

Farmers recommended to store and sell ragi (06, jan 2014)

Ragi or Finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*) is grown as a cereal in Asia and Africa. Ragi is the staple diet in many villages across South India especially in North Karnataka besides Maharashtra and the North Western Zone of Tamil Nadu. It is also used as a major substitute for rice among the diabetic patients and also the diet conscious people. Ragi is majorly utilized in savories, sathu mavu, biscuits and feed industry.

In India, it is mainly grown in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Maharashtra. More than 80 per cent of the crop is grown as Kharif crop. In 2012-13 India produced 19.29 lakh tonnes of ragi from 13.07 lakh hectares with an average productivity of 1641 kg per hectare. Karnataka tops the Indian ragi production with a contribution of 67 per cent followed by Tamil Nadu (11 %), Uttarakhand (9 %) and Maharashtra (7 %). Tamil Nadu is having the highest productivity of 2731 kgs per hectare which is higher than the country's average productivity of 1641 kg per hectare. According to Fourth Advance Estimates of Government of India, India will produce 15.9 lakh tonnes during kharif of 2013-14.

The area and production of ragi shows a declining trend over years where as the productivity showed upward trend. The compound annual growth rate in area and production from 2001 to 2012 had shown a negative growth rate of 2.56 and 1.57 per cent respectively. Tamil Nadu ranks second in India's ragi production which produced 1.71 lakh tonnes of ragi from 0.75 lakh hectares.

Ragi contributes 3 per cent of total area under cereals and 2 per cent of the total cereal production in Tamil Nadu. Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Salem, Erode and Vellore districts together accounted for 95.15 per cent of the total area of 75,650 ha under this crop during 2010-11. Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri districts alone share 67.66 per cent of the State's ragi production. The area and production showed declining trend where as the productivity showed increasing trend in Tamil Nadu.

It is produced mainly in Kharif season (July-August season) in all the major ragi growing districts as rainfed crop. It is also grown as irrigated crop in Krishnagiri district as August sowing in ragi is famous after gingelly harvest. Fresh arrivals will start at end of December and the stored crop will serve round the year. Since Tamil Nadu's production does not support the demand for entire State, traders are also procuring it from Karnataka.

Ragi is exported to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Srilanka. Export demand for ragi exists all round the year. Ragi could be stored for more than 5 years without any storage loss.

Under this circumstance, Tamil Nadu ragi farmers are to be informed whether to store the harvested ragi or sell immediately. Scientists in the back office of Agro Marketing Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI &BPC) Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies (CARDS) in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University have analyzed the last 10 years prices of Ragi that prevailed in Tindivanam market.

Ragi is substituted with maize in feed preparation whenever the price of ragi is lower than maize price. Ragi production in Karnataka, demand by the end users and maize price are the major factors which decide the price of ragi in Tamil Nadu. It fetches peak prices during August- November and lean prices during December- January since arrivals from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu coincide during January. Trade sources reported that this year bumper ragi

production is expected in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu which supports the price of ragi in the lower side. Also the current farm gate price of maize is Rs.1300 per quintal where as ragi is being sold at Rs.1700 per quintal. This will not support the increased use of ragi in the feed preparation.

Econometric analysis of Back Office of AMI & BPC predicted that farm gate price of ragi will rule around Rs.17-19 per kg during December, 2013 to February, 2014. After February there are chances for price to increase upto Rs.2 per kg. Hence farmers are recommended to store the harvested ragi and sell in March-April, 2014.

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