

Rubber Board worried by productivity decline

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Declining rubber productivity seems to be a cause of worry not only for stakeholders but for the Rubber Board as well. It is now contemplating a productivity enhancement campaign in growing areas across South India.

Christened Campaign 2019, the Board is in the process of organising a large scale mass-contact programme to increase productivity in rubber holdings with a long-term view to ensuring sustained natural rubber supply and eliminate the necessity for imports.

Creating awareness

Starting February 18, the campaign will focus on creating awareness among growers in critical agro-practices and scaling up their adoption level through a holistic approach. Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) will be popularised among growers, say Board officials.

The present analysis by the Rubber Research Institute of India indicates that adoption

Sector dynamics

	2017-18 (tonnes)	2018-19 (tonnes) up to Nov 2018
Production	6,94,000	4,07,000
Consumption	11,12,210	8,18,040
Export	5,072	642
Import	4,69,760	4,06,374
Average domestic price of RSS-4 (₹/kg)	129.80	126.05 (up to Dec 2018)
Average International price of RSS-3 (₹/kg)	116.78	106.22 (up to Dec 2018)

Total production in Nov 2017: **64,000 tonnes**

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Source: Rubber Board

of technological innovations with cost saving and income enhancing measures could make rubber cultivation moderately profitable even during the prevailing low-price scenario.

Having invested a lot in developing plantations, it is unwise for farmers to leave rubber untapped because of low prices, the officials felt.

The need for imports

Of late, that there has been a widening gap between production and consumption, which is being met by imports.

This has led to a fall in

prices coupled, with the lower rates prevailing in the international markets.

This has forced the majority of growers to leave their holdings untapped, thereby affecting domestic production.

According to growers, rubber plantations are now witnessing re-foliation after wintering (seasonal leaf fall).

This is a period where the moisture level in the soil is low.

Normally, during this period, growers give tapping a rest, sometimes for up to two months. The tapping normally resumes with pre-mon-

soon showers in the first half of April. The Board has proposed to conduct group meetings in all rubber growing areas in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, with the participation of Rubber Producers' Societies (RPSs) up to March 15. Thereafter, the package of GAPs will be implemented in holdings having demonstration potential.

Output-consumption gap

According to Rajiv Budhraj, Director General, Automotive Tyre Manufacturing Association (ATMA), the production-consumption gap in natural rubber is widening in India.

During the ongoing fiscal year, domestic production will be able to meet just about half of industry's demand.

The industry has been communicating with the Rubber Board on the need to increase production and productivity. Recently, an ATMA Study Mission visited Agartala to hold parleys with the Tripura Government to increase productivity and production of rubber in the North East.