

# Consumer Dialogue

Volume V, Issue 4, October-December 2014

E-newsletter

## Willingness to Purchase Organic Products

About 98 percent consumers have expressed their willingness to purchase organic products, if they are available. This was revealed through the findings of the study done by CUTS-Consumer Action Research and Training (CART) in an 'Annual State-level Stakeholder Consultation and Feedback Meeting' held at Jaipur on November 13, 2014. The consultation was organised as part of the 'Pilot Project to Promote Organic Consumption in the State of Rajasthan', which is supported by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC).

Further, findings also revealed that 91.3 percent farmers are aware of the negative impacts of chemicals and pesticides on crops and despite this, 90.7 percent of the farmers who are accustomed to use chemical-based fertilizers and pesticides because they believe that it gives a high yield.

The study was conducted in six major agriculture potential districts namely Jaipur, Dausa, Chittorgarh, Pratapgarh, Udaipur and Kota through sample sizes of 1,536 consumers and 1,529 farmers respectively.

Amarjeet Singh, Project Coordinator, CUTS through a presentation shared more details of the findings elaborated that only 25.2 percent consumers have purchased organic products at any point of time although 78 percent consumers are aware of adverse effects of pesticides. The awareness is low among women found at 28 percent. Encouraging fact is that if organic products are available 98 percent consumers expressed willingness to purchase. He further shared that 2.8 percent farmers use only organic input, 39.2 percent use only chemical while 57.9 percent farmers use a mix of both organic and chemical inputs. Certification awareness is an issue as only 13.6 percent of the farmers were found to be aware of the concept of organic certification.

As special guest of the programme Shital Prasad Sharma, Director, Agriculture Department, Government of Rajasthan appreciated CUTS and Swedish Society of Nature Conservation (SSNC) for their integrated efforts to put together the production and consumption aspects. Sharma suggested organising farmers into 'Farmers Interest Groups'.

Certification awareness is found to be an issue as only 13.6 percent farmers are found to be aware of organic certification. Sharing the experiences from Sweden, Sara Nilsson, Programme Officer, SSNC said in last two years organic consumption has considerably increased in Sweden and they want this to increase world-wide. Sustainable consumption and promoting organic farming is one of the key areas of work for SSNC. Sara also shared that 40 organisations and 25 countries have participated in the 'Green Action Week' organised worldwide in the month of October.

Prior to this, George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS welcoming the guests said that under National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture promoting organic farming is a key component. Cheriyan also said that 'National Project on Organic Farming' started in 2004 but even after ten years, there is only 0.3 percent of cultivated land, under organic farming i.e. 5.2mn hectare out of which 90 percent is forest land.

Other speakers in the programme included Dr. S S Rathore, Programme Coordinator, *Krishi Vigyan Kendra*, Jaipur; Surendra Babu, Assistant General Managers (AGM), National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD); B D Yadav, Professor of Vegetable Cultivation in Agriculture Research Institute, Government of Rajasthan, who all had shared their experiences and knowledge on different aspects of organic farming and its importance with participants. Among participants, officials from the State Government, consumer activists, scientists from research institutes, NGO (Non-government organisations) representative and large number of progressive farmers were part of the programme.

Link: detailed report can be viewed at: is [http://cuts-international.org/cart/ProOrganic/pdf/Event\\_Report-Annual\\_Stakeholders\\_Meeting-ProOrganic.pdf](http://cuts-international.org/cart/ProOrganic/pdf/Event_Report-Annual_Stakeholders_Meeting-ProOrganic.pdf)



## INSIDE

- ACTIVITIES
- IMPORTANT JUDGEMENTS/ DECISIONS
- REPRESENTATION
- INFORMATIVE
- UPCOMING ACTIVITIES



CUTS CART



## Organic Food and Farming for All

CUTS CART organised a State-level Stakeholder Consultation on 'Organic Food and Farming for All' on 16 October, 2014 at Jaipur to earmark the conclusion of Global Green Action Week (GAW), which was supported by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

The consultation was organised to advocate for a shift in policy towards organic consumption and production. The aim of the campaign is to highlight problems associated with the use of pesticides in farming and to drive consumer awareness and demand for food that is produced using alternative techniques not damaging to the health of consumers. Under the campaign, Cottage Meetings, Signature Campaign and Street Plays were organised in the city in the month of September.

As special guest of the programme, Sheetal Prasad Sharma, Additional Director (NMOOP), Department of Agriculture, Government of Rajasthan briefed about the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture



and Sub-Mission, under Organic Agriculture. General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), R A Mishra shared his experiences of working on the issues through Farmer Clubs and also briefed about the initiatives by NABARD, such as credit schemes for organic cultivation. K Ram Krishna, Director of Research, SKN Agriculture University, Jobner through a presentation said that there are serious health concerns due to polluted environment, unsafe Drinking Water (presence of Nitrite affecting Kidney, causing Cancer and Respiratory Diseases) and Food (due to pesticides affecting Liver, Kidney and causing Cardiac problems). Sanjay Jhala, Dy. Director, Department of Food and Consumer Affairs also participated as another speaker.

As part of the event, a panel discussion was also held in which the experts from different agencies participated including S S Rathore, Incharge, *Krishi Vigyan Kendra*, Jaipur; A C Shivran, Professor of Agronomy, SKN University of Agriculture and Satyaveer Beniwal, Deputy General Manager, Morarka Foundation. (More details about the stakeholder consultation and the whole GAW campaign can be viewed at:

[http://cuts-international.org/cart/pdf/Stakeholders\\_Consultation\\_Report\\_Green\\_Action\\_Week-2014.pdf](http://cuts-international.org/cart/pdf/Stakeholders_Consultation_Report_Green_Action_Week-2014.pdf) and  
[http://cuts-international.org/cart/pdf/Report-Green\\_Action\\_Week-2014\\_Organic\\_Food\\_and\\_Farming\\_for\\_All.pdf](http://cuts-international.org/cart/pdf/Report-Green_Action_Week-2014_Organic_Food_and_Farming_for_All.pdf)

## Evaluation and Monitoring Progress of Project

Sara Nilsson, Programme Officer and Ulrika Hjertstrand, Coordinator, Green Action Campaign from Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) visited CUTS Consumer Action Research and Training (CART) in Jaipur to review the progress of projects supported by SSNC, mainly ProOrganic project and also Green Action Week (GAW) Campaign implemented by CART. The purpose of the meeting was to strengthen the mutual cooperation and to analyse the ground realities of the implementation of projects. The main objective of the visit was to access the effectiveness of interventions, outcomes, achievements and the progress of the projects and the roadblocks faced.

[http://cuts-international.org/cart/ProOrganic/pdf/Report-Visit\\_by\\_SSNC\\_Team\\_Nov\\_2014.pdf](http://cuts-international.org/cart/ProOrganic/pdf/Report-Visit_by_SSNC_Team_Nov_2014.pdf)



## Social Boycott of Power Thieves: Need of the Hour

There is more than 70,000 crore loss to the government exchequer in electricity sector. One of the major reasons for this loss is the power theft. These were some of the issues shared during the special screening of *Katiyabaaz*, which is a national award winning documentary presented by noted film maker Anurag Kashyap and directed by a team comprising of Deepti Kakkar and Fahad Mustafa. This event was organised by CUTS CART at Jaipur on 16 December, 2014. The film narrates the story of the conflict between the citizens of Kanpur and its bankrupt electricity supply company, through the eyes of two protagonists – a woman bureaucrat and an electricity thief whose actions contribute



heavily to the electricity utility's losses. The screening was coupled with a panel discussion on the occasion on the issue of power theft and its status and the efforts by government to curb it, which witnessed the presence of all the stakeholders like representatives from discoms, regulator, energy department of Rajasthan, CSOs, NGOs, academics, public representatives and media. (photo 3)

In the opening session, RG Gupta, Advisor to Government of Rajasthan, Department of Energy; R C Sharma, Director (Engineering), Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC) and K L Vyas, Ex-Member, RERC spoke on various aspects of power theft in Rajasthan. Gupta said that there is need of a mass campaign on issues looking to the mounting losses to discoms and to stop vote bank politics of electricity. Vyas said power theft is a social evil and only law cannot cure it. Sharma called for public boycott of electricity thieves. He informed that Standards of Performance for DISCOMS has been notified by RERC to provide compensation in failure to give time bound solution to consumer problems.

The power packed movie initiated a stormy discussion there, wherein key dignitaries like Ms. Chavi Rajawat, *Sarpanch*, Sodha village in Tonk district; Rajendra Prasad Bora, Senior Media Person and Sunny Sebastian, Vice-Chancellor, Harideo Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication as panellists expressed their insights on the issues presented in the documentary. Then followed up with floor discussion among participants, which were around 100 in number. In the discussion issues related to bad quality of service, delay in connection, corruption, man-power shortage and lack of separate data of power theft etc.etc. were discussed.

In the beginning, Udai Mehta, Director CUTS International welcoming the guests said that the documentary highlights the issues faced by electricity sector. He also urged the RERC to have a third party evaluation of 'Standards of Performance'. Deepak Saxena briefed the audience on the background and characters of the documentary and said that the burden of power theft is ultimately born by the consumers due to hike in tariff.

## ProOrganic Activities Reaches at the Grassroots

Awareness campaigns at the grass root, under the project in selected 102 *gram panchayats* of all six districts are scheduled during the period August 2014-January 2015 with the aim to make consumers aware of available organic products and influence their buying habits by use of street plays, posters, hand outs etc.

The campaigns commenced during August 2014. The team comprising of Amarjeet Singh, Deepak Saxena, Arjun Kant Jha and Dharmendra Chaturvedi attended the awareness campaign organised in different areas to oversee and monitor the programmes. So far 88 *gram panchayat* programmes were conducted till December 31, 2014 in targeted districts. These awareness campaigns were organised with an aim to ensure village participation of both farmers and consumers to in order to create awareness among them on the issues of organic culture. Progressive farmers, agriculturists and the district partner acted as resource persons in all the programmes.



## ACTIVITIES





## ACTIVITIES



## National Environment and Awareness Campaign

Regional Meeting at Delhi on 28-31 October, 2014 under the National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) for the year 2014-15 was held for the scrutiny of proposals received from the states of Delhi, UP (Western & Eastern) and Rajasthan. Dharmendra Chaturvedi and Arjun Kant Jha represented CUTS in the regional committee.

The regional sanctioned a total 295 proposals with a total disbursement grant of ₹29, 50,000 out of the total of 378 proposals received in the current year. Prior to this, the second round of scrutiny of NEAC applications by Centre of Excellence (CoE) was held on October 17, 2014, Prarthana Borah, Programme Director, Centre for Environment Education (CEE), New Delhi did the scrutiny along with CEE team from Jaipur.

## REPRESENTATION



- George Cheriyan attended the National Consumer Convention organised by Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) with the support of Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India on 'Challenges facing Indian Consumers' Suggestions on a National Consumer Policy' at Scope Complex, New Delhi on October 10, 2014 as a resource person. Later George also attended Annual General Meeting (AGM) of CCC on October 11, 2014 held at Jawahar Lal Nehru National Youth Centre, New Delhi.
- Amarjeet Singh attended 3<sup>rd</sup> Universal Salt Iodisation (USI) State-level Stakeholders meeting organised by Micronutrient initiative in Jaipur on October 10, 2014.
- Deepak Saxena and Dharmendra Chaturvedi participated in the 'World Standards Day' event on October 14, 2014, was jointly organised by Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Jaipur office and Vishwakarma Industries (VKI) Association, Jaipur at the conference hall of Industries Association situated in VKI area.
- George, Deepak and Amarjeet were invited to meet Subodh Agarwal, Principal Secretary, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Government of Rajasthan on October 16, 2014 for a meeting of consumer organisations.
- Jaishree Rathore participated in an open house discussion arranged by *Bhartiya Sanchar Nigam Limited* (BSNL) on October 29, 2014 at Jaipur.
- George Cheriyan attended the meeting of the Consumer Policy Advisory Committee of the Bureau of Indian Standards scheduled at Manak Bhawan, New Delhi on October 31, 2014, which was chaired by Sunil Soni, Director General, BIS.
- Deepak Saxena & Dharmendra Chaturvedi attended the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of State Advisory Committee of RERC, held on November 19, 2014 at the office of Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC), Jaipur chaired by Vishvanath Hiremath Chairman, RERC.
- On November 21, 2014, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Shri Ram Vilas Paswan invited few consumer organisations for a one to one meeting with the Minister Pradeep Mehta and George Cheriyan met with the Minister.
- George Cheriyan and Amarjeet Singh attended the Stakeholders Workshop on "Fourth Amendment to Consumer Protection Act, 1986", held at Indian Institute Public Administration, New Delhi on November 24, 2014. The purpose of the workshop was to seek comments on the proposed amendments to Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
- Amarjeet Singh attended the fourth meeting of the Resource Management Sectional Committee, MSD 12 of Bureau of Indian Standards held at Manak Bhavan, BIS Office, New Delhi on November 25, 2014. In context, George Cheriyan attended one day Workshop on 'proposed amendments to Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986' held at New Delhi on December 1, 2014 and similarly on December 10, Amrat Singh participated in the Meeting of Regional Publicity Committee, Central Regional Office of BIS, New Delhi.
- Amarjeet Singh attended State-level Rajasthan Government function on the occasion of National Consumer Day at *Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj and Gramin Vikas Sansthan* (IGPRS) Jaipur on December 24, 2014.



## Curbing Adulteration: A Challenge for the Government

**W**aging a war against food adulteration has become difficult for the Government of Rajasthan with its limited resources. Due to fund crisis many of the mobile food laboratories have become defunct. For thousands of shops and lakhs of customers, there are only 77 food inspectors, who can take samples of food products to ensure quality of products being sold. Moreover, the mobile laboratories are in-operational, which is a big setback for the officials taking on food adulteration. Mobile laboratories, which help the Government to test food products on the spot like spices, dry fruits and milk products, at present in the absence of funds have become out of use and so the Government is forced to send samples to stationed government laboratories.

According to sources, the officials who are taking samples are in limited numbers with only 77 food inspectors to look after a population of nearly 7 crores. In Jaipur, there are 11 food inspectors taking samples of food items.

Moreover, there are seven food laboratories in the State, which were closed down due to lack of food analysts, over the past few years. However, the health department continued its drive against food adulteration.

(TNN, 10.10.14)

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/Manpower-shortage-hampers-drive-against-adulteration/articleshow/44769839.cms>

## Government to Revisit Food Safety Law

**T**he Government of India will revisit the food safety Act to make it more stringent to check growing instances of adulteration and contamination. A task force set up by Government will submit its suggestions in 45 days, which will be then be put up in public domain for inviting comments. Imported food items will also be covered by this. This decision taken by the Government is due to the fact that food adulteration and contamination have been the cause of the rising burden of non-communicable diseases across the country.

The proposed task force will also revisit the punishment stipulated for milk adulteration and make it more stringent. In order to make better food safety law, the Government would focus creating infrastructure and manpower to face the challenge, such as setting up testing laboratories, under Public-private Partnership.

The concerned Minister J P Nadda informed that 13,571 out of 72,200 food samples analysed in 2013-14 were adulterated, resulting in launch of 10,325 civil and criminal cases. He also informed that the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India was at present engaged in an exercise for harmonisation of the maximum residue limit of pesticides in food commodities.

(BL, 15.12.14)

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/politics/govt-to-revisit-food-safety-law-make-it-more-stringent-nadda/article6694799.ece>



## RTI Act: Violators Put into Dock Twice

**T**he Rajasthan State Information Commission has slapped a fine of ₹25,000 for the second time on the Public Information Officer (PIO) of *Gram panchayat* Madhorajpura, under Phagi *panchayat samiti* in Jaipur district.

On February 20, 2012, Manak Chand, a resident of Phagi in Jaipur district, had asked the Public Information Officer Secretary, *Gram Panchayat* at Madhorajpura, Phagi *tehsil* of Jaipur district for some information, under the Right to Information Act. However, the PIO did not provide the information till January 15, 2014. As a result, the Information Commission slapped a fine of ₹25,000 on the officer in January 2014 and the PIO deposited the same of August 22, 2014.

On not providing information even after that, a complaint was lodged and a notice was issued on June 19, 2014, but the PIO did not provide the information even after July 31, 2014 and did not give any clarification for not providing the information. The State Information Commission, considering the PIO responsible has imposed a penalty of ₹25,000 on September 29, 2014 and asked to send a demand draft of the amount within 21 working days at the Commission's office.

(Tol, 13.11. 14)



सूचना का  
अधिकार  
RIGHT TO  
INFORMATION



## Online Shopping: Not an Easy Ride for Consumers

**D**id you ever inquire about or check the warranty and service eligibility of the product, you have purchased through online shopping?

If no, there is a high probability you can be taken to a ride. According to a survey by MySmartPrice, a price comparison platform, among the people, who claimed warranty on products bought online, a whopping 54 percent of them said that they were denied warranty at least once.

As per the study, 55 percent of the respondents said warranty claim processes took more than a month to complete whereas 45 percent of the respondents stated that the process of claiming warranty for a product online is usually completed within a week or two. MySmartPrice said that denying warranty and delay is due to the “conflict between service centres and respective brands, or because of lack of service centres in the complainant’s location”.

Commenting on the survey findings, MySmartPrice Co-founder Sitakanta Ray said: “While it is heartening to see several brands take an online only approach, it is also disappointing to see some brands turning away customers who bought their product online for service”.

Ray further said: “To the few who do find the product defective, it is also important that both stores and brands work together to solve their issues”.

The study draws insights from over 20,000 consumers who shopped through the MySmartPrice platform. It gauged shoppers concerns related to denial of warranty; need to claim warranty, and duration taken to claim the warranty. Some of the reasons for denying warranty included lack of a bill from retailer or a stamp of the retailer on the warranty book.

(PTI, 25.10.14)

[http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-25/news/57395627\\_1\\_warranty-service-centres-brands](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-25/news/57395627_1_warranty-service-centres-brands)



## Consumer Forums Not Less than a Civil Court

**C**onsumers who have filed complaints in any consumer forum can see the cause list, case status and judgment by accessing internet services.

Over 3.7 lakh cases are pending in consumer forums across the country and at least 70 percent are pending in district forums. Even though there is maximum pendency at district-levels, about two dozen of the district forums are defunct.

Citing reasons behind the inordinate delay in disposal of complaints, the Consumer Affairs Department conveyed to the Parliamentary Standing Committee that inadequate infrastructure at consumer forums had affected their functioning. It also stated that for sustaining faith in the consumer dispute redressal machinery and it is imperative that infrastructure requirements are met.

“With the aim to reduce the number of cases or complaints piling up at all levels and particularly at district *foras*, presently there is a proposal to have mediation during the entire period when any case is being heard. This will not only save time but will also satisfy both parties”, indicated a department official. This proposal has been included in the proposed Consumer Protection (Amendment) Bill.

The Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said that the practice of cases continuing for years must be stopped. “The objective of consumer forums become meaningless if these work like normal courts and people have to wait for 2-3 years for an order”.

Meanwhile, under the computerisation and computer networking of consumer forums (Confonet) being undertaken to enable access to information and quicker disposal of cases, the Government has supplied a new set of hardware to the forums. Out of the 473 district forums, which have the facility for online access to web-based case monitoring system, only 377 such entities are regularly entering data. Under Confonet, consumers who have filed complaints in any consumer forum can see the cause list, case status and judgment using internet.

(IE, 24.11. 14)

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/3-7-lakh-cases-pending-in-consumer-forums/articleshow/45253646.cms>



## Upcoming Activities under Consumer Protection

- Conclusion of remaining activities of *gram panchayat* level awareness programmes, under ProOrganic project by January 31, 2015.
- Dissemination cum Advocacy Meeting at Jaipur under ‘Right to Choice of Consumers of Financial Services’ project on February 20, 2015.
- Commemoration of ‘World Consumer Rights Day’ on March 15, 2015 on the theme ‘Healthy Diets’.
- Kick starting District-level Consultation Workshops, under ProOrganic” to be completed by April, 2015



**CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CART)**

D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016, India, Ph: 91.141.5133259, 2282821, Fx: 91.141.4015395  
Email: [cart@cuts.org](mailto:cart@cuts.org), Web: [www.cuts-international.org/cart](http://www.cuts-international.org/cart)