

Consumer Dialogue

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E-newsletter

Adoption of Organic Farming Is a Sustainable Solution to Save Earth and the Humanity

"If agriculture in this country fails, we fail, the Government fails and the nation fails. Adopting organic farming will lead way to sustainable agriculture and consumption", said S Mukherjee, Additional Director (Horticulture), Rajasthan Agricultural Research Institute (RARI) during a district-level farmer's orientation workshop organised by CUTS CART at Jaipur, on June 26, 2014. Mukherjee said that there is a market potential of ₹14,520million worth for organic farming in Rajasthan, whereas the present accessible market is of ₹5620million only.

The training workshop was organised, under the Pilot Project to promote organic consumption in the state of Rajasthan (ProOrganic) supported by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). Giving details of the Project, Amarjeet Singh, Project Coordinator of CUTS said that the Project aims to promote organic consumption in Rajasthan covering six major agriculture potential districts (Jaipur, Dausa, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Pratapgarh and Kota) through awareness generation, sensitisation, capacity building and advocacy activities.

Professor A K Gupta (Agronomy), RARI, briefed the importance of organic farming citing various long-term health and financial benefits of organic farming, while Anand Shulka from Morarka Foundation spoke on organic farming from business perspective and cited success stories of Morarka Foundation. The Coordinator of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Chomu, S S Rathore delivered a lecture on 'Organic Soil Management and Fertilizers'. Professor Shriram Sharma from Agriculture University, Jobner, mentioned the depths of pest management using organic methods. Hari Mohan Gupta of SOAM Society briefed the participants about organic certification process and organic farming methods.

The training was attended by more than 50 farmers from selected *panchayats* of all blocks of Jaipur District. On the second day, i.e. June 27, 2014, all the participants were taken for an exposure visit to RARI, Durgapura and Rajasthan Gow (cow) *Seva Sangh* to acquire experience from organic farming methods adopted by them. Deepak Saxena, Sr. Programme Coordinator, CUTS, compared the proceedings and Project Officer, Arjun Kant Jha of CUTS extended the vote of thanks.

All the experts and participants demanded to incentivise organic farming and a separate department for promoting organic farming from the Government.



CUTS CART

Upcoming Activities under Consumer Protection

- Research and Launch cum Consultation with Senior Bank officials, under the Project on 'Right to Choice of Consumers of Financial Services, with special focus on the issue of Mis-selling and Financial Incentives in Indian Banks', in partnership with CI and Which? (UK)
- District Awareness Campaign Activities, under the ProOrganic Project starting from August 2014 to be organised at each of the 102 *gram panchayat* of targeted six districts.
- Activities to start under the National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) for the year 2014-15, with the theme 'Combating Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought' and CUTS to serve as a Regional Resource Centre of Rajasthan.

ACTIVITIES



Research

The data analysis of the survey conducted, under the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) supported ProOrganic Project and the draft report of research was shared with the ProOrganic team and inputs/comments were received after reviewing the same. Survey agency, *Vimarsh*, made a presentation of the study on May 05, 2014. Moreover, the team is reviewing the report and will finalise soon.

Farmer Orientation and Exposure Visit in Other Districts

Besides, Jaipur, five more District-level Orientation and Exposure Visits for farmer groups were conducted during April-June 2014. This was done to motivate the farmers to reduce the use of chemical manures in farming and showcase organic farming, under the ProOrganic Project supported by Swedish Society for Nature Conversation (SSNC). About 262 male and 120 female farmers were part of the events including the Jaipur one.

During the district-level orientation workshops, scientists from *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* of all the districts became the local resource person, whereas National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Agricultural Universities, Agriculture Department, Horticulture Department and Rajasthan State Seeds Corporation in some of the districts provided information of their respective institutions. Participation of various agricultural institutions resolved queries of the farmers regarding the various available schemes. For the exposure visits, all the participants were taken to the nearby organic farms for hands on experience. These farmers' orientation and exposure visits were held in Kota on April 29-30; Chittorgarh on May 06-07; Udaipur on May 13-14; Dausa on May 28-29 and Pratapgarh on June 11-12, 2014. The events were coordinated by the local coordinators in each district.



REPRESENTATION



- Deepak Saxena, represented CUTS in the regional meeting of Consumers International for Asia, Pacific and the Middle East (CIAPME) members organised at Empress Hotel, Chiang Mai in Thailand and also attended the international seminar on 'Consumers in the Digital Age' on April 1-4, 2014.
- Arjun Kant Jha and Dharmendra Chaturvedi of CUTS participated in the launch event of the Centre for Road Safety at Rajasthan Police Academy, Jaipur on April 10, 2014.
- George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS and Amarjeet Singh attended two back to back conferences organised by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), India, under Consumer Policy and Protection (CPP) Programme of GIZ at Delhi. The first conference on 'Enforcement of fair commercial practices: Appropriate legislative measures' was held on April 14, 2014.
- Pradeep Singh Mehta, Secretary General, Bipul Chatterjee, Deputy Executive Director, George Cheriyan, Director, and Amarjeet Singh of CUTS attended a meeting with Department of Consumer Affairs of Government of India, chaired by the Additional Secretary to discuss the long term institutional collaboration with the Ministry as a think tank approach on April 16, 2014.
- George Cheriyan attended a meeting of the drafting group of the National Consumer Policy on April 22, 2014 organised by Department of Consumer Affairs of Government of India. The meeting was attended by Additional Secretary, G Gurucharan, and other officials.
- Deepak Saxena represented CUTS in a meeting on April 24 and May 20 to review the proposed amendments in Consumer Protection Act, 1986 organised by Department of Consumer Affairs of Government of India.
- Amarjeet Singh participated in the Regional Event on "Financial Capability – A people-centred approach to rethink Financial Inclusion" held on May 9, 2014 organised by Centre for Micro Finance (CmF) in partnership with GIZ in Jaipur.
- Deepak Saxena participated in a meeting on possible amendments in Legal Metrology Act in New Delhi on June 11, 2014 organised by Department of Consumer Affairs of Government of India and Arjun Kant Jha also participated in the second such meeting held on June 20, 2014.

Right to Education Will Apply to All Schools in Rajasthan

The Right to Education (RTE) rules would apply equally to all the 37,500 schools across the state. The Committee headed by former Justice, Shiv Kumar Sharma, said that it has regulated the fee for 23 schools in Jaipur and instructed the institutes not to raise the fee without prior permission of the Committee. Moreover, for the remaining schools, the fees would be defined in due course of time. 'Until the Committee decides fee for these schools, no one is allowed to raise the fees', Justice Sharma added.



This one member school fee regulatory committee was constituted as per Rajasthan School (Fee) Act of 2013, passed by the assembly for regulating fee structure of government, private and all aided schools. The average rise in school fee in Jaipur, in the current year ranges between 30 to 65 percent. Further, the Committee in its decision has also directed the schools administration not to force the parents of students to purchase uniforms and books from a particular or specified shop. The Committee will regulate the fee on the basis of consumer price index of the schools' overall expenditure liabilities. Besides, it had also directed that all minorities educational societies would come under the purview of the Fee Act, which will also bind these schools from taking capitation fee or any other charges, which is termed as illegal or unjustifiable.

(HT, DB & RP, 22.04.14)

WB State Consumer Department Settles Grievance in a Month's Time

Ramal Kr Mukherjee, a resident of New Alipore (Kolkata) had purchased an air conditioner (AC) in April 2010 from a reputed retail electronic shop. There was a free gift (sports shoes worth ₹3499) on the purchase of the AC. He was given a 'gift coupon' to claim the gift. However, he was not provided adequate information about the specific outlet of the shoe company that was covered, under the scheme. So he had to wander from one to the other in order to claim the gift. Finally, he found the outlet, which was supposed to be a part of this scheme. However, the shop could not provide the shoe of his size and he was asked to come back after a few days. He visited the shop a couple of times and was informed about the unavailability of shoes of required size.

Disgruntled and aggrieved Mukherjee wrote a letter in despair to the retail electronic shop from where he had bought the air conditioner and sought their attention to the matter. In view of the fact that there was no response from the shop, he wrote to the manufacturer of the AC firm. But there was no response even from his end. In all these back-and-forth, the validity of the 'gift voucher' had expired.

Advised by a friend, eventually, Mukherjee lodged a complaint with West Bengal Consumer Affairs Department in early June 2014. His demand was that the promised amount of ₹3499 should be reimbursed to him by the electronic shop from where he had purchased the AC. Finally, Mukherjee received an SMS from the department within 24 hours that his grievance has been registered and around three weeks after the date of the complaint, he got a letter from the West Bengal Consumer Commission asking him to be present at the regional office. The shop owner had also been asked to be present in the office on the specified day. On the same day, the shop owner realising his fault handed over a cheque of ₹3499 to Mukherjee. Thus Mukherjee's case was settled by the WB Consumer Affairs Department within a month.

Mukherjee's case should inspire the aggrieved consumers to rise up for their rights and approach their respective State Consumer Departments/Forums for relief. The case shows that speedy redress is possible.

(<http://wbconsumers.gov.in/HtmlPages/index.aspx>)



No Penalty on Pre-paying of Loans

Suppose a bank charges a customer a pre-payment penalty of 0.10 or 0.15 percent (of the outstanding home loan), then is it willing to lose its client of ten years or so? The customer is bound to not only exit from accessing the housing loan but also lose entire banking relationship too.

Now you can pre-pay your home loans, vehicle loans or personal loans without worrying about what your bank might charge you as a penalty.

In a consumer friendly move, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed the banks not to levy any penalty on individual borrowers pre-paying floating rate term loans.

"It is advised that the banks will not be permitted to charge foreclosure charges/pre-payment penalties on all floating rate term loans sanctioned to individual borrowers with immediate effect", the RBI said in a statement. Customers tend to prepay (foreclose) their loans, when they find that interest rates on their term loans have risen. Some customers foreclose their loans by switching to banks that offer loans at lower rates.

Some banks charge as much as two percent of the outstanding amount as penalty for foreclosure. Such banks face the prospect of losing customers due to levying of pre-payment penalties.



(BL, 07. 05.14)



Rajasthan Eyes ₹2,500 cr Investment in Wind Energy Sector

The Rajasthan Government recently approved an amendment in the Wind Energy Act, 2012 to attract investment of ₹2,500 crore to produce 400 MW power from wind mills in the state. The Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, approved the amendment in the existing "Wind Energy Act, 2012" with an investment prospect of ₹2,500 crore by producing 400 MW power through wind mills. A committee would also be set up to draw lines on purchase of lands (private and government) for wind mill installations in the state.

(Tol, 18.06.14)



New World Bank Report: Make Distribution Reforms a Top Priority

Two decades after the initiation of power sector reforms in India, more than 300 million Indians still live without electricity. India's per capita annual power consumption is among the lowest in the world.

Power distribution in India needs sweeping reforms if it is to bring back the country to a high growth trajectory and meet its goal of expanding access to electricity to all by 2019, said a new World Bank (WB) report. At present, India's annual per capita power sector consumption of around 800 kWh is among the lowest in the world.

"More Power to India: The Challenge of Distribution", launched in New Delhi is a review of the Indian power sector across key areas of access, utility performance, and financial sustainability. The study, conducted at the request of the Government of India, has identified electricity distribution to the end consumer as a weak link in the sector. The report recommends freeing utilities and regulators from external interference, increasing accountability, and enhancing competition in the sector in order to move it to a higher level of service delivery.

(<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/06/24/make-distribution-reforms-a-top-priority-says-new-world-bank-report>)

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/06/19703395/more-power-india-challenge-electricity-distribution>)

330mn Internet Users by 2016 in India

Driven by falling handset prices and rise in smartphone penetration, data subscribers in India are likely to grow an average 25 percent every year to reach 519 million by 2018 fiscal, a report by Morgan Stanley (Multinational Financial Services Corporation) said.

In its report on India's telecom sector, Morgan Stanley said it believes internet users will rise to 330 million in 2016 financial year, driven by falling handset costs, higher smartphone penetration, faster bandwidth and higher internet content or online services.

"By FY2018, we expect data subscribers to grow at a 25 percent CAGR (compound average growth rate), from 210million to 519million and see a 35 percent CAGR in data usage to 750MB per subscriber, near the Asian average", the report said. The report said that over the last two years, smartphone prices in India have come down from \$200 to \$50.

As per telecom regulator, TRAI's data, total internet subscribers in the country at the end of September 2013 stood at 210 million.

Of those, 188 million (90 percent users) access it on mobile devices. Of the rest, 7mn were narrowband subscribers (with speed less than 256kbps) and 15mn were broadband subscribers (with speed of over 256kbps).

"Data is the next growth leg. We expect data contribution to more than double to 23 percent of overall revenues (as against 10 percent currently) in the next two years", the report said.

The report said that data growth will be driven by operator strategy of lower average revenue per mega byte (ARMB) for higher MB pack and operators having a strong data ecosystem, including strengthening spectrum portfolio.

(PTI, 16.06.14)

