**Alarming Discomfiture in Kerala's Agriculture Sector**

By Rajesh Abraham, 10th February 2016

KOCHI: The distress in the state’s agriculture sector is well-known, but the extent of damage, in terms of sheer numbers, is alarming.

The latest statistics, put out by the Economics and Statistics Department, shows that there is a drop in production in not just natural rubber, but also in other key crops cultivated in the state viz pepper, ginger, turmeric and paddy from 2001-02 to 2014-15.

The ‘Report on Agricultural Statistics’ reveals that there has been a steep 30 per cent drop in production of pepper over the last 13 years to 40,690 tonnes from 85,431 tonnes, despite the fact that the price of the commodity hit a high of Rs 715/kg last year, before declining to Rs 515/kg now. The area of cultivation of the spice also declined by 58 per cent

The rubber production fell by 13 per cent though surprisingly the area of cultivation increased by 16 per cent since 2001-02. Clearly the farmers have stopped production due to non-remunerative prices of the commodity.  Ginger, another key spice from the state, also saw a declining trend in production; down 43 per cent in the same period.

P Indira Devi, professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Kerala Agricultural University, explained the dip in pepper production may be due to the wilt disease.

“The pepper wilt management is very poor. Changes in climate conditions have also affected pepper production,” she said.

Surprisingly, there’s a big jump in the production of arecanut - up 49 per cent in the same period.

“The farmers have a tendency to become efficient in crop management when the prices soar. This may be the reason for the sharp rise in arecanut production,” Indira Devi said.

The price of white arecanut, harvested during 2014-15, shot up by 63 per cent compared to the prices during 2013-14.

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