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# Areca growers seek cash incentives

DHNS

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Areca growers in the State have requested the government to give cash incentives to areca growers to switch over to food crop cultivation and also encourage them to go for group cultivation to face competition from corporate sector in agriculture field.

A memorandum to this effect by Kissan Sene and Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha was submitted to Bharatlal Meena, Principal Secretary, Agriculture Department, on August 14. The government is yet to respond to the demand.

The memorandum, while explaining the situation of areca growers in the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Kodagu, has stated that a special scheme for arecanut growers who divert to cultivate food crops like paddy should be encouraged by the government.

The cost of one acre for planting areca is about Rs 1,62,000. So, the government should pay Rs 10 lakh per acre to farmers so that they can go for change in the crop pattern.

Andhra Pradesh pays Rs 10 lakh per acre to tobacco growers who surrender their license and grow foodgrains. In Karnataka too, those tobacco growers who surrender license to the government get Rs five lakh. Similar system should be extended to growers of areca who would like to shift to foodgrain cultivation, the memorandum said.

Ravikiran Punacha, President, Kissan Sene told Deccan Herald that production of areca is about 1,300 lakh tons in an area of 2.40 lakh ha, as per the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, New Delhi. In the entire country, the product is about 6.5 lakh tonnes.

The production would be more than the demand by 2020. There could be a surplus of 8,000 tonnes in five to six years. With corporate sector entering farm sector, small and marginal farmers of areca would not be able to face the competition. Hence, the group farming system is the only solution.

Keeping food security in view, it is better for commercial crop growers to switch to food crop cultivation. This has been the view of many farmers. The coastal districts are suitable for cultivating paddy, vegetables, herbal plants, tumeric, ginger, coco, cashew and banana crops, he said.

The market price of areca since last one decade is below the cost of production. Some years ago when the cost of production per kg of areca was about Rs 114, the market price was much lower.

But now the cost of production is Rs 160, while the market price is Rs 180-190. Because of the loss for many years, farmers are facing huge debt burden. The government must waive the loan raised by areca growers who have mortgaged their properties.

In Dakshina Kannada, we do not get an agriculture labourer for less than Rs 500 a day. There is an acute shortage of labourers. This could be overcome by going in for group farming where machines could be used for cultivation. Similar experiment is going in a smaller scale by Dharmasthala Gramabhivrudhi Association, Ravikiran said.

He said that in Dakshina Kannada, the cultivation of paddy has come down drastically. Though the government records show that it is cultivated in 27,000 ha, in reality it is not exceeding 5,000 ha.

When food production is coming down, it is high time the government to do something to make cash crop growers to change over to foodgrain cultivation, he said.

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