

Agri dept launches drive to make farmers plant trees

TNN | Nov 16, 2021, 04.03 AM IST

Coimbatore: The green cover of the district may increase in the next few years as the agriculture department has launched a drive to get farmers to plant tree saplings and nurture them. The agriculture department has ordered 3.43 lakh tree saplings for Coimbatore under a scheme called Tamil Nadu Mission on Sustainable Green Cover in Farm Lands.

While distribution of tree saplings will start in a week, officials are planning to finish it in a month as conditions are conducive for plantation with the state receiving heavy rainfall recently. The main aim of the scheme is not only to increase the tree cover of the state but also the income of farmers.

R Chithra Devi, joint director of agriculture, Coimbatore district, said the agriculture department has placed the orders for the saplings with the forest department. “Farmers have to register through the Uzhavan app and can receive the saplings from the designated nurseries free of cost. Small and micro farmers, women farmers and farmers from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe will be given preference,” she said.

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Timber value species like teak, red sandal, acacia, vengai, sandal, manjal kadambu, rosewood, malai vembu (*Melia dubia*), mahogany, karumaruthu, poovarasu as well as medicinal value trees such as neem, pungan, tamarind, maruthamaram, thandrikkai, thobamaram, Indian gooseberry, murungal maram, chinnamon, manila tamarind and vilvam will be distributed. Agriculture officials said farmers will receive Rs 7 per tree for each year as incentives for three years between the second and the fourth year.

Farmers will get 50 saplings for one acre if they plant them in bunds, whereas those farmers who want to take up tree cultivation in farm fields will get 160 saplings per acre.

An official said Coimbatore city has better tree cover among the top five big cities in the state according to a survey conducted last year. When it comes to forest area Coimbatore district stands second with 1,975 sqkm preceded only by Erode district with 2,307sqkm.

The official said in the phase one, 73 lakh saplings will be distributed to farmers across the state at a cost of Rs 28.57 crore and during the phase two, 112 lakh saplings will be distributed at a cost ofRs 43.84 crore.