

EDEL PULSE: POST CONFERENCE NOTES

Poor monsoon rains on rural parade

India Equity Research | Conference Notes



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We hosted 23 dealers and distributors at Edel Pulse 2012, our unique one-day investor forum meant to provide on-the-ground insights into Indian businesses as well as to gauge the rural demand scenario in the wake of poor monsoon and general slowdown. The distinctiveness of this forum is its peer review of listed Indian corporates via interactions with competing businesses, consultants, service providers, suppliers, distributors and even function managers in listed companies.

We also took investors to the APMC market, warehouse and made them meet agricultural dealers to help understand the food supply chain.

Our interactions reveal that the rural slowdown is limited to consumer discretionary, but seems severe in areas having a weak monsoon. Everyone is pinning hopes of a turnaround on the ensuing festival season. Following are the key highlights from the event:

Slowdown limited to consumer discretionary...

Currently, the rural slowdown is limited to consumer discretionary like cars, two wheelers and white and brown goods where sales are sluggish and discounts are high. Enquiries for real estate have slowed down. On the positive side, FMCG demand continues to be robust. Rural NPAs for private sector banks remain low. Demand for mobile handsets has picked up due to cheaper smartphones.

...more pronounced in rain deficient states

Weak monsoon in certain parts of the country is becoming a major worry. Fall in demand for consumer discretionary is more pronounced in drought affected regions of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Rajasthan. FMCG has seen down-trading to lower SKUs in such areas, but within the same brands. Weak monsoon has affected demand of acute therapy (anti-malaria and anti-infective drugs). Banks have also seen a drop in demand in such areas though of late, there has been a recovery. Currently, all hopes are being placed on the festival season. If monsoon situation deteriorates further in September, it could dash such hopes and also affect winter crop. Thus, monsoon stays the key monitorable in the near term.

Farm to fork: Significant investment needed in warehousing

Our efforts to showcase the food-supply chain reveal that there exists ample scope for lowering wastage and improving productivity at various stages of sowing to distribution, the biggest being the lack of storage infrastructure. Rising land prices are rendering the setting up of new warehouses unviable. Thus, food inflation can stay sticky in the near to medium term.

Edelweiss research team

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AUTOMOBILES

Slowdown prolongs

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We hosted auto and farm equipment dealers from small towns of Western India to gauge the impact of the ongoing economic slowdown and drought-like scenario, especially on rural India. Demand across product categories has been affected since the beginning of the year. Discount levels, which started rising with demand slowdown, have remained at higher levels. Inventories are under control at dealers' yards due to production adjustments by OEMs. Dealers across categories are hopeful of a demand revival in the coming months due to the ensuing festive season, but remain cautious due to weak monsoon.

Dealers of tractors, cars and two wheelers from Rajasthan and Gujarat attended our conference. Following are the key highlights:

Auto: All eyes on festive season, but weak monsoon is a concern

Demand for cars and two wheelers has remained lukewarm throughout the year due to the economic slowdown. Monsoon affected areas have been impacted more in recent months. In cars, dealers are experiencing a decline in footfalls along with low conversion ratio. Discount levels have remained at higher levels (up to INR30k for Maruti) for petrol cars whereas most diesel cars are facing long waiting periods with no discounts. Despite low sales, inventory levels are under control at dealers' yard thanks to the steps taken by OEMs (production adjustments, etc). Financing is also easily available at an average interest rate of ~11% from commercial banks and ~13% from NBFCs. In two wheelers, inventory levels have gone up. Exchange schemes have started to emerge as well.

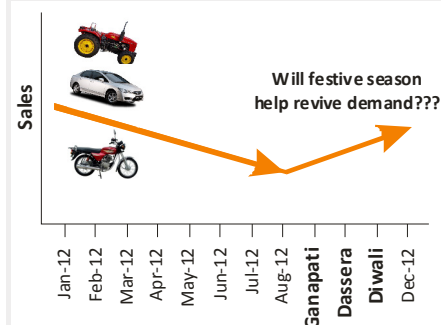
Tractors: Cyclical slowdown to continue for some more time

Dealers see the current slowdown as cyclical and expect the trend to continue for some time. Weak monsoon has also aggravated the pain. However, they are hopeful of a recovery in the coming months due to the festive season. Discount levels remain at higher levels due to lower sales and increasing competition. Inventories are under control due to the discipline shown by OEMs. Bank finance is available at an average rate of 13% by banks and 19% by NBFCs.

Our view: Slowdown to persist

The feedback from dealers has been in line with our expectation of a weak auto demand in the wake of the economic slowdown. However, the situation in rain-affected areas is worse than other parts. Dealers across segments are hopeful of a recovery during the coming festive season. New launches in cars, two wheelers and tractors (by M&M) are also likely to bring some cheer to demand in the coming months. We believe there could be a sequential recovery, though sustainability depends on monetary and fiscal action by RBI and the government.

Can festive season revive demand?



Source: Edelweiss research

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BANKING AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

No visible strains on rural credit growth, quality

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We hosted representatives of three rural financiers to gauge the credit demand and the impact of slowdown/deficient monsoon on growth and credit quality. We understand that growth is firm and NPAs are contained given the robust rural incomes.

Federal Bank's Agriculture Head, Mahindra Rural Housing Finance CEO and Manappuram's Regional Manager attended our conference. Following are the key highlights:

Agri performing well for Federal Bank; gold loans post growth

Federal Bank's current agri loan book stands at INR43bn (11% of advances), of which, INR13bn is gold loan, INR2.5bn is indirect lending (to sugar companies) and the balance is direct agri lending. However, gross NPLs in this portfolio are contained at INR1.2bn (merely 2.7%, lower relative to PSU banks). It does not see any major asset quality issues within the agri portfolio at this stage due to deficient monsoon. RIDF investments stand at INR20.5bn, though it aims to meet regulatory agri requirement at 18% of advances in next 12-18 months. Incrementally, the bank is expanding its agri branches in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab.

Manappuram Finance's representative indicated a pick up in business after LTV per gram was raised to ~INR2,100 in the last 15 days. Initially, when the loan value was INR1,600-1,800 per gram (coupled with regulatory uncertainties and funding side issues), it saw a moderation in disbursements. Currently, it offers four schemes (compared to 8-10 schemes earlier) with lending rates varying between 15% and 24%. However, more than 60% of disbursements happen in high LTV-high rate category.

Mahindra Rural Housing Finance eyes USD1bn loan book by FY15

Mahindra Finance's endeavour to provide rural housing finance through its subsidiary is progressing well with the loan book of INR6n yielding 19% for loan ticket sizes ranging from INR85k-INR1L. There are no strategically focused competitors in its area of operation. Although a weak monsoon induced a dip in collection rates in June (as 30% of customers across India and 85% customers in Maharashtra are agri dependant), July and August have been robust months with little stress. While 50% LTV does offer comfort, there are practical challenges in possessing and selling the collateral to settle dues. In terms of the borrower composition, it wants to maintain the current distribution of 30% farmers, 30% salaried class and the rest being self employed. In terms of profitability, opex/average assets may decline 200bps to 5%.

Our view: Private sector more at ease in rural exposure than PSUs

We sense a sustained degree of comfort among financiers in terms of growth and asset quality in their rural exposures. This is in marked contrast to that of public sector banks which are grappling with agri NPAs ranging from 5-10%.

Gold loans pick up after LTV hike



Source: Edelweiss research

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CEMENT

Optimistic on demand

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Cement dealers who participated in our conference were of the view that the current demand slowdown was purely seasonal due to a pick up in monsoon. They were fairly confident that post the rainy season, demand will recover and grow ~8-12% YoY in their regions. The current price correction is also seasonal in nature as it will recoup with a revival in demand. While we maintain that cement demand for FY13 will grow ~8-9% (Q1FY13 growth was ~10%), low industry capacity utilisation of ~78% in FY13 and FY14 will continue to keep prices volatile.

Cement dealers from Nagpur (Maharashtra), Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) and Patna (Bihar) attended our conference. Following are the key highlights:

Slowdown in construction, monsoon depresses demand

The current cement demand is low on account of a pick up in monsoon and slowdown in construction activities. However, cement dealers are fairly optimistic on growth of 8-12% YoY in FY13 in their regions. In Lucknow, post the monsoon, demand is expected to pick up on back of projects announced by the new state government. In Bihar, demand will improve due to the stable political environment and sustained development. Dealer in Nagpur expects demand to remain stable.

Prices under short-term pressure, to recover post rains

Cement prices are under pressure due to the low seasonal demand. From the recent peak level (of June 2012), prices have declined by INR15-20/bag in the trade category and by INR30-50/bag in the non-trade category across regions. The gap between trade and non-trade is widening which may exert downward pressure on trade prices in the near term. Dealers expect further price declines in the coming weeks. However, all of them are fairly confident of a recovery in prices with the revival in demand post monsoon.

Our view: Prices to remain volatile

While we maintain our view that cement demand in India for FY13 will grow ~8-9% (Q1FY13 growth was ~10%), low industry capacity utilisation of ~78% for FY13 and FY14 will continue to keep cement prices volatile.

Prices set to recover post rains



Source: Company, Edelweiss research

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CONSUMER GOODS

Long-term story intact

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We hosted dealers of different consumer companies to assess the overall demand, likely impact of the discretionary slowdown and the deficit in rainfall. Our interactions suggest that most non-discretionary Consumer Goods segments remain confident and are not witnessing any slowdown in growth. Media spends play a key role in discretionary sales. Growing direct reach, widening rural portfolio (premium products like *Dove*, *Saffola oats* and *Colgate mouthwash* available in rural areas), more focus on lower priced units, on ground initiatives to promote consumption are some of the proactive steps taken to beat the rural slowdown. Also, premiumisation trend continues (in cigarettes -from *Bristol* to *Gold Flake*- and soaps and biscuits while oil is an exception) though temporary downtrading can be seen in select categories. We remain concerned on the monsoon deficit, but stay bullish on the Indian Consumer space from a longer-term perspective.

Four dealers of various consumer companies from rural areas/small towns across Western India attended our conference. Following are the key highlights:

Brand loyalty pays off, credit cycle unchanged

Only rain deficient areas have seen some signs of downtrading to lower SKUs, though sales for brands have not been affected due to brand loyalty. Credit cycle has not been affected. Literacy rate has seen a significant step up, resulting in a shift from unbranded to branded products while dealing a blow to contraband products. However, small unbranded players with stronger brand equity continue to dominate regional demand (like *Sapat tea* in interiors of Maharashtra).

Body lotion gives Marico a face lift; Sensitive smiles for Colgate

Marico is seeing an acceleration in volume post the select price cut in LPP; its body lotion is experiencing good acceptance in rural patches. Supply issues for Nestle have been resolved. Britannia is facing intense competitive pressure from ITC. Colgate has seen a major consumer shift from toothpowder to toothpaste (~70:30 in FY98 to 30:70 currently). *Colgate Sensitive* is doing well in rural areas, riding high on established brand equity while *Sensodyne* (GSK) is the preferred brand in bigger towns. Chocolates category (Cadbury, Nestle) has seen good growth ~30% YoY.

Our view: Rising income levels to sustain growth

The feedback from dealers has been in line with our expectation. The FMCG pack is likely to do well on back of rising income levels and lifestyle changes which will make penetration levels and per capita consumption attractive for years to come. Wage inflation is posing distribution hassles though aiding overall rural spending. We believe slowdown in discretionary spends may extend to non-discretionary in H2FY13.

Sensitive gaining in rural areas



Source: Company

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EDUCATION

Prospects high, execution key

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We hosted Mr. Sanjay Chowdhury, CEO, IMS Preschool, a subsidiary of IMS Learning. The company is in nascent stages after two years of operation in three key business areas (certification programmes, government projects for underprivileged/tribal people and vocational training). We believe there is huge demand for such education/training, though execution remains a major challenge. Key highlights.

Huge opportunity, execution a key challenge

The company has three major business areas—certification programmes in financial modeling, management accounting and HR recruitment skills, government projects for underprivileged, SC/ST and tribal people and vocational training for people (with basic education) to learn short courses to become plumbers, fitters, welders, and electricians. Mr. Chowdhury believes there is huge demand for cheap labour, which was available in tribal areas. However, these underprivileged people need to polish their skill sets through short courses and bridge the gap. However, execution of this will be a big challenge.

Corruption levels to dip in skill development project

On the government side, Mr. Chowdhury believes corruption levels in huge INR30K crore skill development project will dip over a period of time as the Gujarat government has already taken steps in this direction. It will issue vouchers to candidates who can utilise the same to receive training/education by directly approaching an education provider of their choice.

Our view: Vast potential, but patience is key

Based on our discussion with Mr. Chowdhury, we believe that India is also joining the league of developed countries like the US and Europe in the field of education where short-term certification programmes are gaining lot of traction due to quick results and lower amount involved. This is one of the reasons why the number of CAT aspirants has come down from 2.75 lacs to 1.75lacs in the last five years even though MBA degrees are still sought after and short courses are mostly in the concept stage. In terms of government initiatives for skill development, there are many players but few are genuine and capable. However, corruption is dipping slowly due to advanced processes including the direct issue of vouchers. For short-term vocational training courses (like nurses, welders, fitters, electricians and plumbers), there is high demand as these courses cost INR5k-INR10K with a three-month payback period. We also believe that education is a long gestation business and may need lot of patience before it becomes fruitful.

Huge prospects in training tribals



Source: thealternative.in

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ENGINEERING & CAPITAL GOODS

Prayers for festive demand get louder

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We hosted two large dealers from South and West India to validate the demand scenario in these regions. On the face of it, demand has been hit due to a combination of: (1) weak macros; (2) scanty monsoon; and (3) pressure on margins among companies. We comprehend that customers are postponing purchases, which has affected demand in white/brown goods. We also gauge that the severe drought in several parts of the country could further accentuate the demand situation. Dealers are eyeing festive demand to perk up sale of appliances and other consumer/electrical goods.

Following is the summary of interaction with two dealers of white/brown goods and electrical goods/appliances. Brands included LG, Voltas, Haier, V-Guard, Bajaj Electricals, Finolex besides imported goods. Areas covered included Tamil Nadu, parts of Kerala (South India) and Ahmednagar and its satellite smaller towns/ rural areas (West).

Seasonal demand strong, but festive demand can light up scenario

Seasonal products have recorded a robust growth in demand at 20%-25% in both western and southern markets. While an extended summer helped the pick-up in cooling products (fans, coolers and air conditioners), scanty monsoon has affected appliances as customers have resorted to postponing purchases (more evident in white goods). We understand that the drought situation could worsen the pressure further. Dealers indicated that many times newly launched products were not available on shelves even as companies spent heavily on advertisement/sales promotion.

Mixed segmental performance, after sales service becomes key

While appliances have seen a growth of 20-25% during the past six months, air conditioners have grown by only 15-20%, especially in Aurangabad. Dealers explained that after-sales service of products has become the critical factor in choosing appliances. Here, domestic local vendors are of immense help both in terms of service and costing to companies. The currency depreciation has also hit margins of several players sourcing components/ finished products from overseas vendors, given that they are unable to pass on all the cost increases to final customers.

Our view: Competitive intensity to aggravate

The feedback from dealers has been broadly in-line with our expectation of a moderation in demand due to scanty monsoon. The demand situation can accentuate further due to the severe drought in many parts of the country. We believe that the ensuing festive season is key for a recovery in demand. With several new entrants in the market, we expect the competitive intensity to remain fierce. From our dealer interactions we also gather that Bajaj Electricals remains strong in appliances market while Crompton Greaves is implementing newer strategy to regain market through newer products launches.

Consumers are delaying purchases



Source: Havells

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PHARMACEUTICALS

Weak monsoon nips acute therapy

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Lack of seasonal pick-up due to poor monsoons will impact growth of acute therapy players while chronic companies are likely to do well. Diabetic segment is growing over 31% driven by high volume and new products such as Gliptins. Segments like dermatology, gastroenterology and vitamins are also showing a strong traction. We expect the high base effect to dent domestic growth trajectory during H2FY13. We continue to prefer companies with a robust chronic presence such as Sun, Lupin and Torrent.

We hosted Mr Harinatrajan, VP, AIOCD, and a big pharma distributor for leading pharma companies from Gujarat. Following are the key highlights:

Seasonal pick up not strong due to poor monsoon

July-Sept period is a seasonally strong one for acute segments such as anti-infectives, anti-malarial, gastro and pain management. However, due to deficient rainfall, the demand has weakened in the acute segment to 6%-7% while chronic continues to see ~18%-20% growth led by anti-diabetics, cardiac and CNS. Vitamins and Minerals is also leading in terms of growth and players such as GSK, Pfizer (Becosule) and Ranbaxy (Revital) are seeing a higher traction. Other segments witnessing growth include dermatology (specifically cosmetology) and gastroenterology (Sun leads the segment in terms of incremental growth).

Chronic focused players to do well; MNCs lack reach and aggression

Chronic focused players such as Sun, Lupin and Cadila are doing well. IPCA and Torrent are also seeing a decent traction (Torrent has moved up two ranks in CNS). Cipla has a high recall and is gaining momentum within the acute. Glenmark has posted strong growth within cardiac (Telmisartan group) and derma segments. MNCs are strong in hospital and vaccines though their aggression as well as field force penetration is lagging Indian peers. GSK which holds a monopoly in vaccines has gained more room in anti-infectives while Pfizer is going through a reshuffling of the management and high attrition in its field force. Moreover, as per AIOCD AWACS, the move to impose taxes on gifts to doctors could eliminate small unorganized players and would be positive for the industry in the long run.

Our view: Base effect to impact domestic growth in H2FY13

Though poor monsoon may impact anti-malaria, respiratory and anti-infective sales in Q2FY13, chronic segment would continue to grow at a rapid pace. Diabetic segment is growing over 31% driven by high volume and new products such as Gliptins. We believe that the growth momentum in domestic market is likely to sustain even as higher base effect in second half could dent growth. We continue to prefer companies having a strong chronic presence such as Sun, Lupin and Torrent.

Anti-malarial drugs in low demand



Source: Edelweiss research

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REAL ESTATE

A seasonal dip in volume

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We hosted two leading property dealers to get a sense of the price-volume action and buyer profile. Property volumes have slackened in the last 3-6 months due to a variety of reasons even as Gurgaon witnessed a steep drop in enquiries, especially within the last fortnight. Investors/NRIs dominate the buyer profile with Gurgaon reporting an investor involvement as high as 80-90%. Prices, however, continue to rise as dealers maintain that prices may remain firm on account of lower supply and higher costs.

We hosted two property dealers hailing from Gurgaon and Chandigarh. Following are the key takeaways from the conference:

Volume, enquiries weaken in past 3-6 months

Demand has weakened across most markets as a result of high prices and weakened sentiment. For instance, Chandigarh has reported a ~15-25% drop in volume in the last 3-6 months while Gurgaon has reported a steep drop in enquiries in the last 15 days (over and above the weakening walk-ins due to intense summer heat). Similar data points were reported from other cities (over separate telephonic conversations) due to a range of attributing reasons including seasonality, high prices and weak sentiment. In terms of the buyer profile, Chandigarh reported 30-40% buyers being investors and ~15-25% being NRIs while Gurgaon reported ~80-90% of buyers being investors. Some dealers believe that volumes may remain subdued till 2014 elections.

Prices stay firm; investor demand, thin pipeline to sustain buoyancy

Prices in Gurgaon have gone up by ~15% while Chandigarh has seen a price hike of 15%-20% with the exception being central Chandigarh which has seen property prices softening by ~20-25% over the last four years. Strong investor demand and a poor supply pipeline are expected to support prices in Gurgaon while infrastructure development is expected to lead prices in Chandigarh.

Our view: Volumes to recover in festive season

We had highlighted the weakening demand in Q1FY13 result preview dated July 4, 2012, citing excess summer heat and high prices. We believe that volumes are likely to remain soft in the following two months, ending on October 15, due to inauspicious period of *Adhik maas* which would be followed by *Shraadh*, according to the Hindu calendar, with an expected pick up in Q3FY13 with the return of festive season and due to increased NRI activity. We further believe that prices are likely to remain firm on account of lack of triggers and a general tardy pace of approvals. The sector as a whole continues to face debt woes and developers who are able to reduce debt and to launch projects amidst weakening supply are likely to perform well. Our top picks are DLF and Jaypee Infratech.

Gurgaon sees sharp dip in enquiries



Source: DLF

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TELECOM

Smartphones device a recovery

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We hosted one of the largest handset distributors of Micromax. We realise that handset volume has grown steadily during the past four months thanks to a uniform demand across rural and urban areas. The smartphone segment is gaining traction as opposed to feature phones due to attractive price points. 3G-enabled phones demand may take off post recent tariff cuts. Tablets are an upcoming segment with institutional sales driving demand. Following are the excerpts:

One of the largest distributors of Micromax handsets in India covering the territory of Maharashtra attended our conference. Following are the key highlights:

Demand picks up in past four months, MNC brands gain lead

Handset demand that slackened temporarily in 2011 seems to have picked up during the past four months. The slackness was blamed on INR depreciation and a slowdown in the economy. But the recent improvement in demand is probably due to the advent of affordable smartphones. The average selling price has declined by about 23% during the past two years due to higher volume in the low-end (sub-INR1200) handsets. Apparently, there is no distinction in demand trends in rural and urban areas as demand is uniform across the state. MNC brands have made a comeback at the expense of non-serious Indian brands.

Rural areas graduating from feature phones to smartphones

Feature phones were the hallmark of Indian brands due to their understanding of rural demand. Thus, phones with longer battery life (due to power shortage) and louder speakers (for listening to music by a larger group of people) were an instant hit in rural areas which helped domestic brands to build scale and brand loyalty. But early adopters of feature phones are graduating to smartphones (~10% of sales) which are now available in a range of INR5,000-INR9,000. The demand for smartphones was initially seen in cities, but is now picking up in smaller towns as well. **3G phones still not in demand, Tablets an upcoming segment:** High 3G tariffs seem to have precluded the demand for 3G phones. Even though the customer prefers a smartphone, the purchasing decision is not based on the accessibility to 3G services as 3G tariffs are perceived to be high. However, recent tariff cuts would facilitate more 3G phone purchases. But the surprise element has been the Tablet segment, essentially due to attractive price points of INR5,000-INR6,000. Institutional sales are key drivers of Tablet sales with some charitable trusts purchasing to supply to schools. Even corporates are purchasing for their sales force.

Our view: Exciting times ahead

The slowdown in net subscriber additions was expected to have an impact on the handset demand. But rural penetration and graduation from feature phones to smartphones besides the adoption of Tablets would lead to a healthy growth in devices. Thus, we believe these are exciting times for device manufacturers.

Smartphones revive sectoral hopes



Source: Edelweiss research

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FARM TO FORK VISIT

Focus on productivity improvement

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We took investors to the agricultural mandi and warehouse and met agricultural traders. Contrary to popular perception, farmers are well connected to the market while the role of middlemen has been declining steadily. Similarly, wastage has constantly dipped as the economy progressed. FDI in retail is being opposed due to lack of level playing field and fear of job losses.

We took investors to the Mumbai APMC market and also visited the laboratory and warehouse maintained by NBHC. Our interactions with traders led to some interesting findings:

Agricultural supply chain improving continuously

With the advent of mobile phones, internet and TV, farmers are a lot more aware and well connected with the agriculture market (called mandi). Mumbai APMC is receiving farm produce directly from farmers in far off states (e.g., potato from Agra or rice from Punjab). Hence, middlemen have lost relevance. Rural and urban mandi price difference arises due to transportation costs, taxes and wastage. Wastage in food grains starts from sowing due to low mechanisation and continues till the produce reaches the end-consumer for poor road network and lack of warehousing. However, with the progress of the economy, increase in farm mechanisation and an improvement in road infrastructure, the wastage is dipping continuously. This trend is likely to persist. Warehouses could not only store agri produce, but also aid in certifying the quality of produce and get funding against the produce stored. High land prices are creating hurdles for setting up warehouses and act as a major bottleneck for productivity improvement.

FDI opposed due to lack of level playing field

Currently, FDI in retail is opposed by traders as they do not expect any major improvement in the infrastructure from it. They also fear that better pricing for farmers and consumers cannot happen together. Due to lack of level playing field, traders fear job losses as well.

Our view: Need for productivity enhancement

We identify three major areas of productivity improvement by lowering the wastage: (1) **At the farm itself:** where the wastage in sowing and harvesting can be lowered by higher mechanization; (2) **The way the produce reaches the market:** which involves an improvement in the road network and investments in refrigerated carriers; and (3) **Lack of warehousing near the farm and near the mandi:** this affects farmers holding power.

While the first two factors are likely to improve as the economy expands, government intervention is needed to ensure enough warehousing capabilities.

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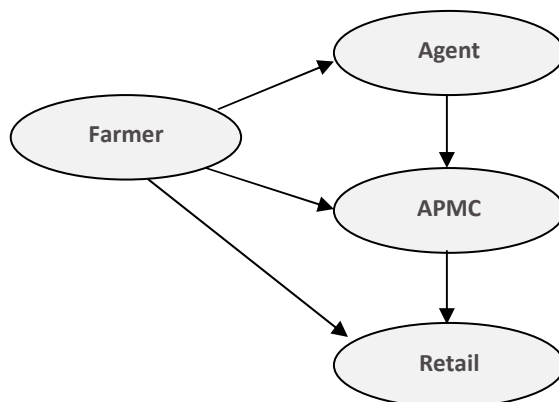
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Fig. 1: NBHC offerings to farmers



Source: www.nbhcindia.com

Fig. 2: Food supply chain

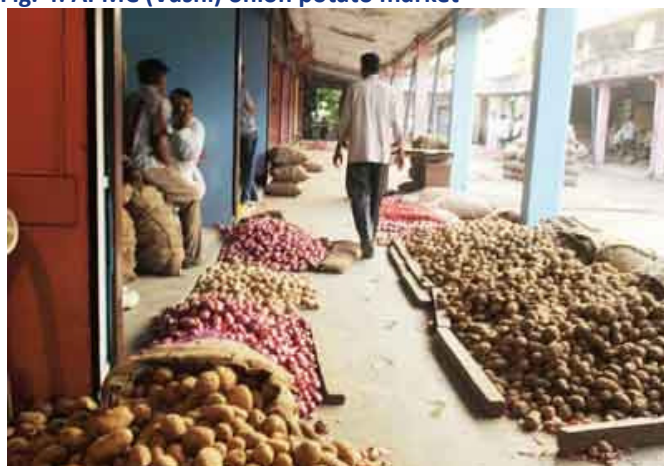


Source: Edelweiss research

Fig. 3: Filtering of sample by warehouse laboratory



Fig. 4: APMC (Vashi) onion potato market



Source: Edelweiss research



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