



This Onam, 'Krishikootams' to meet the market demand

Farmers Use Hybrid Varieties As They Are More Resilient

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Kochi: To prevent further burn in people's pockets amid escalating vegetable prices, local body authorities plan to ensure that Ernakulam residents don't have to cut down on their Onam delicacies.

With most crops getting ready for harvest in the next couple of weeks, the district agriculture department and other panchayats have started their focus on meeting the Onam market demand here.

"Our focus is to curtail the prices by becoming self-sufficient. Farmers' groups have been given the choice of what should be cultivated with help of Krishi Bhavan officials based on soil and land conditions," said Ernakulam principal agriculture officer Bincy Abraham.

Apart from common vegetables, cultivation is location-specific with consumer preferences and marketing



A vegetable farm at Karumalloor in Paravur taluk

possibilities have also been considered, she added.

In places like Vypeen where there is salinity in soil, only crops like ridge gourd, long beans or Ivy gourd can be cultivated. So, farmers have sown those seeds. In rural areas like Muvattupuzha, where there is a lot of commercial cultivation, almost all vegetables are being grown.

As Ernakulam is the main point for wholesalers looking to supply to Keralites outside the state and even the country, hybrid va-

rieties of seeds have been introduced in urban and semi-urban panchayats and also in homesteads in municipalities and the corporation limits.

Ernakulam agri-market and Muvattupuzha rural market will serve as the main wholesale points in the district.

Agriculture officials said farmer produce would be procured from 'krishikootams' or farmer clusters and sold through special agri-markets, which will start four days before Onam.

"Most of the crops will be ready for harvest by mid-August. As crops like pumpkins and bottle gourds will last longer, they will be harvested and kept ready for sale before the festival days. Most farmers are using hybrid varieties as they are more resilient and sturdy," said Krishi Vigyan Kendra horticulturist Shoji Edison.

Following last year's successful venture in floriculture, several farmers are also growing flowers to meet the demand for 'pookalam'.

"Marigold is being cultivated in nearly 25 acres of land in some of the semi-urban panchayats near the city. Some of them have leased out land and engaged MGNREGS workers to manage the fields," Edison said.

Officials said that as per the present estimates, they should be able to meet the market demand. Horticulture will procure vegetables like potatoes, onion, cauliflower and cabbage, etc.