

Chilli farmers feel the ‘lockdown’ heat as rabi season set to end

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A video that captured the heart-rending story of a chilli farmer has gone viral in WhatsApp groups in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. With a lush green crop, almost ready for harvesting,



in the backdrop, the farmer lamented how the lockdown is killing the crop.

“We have invested a lot. The situation is very bad now. Chillis, being very delicate, are falling as temperatures are rising. We

As the season advanced and the country announced a 21-day lockdown, the woes of the chilli farmers that grow this labour-intensive crop only increased - THE HINDU

desperately need labourers to get the chillis plucked,” the unidentified farmer pleads.

Collective agony

He is not alone. It is a collective agony of thousands of farmers in the two Telugu States.

As the movement of people and vehicles is curtailed, chilli farmers in the two Telugu States, which contribute 50-60 per cent of India’s chilli output, face a serious challenge of losing the crop. Marketyards across the two States have been shut down owing to Covid-19 fears.

According to estimates, about 30-40 per cent of the crop is yet to be harvested. Some of the farmers, who completed the harvesting, placed their produce in cold storages.

With the rabi season coming to a close in a week or so, the chilli farmers are not in a position to hire labourers for harvesting the crop. Besides, they would require pesticides and fertilisers ahead of the harvesting season but they are not able to get the stocks as the input dealers have shut down the shops.

Between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, chillis are grown in about 6 lakh acres, with a total output of 7-8 lakh tonnes.

The problem began a month ago as traders had either stopped or slowed down the purchases after international supply chains were disrupted by the coronavirus outbreak.

There has been no let-up in the situation ever since. As the season advanced and the country announced a 21-day lockdown, the woes of the farmers that grow this labour-intensive crop only increased.

Production cost

They are in a precarious situation. The cost of production has gone up to about ₹2 lakh an acre.

“They would require at least 50 people (mostly women) to pick chillis. With labourers not moving out of their villages and with no vehicles in sight, it has become very difficult for them to hire people,” Sarampally Malla Reddy, Vice-President of All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), told BusinessLine.

B Dasaratha Rami Reddy, Secretary-General of the Confederation of Indian Farmers’ Associations (CIFA), has said that the movement of vehicles and people has become still more difficult as villagers blocked the roads.

Malla Reddy pegs the availability of labourers at 10 per cent of the total requirement. “There is another challenge of storing the output. As markets are closed, they need to store the produce in cold storages, whose capacity is very low, compared with the output,” he said.

Storage issues

All cold storage godowns are brimming with chilli stocks. “Not all can afford the fee. It will cost ₹160-200 to store a bag (of about 40-50 kg) for six months,” Jaipal Reddy, a farmer in Warangal district, said.

The farmers have lost hope. “Even if the markets are opened and we are able to complete harvesting, we may not get a good price as the produce would flood the market once the situation is eased,” another farmer said.

Source: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/chilli-farmers-feel-the-heat-as-rabi-season-set-to-end/article31281727.ece>