

Wholesalers want curbs relaxed to maintain supply of essential goods

Vatsala Shringi and Ashish Mishra
■ htreporters@hindustantimes.com

NEWDELHI: Ensuring that the supply chain is not disrupted is a major challenge, especially with an extension of the lockdown for 19 more days, according to various stakeholders involved in the process.

The stock of essential items, including perishables, foodgrains, packaged items, pharmaceutical products, consumer durables and dairy products, is already thinning out across the city, traders said, saying they were apprehensive that continued curbs on movement may spark shortages.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the lockdown will be extended till May 3 to contain the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19). The Centre will issue a set of guidelines for states to implement the extended lockdown on Wednesday.

Fresh curbs, put in place by the Delhi government to ensure social distancing at wholesale vegetable and fruit markets, are likely to hit the supply of green vegetables, especially those arriving in small and medium-sized vehicles, such as pickup trucks and tempos. The government imposed staggered timings for purchase of vegetables and fruits, token-based entry of only 2,000 vehicles and allowing only one supply vehicle per trader, be it a small or big truck.

Traders at Azadpur Mandi, which is Delhi's biggest wholesale fruit and vegetable market, said the situation, except for staples, such as potatoes, tomatoes and onions, is likely to worsen at retail markets in a couple of days.



■ Wholesalers say that supply of green vegetables to city markets has been affected due to decreased supply. SANJEEV VERMA/HT PHOTO

"Nearly 60% of major green vegetables are not reaching the wholesale market. The shortage of bottle gourd, ridged gourd, brinjal, bitter melon and okra at the mandi will start reflecting in retail markets soon. The revised rules are not allowing the adequate supply of these vegetables by farmers. It's a failed system," Anil Malhotra, a member of Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC), Azadpur, said.

He said that these vegetables and fruits, such as muskmelon and watermelon, are supplied in smaller vehicles from neighbouring states of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Usually, a wholesale trader receives vegetables from three to five vehicles per day. "Nearly 64 traders were challoaned for violating the norm of one vehicle per trader. This is creating a gap in supply. For instance, if a trader normally used to get 15 tonnes of these vegetables per day, he will now get only three to four tons. It will eventually result in price rise

at retail markets," Malhotra said.

However, Adil Ahmad Khan, chairman, APMC Azadpur, a Delhi government-appointed official, said that there were some hiccups, initially, in the implementation of the new system and that it would be streamlined soon.

"There are some concerns regarding the supply of green vegetables and entry passes. We have held a meeting with the traders and assured that arrangements will soon be made so that the supply of green and perishable vegetables is not affected. The validity of passes, which were issued to the wholesale traders of the mandi, has now been extended till May 3," Khan said.

Transporters too said that they are working at just 15%-20% of their capacity. Pradeep Singhal, chairman, All India Transporters Welfare Association, said that many trucks are stranded at borders, while there are not enough loaders or drivers. "Most of the workforce has left the city. There are not enough people to drive

vehicles. We are in talks with the government and have also requested them to provide social security for drivers so that they are encouraged to resume work," said Singhal.

Besides, retailers and small-time grocery store owners said that they are running out of essential items.

Sumit Dawar, a grocery store owner at Lajpat Nagar market, has been using making trips in his vehicle to procure stock from wholesalers. "Initially, the supply would reach every three days, which gradually started extending to almost a week. People would stock up the moment fresh supply arrived. Besides, many distributors of flour brands, packaged items and toiletries have not been supplying stock. To deal with this, I decided to get permission from the local authorities to use my car for getting some stock, but even then, only a limited stock can be ferried in a car," said Dawar.

At central Delhi's Gole Market, some stores have run out of cooking oil, ghee, rice flour and condiments. In southwest Delhi's Dwarka, retailers said that they do have enough pulses and legumes in stock, and are running out of spices, frozen foods and sanitary items.

Naresh Gupta, the president of Delhi Grain Merchants Association said, "We are able to send out stock only once or twice a week. With limited resources at hand, it is becoming difficult for dealers to transport goods on time."

Vijay Jain, president, All India Traders Association, is hopeful that the new guidelines will ease restrictions on interstate transportation of goods.