

# Pokkali farming in Maruvakkad derailed

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There will be no pokkali farming in Maruvakkad paddy fields in Chellanam panchayat after dewatering was disrupted, threatening to wash away paddy seeds sown in nearly 2.50 acres by the rising water level.

Dewatering was disrupted after pumping had to be suspended in the wake of a legal notice sent by the Maruvakkad Padashekhara Karshaka Samithi to the Chellanam agriculture officer, demanding the surrender of the pump house key. The district administration had allowed Pokkali paddy farmers to use the pump house, and the Pokkali Land Development Authority chaired by the District Collector had funded the pump operator's fee till September 4.

The Samithi had suspended dewatering on July 20, though it was supposed to dry the fields and hand them over for pokkali farming by April 15. Farmers had to resort to protest with sprouted seeds and take their case before the Agriculture Minister and the District Collector before the Padashekhara Samithi handed over the key to the pump house, and pumping could be resumed only on August 22. It was again disrupted on September 7, and since



Dewatering in the paddy fields was disrupted after pumping was suspended in the wake of a legal notice sent by the Maruvakkad Padashekhara Karshaka Samithi to the Chellanam agriculture officer, demanding the surrender of the pump house key. FILE PHOTO

then the water level has risen in the fields.

At a meeting of stakeholders called by District Collector G. Priyanka here on Wednesday, the Samithi declined to cooperate and facilitate dewatering. "We requested continuation of dewatering at our expense, but the Padashekhara Samithi declined. If the salinity in the water goes beyond 8 ppm [parts per million], it will affect the flowering of seeds, leading to chaff. The salinity level depends on the monsoon, and if it goes beyond the permitted limit, the seeds we sowed will be wasted," said Francis Kalathungal, a Pokkali farmer.

As the Samithi was insistent on prioritising saline aquaculture over Pokkali farming, the Fisheries Deputy Director, who attend-

ed the meeting, warned that the department would not issue licences for aquaculture to those who declined to undertake paddy farming.

According to rules, paddy farming should be undertaken during seven months of the year from April 15 to November 15, and aquaculture for the remaining five months.

The district administration assured that paddy farming would be guaranteed in Maruvakkad next year.

The Agriculture department has also drawn up an action plan to ensure that 260 acres of cultivable land out of the 465 acres in Maruvakkad are brought under pokkali farming from next season, and that aquaculture is not prioritised over paddy farming.