

Trade sees cotton area up by 10-15% in North

Seed firms say acreage may not rise as growers face water, weather problems

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The area under cotton is seen expanding in North India during the current kharif season, mainly in Haryana and Rajasthan. The trade expects the area to increase by 10-15 per cent.

However, seed companies such as Rasi Seeds and Crystal Crop Protection Ltd among others don't see any major increase in the area in the North as farmers have faced challenges in water availability in parts of Rajasthan and Punjab. The heat wave has affected germination in some areas, while fears of pink bollworm attack have also gripped growers.

Sowing to extend

Traditionally, the sowing window for cotton in North India is between mid-April and mid-May. This year, the sowing sea-

son is seen extending till mid-June as farmers, lured by surging prices, are likely to bring more area under the natural fibre crop. "The trend in cotton sowing has been good so far and we expect the area to increase by 10-15 per cent," said Mukesh Tayal, President, Indian Cotton Association Ltd (ICAL), the apex trade body in the region.

"As on date, sowing has been complete on 75-80 per cent of the area. I expect cotton would be sown by May 30 and some area to be covered by mid-June. We have lot of cotton sown on time this year," Tayal said.

The latest State-specific cotton sowing data for the season was not available. In the 2021-22 kharif season, cotton was planted on 6.88 lakh hectares (lh) in Haryana, 3.03 lh in Punjab and 7.08 lh in Rajasthan. Total cotton area in North stood at 17 lh in 2021-22. Atul Ganatra,



A farmer inspects his cotton farm affected by lack of water at Gharsana district in Rajasthan (file photo)

President, Cotton Association of India, expects sowing to be done in around 20 lh in the North this year.

Seed firms skeptic

While the trade expects area under the fibre to go up in North, seed companies are not bullish about the prospects in the region.

"North is okay as far as we are concerned as there is bit of growth in sales. However, it looks like there is no expected increase in acreage, especially Punjab and Haryana, while there is some growth in Ra-

jasthan. Overall, there is no growth in acreage in North this year," said M Ramasami, Founder, Rasi Seeds Pvt Ltd, the largest cotton seed company in the country.

"Farmers are not keen to expand cotton area in Punjab and Haryana as last year there was a heavy attack of pink bollworm. For the first time, farmers faced pink bollworm attack in these States and the damage is still fresh in their memory," Ramasami said.

Ankur Aggarwal, Managing Director, Crystal Crop Protection Ltd, said the seed purchases

by farmers in North was lower by 15-20 per cent over last year and staggered due to reduced water availability and dry spells.

Bhagirath Chaudhary, Founder Director, South Asia Biotechnology Centre, Jodhpur said: "Farmers are increasing cotton area in Rajasthan, where there has been a major concern with the availability of quality Bt cotton hybrid seeds and selling of unapproved and low-quality seeds by fly-by-night operators. Another big concern is the supply of electricity for ground water irrigation for sowing across Rajasthan and the timely release of canal water in Ganganagar and Hanumangarh of north-west Rajasthan."

Further, Chaudhary said induced by high market price, cotton adaptability and growing ginning industry, Rajasthan is emerging as a major cotton producer in the northern zone. The area under the fibre crop has expanded in the last 2-3 years, he said.