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**EDIT**

**Farming Latin American-style**

Saturday, 30 June, 2007, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

**Bosky Christopher, Mumbai**

A14-member trade delegation of the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), headed by Association President A R Sharma returned home in the first week of June after visiting Latin American countries (Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil). The delegation had a very good opportunity to study the agricultural practices being followed in these countries for better agricultural productivity, usage of waterways for economical transportation, economies of scale by processing industry, uniform quality of meal and very high capacity utilisation.

"The eye-opener in the agriculture sector was no tillage practice being followed which has boosted the productivity and resulted in cost saving. Also, zero burning technique is a practical and environmentally sound replanting technique being implemented by the agriculture sector of Brazil, Argentina & Paraguay. It involves plucking of roots & straw with the help of plucking machine, which is left to decompose in situ. This allows plant tissues to be recycled - this enhances organic matter and replenishes the soil, improving its physical properties and fertility," said Sharma.

The non-tillage practice and zero burning technique should be studied thoroughly and could be implemented in India for better agricultural practices and higher productivity of oilseeds. A detailed report would be submitted shortly to the ministry of agriculture for its consideration, added Sharma.

The Association is also exploring investment opportunities in Paraguay. "In Paraguay, a lot of fertile land is available for agricultural activity. The productivity and the soil fertility and water availability are excellent. The Association is studying the possibility to form a consortium of interested members to buy a land in Paraguay and do the farming activity for growing soyabean and other oilseeds," said Sharma.

Japanese has already bought about 80,000 hectares and doing cooperative farming. To explore this possibility, a committee has been formed under the chairmanship of Pravin S Lunkad, deputy leader of the delegation to prepare a white paper giving complete details on the proposed consortium. The Association will act as facilitator and as catalyst without any financial liabilities.

Meanwhile, there are indications that the government is favourably considering the industry's request to defer the implementation of the new food labelling rules by 6 months from its present date i.e. August 21, 2007. "We are hoping that a written communication in this regard may be issued shortly by the Ministry of Health. The deferment of the implementation date of notification by six months, if announced as expected, will give a much needed breathing time to the industry and also enable the government to suitably modify the food labelling rules to make them implementable and realistic in the Indian techno, social and economic scenario," said Sharma.

The wide fluctuations in vegetable oil prices in the market in the last one and half months, has caused serious concern. The CPO which was quoted \$725 FOB Indonesia on first week of May raised to \$840 on June 6 and again went down by \$115 within one week to \$725. "This had a serious impact on domestic price of edible oils and left many importers and traders bleeding and had to incur heavy financial losses. We need to be very careful in buying raw oil for refining and selling refined oil and avoid temptation to indulge in the speculations in this very volatile market," said Sharma.

"Import of edible oils are likely to be lesser than expected earlier and may be in the range of 47 to 48 lakh tonnes during the current oil year (2006-07) compared to 44.2 lakh tonnes last year," added Sharma.

FoodBeverageNews e-paper

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