a single official came to the protesting farmers to negotiate.

Another farmer Muhammad Ramzan of Kamalia said he had been allotted 12.5 public acres five years ago with a promise to award ownership to them, but the government had now withdrawn the notification with intent to re-allot land through a fresh auction.

“What should I do when I have sold my three acres to cultivate the allotted 12.5 acres. I demand that the government award me the ownership of the land as per promise”, Ramzan said.

Also, PPP leaders Khursheed Ahmad Shah, Qamaruz Zaman Kaira, Mian Manzoor Watto and Shaukat Basra and PTI leaders Mian Mehmoodur Rasheed and Chauhdry Sarwar addressed the protesters, demanded immediate release of farmers and fulfillment of relief packages.

Policemen tried to stop Khursheed Shah’s caravan at Avari Chowk traffic signal, but PPP activists removed the barriers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286805

BOYCOTT OVER FARMERS’ ISSUE DISRUPTS SENATE SESSION
Dawn September 29th, 2016

Amir Wasim

ISLAMABAD: The opposition boycotted the Senate session on Wednesday to protest against alleged manhandling of Pakistan Peoples Party leaders and protesting farmers by police in Lahore and disrupted the proceedings by pointing out lack of quorum.

Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani adjourned the session till Thursday afternoon without taking up any of the agenda items, except the question hour, when the government failed to ensure presence of 26 senators, a minimum requirement for completing quorum in the 104-member upper house.

Soon after the question hour, Leader of the Opposition Aitzaz Ahsan took the floor. Speaking on a point of order, he said that the Punjab government had created hurdles in the way of his counterpart in the National Assembly Syed Khurshid Shah while he was going to express solidarity with the protesting farmers in Lahore.

Hundreds of growers have been protesting against “anti-farmer policies” of the government outside the Punjab Assembly by staging a sit-in under the banner of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) for the past two days. The PKI leaders claim that police have launched a crackdown on the protesting farmers and detained over 600 of them in different areas of Punjab.

PPP leaders, including Mr Shah, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Nazar Gondal and Manzoor Wattoo, were going to address the participants of the sit-in when they were stopped by police near the venue. The party workers accompanying the PPP leaders reportedly removed the barriers after a brief exchange of arguments with policemen and the leaders managed to reach the venue and address the protesting farmers.

Referring to the incident, Mr Ahsan questioned police behaviour with Khurshid Shah, saying that he was neither carrying any weapon nor going to attack anyone.

He accused the Punjab government of resorting to violence against the protesting farmers and arresting hundreds of them.

The PPP leader said that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had announced a Rs341 billion “Kissan Package” for poor farmers. Later, when the International Monetary Fund raised an objection to it, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar told the IMF that the government would release only Rs30bn for the package.

He said that poor farmers needed relief because they were facing hardship and not getting better price for their products.

Mr Ahsan said that the opposition had decided to boycott the proceedings to register its protest against the Punjab government’s act of stopping Mr Shah and detaining the farmers and led the boycott.

The Senate chairman sent Leader of the House Raja Zafarul Haq to bring back the opposition members. But he returned to the house saying that they had refused to come back and participate in the proceedings.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Aftab Shaikh said that the government would provide protection to Khurshid Shah. He said that the farmers had been stopped by police because of the Lahore High Court’s decision to ban protest on The Mall.

The minister was still speaking when PPP’s Sherry Rehman returned to the house only to point out lack of quorum.

After finding no quorum, the chairman suspended the proceedings for 30 minutes. However, when the members assembled after the break, the house still lacked quorum, forcing the chairman to adjourn the proceedings.

Earlier in the day, PPP members Ijaz Jhakrani and Ayaz Soomro, during the National Assembly session, also raised the issue of alleged manhandling of Mr Shah and the protesting farmers by police.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286845/boycott-over-farmers-issue-disrupts-senate-session

FARMERS TO WAIT AND SEE AMID GOVT ‘ASSURANCES’
Dawn, September 30th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: The Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, which organised a sit-in of farmers at Faisal Chowk on Tuesday and Wednesday, warned the government of province-wise road blockades at tehsil level after 10th of Muharram in case their demands are not met.

A meeting of farmers’ delegation with the Punjab chief minister could not be held on Thursday apparently due to the CM’s engagements and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf’s power show on Friday (today).

Dozens of farmers, protesting for the last two days against policies of the federal and provincial governments and demanding acceptance of their demands, wound up their protest late on Wednesday after a ‘successful’ meeting with the members of the provincial cabinet committee.

The meeting between two sides, which took place at 90 Shahra-i-Quaid-i-Azam, concluded with an understanding that the provincial government would ensure uniform rate of power tariff of Rs5.35 per unit round-the-clock for tubewells rather than Rs5.35 for day and Rs10.35 for night.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Mahmood Khokhar told Dawn on Thursday that a delegation led by provincial president Rizwan Iqbal met Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah, agriculture minister Dr Farrukh Javed and the secretary agriculture and submitted its demands.

He said the government side informed the delegation that the demand of power tariff had been taken up by the chief minister with the federal government while the PKI delegation could take up the rest of the demands at a meeting with the chief minister.

Mr Khokhar said before the start of the meeting police released all the farmers. He said a meeting with the chief minister was being scheduled for Oct 1 because of PTI's Raiwind march today (Friday) and the CM's other engagements.

He said it had been decided in the meeting of PKI's executive committee that farmers across the province would launch street show by blocking rural roads and main arteries with tractor-trolleys and cattle in all tehsils and districts.

He said the same day a group of about 1,000 farmers led by the PKI office-bearers would also hold a protest gathering in front of parliament.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed says the major problem the farmers are facing is non-implementation of subsidised power tariff by power distribution companies.

He said the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad delegation was assured that the matter would be taken up with the Ministry of Water and Power after 10th of Muharram.

Mr Javed further said the ministry had also begun efforts to bring down GST on subsidised fertilizers from 5pc to zero and remove ambiguity in agriculture income tax.

The minister said the department had also planned to stop implementation of notification No 922 in Toba Tek Singh under which state land up to 12.5 acre leased to farmers having less than four acre had to be withdrawn for re-leasing.

The farmers had been promised that they would be given ownership rights for five years. A meeting with the Board of Revenue is likely to be held here on Friday.

He said the government had intervened and promised to expedite payments to sugarcane growers from mills.

He said a farmers' delegation would see the chief minister in a couple of days and was likely to get some relief. To stop bilateral agriculture trade with India required consent of both Punjab and Sindh governments, he said.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286984/farmers-to-wait-and-see-amid-govt-assurances

FARMERS' PROTEST
Dawn, September 30th, 2016

FOR a number of years now, small farmers from Punjab have been descending upon Lahore and protesting in the streets to draw attention to the plight of the agriculture sector. Every year the government starts by responding with force, then negotiates with them to clear the streets.

This year too, according to representatives of the movement, some 3,000 of them have been picked up by police, while their comrades carry on their protest on Lahore's major roads. This is a peaceful movement which consists of small farmers, those who are most vulnerable to the vagaries of this sector.

Small farmers are hemmed in by the power of the big landlord, the patwari, the moneylender or middle man and the power of the state machinery that controls procurement and has some control over distribution of vital inputs. They are most vulnerable to the vagaries of weather and calamities such as floods, as well as wild swings in the price of their commodity.

For more than three years now, they have endured floods, drought, pest attacks and steeply falling commodity prices, to the point where many are getting pushed into penury.

The sad part of the episode is that neither the government nor the opposition parties that are in Lahore in a theatrical show of solidarity can really help them. The government lacks the will and the resources, while the opposition parties are only there for show.

The agriculture sector, which is one of the largest employers of the country's unskilled labour force, is far too permeated by informality. Banks are shy to lend to this sector, subsidy mechanisms end up benefiting the big landowner or the fertiliser manufacturers more than the small farmer, and endless power subsidies for tube wells as well as support prices for major crops beyond wheat require far more resources than are available to the state.

Until the state can give the agriculture sector its fair share of attention through reforms that formalise much of the activity here, it will be next to impossible to devise the kinds of interventions that these farmers need.

Getting proper targeting of subsidies and allocation of formal credit for small farmers requires greater documentation of their cash flows. The opposition's politics and palliative announcements such as last year's Kissan Package will not do much. The voice of the small farmer needs to be heard with far more seriousness than is currently the case.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1286960/farmers-protest

COTTON PRICES COME UNDER PRESSURE
Business Recorder, 30 Sept 2016

Dr Zafar Hassan
LAHORE: Global decline in cotton prices coupled with notable fall in yarn prices in Faisalabad have put pressure on the domestic lint prices over the past couple of days. Traders said in Karachi that cotton prices fell by Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 per maund (37.32 kgs) within a couple of days. Chinese cotton markets will also close for about a week beginning from the first of next month.

Seed cotton (kapas / phutti) prices in Sindh are said to have ranged from Rs. 2,900 to Rs. 3,150 per 40 kgs, while in the Punjab they reportedly extended from Rs. 2,800 to Rs. 3,150 per 40 kilogrammes according to the quality. Lint prices in Sindh are said to have ranged from Rs. 5,900 to Rs. 6,200 per maund (37.32 kgs), while in the Punjab they extended from Rs. 6,200 to Rs. 6,250 per maund on Thursday.

Output of cotton crop (August 2016 / July 2017) in Pakistan is expected to be 12 million bales (155 kgs) ex-gin. Generally speaking, the quality of cotton is alright till now and seed cotton for about three million bales from the current crop have already reached the ginning factories.

In ready cotton sales on Thursday, 400 bales of cotton from Mirpurkhas in Sindh are said to have been sold at Rs. 5,900 per maund (37.32 kgs), 400 bales from Shahdadpur sold at Rs. 6,075 per maund, 200 bales each from Hala, Shahpur Chakar and Sanghar sold at Rs. 6,100 per maund, 400 bales from Daur and 1,000 bales from Nawabshah were both said to have been sold at Rs. 6,150 per maund.

In the Punjab 200 bales from Bahawalnagar reportedly sold at Rs. 6,200 per maund, 600 bales from Harunabad sold at Rs. 6,200 / Rs. 6,250 per maund and 200 bales each from Chichawatni, Kassowal and Mian Channu all sold at Rs. 6,250 per maund.

At the closing of this week, both raw cotton and yarn prices became weak and remained under pressure. Textile mills working also deteriorated and offtake for both raw cotton and textile decreased.

Death occurred of Nadirshaw D. Kabraji on the 25th of September 2016. The late Mr. Kabraji was a chairman of the Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) and a veteran of cotton trade for more than six decades. He was a leading ginner and exporter of cotton and was very active in cotton trade. His firm Hakimuddin Harmusji and Sons enjoyed a high reputation in cotton trade. He was a very congenial personality with extraordinary experience in cotton. We pray for the deliverance of his soul and extend deep condolence to his family.

On the global economic and financial front, a dangerous decline in world trade since the last four years is of glaring proportions. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), lack of investments has been the leading cause for the worrisome decline in global trade. Lack of trade liberalisation and growing protectionism have also been cited as reason for the disturbing decrease in global trade.

According to the IMF, “global trade growth has decelerated significantly in recent years” which is a serious impediment to the revival of the economic growth in the larger economies, as well as in the emerging and developing economies. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has already warned that globalization is grinding towards a halt. OECD has clearly warned that the floundering growth is widespread and appears destined to continue at least for the next few years.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) also predicted earlier during this week that global trade is treading at its slowest pace since 2009. Thus the WTO has projected that “global trade will rise only 1.7 percent this year, down from its prediction of 2.8 percent in April 2016. WTO also warned that “the dramatic slowing of trade growth is serious and should serve as a wake – up call”.

WTO ascribes the downgrade to an “unexpectedly sharp drop in merchandise trade volumes in the first quarter”. Slowdown in the Brazilian and Chinese economies and decrease in import growth in North America since the last couple of years have also slowed the global economy.

In a BBC programme, Kenneth Rogoff, a professor of economics at Harvard University, has observed that “A Slowdown in China is the greatest threat to the global economy”. Professor Rogoff added that “I think that the (global) economy is slowing down much more than the official figures show”.

The global banking system is mired in multifarious problems from liquidity to laxity in their dealings. In some cases impropriety and malfeasance have also been reported. Doubts about the dealings of some banks have also been reported. Since the financial crisis of 2008, those banks cited for irregularities include Citigroup, Deutsche Bank, Bank of America, Barklays and Goldman Sachs.

The current slump in the shares of Deutsche Bank to their lowest level in nearly a quarter of a century occurred this week as Chancellor Angela Merkel reportedly ruled out state assistance for the lender. Earlier, Deutsche Bank was described as the world’s riskiest large bank by the International Monetary Fund. Prices of several other European banks fell in tandem.

The international refugee problem, more so in the Middle East, North Africa and most of Europe has become terrifying and explosive. For instance, the hellish political fiasco in Syria has evolved into a global flash point which is likely to spread speedily.

It is a stark reality that the entire world is poised towards an unprecedented calamity with re-emergence of Russia as a claimant to its lost superpower status, the shattering of the existing socioeconomic order, the serious divisions in Europe, the rise of radicalism in American and Europe, the many millions of homeless refugees around world, the tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and the highly inequitable division of wealth between the rich and the poor.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/30/18-page/798518-news.html

REFORMS IN AGRI SECTOR TOP PRIORITY: DR AYESHA
Business Recorder, 1 october,2016
LAHORE: The visits of foreign investors for search of business opportunities in Punjab are a sign of their confidence in the economic uplift of Pakistan, said Punjab Finance Minister Dr Ayesha Ghaus Pasha during her meeting with Polish Ambassador Piotr Opalinsic on Friday.

Secretary Agriculture Cap Muhammad Mehmood (r), Additional Secretary Energy Ifat Farooq and General Manager Business Development Mines Zafar Chishti were also present on the occasion.

She said the Punjab government was paying special focus to the social sectors for best living standards to the people of province.

Reforms in the agriculture sector and livestock development are our top priorities, she added. She said friendly relations between Poland and Pakistan are spreading over decades, however, there is a need to further promote economic and trade relations.

She said that Poland is famous for mines engineering, energy and agriculture due to its experience and special expertise.

She said that cooperation of Poland will prove to be fruitful for the promotion of modern technology and overcoming energy crisis in Pakistan.

That is why the Punjab government is ready to provide all out assistance to Polish experts and investors in the province, she added.

The secretary agriculture and additional secretary energy apprised the guests about the opportunities of investment and technical assistance in their sectors.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/10/01/9-page/798918-news.html

UREA SALES INCREASED BY 34 PC IN AUGUST
Business Recorder, 2 October, 2016

KARACHI: Urea sales in the country in August 2016 have increased by 34 percent as compared to the same month last year. However, the urea sales declined by 26 percent as compared with July 2016 as seasonal slowdown weigh in, analysts said.

As per the latest data released by National Fertilizer Development Centre (NFDC) for the month of August 2016, urea sales stood at 574,000 tons. On a cumulative basis, the urea off-take during the eight months of calendar year 2016 clocked in at 3,175,000 tons, down 16 percent on year-on-year basis as compared to 3,765,000 tons in the same period last year as farm income has decreased overall fertilizer demand in the country, an analyst at BMA Capital said.

DAP sales in August 2016 clocked in at 137,000 tons posting a decline of 31 percent on month-on-month basis.

Of the mainstream fertilizer companies, Fauji Fertilizer (FFC) remained a clear outperformer by posting YoY growth of 19 percent. Better numbers as compared to Engro Fertilizers (EFERT) indicate company's superior distribution network.

CAN, being a close substitute to urea, also recorded strong improvement as indicated by over 100 percent on YoY growth in Fatima Fertilizer's (FATIMA) off-take.

Improvement in fertilizer off-take came as new fertilizer prices (urea Rs1,400/bag and DAP Rs2,500) took effect. Going forward, DAP sales could potentially take a hit if importers (and manufacturers) revert prices to original levels. Just to recall, government has so far failed to devise subsidy disbursement mechanism for DAP, resulting into cash crunch for importers. Overall industry ended the month with urea inventory of 1.3 million tons in hand at the end of August 2016.

We believe that 2016 should end with an inventory of one million tons given oversupply situation prevailing in the market", Faizan Ahmed at JS Global Capital said.

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/10/02/17-page/799299-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 19TH TO SEPTEMBER 25TH 2016
'FAILURE' OF RESEARCH TO UPLIFT COTTON
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, September 19th, 2016

AshfakBokhari

THE textile industry has blamed research institutions for the decline in cotton production and the consequent shrinking of sowing area by failing, in particular, to develop effective varieties of cotton seed and an increase in the yield.

But more severe has been the critique by Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif who, while speaking at a seminar on Aug 31, gave a deadline of three months to the experts and scientists of agriculture research organisations to come up with results or leave their positions for young professionals. He said there would be no compromise on work and those who failed to deliver would have to go to home.

The head of the cotton committee of the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma), Seth Akbar, has described the reduction in sowing area in Punjab as "a failure of the cotton research bodies which have now become ineffective and, in fact, a burden on the industry." The spinning industry, he says, contributes Rs700m every year for cotton research, which, he thinks, is being spent on salaries and administrative expenses.

Aptma thinks the country will have to import more cotton worth $1.3bn this year because of a 16pc reduction in Punjab's cotton sowing area. Punjab's Agriculture Minister FarrukhJaved says the textile industry was becoming highly dependent on imported cotton. Therefore, duties and taxes on import of cotton would make the entire value chain uncompetitive. There is an urgent need for withdrawal of 4pc customs duty and 5pc sales tax on the import of cotton.

This year's setback comes in the wake of last season's cotton crop failure which was severe in Punjab where the year-on-year shortfall crossed 40pc.Itwiped out billions from the rural economy.

However, reports from the lower Sindh region suggest sowing area this season is higher than last year's. Cotton has been sown on 640,000 hectares compared to 621,000 hectares a year ago. In Punjab, cotton is being cultivated on

430,000 acres this year, as compared to 540,000 acres in 2014. The area undercotton cultivation is decreasing due to the persistent use of obsolete first generation seeds and inadequate supply of quality seeds.

Meanwhile, the proceedings of the fourth meeting of the Federal Textile Board held on Aug 29 presented a different scenario of the cotton sector. The meeting chaired by Commerce Minister KhurramDastgir was informed that Pakistan was expected to produce around 13m bales of cotton in the coming season.

Officials said that the ‘recovery’ in cotton output was the outcome of ‘sustained efforts of the federal and provincial governments in the last year’. Besides, an official statement issued after the meeting said through close coordination between federal and Punjab governments, pink bollworm, which had damaged the cotton crop last year, has largely been controlled.

Shahbaz Sharif wants the planners and agriculture experts to critically analyse causes of decrease in the output of agriculture commodities and share their knowledge with all the stake-holders. While speaking at a seminar, he said quality seed was sine qua non for increasing cotton production but other steps were also needed. The grower should get the best reward for his produce. He regretted that the agriculture extension services have become a dead horse and asked for their revival.

Textile leaders while appreciating the chief minister’s close interest in their industry’s affairs, pointed out that a major factor in the decline of cotton production was the supply of spurious cotton seed and unapproved Bt. cotton seed, which has lost its efficacy. The fact remains that the government has neither approved any Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) cotton variety nor enacted laws to check the fake ones. Also, no cotton seed research, they said, has been undertaken to increase yield.

Cotton production has suffered a major fall in output in the last couple of years. Textile exports have also declined and in the just-ended fiscal year 2015-16 dropped by more than 7pc to $12.46bn compared to $13.45bn a year ago, according to official figures.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the governing body of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) held on Aug 30 after a lapse of two years and chaired by federal minister for food security Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan was not attended by senior provincial representatives. The minister expressed his dismay over their lack of interest in a matter which was of critical importance and asked the secretary of the PCCC to seek an explanation from the members for their absence, which may be due to centre-provinces differences.

With the exception of Australia, all major cotton producing regions have recorded a decline in production in 2015-16. In terms of the fall in percentage, Pakistan remains the worst hit. Numerous factors such as pest attack, insufficient input and limitation of existing varieties contributed to the decrease in Pakistan’s cotton output. But its average per hectare yield of 560kg’s is better than the Indian yield of 516kg.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1284528

OUTLOOK FOR THE NEXT POTATO CROP
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, September 19th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

AS potato sowing nears in Punjab, farmers’ early hopes are positive for the crops’ production and trade.

After two years of financial grilling, they hope, though still cautiously, to be compensated to some extent in the coming season. Their optimism has reasons.

Firstly, hit by a glut in the market for the past two years, many small farmers have opted to sow other crops. This may impact the overall production, reduce supply and stabilise the market. Because of bumper crop, the prices had fallen to Rs2/kg at the farm level in 2014-15.

The second factor that creates optimism among farmers is the upcoming infrastructure in the core potato belt. In the last few years, many washing houses and spraying process setups have cropped up in central Punjab.

Now, the crop can be treated and put directly in the reefer, which means freezing its quality at a certain point, right in the cultivation area — thus sending the crop almost directly from the field to the export market. Though these setups are not still enough in numbers to treat the entire export, they are coming up fast and facilitating the process.

The third factor, of late, that has given some glimmer of hope to farmers is the rising prices of potato in the market. In the last few weeks, it has recovered to Rs40/kg in the retail market in urban Punjab.

Though farmers still say that the current rise was only benefitting middlemen who stocked potato for a few months and growers had long sold it. In any case, even if the farmer was holding it in the cold storage, he was paying roughly Rs7/kg as storage cost. The farmers might not be making money on potatoes right now, but the increasing prices certainly give a psychological boost to the trade.

The fourth factor that farmers think could work in their favour is the Pakistan's potato finding a stable niche in its traditional market. Better tuber quality has helped potato find permanent place in the Middle East and Central Asian markets. These markets are big enough to absorb substantial amount of the vegetable to keep the domestic market stable, unless, of course, India has a bumper crop and floods the same markets with its produce. Even in that case, a crop failure in any country of the region could help Pakistan's exports. The overall situation is thus looking up.

Some farmers also fear that the availability of quality seed may drop compared to the previous years and affect production. The agricultural department officials, however say, Pakistan needs over 50,000 tonnes of seed and only 10pc of which is imported anyway. They are hopeful that average target of sowing 400,000 acreage would be achieved.

Farmers' cautious approach is, however, necessitated by two factors. Firstly, it is still too early to predict things with complete certainty — though clues are hopeful. The helpful weather conditions, which make better germination possible, also add to the growers' confidence in the next crop.

Secondly, the growers' fear stems from the government's policy to keep the prices of essential commodities like potato down for urban consumers through administrative means. But "the government does not interfere in order to bring doctors' fee down or asks lawyers to charge their clients less; why does it interfere in pricing of agricultural commodities?" asks DrAfzalHaider — a potato grower.

Farmers are gathering for their annual meeting in the last week of September in central Punjab to plan the crop according to emerging trends.

The Potato Growers Association, along with multinationals (working in the seed and fertiliser sector) and the University of Agriculture (Faisalabad) get together to train farmers in the latest seed developments, application of balanced fertilisers, plant pathology and overall handling of the crop.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1284527

GLOBAL HARVEST PROSPECTS IMPROVE FOR MAIZE, WHEAT AND RICE CROPS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, September 19th, 2016

Staple food prices rose in August even as grain prices fell and the outlook for global cereal production improved.

The FAO Food Price Index, averaged 165.6 points in August, up 1.9pc from July and almost 7pc from a year earlier. The monthly jump was mostly driven by cheese and palm oil quotations, while those for wheat, maize and rice all fell.

The expected increase in grain output is forecast to boost inventories and push up the global stock-to-use ratio to 25.3pc, an "even more comfortable (supply and demand) situation than predicted at the start of the season," FAO said.

FAO raised considerably its world cereal production forecast for 2016 to 2,566m tonnes, up 22m tonnes from July projections.

FAO's cereal supply and demand brief attributed the increase primarily to anticipation of a record global wheat harvest this year and a large upward revision to this year's maize crop in the US.

Coarse grain global output for 2016 should be around 1,329m tonnes, 2.1pc higher than in 2015, buoyed by higher forecast maize output in several countries, in particular the US.

Rice production is expected to hit a new record this year at almost 496m tonnes, owing to favourable weather conditions in much of Asia and on more US farmers shifting to the crop as a result of its more attractive relative price.

The wheat output forecast was also raised to 741m tonnes, driven by large upward revisions to projections for Australia, North America, India and the Russian Federation. Russia is poised to become the world's largest wheat exporter in 2016/17, overtaking the European Union, where wet weather has hampered this year's crops.

FAO did not materially change its forecast for world cereal utilisation in the coming year, which is expected to grow by 1.6pc, led by maize — and to some extent lower-quality wheat supplies — used as animal feed.

The FAO trade forecast for cereals in 2016/17 has been scaled up by almost 9m tonnes on the back of abundant export availabilities of wheat and coarse grains.

FAO's trade-weighted index-tracking international market prices for five major food commodity groups, reversed its July drop and rose in August to its highest level in 15 months.

Reflecting cereal grain crop trends and prospects, the FAO Cereal Price Index declined by 3.0pc from July and is 7.4pc below its August 2015 level.

The FAO Meat Price Index was broadly stable, rising 0.3pc from July even as bovine meat quotations declined. Abundant coarse grain feeds drove a recovery in US beef supply.

The FAO Dairy Price Index rose 8.6pc during the month, confirming a notable change in market sentiment linked to falling milk production in the EU and a tightening of export supply prospects after an unexceptional opening to the dairy year in Oceania.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index rose 7.4pc during the month, driven by stronger palm oil prices due to lower than anticipated output from Malaysia and rising import demand by China, India and the EU.

The FAO Sugar Price Index, now at its highest level in almost six years, rose 2.5pc from July and is now as much as 75pc above its year-ago level. A stronger currency in Brazil, by far the world's largest producer of sugar cane, drove much of the gain as it limited export supplies with producers preferring to sell to the local markets. — Courtesy FAO

http://www.dawn.com/news/1284526/global-harvest-prospects-improve-for-maize-wheat-and-rice-crops

DAP IMPORT: NO BREAKTHROUGH IN TALKS ON FERTILISER SUBSIDY CLAIMS
The Express Tribune, September 20th, 2016

Peer Muhammad

Islamabad: A meeting between fertiliser importers and government officials remained inconclusive on Monday as the latter sought two more weeks to resolve the problems arising out of delay in settling subsidy claims on the import of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP).

Ministry of National Food Security and Research Secretary AbidJaved chaired the meeting, which was attended by officials of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industries and representatives of fertiliser importing companies.

According to a source privy to the meeting, fertiliser importers informed the government about their decision to increase DAP price by Rs300 per 50kg bag as the government had failed to establish a mechanism for processing the subsidy claims submitted by them over the past three months.

They said the FBR was required to come up with the mechanism but it was still uncommitted and had not been able to set the framework.

Responding to the concerns of fertiliser companies, the national food security and research secretary assured them that he would meet the FBR chairman to remove the impediments and sought two more weeks in this regard.

He would also talk to provinces and the Ministry of Finance about depositing the subsidy in accounts of the State Bank of Pakistan.

Representatives of the companies, however, said they would hold a meeting to chart a future line of action and decide whether they would increase the DAP price or give further time to the government.

“There is no breakthrough in the huddle and we will decide our future line of action very soon,” commented a company representative.

Earlier, the fertiliser importers had warned the government in a letter that they would increase the DAP price by Rs300 per bag because no mechanism had been put in place to pay subsidy to the importers for the past three months. The decision was taken in a meeting of the Fertiliser Importer Council on Friday.

“Although the importers have been passing the subsidy on to farmers by giving a concession of Rs300 per bag since June this year, they have not received their claims so far,” said the letter.

It said the FBR, which had been required to establish the subsidy payment mechanism, could not perform the task. The federal government also did not take any steps to deposit the subsidy in the State Bank of Pakistan, it added.

The importers contended that they were working on very narrow margins and their finances had been choked for months due to delay in releasing the subsidy.

The subsidy is higher than the profit margins and they have little motivation to continue with the concession. As a result of liquidity crunch, they are compelled to increase the DAP price by Rs300 per bag.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1184528/dap-import-no-breakthrough-talks-fertiliser-subsidy-claims/

CM KISSAN PACKAGE: FARMERS TO GET INTEREST-FREE LOANS
The Express Tribune, September 20th, 2016.

LAHORE: The Land Record Management Information System on Monday started registering names of farmers seeking to acquire interest-free loans through smartphones under the mobile-assisted farming initiative started by the Punjab government.

In the first phase, Rs80 billion will be distributed among farmers and 144 land record centres working in almost all tehsils will remain open from 4pm to 8pm for registration process. The initiative is part of the Chief Minister's Kissan Package 2016 aimed at increasing farmers' income.

Loan distribution will be increased to Rs100 billion and smartphones will be given to over five million small farmers over the next five years. Around 0.45 million small farmers, having less than 12.5 acres of land, will be given interest-free loans in the province.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1184553/cm-kissan-package-farmers-get-interest-free-loans/

OSTRICH FARMING AMONG SIX SCHEMES APPROVED
Dawn, September 21, 2016

LAHORE: The Punjab Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) approved on Tuesday six development schemes at an estimated cost of Rs2,127.89 million (Rs2.13 billion).

The schemes were approved in the 15th meeting of PDWP of current fiscal year 2016-17 presided over by Planning and Development (P&D) Board Chairman Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan.

According to a P&D spokesman, the approved schemes included development of ostrich farming in Punjab at the cost of Rs69.7m; propagation of ducks rearing worth Rs45.03m; developing rural poultry models to support rural economy at the cost of Rs184.44m; replacement of 45 tubewells of Lahore Water and Sanitation Agency at the cost of Rs649.72m; provision of clean drinking water, sewerage system, PCC and allied facilities in Ganj Bazaar Gulistan Colony and adjoining localities of Lahore at the cost of Rs771m; and provision of clean drinking water, sewerage system, PCC and allied facilities in Chohan Colony, Singhpura, and adjoining localities of Lahore worth Rs408m.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1285150

SUBSTANTIAL RISE IN CHILLI EXPORTS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT QUALITY SEEDS: SHAH
Business Recorder, September 21, 2016

KARACHI: Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Food Security and Research Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah said on Tuesday that the export of chilies would not witness any substantial increase without providing quality seeds to the growers.

He express these views speaking at an awareness seminar on potential of export of chilies organized by Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) in collaboration with Sindh Agricultural Growth Project (SAGP), here at a hotel.

"You cannot fight in global competitive market until you facilitate your growers," he said adding that the best quality treated seeds would help improve the productivity and that would engender a significant increase in the export volume.

He said a multi-million chili drying plant was setup in Kunri area of Sindh some years ago, but it remained dysfunctional due to negligence of relevant authorities. However, he expressed hope the plant would become operational by the end of this month as work in this facility was underway.

"Chili is an important agricultural product of Pakistan with around 200,000 tons estimated annual cultivation but unfortunately its export decreased by 35 percent after Aflatoxin and micro-toxin hit the commodity," lamented Sikandar Hayat Bosan, Federal Minister for Food Security and Research, speaking as a chief guest at the seminar.

He further said that trade of chili played an important role in the local economy. He said Pakistan was among the top 5 producers of chili in the world, and one of the eminent exporters of chilies.

“According to an estimate, Pakistan has a potential to export 90,000 ton of chilies per year, which will help bring the country much-needed foreign exchange amounting to $ 47 million per annum,” he said.

Bosan said aflatoxin attack could be overcome by proper picking and handling practices, necessary improvement in traditional sun-drying practices, introduction of commercial scale mechanical dryer, isolation of old and new chilies and proper grading and storage.

S.M Munir, chief executive TDAP in his welcome address said the objective of the event was to create awareness about potential of export of chilies among growers/exporters.

He said that Pakistan earned $ 4.7 million in 2014-15 through export of chilies (powder/whole) to the world. He said the top importing counties of chilies in the world were: USA, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Malaysia and some Middle Eastern countries and Pakistan’s major exports of chilies were also aimed to reach Saudi Arabia, UAE, Mexico, USA, Kuwait etc.

“Top exporter of chilies in the world is India with market share of 36 percent, then comes China with 11percent, Bangladesh 8 percent, Peru 8 percent and others 31percent while Pakistan has 6 percent market share,” he said.

In FY 2015-16 Munir said the authority organized as many as 25 exhibitions relating to agro-food in different countries. He urged the growers to participate in such exhibitions and help the country to enhance its export market share. He also asked the growers to put forward their proposals regarding how the authority can assist them in promoting business.

“We have got some rupees 28 billion export development fund (EDF) at the ministry of commerce. The same can be utilized for purchase of export-oriented machinery to growers, he assured.

Other speakers at the seminar emphasized that adopting modern techniques of growing chilies would help increase the quality of chilies enabling them to export more chilies.

Growers from Kunri and other chilies growing areas of Sindh and exporters of red chilies attended the seminar.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/21/9-page/795872-news.html

KHARIF CROPS FACING IRRIGATION WATER SHORTFALL
Business Recorder, September 21, 2016

LAHORE: The Indus River System Authority has forecasted two percent shortfall for current Kharif crops including cotton, rice, sugarcane, vegetables, fodder for live stock and orchards over the protected existing uses of canal water in each province under the 1991 water accord among the provinces.

Talking to Business Recorder, Punjab Irrigation Canal Regulator Eng. Husnain said that as WAPDA did not allow IRSA to fill the gigantic Tarbela dam over the mighty Indus to its full capacity up to 1550 ft during the current Monsoon season 2016 owing to on-going construction work of accident prone Tunnel Four Tarbela hydel power project. Consequently the reservoir could only be filled up to 1544 ft level resulting in the current shortfall of irrigation water for the strategic Kharif crops.

Engineer Husnain further said besides below normal rains in the catchments of the rivers in September, the water flows in the four live rivers have marginally decreased. The strategic 20,000 cusecs capacity Marala–Ravi link canal that supplements water in the river Ravi has almost been closed. The water flow in the Chashma–Jhelum link canal has also been cut down from 20,000 cusecs to 2,000 cusecs.

According to 20th September river water report of WAPDA: river Indus at Tarbela: Inflows 75900 cusecs and Outflows 105000 cusecs, Kabul at Nowshera: Inflows 17900 cusecs and Outflows 17900 cusecs, Jhelum at Mangla: Inflows 14100 cusecs and Outflows 55000 cusecs, Chenab at Marala: Inflows 27900 cusecs and Outflows 8000 cusecs.

Meanwhile in view of depleting water resources of the country IRSA held a high level meeting with a World Bank delegation on Tuesday to chalk out a plan for reducing the huge waterline losses. Senior representatives of the provinces also attended the meeting. Veteran water expert and consultant to the Punjab government Eng M.H. Siddiqi represented the Punjab irrigation department.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/21/13-page/795912-news.html

WORLD BANK TEAM, CM PUNJAB DISCUSS AGRICULTURE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT
Business Recorder, September 22nd, 2016

A delegation of the World Bank’s Agriculture and Rural Transformation Mission led by Country Director Patchamuthu Illangovan met Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, here Wednesday. Matters regarding development of agriculture sector and strengthening of markets for agriculture and rural transformation in Punjab were discussed in the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that Pakistan is an agrarian country and agriculture sector is the backbone of its economy. He said that development of agriculture sector could help strengthen national economy and achieve the target of self-sufficiency. He said that Punjab government would welcome cooperation of the World Bank in the development of agriculture sector.

He said that provincial government wants to benefit from the experience of the World Bank experts for the uplift of agriculture sector and increase in per acre yield. He said that an agreement of cooperation would be signed between Punjab government and the World Bank for development of agriculture sector.

Shahbaz Sharif further said that the World Bank in an important partner of Punjab government in the programme of uplift of social sectors and several programme are running in the province with the cooperation of the World Bank for the provision of basic amenities to the masses. He said that the World Bank is extending commendable cooperation for the development of social sectors adding measures would be taken for increasing its cooperation in agriculture sector.

Chief Minister Punjab said Punjab government has given a historic package of Rs 100 billion for increasing per acre yield and prosperity of small cultivators. He said programme of provision of interest-free loans to small cultivators has been started and these loans are being given in a highly transparent manner.

Shahbaz Sharif furthers said that Punjab Agriculture Commission has also been established for the uplift of agriculture sector and solution of problems of cultivators while a high level committee has been constituted for evolving agriculture policy. He stated that measures are also been taken for establishment of Small Farmers Development Corporation. Shahbaz said future of Punjab is linked with agriculture and development of agriculture sector.

He said agriculture research could go a long way in increasing agri production. He said benefit of research to farmers is of vital importance therefore extension services are being fully activated. He said comprehensive reforms are being introduced in seed industry. He pointed agriculture experts of the World Bank have given excellent recommendation for the development of agriculture sector in the province.

Country Director of the World Bank Patchamuthu Illangovan assured all out cooperation would be extended to Punjab government for the uplift of agriculture sector. He said that there is a vast potential for the development of agriculture sector in Punjab and the World Bank with work with the provincial government for fully utilizing this potential. He said finest agriculture scientists of the world have been appointed in Islamabad and working with them would leave a positive impact on agriculture sector in the province.

Provincial Ministers Dr Farrukh Javed, Yawar Zaman, Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, Special Assistant on Livestock Arshad Jutt, Advisor Dr Ejaz Nabi, Chief Secretary, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Chairman Planning and Development, Secretaries of concerned departments, agri experts and senior officers were also present on the occasion. Senior Director Agriculture Juregen Voegele, Senior Agriculture Economist Johannes Georges Pius Jansen and other experts comprised the World Bank team.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/86956/

R& D PROJECTS NEEDED IN FIELD OF AGRICULTURE: KATI PRESIDENT
Business Recorder, September, 23rd, 2016

KARACHI: President Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI) Zahid Saeed has said that research and development (R&D) projects are needed in the field of agriculture because increasing import of food items in an agricultural country such as Pakistan is a matter of concern.

“If we focus on our agriculture sector we can produce sufficient food items to meet national demand and can export them to world as well,” he said on Thursday.

Zahid Saeed said that rise in import of fuel and machinery cost heavily on our reserves hence we should promote research and development in this sector also to save our financial reserves

He said traders and industrialists should welcome if international institutions and media verify the positive indicators of economy in Pakistan.

He proposed that to make this situation sustainable a comprehensive strategy should be devised.

KATI president said that positive indicators were widely affirmed internationally and investment environment was also predicted positive.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/23/9-page/796369-news.html

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT’S STEPS TOWARDS AGRICULTURE SECTOR HAILED
Business Recorder, September, 24th, 2016

The business and farming community have hailed the steps taken by Punjab Government for development of agriculture, stability of agri economy and best usage of water resources and signing an agreement of cooperation with World bank describing it a far-reaching step.

President of Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Fareed Mughis Sheikh said World Bank will provide technical assistance to the Punjab government for promoting agriculture, increasing per acre yield, stabilising agri economy and using water resources in the province. The World Bank will also extend cooperation regarding implementation of modern technology for promoting agriculture on lasting basis.

Fareed Sheikh said the agreement between the Punjab government and World Bank augurs well and agri-economy and prosperity of villages will be promoted through its implementation. He said the agreement signed with World Bank was a milestone in the development of the agriculture sector.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/87569/

CHINESE TEAM VISIT PARC HQ

Business Recorder, September, 24th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: A Chinese delegation has visited Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) Headquarters Islamabad on Thursday and held meeting with Chairman PARC, Dr Nadeem Amjad, for Pak-China Collaboration in Seed Sector.

On this occasion Chairman PARC acknowledged the support of China in various projects of PARC. He gave a detailed presentation about PARC, its mission and vision to achieve sustainable food security and poverty alleviation through knowledge and innovation.

He briefed about PARC presence in the country, National Agricultural Research System of Pakistan, PARC disciplines of in-house research i.e., Plant Sciences, Natural Resources, Animal Sciences, Agricultural Engineering and Social Sciences. He also highlighted the Pakistan Agricultural Scenario and PARC major achievements.

In the meeting Pak-China experts have exchanged the information and discussed the areas of mutual interest to accelerate the development of seed sector in Pakistan.

The Chinese delegation appreciated PARC's role of collaboration with international partners for the development of agriculture sector in Pakistan. They were of the view that this meeting would definitely prove fruitful to further strengthen existing collaboration between the both countries.

The Chinese delegation was headed by Zhang Yanqiu, Director General, Bureau of Seed Management, Ministry of Agriculture, Peoples Republic of China. Other members included Liao Cuimeng, President, Yuan Longpin Hi-Tech Agriculture Co. Ltd., China, Geng Yueming, General Manager, Hubei Provincial Seed Group Co. Ltd., Ms Zhan Qin, Chairperson, Winall Hi-Tech Seed Co. Ltd., China, and Liu Xianhui, General Manager, Beidahuang Kenfeng Seed Co. Ltd., China. —PR

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/24/19-page/796702-news.html

PUNJAB SEEKS RESOLUTION OF FERTILISER SUBSIDY ISSUE
The Express Tribune,September 24th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab Agriculture department has asked the federal government to take immediate steps to resolve the fertiliser subsidy issue, in order to ensure availability of the required fertiliser for the upcoming Rabi crop.

An official in the Punjab government told The Express Tribune that Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed wrote a letter to Finance Minster Ishaq Dar. He suggested the latter to address the issue at the earliest as it has been delayed for three months due to the absence of a mechanism to process the claims of the fertiliser importing companies.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has failed to develop any mechanism for processing of the fertiliser subsidy, a task which was assigned by the federal government through a notification on June 25, 2016 to disburse the subsidy announced in the budget 2016-17.

The provincial minister expressed fear that there would be shortage of DAP for the Rabi crop of wheat, which would start sowing from October.

The letter mentioned that if the subsidy, meant for facilitating the farmers to reduce the cost of production, did not reach them in a timely fashion it would have no utility.

Officials revealed that Javed also asked the centre to ensure that all the provinces deposit their due share for fertiliser subsidy as they did not honour their commitment last year and it was only Punjab which contributed Rs3 billion of its due share to the pool.

Earlier, fertiliser importers also wrote to the federal minister for National Food Security and Research to resolve the subsidy issue or they would increase the price of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) by Rs300 per 50kg bag.

Earlier this week, the federal secretary for National Food Security and Research also sought two more weeks to address the issue after meeting with the FBR chairman.

The importers pointed out that the government had failed to finalise the mechanism for processing subsidy claims and disbursing funds to DAP importers even three months after issuing a notification for subsidy payments on June 25, 2016.

It said the FBR, which had been tasked with putting in place the required mechanism, had failed.

The importers further said that the federal government also did not take any steps to deposit the subsidy in the State Bank of Pakistan.

A source in the ministry said that the federal government has recently deposited 25% of its share in the subsidy amount in the first phase and has assured that the remaining would be deposited shortly.

However, the official said that no province has so far contributed their due share.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1187291/punjab-seeks-resolution-fertiliser-subsidy-issue/

RS7.3BN AGRI, ROAD DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES APPROVED
Dawn, September, 24th, 2016

LAHORE: The Punjab Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) approved on Friday eight development schemes, including three agricultural, with an estimated cost of Rs7.3 billion.

The schemes were approved in the 16th meeting of the PDWP in current fiscal year 2016-17.

According to a spokesman for the planning and development department, the approved schemes involving agriculture were establishment of Punjab Bioenergy Institute (PBI) at University of Agriculture Faisalabad (Phase-I) (Revised) with Rs792 million; testing indigenous hydroponic greenhouses for vegetable growing at various locations in Punjab with Rs87.4 million; and promotion of agriculture mechanisation in Punjab with Rs1.1 billion.

Road-related schemes approved were dualisation of the 3.11km road from Jang Bahatar motorway interchange to Wah with Rs655 million; widening/improvement of Rawalpindi-Chakri Road (Mohra Chapri) to motorway interchange with Rs670 million; rehabilitation/widening and improvement of 76.5km Shahpur-Bhera-Malikwal road with Rs2.2 billion; widening/improvement of 55km road from Khushab to Nowshera via Khura with Rs876.849 million and rehabilitation/carpeting of Phalia to Sial Morr Interchange up to Tahli Adda I/C Phalia ByPass with Rs854.6 million.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1285782/rs73bn-agri-road-development-schemes-approved

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 11TH TO SEPTEMBER 18TH 2016
OUTDATED BULLDOZERS: CULTIVATION TARGET MAY BE MISSED
Dawn, September 11th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: At least 306 bulldozers of the Punjab agriculture department have become outdated as their non-replacement is likely to miss the current fiscal year’s target of converting 50,000 acres of waste land into cultivable land.

The department is currently converting the waste land into cultivable land with an average of 25,000 to 30,000 acres annually and is considering outsourcing the provision of bulldozers to farmers.

Sources in the department told Dawn on Saturday that the field wing of the department had so far achieved around 65 per cent to 70pc target in the first two months of the current fiscal year.

They feared that heavy rains in July-August 2016 and expected rain spell in ongoing month of September were restricting the department from performing horizontal land leveling/development activities.

They said the waste land usually comprised sand dunes, water logging and salinity and mountainous nature was converted into cultivable land by leveling and removing soil with the help of bulldozers.

They said currently 130 bulldozers were working in South Punjab followed by 120 in Potohar region and 70 others were available in central region comprising Sargodha, Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Lahore.

Sources said addition of 25,000 to 30,000 acres to cultivable land annually was costing Rs500,000 per acre.

They said at least 15 to 20 hours were required for a bulldozer to level an acre, but the existing bulldozers which had already completed 50,000 hours and needed repairs periodically were not fulfilling the target.

They said the government's seriousness could be judged from the fact that a summary sent to get 22 bulldozers repaired on an urgent basis was not yet approved. The spare parts of existing bulldozers were imported and required heavy funding, they added.

Sources said the government on the one hand was planning to outsource the bulldozers while on the other it was not approving new purchase. They said the cost of a new bulldozer was around Rs40 million.

They said that 1991-92 model bulldozers with 120HP engine had become outdated after completing 11,000 hours while the new bulldozers have the capacity of 150 to 160HP.

They said small farmers having 12.5 acres or less land were being given subsidy of Rs560 per hour rent against full calculation of Rs2,500 and free diesel while farmers having over 12.5 acres were getting Rs100 subsidy per hour without diesel.

Sources said the new bulldozers, if purchased, would have Rs6,000 rent per hour. They said a proposal submitted to acquire 50 new bulldozers worth about Rs2 billion was not entertained by the provincial chief executive a few months ago.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed said the department had moved a summary to the government to get around 100 to 150 reconditioned bulldozers with an estimated cost of Rs640m.

He said though the target of 50,000 acres was ambitious for the current fiscal year, he claimed the department was improving its annual target.

He said the outsourcing was under-consideration, but private parties were not taking much interest in the project because of affordability factor of bulldozers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1283435/outdated-bulldozers-cultivation-target-may-be-missed

DI-AMMONIUM PHOSPHATE: FERTILISER IMPORTERS TO INCREASE PRICE BY RS300 PER BAG
The Express Tribune, September 18th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: Fertiliser importers are all set to increase the price of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) by Rs300 per 50kg bag as the government has not been able to establish a subsidy mechanism and transfer funds to the importers for three months.

The price-revision decision was taken at a meeting of the Fertiliser Importer Council on Friday.

The council also wrote a letter to the minister of national food security and research, informing him about its intention to push the DAP price up by Rs300 per bag.

The importers pointed out that the government had failed to finalise the mechanism for processing subsidy claims and disbursing funds to DAP importers even three months after issuing a notification for subsidy payments on June 25, 2016.

“Although the importers have been passing the subsidy on to farmers by giving a concession of Rs300 per bag since June this year, they have not received their claims so far,” said the letter.

It said the Federal Board of Revenue, which had been tasked with putting in place the required mechanism, could not perform the task.

“The federal government also did not take any steps to deposit the subsidy in the State Bank of Pakistan,” the importers added.

“We are working on very narrow margins and our finances are choked for months due to government’s failure to establish a comprehensive mechanism. The subsidy amount is higher than the profit margins and we have little motivation to continue with the concession.”

As a result of the liquidity crunch, they were forced to increase the DAP price by Rs300 per bag.

An importer, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Express Tribune that a meeting had been slated for Monday between government departments and fertiliser importers to find a solution to the issue.

In the meeting, the importers would take a final decision on whether to go ahead with the subsidy or suspend it. “We will not push ahead with the subsidy if the government gives us another deadline or resorts to delaying tactics,” said the importer.

“On the one hand, the FBR is not ready to develop the payment mechanism despite taking responsibility, while on the other, the provinces are not ready to contribute their 50% share in the total subsidy of Rs10.8 billion as announced in the budget,” remarked a source in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Last year, only the federal and Punjab governments managed to deposit their share of Rs17 billion out of the total Rs20 billion subsidy. The remaining provinces did not contribute their share amounting to Rs3 billion. The official feared that the three provinces would be reluctant this time too.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1183529/di-ammonium-phosphate-fertiliser-importers-increase-price-rs300-per-bag/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 5TH TO SEPTEMBER 10TH 2016
A FARMER’S EID
Dawn, September 5th, 2016

Naween A. Mangi

EID-UL-AZHA is coming up soon. Most people are busy considering what sacrificial animal to buy and what delicacies to prepare on the big day. Gada Hussain, a 22-year-old farmer in upper Sindh, is anxiously wondering whether he'll get to spend the day with his family like everyone else. Normally, he misses all the special holidays.

The night before Eid-ul-Fitr a couple of months ago, Gada received a message from the landlord whose three acres he farms, to arrive at his guesthouse at sunrise. When he got there, he was ordered to clean the entire guesthouse. He began removing cobwebs from the ceiling, sweeping the floor and washing down the courtyard. By the time he was done, he had already missed the Eid prayer. He was ordered to stay and serve the day's guests with water and tea.

The farmer bit his tongue, cursed under his breath and obeyed. This wasn't the first time. He has unloaded sacks of cement, demolished a building and done construction work for his landlord in the past. When he walked the three kilometres home after sunset, his pockets were as empty as when he began the day. This free labour is routine.

Gada, a quiet, somewhat sullen young man with dense, curly hair and a short temper, has been planting and harvesting rice and wheat on this land ever since he started helping his father when he was 10. The landlord, a politician and rice mill owner, has about 100 acres of land and dozens of farmers at his beck and call.

Gada rises every day before dawn and opens up his pigeon hovel, fills up their grain and water containers and lets two dozen of them free. He stands there for a few moments gazing up at the sky. This is one time during the entire gruelling day that Gada's eyes soften and joy fills his heart.

There's little time to enjoy this sport. Soon enough, he grabs his scythe and heads to the land, dressed in a faded dhoti and a kurta without buttons. There he chops up a bundle of grass, collects stacks of hay for his two buffaloes, checks on his standing crop and then returns home where his pregnant wife helps him unload the donkey cart and then serves him a breakfast of potatoes and leftover rice.

In the last two seasons, the land he farms, produced 200 maunds of rice and 50 maunds of wheat — which according to custom are split half and half between the farmer and the landlord. Gada is responsible for paying for the tractor that ploughs the land, the seed, the fertiliser used for the seed and the labour for planting and harvesting.

The landlord shares the cost of the fertiliser for the crop and pesticide and pays one-fourth of the thresher charges. Since Gada has no cash upfront, he has to buy seed and fertiliser on credit which increases the cost by over 60 per cent because of interest charges.

Gada spends all year caring for his crop. He plants the seed for his rice crop in the intense heat of June and makes several rounds to the fields late at night to check on the water level.

On the last day of the rice harvesting season, when the thresher machine arrives, Gada is filled with nervous excitement. It's the day of reckoning. His wife and other women in the family cook up a large meal for the labourers while he arranges cold drinking water, tea and cigarettes for them as well as a clean rilli for the landlord to sit on so he doesn't spoil his starched white clothes.

The cleaned crop is spread in a round heap and then the traders begin weighing the crop. On one side of the scale sit the landlord and his assistants. On the other, stand Gada, a cousin and a couple of farmers acting as witnesses. Gada scoops up every last grain and tosses it onto the pile so the weight is higher. His gaze is fixed on the landlord; if he's unhappy with the output, Gada will have to brave his rage.

When the accounts are prepared two weeks later, Gada comes out Rs8,000 in debt which will be carried over to the next season. Gada comes home with nothing after months of toiling in the heat; still, he must do it because it affords him animal fodder, a loan in times of need and access to rice and wheat he couldn't afford to buy.

Not all landlords are the same. Some take care of their farmers, realising that their own lives and fortunes are tied to that toil. They don't charge interest on loans taken for seed or fertiliser and don't use their farmers as free labour.

But for Gada, if he is summoned, he must go. If he doesn't, he risks losing the right to farm that land which means he won't be able to feed his family. The last time he spent the day as a construction worker without a wage at his landlord's house, he went hungry because the group of five workers wasn't given enough food and had to get through the day without tea.

He came back so angry, he threw his scarf on the floor and pledged never to go back. Then when his sweat dried, he realised that he had no choice. So this Eid too, Gada will be on standby, hoping he can stay with his three kids, but prepared to go if he is summoned. That's just the way it is.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1282090

THE KISSAN COMMISSION —WILL THERE BE CHANGE?
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, September 5th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

PUNJAB ultimately set up the much-awaited Kissan Commission last week. The commission will oversee Rs100bn investment in agriculture for the next two years.

The chief minister himself had promised to set up the commission in the third week of March and had since been presiding over preparation meetings to finalise one.

The composition of the commission is an elaborate one, some say too elaborate to be efficient enough. It includes the chief minister as chairman, five ministers (agriculture and allied departments), six secretaries (including the chief secretary), four farmers' associations, two heads of agriculture-related companies that Punjab owns, two vice-chancellors (agriculture and veterinary universities) , four industrial associations (PCGA, APTMA, PSMA and PAMIMA) and two professors of the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). The commission can co-opt as many technocrats and experts as it deems necessary, adding to the numerical strength, or as some say rush, of the commission.

In its first meeting, the commission has formed two committees — one for preparing provincial policy on agriculture and the other for development of small farmers. On a positive note, the chief minister has insisted on keeping the commission independent and working through sub-committees — which would have experts from related fields.

Government circles are hopeful that the commission will provide farmers a platform to raise their voice. The major aim of the commission remains: to discuss and address all those issues of the sector which have been raised on the streets in the last one year.

The Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, which mainly led farmers' protest during the last year, however has some other ideas. Rejecting the commission as 'too officially dominated, too big to be effective, too urban dominated to assess their issues and having a lure for taking them off the streets', they have announced a 'Save the Agriculture March' for September 21 — merely three weeks away — on the streets of the federal and provincial capitals. It hardly augurs well for the effort on both the sides; the government thinks it has taken a step forward but the farmers insist it is a step backwards.

Farmers do have some points here to make. Will the commission focus on the recommendations as the chief minister promised last March? Out of three dozen odd members, they complain, only four seats have gone to farmers. Another issue for them is filling the commission with urban experts.

The secretaries, along with members from some non-governmental organisations, have always been on the forefront of previous efforts to solve sectoral problems. So were some of the celebrated technocrats. Their input has not been able to solve the issues, rather helped them worsen.

Those technocrats have, in turn, blamed the politicians for failure to take their words seriously and implement them in letter and spirit, and yet the farmers' issues remain unsolved.

The setting up of the commission is thus an effort in trying the same methodology, which created the problem in the first place. Farmers are taking the effort in the same perspective.

Similarly, the agriculture department has not been able to solve issues and that is precisely why an independent commission was promised. The CM had advised the commission to re-prioritise its efforts and the initiatives of the department.

Farmers argue that problems of the farm sector are well-documented and have been rotting, along with their proposed solutions, on official shelves for the last many decades. The commission will now reinvent the wheel by constituting sub-committees, which would, in turn, hire experts and consume months, for formulating irrelevant recommendations.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1282001/the-kissan-commission-will-there-be-change

THE PRICE OF PADDY
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, September 5th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

Paddy crop is ready for harvesting in lower Sindh, although in areas banned for cultivation, harvesting has already started. For instance, paddy from Sanghar has started reaching rice mills in upper Sindh. Farmers in upper Sindh still have at least a fortnight or so to go for crop harvesting.

The crop across Sindh is healthy, the impact of pest attacks in lower Sindh being practically washed away by rains.

If heavy and devastating rains do not occur farmers expect a bumper crop. Subsidy on urea fertiliser has helped growers apply its required dozes in their fields which they otherwise avoided to keep their cost of production down.

According to a seasoned rice grower, Haji Ameer Bux Pahore from Shikarpur, with every acre producing 10 maunds more than the usual output, the province expects a larger size of the crop compared to last year.

Subsidy on DAP fertiliser was given last year under the Prime Minister's Rs340bn Kissan Package, announced ahead of local bodies elections.

The subsidy has reduced the DAP's price to Rs2,600 from Rs4,000 per bag and that of urea to Rs1,400 from Rs1,850 per bag.

Farmers in upper Sindh — where much of the paddy is grown on the right bank of the river Indus — are the ones who will mainly get the advantage of the subsidy. Paddy cultivation in lower Sindh is only permitted in Kotri barrage's non-perennial command.

The subsidy on fertilisers would possibly reduce cost of production by Rs5,000 or so per acre. Expenses of Rs15,000-Rs17,000 for land preparation remain unchanged as a major head of cost of production. Then comes the cost of hybrid seed which is around Rs1,000 per kg. Around 7kgs of seed are used in an acre.

According to Nabi Bux Sathio and another paddy grower, Nadeem Shah, the coarse variety (irrr-6) was selling at a price of Rs975 to Rs1,020 per 40kg at the initial stage of harvesting this season. The price may drop when the crop's arrival in the market picks up pace.

But, they say, the rate is better than last year's when it dropped to Rs700-Rs800 per 40kg after the initial harvest. Sathio recalls that a Rs800 to Rs825 per 40kg price was offered to growers during last year's corresponding period.

Availability of irrigational water remained by and large satisfactory, but water shortage was reported in areas located on left bank of Sukkur barrage where paddy cultivation is banned. Climatic conditions have benefited the crop, especially rains in the first week of August, which had a positive bearing on the crop. The only exception was in low-lying areas where rainwater stagnated in fields, damaging the paddy.

The paddy sowing target set by the agriculture department of 750,000ha was met this season..

Small farmers however complained of rice millers securing 45kg instead of 40kg claiming high moisture content in paddy, while big farmers resist such deductions. Secondly the crop's price depends largely on price trends in the international market, which remained depressed last year. Farmers' feel they would be better-off if they got the average price of Rs900/40kg.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1281998/the-price-of-paddy

GOVERNMENT URGED TO INTRODUCE MANDATORY CROP INSURANCE SCHEME
Business Recorder, September 05, 2016
Representative body of Southern Punjab's business community has urged the Government on Sunday to introduce a mandatory crop insurance scheme immediately to save the farming community from financial losses.

"Better insurance coverage is imperative for the development of agricultural economy which will also reduce uncertainty among farming communities," said president of Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Fareed Mughis Sheikh in a statement.

He further said that sound agri insurance system would help strengthen the agriculture sector of country and successfully address the menace of food insecurity in Pakistan. He said that farmers could be saved from negative impact of disease, drought, flood, pests, natural disasters, weather, rains and other risks through a proper insurance cover.

"Agricultural yields can go up significantly and livestock position can also be improved if cultivators act upon improved methods which should also be covered under insurance scheme," he stressed.

Sheikh said that insurance companies needed to be encouraged to offer wide range of products to the rural population that felt them unsafe due to frequent floods, calamities and pest attacks. He called for a mechanism to provide agricultural risk management training to people and equip them to identify opportunities and develop products that help mitigate risks.

"There is a need to build the capacity of the institutions by providing knowledge and skills required to design, price and implement agricultural insurance programmes, he proposed saying that insurance couldn't obliterate the risk altogether because Agri-insurance alone was not enough to solve the problems of growers.

http://www.brecorder.com/money-a-banking/198:pakistan/82743:government-urged-to-introduce-mandatory-crop-insurance-scheme/?date=2016-09-05

AGRICULTURE SECRETARY STRESSES ON IMPROVED RESEARCH
The Express Tribune, September 8th, 2016

Imran Rana

Faisalabad: Punjab Agriculture Secretary Muhammad Mahmood has stated that researchers should come up with viable policies for different problems faced by the agriculture sector in order to make it more profitable.

He was speaking at a joint meeting of the Steering Committee and Council for Research and Policy organised by US-Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies (USPCAS) at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad.

“The agriculture sector is facing numerous problems including low productivity, water scarcity, decreasing agriculture land and marketing issues,” said the secretary.

He said the government was making all out efforts to address the problems of the farming community and stressed on creating awareness among the farmers about the modern agro-based technologies.

Lauding the steps being taken on the part of UAF and USPCAS, he also stressed upon the need to create collaboration between the agriculture department and USPCAS to help improve the former. Also present on the occasion, the National Assembly former speaker Syed Fakhar Imam called for joint efforts to address the problems of the sector including water irrigation, quality of agriculture components like soil and seed.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1178260/agriculture-secretary-stresses-improved-research/

‘AGRICULTURE EXPERTS SHOULD COME UP WITH VIABLE POLICY SOLUTIONS’

Business Recorder, September 09, 2016
Punjab Agriculture Secretary Muhammad Mahmood has said that agricultural researchers should come up with viable policy solutions to different problems facing the agriculture sector in order to make agriculture profitable. He was addressing at a joint meeting of Steering Committee and Council for Research and Policy at University of Agriculture Faisalabad Syndicate room.

The meeting was organized by US-Pakistan Center for Advanced Studies (USPCAS), Agriculture and Food Security, UAF. The meeting was co-chaired by Former speaker National Assembly Syed Fakhar Imam whereas University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan also addressed the meeting. The Secretary said that the agriculture sector was facing numerous problems including low productivity, water scarcity, soil, decreasing agriculture land, marketing issue and others. He said that the country was blessed with the fertile land, eco system but we could not reap the fruits from its potential. He said that government was making all out efforts to address the problems of the farming community. He was of view that awareness must be created among the farming community about the modern agro-based technologies.

Lauding the steps being taken on the part of UAF and USPCAS, he stressed upon the need to create collaboration between the Agriculture Department and USPCAS that will help improve the efficiency of agriculture department.

Former Speaker National Assembly Syed Fakhar Imam called for joint efforts to address the problems of agricultural sector including water irrigation and quality of agriculture components as soil and seed. He said that major components for a successful agriculture include farmer land, labor, technology and water. He said that California faced drought for five year but they had developed the strategies to face the situation.

He stressed upon the irrigation policy to fight the water scarcity issues. He stressed upon the need to diversification in agriculture as 70 percent of the countries land is covered by three major crops wheat, rice and cotton. He said countries’ agriculture needs a new paradigm in which water, soil and seed must be promoted.

Vice Chancellor UAF, Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that to improve the agriculture sector we must train the farmers and there should be knowledge-based agriculture in which the focus must be on rural poverty of farmers. He said that water, energy and food security must be developed in which production, processing, storage and distribution be promoted.

He showed his concern that a farmer son does not want to become a farmer due to low profit, market issues etc.

He assured that the policy will steer the farmers out of the poverty by reducing the cost production and creating a knowledge corridor through small institutions to help farmers. He said that they have launched three new degree programs seed science, climate change and human nutrition. He said that the under the USPCAS, five chairs including policy and outreach research was set up that will help address the policy issue. He said that commissioned research was being carried out here for the development of agricultural sector.

Vice Chancellor, Lasbaila University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Baluchistan Dr Dost Muhammad Baloch said that there should be training courses for farmers, growers, live-stock and other agriculture related courses for farmer. Chairman Horticulture Board of Pakistan and Ex-Minister of Agriculture, Sindh Hassan Ali Chaniho called for a platform where people from provinces, universities and farmers listen to each other problems and bring up solutions.

Progressive Farmer Syed Faisal Hassan said that agriculture sector is facing seed issues due to which there is a massive difference of growth of Pakistan and other countries. He said that farmers must be respected by which agriculture will be developed.

USPCAS Chief of Party Dr Bashir Ahmad , US scientist Dr Nancy, Registrar Muhammad Hussain, treasurer Umer Saeed, Stakeholders Noshaba and Nasim also spoke at the meeting. All deans, directors, UAF also took part in the meeting.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/83792:agriculture-experts-should-come-up-with-viable-policy-solutions/?date=2016-09-09

KISAN PACKAGE OF CM PUNJAB STEPS BEING TAKEN TO COMPLETE IMPLEMENTATION

Business Recorder,September 09, 2016
Secretary Agriculture Punjab Captain Muhammad Mahmud has said that steps are being taken for the complete implementation of historical Kisan Package of CM Punjab for achieving targets of agriculture sector development by providing its benefits to every farmer.

He stated this while holding meeting of local agriculture department officers at DCO Office committee room during his visit. DCO Salman Ghani was present in the meeting and EDO Agriculture Chaudhry Abdul Hameed gave briefing about the performance and activities of the district agriculture department.

Secretary Agriculture said that solid and comprehensive strategy was being followed to meet the challenges confronted to the agriculture sector and redressing the problems being faced by farmers. He said that huge subsidy was being provided under CM Punjab Kisan package for reducing the cost of production of crops under which interest free loans of Rs 80 billions were being advanced to the small farmers while general sales tax on fertilisers and pesticides had also been waved off besides decreasing the per unit electricity rate from Rs 8.85 to 5.35 on tube-well connections and GST on electricity would also be paid by the Punjab govt.

The Secretary maintained that 2.50 lac soil tests would be carried out by the end of this year for providing technical guidance to the farmers about the cultivation of crops according to the soil test.

He said that the government priorities regarding boosting of agriculture sector were very clear and the support of district administration was imperative to achieve the targets of Punjab government agriculture policies.

He said that District Agriculture Advisory Committee and District Task Force for agriculture be kept active and mobilised for overseeing the performance of agriculture department. He stressed upon effective actions against the spurious and substandard pesticides and fertilisers producers and said that intelligence based raids be conducted for the total elimination of this menace.

He appreciated the services and performance of local agriculture department under the supervision of EDO Chaudhry Abdul Hameed and informed that CM Punjab Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif had approved the reward of additional salaries for the officers of agriculture department who would show excellent and marvellous performance to achieve the targets.

DCO Sakman Ghani assured full cooperation of the district administration for the effective implementation of new initiative under Kisan Package and said that no stone keep unturned for achieving the desired results in agriculture sector. He said that vigorous campaign was continued to curb the menace of producing and sale of spurious pesticides.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/83785:kisan-package-of-cm-punjab-steps-being-taken-to-complete-implementation/?date=2016-09-09

October 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 24TH TO OCTOBER 30TH 2016

AGRO-FOOD PRODUCTS: ACCESS TO EXPORT MARKETS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 24th, 2016

Muhammad Ashraf

The agro-food sector is the largest non-textile component of the national export basket, and has been the main driver of export diversification during the last 15 years — since 2001.

The share of textiles has declined from 68pc to 60pc, whereas that of the food sector has increased from 10pc to 19pc.

The increase in share of national exports notwithstanding, only a small part of the total agro-food production is exported — wheat 2pc, meat 2pc, sugar 5pc, mango 6pc, onion 10pc, potato 18pc, citrus 21pc and dates 25pc. Rice is the only exception with around 60pc of produce being shipped abroad.

The prime reason for the suboptimal participation of agro-food production in the export market is the detachment of the value chain from the dynamics of the global market — which are complex, diverse and distinct from industrial products.

Firstly, food exports are linked to food tastes, which are profoundly cultural in nature. The narcissist myth of Pakistani fruits being 'the tastiest', is not supported by empirical realities.

The volume of our food exports to a country is directly proportional to the size of the Pakistani diaspora, as the main consumer of Pakistani food products remains the ethnic community instead of the larger mainstream consumer.

For the mainstream segment, the export of 'taste' has to precede the export of 'product'. Secondly, the production patterns and food safety requirements necessitate a specialised and agile supply chain, able to move with speed to the market.

Almost all major supermarkets in developed countries source horticulture products through a third party — wholesaler/importer in the importing country or commercial exporter in the exporting country.

The role of the oft-belittled middleman becomes indispensable to (a) bridge the capacity gaps of producers to meet the market requirements, (b) consolidate the produce of multiple smallholders into container loads, and (c) ensure quality consistency.

Thirdly, perishable products (e.g. horticulture, meat and dairy) compete in the market on lead time rather than price.

The short shelf life confers a price premium in the regional markets by shielding against distant 'efficient' producers whose competitiveness erodes due to increased delivery costs and longer lead time.

For the same reason, the lucrative remote markets (e.g. Europe and North America) are lost to our exports as the majority of our fresh produce cannot survive a more than 20-day sea voyage; air-shipment costs many times more than the product itself, which distorts the price equation beyond proportion.

Non-perishables, on the other hand, operate in a price-sensitive market as the importer can afford time to source from the most competitive global producers.

The overpriced Pakistani commodities are knocked out of competition in regional markets — Brazilian sugar captures the Iranian market as Pakistani sugar can't be exported without a 32pc subsidy; Australian wheat seizes the Chinese market as Pakistani wheat costs twice as much; high-yield Indian basmati look-alikes grab 96pc of the Saudi market as low-yield Pakistani super basmati is uncompetitive.

Fourthly, though ostensibly paradoxical, the fresh agricultural produce (e.g. tomato) in most of the developed markets is retailed at a higher price than its processed products (e.g. tomato paste) as the cost imposed by high wastage and expensive refrigerated logistics outweighs the cost of processing. The short shelf life of the product excludes the option of importing from the remote, cheaper, sources.

Fifthly, agriculture products trade in a protectionist and distorted global marketplace. The inconsistencies, inefficiencies and inequities afflict farm policies across the globe as developed countries continue to protect their agriculture sectors through subsidies, high tariffs and trade measures. It not only restricts the access of competitive foreign producers to their markets, but also induces surplus production which, in turn, frequently precipitates global price depressions.

Lastly, the trade in food products takes place in an excessively regulated environment where food safety overrides price consideration. The sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) requirements, though frequently employed as protectionist non-tariff barriers, are prompted by legitimate food safety considerations.

The market access to several niches is contingent upon third party certifications to verify that the product has been (a) produced through good agricultural practices especially the farm inputs (e.g. GlobalGAP), (b) processed, packaged, stored and transported hygienically (e.g. HACCP), and (c) truthfully labelled (e.g. Halal).

To conclude, the agro-food sector, besides ensuring food security, has been the mainstay of national exports. In contrast to industrial production, which has long gestation periods, agriculture provides the quickest road to turnaround in national exports.

However, in its current structure it lacks vitality and the agility to penetrate an intensely competitive $1.486tn global market, in which Pakistan's share is a paltry 0.27pc.

The increased participation in export market requires a comprehensive sector development strategy which entails (a) shifting the production paradigm from supply-led to demand-driven, (b) increasing competitiveness through productivity enhancement and improved postharvest practices, (c) removing information asymmetries through capacity building of producers, (d) value addition by effective use of processing technologies especially for increasing shelf life of perishable products, (e) value maximising penetration into the premium-price mainstream market segment through taste development, and (f) value capturing by promoting international certifications of farms and production facilities.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1291793/agro-food-products-access-to-export-markets

A SWEET AGREEMENT
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 24th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

IN consultation with growers' bodies, the Sindh government has managed to fix the sugarcane rate for 2016-17 at Rs182/40kg, coupled with an undertaking by sugar millers to commence cane crushing from Nov 15.

Growers and millers agreed they won't challenge the government's notified rate.

For the first time, Sindh has come up with its own sugarcane rate, instead of following Punjab, with a Rs2 raise in sugarcane price given its better sucrose recovery.

This understanding — reached between the stakeholders at the Oct 7 meeting held in Karachi – was contrary to the litigation over the cane price of Rs172/40kg, notified for the 2015-16 season. The case is still pending adjudication.

Growers said if they had not agreed to the Rs182/40kg rate and insisted for a price of Rs225-200/40kg, nothing tangible could have been done. The sugar millers would have delayed the crushing season at the cost of the sugarcane producers.

When sugar factories delay crushing till the fag end of the season, farmers go for rapid harvesting of the crop, which provides an opportunity to millers to bargain for a lower price.

Growers want a ban on the inter-provincial movement of sugarcane. Last year, as per reports, an average price of Rs190-200/40kg was paid to farmers, by Punjab's sugar mills, on the border of Sindh.

Growers want a timely start of the crushing season as, otherwise, there are delays in the sowing of wheat on around 10-15pc of the sugarcane producing area, which reduces per acre yield.

Pakistan Sugar Mills Association's (PSMA) Sindh chapter insists that cost of a kilogramme of sugar does not allow them to pay Rs190 or Rs200 per 40kg as demanded by farmers.

Growers argue that millers never share their cost of production, on 1kg of sweetener in black and white, with either them or the government.

They reject the move for the deregulation of sugarcane prices as indicated by the federal ministry of industries and production.

The meeting, convened by the ministry on Oct 14, to discuss the proposal, was postponed until the first week of November.

Sindh's growers, in their informal chat with Sindh's Agriculture Secretary Saeed Magnejo, told him in clear terms that they did not approve of the deregulation plan.

"Will the federal government leave everything to the open market? Does it mean that it will not regulate the import/export of sugar?

In such a case, millers will always be exporting if they find the international market more attractive and if they have surplus sugar", says Mahmood Nawaz Shah of Sindh Abadgar Board.

This season as well, they are seeking permission to export sugar.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture's General Secretary Nabi Bux Sathio says that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have rejected idea of deregulation; then how could Sindh agree to it?

He believes that deregulation won't benefit the farmers and says that in the present case as well, millers will always be able to win concessions of rebate, subsidy and permission for sugar export.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1291792/a-sweet-agreement

FERTILISER SUBSIDY CLAIMS: FBR STAYS AWAY, FOOD MINISTRY STEPS IN
The Express Tribune, October 24th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

Islamabad: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR)'s decision to distance itself from the verification process of subsidy claims filed by diammonium phosphate (DAP) importers, has spelt trouble for the Ministry of National Food Security and Research because of its lack of expertise in the area.

The payment of subsidy claims has already been delayed for months in the wake of less coordination among government departments and absence of cooperation from some provinces.

Under the fertiliser subsidy package announced in the federal budget for 2016-17, the FBR was initially tasked to verify the claims to be submitted by the DAP importers, but the recent FBR decision to sideline itself posed a new challenge to the food ministry to undertake the task.

The FBR had earlier failed to establish a mechanism for processing the fertiliser subsidy for more than three months, a responsibility entrusted by the federal government through a notification on June 25, 2016.

The FBR will now play the role of a post office by receiving the subsidy claims and forwarding them to the food ministry for verification.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research has given this task to one of its wings, the Agriculture Policy Institute (API), but it has no previous experience of dealing with this matter as well as the complications that arise from over and under-invoicing.

It has been learnt that API officials have started working on the verification process, but challenges remain. Questions will be raised over transparency of the claims being submitted by more than 15 fertiliser companies as the food ministry has found some unrealistic figures received from a few companies.

This is not for the first time that lack of coordination and cooperation between federal and provincial departments has stood in the way of a smooth implementation of policies, leading to bad governance.

In fiscal year 2014-15, the allocated Rs2-billion subsidy could not be released due to failure of the government to devise a mechanism throughout the year. In the same way, the federal and provincial governments could not come on the same page last year, which hampered the implementation of subsidy schemes, as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and Sindh refused to contribute their subsidy share.

This year too, the two provinces are yet to announce whether they will contribute or not. Only Punjab and Balochistan have agreed to release their share and the former has already deposited half of it in the State Bank account. In a recent meeting, the representatives of K-P and Sindh stated that they had prepared a summary for assessment by their chief ministers, but no concert decision has been taken so far.

Earlier, voicing concern over delay in the payment of fertiliser subsidy, the Punjab Agriculture Department asked the central government to take immediate steps to resolve the issue and ensure supply of necessary fertiliser in the current Rabi crop-sowing season.

The Punjab agriculture minister wrote a letter to Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, asking him to address the matter at the earliest as he feared DAP shortage for the staple wheat crop.

He also asked the centre to ensure that all provinces deposit their due share as they had not met their commitment last year and only Punjab contributed its share of Rs3 billion.

Not only this, the fertiliser importing companies have also asked the government to stop the marketing of subsidised DAP as the outstanding payments for the last three months as well as from last year have not been made to them.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1207566/fertiliser-subsidy-claims-fbr-stays-away-food-ministry-steps/

KPEC GETS CUSTODY OF EX-DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURE DEPT IN GRAFT CASE
Dawn October 26th, 2016

PESHAWAR: An Ehtesab court here on Tuesday remanded a former district director of agriculture department into the custody of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ehtesab Commission (KPEC) for 14 days in a corruption case relating to the provincial government's Insaf Food Security Programme (IFSP).

The judge Subhan Sher Khan directed that the suspect Kareem Nawaz Baloch should again be produced on Nov 7.

The investigation officer of the case, Hafiz Mohammad Anwer, and a special prosecutor Mohammad Farooq Shah produced the suspect before the court seeking his physical remand.

They informed the court that the suspect was arrested a day earlier on charges of corruption and corrupt practices. They alleged that when the suspect was serving as district director agriculture department at Dera Ismail Khan in 2015 he had indulged in nepotism during distribution of free seeds among the farmers under the IFSP.

They stated that the suspect had provided seeds to non-deserving persons and had thus inflicted loss to the tune of millions of rupees to the exchequer. They added that the physical remand of the suspect was needed so as to interrogate him in the case.

Meanwhile, the National Accountability Bureau, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has filed a reference in an accountability court against seven persons charging them of deceiving general public to the tune of Rs142.82 million on the pretext of investing their hard-earned money in Islamic mode of investment.

In the reference, the NAB claims that the six suspects named Umer Mohammad, Sajad Gul, Imran, Mohammad Osead, Jamil Ahmad, Shahid Khan and Mohammad Hussain had deceived around 101 persons. Two of these suspects, Imran and Mohammad Osead, have been absconding.

The NAB alleges that the suspects had lured the affected persons and told them that their money would be invested in such businesses which would be in accordance with modaraba or Islamic investment. After receiving huge sum of money from the victims the suspects initially paid some profit to few of them, but later on stopped paying the profit and didn't return the principal amount as well.

There are 14 prosecution witnesses in the reference. Against the same suspects another reference has also been pending in an accountability court.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1292300

WHEAT OUTPUT ESTIMATED AT 26M TONNES FOR FY17
Dawn October 26th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) has fixed the wheat production target of 26.01 million tonnes for the 2016-17 Rabi season.

In a meeting on Tuesday, the committee headed by Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan was informed that there will be 6 per cent less irrigation water supply during the Rabi season. However, this shortage will have no adverse impact on the Rabi crops, Mr Bosan told a news conference after the meeting.

The committee did not discuss the issue of the support price. Mr Bosan said the ministry is not interested in enhancing the support price. Instead of increasing it, measures are being taken to reduce the cost of production, which is the best solution, he added.

The final estimate for the 2015-16 wheat production is 25.4m tonnes against the earlier target of 25.8m tonnes.

Mr Bosan said the government's relief package for farmers has yielded good results. In the last season, the application of fertilisers has increased with a positive impact on the Kharif crops, as sugarcane and maize recorded a rise in production.

The irrigation water availability position for the Rabi season is estimated to be 30.34m acre-feet against the average usage of 36.3m acre-feet for the season.

The meteorological department has informed the committee that less rainfall is expected in the October-December period whereas above-normal rainfall is expected in February-March, he said.

In response to a question, the minister said the minor shortage of water during the season will be overcome through better water management. Since there is no immediate need for water for the Rabi crop, the Punjab government has announced the closure of canals for 15 days.

Referring to the cotton production, he explained economic factors were the main reason for the last year's losses. While prices were low, the cost of production was high, he said, adding that farmers are getting a higher profit this year due to better prices.

In Punjab, the loss to the cotton production was 24pc while it recorded an increase of about 5pc in Sindh, he said.

The minister said the country exported 100,000 tonnes of mangos this year, as there has been no rejection of any consignment from any country. Last year, the country exported 70,000 tonnes of mangos. The largest recipients of mango consignments from Pakistan were Iran, Japan, South Korea and Australia in addition to several European Union and Middle Eastern countries.

Mr Bosan said the State Bank of Pakistan has informed the committee that the target for agricultural loans in 2016-17 has been enhanced to Rs700 billion from Rs600bn last year.

He said that the country had a bumper potato crop last year. Against the requirement of 3m tonnes, Pakistan produced 3.8m tonnes of potatoes. The target for the upcoming potato season is 3.8m tonnes, he said.

The committee also set targets for other crops such as gram, lentil, onion and tomato.

The committee was informed that the certified wheat seed availability during the upcoming Rabi season will be 35.9pc, maize 44pc and moong 71pc of the requirements. The supply of urea and diammonium phosphate (DAP) will remain satisfactory for the 2016-17 Rabi season, the committee was informed.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1292227/wheat-output-estimated-at-26m-tonnes-for-fy17

AGRICULTURE TARGET: DROUGHT EXPECTED IN PEAK SEASON OF RABI CROP
The Express Tribune, October 26th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

Islamabad: A drought is in the offing as the peak season for Rabi crop approaches, according to the MET department and Indus River System Authority (Irsa). However, Federal Minister for Food Security and Research Sikander Hayat Khan Bosan said the crop yield would not be affected even as he admitted the likelihood of dry weather in the coming months.

The development is all the more alarming as last year the authorities helplessly watched as agricultural gains were erased due to unfavourable weather, resulting in the sector posting a year-on-year contraction in growth. Subsequently, the prime minister took it upon himself the task to safeguard the interests of farmers with a multi-billion dollar Kisan Package being announced just before the by-elections.

The Federal Committee on Agriculture met in Islamabad Tuesday with Bosan chairing the meeting. The meeting was attended by provincial representatives from agriculture departments, officials of the State Bank of Pakistan, ZTBL, Passco, Parc, Pakistan Meteorological Department, Irsa and other concerned departments.

The committee reviewed the performance of the Kharif crop 2016-17 and production plan for Rabi crops 2016-17. The committee also discussed the position of agricultural inputs for Rabi crops.

The committee fixed a target of 26.01 million tons for wheat production at an area of 9.12 million hectares for the year 2016-17 against previous year's target of 25.50 million tons.

Additionally, the forum was informed that sugarcane production for 2016 was estimated at 71.8 million tons from an area of 1.223 million hectares. The rice crop of 2016 was estimated at 7.8 million tons from an area of 2.66 million hectares. Production achievements of some other crops like maize, moong, mash and chilies were also discussed in the meeting vis-à-vis the targets previously fixed.

Sources said that MET department and Irsa informed the committee about the water availability situation for the Rabi crops and warned that there was likely to be less water available for the crops due to prediction of dry weather in the three coming months, which would have adverse implications for the overall productivity of crops.

Following the meeting, Bosan addressed a press conference and said that there would not be any adverse effects on crop production as the reservoirs had sufficient water and Punjab government had started storing it by suspending usage in canals for the coming two weeks.

The minister said that irrigation water availability position for current Rabi season was estimated at 30.34 million acres feet (MAF) against the average usage of 36.3 MAF for the season.

Bosan further said that he had been informed by the MET department that there is less rainfall expected during October and December whereas above-average rainfall is expected in February and March next year.

The representative from State Bank said that the allocations of institutional credit for agriculture had substantially increased to Rs700 billion for 2016-17 against Rs600 billion during 2015-16.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1210140/agriculture-target-drought-expected-peak-season-rabi-crop/

SPURIOUS FERTILIZERS AND PESTICIDES: OFFICIAL TERMS 'MAFIA' ENEMIES OF AGRI DEVELOPMENT
Business Recorder, 30 October 2016

FAISALABAD: Divisional Commissioner Momin Agha directed the officers concerned to continue an organised and vigorous crackdown against the sale and produce of fake and spurious fertilizers and pesticides in the four districts of Faisalabad division to curb the enemies of agriculture development.

He was presiding over a meeting of Divisional Agriculture Advisory Committee. The meeting was attended by EDOs Agriculture, Director Livestock Dr Munir Shami, DOs Agriculture, ACG Mahr Shafqat Ullah Mushtaq, representatives of cooperative, fisheries, commercial banks, irrigation, forest, pesticides and fertilizers companies, sugar mills and farmers. The Divisional Commissioner emphasized upon effective pursuance of the cases in the courts against the accused spurious fertilizers and pesticides so that such elements could be brought to their end.

He directed the EDOs Agriculture to provide the details of the cases against the adulterated mafia and said that proper analysis should be carried out to access the departmental progress regarding actions against those involved in sale and produce spurious fertilizers.

He said that Punjab government was very much committed to provide the pure and quality fertilizers to the farmers for the progress of the agriculture and no hindrance would be tolerated in this regard. Commissioner also reviewing the current situation of the present crops, availability of irrigation water and electricity, progress of development projects of agriculture sector.

He stressed upon holding farmers forum for discussion and solved the issues and problems being faced by cultivators. The Divisional Commissioner said huge subsidy was being provided under the CM Punjab Kissan Package for reducing the cost of production of crops under which interest-free loans of Rs.80 billions were being advanced to the small farmers besides decreasing the per unit electricity rate from Rs 8 to 5 on tube-well connections.

He said to the agriculture officers to achieve targets of agriculture sector development by providing its benefit to every farmer. He said that for promoting the Kitchen gardening project it would be introduced at schools level also. EDO Agriculture Faisalabad Ch Abdul Hameed informed the meeting about the welfare steps being taken by the agriculture department for the prosperity and development of the farmers. He informed about availability situation of fertilizers and their reduced prices and training of the farmers.

He highlighted the salient features of the CM Punjab Kissan Package. The EDO told to resolve out the issued and problems of the farmers' complaint cell was also functional at EDO office. During the advisory meeting farmers presented suggestions and appreciated the historical Kissan Package of CM Punjab Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/10/26/13-page/808010-news.html

GOVT LIKELY TO ALLOW EXPORT OF 0.8M TONS OF UREA

The Express Tribune, October 25th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: The government is expected to permit export of 800,000 tons of urea in line with a proposal of the Ministry of Industries because of surplus production in the country.

"The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet may take up the export proposal in the current week," a senior government official said.

Finance Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar had chaired a meeting last week that reviewed the fertiliser stock position for the current crop-sowing season. He was briefed on the production and inventory levels and agreed in principle on urea exports because of surplus commodity in the country.

A senior official of the Ministry of Industries and Production told The Express Tribune that the industries ministry also recently held a meeting with fertiliser industry players and discussed the prevailing demand-supply dynamics as well as the outlook.

"The Ministry of Industries agreed in principle to allow export of 0.8 million tons of urea," the official said.

According to the ministry's estimates, 1.4 million tons of surplus urea will be available by the end of ongoing Rabi crop-sowing season at the end of March 2017. The government wants to keep a buffer stock of 0.6 million tons.

"A quantity of 0.8 million tons will be left for export after keeping the strategic reserves," the official said, adding the shipment of the commodity overseas would help tackle oversupply in the domestic market.

In the meeting, the economic viability of exports also came up for discussion as export margins on current prices of $200 per ton were not attractive for the manufacturers. The average transportation cost for the industry amounts to $100 per ton for which the government may provide subsidy.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1208690/surplus-commodity-govt-likely-allow-export-0-8m-tons-urea/

'WATERLOGGING CAUSING HUMANITARIAN ISSUES IN SANGHAR'
Dawn October 25th, 2016

SANGHAR: The waterlogging caused by Chotiariyoon dam is fast leading to a serious humanitarian issue as it has rendered infertile large tracts of fertile land within 25-kilometre radius of the reservoir, depriving local population of their only source of livelihood and forcing them to migrate to urban areas, warn speakers at a moot here on Monday.

They said at the gathering on disaster preparedness organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in collaboration with the Health And Nutrition Development Society (HANDS) at the office of deputy commissioner that the reservoir, located 30 kilometers from here, had made life unbearable for the population of both humans and livestock and led to a disaster-like situation.

They said that Sanghar was a disaster prone district which suffered a great deal during the disaster caused by torrential rain and flood in 2011, but it still lacked infrastructure and facilities to rescue population in case of an emergency.

They said the stretch of Achhro Thar desert that fell within the district, too, had always been prone to disasters and frequent droughts and faced acute lack of drinking water as well as health facilities which had made the disaster a permanent phenomenon in the stretch and made living conditions unbearable for both humans and livestock.

They said the district was still reeling from the great disaster of 2011 heavy rains and flood and the roads network, damaged by the flood, had still not been constructed causing severe hardships to local population.

The ruined infrastructure was in dire need of repair and reconstruction but in fact the entire district was still in the same state of unpreparedness as was witnessed during 2011 disaster, they said.

A HANDS representative informed the moot that his organisation had set up an emergency response centre in the district, which had 500 bags of ration, boats, pumping machines, blankets, ambulances, medicines and other necessary equipment for carrying out rescue operation in the event of a disaster.

Deputy Commissioner Umar Farooque Billo assured the participants that the district administration would seriously look into the issue of preparedness for disasters and remain ready to face any adverse situation.

He said the DDMA would also set up an emergency response centre and ask different government departments to put in their share in concerted efforts against disaster threat.

He admitted the reservoir had caused serious waterlogging which had led to disaster like situation in its catchment area. About a hundred tube-wells as well as pumping stations would be set up in the affected areas to lessen the impact of waterlogging, he added.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1292021/waterlogging-causing-humanitarian-issues-in-sanghar

GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO STOP COLLECTION OF AGRICULTURE TAX FROM FARMERS: MINISTER
Business Recorder, October 27, 2016

Punjab Minister for Agriculture Dr Farrukh Javed disclosed here on Wednesday that the provincial government had decided to stop collection of agriculture income tax from farmers. The decision was taken on the complaints of farmers regarding complicated procedure of collection of agriculture income tax and directives in this regard have been issued to all the field officers and assistant commissioners of revenue.

He expressed these views while talking to the delegation of farmers. He said the Punjab government is taking every possible step to provide maximum financial relief to the farmers. He said the government has taken serious steps to provide relief and increase of agriculture production.

The minister said that Kisan Package of 100 billion will provide interest-free loan to 5,00,000 farmers which will help diminish the role of middle man. The minister stated the registration of farmers regarding loans will continue till November 15 but the government will start distribution of loans soon. The minister directed all the field officers to ensure implementation of notification regarding decision of withholding the agriculture income tax.

http://www.brecorder.com/taxation/181/97018/

FARMERS SAY DELAY IN RAIN TO HIT WHEAT YIELD
Dawn October 29th, 2016

SWABI: Farmers here have said that any further delay in rainfall would have worst impact on wheat yield in rain-fed areas of the district in the upcoming year.

Wheat is the largest Rabi crop of the district sown in September-October and harvested in May-June each year.

Talking to this scribe, the farmers said that agriculture across the arid land of the district depended on rain and all the activities to cultivate different crops, especially wheat, revolved round it.

In case of no rain in the next week or so the farmers would be under tremendous pressure whether to sow wheat or not.

“We are perturbed and don’t know how to deal with the drought-like situation,” said Gohar Ali of Gohati. He said that they had planned to cultivate wheat over 100 acres in Baraki area.

The farmers said that there was no alternative arrangement to irrigate the arid land and if there was no rainfall there would be no wheat crop.

Rawaiz Khan, 50, a resident of Chota Lahor city, said that if the peak time for cultivation was missed because of no rains the local farmers would suffer financial losses.

Liaquat Yousafzai, general secretary of Kashtkar Coordination Council, said that if there was low yield the ultimate sufferers would be the farmers. He said that no one would come for their financial help despite the slogan raised by the lawmakers that Pakistan was an agricultural.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1292965/farmers-say-delay-in-rain-to-hit-wheat-yield

KISSAN ITTEHAD TEAM MEETS DAR: 'GOVT WANTS TO CREATE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR FARMERS'
Business Recorder, 29, October 2016

ISLAMABAD: A four-member delegation of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad led by Khalid Mahmood Khokhar here on Friday called on Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar.

Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, Minister for National Food Security and Secretary to the Prime Minister Fawad Hasan Fawadwas were also present at the meeting, said a press release.

The minister said Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif wanted welfare of agriculture community, adding the government had taken historical steps in agriculture sector including Prime Minister's Kissan Package 2015 and unprecedented measures during the National Budget this year.

He assured the delegation that the government was cognizant of difficulties of the agricultural sector in the context of decrease in global commodity prices.

He stressed upon the delegation for enhancing crop yield and farm productivity through mechanization and adoption of best practices.

The minister invited the delegation to engage in a sustained policy dialogue with the government for designing future interventions in the agriculture sector.

He said the government was determined to create a facilitating and supportive environment for farmers. The minister assured the delegation that further improvement in research and development for enhancing agriculture output in the country was being undertaken.

The minister appreciated the valuable role played by Minister for National Food Security on facilitating the farming community and reiterated government's support for the agriculture sector.

Chairman Pakistan Kissan Ittehad appreciated the commitment of the government and the steps taken so far for agriculture sector.

He highlighted the challenges faced by the agriculture sector and sought support of the federal government for protecting the interests of the farming community.

Secretary National Food Security, Secretary Industries and senior officials of the Ministry of Finance attended the meeting.-APP

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/10/29/8-page/809365-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 17TH TO OCTOBER 23RD 2016
SAB WANTS SETTING UP OF COMMISSION TO ADDRESS FARMERS' GENUINE ISSUES
Dawn October 18th, 2016

LARKANA: The Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) has called for constituting an 'agricultural reforms and revitalisation commission (ARRC)' to effectively address the genuine issues of agriculture and manpower linked to it.

SAB central vice president Gada Hussain Mahesar speaking to Dawn hereon Monday said that the proposed commission be tasked with preparing plans and strategies aimed at revitalising the agriculture sector and promoting agro-based industries.

Unfortunately, he said, no government had taken the poor performance of the department and the manpower linked to it seriously with a view to pull this important sector out of crisis. Introducing justified agriculture policies based on ground realities should be prepared and implemented in the field, he said.

He said illogical approach would affect the rice trade and ruin the agriculture sector as a major chunk of population was connected with it.

In a communication to PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Mr Mehisar mentioned that in 2014 paddy rate remained between Rs950 and Rs1,000 per 40 kilogram and the rice with 25 per cent broken in Karachi market between Rs1,400 and Rs1,450 per 40 kilogram while at present the paddy rate was between Rs780 to Rs800 per 40 kilogram with delivery at rice mills and open markets.

The situation would ruin growers economically as they spent from Rs30,000 to Rs35,000 per acre to grow paddy crop, he said. Sindh exported between 2.6 million tonnes to 2.7 million tonnes of different varieties annually and this year due to bumper crop, the rice export might jump to 2.9 million tonnes, he said.

Mr Mahessar, who is also former president of the Sindh Balochistan Rice Millers Association, said it would cause huge losses to rice growers in Sindh.

The only solution under the prevailing condition proposed were initiatives for early opening of procurement centers in the province. He said the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) should be asked to purchase about 6,00,000 tonnes of rice at the rate of support price of Rs1,400 per 40 kilogram with 20 per cent broken. It would facilitate the growers in getting reasonable price ranged between Rs950 and Rs1,000 per 40 kilogram, he said.

The stocks might later be thrown in the international market as prices improved to earn foreign exchange. This was the time for the PPP-led government to introduce long term changes in the existing policies in agriculture sector, he said.

He said the proposed commission should ensure availability of certified seeds and free flow of soft term bank loans. Instead of injecting huge money in building dams, deficiencies in the existing irrigation network system should be addressed on priority to save 40 per cent water losses and protect land from water logging and salinity.

Once the commission was formed and its recommendations implemented, it would herald better future for the people of Sindh and would also overcome the future economic challenges and law and order situation in the province, he said.

Larkana Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Khair Muhammed Shaikh said the current rate of paddy was between Rs650 and Rs700 per 40 kilogram that should at least be Rs950.

It was sole responsibility of the government to evolve strategy against exporters' monopoly and boost up Passco and the Trade Corporation of Pakistan in saving growers interests.

In 2013, when the Sindh government had purchased only 10,0000 tonnes of rice, the paddy rates touched Rs1,100 per 40 kilogram, he said and called for adopting the same policy now. The government should stock one year's crop and dispose it off in the international market when the rates swelled, he said.

Larkana Chamber of Agriculture president Siraj Rashdi said paddy rates, which were currently between Rs650 and Rs680 per 40 kilogram in the open market, should minimally be between Rs1,000 and Rs1,200.

In 2013, the rate was 1,050 per 40 kilogram and in 2007, it was Rs700 only. The per acre cost of production was Rs38,500 and if calculated it came to be Rs750 per 40 kilogram, so there was a visible loss to the growers, he said. Thus the growers were sandwiched between millers and exporters, he said.

He alleged that exporters always preferred to remain absent from minister's meetings in Karachi which further aggravated the issue, leaving the growers to suffer losses, he said.

The will of the government was the key to the solution of this grave problem, he said. Different associations related to agriculture also support formation of the agriculture reforms commission.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1290619/sab-wants-setting-up-of-commission-to-address-farmers-genuine-issues

RICE CROP: GROWERS GET LOWER PRICES
The Express Tribune, October 18th, 2016.

HYDERABAD: The $2 billion worth of rice exports from Pakistan are likely to fall if paddy growers continue to receive low returns on their investment, the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) warned.

SCA President Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar pointed out at a meeting of the association that for the third consecutive year the rice farmers were getting low prices for their crop.

Millers were paying between Rs750 and Rs800 per maund (40kg) for Irri-6 rice against the support price of Rs900 set by the provincial government.

Representatives of the farmers accused the millers of exploiting them and hit out at the government for failing to enforce the official price. The share of Irri-6 rice variety in national exports stood at around $1.3 billion, the SCA said.

The SCA, furthermore, demanded that the government should increase the support price to Rs1,000 per maund so that the farmers could recover their losses and feel encouraged to cultivate Irri 6 in the next season.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1201297/rice-crop-growers-get-lower-prices/

COTTON GROWERS URGED TO KEEP CROP CONTAMINATION FREE
Business Recorder, October 18, 2016

The Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed has called upon the cotton growers to keep their crop contamination free while picking as it can help them getting a higher price whereas Pakistan can earn more foreign exchange by producing higher quality end products by using this clean cotton.

He said that Pakistan's cotton was liked very much internationally and nationally because of its high quality but the farmers have to keep it clean from grass, weeds, plastic shoppers, left over cigarettes and other such things and crop should be dried to maximum level after picking. Farrukh Javed was talking to a group of growers in his office here on Monday.

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185/94171/

PUNJAB'S INTEREST-FREE LOANS: A HASSLE FOR GROWERS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 17th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE Punjab government's Rs100bn interest-free loan to farmers is a long-awaited and much-needed step. The rising cost of inputs and declining prices of outputs had not only created a yawning income gap for farmers, but also started a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty in rural areas.

This interest-free loan should add to the productivity, generate economic activity and reduce poverty. It should also help the entire input industry which has suffered badly due to the declining purchasing power of farmers and needed a subsidy package to sustain itself.

The government's decision to add 70pc new applicants, who have never taken loan from any formal sector institutions, in the list of beneficiaries should help expand the base — from current 2.2-2.7m.

The amount of loan, which is Rs65,000 per acre, also raises a hope that it will be used for the crop development; it is too small to be diverted to other sectors.

So far, the application collection system has been anything but smooth; marred with procedural hiccups; it has generated a lot of resentment among farmers. First, the ratio of rejection of applications has exceeded the acceptance. There may be valid reasons for the rejections, like deeds not being in the name of the applicant required as collateral terms. If they are continuously used as a reason for rejection, the entire exercise may see its benefits grossly compromised.

Secondly, despite claims of computerisation of records, there are villages after villages that still lie outside the digitisation process and this failure is now haunting the applicants. Even the land contracts and tenancy deeds in the rural areas hardly have enough legal finesse to meet the institutional requirements of lending agencies. The farmers also complain that the official timing of applications submission — 8am to 4pm — does not coincide with social realities of rural areas.

Thus, the loan applications are slow, and their acceptance even slower. The officials say that farmers don't meet the criteria and farmers claim that procedure is too cumbersome. Both claims might have partial truth in them, but they have to be fine-tuned for the full realisation of the benefits.

Because of this slow process, the officials concede that they may not be able to process more than 100,000 applications by October 18 against a target of 500,000, which, would only be 20pc of the target. Being the first exercise of its kind, teething problems are inevitable. But, if not removed steadily, they can mar the process.

Some policy decisions might also be needed for involvement in the financial institutions in the loaning process. Smaller loans carry a very high lending rate — upto 25pc. The farmers fear this amount will inevitably be added to the loan money as administrative charges — correspondingly reducing the total amount.

The issue came up in preparatory meetings as well, but the government chose to ignore it. That may not be as expensive as being feared but certainly deserves a clarification. It can be better utilised with transparency and farmers' satisfaction.

The farmers want a sustainable loan process, rather than a one-year process.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1290372/punjabs-interest-free-loans-a-hassle-for-growers

GROWERS DEMAND FIXING OF SUPPORT PRICES OF VARIOUS CROPS
Dawn, October 17th, 2016

SUKKUR: A large number of growers belonging to Sukkur, Khairpur and Ghotki districts held a demonstration outside the local press club on Sunday against the government's failure to increase procurement rate of different crops.

The demonstration was led by Sindh Hari Committee and Awami Jamhoori Party including Comrade Mir Munawwar Talpur, Hakeem Zangejo, Shah Mohammed Indhar, Malik Khoso, Mohammed Bukhsh Kaladi and Ghulam Mustafa Jumani.

The leaders told the media that farmers were facing losses due to the government's indifference towards their demand of an increase in the official procurement rates of various crops.

They argued that the cost of production had increased due to high inflation as the rates of all agricultural inputs had gone up manifold over the past years. No reasonable upward revision of the official procurement rates had been made to match the inflation, they said, adding that their produce was selling at a throwaway price. This had pushed most farmers below the poverty line, they added.

The protesters said that they and their families were facing starvation due to the heavy losses they had been suffering over the years.

The leaders said that 70 per cent population of the country depended on farming but but government could not evolve a policy to give a boost to the agriculture sector and bring about an improvement in the lifestyle of the peasant segment, which remained under the burden of the loans that continued to soar. Peasant families could not even afford medical treatment due to poverty, they said.

They urged the government to fix the official rate of sugar cane at Rs250/40kg, cotton Rs4,000/40kg and paddy at Rs1,250/40kg, besides increasing the rates of other crops keeping in view the already increased production cost.

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) in its meeting held here on Sunday urged the government to refix the rate of paddy crop as its prices had significantly declined in the market.

The meeting was chaired by SCA president Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar. It expressed concern over the fact that the crop's rate had come down to Rs750-800/40kg although a notification fixing it at Rs900/40kg had earlier been issued by the agriculture department.

It said that farmers were being exploited by traders in the market. It also urged the government to fix the support price of Rs1,000/40kg for Irri-6 (coarse variety), which was mostly grown in Sindh, for one year without any delay.

The meeting noted that the falling prices of crops in the market had hit farmers economically. "On the one hand, farmers are getting a low price and, on the other, rice mills owners are making deductions. Farmers are in double jeopardy and facing heavy losses."

The meeting stressed that it's millers, and not farmers, who had to pay for offloading of crop as per the market committee rules but it was other way round now.

It said that Pakistan's exports of Irri-6 stood at $1.3 billion. In the last few years, framers had remained disappointed due to the price factor and the area under paddy cultivation would shrink.

The meeting said that farmers in five districts — Shikarpur, Kandhkot-Kashmore, Jacobabad, Larkana and Qambar-Shahdadkot cultivated only one crop of rice and if they didn't get its adequate price then they would be economic devastated.

The meeting regretted that the agriculture department remained a silent spectator although it had informed the Sindh High Court, Larkana circuit bench, earlier that Rs900/40kg had been fixed for paddy crop.

The meeting called for binding sugar mills to commence crushing from Nov 15 as per the decision taken in the Oct 7 meeting.

It also demanded a ban on the movement of sugar cane crop from Punjab and the sugar mills of Ghotki be restrained from getting a single trolley of sugar cane from their Punjab farms to save Ghotki's cane growers from losses.

The SCA repeated its call for setting aside Rs100-billion to extend interest-free loans to farmers in Sindh.

The meeting was attended by Nabi Bux Sathio, Zahid Bhurgari, Mohammad Khan Sarjeo and others.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1290468/growers-demand-fixing-of-support-prices-of-various-crops

FOOD INSECURITY: WHY SHOULD WE GROW CROPS, ASK GILGIT FARMERS
The Express Tribune, October 17th, 2016.

Shabbir Mir

Gilgit: While sprawling buildings and urbanisation may have left little land for farming in Gilgit city, provision of wheat on subsidised prices has dealt a double blow to agriculture in the mountainous Giglit-Baltistan region which is fast losing its breadbaskets.

The region, where hardly two per cent of land is arable but has a teeming population of over 1.4 million people, is in danger of facing acute food shortages especially in the wake of another natural calamity such as the creation of the Attabad Lake or if Islamabad decides to withdraw the massive subsidy it provides for wheat.

"We used to harvest wheat and maize until a decade ago," recalls Muhammad Ayub, a former farmer who lives in Kashrote area of Gilgit. "But today we can't as houses have sprung up everywhere," he says matter-of-factly. "We purchase everything from the market now."

Kashrote, once considered as one of the best places in the region for agriculture due to the abundance of water and fertile land, has been overtaken by unplanned construction which has been spilling over from the bulging Gilgit city.

Situated adjacent to Gilgit Airport, its topography has changed from lush green to dull concrete grey and has little by way of farming now.

The situation in Kashrote is similar to those in other areas of Gilgit including Nagral, Majini Muhalla and Ampheri.

"The question is, why should I grow wheat now?" asks Arshad Ali, another resident.

"The very thing that we used to work so hard for, is now available at such a low price," he said referring to the massive subsidy which the government provides for wheat.

The subsidy dates back to 1970s when then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto authorised wheat for G-B on subsidised rates since local production was insufficient to meet demand and transporting wheat from other provinces added significantly to the cost. The subsidy on 1.5 million bags a year continues till today in a region where a bag of 40 kilogrammes is available for just Rs600 to Rs700 – almost 50% less than what is charged in Punjab- the province where it is grown.

"This (dependence on subsidy) can cost people dearly," forebodes Maisoor Nafees, an agriculturist who teaches at the Karakoram University in Gilgit.

"G-B is prone to landslides and any major disaster can cut it off from rest of the country triggering a crisis," Nafees told The Express Tribunereferring to floods that struck G-B in 2010, cutting it off for over a month.

The prolonged disconnection meant stocks of grain and other commodities in G-B were depleted, almost causing a famine.

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Hafeezur Rehman is someone who feels most uncomfortable about the subsidy, but he has had little option but to succumb to the pressure exerted by powerful bodies such as the Awami Action Committee (AAC).

"I'm sorry to say this subsidy has turned us into addicts," Rehman told a gathering last week.

"There are certain elements which are politicking on this issue," he said, referring to 13-day long sit-in which the AAC held during the previous Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government to get the subsidy restored which had been withdrawn by the federal government.

The AAC is an alliance of various groups and parties formed to keep the subsidy intact as it links subsidy to G-B's disputed constitutional status that keeps it away from mainstream politics.

"Due to the subsidy, we owe Rs30 million to Pakistan Agriculture and Storage Corporation (PASCO)," Rehman said, highlighting how the subsidy was not only affecting local agriculture but was also embroiling the region into a vicious cycle of debt.

However, Rehman's government realizes that they need to find a more permanent and local solution to the subsidy and revive agriculture in the region.

Earlier this month, the government formally launched a $120 million agriculture development project, co-funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which would help irrigate around 50,000 acres of barren land in the mountainous region, and help break their dependence on wheat from other areas of the country.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1200344/food-insecurity-grow-crops-ask-gilgit-farmers/

GOVT NEEDS TO GIVE SPACE TO POLITICAL-ECONOMIC EXPERTS
The Express Tribune, October 17th, 2016

Ikram Hoti

ISLAMABAD: The boisterous countdown to the October 30 Islamabad 'shut-down' excites a part of the Pakistani population amid accusations about the way the PML-N government is handling the economy of the country.

The most repeated ones are that this government took phenomenal amounts of local and foreign loans to 'mis-spend', neglected the social sector arrogantly and overspent on non-development activity. It pursued policies that saw the country's exports plummet, overtaxed the small-income majority and appeased the high-income group, failed to unfetter the economy from the sluggish trends, despite claiming to have made great achievements in planning big in the energy and physical infrastructure spheres.

Maybe such appraisal is driven by political hostility and desperation. Still, you cannot dismiss the worries about the health of the Pakistani economy that undergoes instability and faces hostile market trends on the one hand and a persistent baggage of sluggishness on the other.

This economy has long been victim to unrealistic policies of governments that could not outgrow certain limitations of technical and political nature. Some of these limitations have been on account of the structural weaknesses of the state; others have been due to the painful imbalance in the share of power between the functionaries of public finance and the handlers of real powers in running this virtually dysfunctional state.

As I pointed out in my previous article carried by this newspaper, experts of political economy are allowed little room in the midst of public finance managers and the real powers of this country. Political-economic wisdom is required to steer Pakistan, out of where it is stuck in the course of protracted sluggishness compounded by the imbalanced allocation of funds.

The culture of irrational allocation of funds drives the public finance managers in a direction that is defeatist for the state and the economy and that is what actually causes the scare in the economy-sensitive circles.

Manipulating this scare to political ends and not coming forth with functional propositions for steering Pakistan out of this course is the most striking dilemma. And it particularly hurts to see that this dilemma cannot be wished away by traditional means.

The manipulators of this dilemma in the political and media circles outnumber the saner elements that plead political economic sense reinforced by better statecraft.

The tragedy of the situation is that such pleading is least welcome in a country that takes the course of regional and even global hostility in the name of ‘strategic’ and ‘national’ goals, while performing so poorly in the spheres of public finance and statecraft that its vulnerability scares the international watchdogs.

Manipulators of this tragic situation seek power in a politically docile environment and ignore the fact that political-economic experts need to be running the show to pull this country out of the painful void where it rots—not the bureaucratic public finance handlers.

Political forces need to initiate allowing space to political-economic experts with authority to supervise the public finance managerial corps. It should be for experts to create a balance between allocation of funds to three different spheres: economic-development, social sector and security apparatus.

Only a balanced allocation would guarantee oversight for functional accountability and without regular accountability there would be no stopping the contagious disorientation and waywardness.

Political opponents of the government do talk against the prevailing disorientation and waywardness, but they refuse to figure out how Pakistan fell into this trend and the incorrigible sluggishness.

When it comes to hammering some sense into political players that seek power in neglect of the facts about the slump of Pakistan, one needs to point out, those countries where priorities of taxing the economy and allocating the resources tilt in favour of wayward forces, the unavoidable outcome is despondency.

It is hard to outgrow this trap. It needs national rejuvenation led by experts politically motivated, not by politicians and government functionaries that seek applause and rewards for toeing the defeatist priorities.

There are enough indications of waywardness of the defeatist proportion in handling the state power and the economy in Pakistan. Members of the civil society, some of the political activists and media persons do intermittently point at the self-destruct direction Pakistan has taken. But mere criticism does not do at a stage where change of course is imperative.

Realistic and plausible propositions with practical details are required for the change of course at this juncture. When I say political-economic experts need a space in running the country’s economy, it implies that the policies they propose should be adopted without much reluctance, by all power-holders.

No traditional reservations should prevent them from submitting to well-meaning experts after seeing the results of their own doing. These reservations are mostly pretentious and many of them are based upon self-interest and a self-destruct hostile orientation.

When China and India were outgrowing the defeatist policies of the past, they allowed experts of political economy to function without shackles. They allowed them the authority enough to get their policy-proposals through.

Political forces that sought share in power by divisive means were not allowed to interfere with this process. Can Pakistan give itself such a chance?

The writer has worked with major newspapers and specialises in the analysis of public finance and geo-economics of terrorism

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1200143/running-economy-govt-needs-give-space-political-economic-experts/

‘DISTORTED POLICIES HINDER COMPETITION IN S. ASIA’S AGRIBUSINESS’
Dawn, October 19th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: A low agricultural yield and high waste continue to plague the upstream parts of the value chain while downstream activities remain small, leading to low productivity across South Asia, according to a new World Bank report.

The World Bank study, titled Agribusiness in South Asia, says outdated support prices for cereals, farm inputs and subsidies impede diversification to more productive systems while distorted trade policies also hinder competition, thereby rendering the sector insulated and limiting growth.

Much of the region’s agricultural development has come at a high cost in terms of natural resources. In particular, the overuse of water has been driven by substantial direct subsidies: irrigation charges in Pakistan cover only 10 per cent of the cost and indirect subsidies. Free power enables farmers in Indian Punjab to pump beyond sustainable level.

The study says the stress on land and water resources is exacerbated by rapid income growth, urbanisation and climate change. Climate change also leads to interruptions in supply and volatile prices for the food industry.

The report says agricultural production in South Asia is predominantly small scale, making it cumbersome for processors to secure a steady supply of quality products at a reasonable cost.

Concerns that large processors will bypass smallholders by integrating vertically with intermediaries/aggregators or by importing the produce, coupled with fears that large processors would exploit smallholders, have led some governments to put in place counter-productive policies.

South Asia is still predominately a producer of primary agricultural products, which are larger in value than food processing in all countries. Except for Pakistan, other South Asian countries do not come close in terms of value added as a proportion of primary agriculture.

Also, South Asia is poorly connected to the global food value chains in terms of both exports and imports. South Asia’s share of world agro-food trade is only 3pc for exports and 2pc for imports as opposed to 14pc and 9pc, respectively, for East Asia.

South Asia’s recent increase in the export market share is driven by India, mostly due to the removal of the export ban on rice.

All countries, except Pakistan, export more raw material than processed products. It says that leading firms in South Asia have had to develop linkages with smallholders, who dominate production of raw materials in the region. Firms have increasingly relied on joint ventures with smallholders.

Lack of market information and logistical difficulties prevent small-scale producers in South Asia from accessing markets efficiently.

The region's agriculture sector is also hampered by some instances of inverted tariff structures. Citing example, it says Pakistan's import duty on finished poultry products from Malaysia is zero, and from China is 16pc, but local poultry processors must pay 15-30pc duty plus 17pc sales tax on inputs.

Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) have long been cited as one of the major reasons behind low intra-region trade. NTBs are far more pronounced in India and Pakistan than in the other countries. These barriers can broadly be categorised as the positive list approach, technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, trade facilitation and customs procedures, financial measures, para-tariff measures and visas.

Most countries in the region have recognised the need for reforms in agricultural marketing. India and Pakistan, which have the most distorted marketing policies, are taking several steps to this end. The 'mandi' in Punjab adopted its Agricultural Produce Markets Ordinance in 1978, which was virtually unchanged from the original Act of 1939 and provides for strict control over the marketing of agricultural produce via market committees.

Also, produce must be traded through the market, mostly with a fee levied by the market. As a consequence, there are no private markets to compete with the established markets. There are about 150 fruit and vegetable markets and 150 grain markets in Punjab.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1290815/distorted-policies-hinder-competition-in-s-asias-agribusiness

GROWERS PUT OFF PROTEST
Dawn, October 22nd, 2016

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has postponed its protest scheduled for Sunday (Oct 23) in the city after a meeting between its leaders and Sindh Agriculture Minister Suhail Anwar Siyal in Karachi.

In a statement issued here on Friday, SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur and general secretary Advocate Ali Palh said they met Mr Siyal and Agriculture Secretary Saeed Mangnejo to discuss with them the issues being face by growers.

The statement said that the minister held out the assurance that the issues would be resolved soon. As such, the SAI decided to postpone its Oct 23 protest, it added.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1291477/growers-put-off-protest

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 10TH TO OCTOBER 16TH 2016
ORGANIC FARMING IN URBAN JUNGLE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 10th, 2016

Venessa Lee

Bjorn Low, 35, the co-founder of Edible Garden City, an urban farming social enterprise, took the unusual step to champion growing one's own food in land-scarce Singapore.

When it comes to farming in urban jungle Singapore, which imports more than 90pc of its food, Low is determined to pursue his vision despite its challenges.

"We're sharing the ideology of a movement building a sustainable urban farming industry in Singapore," he says.

After leaving advertising in Britain, he and his wife, spent about four years working on organic farms in places such as Spain, Scotland and Japan.

On their return to Singapore, he started Edible Gardens in 2012 with former landscape designer Robert Pearce. Low changed the outfit's name to Edible Garden City about two years later, but its goals for improving local sustainability in food production are unchanged.

His big-picture plans include reviving interest in local vegetables that Singaporeans used to eat, but which have fallen out of favour — leafy greens such as mani cai and ulam raja.

Low works with restaurants to substitute locally grown herbs for those used in Western dishes such as wood sorrel.

Four years ago, with a capital sum of $12,000, he began designing and maintaining vegetable and herb gardens at restaurants.

Edible Garden City also makes use of under-utilised spaces in Singapore, where the land used for agriculture makes up less than 1pc of the total land area.

Low and his team have built similar gardens on the rooftops of buildings, as well as in schools such as Pathlight, which teaches high-functioning autistic children, and Montfort Secondary.

From its early days with five staff, Edible Garden City has 12 today. And last year, it generated $700,000 in revenue, with a net profit of $100,000.

Low's interest in agriculture did not start in Singapore, but in London, where he and his wife Tan, were posted by their advertising firm.

The dark London winters "made us reflect on what we wanted in life", he recalls. He had become interested in gardening in his apartment and started thinking about growing his own food.

He and Tan discovered the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms international volunteer network and, for the next four years or so, worked on organic farms, mostly in Europe.

He was influenced by the late British ecological writer John Seymour, who advocated living as close to nature as possible and being able to produce enough food on one acre (0.4ha) of land for a family of four.

Low is part of a growing urban farming scene. With factors such as global price and supply fluctuations, "local production plays an important complementary role in ensuring Singapore's food supply resilience", says an Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) spokesman. The AVA has a $63m Agriculture Productivity Fund to help local farmers.

However, the challenges are considerable for Mr Low. Once drawing a monthly salary of about $10,000 in his ad man's job in London, he paid himself a salary of $1,500 for the first year after starting Edible Gardens. The figure has since increased to $2,500.

And parents of his trainees have baulked at the 'messy' and hot farming conditions.

Things improved when, in 2014, Low met Cynthia Chua, founder and chief executive officer of the Spa Esprit Group. Low's name came up when Chua was looking for local farmers to work with a French chef who wanted to grow his own produce.

"Bjorn showed me what I thought was not possible," says Chua, citing how his ideas include farming in air-conditioned surroundings.

"He is forward-thinking. Growing one's own food is possible. I can interpret (his vision), I can excite the public about it," she says. "I think he is a pioneer."

Her group invested $250,000 in Edible Garden City and Mr Low estimates that about 40pc of his business is the outcome of this collaboration with Ms Chua.

Low has been working on producing beauty products, such as anti-bacterial creams using calendula flowers grown by Edible Garden City, which will be used in some Spa Esprit businesses by the end of the year.

Also by year-end, he plans to move to his business' new 86,100 sq ft headquarters in Queenstown.

With a recent $200,000 grant by the Singapore Centre For Social Enterprise, Edible Garden City hopes to hire 20 beneficiaries from vulnerable groups in two years. It already employs three adults with autism, who work part-time on indoor farming

premises at the Enabling Village, a community space in Redhill for persons with disabilities.

He is thinking of a 'new type of community centre', which can bring commercially viable urban farms into communities, where they can produce food as well as engage groups such as people with disabilities and the elderly in the enterprise.

According to him, "With nature, you fall into the cycle of life. It takes time to grow something. You feel connected to it."

https://www.dawn.com/news/1289170/organic-farming-in-urban-jungle

CROPS SUFFER IN HOT AND WINDY WEATHER
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 10th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

WITH September being exceptionally hot and routinely windy, the agriculture cycle in Punjab has been disturbed.

October is equally hot so standing crops are suffering varying degrees of losses, sowing for potato, and harvesting of cotton has been delayed, with farmers hoping to squeeze more and more yield. Wheat sowing is likely to suffer as well.

The temperature, which historically has been lower, or at mid-30°C during September, rose to over 40°C and the winds rose to a speed of over 60km per hour to flatten crops in some areas.

The temperature increase was 4-5°C. The shedding of cotton bolls and corn-comb, and the weakening of their stems, following high-speed winds, led to lodging of a portion of not only these crops, but sugarcane and rice as well.

The farmers' estimates of losses from the shedding and lodging of these major crops vary from 15-40pc because crops and areas were not hit uniformly. Some corn farmers claim that they are now selling their crop to silage makers as fodder instead of to the industry. All of them, however, lament 'substantial losses'. Official circles have more conservative loss estimates.

Cotton growers claim higher losses. Their sense of loss is magnified by earlier positive signs for the crop which, by and large, had recovered from hot weather shedding during June-July.

Even the recent first picking of early sown crops was healthy — brightening the final output prospects. But then three factors — extended heat-wave lasting right up to the first week of October (when this piece was written), the widespread attack of White Fly and high-speed winds dotting September — came together to hit the crop. These dimmed farmers' hopes.

The White Fly attack has started a blame game in the province — with farmers and officials holding each other responsible for it. The province started the cotton season under the threat of Pink Bollworm, which had destroyed last year's crop.

It scared the farmers of over 1m acre to opt out of the crop, fearing a repeat of the attack and more losses. The acreage thus dropped to 4.4m acres — a reduction of 22pc according to official statistics and 25pc as per farmers' claims, compared to last year.

The decline, which started from 6.6m acres, reached 4.4m acres in the last few years. The planners also revised the Economic Threshold Level (ETL) for Pink Bollworm to one — meaning that if farmers find even one pest on the plant, they must spray the crop, turning it essentially into a preventive exercise.

However, the Jassid and White Fly (two other lethal pests) were ignored in the process. The ETL for them was neither revised nor any especial measures suggested. This failure is now haunting the crop.

Farmers blame official circles for not revising ETL levels, and the private sector for not educating farmers on the potential threat. Interestingly, the last ETL for different pests was prepared in 1973.

The provincial agriculture bureaucracy says the White Fly was not a hidden pest, like the Pink Bollworm which remains invisible on the plant till its cycle starts, and then becomes virtually impossible to control.

On the contrary, the White Fly is entirely visible from the get go and thus controllable by timely action — even the first pest can be seen on stem and leaves.

It is mainly the farmers who fail to break the reproductive cycle of the White Fly through quick and repeated sprays, even after official warnings. Owing to financial reasons or lack of awareness, the situation still persists in the most affected parts of the province.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1289169/crops-suffer-in-hot-and-windy-weather

RETAILERS OVERCHARGE FARMERS FOR UREA, DAP
Dawn, October 12th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: Farmers in different parts of the country are complaining of overcharging on urea and DAP fertilisers.

The federal government had announced subsidised rate of Rs1,400 for a 50kg bag of urea instead of regular rate of Rs1,800 and Rs2,400 to Rs2,500 for diammonium phosphate's 50kg bag against the previous market rate of Rs3,100.

A majority of farmers in Punjab are getting subsidised fertilisers with few complaints of overcharging being reported to the helpline (080015000/04299200773) of the Punjab Agriculture department. However, complaints have been received from south Punjab and Lahore districts.

Interviews with the farmers reveal that some dealers are charging up to Rs1,650 for urea and up to Rs2,800 for the DAP.

"I have recently purchased 70 bags of the DAP for Rs2,700 to Rs2,800 per bag and the dealers claimed they had bought it at higher rates from the company," said Lalzada of Akora Khattak, Noshehra, who had sown potato and cabbage recently. He, however, said urea fertiliser was available at the declared price in their area.

Lalzada said he had officially lodged his complaint to the assistant commissioner's office about overcharging by the dealers but to no avail. He further said dealers of all companies were also overcharging on the DAP in Mardan, the biggest market of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

A Rahim Sanjrani, a cultivator from Sanghar, Sindh, said he had recently bought eight bags of urea at Rs1,650 per bag and a dozen of the DAP at Rs2,800 from a local dealer. He said the farmers in Shahdadpur, Sanghar, had no access to officials concerned for lodging their complaints and they even did not know the process.

However, Muhammad Amjad, a cultivator from Faisalabad district, said he got both fertilizers at the subsidised rates.

An employee of a major fertiliser company said the government had announced Rs300 subsidy on the DAP but international downfall in prices got the price down from Rs3,100 to Rs2,800 to further reduce it to Rs2,400. He said all fertiliser companies were importing the DAP at cheaper rates nowadays.

A source in the Punjab Agriculture department told Dawn that the complaints regarding overcharging were being brought to the notice of highest authorities who were directing the district officers agriculture to ensure prices or initiate action against violators. He said majority of complaints against overcharging were coming from south Punjab and Lahore district.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Dr Farrukh Javed claimed that both subsidized fertilisers were available in abundance throughout province and he had yet to receive any complaint of overcharging. He said the products of Fauji Fertilisers Company were not under subsidised package announced by the federal government in June 2016.

Mr Javed claimed he was ensuring the subsided prices through his farmers' feedback farmers instead of depending on the department's field formations.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1289630

BOSAN APPRECIATES FAO FOR ROLE IN UPLIFT OF AGRI SECTOR IN PAKISTAN
Business Recorder,October 11, 2016

Pakistan Monday acknowledged the role of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations in Pakistan for improvement of agriculture sector and poverty reduction. This was stated by Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research (NFSR) Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan in a meeting with Director General FAO-Rome H.E. Jose Graziano da Silva during his visit to Pakistan, a statement said here.

Bosan appreciated the major contributions made by FAO in Pakistan over few years such as achieving Avian Influenza free status since 2008 and establishing National Poultry Lab which is as Hub Lab for SAARC countries, control of FMD of cattle and buffalo, implementing community based development initiatives for alleviating poverty and ensuring food security and supporting relief and rehabilitation activities in emergencies were especially mentioned.

Minister also requested further technical support from DG FAO in strengthening the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) of Pakistan; value addition and reducing post harvest losses in fruits and vegetables; because unavailability of handling, processing, transportation, and packaging technologies results in about 20-30 percent post harvest losses in these crops; exploiting genetic potential of local fish species Rohu, Thaila, Mori and their value addition; developing thermo-stable vaccines for control of trans-boundary animal diseases in Pakistan; conservation and improvement of farm animal genetic resources; and research on climate change impacts and mitigation.

The DG FAO was also briefed on several success stories from Pakistan under the current government's agro friendly policies. One of the examples shared was of livestock uplift and eradicating various deadly animal diseases. While appreciating the efforts for solving core issues in agro and livestock sectors, DG FAO also highlighted the benefit and importance of having a unified national policy.

He said that it was a big challenge for the country to develop, implement and make it a success story through efficient co-ordination among the provinces. He was of the view that zero hunger program for the poor faction of the country is multifaceted. The DG FAO stressed that food production was not only one factor to be emphasised but promoting balanced diet among masses was also very important.

It is pertinent to mention here that meat-eating habits have lead to higher cancer rate in people especially women. “So it is very important that we deal with this issue on priority basis,” he added and suggested bringing all stakeholders, private sector and civil society on board for uplift of agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors. Later on, DG FAO met Federal Minister Planning, Development and Reforms (PDR) Professor Ahsan Iqbal who emphasised on the nutritional value of the agro products.

He insisted on providing for national and international donors to support agriculture and livestock related research and production of better nutritious crops. The Minister PDR agreed to the issues mentioned by DG FAO and also appreciated the offer made by DG FAO and all the participants of the meeting agreed to join hands on solving core issues discussed in detail.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/92715/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 3RD TO OCTOBER 9TH 2016
GROWERS FEEL THE PINCH DUE TO LOW COTTON RATES
Dawn, October 3rd, 2016

Malik Tahseen Raza

MUZAFFARGARH: The cotton growers are disappointed at the low rates being offered to them for their produce by traders and cotton factories in the South Punjab.

The Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had announced last year a relief package for the farmers after the damage of the crop due to bad weather conditions in the cotton belt area in Muzaffargarh district.

The traders and cotton factories are offering only Rs3,000 to Rs3,100 per 40kg price to growers. The growers say how can they accept the offer at such low rates as they paid as much as Rs2,000 per bag for fertilizers and Rs3,700 per bag for DAP.

A trader said since the quality of the local cotton was low the traders would buy the yield on their own rates. Apart from this, he said the rates of cotton depended on the international market where rates fluctuated on a daily basis.

Landlord Malik Ahmad said he sown the cotton on more area than the last year because the local tenants largely relied on the yield.

He said the government should take action against traders and owners of factories who were blackmailing growers in a bid to reap rich profit.

A group of farmers said that 68 of the 81 cotton factories in the district were functional, but owners and other traders were offering them low rates.

A large number of cotton growers in Kot Addu tehsil said they would burn their produce on the main roads if they could not get the good price.

SECURITY: The city was declared sensitive for Muharram and army and Rangers will be deployed here during the upcoming holy month, District Coordination Officer (DCO) Hafiz Shaukat Ali said on Sunday.

He said these strict security measures were being taken following the killing of alleged terrorists here.

District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Awais said he had finalised a security plan under which more than 2,000 police officials will be deputed for 1,237 majalis and 546 processions. He said 119 people had been granted licences for tazia of Ziarat. He said his teams were checking textile mills, guesthouses and other industries where Afghan refugees were allegedly living without identity cards.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1287651/growers-feel-the-pinch-due-to-low-cotton-rates

THE GROWING INTEREST IN CORPORATE FARMING
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 3rd, 2016

Mubarak Zeb Khan

CORPORATE farming has gained traction in the wake of the Kissan package for the agriculture sector in the last budget, as a growing number of companies are enrolling themselves with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan.

As many as 185 such companies have been incorporated from Sept 15, 2015 to Sept 27, 2016. Most of them are in seed, fish farming, poultry, livestock and feed businesses. It raises hope for an injection of fresh investment.

The highest number of corporate farming companies — 116 — have been enrolled in Punjab, followed by 43 in Sindh, 16 in Islamabad and 10 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; but no company has been registered in Balochistan in the last year.

A senior SECP official, however, said it will be difficult to assess the volume of investment in farming just from increasing registrations. Even so, 70 companies — the largest number — are registered in the seed business followed by over 20 in the livestock and dairy sectors.

In the last budget, the government announced a string of concessions in customs duties and other taxes for dairy, livestock and poultry sectors. The rate of duty was reduced to 2pc from 5pc on import of machinery for these sectors.

Similarly, incentives were announced for the promotion of fish farming and duty was exempted on certain feeds. The customs duty on cold chain storage and capital spending in this segment was also removed.

A tax official said the tax concessions are stimulating investment in farming. Few years ago, the government allowed people to invest their undeclared money in livestock as part of an amnesty scheme.

“We have seen a positive outcome gained by the tax concessions in terms of registration of companies”, the tax official said. Yet a major problem for corporate farming investors will be the acquisition of huge landholdings.

A policy for corporate farming was evolved in 2000, and enforced through an ordinance but it remained dormant as no concession was offered to prospective investors.

However, there are a few successful cases, such as large dairy farms, which have benefited from the corporate farming policy.

Afaq Tiwana, an expert on corporate farming says agriculture badly needs capital investment to avoid stagnation. Corporate farming, according to him, can provide the sector with capital, technology and modern management.

He says corporates need large tracts of land for commercial farming, which can be acquired on lease or through a sponsor interested in contract farming. The JDW Group of Jehangir Tareen has 30,000 acres of leased land in Rahimyar Khan. This, he said, has become a model for other farmers to emulate.

The government will now have to promote corporate farming — a corporate business — which can ensure food security, he adds.

It will be easier for corporate farming companies to access bank credit to induct new technologies and invest in machinery and plants. Some companies aim to introduce innovation in the agriculture sector. They include Innovative Farming Technologies (Pvt) Limited and Agrotech (Pvt) Limited.

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.dawn.com/news/1287509/the-growing-interest-in-corporate-farming

COTTON GROWERS WARNED OF PEST, VIRAL ATTACKS
Business Recorder, September 25, 2016

The Met Office has warned the growers about pest and viral attacks on cotton crop during the hot and humid monsoon conditions during monsoon, asking them to be 'very' careful to cope with the threat. It said farmers obtaining water through tube-wells should schedule crops irrigation as per the expected rainy weather till September 30. It said farmers should control weeds growth at their present stages to stop any negative impact over the crops.

It advised the farmers to take timely precautionary measures to protect their crops, livestock and other property from the expected rains. It said farmers of cotton belt should be aware of adverse effects of stagnant water in the fields. "Mechanism for drainage of stagnant water from fields should be evolved on priority basis and necessary requirement in this regard should be taken," it added.

In Punjab, rain-dust-thunderstorm is expected at scattered places, upper parts of the province after September 25. Mainly hot and dry weather has been forecast for the most parts of Sindh till September 30. Rain-dust-thunderstorm is expected at scattered places in Upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after September 25. Weather in Balochistan is likely to remain mainly hot and dry in its most parts over the period.

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185:pakistan/87866:cotton-growers-warned-of-pest-viral-attacks/?date=2016-09-25

PUNJAB AGRI DEPT LAUNCHES RS 4.34 BN PROJECT

Business Recorder,4 October 2016

LAHORE: The Punjab agriculture department has launched Rs 4.34 billion programme to collect 592,000 soil samples from the cultivated land across the province in order to guide the growers about these samples for balanced and rational use of chemical fertilizers.

This will be a five-year programme titled 'project for agriculture extension' under the 'Kisan Khushal – Punjab Khushhal' project. Secretary Agriculture Punjab Muhammad Mahmood chaired a meeting in this regard at the Agriculture House on Monday which reviewed the targets set at district level for this project and methods to achieve it.

The department has provided motorcycles and smart phones besides up-gradation of soil fertility laboratories. This project will also help timely transfer of latest technology to the growers leading to increase in per acre yield of different projects.

Agricultural experts speaking at the meeting claimed that farmer may secure additional income of Rs 305 billion if balanced use of nitrogen and phosphorous is promoted only on 50 percent of the land being used in Punjab for wheat, paddy, sugarcane, cotton and maize.

Some 70 percent of the growers in Punjab own up to 12.5 acres of land because of continuous increase n population and division of inheritance.

They also said that growers can take help from the website developed by the University of Agriculture Faisalabad in the light of report by soil survey to select the latest production technology of different crops and earn profit of up to Rs 100,000 per acre. Progressive farmers can even add up to 300,000-400,000 per acre by following latest technologies, the speakers added.

They said that models given on website not only increase per acre production of different crops but also bring down the input cost. The website also gives weather prediction for next five days to guide the farmers.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/10/04/13-page/799595-news.html

INCLUDING AGRICULTURE: FPCCI STRESSES ON EXPLOITING FULL BENEFITS OF CPEC
The Express Tribune, October 6th, 2016.

KARACHI: Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) has urged the Planning Commission to devise a thorough business plan through which Pakistan could benefit from China's expertise in the agricultural sector.

"The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) may open new doors of cooperation in the agriculture sector, which would help in transfer of technology pertaining to agro-chemicals, pesticides, seeds and fertilisers," FPCCI Standing Committee Head on Horticulture Exports Ahmad Jawad said in a press release.

The size of the Chinese economy is much bigger than that of Pakistan and yet it is not clear what the CPEC polices will be, if agriculture is included? The gut feeling is that it should be left alone. The corridor is already very intrusive and there is general perception of dependency on China, he added.

The membership of Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) would provide Pakistan an access to a large market for its exports, and attract investments in the energy and infrastructure sector. However, there is a difference between Pakistan gaining new markets for growth.

He said Pakistani kinnows, dates, mangoes, guavas, bananas green chillies, tomatoes and cauliflower, among other fruits and vegetables, have a good potential in these countries once CPEC is operational.

"With the establishment of an agro-business development center, Pakistan would not be able to enter the Chinese market with finished agricultural products, besides adding more value to its own commodities."

Similarly, he added, Chinese businessmen started negotiations with their Pakistani counterparts to execute the horticulture trade from 2017. Pakistan has the eye catching opportunity to promote its horticulture products through CPEC route on economical rates.

Though Pakistan produces precious fruits starting from Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) to Balochistan, what the country needs is to setup controlled atmosphere (CA) stores through public private partnership mode along the CPEC routes to facilitate fresh produce exports especially in G-B and Balochistan.

Jawad mentioned setting up agro-business centres that may be developed on the way of Kashmore, Shikarpur, Jhal Magsi and Khuzdar, where a variety of agro-commodities are marketed. Similarly, Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur -are a potential market for crops like wheat, pulses, cotton, sugarcane, rice and fruits such as mango, watermelon, besides vegetables, livestock and dairy.

He said that we have not benefited from the free trade agreement signed between the two countries, but the Chinese have taken full advantage of the concessions they have gotten under FTA from Pakistan.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1194181/including-agriculture-fpcci-stresses-exploiting-full-benefits-cpec/

SINDH GOVT TO START E-TRADING OF AGRI PRODUCTS THROUGH PMEX
Business Recorder, 6 October 2016

KARACHI: The Sindh government has devised a strategy for e-trading of agriculture products through Pakistan Mercantile Exchange (PMEX) platform.

The decision was made at a meeting chaired by Sindh Board of Investment (SBI) Chairperson Naheed Memon at her office.

As a pilot project for two years, 6,000 tonnes of red chilli will be traded annually through Pakistan Mercantile Exchange's e-trading platform. Sindh Enterprise Development Fund will subsidize the trading fee of Rs 2.5 per kilogramme for growers/aggregators against 'warehouse receipts' and the Sindh government will provide aggregate subsidy of Rs30 million to sustenance growers over the period of two years.

This initiative will provide right price in a timely manner to farmers/growers, enabling them to invest it timely for other crops. Premium pricing mechanism will enable growers to invest more through quality inputs, eg, pesticides, etc.

The PMEX's trading platform will provide a chance to grower/farmer to access premium local markets/buyers as well as international markets.

The Sindh government is making consistent efforts to transform conventional agri-practices in Sindh and this initiative would give farmers/growers access to wider market base. Trading through e-platform will expedite the process for growers to get the right price for their produce within a stipulated time of 72 hours.

Naheed said that the Sindh government has decided to subsidize the PMEX trading fee for two seasons through Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) and termed it as game changer for agri-trading practices in Sindh.

She said the Sindh government had planned to replicate the scheme to other commodities and added that the Sindh government had encouraged the linkage between the different stakeholders in the market and promoted a unique idea of trading red chilli through e-trading platform. Moreover, She said the Sindh government would also welcome such ideas to transform conventional agro-practices in the province.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/10/06/5-page/800216-news.html

PUNJAB APPROVES RS70 BILLION INTEREST-FREE LOANS FOR FARMERS
Dawn, October 8th, 2016

Amjad Mahmood

LAHORE: A marathon meeting of the Punjab cabinet on Friday approved provision of interest-free loans to small farmers through the use of smartphones. A sum of Rs70 billion will be distributed among the farmers through the scheme during the ongoing year.

The meeting, which continued for over four hours to take up all the 23-point agenda with Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in the chair, also gave a go-ahead to the agreements between the provincial government and financial institutions for the loan scheme.

It discussed and referred to the cabinet's standing committee the Punjab population policy and amendments to the Punjab Police Rules 1934, forwarded by the inspector general of police (IGP).

The cabinet also decided to set up Khadim-I-Punjab Agriculture Endowment Fund with Rs2bn seed money, endorsed the decision of privatising 100MW solar energy project, set up by the government with its own resources and approved setting up of finance & development and legislative standing committees of the cabinet for tackling its rules of business.

It gave its nod for re-issuance of development budget to administrative departments for 2016-17 and a mechanism for identification, implementation and monitoring of various development schemes.

POLICE RULES: The amendments proposed by the IGP had earlier been endorsed by the cabinet's sub-committee on law and order to adopt the recruitment criteria of the armed forces.

It has been suggested that the maximum recruitment age should be reduced from 25 to 22 years. It also set standards of height for various categories. For general cadre, anti-riot unit and drivers/tele-operator males, it will be 5.7 feet and for females 5.2 feet. The recruits should be at least matriculate.

For the Dolphin Force and Police Respond Unit (PRU), the height for male recruits has been set as 5.9 feet and for females 5.4 feet while their qualification should be at least intermediate.

The amended rules propose banning relaxation in physical and education standards by any authority. Earlier, an officer of the rank of the deputy inspector general (DIG) was allowed to do so under certain conditions.

It also suggested taking birth date in Matric certificate as the only authentic document for promotions.

The new rules also suggest setting different superannuation age for various ranks. This age limit for constables will 50 years, for head constables 52, assistant sub-inspectors (ASIs) 54, and sub-inspectors (SIs) 56. But acting charge, officiating promotion or additional charge will not be considered for this purpose.

For promotion, a constable will have to do courses from police training schools to be eligible to become the head constable. If qualifications of two or more candidates are equal, the seniority in joining the Punjab police will be considered while the quota of 10pc promotions on discretion of the DIG will stand abolished.

The constables considered overage for joining police training schools but eligible for promotions should have a five-year field experience with good performance, fitness certificate from a government hospital medical superintendent and role in arrest or provision of actionable information leading to arrest of hardened criminals.

Also they must not have been punished in last three years. They will be considered for promotion against a 10pc quota by a committee, comprising the capital city police officer (CCPO), SP (admn) and SP (HQs) for Lahore and regional police officer (RPO), senior superintendent of police (SSP) and district police officer (DPO) concerned.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1288734

FERTILISER SUBSIDY: SINDH AND K-P REMAIN STINGY IN CONTRIBUTION
The Express Tribune, October 8th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

ISLAMABAD: Provincial governments of Khyber-Pakthunkhwa (K-P) and Sindh are adopting a stingy approach in contributing their share of the fertiliser subsidy pool, a situation much like last year's, putting in doubt the government's plan to support the agriculture sector.

Plan to support farmers came strongly from Finance Minister Ishaq Dar who said the country's economic growth was pegged back by contraction in the agriculture sector. He announced measures to support the sector during his budget speech in June this year.

However, despite committing with the federal government, both provinces have not taken any concrete steps to contribute their share for the subsidy, said officials familiar with the matter. They have failed in depositing their shares in the consolidated account opened in the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for this purpose.

Pertaining to this, a meeting was held Thursday in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, which was attended by officials from ministries concerned, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), SBP and representative from the fertiliser importing companies, to resolve the subsidy issue between the federal government and provinces as well as with the importing companies.

The meeting was informed that the federal government has recently deposited Rs3.45 billion, an amount which is 50% of its own share and 25% of the total subsidy amount for importing DAP fertiliser.

The federal government informed the meeting that the remaining amount of Rs3.45 billion will be deposited in the coming week. Punjab told the meeting that it has deposited Rs1.19 billion in the account and intended that the remaining share will be deposited on a monthly basis.

The representative of the Balochistan government assured that it will soon contribute its share as it did in the previous year. However, it has a very nominal consumption of DAP fertiliser and its contribution therefore is minute accordingly.

Sources, however, revealed that both Sindh and K-P were unclear over their contribution as both of them failed to give any assurance in this regard, saying that they have put the summaries to their respective chief ministers, who are yet to take any decision.

“This is the same response they gave to the federal government last year and ultimately failed to provide their due shares,” said one officer.

The officer said that incumbent Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah as finance minister had himself committed that his province will contribute the subsidy amount, but no practical step has been taken as yet.

The officer said that following Punjab, Sindh is the largest consumer of DAP fertiliser during Rabi and Kharif crops, but it avoids contributing its share.

The Punjab Agriculture Minister had also written a letter to the federal finance minister, last month, urging him to expedite framing a mechanism for processing of the importers claims for the subsidy amount, which is still unaddressed.

Additionally, Punjab also expressed dismay over the two provinces not contributing their due share and urged the federal government to ensure their contribution.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1195291/fertiliser-subsidy-sindh-k-p-remain-stingy-contribution/

INTEREST-FREE LOAN SCHEME ‘DISILLUSIONS’ FARMERS
Dawn, October 9th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: The applications of a good number of farmers, who want to avail themselves of interest-free loans for Rabi and Kharif crops under Punjab Kissan Package 2016, are being ‘refused’ either for not having ownership rights of lands or their tracts not computerised at tehsil level land record centres.

The information cell set up at the Punjab Agriculture House is currently receiving up to 120 calls from farmers throughout the province on a daily basis and such complaints have major chunk of total enquiries, Dawn has learnt.

The Punjab agriculture department has been receiving applications since Sept 19 after the provincial government announced Rs70 billion worth of interest-free loans up to Rs25,000 per acre for Rabi and Rs40,000 per acre for Kharif for small farmers having land up to five acres.

Farmers having agriculture land up to 12.5 acres are eligible for applying – the condition which seems to have no logic.

A source in the department told this reporter that farmers were asking about basic registration process, requirements and eligibility criteria.

He said: "A number of farmers are also complaining that their applications are being turned down on the grounds that either they lack land ownership documents or permission document of the land owner. The applications are also being rejected because land record in remote districts is not yet computerised."The source said the exact number of applications tehsil-wise would be available on the Oct 18 closing date.

He said initially farmers faced registration problem because the information about registration process was not timely conveyed to tehsil level land record centres.

The source said some farmers did not know even the basic information that those who cultivate state land and do not have even identity documents of ancestral lands or do not have proof of owner's death, are not eligible.

A senior official, who wished not to be named, told this reporter that the 'genuine' problems of applicants were being brought into the notice of the provincial agriculture secretary who is communicating with the district coordination officers to facilitate farmers.

He said the department might extend the date of registration to achieve the target of 500,000 farmers under the package.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Mahmood Khokhar said the government announced the process without facilitating the farmers for land ownership and computerisation of lands.

He also criticised the provincial government for depriving farmers having land above five acres of the facility and questioned as to why the government announced eligibility criteria.

He suggested that the government accept applications of farmers not having ownership rights or documents or computerised record by involving patwaris manually and ensure transparency. "Can government field formations not check on ground the presence of tenants cultivating the lands of their owners?"

Khokhar said he received calls from Bahawalpur district where a good number of farmers failed to get themselves registered on Saturday.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1288945

November 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 28 TH TO DECEMBER 4TH 2016

FOREIGN FIRMS BEING INVITED TO OVERCOME COTTON SEED SHORTAGE

Business Recorder, 30 November 2016

Tahir Amin

ISLAMABAD: The government has decided to invite foreign seed companies to overcome cotton seed shortage and increase yield after getting legal protection through proposed "Plant Breeders' Right Bill."

The Senate last week passed the 'Plant Breeders' Right Bill' and with the adoption of the bill by both Houses of the Parliament, it will become Plant Breeders' Rights Act of 2016 after the President's assent. The development of new plant varieties and the rights of their breeders have been protected for the first time in Pakistan under the proposed legislation.

The Plant Breeder Right Act has been remained pending for the last 11 years. In the absence of this legislation, dealers/companies had no legal protection. Only first generation of BT cotton is available in the country, while the second and the third generations are yet to be made available. However, officials said that proposed legislation would provide level playing field; thus encouraging seed companies to develop the latest cotton seed in the country.

Secretary Ministry of Textile Industry Hassan Iqbal on Tuesday chaired a meeting on cotton seed issue which was attended by Secretary Punjab Agriculture department and director generals of other provinces to finalise modus operandi for inviting foreign companies including Monsanto to overcome certified cotton seed shortage.

Director General Federal Seed certification and Registration Department (FSC&RD) briefed the meeting on availability and issues related to seed.

The Secretary Punjab briefed the House about various activities undertaken by the department for bringing discipline in Agriculture and Seed industry in the province. Federal Secretary appreciated the activities of Punjab government and expressed all possible support to Punjab government and private sector for strengthening of cotton sector.

Chairman Seed Association of Pakistan (SAP) Chaudhry Asif Ali raised some concerns over plans of Punjab government while both parties were advised by the Chair to interact in detail and develop consensus on various issues.

Currently, around 50 percent carried seed was available in the country which was not meeting the requirement and negatively affecting cotton production, a senior official revealed to Business Recorder here on Tuesday. The participants also decided that foreign companies would be allowed only to provide genes while seed would be developed locally.

The official said the proposed legislation would encourage plant breeders and seed organisations of both public and private sectors to invest in research and plant breeding; development of superior varieties of field, vegetable and ornamental crops; and facilitate access to protected foreign varieties and new technologies.

Currently, only Bollgard-I is available in Pakistan, however the move would help in introducing Bollgard-II and Roundup Ready Flux (RRF).

The sources further said that Ministry of Climate Change officials assured the participants that all the pending issues before the National Bio-safety Committee (NBC) regarding Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) would be resolved soon.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/11/30/7-page/823818-news.html

LOW YIELDS, SUBSIDIES AIL AGRO ECONOMY
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, November 28th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

The ‘Food Security and Nutrition Strategic Review’ is an independent, analytical and consultative exercise that identifies the key challenges faced by Pakistan in achieving food security and improved nutrition.

It provides prioritised areas for action for the government, the UN and all humanitarian and development partners.

Preliminary findings of the strategic review revealed a large number of challenges in raising food availability. These are slow growth in yields, a lack of international competitiveness, unproductive subsidies, rising land fragmentation, problems with quality and timeliness and productivity of input supply; and extensive water scarcity and climate change issues.

In order to create long term improvements in diet diversity, agricultural diversification and productivity must expand, even after they have a less direct impact on poverty. If prices decline from increased productivity in products, the buying power of consumers rise and they can afford a more diverse diet.

Domestic farming is facing a growing demand for output per unit of land to supply the expanding population, yet food availability from domestic sources has been lagging growth. Various causes appear to be low growth in yields, poor input availability and quality, and large post-harvest losses.

Key crops and milk are currently uncompetitive with international markets, although some of this is policy induced from developed countries. Most traditional inputs cannot be engines of growth, as land, tube wells, overall water, and even fertiliser and tractors, have nearly reached their maximum possible contribution.

Few of these inputs can be significant enough to add the kind of growth in production needed. Improved seed, research and development, better mechanisation and management of agricultural practices are what need to be expanded.

Currently, internal commodity prices are high compared to world prices for many key products. Thus, aside from farm level food security and avoidance of risk from international markets, these high domestic prices benefit the largest 6 to 7pc of farms who supply less than 50pc of wheat and milk.

Among the most challenging areas for Pakistan are food security and nutrition. The average caloric intake in Pakistan of about 2,260 kcal is above the internationally accepted recommended daily value of 2,100 kcal per person per day. This obscures the points that the poor in urban areas only consume 1,786 kcal, slightly above the undernourishment level, and in rural areas it is only slightly better, at 1,848 kcal.

Malnutrition in Pakistan is estimated to cost the economy around 2 to 3pc of GDP per year, which is higher than the costs of the energy crisis.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1298998/low-yields-subsidies-ail-agro-economy

AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS: MINISTRIES CLASH OVER CONTROL OF COTTON COMMITTEE
The Express Tribune, November 29th, 2016.

Zafar Bhutta

ISLAMABAD: A dispute has emerged over production figures of the cotton crop in the country as two key ministries are vying to run and control affairs of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee and the cotton commissioner office.

Though the Ministry of National Food Security and Research has sought control over these departments because of being relevant to the ministry, the Cabinet Committee on Restructuring has decided to keep them with the Ministry of Textile Industry.

The controversy over the cotton production data erupted in a meeting of the restructuring committee held on November 11.

During the sitting, the Ministry of Food Security demanded that the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee and the cotton commissioner office should be transferred from the Ministry of Textile Industry, arguing that the two offices had failed to perform in line with expectations and the cotton output had dropped sharply.

The food security and research secretary recalled that his ministry was created on October 26, 2011 and most of the departments and organisations associated with the erstwhile ministry of food and agriculture were transferred to the new ministry.

However, he pointed out, some of the organisations whose activities were closely related to the food security ministry were not handed over to it. Two of them were the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee and the cotton commissioner. Instead, their control was given to the Ministry of Textile Industry.

He argued that the Ministry of Textile Industry, which was mainly associated with the industrial sector, had a natural clash of interest with the agriculturists. In that regard, he cited a persistent decline in the key cotton crop for the past five to six years, causing a huge loss to the national economy.

He insisted that the textile ministry had no linkages with the agricultural community and all issues related to agriculture research on seeds and other inputs were being dealt with by the Ministry of Food Security and Research.

"It is the focal ministry at the federal level which keeps a close liaison with provincial governments on issues of agriculture," he said.

Speaking to the meeting, the minister of state for professional education and training pointed out that a lot of discomfort was felt by farmers and cotton growers over the placement of agricultural issues with the textile ministry. In order to safeguard the interests of farmers, he stressed, such subjects should be placed under administrative control of the Ministry of Food Security and Research as it was the relevant ministry.

Countering the arguments, the textile ministry secretary claimed that cotton production had, in fact, increased after 2011. "Cotton yield has also risen from 595 kg per hectare in 2002 to 765 kg per hectare in 2014," he said.

The highest yield of 815 kg per hectare was achieved in 2012.

He said the performance of central cotton committee had improved with particular focus on the collection and use of cotton cess for the improvement in crop and the assistance of farmers.

In an attempt to remove impurities from the cotton produced in Pakistan, the cotton committee and the cotton commissioner had initiated various clean crop programmes for the provincial agricultural departments, growers and cotton-pickers, he said.

He asked the cabinet restructuring body that the cotton committee and the commissioner office should not be transferred to the food security ministry.

Latest data indicates that cotton production was recorded at 8.78 million bales by November 15 this season, up 9.49% from the previous year. Last year, the overall output had dropped about 30%.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1247342/agricultural-affairs-ministries-clash-control-cotton-committee/

FARMERS' WOES: SINDH AGRICULTURE BODY ASKS FAIR PRICING
The Express Tribune, December 1st, 2016.

Nawabshah: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) Divisional President Naz Dharejo on Wednesday demanded fair prices of agriculture commodities for the growers and said that substandard pesticides and fake fertiliser had severely affected agriculture production in Sindh. He was addressing an annual meeting of the divisional body of SCA; he also demanded action against those dealers who were involved in the sale of fake fertiliser and substandard pesticides. Dharejo said that growers must be paid fair prices and should also be provided proper irrigation water for their crops. He alleged that influential landlords were involved in stealing irrigation water while officials of Sindh irrigation department had failed to control the situation.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1249775/farmers-woes-sindh-agriculture-body-asks-fair-pricing/

EARLY DROUGHT WARNING HELPS FARMERS PREPARE FOR DRY SEASON4
Dawn December 3rd, 2016

RAWAT: Like his farming neighbours, Bilal Khan plants wheat in late October or early November each year, and harvests and sells his winter crop a few months later.

But this year, there are no wheat stalks are to be seen on his three hectares (five acres) of land in Rawat, a town about 20km from Islamabad.

Instead, Khan is growing onions, potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage and carrots.

In late October, the Pakistan Meteorological Department informed Khan and other farmers that no rain was forecast for the crucial wheat-growing months of November and December in parts of northern Pakistan that rely solely on rain-fed agriculture.

The warning was one of the first of its kind from Pakistan's weather service, aimed at helping farmers look ahead months, rather than just days, and plan for crops more likely to survive drought.

"As advised by the weatherman on the radio, I exercised caution and opted for vegetable cultivation, it being less water-intensive," Khan said. He is irrigating his crops with water drawn from a nearby pond.

Winter rains are usually reliable in this region — but already those who did not heed the weather forecast are regretting their decision, as they watch the wheat they planted fail.

Muhammad Khan spent $2,000 on wheat seed which he finished sowing on Nov 7 on his family's four-acre farm in Ghool, a village about 90km southeast of Islamabad.

His nights have been sleepless since he noticed the seeds growing abnormally slowly.

The wheat plants were only three inches tall by Nov 21, rather than the 12 inches he would have expected.

"Even if rains come in January and February, the wheat output would be less than 50 per cent" of normal, because the grain heads will be underdeveloped, Khan predicted.

Slow growth makes the crop vulnerable in other ways too. Karaim Nawab, a wheat farmer in Gujar Khan, said if wheat doesn't grow strongly enough to properly grip the soil, the plants are at risk of being flattened if there are heavy winds later in the season.

Wheat is grown on around nine million hectares (22 million acres) of land in Pakistan, 30 per cent of which is rain-fed. Around 25 million tonnes of the crop are produced annually across the country. The Potohar plateau in the northeast, where Islamabad and its surrounding area are located, produces three million tonnes.

Farmers usually finish sowing wheat by mid-November and, under normal circumstances, two rainy spells in November and December drench the fields, allowing the seeds to germinate. The harvest begins in April.

This year, things are different. Ghulam Rasul, director general of the Meteorological Department, said the winter drought appears to be the result of an unusual high pressure zone over Central Asia that has driven rain clouds over northern Pakistan and beyond without letting rain fall.

Rasul says the drought is a consequence of the El Nino phenomenon, but that the effects are much harsher now than the last time the weather phenomenon affected Pakistan, in 2009. The most recent El Nino has also caused severe droughts in Africa and devastating floods in Asia-Pacific countries.

The winter drought comes on the heels of a monsoon that receded in early September, almost three weeks earlier than expected.

Apart from holding back the onset of winter rains across Pakistan, El Nino is also causing large fluctuations between day and night-time temperatures, Rasul added, another headache for farmers.

Muhammad Tariq, director of the state-owned Rain-fed Agriculture Research Institute in Chakwal, said wheat required temperatures of 21 to 25 degrees Celsius for effective germination.

“This winter, during the peak wheat-sowing months of October and November, the temperature remained around 30 degrees,” he said.

The unusually high temperatures have forced farmers to delay wheat sowing in Islamabad and its suburban areas such as Rawat, Gujar Khan, Taxila, Attock and Rawalpindi.

“Although drought-tolerant wheat varieties have been introduced in the rain-fed areas, these varieties also need water,” Tariq said.

In Rawat, Bilal Khan is confident his vegetables will sell quickly when he takes them to market in February and March. He predicts he will make as much money as he would have from a wheat crop.

“The forecast has been a big help as it has saved my investment of almost $3,000 going down the drain had I cultivated wheat this time,” he said.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1300184

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 21ST TO NOVEMBER 27TH 2016
TUNNEL FARMING GAINS GROUND
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, November 21st, 2016

Mohiuddin Aazim

Tunnel farming for vegetables is becoming popular across the country as it boosts per-acre yield, cuts the cost of production and helps in off-season production.

Back in 2005, the ‘fruit and vegetable development project’ of the Punjab government was launched as the first major initiative on tunnel farming. Now thousands of farmers in all provinces are engaged in it. Many of them say it has helped them grow more and better veggies at lower than usual costs, thus boosting their income.

The average per-year production of tomato, cucumber, cabbage, cauliflower, turnip, bitter and bottle gourds, okra and capsicum has increased during FY2010-14, as compared to FY2005-09, according to the officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Consolidated data for FY2016 on veggies' cumulative output is yet to be released. But officials of agriculture departments of Sindh and Punjab confirm a rising trend during the last fiscal year.

Most tunnel farms are spread over 10 to 20 acres of land. But, some tunnel farms cover a larger area in Punjab. In Sindh, too, urban owners of unused land have started leasing it out to individual farmers or farmer-groups interested in tunnel farming.

In Punjab, tunnel farming of vegetables has taken root in Arifwala, Mailsi and Vehari and is fast becoming popular in Faisalabad, Jhang, Multan, Rahim Yar Khan and Sialkot, according to officials of Punjab Agriculture Department.

After some incentives offered in the two annual agricultural budgets including the current fiscal year, "tunnel farms have started coming up in other areas as well like in Kasur, Lahore, Nankana Sahib and Sheikhupura," an official told this writer. At present, tunnel farming is being carried out on 250,000-300,000 acres of land in the province, he added.

In Sindh and KP, too, similar incentives for tunnel farming are being provided.

But the provincial agriculture departments have made no arrangement to collect data on the actual production of vegetables in tunnel farms. Guesstimates by officials put vegetable output in tunnel farms at 2-3pc of the total production of 3.1m tonnes (excluding potatoes).

Some private sector companies have also started playing a key role in promoting tunnel farming. One of them, Four Brothers Farms Ltd, claims that it offers, on turn-key basis, a complete package of erection, maintenance and running of tunnel farms commercially. Farmers in Punjab, Sindh and KP are taking advantage of services provided by such companies.

Though the number of active and large companies in the field of tunnel farming promotion can be counted on one's fingers, the total number of firms that claim to have expertise in this area is close to 200.

The National Agricultural Research Centre and Ayub Agriculture Research Centre continue to provide technical know-how on tunnel farming to growers across the country.

Farmers say that off-season and higher production of vegetables, economised use of water and more effective pest and weed management are three main features of tunnel farming which together make it feasible. But they point out that unlike in traditional veggies' farming; tunnel farming requires larger quantities of fertilisers. That is where they need governmental support.

In exceptional cases, per-acre yield of some vegetables particularly tomato, cucumber and capsicum obtained through tunnel farming has been recorded to be three times higher than traditional farming, according to growers of Sindh and Punjab. However, on average, 60-70pc higher than normal yield is a norm, officials say.

But according to farmers, the initial high cost of setting up a tunnel farm may discourage many.

Farmers engaged in tunnel farming say that setting up a medium sized tunnel farm requires a capital cost of Rs1.5-2.0m.

They point out that in Sindh, as opposed to Punjab; farmers prefer low tunnels (i.e. the ones that accommodate low height rows of steel structures covered with polythene sheets).

The cost of running these tunnel farms are stated to be lower than that of the walk-in and high tunnels, the first providing enough space between two series of rows for growers' movement, and the second housing multi-storey rows of artificial soil beds for veggies.

Senior bankers say they have been lending to owners of tunnel farms, both under a specialised incentive scheme introduced in the last two years and as part of regular operations. "But loaning for setting up such farms might have been slower because it is treated as an agricultural development loan and attracts a different approval criteria," admits the head of the agriculture division of one of the top five banks.

Officials of the state-run National Bank of Pakistan claim they regularly make loans to farmers and companies for the setting up tunnel farm structures.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1297525/tunnel-farming-gains-ground

SBP'S ANNUAL REPORT: SINDH RANKS WORST IN COLLECTION OF INCOME TAX ON AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, November 21st, 2016.

Farhan Zaheer

KARACHI: Sindh – the second largest province of Pakistan both in terms of economy and population – has been the worst performer in fiscal year 2015-16 (FY16) among four provinces when it comes to collecting tax on agriculture income as a percentage of total tax collection.

Except for Sindh, the other three provinces have either improved or maintained their share of tax on income (agriculture) in FY16.

Sindh's tax on income (agriculture) in FY16 dropped further to just 0.3% from 0.5% in FY15, according to the SBP's Annual Report on the State of Economy 2015-16.

On the other hand, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's (K-P) share improved from 0.4% to 0.6% while Balochistan improved its share from 0% to 0.1%.

"The situation of tax collection on agriculture income is appalling not only in Sindh, but also in other provinces. This shows lack of commitment on the part of provincial governments," said Dr Kaiser Bengali, a left-leaning economist.

An increase of 0.1% or a similar change in agriculture tax income would not bring any significant change on the ground. "The fact is that no province is collecting this tax seriously," he added.

"This dismal situation can certainly be changed provided we have the political will," he said.

The Sindh government collected Rs125 billion (0.3% of this makes up just Rs375 million) in total provincial taxes in FY16, up 14% from Rs110 billion in FY15.

What is disappointing is that the Sindh government's agriculture income tax has never exceeded 1% of the total tax collection since FY10 when it was 0.9% – the highest percentage

The total tax collection of Punjab, which contributes over 50% to Pakistan's GDP, was Rs151 billion in FY16, up 54% compared to Rs98 billion in FY15. However, 1% of Rs151 billion makes up just Rs1.5 billion, which is miniscule considering the size of agriculture in this breadbasket of the country.

Punjab's case is quite different because this province's agriculture income tax collection in FY10 was 2.7% – the highest percentage of agriculture tax collection among provinces in the last seven years. Since then, it has never reached this level, in fact, it has never collected more than 1.1% in any of the last seven years.

Although as a percentage of total tax, the agriculture income tax collection in K-P improved in FY16, but the overall picture in the province is as bleak as in others.

For instance, the northwestern province collected just Rs14.3 billion in FY16, down 29% from Rs20 billion in FY15. Out of the Rs14.3 billion, the share of agriculture income tax was just 0.6% or Rs85 million.

Similar to Sindh, the province is struggling to collect even 1% of the total provincial tax collection in agriculture income tax.

Perhaps the story of Balochistan is even worse. The country's largest province in terms of landmass collected just 0.1% in agriculture income tax, though it was the highest in the last five years.

The total tax collection of the province was miserably low at just Rs4.2 billion (0.1% of Rs4.2 billion makes up just Rs4.2 million).

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1237528/sbps-annual-report-sindh-ranks-worst-collection-income-tax-agriculture/

'PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE TO END HUNGER'
Dawn November 22nd, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: In order to end hunger we have to promote sustainable agriculture, which means investing in rural smallholder producers, said International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) President Kanayo F Nwanze on Monday.

Mr Nwanze, who is on a two-day visit to Pakistan, stressed the fund is committed to supporting the government in tackling poverty.

The IFAD president held a meeting with Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan to discuss policy measures taken by the government for food security and ending hunger.

IFAD's programme in Pakistan was reviewed during the meeting. The upcoming meeting of fund's governing council was also discussed.

Mr Nwanze is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz besides other officials.

IFAD is recognised by the government for its strong commitment to rural poverty alleviation and its ability to implement development projects in the most difficult and challenging areas of the country, such as Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK, Balochistan and southern Punjab.

IFAD financing in Pakistan is focused mainly on promoting the sustainable economic transformation of the rural poor and ultra-poor households.

IFAD has been working in Pakistan since 1978. It has provided more than $604 million in financing for 26 projects, benefiting more than 2 million households.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1297761/promote-sustainable-agriculture-to-end-hunger

IFAD'S $40M RURAL GROWTH PLAN IN JEOPARDY
Dawn, November 23rd, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has placed a $40 million project of the Punjab government in the "risk category," according to an IFAD evaluation report.

The objective of the project was to contribute to rural growth and poverty reduction in four districts of the province. The project was to focus on improving livelihoods of 115,500 households in Bhakkar, Khushab, Layyah and Mianwali, the report said.

The Livestock and Access to Markets Project (LAMP) for which IFAD had approved $35 million was approved in December 2013 and became effective in February 2015.

Despite loan effectiveness, the recruitment of key staff, including project coordinator and finance director, remains pending and the project continues to be managed by the director general (extension) as an additional charge.

Following the dismal performance, IFAD fielded a full supervision mission to review the project. A report by the mission observed that there have been persistent lags between design, approval, loan signing/effectiveness, first withdrawal and actual expenditures.

Disbursement conditions for the first tranche of initial $1m were met in July 2015 and the amount was released in the same month.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1297957

ZTBL OPENS 10 NEW BRANCHES IN CURRENT YEAR
Business Recorder, 24 November 2016

LAHROE: The Zari Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) will expand its branch network by opening 10 new branches in the country in the current year. This was said by Syed Talat Mahmood President ZTBL while addressing an award distribution ceremony of ZTBL officials at a local hotel. He said total numbers of branches of the bank are now more than 460 in the country.

He said the bank's deposits had been increased up to Rs. 155 billion from Rs 11 billion within three years since he took over the charge. ZTBL's profit had also been raised up to Rs 8.5 billion from Rs 5 billion in the same period he added.

The president said the bank's recovery had been improved whereas its annual disbursement reached Rs 151 billion in the current year. The ZTBL was making enormous growth and progress as its assets had also been increased, he maintained. He said those who achieved high performance through hard work would be awarded and acknowledged, adding that they could also set an example for other employees of the bank.

Syed Talat Mahmood said the administration would put in place all possible measures for welfare and progress of its employees. He distributed commendatory certificates, shields and awards among ZTBL officials for showing outstanding performance.

CEO Main Amir Hussain, Operational Head Asadullah Habib, SEVP Head HR Khalid Mahmood, SEVP Nadeem Chouhan, MD Kisan Supports Services (KSSL) Col Khalid Rafique (R) and other officials were also present on the occasion.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/11/24/5-page/820933-news.html

SENATE CLEARS PLANT BREEDERS' BILL
Dawn, November 25th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The development of new plant varieties and the rights of their breeders have been protected for the first time in Pakistan with the adoption of the ‘Plant Breeders’ Right Bill’ by the Senate on Wednesday.

The new law will encourage plant breeders and seed organisations of both public and private sectors to invest in research and plant breeding; development of superior varieties of field, vegetable and ornamental crops; and facilitate access to protected foreign varieties and new technologies.

With the adoption of the bill by both houses of parliament, it will become Plant Breeders’ Rights Act of 2016 after president’s assent, which is largely a formality.

Establishment of a viable seed industry is essential to the food security in Pakistan to ensure the availability of high-quality seeds and planting material to the farmers. It is necessary to make provisions for developing the breeding of new plant varieties, protecting the rights of their breeders and providing exemptions to them.

To comply with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, the government has already introduced several laws in the field of intellectual property, including patents, trademarks, copyright and industrial designs. Under the agreement, Pakistan is also required to provide intellectual property rights to the breeders of new plant varieties.

The new act will facilitate access to protected foreign varieties and new technologies; creating healthy competition for variety development among public and private sector organisations; facilitate in generating revenues for research institutes and financial incentives for plant breeders; and effectively control menace of counterfeiting in the seed sector for betterment of farmer community and food security in the country.

Under the act, the federal government will establish the ‘Plant Breeders’ Rights Registry’ under the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to facilitate protection of new plant varieties and issue certificates.

A plant variety protection advisory committee will also be established with members from the public and private sectors to advise the ministry of the registry on scientific and technical issues.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1298445/senate-clears-plant-breeders-bill

MONSANTO PAKISTAN INTRODUCES BIO-TECH SEED
The Express Tribune, November 26th, 2016.

LAHORE: More than 500 corn-farmers from across Punjab attended the field trial and demonstration event organised by Monsanto Pakistan at their field research facility located at Manga Mandi near Lahore.

The event showcased Monsanto’s latest bio-tech corn seed technology together with high performance hybrid seed products, with the objective of educating famers on Monsanto’s latest products and technology.

The occasion also included an exhibition space for various vendors and businesses related to the agriculture sector, including agriculture implements manufacturers, on-farm solar energy solution providers, fertilisers and agri finance institutions.

Briefing the visitors, Shariq Bokhari, Sales Effectiveness Lead – Asia & Africa at Monsanto Pakistan, explained that the new bio-tech seed had the potential to increase the yield of corn crop by an additional 5-10% through mitigation of yield losses incurred on account of weed and insect attacks.

Farmers attending the event received detailed briefings and practical demonstrations of the new seed technology. Many of the farmers showed excitement at the prospect of a new and technologically advanced seed and urged the introduction of the new bio-tech corn at the earliest.

Explaining the features of the to-be-launched bio-tech corn products, Monsanto's Regulatory Affairs Lead Muhammad Asim said, "the bio-tech seed has special features that enable better yield assurance through protection against weeds and pests, resulting in enhanced livelihood of farming communities."

Asim confirmed that the new bio-tech corn received approval in February 2016 for commercialisation from the Federal Ministry of Climate Change and currently permission of hybrids with the modern technology is awaited for commercial import from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

He explained that all other regulatory requirements had been fulfilled after having initiated the very first trials in 2009 and subsequent submission of commercialisation application in 2011. It is expected that the new product will be commercially available soon.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1244503/new-techniques-monsanto-pakistan-introduces-bio-tech-seed/

'NEED TO MARKET AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE'
Imran Rana

Faisalabad: The country is facing issues of weak marketing for agricultural produce, which is hindering the chances of getting reasonable prices not only domestically but also at the international market, said University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad.

Addressing the inaugural session of a three-day workshop on students' entrepreneurship and professional development arranged by the UAF Department of Computer Sciences, he expressed concern that middlemen were fleecing producers and the consumers.

Keeping this in view, we have to strengthen our agricultural marketing system in order to make agriculture a profitable sector, said Ahmad while chairing the session.

He said that in modern times online shopping had gained immense importance and there is a great need to benefit from information and communication technologies to compete with the rest of the world.

Pakistan Institute of Entrepreneurship CEO Tahir Mehmood Ch said that more than 90% of the products in the country are directly or in-directly related to agriculture. He stressed the need to inculcate the Information and Communication Technology with the agriculture sector in order to increase the profitability in the sector.

He said that with the usage of social media, the farming community can sell their produce.

Dean Faculty of Sciences Dr Muhammad Javed called for enhancing the skills of students with innovative ideas, so that they can face the challenges of life effectively.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1244498/need-market-agricultural-produce

PAD STARTS PROCUREMENT OF 'FRUIT FLY TRAPS'
Business Recorder,November 27, 2016

The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has started the procurement of 'fruit fly traps' for management of fruit fly for mango, citrus and guava orchards spreading over 15,000 acres of land in 30 districts of the province under its three-year project 'management of fruit fly with special reference to non-conventional methods.'

The three-year project will be carried out at the cost of Rs 227 million. During the last financial year, the department had provided fruit fly traps to orchards spreading over 16,500 acres of land in the province, sources in the agriculture department told Business Recorder on Saturday.

The orchard growers of notified districts will be provided Methyl Eugenol and six trap boxes per acre for control of male population of fruit fly and Protein Hydrolysate with material for control of female population on cost sharing basis. The farmers having orchard areas from one to 12 acres of targeted crops will be eligible for 50 percent subsidy and having area from 13 acres and above for 30 percent subsidy. For provision of material, advertisements will be issued through press, extension field staff and electronic media in all notified districts, so that maximum growers can be invited to participate in the process for availing the government facility.

The province of Punjab is blessed with favourable climatic conditions for the production of high value fruit crops because of highly fertile alluvial soils, conducive day and night temperatures, availability of sweet water and cheap labour. More than 20 fruits are grown on commercial basis, albeit, mango, citrus and guava have significant share and their area is more than 82 percent of the total area under fruit crops.

International standards for export of fruit and vegetables are increasing. Being food items, the world is imposing various sanctions on problematic imports. The sources said that keeping in view the ensuing threat of fruit fly and increasing appetite of export of fruits from Pakistan to European countries and other high end markets, it was the need of time to design and execute a comprehensive project for the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) of fruit fly in 30 top producing districts of the province. Implementation of this project on one side will be helpful to minimise the infestation of fruit fly and on the other side it will enhance the quality production of targeted fruit crops for fetching foreign exchange through enhanced exports.

The per unit area production of mango, citrus and guava in Punjab is low as compared to other competitive countries and export share of these fruits are also minimum due to improper management of insect/pest, especially fruit fly while there is a great scope to enhance both production and export.

Citrus, mango and guava fruit crops occupy first, second and third positions respectively with respect to area and production in Punjab. The fruit fly attack is frequently observed in all three fruit crops; however, guava is highly favourite crop for the fruit fly. All out efforts will be made to minimise the infestation of fruit in the project districts. The infestation will be tackled by adopting male and female controlling techniques along with crop sanitation.

Fruit fly directly damages fruits and causes significant loss. Farmers' awareness about its control is not updated. Generally chemical control is adopted which does not control the pest on long-term basis. Moreover, consequential pesticide residue also causes hazard to human health. Only solution lies in managing fruit fly through integrating all possible methods.

Top five growing districts each of mango, citrus and guava in Punjab will be selected for provision of Methyl Eugenol and Protein Hydrolysate on cost sharing basis. These districts for mango are Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh, Khanewal and Bahawalpur. For Citrus, these districts are Sargodha, Toba Tek Singh, Mandi Bahauddin, Sahiwal and Vehari. For Guava these traps would be provided on cost sharing basis in Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur, Faisalabad and Okara.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/107312/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 14TH TO NOVEMBER 20TH 2016
PUNJAB: CREATING ITS OWN ROADMAP
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, November 14th, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

A SUB-COMMITTEE of the Kissan Commission is mulling a policy that may lead to a paradigm shift from the current pricing policy — 'accessible staple supplies to all, especially to the poor, at an affordable price'.

The subsidised price of wheat, critics say, was tantamount to pandering to the urban consumers at the cost of producers. Under the existing policy, artificially low prices negatively impact agriculture.

If the new policy gets the final nod from Punjab's chief executive and the provincial assembly, effort would then be concentrated on looking at agriculture as a business model and strive for its commercial success.

The in process policy suggests elaborate plans for technological advancement, areas of investment, infrastructural development, human resource betterment, improvement of sector-wise governance and need for continuous policy revision.

For technological improvement, before moving forward, the policy suggests taking stock of previous interventions, like the high efficiency irrigation systems which had cost the provincial exchequer billions of rupees in subsidies, and seeing how efficient these initiatives have been.

For the future, it wants Punjab to invest, first and foremost, in seed technology, which has assumed added significance due to climate change. Low productivity and regular crop failure also calls for investment. Re-engineering all machines according to crop needs, standardisation of design and metallurgy also gets due share in the document that is being finalised.

For investment and infrastructure, the document underlines the need for a comprehensive rural development plan.

It notes that, according to a previous study, most of the 25,000 villages in the province, on average, are still 6km away from metalled roads, hindering the movement of goods and services in rural areas — the primary cause of 40pc post-harvest losses.

The document thus advocates for a comprehensive development programme. Significant stress is given to research and development, which is almost negligible in the sector.

In the last ten years, its premier institution — The Punjab Agriculture Research Board (Parb) — has not spent more than Rs1bn, which makes Rs100m a year — for a sagging sector worth Rs1.2tn. Unless the government develops a long-term R&D plan, all other efforts will fail.

The policy further propagates improving agricultural governance in the province.

Almost all laws (seed, fertiliser, pesticides, markets, machinery and cooperatives) governing the sector have long outlived their utility. The Seed Act, framed in 1976, was updated in 2015 but is still to take its final shape.

The most crucial missing component is the implementation mechanism. There is a need to refresh the existing provincial legal framework and, even more importantly, develop an effective monitoring mechanism.

Along with re-casting these laws, Punjab should develop a system of continuously updating its laws incorporating technological and environment changes. The fast pace of development in technology (precision agriculture being one example and climate-smart technology another) requires a quick response.

Lastly, but certainly not finally, the policy underlines the need for human resource development for the sector.

Currently, the sector, like most other areas, has suffered a lack of scientists who can lead the effort. The failure of research and development led to brain-drain as is the case in other sectors. The policy document asks the province to devise a plan to attract the right talent for research.

This policy is the first attempt by Punjab to create its own roadmap.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1296079/punjab-creating-its-own-roadmap

GROWERS HOLD PROTESTS IN LARKANA, SUKKUR OVER LOW PADDY PRICE, WATER SHORTAGE
Dawn November 15th, 2016

LARKANA: Paddy growers of various parts of Larkana district on Monday held a demonstration Jinnahbagh gate to demand a reasonable price of their produce.

They raised slogans against the government for not paying heed to their repeated calls for fixing a reasonable rate for their produce.

The protesters marched from Jinnahgate to the local press club where their leaders told reporters that paddy growers were being denied a reasonable rate despite the fact that the price of various paddy verities in the international market had gone high and rice growers in other parts of Asia were getting given the benefit of this upward trend by their respective governments.

They warned that they would intensify their protest if their demand for a higher price of their produce was not considered and accepted.

SUKKUR: The growers whose lands are fed through the Narli minor (irrigation channel) staged a protest demonstration in front of the Ghotki deputy commissioner's office at Mirpur Mathelo on Monday against acute shortage of water in their areas.

The protesters, led by Mohammed Ali Shar, Mohammed Zaman Shar and others, raised slogans against the irrigation officials concerned for allegedly causing an artificial shortage of water.

They told local reporters that water being released in Narli minor was not reaching their lands at the tail-end due to which they had been suffering heavy losses.

They said that farming was the only source of livelihood for hundreds of families living in the tail-end areas but unavailability of water had turned their lands barren.

They alleged that the irrigation officials concerned were selling away the canal water to the influential landowners by diverting it to their lands. The big landowners had also laid illegal watercourses, they complained.

They urged the higher authorities to take notice of the illegal practice and take effective steps against such landowners and dishonest officials in order to save lands of the affected growers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1296389

BODY TO CHECK EXPLOITATION OF FARMERS
Dawn November 19th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: The Punjab government has recently constituted a sub-committee under the Agriculture Commission, a component of the Khadim-i-Punjab Kissan Package, to pinpoint existing flaws in the Agriculture Marketing Information System (AMIS) and to improve monitoring of daily agriculture produce prices in markets to minimise the exploitation of growers.

Besides Dr Ali Cheema of the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), the convener of the sub-committee, there are nine more members, including academicians, agriculture officials, members of farmer associations and progressive farmers, says a notification issued on Nov 7.

As per the terms of reference of the sub-committee, the members will review the marketing system, conduct analysis and consult stakeholders on agriculture marketing. They will also chalk out directions for agricultural marketing system/policy.

They will also deliberate on implementation of electronic commodity warehouse exchange supply chain, model agriculture markets, incentivisation of major and alternative crops, suggest improvement in existing marketing laws/marketing divisions, devise a strategy for certification and quality regime, chalk out a plan for modern/model markets infrastructure with modern weighing systems and online information system to support buyers, sellers and exporters.

The committee shall be supported by the marketing wing of the Agriculture Department. It shall meet on a regular basis and may co-opt any other member and shall submit its report within two months.

Farmers Associates Pakistan Chief Executive Officer Afaq A Tiwana, one of the members of the sub-committee, says though another committee has been constituted for reforms in the agriculture marketing system but past experiences suggest that the decisions of such committees are never implemented by the governments.

He says the current system of AMIS working in 135 market committees in the province to ensure fair price of farmers' produce is not efficient.

Mr Tiwana says the exploitation of farmers at agriculture markets starts from commission agents and stretches to food and agriculture department officials and district machinery.

He says he will attend at least the first meeting of the sub-committee to see if the government is serious about its intentions.

Mr Tiwana is of the view that the agriculture marketing wing officials get their salaries from the income generated from market committees and it is apparently difficult for them to stop exploitation of farmers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1297270/body-to-check-exploitation-of-farmers

HIGHER COTTON PRODUCTION LIKELY THIS SEASON
Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: Higher cotton production prospects for this season have brightened following sustained phutti (seed cotton) arrivals during the last fortnight.

Figures released by the ginners' body on Friday show the total cotton production up to Nov 15 stood at 8.78 million bales, up 9.49 per cent from the corresponding period a year ago.

Both Sindh and Punjab have so far recorded better cotton production figures.

Punjab had lost up to 40pc of its cotton crop in the last season. But it has recorded 15.59pc higher production at 5.38m bales against 4.65m bales a year ago.

However, reports from cotton-growing areas in Punjab suggest cotton balls were damaged due to excessive heat during the maturing period of plants. Its full impact will be known only by the end of the season.

The cotton production in Sindh recorded a rise of 1.65pc for the period under review on a year-on-year basis. In total, 3.45m bales have been produced so far against 3.39m bales a year ago.

Meanwhile, spinners seem far from being worried about the falling cotton production because they believe 10-11m bales (depending on the weight of a bale at 170kg or 155kg) will be sufficient to meet their demand.

Talking to Dawn, textile spinner Asif Enam said about 30pc of the spinning capacity of the country is closed down due to the wrong duty structure and cheap imports of textile goods. “We have been drawing the government’s attention to the high cost of doing business, but to no avail,” he lamented.

Spinners have so far purchased 4.68m bales against 5.52m bales a year ago. Similarly, exporters have lifted 155,544 bales as opposed to 343,155 bales in the corresponding period last year.

Ginners are holding 2.04m bales of unsold cotton stocks, which is a little less than 2.16m bales that they held in the same period of the last season, according to the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1297200/higher-cotton-production-likely-this-season

KITCHEN GARDENING CULTURE: ARRANGEMENTS MADE TO SELL SEED KITS
The Express Tribune, November 19th, 2016.

SIALKOT: The Punjab Agriculture Department has made necessary arrangements to sell 110,000 seed kits at low rates during the ongoing Rabi crop-sowing season in the province. The step has been taken for the promotion of kitchen gardening culture and creating awareness of the importance and utility of home-grown fresh vegetables across the province.

Sources in the agriculture department told APP on Friday that kitchen gardening trend had gained popularity among people, especially the women in Punjab. Under the arrangement, 5,200 seed kits will be sold at low prices aiming to promote the kitchen gardening culture in Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1235991/kitchen-gardening-culture-arrangements-made-sell-seed-kits/

BETTER YIELD, QUALITY SEEDS CAN REDUCE IMPORT OF PULSES
Imran Rana

The Express Tribune, November 20,

FAISALABAD: The import of pulses worth billions of rupees may be reduced by developing quality seeds, promoting cultivation on large areas and an increase in per-acre production, suggested Dr Yusuf Zafar, Chairman of the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc).

“Measures are being taken to increase pulses productivity to meet domestic needs,” Zafar said while speaking at an international conference on sustainable agriculture, arranged by the US Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Agriculture and Food Security, University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF).

Pakistan produces a surplus in major crops including wheat, rice, corn and sugarcane but per-acre production is very low compared to the rest of the world.

He emphasised the need for promoting crop management technologies with joint efforts of all stakeholders such as researchers, public and private sectors, government institutions and farmers.

Pakistani farmers are facing scores of challenges such as soil degradation, changing input prices, lack of suitable agricultural machinery, imbalance in fertiliser usage and burning of crop residue. He called for improving crop management to achieve better yields.

UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said by 2050, Pakistan’s population would double, which would pose a great challenge to the researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders in ensuring adequate food production amid the threat of climate change.

He pointed out that agricultural land was decreasing and being converted into residential colonies. “It is time to work jointly for turning the deserted land into productive land.”

He expressed concern that the sons of farmers did not want to work in agricultural fields, adding the Punjab government was framing a new policy to address woes of the growers and making the sector self-sufficient and profitable.

Former information minister Nisar Memon stressed the need for long-term research in the backdrop of frequent changes in the climate.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1236834/better-yield-quality-seeds-can-reduce-import-pulses/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 7TH TO NOVEMBER 13TH 2016
THE FUTURE OF COTTON
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, November 7th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

Cotton production in 2015-16 declined by 28pc to 9.92m bales, mainly because of climate change, competition with other crops, lower market prices and the outbreak of pink bollworm, according to the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) which held its seventy-fifth session in Islamabad last week.

Pakistan informed the meeting that the future cotton policy envisages a number of strategies which include germ-plasm improvements, development of hybrid cotton, improved farm and crop management, bringing additional area under cultivation — especially in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa — and minimising post-harvest losses.

Planning and coordination of cotton research and development programmes, among federal and provincial cotton research institutions, is being strengthened to increase cotton production, improve yields per hectare, evolve disease resistant varieties, promote Bt cotton cultivation and improve the overall quality of cotton.

Cotton is grown by 1.3m farmers on over 3.1m hectares of land, which is 15pc of the cultivable area of the country, with average production hovering around 12.7m bales to 14m bales. This is consumed largely by the country’s 521 textile mills, although a significant quantity (up to 1m bales) is also exported.

However, to meet the demand for extra-long staple cotton, about 2m bales are imported annually.

According to the government statement, the national cotton research and development system was being streamlined — with the involvement of all key stakeholders — to bring it at par with international standards. The government was also encouraging multinational and national technology providers to introduce the latest and most effective insect protection technology.

The ICAC observed that contamination is a serious problem and measures should be taken to end contamination. It urged the government to implement the Cotton Control Act.

According to Shabbir Raza of the Pakistan Cotton Standards Institute. He estimated that, in Pakistan, economic losses from contamination cost the cotton value chain, from raw cotton to garments $1.4bn per year.

Raza described an extensive work plan consisting of administrative, operational and marketing arrangements to produce high quality, clean cotton. Under the work plan, willing ginners and growers register with PCSI and agree to follow recommended procedures; growers receive price premiums; PCSI supervises operations at each gin and evaluates seed cotton and lint quality; and buyers willingly pay a premium for high quality, contamination-free cotton.

PCSI has implemented parts of the work plan, and the Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) has switched its variety based marketing system to a system based on grades subject to quality premiums and discounts. The PCSI has established a network of cotton testing laboratories in various locations in Punjab and Sindh.

Dr Shahid Mansoor of the National Institute for Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering stated that the cotton crop faces many challenges, among them cotton leaf curl disease, breakdown of resistance against pink bollworm against Cry1Ac and whitefly are the most major concerns.

Dr Muhammad Naveed of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee stated that cultivation of biotech cotton in Pakistan distracted attention from bollworm control and increased focus on the control of the leaf curl virus disease. Farmers found an easy solution to minimise this disease by adopting early planting.

Earlier planting of cotton extended the growth period and disturbed the agro-ecosystem, while inviting new pests to emerge as major pests such as the mealybug, red cotton bug and the dusky cotton bug. With regard to bollworms, the pink bollworm had not been a major pest on cotton in Pakistan for 15 years. Biotech cotton helped to control the pink bollworm.

Pakistan is reverting back to proven cultural measures to control the pink bollworm, including stopping early sowing to protect bolls from short diapauses emerging of the pink bollworm. In addition, work is also progressing on a forecasting model based on degree-days, he said.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, who addressed the plenary meeting stated that Pakistan has moved forward and become the fourth-largest cotton producer, third-largest cotton consumer and second-largest cotton yarn exporter in the world. Pakistan is one of the few countries that have the entire textile value chain.

The government is committed on undertaking all possible measures to introduce the latest agricultural technologies and has already carried out important amendments in the Seed Act of 1976. Further, a Plant Breeders Right Bill would soon be placed in the upper house of the Parliament.

Such steps should increase the per acre yield of cotton, which has been stagnant.

ICAC Executive Director Jose D. Sette said that cotton has not been able to reap the full benefits of lower prices because the price of polyester, its most important competitor, has also dropped as a result of overcapacity and weak oil prices.

In fact, after three consecutive seasons of growth, world cotton consumption in 2015/16 shrank by 1pc. If maintained in coming months, the surge in cotton prices, which began in April 2016, will further widen the gap in the price of the two main fibres, with a possible negative impact on demand for cotton.

Overall, 2015/16 may come to be considered a season of transition and the beginning of a long-term drawdown in stocks. However, this adjustment comes at a cost. In 2015/16, the total value of the entire cotton crop was roughly $33bn, the lowest in eleven years.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1294643

THE RIGHT PRICE OF RICE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, November 7th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

Barring the initial harvest stage, when farmers could get a somewhat attractive price for an early lower Sindh crop, rates in upper Sindh's paddy market varied between Rs750-850/40kg by the third week of October.

This year paddy was grown on 745,000ha in the province — against the target of 750,000ha this year and 719,000ha last year.

Harvesting of the crop is in full swing in paddy growing upper Sindh, where it is the only crop of the kharif season. By and large, apart from old varieties of basmati-9, 'subdasi', Shahkar, Shandar, KSK282, irri-6 etc, China's hybrid seed is used for getting better yields.

Paddy grower, Gada Hussain Mahesar says hybrid seed has been preferred for domestic consumption by many growers ever-since it was introduced. Mahesar points out that the hybrid variety lacks aroma and taste and that's why it is not exported to the Gulf region. The seed can also not be stored by farmers for the next season's sowing.

Whereas, he says, irri-6 tastes better, has a long grain size and can be stored. It was most sought after in Dubai and Saudi Arabia for these reasons, he added.

Farmers say that upper Sindh's landowners, Ameer Bux Pahore and Ishaq Mughairi, estimate that for producers to earn and save something the price should be Rs1,200/40kg for super basmati and Rs1,000/40kg for irri-6. They say the cost of production for coarse variety is Rs29,000 per acre with an average of 50-55 maunds per acre yields.

While the hybrid seed gives more yield, it's seed is costly (Rs1,000/1kg) when compared to Rs1,200/40kg of indigenous varieties.

While Mughairi blames cartels for making millers' matters worse, a rice miller, from Mughairi's home district, Qamaruddin Sheikh says millers are incurring losses too. "I sold a100kg bag for Rs3,700 to an exporter from Karachi on Oct 30", he says, while anticipating that the rate would drop even further in next few days.

With the peak season's supply from upper Sindh, super basmati still managed to get a rate of Rs1,500/40kg and the aromatic variety — grown in Kirthar range — Rs1,100/40kg, till mid October.

Farmers say the miller-exporter nexus ultimately hits the growers' income. Rice millers buy 41kg of crop for a price set for 40kg. Millers also make growers pay offloading charges at Rs10/bag; and with no mechanism defined to determine moisture in the crop, growers have to accept the millers' price.

In a meeting held in Karachi on Oct 17, which was chaired by the provincial agriculture minister with rice millers attending, it was decided that no deduction would be made on any crop that undergoes mechanised thrashing. Moisture has been allowed in acceptable limits and unloading charges are paid jointly by farmers and millers — Rs5 each. However, this is not being followed.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) president Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar maintains that the provincial government doesn't control exports nor does it fix the price for the paddy crop. Gone are the days when the federal government used to intervene by lifting paddy through the Trading Corporation of Pakistan and Pakistan Agriculture Storages and Supplies Corporation, he says.

Paddy has almost been completely harvested in the lower Sindh region.

Price for the crop that is stocked by rice millers usually increases in the winter season when exporters place new orders. The rates go up to Rs1,100/40kg. Until July this year paddy was bought at Rs1,250/40kg, while the February rate was Rs950.

SCAs' Bux Sathio claims he sold his paddy in lower Sindh for Rs1,060 in early September.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1294641

A CRITICAL LOOK AT AGRICULTURAL LENDING
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, November 7th, 2016

Mohiuddin Aazim

INCREASED agricultural lending over the past few years has helped achieve some objectives of financial inclusion but lending quality itself falls short on some counts, such as geographical spread.

Banks managed to reach out to 200,000 new borrowers in the last fiscal year, boosting the overall number to 2.4m. The disbursement of farm and non-farm agricultural loans to small land owners and agri-businesses has helped achieve the targets of the national financial inclusion plan.

In FY16, the number of agri-businesses served by the banks surged past 770,000, from 550,000 a year ago. A much smaller increase of 11,000 plus was also recorded in loan disbursement to subsistence level farmers.

Performance improved despite a negative growth (of 0.2pc) in the agriculture sector. These achievements were made by the State Bank of Pakistan's efforts to boost farm credit. The bulk of farm loaning is revolving in nature and, thus, more rewarding for banks.

Livestock has started getting more attention from banks because of its higher average growth rate as compared to major crops. One of the factors that kept agricultural lending high, close to Rs600bn, in FY16 was that unlike the crops sector that saw a big fall of 6.3pc, the livestock sector grew by 3.6pc.

"This growth contributed its bit in keeping demand for agricultural credit," says the head of a large local commercial bank. "Besides, though cotton production took a plunge and should have theoretically depressed demand for credit from the crops sector, cotton farmers' net borrowing from banks remained intact as their repayments declined and demand for credit from sugarcane and wheat growers went up since the output of these crops remained high."

Over the last four years, the volume of agricultural credit has increased at a high average rate of 45pc — from Rs212bn in FY12 to Rs598bn in FY16. But farmers in Sindh, the province that has roughly a 20pc share in the country's overall agriculture, still feel neglected. The reason is obvious: In FY12, Sindh's share in the total agricultural loans stood at 12pc but in FY16 it plunged to 8.3pc.

Sindh-based agriculturists complain that the state-run Zarai Taraqiati (Agricultural Development) Bank has not been making enough additional loans in the province for the past four years, adding that credit requirements of even first-class borrowers are not fully met by the bank.

They make a similar complaint about the state-run National Bank of Pakistan. Private commercial banks and microfinance banks are generally doing well, they say.

Central bankers say that the decline in agricultural credit disbursement in FY16 is just an aberration from an otherwise rising trend seen between FY12 and FY15 when the share of the province in such disbursements rose from 12pc to 12.7pc.

Balochistan, KP and Gilgit Baltistan also continue to get less than 1pc each of total agricultural loans for different reasons but the most cited one is, according to farmers, that banks do not reach out to new borrowers.

In addition to this, agricultural lending also remains short in meeting genuine needs of all farmers due to the fact that the government-sponsored schemes for boosting farm productivity is practiced in varying degree of enthusiasm across all provinces.

The credit guarantee scheme (for small and marginalised farmers) announced in the last year's budget was implemented more vigorously in Punjab than in Sindh and other provinces, representatives of Sindh Abadgar Association allege.

Central bankers claim that agricultural lending during the current fiscal year is as much under focus of banks as in previous years but consolidated data on it for the first quarter of the year would be published after some time.

Bank executives dealing with agricultural finance say, however, meeting the full fiscal year target of Rs700bn seems too difficult.

A number of executives of five top local banks and two microfinance banks recently informed this writer that their respective banks have not seen much of agricultural credit demand in Q1FY17 both due to the traditional dip seen in every first quarter and also because the agriculture sector's performance during this year is also not expected to rebound fully.

Bankers say that livestock and crop loan insurance scheme and agricultural value-chain financing system, introduced to support growers and livestock breeders, have made disbursement of agricultural loans a bit easier.

Risk management in agricultural finance was a major issue but these two systems (launched earlier but fully executed in FY16) have made assessment of agricultural borrowers and recovery of agricultural loans easier due to involvement of third party risk assessment and sharing, bankers say.

Initially both schemes have targeted a small number of agricultural borrowers 'but going forward as provincial governments become more supportive, farmers get to know these schemes full well, banks would find it easier to lend against the cover of these two schemes larger amounts of loan. And, that may keep the growth momentum in farm lending going'.

But they say that agricultural warehouse receipt financing scheme that could mitigate the risks of agricultural loaning is yet to be made popular because growers have not shown much interest in it.

Growers complain that at people at bank branches handling this scheme often fail to explain to them in simple words about how exactly the scheme works.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1294644

MILLERS START CANE CRUSHING 11 DAYS AHEAD OF AGREED UPON DATE
Dawn, November 8th, 2016

HYDERABAD: Three sugar mills have started cane crushing in the wake of an agreement reached between their association and cane growers and the two sides' meeting with government functionaries on Oct 7 in Karachi.

Sindh Cane Commissioner Agha Zaheer, however, claimed that four, not three, sugar mills had started crushing cane. He identified them as the Digri, Matiari, Sanghar and Sindh Abadgar sugar mills.

"A rate of Rs188-189 per 40kg is being paid to growers for their produce. The rate is inclusive of Rs8-9 per 40kg transportation charges," he added.

It is learnt that other sugar mills have also fired their boilers indicating start of the crushing process any time under, what is believed to be somewhat rare agreement. Last year, sugar mills, barring a couple of them, had started crushing in the month of December. They delay was attributed to a controversy over official cane procurement price.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture general secretary Nabi Bux Sathio welcomed the development and noted that under the agreement, mill-owners were supposed to start cane crushing on Nov 15 but they fired their boilers 11 days earlier, i.e. Nov 4.

“This shows that they always protect their own interests given the fact that the ex-mill price sugar in the market is Rs70-71 a kilo. The mills that have started crushing want to capitalise on the sweetener’s market,” he said.

He, however, added that the early commencement of cane crushing season would certainly help farmers go for wheat sowing sooner as their lands would become free for the wheat crop. Technically and ideally, they should have started wheat sowing in October.

The Sindh government has already notified Rs182/40kg as the minimum cane procurement price for the 2016-17 season. An earlier notification fixing the rate at Rs172/40kg for 2015-16 season has been challenged in the Sindh High Court’s Hyderabad circuit bench, which would hear the case soon.

The Sindh Abadgar Board, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture and Sindh Abadgar Ittehad had moved the court separately and later the petitions were clubbed together.

For years, cane crushing is delayed by 40 to 45 days by mill-owners to get more and more sucrose recovery. The ultimate sufferers are growers whose produce starts losing weight by that time.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1294918/millers-start-cane-crushing-11-days-ahead-of-agreed-upon-date

RABI FESTIVAL: FARMERS BEING EXPLOITED BY MIDDLEMEN, SAYS UAF VC
The Express Tribune, November 8th, 2016.

FAISALABAD: Farming community is being exploited at the hands of the middlemen. The farmers must be paid well for the hard work in order to ensure food security in the country.

University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said this while distributing prizes to the winners of the Goat Milking Contest which was held at the varsity on Monday. The event was part of the Rabi Festival and aimed to encourage farmers to increase productivity.

The first prize was bagged by Nagri Beetal Goat owned by Shoukat Ali from Jaranwala which gave 7.99 litres of milk. The second prize was achieved by Anwarul Haq’s Beetal Goat with 7.91litres of milk. The third prize was awarded to Nagri Beetal Goat owned by Chaudhry Anwar with 6.67 litres of milk.

In the beauty contest, Nagri Beetal Goat of Muhammad Ali from Bahawalnagar got the first prize.

While addressing the participants, UAF vice-chancellor said, “If we fail to provide the facilities to the farming community, we will not be able to ensure food security in the country.”

He maintained the government was bringing reforms in the agriculture policy to address the problems of the farming community. Iqrar Ahmad said, “It is a matter of concern the farmers do not want their sons to become farmers.” He said the markets for small animals, including goats needed to be established to boost productivity.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1223762/rabi-festival-farmers-exploited-middlemen-says-uaf-vc/

TRACTOR MAKERS WANT RELEASE OF ST REFUNDS
Dawn, November 11th, 2016

KARACHI: Tractor industry's outstanding sales tax refunds worth Rs3 billion are resulting in huge operational challenges as the cost of doing business is increasing, Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (Pama) Director General Abdul Waheed Khan said.

In a letter to Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, he said that with the recent reduction in sales tax rate on supply of tractors, tractor manufacturers are charging sales tax at the rate of 5 per cent on supply of tractors as against the input tax on purchases of components at 17pc, both local and imported.

Since input tax is at a much higher rate as against the output tax, refunds are consistently accruing and increasing on a regular basis.

"Ultimately the burden of such undue cost would be borne by the end consumer i.e. farmer who is already facing challenges on account of depressed commodities prices and increased input cost. This burden is also nullifying the various supportive initiatives taken by the government to improve the financial health of farmers," the letter said.

To minimise the accumulation of refunds, he said the tractor industry is continuously urging the government to reduce rate of input tax on purchase of imported components by tractor manufacturers to match the reduced rate of 5pc.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1295499/tractor-makers-want-release-of-st-refunds

PAKISTAN'S TRADE DEFICIT WIDENS 22%, STANDS AT $9.3 BILLION
The Express Tribune, November 11th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan recorded a trade deficit of $9.3 billion in the first four months of the ongoing fiscal year, widening 22% year-on-year and far more than official estimates, as exports failed to recover while imports kept increasing during the July-October period.

The higher-than-anticipated trade deficit, gap between exports and imports, has not rung any alarm bells in official circles yet, as the government is mum over recommendations submitted to improve the situation of the external trade sector.

Exports plunged 6.3% to stand at $6.43 billion during the four-month period, reported the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Thursday. In contrast, the import bill increased 8.6% to $15.8 billion in the same period. Resultantly, Pakistan posted a $9.3-billion trade deficit – higher by $1.7 billion or 22% over the corresponding period, said the national data-collecting agency.

There was one positive aspect, as exports picked up slightly in October while pace of growth in imports reduced marginally as well. However, it was not sufficient to recoup losses in terms of contraction in exports during previous months. Exports increased to $1.8 billion during October.

For fiscal year 2016-17, the government has projected exports would grow to $24.75 billion and imports may remain at $45.2 billion. It had projected a $20.5-billion trade deficit for the entire fiscal year but the first four-month deficit has already covered 45.4% of the annual target.

The government closed the last fiscal year 2015-16 at an eight-year low level of exports, which dropped to $20.8 billion despite preferential access to European markets. The exports have been declining since the current government took over, falling from $24.5 billion in 2012-13.

The continuous decline in exports is alarming when analysed in light of other developments taking place on the external accounts front. Remittances have started shrinking while foreign direct investment is also not picking up.

Due to drying up of these important non-debt creating sources, the government has been heavily borrowings to build foreign currency reserves and meet external account requirements. During the week ending November 4, central bank's reserves further decreased to $19 billion. The reserves are largely built by borrowing from external sources and purchasing dollars from the spot markets.

The IMF's last report on $6.4 billion bailout programme revealed that Pakistan's gross external financing needs would reach $10.9 billion in this fiscal year. Since the trade deficit is more than official estimates, the gross financing requirements are also likely to go up. The $10.9 billion estimated financing requirements are already $4.4 billion higher than fiscal year 2015-16 requirements.

In September this year, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had constituted a committee to address the issues faced by the country's exporters within one week. However, more than two months have lapsed and the government has yet to come up with a package that may address these issues.

The sources said that the Ministry of Finance was sitting on the recommendations, as these carried financial implications for the budget.

In its assessments, the IMF has said that appreciation of Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER), security and governance challenges and power outages were the reasons behind the fall in exports. The IMF has also projected a significant rise in imports due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It has estimated CPEC imports at 11% of the total imports in the years ahead.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1227132/pakistans-trade-deficit-widens-22-stands-9-3-billion/

'GOVERNMENT TAKING ALL POSSIBLE STEPS TOWARDS ADDRESSING ISSUES OF FARMERS'
Business Recoreder, November 11, 2016
Punjab Governor Rafique Rajwana on Thursday said that the government was taking all possible steps to address the issues of farming community and to ensure quality education. He stated this while presiding over 43rd Senate meeting of the University of Agriculture Faisalabad at New Senate Hall.

He said that the agriculture was the backbone of our economy that is contributing 21 percent to the GDP of the country. He said tangible researches would pave the way to increase agricultural productivity. He said that majority of population was depending upon the agriculture sector. He said that he will suggest the government to declare Faisalabad a knowledge city to get benefit from the potential here.

It is our government commitment to serve the woes of common people in order to improve their livelihood. The food security was standing among the top agenda of government policies. He said the government had introduced Kissan Package and increased loans for farming community that is hallmark step to ensure food security.

He showed his concern that malnutrition was hitting a large number of the population which need to be addressed effectively. He said that to redress the grievances of the cotton growers about non-availability of seed, the government had formulated Punjab Seed Act. The governor said that cotton crop was a key of our agrarian economy and the government is paying its full attention to support to cotton growers and availability of quality seed as well as fair prices of their output.

He acknowledged the rankings status of UAF at international and national level. He said that no nation can make the progress without the education. UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that although the country was having the abundant food but most of the population was malnourished. He said that it is due to unhealthy life style and dependency over two crops. The UAF had developed a new variety of cotton which is short duration and climate resilient.

He said that the UAF was working on the hybrid seed of the wheat and maize that will result in increasing the productivity. He said that the UAF was in touch with 10 million farmers through the mobile phones and internet. Commissioner Momin Agha stressed upon the need to declare the Faisalabad a knowledge city. He congratulated the government for making all-out efforts to address the problems of the farming community. Registrar Muhammad Hussain presented the agenda before the House.

The Senate also elected Dr Ijaz Bhatti and Dr Tahira Iqbal as the members of the syndicate for the three years. The Senate also approved Rs 8638.023 million budget estimates for the financial year 2016-17. The budget estimate was presented by Treasure Umer Saeed. The non-development is standing at 4233.281 million whereas Rs 34.33 million for the Water Management Research Center, non-development (Punjab government Rs 179.58 million, development fund (federal government) Rs 788 million, development fund (Punjab government) Rs 853.017 and competitive research grants Rs 2549 million.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/101972:government-taking-all-possible-steps-towards-addressing-issues-of-farmers/?date=2016-11-11

FERTILISER SALES: DAP IMPORTERS DON'T AGREE WITH PRICE REDUCTION
The Express Tribune, November 12th, 2016.

Peer Muhammad

Islamabad: Fertiliser importers have turned down a government proposal to slash the price of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) from Rs2,500 to Rs2,250 per 50kg bag to bring it in line with the international market rate, sources said.

The proposal was shot down at a meeting on Thursday at the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

In the global market, the price has gone down since the fixing of the rate in Pakistan at Rs2,500 per bag through a government notification on June 25, 2016. Both the government and fertiliser companies had agreed on that price after including subsidy in the current year's budget.

When the government issued the notification about four months ago, DAP was being sold for $355 per ton in the world market and now the price has dropped to $305, a decrease of $50. Fertiliser companies are selling the commodity at the notified price irrespective of the market rate. Keeping in view the price fall, the government is seeking to push it to Rs2,250 per bag.

According to sources, the provinces, particularly Punjab, have complained that importing companies are selling DAP at the higher price set about four months ago, which has hurt the centre's plan to offer subsidised DAP to the farmers.

They suggested the federal government to issue a fresh notification and set the price at Rs2,250 per bag for the end-consumers.

However, sources said, the fertiliser companies did not agree with the proposal, claiming that market forces had already impacted the fertiliser prices and they were selling the commodity at lower rates. In this scenario, they emphasised, there was no need to issue an official notification for price revision.

Bowing to arguments of the companies, the government officials asked them to submit their rate lists in the next meeting, which would be held in the next 15 days. After that, the government will issue a fresh price notification.

Participants of the meeting also discussed the contribution of provinces in fertiliser subsidy. It was noted that except for Punjab, no other province had released its due share so far.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1228371/fertiliser-sales-dap-importers-dont-agree-price-reduction/

FAKE FERTILIZER FACTORY UNEARTHED
Business Recorder, November 12, 2016

A joint team of the provincial agriculture and revenue departments unearthed a fake DAP fertilizer manufacturing factory in Baseer Pur and recovered hundreds of fake fertilizer bags and arrested two persons involved in it from the spot. The joint team also recovered sand, crush stones and other material being used by this factory for production of fake DAP.

The police concerned registered a case against two persons arrested from the scene on the application of Assistant Commissioner Depalpur who headed the joint team during the raid. Samples of fertilizer recovered from the factory were also sent to the laboratory for its chemical analysis by the provincial agriculture department.

A spokesman of the Punjab Agriculture Department said on Friday that a joint campaign has been launched by the provincial agriculture department and provincial revenue department to unearth those involved in heinous business of manufacturing and selling of fake fertilisers and pesticides.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/102282:fake-fertilizer-factory-unearthed/?date=2016-11-12\

FARMERS ADVISED TO PLAN IRRIGATION
Business Recorder, November 13, 2016
The Met Office has asked the farmers to schedule crops irrigation as dry weather is expected to continue for another 10 days across the plains. It says that the farmers irrigating their lands through tube-well water should keep the expected dry spell ahead and the growers should start sowing vegetables for the winter season on time with a view to help the crops utilizing the soil dampness fully.

Farmers of the rain-cropped areas should also to sow their Rabi crops till November 15 as latter cultivation would have negative impacts on the production. Growers of the irrigated parts of Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkwa should complete the process of wheat sowing during November, it said.

The Met said that the weeds should be controlled from their further growth, warning that the unwanted plants would scale down the crops growth and output. It further said that farmers of the cotton crop areas should prepare field for incoming Rabi season and complete the sowing on time.

Mainly dry weather is expected in most parts of Punjab with light rainfall at scattered places in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Gujranwala Divisions till November 13. Weather in Sindh is likely to remain mainly hot and dry over the period. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, mainly dry weather is expected till November 20 with a chance of light rainfall at scattered places in Malakand and Hazara Divisions till November 13.

Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of Balochistan. Mainly dry weather is expected in most parts of G.B however light to moderate rain with snowfall is expected at Gilgit and Skardu from on November 16 and November 17. In Kashmir, mainly dry weather is expected, the Met said.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/102602/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 31ST TO NOVEMBER 6TH 2016
FREEZING THE WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 31st, 2016

Jawaid Bokhari

With agriculture under distress for some time now, policymakers seem to be reviewing their policies to shore up a sector that is the backbone to the country’s economy and deserves to be put at the centre of the national development strategy.

The recent speculation that the government would do away with the crop support price was followed last week by the remarks of the Minister for National Food Security and Research, at a press conference, that the ministry is not interested in enhancing the crop support price, and that reducing the cost of production is the ‘ best solution.’

The support price for wheat has been frozen for the past couple of years and sugarcane price — going by this season’s rate of Rs180 per 40 kg, fixed by Sindh — is as much as millers generally paid to sugarcane growers last year in Punjab. The next step, sooner or later, may be the withdrawal of the support prices of wheat and sugarcane if the approach to cutting the cost of production proves to be a success. Lower prices could make local commodities competitive in the international market.

The support price for two major food crops — wheat and sugar — had apparently become counter-productive. Except for growers representatives, who feared that bulk of the farmers would fare badly in the domestic market in the absence of support prices for the two major commodities (that also impacted the prices of other crops), there was a strong criticism by other stakeholders and experts that the support prices were producing an agricultural crisis.

According to the critics, the support price had turned into an indicative price, with the market manipulated purchase price holding sway at the cost of a vast majority of farmers, specially the small growers.

A lot of the government’s money was stuck up in stocks purchased from the market to shore up the falling rates. Export was either subsided or ruled out with domestic prices higher than the international market rate.

The announcement of enhanced support prices was promptly followed by an increase in prices of farm inputs which siphoned off a sizeable portion of the gains intended for farmers.

Similarly, the prices at farm gates are extremely low compared to the urban retail prices of food items, including fruits and vegetables, with the middle men, wholesalers, retailers and transporters all prospering at the cost of the farmers. The end result is that growers’ earnings and investment are sharply reduced due to the transfer of resources from agriculture to the urban economy.

Thus impoverished, a majority of growers cannot afford to buy an adequate quantity of farm inputs. For example, the cutting cost of production as ‘the best solution’ has come on the heels of reports that cultivators cannot afford such essential items as fertiliser; its sales have declined and stocks are piling up at the factories.

The subsidy to farmers turns out to be a real support for fertiliser manufacturers, importers and suppliers. Punjab has gone a step further by announcing Rs100bn interest-free loans for growers. Reduced cost of production of agricultural raw materials would make traditional industries like textiles, sugar mills etc more competitive.

However, the crutches being provided to the farmers need to be removed as soon as possible and growers must be helped stand on their own feet. For this the great challenge is to stop the enormous transfer of resources from the rural to urban areas. There is no wisdom in draining agriculture of its resources and then subsidising it.

The commodity pricing issue, between farmers on the one hand, and the industry and trade on the other hand, needs to be resolved by all stakeholders in their mutual interest to help the government withdraw its intervention. This can only happen when growers acquire strong economic muscle to secure a fair bargain.

The issues in agricultural productivity cannot be resolved without addressing multiple problems facing the countryside. These include: skewed landlord ownership and lack of corporate/cooperative farming; the need for development of a wide network of affordable common facilities for small farmers for mechanised farming, etc.

In short agricultural needs a culture change to revive on a durable basis.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1293199/freezing-the-wheat-support-price

CONCLUDING THE AGRICULTURE INCOME TAX BATTLE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 31st, 2016

Ahmad Fraz Khan

The Punjab government has stopped collecting agriculture income tax following a stay order by the Lahore High Court, the provincial agriculture minister announced last Wednesday.

Apart from street protests by farmers, over 1,000 petitions challenging the tax have been filed in the Lahore High Court.

The Punjab Revenue Authority (PRA) was never able to collect the targeted amount. Last year, it reported a 33pc drop in collection — only Rs1.55bn could be collected against a target of Rs2.3bn. This year, though the target was kept the same, collection problems have increased since most of the farmers have simply refused to pay following the court's stay order.

Farmers claim that tax, at least for now, hardly makes sense as the agriculture sector is under stress and gigantic official efforts are underway to revive it. They contend, both federal and provincial governments are competing extending subsidies to put farming back on its feet.

The federal government had announced a Rs341bn package, which included Rs5,000 direct subsidy to farmers, last year. During the current fiscal, it offered a Rs20bn subsidy on fertiliser alone, along with cutting electricity rates and reducing mark-up on credits and duties on import of certain machinery.

Punjab itself had announced an Rs100bn Kissan Package last year and this year offered Rs100bn interest-free loans. As compared to the huge subsidies the total tax target was a paltry Rs2.3bn.

'Does taxing the farmers under such conditions make sense?' ask farmers. With over 96pc farmers owning less than 12.5 acres, does the government really think they are making money out of the land? If so, why subsidise them? If not, why tax them? There seems to be a policy disconnect.

In addition to this the farmers have also raised two other major objections: in case of income tax returns for non-farm income, the first Rs400,000 are exempted. In case of agriculture income tax, the exemption is only Rs80,000.

Businessmen are supposed submit returns through a self-assessment process whereas all the lower-rung revenue officers (patwari, naib tehsildar and tehhsildar) are there to assess the farmers' income. These objections became big issues both inside and outside courts.

It is not to oppose taxation of agriculture income per say; everyone making money from any source should be taxed. However the tax collection could be put on hold till the revival of agriculture.

Meanwhile, as the farmers suggest, the government continue collecting land tax, and also make it progressive. The current value of land tax is certainly too low, Rs100 per acre, because it was fixed way back in 1991, and can be revised upwards. Farmers have no problem with it as it is static and remains outside the discretion of revenue officers. With yields going up, tax can be increased.

http://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1293200

SINDH'S FALLING SUNFLOWER CULTIVATION
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, October 31st, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

A drastic decline in sunflower cultivation has been reported in Sindh, after it touched a peak in acreage following the 2010 super floods.

Statistics available with the Sindh agriculture department indicate sunflower acreage has dropped to 65,883 hectares in the 2015-16 season, against 266,964 hectares in the 2010-11 season. And this has happened despite the soil and climatic conditions in lower Sindh, particularly the coastal region, suit this crop.

Since it is a low delta crop, growers find it easy to opt for. The fact that it can be grown between October-February is an added advantage,and farmers consider it a better alternate crop to wheat in the Rabi season.

The wheat crop requires more investment than sunflower which does not demand land preparation. It is grown on the residual soil moisture in the same land used previously for paddy cultivation in the Kharif season.

Farmers earn Rs40,000 per acre in case of sales at a government announced support price. Alternatively, if they produce 15 to 16 maunds per acre of sunflower, farmers can get Rs35,000 to Rs40,000 an acre.

During the super floods of 2010-11, free seed and other inputs were provided to support farmers in flood ravaged areas.

Even before the floods, sunflower cultivation showed an upward trend from 2005-06 to 2009-10 seasons, when it ranged between 248,979ha and 220,963ha.

However over the years a gradual decline in per acre productivity with an inadequate market rates ranging between Rs1,200 to Rs1,800 per 40kg was recorded. Some attribute this to the poor seed quality of this oilseed producing crop.

“Sunflower is indeed a better option for farmers, especially when they find water availability a serious issue during the Rabi season, or when their cotton’s harvesting is delayed. They cultivate it easily, from Thatta to Larkana, though some variations are seen in the two regions”, says Mahmood Nawaz Shah of SAB. He is worried about why such a decline is going unnoticed bu relevant authorities.

Price-wise, the sunflower crop remains dependent on market trends.The rates were as high as Rs2,600/40kg before slumping to Rs1,600/40kg.

Farmers’ dependence on hybrid seeds is a disturbing factor in sunflower cultivation, with the absence of domestic hybrid seed technology being considered a major irritant for them. The technology being made available locally could otherwise make its cultivation inexpensive.

Progressive growers, like Abdul Majeed Nizamani and Nadeem Shah, have given-up or are reducing cultivated area of sunflower because of inadequate price and low yield.

Nizamani had approached the Pakistan Agriculture and Research Council (Parc) for local seed and had borne the expenses. He conducted a trial run on his agricultural land in Badin, but didn’t get the desired production.There was no uniformity in the crop and then PARC didn’t go for further research”, he says.

SAB has made an appeal to the federal and provincial governments to support farmers in sunflower cultivation by providing them with hybrid seeds and a bag of DAP fertiliser. It argues that this wouldn’t be a bad bargain for the government since it would then be able to reduce its import bill on edible oil.

A private seed supply company representative Saleem Khanzada, however, foresees an increase in sunflower production this year. “It will get the area it lost to wheat”, he says He linked lower yields with a lack of proper crop management on the farmers’ part.

http://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1293197

OFFICIAL SUGAR CANE PROCUREMENT RATE FOR 2016-17 SEASON NOTIFIED
Dawn, November 3rd, 2016

HYDERABAD: The Sindh agriculture department issued on Wednesday notifications, fixing minimum price of sugar cane at Rs182 per 40kg for 2016-17 season and the date for the commencement of crushing season in the light of an agreement reached between sugar factory owners and growers at a meeting of the Sugarcane Control Board in Karachi on Oct 7.

The department notified the price and fixed Nov 15 for commencement of sugar cane crushing season 2016-17 and payment of quality premium, a matter which has, however, been sub judice in apex court since 2007.

Of the 38 sugar mills in the province, 34 will start crushing as per scheduled date of Nov 15. The remaining four mills, which had not crushed cane last year as well, has remained shut for a variety of reasons. The growers had challenged in the Sindh High Court the cane price notification for 2015-16 on Jan 4, 2016, which had fixed the price at Rs172 per 40kg.

The Hyderabad circuit bench of the SHC will hear the growers' petitions filed by Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) and Sindh Abadgar Ittehad on Nov 3.

According to the new notification, the rate of quality premium has been fixed at 50 paisa per 40kg sugar cane over each 0.1 per cent (including fraction thereof to be calculated prorate) of excess sucrose recovery above 8.7 per cent determined on the basis of overall sucrose recovery basis of each mill.

The notification, however, clarified that as the matter was pending a decision in the Supreme Court and as per decisions of the federal government the payment of quality premium would remain suspended till the court decision arrived or a consensus was reached among all stakeholders.

A recently held meeting between the stakeholders held under the directives of apex court failed to reach a consensus agreement on payment of quality premium, which had remained suspended for a long time.

The sugar millers were required to pay quality premium at the fixed rate when the recovery of sucrose crossed the benchmark of 8.7pc.

Sindh's benchmark for sucrose recovery in sugarcane is 8.7 against 8.5 per cent of Punjab's and that is why official price of sugar cane in Sindh is always a few rupees more than that of Punjab.

The Punjab government has not yet issued cane price notification.

For 2016-17 crushing season, sugar millers are likely to light up their boilers at least a week before the date of commencement and usually only a handful of sugar mills ignite the boilers on time every year despite the issuance of notification by the provincial government.

In Oct 7 meeting, SAB and SCA leaders had pressed the government to issue a price between Rs190 to Rs200 per 40kg but the government hinted that sugar millers would not agree to it. Then they lowered the demand to Rs190 per 40kg but the government insisted on Rs182 per 40kg price and issued the notification accordingly.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1293889

AGRI SCIENTISTS FOR STRENGTHENING INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA LINKAGES
Business Recorder, 3 November, 2016
Faisalabad: agri scientists have emphasized the need for strengthening industry-academia linkages and to promote innovative approaches to fight the challenges of modern era.

addressing at the inaugural session of a six-day rabi festival including two-day dice competition staged at the university of agriculture faisalabad on wednesday, they mentioned that dice provides a common platform for both academia and industry to share and collaborate on innovative concepts and products.

uaf vice chancellor prof dr iqrar ahmad khan said that strong academia- industry linkages would pave the way to address the issue including food security, poverty alleviation and health sector.

he called for sharpening the entrepreneurial skills in the students. he said that the agriculture is the backbone of our country which is contributing 21 percent to the gross domestic product.

he showed his concern that agriculture land was decreasing with a large pace whereas the rural population was moving towards urban areas.

he stressed upon the need to come up with out-of-the-box solutions to problems of the general public and farming community. he also said that punjab government was setting up a knowledge park in lahore to develop knowledge-based economy with the investment worth billions of rupees every year.

he demanded the government to declare faisalabad a science city as it is having many knowledge and research institution that would make the collaborated efforts for the national cause.

he said that in the recent us news and world report on education, the uaf is standing at 21st number worldwide in isi listed publications in agricultural sciences. he said that the uaf was the only institution ranked among the top 100 varsities of the globe in any category. the university students’ current enrollment has surpassed 23000 whereas it is offering 165 degree programs with a special focus on agriculture and rural development.

fcci vice president ahmad hassan said that there is the need to bridge the academia and industry to work together. he said that strong academia-industry linkages were the imperative to make the development and to compete with the rest of the world.

dice chairman sohail jamal said that innovation was lifeblood of any nation and economy and is a key ingredient behind its sustainable progress and prosperity. he said that agriculture sector was facing 40 percent post harvest losses where the only 95 percent of the milk remained unprocessed.

he said dice is a strategic initiative of dice foundation, usa aimed at fostering innovation and entrepreneurship culture in the country at all levels.

he said that dice provides a common platform for both academia and industry to share and collaborate on innovative concepts and products.

uaf director oric zahir ahmad zahir, dr habib aslam gaba from fcci, sadaf amir from jk farm, fritzz bohmler from germany, mpa dr najma afzal, dr nadeem tariq, dr ghafoor, dr waseem ahmad and other notables also spoke on the occasion.

as many as students from 21 universities participated part in dice contest based on innovative ideas in agriculture and food sector.

on november 3, the dice contest prize distribution will be held at 5:00 p.m. at exhibition centre. on november 4, one-day seminar on indus water treaty will be held at 1:00 a.m. at new senate hall with wapda chairman muzammil hussain as the chief guest.

on november 5, the agri exhibition will begin at exhibition centre at 9:30 a.m. following international seminar on cotton at new senate hall in which experts from 40 countries are taking part. the basketball match will be held at university ground at 3:00 p.m.

on november 6, punjab agricultural secretory muhammad mahmmod will chair the farmer convention at iqbal auditorium at 10:30 a.m. the kabadi match and tug of war match are arranged at 3:00 pm at university ground and a cultural night at 7:30 at iqbal auditorium. on november 7, prize distribution of agri exhibition will be arranged at the expo center at 5:00 pm.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/11/03/5-page/811480-news.html

COTTON: CLCV, INFERIOR SEEDS CAUSING HUGE LOSSES

Business Recorder,November 03, 2016

Pakistan is losing over 9 million bales worth billions of rupees every year due to Cotton Leaf Curl Virus (CLCV) besides lack of quality seed, water scarcity/distribution and weeds.

The country has the potential to produce over 20 million bales, however, due to CLCV, lack of quality seed, water scarcity/distribution and weeds; cotton production in the country has reduced to around 10 million bales.

This was revealed by the government officials as well as experts while addressing the 75th Plenary Meeting of the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) here on Wednesday. The event was organized by the Ministry of Textile Industry which is being attended by around 400 delegates from 30 members' states.

Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said Pakistan was producing average 700-750 kg cotton per hectare which was low as compared to the production of the regional countries. However, it is better as compared to around 500 kg per hectare in India.

He further said that some areas in Sindh province were producing average 1000 kg per hectare, which indicates that local crop has potential to achieve the highest crop.

Cotton Commissioner further said Pakistan has potential to produce 20 million bales per annum, however, due to different diseases/pests, water scarcity and lack of quality seed, the country is yet to achieve the desired results.

Dr Shahid Mansoor Director National Institute for Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering (NIBGE), Faisalabad said that CLCV, mealy bugs causes 3 million bales, lack of quality seed and high input cost – 3 million bales, water (scarcity/distribution-one million bales, weeds, bollworms, heat stress and other sucking pests cause 2 million bales every year.

Dr Venkatesh N Kulkarni, Vice President (R and D), JK Agri- Genetics Ltd India while giving presentation on "Bt Cotton and Pest Scenario in India" said that hybrid's susceptibility due to high-pressure of whiteflies, hairy or bushy genotypes, late sowing, high nitrogenous fertilisers, inadequate phosphorus and potassium in the soil, indiscriminate use of pyrethroids, acephate, fipronil and mixtures and whitefly resistance to insecticides cause out-break of whitefly. Kulkarni said that the out-break causes about 37 – 62 percent (average 45 percent) yield losses, 5 to 12 repeated insecticidal applications, psychological stress, environmental pollution, economic losses and social unrest.

The experts stressed the need for using efficiently all the agriculture inputs including water, fertilisers and other pesticides to enhance productivity. They said that flood irrigation for cotton crop was reducing the ground water level and available water resources were facing immense pressure due to increasing population across the glob.

Talking to media persons, Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that the conference would the pave way for promotion of cotton sector in the country, which has been facing challenges in the country.

Renowned agriculture experts, Dr Abid Ayub and Dr Naveed also highlighted the importance of the conference, saying that it would help Pakistani scientists to promote quality cotton production in the country.

The experts participating in the event shared the outbreak of cotton diseases including different pests' attacks on the crop. The experts shared their experiences for controlling such attacks, adding that it would be incorporated in policy making to control any outbreak in future.

Experts further recommended that cultivating insect resistant cotton crop varieties to minimise the pest attack on the cash crop for production of quality crops. This strategy would not only help boost quality crop production but also help enhance farm income. They were of the view that the excessive use of pesticides should be avoided which is creating environmental hazards.

During the Wednesday's session, the participants recommended to adopt the theme for next year's (2017) ICAC meeting" as "Opportunities and Challenges in Technology Transfer."

In total three topics were discussed for next year's meeting including "Future of Biotech Cotton", "Opportunities and Challenges for Technology Transfer" and "Reducing the Containment of Cotton."

However, with the majority's opinion, the representatives selected the technology transfer topic for the purpose with the arguments that it would help transfer of technology and lead to promote cotton output by small growers.

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185/99429/

HUNDREDS OF FERTILISER BAGS SEIZED AT TORKHAM
Dawn, November 5th, 2016

LANDI KOTAL: Customs staff at the Torkham border seized hundreds of fertiliser bags during checking of two trailers on Friday. Officials said that as many as 1,600 bags of DAP fertiliser were concealed in hidden cavities of the trailers which were taking returning families back to Afghanistan.

They said that they impounded both the vehicles along with taking the drivers into custody. A case has also been registered against the owners of both the vehicles.

Meanwhile, two persons were buried alive in a mudslide in the far flung Bazaar Zakhakhel area on Friday.

Khasadar officials said that Abdullah and Tiladar were busy digging mud from a mound for repair of their house when the incident took place. Both died on the spot and later their bodies were retrieved by local residents.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1294347

December 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 26 TH TO JANUARY 1ST 2016

OMISSIONS IN THE PROPOSED PUNJAB SEED ACT AMENDMENT

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, December 26th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

The Punjab government recently drafted the Punjab Seed (Amendment) Act 2016 to facilitate import of seed for multiple crops by seed companies, apparently to overcome substandard seed and increase per acre yield.

The draft act, initially dubbed the Punjab Seed (Amendment) Act 2016, will be converted into the draft Punjab Seed Bill 2016. It is the offshoot of the Federal Seed Act 2015 following the 18th Amendment.

The new draft has omitted several important sections and clauses of the Federal Seed Act 2015 apparently to provide relief to certain individuals, multinationals and local seed companies for promoting genetically modified seed like GM cotton, GM corn, GM rice, GM vegetables etc.

Firstly the proposed draft omits the most important section — Section 22A — of the Federal Seed Act 2015 which imposes a restriction of registration or enlisting imported plant variety, or hybrid and compulsory adoptability trials at multiple locations in Punjab, Sindh, KP, etc for at least two years within Pakistan to check their performance in local agro-climatic conditions.

Secondly under Section 6 (Functions of Punjab Seed Certification and Registration Department) of the Punjab Seed (Amendment) Act 2016, the clause (a) clearly states 'controlling the quality of seeds through truth-in labelling (Rules 1991)'.

Agriculture experts fear that by this procedure any individual, breeder or seed company can import GM and non-transgenic seeds, plants and hybrids of any major and minor crop without any testing, evaluation and risk assessment. Such actions can spread unknown diseases and viruses which can be a major threat to agriculture productivity and may cause food insecurity.

Thirdly the draft act omits Section 22D of the federal act which speaks of the registration of seed processing units.

Fourthly, the draft act has also omitted the word 'Registration' from the title of Section 22G and replaced it with 'Enlisting' because the registration requires any imported GM seed needs to be tested for four years—two years for regulatory trials and as many years for large scale trials—at different locations in the country as prescribed under bio-safety rules and bio-safety guidelines.

Experts say clause (c) of the same section which says 'field data of two crop season trials in respect of bio-safety and performance as prescribed' has also been omitted apparently to avoid trials of GM seeds or hybrids to examine its performance. This is done by-passing collection of bio-safety data and risk assessment in local environment as required under the Cartagena Protocol on bio-safety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Fifthly, Section 22-I (constitution of Federal Seed Committee) of Seed Act 2015 has also been eliminated from the draft act which gives powers to seed committees —consisting of representatives of agriculture departments, public and private seed sectors, progressive farmers and any experts— to perform, function and assess imported or local GM seeds and other seed varieties grown in trail fields.

Similarly, Section 22-J (constitution of Variety Evaluation Committee) is also excluded from the provincial draft act. The committee is responsible for evaluating candidate lines, cultivars and varieties of public and private sectors, and imported seed material for disease and the agronomic value of all fields and horticulture crops as prescribed.

Agriculture experts are of the view that the country's history regarding imported seed implies that untested GM and non-GM seeds can be vulnerable to diseases.

Such seeds may perform well in one region but fail to perform in others, or may spread inherited diseases in certain regions, they add.

Experts further say banana bunchy top virus disease, wheat karnal bunt disease, tomato crop viruses (TMV, TYLCV), and cotton leaf curl Burewala virus are some examples which hit local crops as a result of imported seeds in the last few decades.

They claim there is not a single clause in the seed act which is punishable in case imported/ local seed and hybrid pose health risks to human and animal health or drop crop production per acre.

Experts further say the approval of Truth-in Labelling rules was to facilitate vegetables and minor crop hybrids because their hybrid technology changed fast, but the new draft act has included all seed varieties and hybrid of major crops.

Former director general of Federal Seed Certification and Registration department (FSC&RD) Abdul Rauf Bhutta says the import of GM seed into Pakistan without any trials and enlisting option, instead of the registration process, if vetted by the Punjab government, will open a new controversy in the country and may lead to wiping out the local seed manufacturing industry.

He says initially imported seed with certain certification guarantees (phytosanitary certificate from a recognised institute) go through certain stages of clearance starting from the trial period to approval by FSC&RD, Plant Protection department and Quarantine department before the Customs department allows the entry of such seed in Pakistan.

“Imported seed should be a federal subject because of certification, import, export and environmental control jurisdictions”, he suggested.

Bhutta fears the un-checked entry of imported seed could also deprive KP, Sindh and Balochistan of indigenous varieties Punjab is producing, and catering to around 70pc of their requirements with.

Additional Secretary (Planning), Agriculture department, Dr Ghazanfer Ali Khan, who has drafted the Punjab Seed (Amendment) Act 2016, defends it and says the department is going to prepare the draft bill 2016 after certain consultations with all stake holders. He says a conference will be held shortly to receive the feedback and concern of all stake holders in this regard.

He is of the view that under the draft it has been proposed that there is no need of seed variety approval, registration and certification while registration of seed variety is voluntary.

Khan further says some functions should remain with the centre and some others should be under the control of the province.

According to him it has been proven that seed varieties usually become obsolete because of trials lasting two to three years and new varieties come in place. He adds that leakage of under-trial seeds from trial sites is common.

He says that by removing the approval and registration processes the department intends to allow local and foreign seed companies, besides individuals, to bring their varieties to the department for certain verification and use at their will.

Khan says that the Truth-in Labelling procedure has been retained in the draft for checking the quality of seeds at the point of sale, adding that enlisting without any formalities instead of registration (which is a voluntary option) would promote open competition among local and foreign seed businesses and breeders including those who are dealing in GM and hybrid seeds.

In case of testing if the seed is found to be substandard the department will take action against the importer, he adds.

He says the province could now repeal or amend any federal act in the light of the 18th Amendment and the federal legislative list. The provincial government is only amending it with its own requirements.

The additional secretary dispelled the impression that the imported GM seed of different crops would gradually be phased out of the local industry, saying the government always encourages open competition among individuals and companies.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1304424/omissions-in-the-proposed-punjab-seed-act-amendment

MASTUJ PEOPLE GET SOLAR-POWERED DEHYDRATION PLANTS TO PRESERVE FRUIT
Dawn, December 29th, 2016

CHITRAL: The people of Mastuj town have been provided with solar-powered dehydration plants for preserving fresh fruits, enabling the poverty-stricken farmers to increase their incomes.

Talking to media persons, chairman of Qarambar and Shandur Area Development Organisation (QASADO), Syed Saadat Jan said for want of dehydration facility, technical guidance, packaging and marketing, more than 60 per cent of fresh fruit of apricot, white mulberry, wild cherry, pear and apple got wasted as the surplus quantity was fed to animals.

He said the project was launched with the financial assistance of Small Grant and Ambassador's Fund Programme of USAID under which 54 plants were provided in different localities and the women were imparted extensive training on different processes of fruit preservation ranging from harvesting to dehydration and packaging.

Mr Jan said Mastuj town was known for its fabulous apricot, white mulberry, pear and apple, adding QASADO helped in the products' preservation and value addition. He said that the project also envisaged engagement of women in the process by hiring the services of food technologists and agriculturists.

He said the fruits dried in the customary way by exposing them to direct sunlight lost their pleasant charm, taste and brittleness due to which the commodity found no place in the market.

Nusrat Jabeen, who is getting training under the project, said she used to feed a large amount of apricots and apples grown in her orchards to her cows, but this year, she preserved 100 per cent of the produce with the help of the dehydration plant.

She said women from every household were imparted training on processing of fruits and operation of the plant, and on how to ensure hygiene during the whole process. "The fruit processing on modern lines will lead to financial empowerment of women," she said.

Ms Jabeen pointed out a body with the name of Shandur Businesswomen Association Mastuj had been formed to represent the women involved in the field of dried fruits and handicrafts to enhance their entrepreneurial skills.

Nazim of Khoozh village council, Noor Ajam, said as per a survey conducted last year, only a fraction of households dried the fresh fruit and that there was no marketing facility available in the area to sell the fresh fruits.

He said connection of the farmers and growers with the local and national market was yet another outcome of the project.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1305123

PROJECT ON FRUIT FLY LAUNCHED IN PUNJAB
Business Recorder, December 29, 2016

The Punjab Agriculture Department has launched a project to tackle the issue of fruit fly at a cost of Rs 227 million in 30 districts of the province and increase the production of mangoes, citrus and guava. According to a spokesman of the department, the project will help manage 13 generations of fruit fly in a year which directly damage fruits and cause significant loss.

The farmers are not updated about its control. Generally chemical control is adopted which does not control the pest on long-term basis. Moreover, consequential pesticide residue also causes hazard to human health. Solution lies only in managing fruit fly through integrating all possible methods. Two generations of fruit fly – Zoneeta and Daarseeloze – attack mangoes, guava and orange. To mitigate this loss, a plan has been evolved, the spokesman added.

Initially, 50 percent subsidy will be given in 15 districts on fruit fly trap material. During the last financial year, the department had provided fruit fly traps to orchards spreading over 16,500 acres of land in the province while next year growers of orchards spreading over another 15,000 acres of land will also be provided these fruit fly traps. Orchards growers of notified districts will be provided Methyl Eugenol and six trap boxes per acre for control of male population of fruit fly and Protein Hydrolysate with material for control of female population on cost sharing basis. The farmers having orchard areas from 1 to 12 acres of targeted crops will be eligible for 50pc subsidy and those having area from 13 acres and above for will be provided 30pc subsidy.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183:pakistan/118025:project-on-fruit-fly-launched-in-punjab/?date=2016-12-29

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 19 TH TO DECEMBER 25TH 2016
STRINGENT LAW TO REGULATE FERTILIZERS TRADE
Dawn, December 19th, 2016

Intikhab Hanif

LAHORE: Alarmed by the rampant sale of adulterated and fake fertilizers damaging the agriculture sector in Punjab, the provincial government is making a comprehensive law to regulate the business, introducing harsher punishments for any wrongdoing.

The proposed law will regulate the storage, sale, registration, licencing, distribution and use of fertilizers and their materials. The final draft of the law will be put before the cabinet for approval.

Under the proposed scheme of things, as reported by official sources on Sunday, storing and selling fertilizers shall be subject to a certificate by the government. The licence shall only be granted to those having a minimum qualification equivalent to matriculation and trained by the government regarding handling, storage and use of fertilizers after receipt of a training fee.

A license shall be valid for a period of three years and renewable for as many more. The government shall have the authority to cancel the licence for violation of the law.

The proposed law will authorise the government to fix maximum prices of any fertilizer in unavoidable circumstances. Such prices shall have to be conspicuously mentioned on each bag, container or pack by the producer or importer.

Mixing any particular type of fertilizer with any other type or other extraneous material, storing or selling underweight bags of fertilizer, destroying or altering any price tag attached to any brand of fertilizer shall also be a crime.

The producers too shall have to give information about the description and actual quantity of each brand of fertilizer produced and supplied in the preceding calendar month, and the actual or estimated cost of production.

The dealers shall have to share information about actual quantity of each brand of fertilizer product received in stock on each working day at the end of a preceding calendar month, and detail of fertilizer products sold on retail basis to the farmers.

The proposed law shall provide for a minimum one but not more than three-year imprisonment for the first offence of selling or producing adulterated, counterfeit and unregistered fertilizer with fine not more than Rs500,000. The punishment for every subsequent offence shall invite a minimum two but not more than seven-year imprisonment with not less than Rs500,000 but not more than one million rupees fine.

In case of sub-standard or expired fertilizer, the first offence shall invite a minimum six-month but not more than two-year imprisonment with minimum Rs100,000 but not more than Rs500,000 fine.

Producing fertilizer in an uncertified plant shall carry minimum one but not more than three-year imprisonment with a fine not exceeding Rs500,000.

The punishment for selling an underweight product shall be up to Rs500,000 but not less than Rs300,000 fine, under the proposed law.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1303173/stringent-law-to-regulate-fertilizers-trade

SHRINKING TOBACCO CULTIVATION
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, December 19th, 2016

Mubarak Zeb Khan

Tobacco plantation has shrunk from a peak of 43,000 hectares a few years ago to around 34,000 hectares today, owing to rising costs and a dwindling exports market.

Tobacco is grown on around 0.25pc of total irrigated land. The crop plays an important role in the country's economy by generating income and employment through its farming, manufacturing, distribution and retail.

The earning from export proceeds of tobacco and its products fell to Rs1.52bn in 2014-15 from Rs2.33bn in the year 2009-10, a decline of 35pc. This fall showcases structural and policy issues prevalent in the sector.

The Pakistan Tobacco Board (PTB), a subsidiary of the commerce ministry, based in Peshawar, regulates, controls, promotes exports and fixes grading standards, among other things.

The tobacco cash crop is highly regulated. As per rules, the PTB fixes and distributes each year's export allotment of tobacco and tobacco products to companies. Every exporter is bound to export the full amount of the allotted value.

No tobacco or tobacco product can be exported except under an NOC by the Board. Similarly, tobacco seed can only be exported under a permit issued by the PTB or the federal government.

Data compiled by the PTB shows a work force of 350,000, directly and indirectly employed within the tobacco industry. The sector generates an annual income of around Rs300bn and is a source of livelihood for 1.2m people.

There are 75,000 tobacco growers in Pakistan. Out of these more than 45,000 growers are located in KP producing 95pc of Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) over an area of 30,000 hectares. They are in the districts of Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda, Buner and Mansehra.

On average 80-85m kg of FCV, which is the main ingredient for cigarettes, is produced by growers of these districts every year.

Average production of other varieties — like Dark Air cured, White Patta, and Burley— is around 16m kg. These varieties are mostly used in smoking pipes, chillum and naswar, etc consumed in the domestic market.

Naswar is mostly consumed in KP followed by Punjab and Sindh, respectively.

The chairman of the PTB, Dr Ikram Ghani told Dawn that the fall in growing areas of tobacco occurred mainly because of two reasons.

First is a government mandated consistent increase in the minimum price. Pakistan's tobacco price has become higher than that produced in India and Bangladesh. As a result the demand for the country's tobacco has declined drastically.

This increase has also discouraged the cultivation of high quality tobacco. Low quality tobacco-based cigarettes are mostly consumed in the domestic market. The fixation of value is the first area of concern of the sector, he said.

Mr. Ghani said that the PTB has developed new areas for cultivation of high quality tobacco. The best quality is now being sown in Mansehra, followed by the second and third best quality in Buneer and Charsadda, respectively.

"We also plan to grow quality tobacco in Upper Dir, Bajwar and Khurram tribal agencies", the chairman said.

A tobacco farmer said input cost has increased manifold due to an increase in the price of pesticides, fertilisers and woods-used for curing. Tobacco curing consumes a large amount of firewood, while sowing is still carried out through traditional labour intensive methods.

The chairman further added the board was working on a proposal to introduce mechanisation to help farmers use other means to cure tobacco.

The board is also working with the Bank of Khyber to arrange loans for tobacco growers, as the Agriculture Development Bank was not extending them any loans. "We are also working with insurance companies to manage tobacco crop insurance", the chairman said.

Official data shows that Pakistan exported 4.27m kg of tobacco to 21 countries in 2014-15 against 6.67m kg in the previous year, a decline of 36pc. The decline was also seen in exports of cigarettes which fell to 30.41m in 2014-15 from 83.96m in the previous year, a decline of 64pc.

There are 34 companies registered with the PTB dealing in tobacco and cigarette export. Interestingly, these exports are confined to three markets—Saudi Arabia, followed by Oman and the UAE.

Asked why only one company, Phillip Morris, is involved in cigarette exports, the chairman said other companies have brand issues. They produce brands which cannot be exported. "We are working with other companies to encourage them to explore markets for their products and have asked them to submit their company profiles which will then be shared with international buyers".

The 33 other companies are engaged in exporting raw tobacco to 21 countries. Malaysia is the leading export market for tobacco exports, with 28pc of total tobacco exports. 23pc goes to the UK, Belgium, Greece, Germany, Poland and Netherland; while Saudi Arabia and the UAE together stand at 19.4pc.

29.6pc of the remaining export goes to Myanmar, Philippines, Paraguay, Ukraine, Indonesia, Turkey, Belarus, and Kuwait. A few thousand kilograms are also exported to Australia and the US.

The tobacco crop saves in import substitution and also adds to national treasury through taxes. The sector is also one of the main contributors to the government exchequer and sourced more than Rs104bn in Federal Excise Duty/ Sales Tax in FY 2014-15.

According to the PTB, the complexities of tobacco export and manufacture are well known. Tobacco trade has peculiar features: for example the US, being an important exporter of un-manufactured tobacco, is the leading importer of tobacco needed for blending purposes. At the international level, the quality and price are the principal determining factors in its trade, with stiff competition.

The newly evolved strategy of the PTB for export promotion is to encourage manufacturers to participate in exhibitions abroad, send trade delegations, especially to the Central Asian States, and arrange meetings with trade officers posted in the country's missions abroad.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1303060/shrinking-tobacco-cultivation

FARMERS WARNED OF CONTINUING DRY WEATHER SPELL
Business Recorder, 22 December 2016

KARACHI: The Met Office on Wednesday warned the farmers of the continuing dry weather spell, saying that the growers should evolve plans to irrigate crops in the lean period.

The Met said that the dry weather was expected to continue till the end of December. Farmers obtaining crop water through tube wells should schedule the irrigation as per crop requirements.

"During the last two months dry weather has been reported from most of the agricultural plains of the country and is likely to prevail by the end of December," it said, adding that the farmers should sow vegetables for winter season on time.

It said that the wheat cultivation was under way in the most of the irrigated areas of the country. "Farmers of irrigated areas should irrigate the crop as per requirement in accordance with the prevailing weather conditions. Normally, first irrigation is given 20-25 days after sowing," it added.

It warned that the weeds caused a considerable loss in yield every year, advising the farmers to remove the unwanted plants from their crops at the earliest.

Cold and dry weather in Punjab is likely to prevail in its most parts with dense fog in Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Sargodha divisions till Dec 31. Dry weather will prevail in Sindh.

Weather in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is expected to remain dry and cold with light to moderate rainfall at scattered places in Malakand and Hazara Divisions from Dec 27 to Dec 29. Widely cold and dry weather is likely in the most parts of Balochistan.

Mainly cold and dry but cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan with light to moderate rain and snowfall at scattered places from Dec 24 to Dec 25 and from Dec 28 to Dec 30.

An overcast cold and dry weather is expected in Kashmir with light to moderate rain and snowfall in Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot regions from Dec 27 to Dec 29.

Forecast for the next 24 hours: Mainly cold and dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country with shallow foggy conditions over the plain areas of Punjab and Upper Sindh during the morning hours. "Continental air is prevailing over most parts of the country," it said.

In the next 48 hours: Weather is expected to remain unchanged in the most parts of the country. Temperature in Skardu recued by one degree Celsius to minus nine, Hunza and Gupis minus six, each, Gilgit minus five, Kalam, Kalat and Astore minus three, each, Dir and Quetta minus two, each, Rawalakot, Bagrote and Chitral minus one, each, in the last 24 hours.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/12/22/9-page/830952-news.html

BILATERAL TIES: ENVOY ASKS PAKISTAN TO ADOPT LATEST US AGRO-TECHNOLOGY
The Express Tribune, December 22nd, 2016.

US Ambassador David Hale has said that Pakistan is an important ally in the war on terror and America wants to further step up bilateral trade as it will be beneficial for both the countries.

Talking to a delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), led by its President Khalid Iqbal Malik, the envoy said Pakistan was an agricultural economy but it was using old technology.

Pakistan could increase its agricultural productivity manifold by adopting latest agro-technology and machinery being produced by the US, he said.

Praising the improving security situation, the envoy stressed that better security conditions would attract more investors from the US and other countries to Pakistan and help trade and industrial activities to flourish.

He pointed out that the newly elected US president was a businessman, who knew very well the importance of promoting business relations with other countries.

He expressed optimism that during the tenure of the new US administration, trade and economic relations between Pakistan and the US would get a further boost.

Speaking on the occasion, ICCI President Malik put bilateral trade at around $4.533 billion in January-October 2016, but saw a lot more potential for further enhancing commerce between the two sides.

He suggested that both countries should work to facilitate direct contacts between their private sectors, which was the best way to improve trade relations.

Saying that Pakistan’s economy had suffered a huge loss of $107 billion due to the fight against terror, Malik urged the US to provide easy market access for more Pakistani products. It would prove to be the best compensation for the economic loss.

He called on the US to launch direct flights to Pakistan to help promote trade between the two sides.

Apart from defence products, both countries should focus on enhancing trade in many other areas and the embassy should play its role in bringing chambers of commerce of the two countries closer, which would help in identifying new areas of mutual cooperation, Malik said.

He described the pharmaceutical products manufactured in Pakistan as of high quality and asked the US to try to import these products for the benefit of its consumers.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1271014/bilateral-ties-envoy-asks-pakistan-adopt-latest-us-agro-technology/

PUNJAB GOVT INTRODUCES CLIMATE PROJECT FOR BETTER CROP PRODUCTIVITY
Zahid Baig

LAHORE: The Punjab government has constituted a five-member implementation committee to carry out work on a three-year project of “promotion of high-value agriculture through provision of climate smart technology” aimed at enhancing crop and water productivity through application of modern irrigated agriculture development technologies.

According to the information issued by the Punjab Agriculture department here on Thursday, the Punjab government has introduced a climate smart technology project under “Kissan Package” to achieve higher and quality crop productivity. The government will spend a huge sum of Rs 127.75 million on this project which will be completed in three years.

Convener of the said implementation committee will be the Secretary Agriculture Punjab while Director General Agriculture (Field), Director General Agriculture (Water Management), Director General Agriculture (Extension) will be its members and the project director will perform as the Secretary Committee, the information added.

According to the project details, Punjab government is committed to revamping the agriculture sector to utilise its full potential to drive prosperity in the province for wellbeing of the farmers.

Punjab Growth Strategy (PGS), 2018, envisions making a secure, economically vibrant, industrialised and knowledge-based province which is prosperous and where every citizen can expect to lead a fulfilling life. The PGS also envisages enhancing growth in agriculture by facilitating productivity improvement, increasing competitiveness in agriculture marketing and trade by providing a climate conducive to private sector investment, improving supply chain and value addition.

Despite immense potential, Punjab's agriculture suffers from low productivity due to poor farm management practices, high production costs, inadequate water availability and limited knowledge of employing modern technologies for crop production. Small farmers are unable to make use of modern technologies due to their poor economic conditions and high initial cost of technologies.

Climate is one of the main determinants of agricultural production, which throughout the world, is emerging as one of the main concerns for water resources management and water use activities, especially for agricultural production.

The agriculture sector of developing countries, Pakistan being not an exception, has become more vulnerable to the phenomenon due to their geographic, climatic, and economic settings. Owing to these challenges, adoption of climate smart sustainable technologies is need of the hour.

The interventions envisaged under the proposed project would entail promotion of a hi-tech technologies including solar system and tunnel technology for enhancing crop yields, increasing farm incomes, improving livelihood of people, enabling farmers to adjust the agricultural practices with varying environments, promoting renewable energy sources and alleviating poverty in the province. It is indicated that the solar system would be provided for operating high efficiency irrigation systems.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/12/23/13-page/831270-news.html

RISE IN COTTON OUTPUT LIKELY
Business Recorder,December 25, 2016

With improved weather conditions, the country is expected to get a 10.6 million bales of cotton crop during this season (2016-17). Traders and market experts said the country's cotton crop is likely to improve during this season compared to previous season (2015-16) mainly due to favourable weather conditions. There was no doubt that the country's cotton crop would remain lower side during 2016-17, however likely to be better than last season, they said.

"As per our estimates and feedback from the growers, it is being projected that Pakistan's cotton crop will be 10.6 million bales (1bales = 155kg) slightly higher than 9.7 million in the last year," they added. Pakistan's Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC), in the first week of this month, has already revised cotton production target downward side and estimating a cotton crop of 10.54 million bales (1 bale = 155 kg) in this season against actual target of 14.1 million. CCAC has revised cotton crop estimates for the third time during this season.

Traders said cotton prices were also expected to rebound in the coming month due to higher demand of quality cotton and ginners were also likely to offload improved quality cotton in the market in January, they added. They said that United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) had also predicted that Pakistan's cotton crop would rebound 18 percent during that season. USDA recent report on "Cotton and Wool Outlook" said that Pakistan's crop is projected at nearly 8.3 million bales (1 bale = 480 pounds) in 2016-17, an 18-percent rebound from a 2015-16 crop that was the countries lowest since 1998-99. Although 2016-17 area was forecast at a three-decade low, crop conditions appeared to have been favourable that season as the yield was projected at 748 kg per hectare, one of the top yields on record for Pakistan, it added.

Traders said that shortfall in cotton crop would result in higher import of raw cotton to meet the domestic demand. Although, Pakistan is among the leading cotton producing countries, however from the last few years its cotton production is on downward side and declined drastically to 9.7 million bales in 2015-16. “There is a need to take some serious measures for higher cotton crop to reduce import bill. Timely and cheap availability of agricultural inputs including urea, seeds and water necessary to get higher cotton output, besides quality seeds,” they suggested.

http://www.brecorder.com/cotton-a-textiles/185:pakistan/117035:rise-in-cotton-output-likely/?date=2016-12-25

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 12 TH TO DECEMBER 18TH 2016
UNCERTIFIED TRANSGENIC SEEDS BEING SOLD WITHOUT ANY CHECK
The Express Tribune, December 14th, 2016.

Shahzad Anwar

Pakistan without any assessment of their impact on environment, human health and animals required under the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity as regulations remain weak and infrastructure does not exist in the country.

Most of the genetically modified (GM) seed varieties are available in the domestic market beyond the knowledge of relevant government departments and in connivance with some scientists, bureaucrats, politicians, big farmers and seed suppliers.

“GM seeds could be used as a biological weapon against Pakistan’s strategic cash crops,” a former director of Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) told The Express Tribune.

“The introduction of uncertified GM seeds is aimed at saying goodbye to our indigenous varieties that cope well with the effects of environmental degradation and climate change,” he said.

“The local market is being flooded with uncertified transgenic seeds of cauliflower, cabbage, tomato and other vegetables mainly from India and China under the Truth and Labelling Rules 1991, which does not require declaration of the seed trail,” Dr Shahida Wizarat, Head of Economics Department, Institute of Business Management, said.

During a visit to Quetta last year, she found an NGO distributing saplings of GM apple plants among locals without their knowledge.

“At present, there is no national biosafety centre, prompting the need to build capacity of institutions and regulatory bodies for proper inspection of GM seeds,” former Pak-EPA director general Asif Shuja Khan said.

He insisted that seeds had a great link with the economy, public health and environment of any region and Pakistan was a signatory of the Cartagena Protocol, a legal document that ensured the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biological diversity.

Unfortunately, he said, people working in regulatory bodies had connections with multinational seed companies or they had their own GM seed business.

“The government should pick neutral experts for the regulatory bodies who have no financial concern or stake in the seed business,” Khan suggested and said labelling was another important factor that was missing on imported seed varieties.

He feared that mis-declaration and unregulated flow of GM organisms (GMOs) would destroy biodiversity and could hamper Pakistan's exports.

He recalled that Pak-EPA had started a biosafety project in 2005, which continued till 2014. After the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, the subject was devolved to provinces and since then there had been no institution to regulate the sale of GMOs at federal or provincial levels.

However, he decried that laws were hastily passed to protect the interest of multinational seed companies and cited the example of recently passed Plant Breeders' Rights Bill 2016 in the Senate.

The National Biosafety Committee admitted in its meeting that some foreign aid agencies were providing different seed varieties in universities and research institutes in Pakistan without the committee's approval.

"The country lacks expertise in the testing of transgenic seeds and it also does not have seed testing labs even in the seed certification department," Dr Faheem, a professor of Peshawar University's biotechnology department, said.

In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, he said, many GM seeds were being imported for corn and other varieties without any field trial.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1262277/uncertified-transgenic-seeds-sold-without-check/

RESEARCHERS AIM TO SAVE COTTON FROM CURL VIRUS USING WHEAT
Dawn, December 14th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Agricultural scientists are working on a technology that will allow farmers to grow wheat and cotton together in the same field with a view to save the latter from the cotton leaf curl virus (CLCuV), said Dr Abdul Majid, Country Manager of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) on Tuesday.

Sharing results of three years of research at the US Embassy, he said the technology has proved to be successful but a couple of years are needed for its application, including development of machinery for the inter-cropping.

The research was carried out under the $4.5 million USDA-funded 'Cotton Productivity Enhancement Programme' (CPEP) with the objective to develop an intercropping system that allows cotton to be planted early by sowing it directly into standing wheat. This allows the cotton to be more mature and better able to withstand CLCuV.

Explaining the technology, he said intercropping can begin a month earlier with last irrigation of the wheat crop. This early plantation of cotton into standing wheat crop would bring a change in the geometry of the two crops, raising income of farmers by saving water for irrigation and better cotton crop, he added.

When questioned about the possible loss of wheat as a result of inter-cropping, Dr Majid said 10-11 per cent wheat could be lost but there will be a gain of over 30pc to the farmer.

The new technology will be applied initially in Punjab where wheat sowing season starts after mid-November and harvesting begins after mid-May.

It was also shared that under the CPEP, 5,000 accessions of cotton germplasm imported from the United States have been screened at cotton growing areas of Multan, Faisalabad, Vehari and Sakrand against CLCuV. Out of these, 63 accessions have so far been declared as resistant and highly tolerant to CLCuV.

The CPEP is aimed at minimising the adverse effects of chronic and lethal cotton leaf curl virus disease, its scientific studies and development of genetically resistant varieties using both conventional and non-conventional techniques through highly coordinated approaches at national and international levels.

Cotton Specialist at the US Department of Agriculture, Jodi Scheffler said plant breeders have been successful in their mission, and within the next few years, results will be ready to be implemented at farm level, she said.

"In Pakistan, she said, research management to get disease resistant varieties is good and based on experience of practices and diagnostic tests. We consider Pakistani scientists to be world experts," she said.

Director-General of National Agricultural Research Centre, Dr Muhammad Azeem said that by utilising virus resistant USDA accessions, breeders at the federal and provincial institutions have developed resistant and highly tolerant lines.

"These tolerant lines will be included in preliminary yield trials next year,"

http://www.dawn.com/news/1302168/researchers-aim-to-save-cotton-from-curl-virus-using-wheat

PAKISTAN TO DEVELOP INTER CROPPING SYSTEM
The Express Tribune, December 14th, 2016.

Zafar Bhutta

Speaking at a press briefing, ICARDA Country Manager Abdul Majid revealed that experiments on wheat and cotton crops were being conducted as part of the intercropping system, under which a crop is grown among plants of a different kind.

Early planting of cotton could make the crop more mature that would help control the leaf curl virus and intercropping of wheat and cotton was an option in that regard, said Majid, who was flanked by US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Research Geneticist Dr Jodi Scheffler.

Though intercropping would lead to 10% loss of wheat crop, it would improve farmer earnings by 30-40%, he said, while pointing out that intercropping of wheat and cotton was being tested on a small land area of one acre.

China adopted this system four to five years ago and it is still continuing. Chinese farmers have given up wheat cultivation over 10-20% of the sowing area.

Majid insisted that intercropping would secure both wheat and cotton crops, adding low prices of cotton in Pakistan were the outcome of farmers switching to other crops. Last year, cotton production had dropped by around 30% and this year too it was expected to be lower than the target. Dr Jodi Scheffler said a programme for enhancing cotton productivity and ensuring food security had been launched with cooperation of the United States.

Under this scientific cooperation programme, she said scientists of Pakistan and the US were trying to see how they could manage to reduce the risk posed by the cotton leaf curl virus. She revealed that the scientists had found two genes that would be included in local cotton seeds to resist the disease attack. In this regard, the USDA donated 5,000 cotton seed samples for Pakistan's germ plasm collection.

Pakistani scientists have screened the donated samples and identified multiple sources of resistance to the virus in non-commercial cotton that can be combined into one seed.

Under the programme, diagnostic tests have been developed to identify the virus and track its spread as well as suggest management practices to help farmers mitigate effects of the virus and pests.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1262285/pakistan-develop-intercropping-system/

PUNJAB PLANS TO BUY MORE GM COTTON SEED VARIETIES
Dawn, December 15th, 2016

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: Despite perceived failure of genetically modified (GM) cotton seed experience in Pakistan and official reports confirming the presence of advanced varieties of bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) cotton seed in use, the Punjab government is reportedly planning to acquire two more advanced varieties from a multinational GM technology provider.

The agriculture department held a meeting this week to discuss an update on the negotiations with the GM technology provider and muster support of stakeholders in favour of imported varieties of Bt gene. The meeting — attended by officials, researchers, academia, growers, textile producers and seed companies — was a follow-up of a previous meeting held last month to discuss acquisition of advance gene technologies and related issues.

Sources said the agriculture department was planning to buy Bollgard II and Roundup Ready Flex (RRF) genes from Monsanto under the Kissan Package 2016-17, apparently for better seed quality resisting pests and weed controls amid serious reservations by agriculture scientists and cotton growers.

They said both genes were already in use in cotton seed as they were tested positive in the government laboratory reports conducted by the Agriculture Biotechnology Research Institute (ABRI), Faisalabad, in 2012.

The ABRI confirmed the presence of both traits when some seed companies and government research institutes sent their Bt cotton seed samples for the National Coordinated Varietal Trials (NCVT) nationwide, sources said quoting a report.

According to a government report issued in March 2014 and published in the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) of the United States, Pakistan has adopted transgenic cotton (Bollguard II) over the area of about 86pc.

As per minutes of the first meeting available with Dawn, Punjab Agricultural Research Board (PARB) CEO Noorul Islam gave an overview of the negotiations agreement with Monsanto to harness its cotton GM technology (bollworm and weed control) and efforts of the Punjab government to transform local seed industry into a vibrant one.

It was decided an agreement with Monsanto would be made to get the required cotton gene technology on a long-term basis and acquire bollguard II–RRF gene technology, advance gene technology such as bollguard III and IV and lygus control gene technology for sucking pests. The agreement, if signed, will also include long-term partnership to transform local seed industry with reform project to strengthening six private seed companies and the Punjab Seed Corporation.

The chair was of the view that Monsanto’s double gene and weed control technology has been extensively tested for biosafety in other parts of the world. Therefore, it should be given exempt status by the Ministry of Climate Change. Monsanto should share the biosafety data used in other countries for biosafety clearance and file the case with the ministry.

“We must provide advance lines which have good combination of heat, cotton leaf curl virus (CLCV) and drought tolerance along with good fibre traits,” the minutes quoted the scientists as having agreed.

Punjab Agriculture Department’s Director General Research Dr Abid Mehmood, who was one of the participants of the meeting, said nothing is final to get latest gene technology as stakeholders of the meeting only deliberated upon whether imported GM technology should be welcomed or indigenous varieties should be introduced for improving cotton production.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1302383/punjab-plans-to-buy-more-gm-cotton-seed-varieties

FARMERS ADVISED TO IRRIGATE CROPS ACCORDING TO WEATHER

Business Recorder,December 15, 2016

The Met Office has asked the farmers to sow winter vegetables on time for a better output. It also urged the farmers of irrigated areas to irrigate their crop as per requirement keeping in view the continuing dry weather in most of the agricultural plains of the country. “Normally first irrigation is given 20-25 days after sowing”, it said.

It said that wheat cultivation was under way in the most of irrigated areas of the country, “farmers may sow recommended varieties and seed should be specially treated before sowing in consultation with agricultural offices”.

In areas like Potohar Region and adjoining areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where rain water storages are available, farmers should irrigate crops by using irrigation methods already in place like sprinkler irrigation, it said. “During the last 2 months, dry weather has been reported from most of the agricultural plains of the country and is likely to prevail by the end of second decade. Keeping in view the present and expected dry atmospheric/soil conditions, following advices are proposed farming community especially for rain-fed areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab”, the Met added.

Farmers obtaining crop water through tube wells are advised to schedule the irrigation as per crop requirement. “Farmers of irrigated plains of Punjab, Sindh and KP are advised to complete sowing of wheat crop by mid of December to get maximum yield. In case of late sowing, the recommended varieties should be cultivated to minimize the loss in yield”, it said.

Cold and dry weather is expected in the most parts of Punjab, it forecast that the dense fog may prevail in Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Sargodha Divisions till December 20. Dry weather in Sindh is expected. Mainly cold and dry weather is expected with a light to moderate rainfall at scattered places of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Malakand, Mardan and Hazara Divisions on December 19 and 20.

Weather in Balochistan is also expected to be mainly cold and dry with a light rain in north-western parts on December 19 and 20. Mainly cold and dry but cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan with light to moderate rain and snowfall at scattered places on December 19 and 20. In Kashmir, widely cold and dry weather is expected with a cloudy horizon in the most parts of Kashmir. Light to moderate rain and snowfall is expected in Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot regions on December 19 and December 20.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/113527/

WELFARE OF FARMERS: INSTITUTE ORGANISES TRAINING SESSION

The Express Tribune, December 17th, 2016.

Islamabad: Agriculture Policy Tech Institute of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council has organised a training course for the fifth batch of 89 small farmers of Balochistan under RADP Sub-Project “Skill Development of the Farmers of Balochistan”.

The purpose of the training is to build capacity of the farmers in area of crop sciences, horticulture, agri-mechanisation, water resources, animal sciences and value addition, said a statement Friday.

Minister for NFS&R Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan while addressing the certificate distribution ceremony said that under the on-going skill development programme, 1,000 farmers would be trained from Balochistan.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1265759/welfare-farmers-institute-organises-training-session/

CJ TO TAKE UP PLEA AGAINST SEED ACT TOMORROW

Dawn, December 18th, 2016

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court chief justice will take up on Monday (tomorrow) a petition challenging Seed (Amendment) Act, 2015, allegedly for being a violation of farmers' fundamental rights and passed at the behest of US-based multinational seed manufacturing companies.

Advocate Sheraz Zaka assails the law through a public interest petition, pleading that conditions required under the impugned Act would lead to increase in prices of agricultural products and food security threat.

He states under the law, the farmers would be fined and imprisoned for preserving, selling and exchanging seeds, a tradition that has been in vogue for centuries. He says it is a sheer injustice to millions of small and landless farmers.

The law has made it mandatory for farmers to buy seeds from a licenced company or its agent and they have to do so every time they cultivate a new crop, he says. This will create a monopoly of companies and make farmers dependent on multinational corporations, he adds.

He pleads genetically modified (GM) crops, like BT cotton, has been a disaster in the country and the government's intention to promote them through this law is unfortunate.

He says many European countries have banned GM crops because of their severe adverse impact on environment and Pakistan should also do the same.

He points out the law was first presented in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and later in Punjab but faced strong resistance from farmers in both provinces.

He asks the court to set aside the amended Seed Act of 2015 for being unconstitutional.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1303004/cj-to-take-up-plea-against-seed-act-tomorrow

EFFORTS URGED TO OVERCOME POTENTIAL THREAT OF PESTS
Business Recorder, 18 December 2016

FAISALABAD: Agriculture Scientists and Experts have emphasized the need for stepped-up efforts to overcome the potential threat of pests that are responsible for the loss of billions of rupees to national economy.

They were addressing the International Entomological Congress arranged by the Department of Entomology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad at the New Senate Hall, here Friday. The congress was meant to address the issues of crops' pests including pink boll worm, fruit fly and others.

Chairing the session, UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said pink bollworm has emerged as a threat and difficult to manage in cotton growing areas. He stressed upon the need of joint efforts to map out a strategy to decrease the impact of the plant diseases.

He said agriculture was facing major risks due to climate changes, higher average temperature, glacial retreats, floods, and frequency of droughts.

He said that with climate changes, new plant diseases were coming out. He said that it was the need of the hour to develop the climate resilient varieties. He was of the view that the modern trend to overcome the plant pest can not only increase the productivity but also decrease the losses.

He said that soybean had tremendous scope in our farming system. He showed his concern that the country was importing the oil worth billions of rupees.

Punjab Agricultural Research Board Chief Executive Dr Noorul Islam said that the cotton production had faced the 40 percent decline in 2015-16 due to the pink bollworm.

He maintained that we have lost 4 million bales of the cotton in the said period. He was of the view that cotton area had declined from 6 million acre to 4.3 million acre as the farming community faced the loss due to PBW. He said that cotton growers shifted the land for the sugarcane growing.

He said that efforts are being made to revive cotton that is less water intense crop. He said that the cotton is the one of key players of the economy. He urged the scientists to come up with the tangible solution to minimize the loss of PBW and other pests.

Dean Faculty of Agriculture Prof Dr Muhammad Amjad said that depending on the extent of infestation and weather conditions, this pink ball worm can cause about 20 to 30 per cent crop loss. He urged the researchers to come up with the viable solutions to address the issue. He said that control costs for PBW in Southern California and Arizona were estimated to exceed $ 1.2 billion over the past thirty years.

Dr Hafiz Abdul Qayum said we need to develop new varieties of short duration and suitable for different ecologies in the country.

Entomology Department Chairman Prof Dr Jalal Arif said that Pink Bollworm (PBW) can cause 35-90 per cent loss in cotton yield; and 2.1 to 47.1 per cent loss in oil content.

He said that PBW would increase due to global warming, specifically, increases of 1.5 – 2.5 C in average temperatures would greatly enhance winter survival and allow expansion of PBW.

Talking about implementation of pink bollworm management technologies, he suggested array of cultural controls, particularly implementation of plow down regulations, collection and destruction of wastes/residues of ginning factories and mapping of all cotton fields and extensive trapping to monitor population during on- and off-season with light-and/or pheromone-traps. He also recommended discourage single gene Bt cotton cultivation, monitoring for Bt resistance and season-long pink bollworm control on bt-as well as non-bt cotton.

He said that Punjab Chief Minister had given the task of revamping the agricultural policy to UAF Vice Chancellor in which all issues are addressed effectively. He said that the UAF had developed a culture of internationalization and it is the only institutions ranked among the top 100 universities of the globe.

Dr Thomas A Miller from USA said that said hat pink bollworm is costing US cotton producers more than $32 million each year in control costs and yield losses. To eliminate this annual burden, in 2002, the industry began Phase I of a pbw eradication program 2002 to eradicate this key cotton pest.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/12/18/5-page/829547-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 5 TH TO DECEMBER 11TH 2016
AGRICULTURE MECHANISATION: PROGRESS AND ISSUES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, December 5th, 2016

Mohiuddin Aazim

The use of machinery in farming is growing at a slow pace and the use of most modern, productivity-enhancing, machinery is still very limited.

The most notable improvement over the years is a wider use of tractors. But a critical look at the latest data reveals that out of the total land cultivated with tractors, nearly 90pc falls in the category where they are employed on rent. On slightly more than 10pc of such land, farmers have reported use of their own tractors, according to the FY15 statistics, the latest available so far. About 76pc growers now cultivate land with tractors, 20pc with tractors and draught animals—and only 4pc use draught animals alone.

In terms of percentage, the extent of use of other machinery namely tube-well/pump, thresher, sheller, combined harvesting machine, reaper, drill and spraying machine also shows a rising trend, the yearly report by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research reveals. But not a single machine, among those listed above, is being used extensively. Going beyond this list, the use of other machinery remains too limited to merit the attention of data collectors.

The Punjab government is currently working on a project, with Rs1.184bn budget, to promote agriculture mechanisation. Under this project, due to complete in June 2017, farmers are getting agricultural tools and implements with a 50pc subsidy.

Officials say that a few thousand farmers have so far benefited from this scheme. Farmers are being provided with such implements (including water economising sprayers, crop cutters, weed extractors and seed planters) that are expected to boost per-acre crop yields.

In Sindh, too, a foreign-funded Rs2bn agricultural growth project remained in progress during the last fiscal year. As a part of this project, about 1,500 farmers got agricultural implements at 50pc subsidised prices. More than 400 conventional tubewells and over 70 solar-powered tubewells were also installed at crop fields on a cost-sharing basis.

A similar scheme is on during the current fiscal year as well, officials say without sharing their results so far.

Farmers, in both Punjab and Sindh, have been receiving subsidy on tractor purchasing as in the past. And as a result of this, the national average use of tractors in farming increased in 2015, compared to 2010, officials say.

Similarly, the use of solar-powered tube wells has become very popular helping small farmers. But generally speaking, farm mechanisation is still at its early stage in the country.

Thousands of small farmers still prepare their land, sow seed and groom and harvest their crops manually, or with the help of old-fashioned, non-electrical machines. And this is a major reason for the yield gaps and low farm productivity.

One of the reasons for the low level of mechanisation is low investment in agriculture in general, and in mechanisation in particular, according to a report of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.

"The federal and provincial governments periodically announce subsidy schemes for agricultural machinery but that is not enough. The country needs a well-integrated agriculture mechanisation plan with a focus on local industry of machinery manufacturing and import of productivity-enhancing machines," says a former secretary of Sindh Agriculture Department.

"Subsidy on purchase of tractors and tubewells helps politicians gain political sympathy. Beyond that, in the absence of judicious and effective implementation of subsidy schemes, it contributes very little."

In the last five years, banks have made larger loans to the agricultural sector. But only about 5pc of these loans, have been offered for the purchase of farm machinery, official statistics reveal.

The Punjab government has arranged bank loans for local farmers to buy sprinkler irrigation systems but it has only benefited a small number of farmers so far. The use of sprinkler irrigation system is catching up in Sindh too but mainly due to individual initiatives taken by affluent landowners, NGOs and clusters of small farmer groups.

The use of potato diggers, seed spreaders and crop driers is gradually increasing as local manufacturers are producing such agricultural implements but data gathering remains limited to an old set of large and basic agricultural machines, farmers complain.

Agriculture machinery market is developing and out of the 100-plus companies involved in agriculture machine manufacturing and distribution, at least 30 are quite active. Others focus mainly on imports.

Farmers point out that mechanised broadcast seed-sowing is essential for more and even distribution of seeds across the fields and resultant higher yields but they lament that local manufacturing of this and similar machines is missing and imports are very costly.

They also say that production of farm machinery is not undertaken after a thorough research on market requirements adding that many locally produced machines are of poor quality or have short work-life and are, thus, uneconomical.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1300446

A DISPUTE OVER CANE SUPPLIES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, December 5th, 2016

Mohammad Hussain Khan

SUGARCANE crushing started in the middle of the last month but millers claim they are disappointed with the slow pace of cane supplies. Sugarcane growers, however, dismiss their claim, saying that harvesting of crop is picking-up as a normal practice.

Sugar mills started crushing since November 15 as per agreement reached between farmers and the Sindh government. But on November 24, the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh zone placed an advertisement in the local newspapers that they were hit by a slow pace of cane harvesting.

Currently, 34 out of 38 mills are crushing cane and one more is likely to start this season.

“This is the reason many growers anticipate a raise in the rate and that’s why they are perhaps gradually harvesting their crop avoiding bulk supplies”, says the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture General Secretary, Nabi Bux Sathio. He completely rules out the fact that millers are facing a no-cane situation.

SCA Vice-President Zaid Bhurgari argues that sugar factory owners are getting proper supplies. It is well-known that supplies always gradually pick up after harvest starts. There are reports that while a sizeable quantity of sugarcane is being crushed in mills, another similar quantity is lying in the mills’ yard to be offloaded.

Matiari Sugar Mill’s owner, Mohammad Ali Shah Jamote also confirms that his mill was getting proper supplies. “Rather, it is picking up”, he says. Likewise, the general manager of a Mirpurkhas-based sugar mill (wants to remain anonymous) says his mill is operating at 75-80pc of his mill’s crushing capacity. Initial days of this season are considered a lean period, but given the present situation, crushing would be in full swing by the first week of December.

Factories in Tando Mohammad Khan and Thatta districts are offering a rate of Rs160/40kg on varieties with ‘low yields’ or, according to Sathio, making a 10pc deduction on the overall sugarcane weight. In some cases, growers are told by the mills that varieties like PSf-238 and PR-1,000 would be received at the fag end of this season, like in January or February.

Sathio also claims in some cases growers have received Rs192/40kg (inclusive of transportation charges) by a factory in Mirpurkhas that got cane from Tando Mohammad Khan. He wonders when mills are meeting 90pc of their crushing requirements in Tando Allahyar, Tando Mohammad Khan and Mirpurkhas, why would they suspend crushing?

Price of sugar has not dropped in the retail market even after timely crushing of sugarcane, unlike last year when mills started crushing by the second half of December. Sugar's wholesale price was reported at Rs60/1kg and retail price at Rs63/1kg, until November 27, according to a retailer.

Supplies of sugarcane are also continuing from Punjab as the Sindh government didn't agree with growers to ban the inter-provincial cane movement, because a similar ban could not be enforced on wheat on the proposal of the food department. The upper Sindh's sugar mills, especially those in Ghotki district, order their crop from Punjab, owing to their proximity to its border.

Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) vice president Mehmood Nawaz says the trend of crushing has not declined and is rather increasing now.

According to him, sugar mills in Mirpurkhas, Digri and Mehran are daily crushing 140,000 maunds, 100,000 maunds and 185,000 maunds of cane, respectively. Even those sugar mills that delay payments are not complaining of a 'no-cane situation', he says, adding, "Such an advertisement by PSMA Sindh zone is simply mind-boggling.

PSMA Sindh zone's Secretary Qasim Pahore says substantial crushing is not yet being seen, and PSMA had informed the government that starting crushing before December 15 neither benefits neither millers nor growers but the government insisted that crushing must begin by mid-November.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1300445

CROP LOSS MANAGEMENT
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, December 5th, 2016

Amin Ahmed

THE country's apex agricultural research body is evolving strategies to enhance adoption of harvest and post-harvest management technologies through public-private community partnerships.

The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc) has before it two strategies: making agri-food systems more knowledge-intensive and strengthening strategic partnerships and networking.

These strategies are focused on devising innovative, best practices applied and integrated for reduced harvest and post-harvest losses and wastage and developing technical competency expertise in different aspects of post-harvest management.

Currently, the magnitude and nature of geographical spread of research activities in post-harvest loss management is quite meagre as compared to the challenges and efforts needed.

The success of strategies will largely depend on effective partnerships and cooperation among research and development organisations, and other stakeholders engaged in harvesting, post-harvesting and marketing of agricultural commodities and products.

To forge such an effective partnership, Parc needs to rigorously launch a series of awareness campaigns about the importance and scope of networking among stakeholders.

The aim should be to help stakeholders and partners not only to engage in collaborative efforts but also to mobilise partnership support from Parc's sister organisations.

Losses of fresh fruits and vegetables in developed countries range from 2pc for potatoes to 23pc for strawberries, with an average of 12pc losses between production and consumption in general.

On an average, the losses at the retail, food service and consumer levels are about 10pc in developed countries and 20pc in developing countries.

Pakistan's post-harvest losses are estimated at Rs134bn annually. Data collected for fiscal year 2014-15 showed that 7.25m tonnes of vegetables and 6.80m tonnes of fruits were produced having a total value of Rs537bn. At least 25pc losses of horticultural crops means 3.5m tonnes are lost. If post-harvest losses are cut by 1pc, horticultural products worth more than Rs5bn could be saved.

Adequate post-harvest treatments not only minimise post-harvest losses, but also maximise the producer's profits, and result in better-appearing, more nutritious fruits and vegetables on consumer's plates.

In post-harvest management, technical competency needs to be developed in areas like preserving quality (especially for the exportable commodities), pre-storage treatments, crop storage, pest management, packaging, primary and secondary crop processing, qualitative and quantitative loss assessments, and adoption of best international practices.

Currently, four federal and six provincial institutions are engaged in conducting post-harvest management-related research activities. Their focus on research includes variety screening, packaging, storage, grading, fruit processing, fruit handling and preservation through dehydration.

The commodities focused are mango, citrus, apple, peach, apricot, dates, plum, pomegranate, persimmon, guava, grapes, lemon, potato and onion.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1300444

MARKETING OF AGRI PRODUCE

There are certain things in life which are neglected by default and not by design. Almost all the governments in Pakistan have tried to give a lot of incentives to the agricultural sector for ensuring self-sufficiency in food and optimum utilisation of the land resources of the country. However, proper marketing of agricultural produce, which could greatly help farmers, has invariably been missing from this strategy.

Addressing the inaugural session of a three-day workshop on students' professional development, Iqrar Ahmed, Vice Chancellor of University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, nonetheless, made it a point to highlight this issue by asserting that weak marketing of agriculture produce, both in the domestic and international markets, was hurting this sector.

According to him, middlemen are fleecing the producers as well as consumers. Online shopping has, lately, gained an immense importance and "there is a dire need of getting benefit from information and communication technologies to compete with the rest of the world." Iqrar Ahmed lamented that after completing their studies, most of the students were looking for government jobs but they could become self-employed; this will be possible only after they polish their entrepreneurial skills and generate innovative ideas.

More than 90 percent of the products in the country are directly or indirectly related to the agriculture sector and information and communication technology is required to increase the profitability of the sector. The University of Agriculture Faisalabad established a Business Incubation Centre eight years ago to provide a platform and give an opportunity to the students to run a start-up company.

There is absolutely no doubt that Agriculture University of Faisalabad is the premier institution of the country. It was established in 1906 as the first major institution of higher education in the undivided Punjab to provide proper education in various fields of agriculture, undertake related research, provide professionals to the agricultural departments of the government and disseminate knowledge to the farming community to enhance their productivity. Again, there was no doubt that this top rated institution has done a commendable job and made the country proud in the international circles.

The observations of the Vice Chancellor of the University are, in our view, on the spot and need to be accorded high priority in the policy formulation of agriculture sector. The grimness of situation demands that agricultural marketing should have been given due importance but the policymaking circles have not made the needed efforts with the result that the middlemen and some other manipulators have continued to exploit farmers with impunity.

Farmers generally have to sell their produce at the harvest time at very cheap rates offered by the middlemen because of financial and capacity constraints to store the produce and wait for better times. In the process, not only the agriculturists and consumers get a highly raw deal but the economy of the country suffers due to low savings and investment in the agriculture sector and depressed demand from the agriculture sector for non-agriculture products and services. In fact, such a vicious circle continues to depress the economy and is highly exploitative.

The sad aspect is that this distorted state of affairs is missing from the government's strategy, and hardly finds any mention in the official documents and various packages offered by the government from time to time. We have now a number of agricultural universities in the public sector but these too lack the facilities of educating the farmers and consumers to form cooperative societies and establish markets and sale points at their own to benefit society at large.

The government has set up Sunday markets in certain cities to promote direct contact between producers and consumers but the scheme failed to make much headway. This needs to change with the help of latest technology and better education of farmers. Hopefully, banks would also be more liberal in offering credit for cold storage and proper transportation of agriculture produce.

The aim should be to ensure a fair trade regime by compensating those who really deserve and depriving those who are exploiting the system up to the hilt. The University of Agriculture Faisalabad is, in our view, best suited to begin this effort and extend its knowledge and experience in this area to other institutions to set right an unhealthy practice that has been in vogue for a long time.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/12/05/16-page/825641-news.html

BIO-SALINE AGRICULTURE IN THAR: PILOT PROJECT TO UTILISE UNDERGROUND SALINE WATER
Business Recorder, 6 December, 2016

KARACHI: Drought phenomenon could not affect Tharparkar after successful completion of a pilot project that will utilize underground saline water extracted from mining operations in Thar Block-II for bio-saline agriculture.

This was revealed by Professor Dr. Ajmal Khan of National Institute of Sustainable Halophyte Utilization (ISHU), University of Karachi at an international synergy seminar on sustainable utilization of saline resources.

In this regard, Vice Chancellor Karachi University, Prof Muhammad Qaiser and Chief Operating Officer of SECMC, Syed Abul Fazal Rizvi signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on behalf of ISHU and Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company (SECMC), respectively.

The innovative project in Tharparkar is aimed at reducing dependency on rain water for growing fodder as it will seek to utilize salt resistant grass for non-conventional fodder. After successful completion, SECMC plans to scale up the project which will benefit the people of Tharparkar multifold through the production of fodder crops irrespective of seasonal limitations brought on by recurring drought cycles.

Tharparkar district is ranked as one of the lowest in Sindh on Human Development Indices (HDI) and dependence on traditional but inconsistent means of income generation such as rain-dependent agriculture and livestock rearing – its economic landscape continues to suffer. As is common in the region, there are frequent drought cycles which hinder the few means of livelihood which are solely rain-dependent. When drought hits the region, a domino-effect takes place that affects entire economy causing suffering and misery to the locals.

Dr. Ajmal said that aligned with the Institute's vision, domesticating various halophytes to serve as a source of fodder, forage, bio fuel, oil seeds, medicinal plants and other possible usage by utilizing brackish water in Thar will reduce pressure on fertile lands and sweet water resources.

"Successful implementation of this project will protect Thari community against the negative impacts of drought by providing enough forage throughout the year," he said.

In a statement issued here on Monday, COO of SECMC, Rizvi said that the pilot project would take one year to complete and will be scaled-up in a phase-wise approach over the next few years.

"Sustainability of the project shall be ensured by on-site training of local farmers and availability of a larger seed bank through which market linkages and avenues for commercialization amongst the local populace can be enhanced," he said.

Rizvi was of the view that this can be a game-changer for the rural community in Tharparkar who are solely dependent on traditional means of income generation with no other prospects in sight. He further said that this endeavour was one of those many efforts which are part of the Company's vision to bring prosperity to the local Thari people.

Professor Bilquees Gul, Head of ISHU, said that a positive collaboration between the academia and the corporate sector was a welcome opportunity because it gave way for innovation and implementation for the sustainable utilization of halophytes.

She said that together with executing the mega coal-mining project in Thar Block-II which is of national importance, this bio-saline agriculture project by SECMC was a vital social and moral obligation of the Company to take care of the communities in the largely under-privileged region of Tharparkar.

SECMC, through its coal-mining project, has taken the responsibility to uplift the communities in its midst by improving the socio-economic conditions and providing them with multiple means of livelihood to ensure the Thari people are not affected by natural calamities such as the recurring droughts.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/12/06/9-page/825783-news.html

'QUALITY SEED, MODERN SOWING METHODS TO HELP INCREASE AGRI OUTPUT'
Business Recorder, 8 December, 2016

FAISALABAD: The agriculture productivity of the country can be increased manifold by applying the available system including quality seed, sowing methods, balanced usage of inputs, methods to reduce post harvest losses and proper spray of pesticides, said University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan.

He was talking to the participants of annual function of the Department of Entomology here. He said that the awareness about agri practices was imperative to narrow down the gap between the progressive and ordinary farmers.

He also stressed upon the need to raise the investment on the agricultural research and development. He said that in India, percentage on research is three times more than us.

He called for diversification in the crops as we are only stuck to five crops whereas we can grow more than 400 crops in the country due to best ecosystem.

Talking about education, he said that quality education works as an engine of the development. The UAF was making all-out efforts to ensure the quality education and provide the new avenue of knowledge sharing for the students. He said that only education could eradicate injustices and social disparities. He said that the country was blessed with tremendous resources. There is a need to tap the potential.

He praised the Department of Entomology for producing a quality manpower and research in the area of the agriculture. He also stressed he the researchers to come up with out-of-the-box solutions to problems of the general public and farming community. He said that the university was making all-out efforts to ensure quality education at par with international standards.

Chairman Department of Entomology Prof Dr Jalal Arif said that Punjab government was formulating a comprehensive Agriculture Policy under the convenership of Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan to address the issue of the farming community and make the sector profitable. He said that the University leadership was taking all measures to address the issues of the farming community not only at the farmer's doorsteps but also at the governmental level. He said the Department of Entomology BS program had gained 70 students of 3 plus CGPA.

Dr G Christopher Cutler from Dalhousie University Canada said that the University of Agriculture Faisalabad and Dalhousie University Canada have launched a joint degree program BS (Plant Sciences). He said that Pakistan was having a rich culture and loving people.

The students of the Department enthralled the audience with the performances presenting the colors of all provinces. The students also come up with the different skits.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/12/08/11-page/826535-news.html

FARMERS MOUNT PROTEST AGAINST QATARI HUNTERS OVER DAMAGE TO CROP
Dawn, December 10th, 2016

Shakeel Ahmad

MULTAN: Chickpea farmers clashed with police in Mahni area of Mankera tehsil, in Bhakkar district, over damage to their crop caused allegedly by members of the Qatari royal family hunting houbara bustards.

After pronouncements were made through loudspeakers, the protesters gathered in Mahni and started marching towards the camps of hunters, but the police stopped them.

The police asked the protesters to disperse peacefully, but they insisted that the hunters should leave instead because they were destroying the only crop produced during the entire season.

The police baton-charged the protesters when they tried to continue their march towards the camps. The demonstrators shouted slogans against the government and the hunters.

Later on, Mankera's Assistant Commissioner Muhammad Mustafa reached the spot and held negotiations with the protesters.

It was decided that a delegation of protesters would meet the royal hunters to find out whether or not the problem could be solved amicably through compensation etc.

A protester told Dawn that chickpea was the only crop suitable for the sandy soil of the area.

He said that hunting of the rare bird by Arab dignitaries had been continuing in the area for over a decade.

"The UAE hunters caused less damage to our crops and compensated the affected farmers handsomely whereas the Qataris pay a nominal compensation to only some of the farmers," he said.

He said that last year the Qatari hunters announced that a hospital and a school would be built in the area when a similar protest had been held against them, but no initiative had been taken so far in this regard.

District Police Officer Khalid Masood claimed the damage inflicted on the crop was not as grave as made out to be. The local farmers had become used to getting compensation from the royal hunters by holding demonstrations against them.

He added that the Arab hunters had initiated various development projects in the area.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1301587