Govt moves to restrict use of glyphosate

Says application of herbicide shall be only through pest control operators

VISHWANATH KULKARNI
Bengaluru, July 9

After planning to ban 27 pesticides, the Centre has now moved to curb the use of glyphosate, a widely-used herbicide in the country.

"No person shall use glyphosate except through Pest Control Operators," said a draft notification issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, published on July 8. It has given 30 days time for any person to raise objection or suggestions on the draft order, issued at the request of Kerala.

The Restriction on use of Glyphosate Order, 2020, will come into force on the date of its final publication in the Official Gazette, the Ministry said in a notification.

Glyphosate is among the 39 widely-used agrochemicals by farmers in India to control weeds in tea plantations, non-crop and cropped areas, for about four decades now. The use of herbicides such as glyphosate has been on the rise as farmers have been increasingly relying on chemicals to tackle labour shortage, rising costs and to protect their yields from weeds, which compete with standing crops for nutrients.

Further, the order states that all holders of certificate of registration granted for glyphosate and its derivatives shall return their certificates to the Registration Committee for incorporation of the warning in bold letters 'The use of glyphosate formulation to be allowed through Pest Control Operators (PCOs)' on the label and leaflets.

The industry said the government's proposed move is impractical as there are not many PCOs in the farm sector and that it may impact the sales of glyphosate and its product formulations.

Pradeep Dave, President of the Pesticides Manufacturers and Formulators Association of India, said the government wants to see that the application of glyphosate and its products is taken up by qualified people such as PCOs.

Glyphosate is among the 39 agrochemicals widely used by farmers in the country

"However, the only problem is that such operators are not registered with the agriculture department or government," he said.

Surprised at the Centre's move, Crop Life India CEO, Asitava Sen, said CropLife and its concerned members implore the Centre to allow at least 90 days time to respond, instead of the 30 days specified in draft order given Covid and lockdown situation.

Kavita Kuruganti of the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture said the draft order was pretty useless in its scope of action from government. "It does not address anything related to the sale of glyphosate. In the absence of regulatory oversight over who is selling, who is buying and who is using on the ground, what is the point of saying that use is restricted to application only by PCOs? It appears that the government has not yet grasped the full set of repercussions with glyphosate. The government needs to go to the next logical step of banning the chemical," she said.

Rajesh Agarwal, Managing Director, Insecticides India Ltd, said there are hardly any PCOs in rural areas, and that the government's decision could be difficult to implement and may hurt sales. Further, the use of PCOs for spraying would also add to the costs of farmers.

"This move is against farmers' interest," said CD Mayee, President of South Asia Biotech Centre. The government could be thinking of curbing the cultivation of HT cotton by restricting the sales, but now there are other cotton growers who are dependent on these herbicides to control weeds.

Moreover, where are the PCOs in rural areas? The concept of PCO may be prevalent in the US but not in rural India. Any move to create PCOs now would result in corruption and licence raj, yet again, Mayee said.

Major producers of glyphosate in India include Bayer, Sumitomo, Adama, Crystal and Rallis.

A Bayer India spokesperson said as with all crop protection products, glyphosate too has been subjected to rigorous testing. Bayer, in partnership with other stakeholders, will continue to engage with the Ministry to understand this draft order in detail.

Glyphosate consumption stood at close to 670 tonnes during 2018-19. The government's move is also aimed at controlling the spread of illegal herbicide tolerant (HT) cotton, which more farmers are seen planting this year.

The timing of the Ministry's move to restrict use of glyphosate seems interesting. It may be recalled that recently, Bayer reached a $10.9-billion settlement with the Roundup plaintiffs in the US, who had claimed that the use of herbicide had caused them to develop a form of blood cancer. Glyphosate is an active ingredient in the weedicide Roundup.

Now, a taste of farm-fresh edible oil from the marketers of Amul

GCMMF launches 'Janmay' brand for Gujarat and Rajasthan markets

OUR BUREAU
Ahmedabad, July 9

Dairy and food products major Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which sells dairy products under the Amul brand, on Thursday announced its foray into the edible oil segment with the launch of 'Janmay' brand of consumer packs of edible oils.

The dairy major has launched five variants — farm fresh cottonseed oil, soyabean oil, groundnut oil, sunflower oil and mustard oil in 1 ltr pouch, 5 ltr jar and 15 kg tin pack. Initially, it will be available in Gujarat and Rajasthan markets through Amul parlours and retail counters.

RS Sodhi, MD, GCMMF on Thursday informed that "The launch of 'Janmay' range of edible oils in Gujarat is to provide remunerative price to edible oilseeds growers in Banaskantha in North Gujarat and South Gujarat. Our country is highly dependent on imported oils; around 65 per cent of oils consumed is imported as trend is skewed towards refined oils. Indigenous oils such as groundnut oil, mustard oil contribute around 25 per cent of total oil consumption in India." Janmay means "newly born" or "fresh" he added.


RS Sodhi, Managing Director, Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation

The dairy major observed that the demand for branded and packed oil shot up during the pandemic and decided to launch its own brand of edible oils.

Janmay oil products are being packed at a new and modern plant near Panalpur, North Gujarat.

Sodhi also stated that the 3.6 million milk producers of GCMMF are also farmers some of whom cultivate oil seeds such as groundnut, cottonseed and mustard in Gujarat. This is to provide stable and remunerative price to edible oilseed growers of Gujarat.

It is important to note that India had liberalised edible oil imports despite having 90 per cent+ self-sufficiency in 1990s at the cost of domestic producers.

Because of such policy, today India is the world's largest importer of edible oils, spending around ₹75,000 crore annually on foreign exchange on imports, Sodhi stated.

Monsoon above normal as rains move to North

VINSON KURIAN
Thiruvananthapuram, July 9

The rainmaker monsoon trough over North India has shifted alignment further to the North with its western end anchored over Amritsar with its body and tail running across Karnal, Bareilly, Ballia, Patna and Bhagalpur and its end running close to the foothills of the Himalayas.

This is synonymous with monsoon-break-like conditions when rains weaken over the West Coast, Central and adjoining Peninsular India though isolated flare-ups occur at times. In contrast, rains scale up over East and North-East India and parts of the East Coast, though low in intensity.

Monsoon above normal

This has come at a time when the monsoon has continued its above-normal precipitation from June into the second week of July. The country as a whole has received above normal rainfall of 13 per cent till Thursday (June 1-July 9). Tamil Nadu has dramatically returned to the normal category (in fact 17 per cent rainfall above normal and is inching closer to the excess rainfall mark of 20 per cent and above).

But Kerala and Lakshadweep represent the other end with a deficit of 18 per cent reach and tottering close to the deficit (-19 per cent and lower). Central India has turned in a good account for itself except East Gujarat which is in deficit (-33 per cent). In the North-West, Himachal Pradesh (-24 per cent) and Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh (-47 per cent) are nursing deficits too.


The country as a whole has received above normal rainfall of 13 per cent till Thursday PTI

In the North-East, Nagaland-Manipur-Mizoram-Tripura has a deficit of 33 per cent, mainly attributable to the very high averages applicable there. With the shifting of the monsoon towards this region as also to the foothills of the Himalayas, the rainfall figures are expected to improve over North-West India as well as East and North-East India replete with flood events, especially in the latter.

The land-based trough over North India will continue to witness convergence of south-westerly/southerly winds from the Bay of Bengal, the IMD said.

This would bring continue to bring fairly widespread to widespread rainfall with isolated heavy to very heavy falls over Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, northern parts of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, hills of West Bengal, Sikkim and the North-Eastern states during the next five days.

Thunderstorm alert

Isolated extremely heavy falls have been forecast over Uttarakhand and West Uttar Pradesh on Saturday and Sunday; East Uttar Pradesh during on Friday to Sunday; Bihar on Friday and Saturday; hills of West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh from Thursday to Saturday.

An extended IMD warning for July 14-16 said that fairly widespread to widespread rainfall or thundershowers with isolated intense falls is likely over the North-East and adjoining East India; plains of North-West India and along the West coast.

It would be scattered to fairly widespread with isolated intense falls over the Islands, Central India and parts of the South Peninsula.

Tea Board cancels licences of 18 instant tea and biofertiliser units

PS SUNDAR
Coonoor, July 9

The Tea Board's Zonal Office in Coonoor has cancelled the licences of 18 biofertiliser and instant tea factories for various deviations.

Tea Board's Executive Director M Balaji said that this followed the perusal of replies and depositions received from them on the show-cause notices issued to them arising from the inspections carried out by the Board's officials to ascertain the veracity of the usage of tea waste.

However, it had observed that some instant tea factories and biofertiliser units were not adhering to the terms and conditions of the licence regarding the proper use of the tea waste, Balaji said. Some sold tea wastes which were reported to be misused in recycling adding colour and sold in rural shops in the South Indian market, he observed. While the inspection was conducted in 22 units, licence has been cancelled for 18 units which had not maintained proper accounts of the raw material and the end produce.

Upcountry demand lifts tea prices at Kochi auctions

V SAJEEV KUMAR
Kochi, July 9

A robust upcountry demand has lifted prices of dust teas at Kochi auctions this week.

Witnessing a strong demand in CTC grades in sale 28, the market for varieties such as PD, RD and SRD observed a strong feature and appreciated by longer margins of ₹10-15. The demand has resulted in higher price realisation, which has gone up at ₹117.74 per kg against ₹109.78 in the previous week. However, the quantity offered was only 7,48,938.40 kg, as active monsoon in the high ranges started impacting tea arrivals. In orthodox dust, the market was firm to dearer. The quantity offered was 17,500 kg and a small quantity sold was absorbed by exporters and upcountry buyers.

The market for select Nilgiri brokens and whole leaf remained steady and tended to ease. The quantity offered was 3,40,585 kg, while the average price realisation was up by ₹157 per kg compared to ₹149 in the previous week. CTC leaf sales witnessed a strong demand with 98 per cent was sold in the offered quantity of 63,000 kg. The market was higher by ₹10-15.

Rising Covid cases: Gold cements its haven status

COMMENTARY

G CHANDRASHEKHAR

After struggling to find direction until last week, gold, punters' eternal favourite, has today breached $1,800 an ounce to touch a multi-year high of $1,818/oz. It is the highest level since September 2011.

The metal is buoyed by the ongoing risk aversion binge with heavy demand from safe haven hunters in the context of rising Covid-19 infections not only in the US, where it reached the 3 million mark earlier this week, but also in countries as far apart as Brazil and India.

The lockdown of Australia's Melbourne city after a surge in Covid-19 cases has added another layer of uncertainty about the ability of governments and health systems to contain the pandemic from recurring. Developments relating to Hong Kong are also on the radar.

A surge in the interest in the yellow metal is also evidenced by rising inflow in ETFs. Over 30 tonnes have flowed into ETFs in the first week of this month. According to the World Gold Council, such inflows amounted to 104 tonnes in June and, in the first half of this year, they aggregated 734 tonnes.

Very clearly, gold is now an investors' delight, affirming its safe haven status during this time of global health and economic uncertainty. The fact of the matter is that gold is on a fierce tug-of-war with the equities market. Hopes of a V-shaped recovery are rising, as recent data suggest. If the flow of economic data continues to stay positive for a period of time, the stock markets are bound to move higher, gradually moving towards a 'risk-on' environment.

On the other hand, notwithstanding improvements in economic data, if the pandemic situation worsens, it will heighten the uncertainty, and drive investments towards safe assets like gold.

Importantly, the yellow metal is currently benefiting from ultra-loose monetary policies pursued by various central bankers and expectation that such a stance will continue for a longer period. Wider fiscal deficit and rising debt levels are there for all to see.

No wonder, speculative financial investors are betting on a further rise in gold prices and have expanded their net long positions in the bourses over recent weeks. It should come as little surprise if gold prices made further gains towards $1,850/oz in the days ahead.

Physical market is down

However, it must be remembered that financial investment generates speculative froth which can dissipate at the slightest sniff of danger. The physical market for the yellow metal is far from supportive. Import and consumption in two of the world's largest markets — China and India — are enervated.

Continued lockdown in India, limited pace of economic activity and rural population engaged in farm-related activities mean poor physical demand. Sharply rising domestic prices triggered by record international rates keep buyers at bay. Demand destruction at higher prices is very real.

On the other hand, scrap sales are rising, adding to supplies. So, recovery in gold demand in our country will not be anytime soon. India's June imports were as low as 11 tonnes (over 80 percent lower year-on-year), showing only a marginal improvement over even negligible arrivals in April and May.

Given that physical demand in Asia is unlikely to recover soon, gold runs the risk of a big correction if economic data begin to provide evidence of revival in manufacturing and service sectors as well as in trade and investment. It may take the whole Q3 for the revival to gather pace.

In the event, equities will get a boost and gold will lose its sheen. A correction towards $1,600/oz levels in Q4 remains a distinct possibility on current reckoning.

The writer is a policy commentator and commodities market specialist. Views are personal

Palghar farmers seek GI tag for Wada Kolam rice

RAHUL WADKE
Mumbai, July 9

Dahanu-Gholvad chikoo fruit from Palghar district of Maharashtra enjoys the distinction of having Geographical Indication (GI) tag. Now, efforts are being made to get GI tag for Wada Kolam rice, a unique fragrant variety cultivated in the Wada taluka of the district.

On June 29, a final application was made with the GI Registry in this regard. The GI Registry is a part of the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks.

Wada Kolam rice variety is cultivated only in coastal Palghar district, which was carved out of the gigantic Thane district in 2014. Palghar has a unique agro-climate due to proximity to the Arabian sea as also to the woody Sahyadri mountain range. The fertile land also produces chikoo or sapota fruit, which received a GI tag in January 2017.

Wada Kolam rice variety is cultivated only in coastal Palghar district which has a unique agro-climate. The fertile land also produces chikoo or sapota fruit, which received a GI tag in January 2017

The effort to get the GI tag has been spearheaded by prominent Intellectual Property lawyer Ganesh Hingmire and local farmer families from Wada taluka. Hingmire told *BusinessLine* that Wada Kolam rice is very much sought after in the market due to its flavour, therefore many rice mill owners mis-sell their rice varieties as Wada Kolam. The GI tag to the rice variety will give better rates to the Wada farmers. It will bring traceability and accountability to the Wada Kolam rice trade.

Farmer Vaibhav Patil from Wada, secretary of the local farmer cooperative society that has undertaken the data gathering and background towards receiving the GI tag, said that in all of Wada taluka only about 250 farmers cultivate the variety over about 2,500 hectares of land. Since the land is fertile, only cow dung is used as manure, no other chemical is used.

However, the variety has a lower yield, as out of 100 quintals of paddy only 45 quintals of polished rice gets produced, while other varieties yield about 55 quintals. Therefore some farmers are less inclined to plant this variety.

Today, Wada farmers get ₹40 per kg. But if GI tag is received the rate could increase to ₹80-90 and the area under Wada Kolam could easily rise to 5,000 hectares, he said.