Soon, Tamil Nadu veggies to get cold storage

CHENNAI: The state agriculture department has devised a new supply chain management under which produce specific cold-storage facilities will be set up in 10 select districts to prevent wastage of fruits and vegetables.

Annually, farmers in 10 districts cultivate vegetables and fruits on 15 lakh hectares and produce 220 lakh tonnes of yield. But out of the total production, nearly 25% to 30% is wasted owing to lack of proper storage facilities. The new initiative will stem the rot. The project is to be showcased at Niti Aayog meeting in New Delhi on November 4.

“We have devised a system of new supply chain management from the farmers' doorsteps. The government has sanctioned `398 crore towards this and work to construct buildings as part of the supply chain has started,” a senior agriculture department official told TOI.

Ten districts in Tamil Nadu are known for cultivation of chillies, garlic, banana, coconut, carrots and other vegetables and fruits. “The department has started construction of primary processing centres (PPCs). By next year, these PPCs will be operational. Farmers will be able to sell their produce to the collection centres, the start of the supply chain,” said the official. Work to construct a PPC has begun at Palacode in Dharmapuri district.

The new supply chain will also do away with middlemen. “The collection points will receive the produce from farmers and deposit it with primary processing centres (PPCs) equipped with modern facilities. They will process the produce and store it before sending it to the terminal markets or exporting,” the official said.

The districts shortlisted for the project are Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Trichy, Dindigul, Theni, Ramanathapuram, Tuticorin and Tirunelveli. “There will be 487 collection points and 29 PPCs in the 10 districts. Krishnagiri leads among districts with more number of PPCs and collection points. The district, famous for various fruits and vegetables, will have 10 PPCs and 77 collection points at a cost of Rs 96 crore,” he said.

The department has tied up with International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat) for advice on type of machinery need for processing and storing of vegetables. “Each vegetable and fruit requires different type of equipment and the department has asked for suggestions from Icrisat. Based on their input, we have placed orders for the equipment for the PPCs. Collection vans will be deployed to collect the produce from farmers,” the official said. The department is set to order machineries like arecanut dehusker, coconut dehusker, banana hand cutters, billing machines, blowers, carrot washing machine and cellophane tape dispenser.

The supply chain management will be controlled by a team headed by chief secretary at the state level and by district collectors and horticulture officials at the district level. Modern information technology tools will be deployed to link collection points and terminal markets. This will help farmers keep tab on the daily rates of their produce.