

We are allowed to use it only once a week, say hill farmers

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A section of farmers from the hill villages of Meghamalai such as Bommayanayakkanpatti demanded that the forest department should allow them to carry agricultural produce through the forest area to be taken to the market, at the monthly grievances meeting held here on Friday.

A variety of vegetables such as carrot, cabbage and cauliflower are grown in the hilly regions of Meghamalai and farmers carry their produce to the Chinnamanur market. There's only a dirt track that connects Bommayanayakkanpatti and farmers are allowed to use it only once a week.

"We should be allowed at least thrice a week. Otherwise, vegetables perish. We transport them to Chinnamanur in a goods carrier vehicle from where it goes to Theni and other markets in the district," said the farmers.

Wildlife Warden of Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary Sachin Bhosle said that access through the forest area is restricted to once a week as there are wild animals in the pocket. However, he said that the demand would be considered." But only one vehicle will be allowed to use the path even if it's thrice a week.

The issue of grazing permits for cattle was also raised. Farmers rearing the native breed of 'malaimadu' that graze in the foothills of Western Ghats complained that the forest department had only issued 600 permits which are insufficient as there are about 10,000 cattle.

“Thousands of applications were submitted with due documents as demanded but the department has brought down the number of permits compared to the previous years. This will force people to abandon native cattle,” said Kennedy from Malaimadu Valarpor Sangam.

However, the Wildlife Warden said that the permits had been restricted to prevent large scale degradation of forest areas owing to extensive grazing and said that no more permits would be issued.

A section of farmers demanded fishing rights in village ponds and tanks. The positive monsoon and timely release of water from the dams had ensured waterflow to majority of tanks in the district and waterbodies were full of with fish life, they pointed out and appealed that locals should be allowed to fish in village ponds and tanks and outsiders should be restricted from fishing.

Collector M. Pallavi Baldev, DRO Ramesh, DRDA Project Director P. Thilagavathi, and officials participated in the meeting.

SOURCE:- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/permit-us-thrice-a-week-to-carry-produce-through-forest/article30645039.ece>