

Record prices lift cotton acreage

Weather holding good, production could top 375 lakh bales: Stakeholders

RUTAM VORA

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Backed by a five-year high acreage, India's cotton production in the coming season (October 2022-September 2023) will likely be around 375 lakh bales (of 170 kg each) but the weather Gods will have to be kind for that to happen.

Record prices for *kapas* (raw cotton) right from the beginning of the current season have attracted more farmers to the natural fibre. Against the minimum support price (MSP) of ₹5,726 a quintal, farmers received as high as ₹12,500 at one time. However, for the most part of the season, prices have hovered around ₹9,000. For the next season, the MSP has been fixed at ₹6,080.

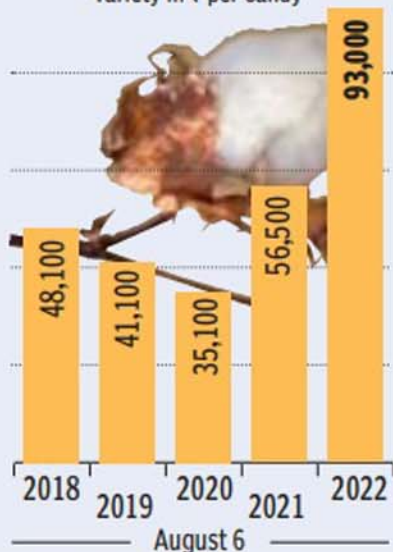
According to Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare data, the area under cotton as of August 5 was 121.13 lakh hectares (lh) compared with 113.51 lh during the same period a year ago.

Unseasonal rains impact

This sets the tone for cotton production to be higher but stakeholders are a little wary of rains during October-November. Last year, unseasonal rains during October-November resulted in the crop being affected and its quality deteriorating. There is a lurking fear of pest attacks, too.

Handsome returns

Spot rates of GUJ (ICS-105 29mm) variety in ₹ per candy



Source: Cotton Association of India

Progressive cotton sowing till Aug 4, 2022 (in lakh ha)

State	Normal area	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
Maharashtra	39.16	41.72	38.74	41.19
Gujarat	22.92	25.04	22.22	22.16
Telangana	18.19	19.98	20.18	21.71
Karnataka	3.87	7.39	5.07	4.69
Rajasthan	5.81	6.47	5.99	6.74
Haryana	6.84	6.50	6.88	7.37
Madhya Pradesh	5.84	5.99	6.00	6.23
Andhra Pradesh	3.37	4.67	3.56	4.24
Punjab	2.88	2.48	2.54	3.00
Odisha	1.56	2.08	1.88	1.66
All India	110.74	121.12	113.5	119.24

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India

Jagdish Magan, a farmer from Morbi district in Gujarat, has increased his cotton acreage by 1.5 times this year.

"We got good returns last year. This year the climate has been supportive so far. And if it remains good throughout, we expect good returns," he said, adding that he has cultivated cotton on 35 *bigha* (about 17 acres of land) this year against 20 *bigha* (about 10 acres) last year.

Though prices looked like dropping a couple of weeks ago, defaults in imports have resulted in domestic prices heading north again.

100% higher than MSP

Atul Ganatra, President of the Cotton Association of India (CAI), said: "Cotton prices this season were about 100 per cent higher than the MSP. There is no such crop where farmers will get a price 100 per cent higher than MSP.

"Even though there was a setback to the output, the returns were very high. Farmers got attracted to the high returns," Ganatra said, adding that the crop appears "fantastic at present," with a likelihood of a crop size to be about 375-380 lakh bales (each of 170 kg).

"The crop will be higher this year, but there should not be any heavy rain in October like last year. If such a thing recurs, then it could damage production prospects," said K Venkatachalam, Chief Advisor, Tamilnadu Spin-

ning Mills Association (TASMA).

Damage in Maharashtra

Initial reports say the crop condition in central, western and southern regions is robust. However, in Maharashtra and parts of the northern States of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan there are concerns over some damage following extended moist weather and the appearance of pink bollworm.

Rajkot-based cotton, yarn and cotton waste trader Anand Poppat said the damage due to excessive rainfall may be minimal and in some areas, farmers could go in for resowing.

In Gujarat, No 1 producer, the area is 25.04 lh (22.22 lh). The cotton acreage in Andhra Pradesh has jumped by 31 per cent to 4.67 lh, whereas in Karnataka

the coverage has surged by 46 per cent to 7.39 lh. In States such as Gujarat, farmers have switched over from groundnut and sesame seeds to cotton.

Outlook positive

"What we need now is favourable weather with good sunny days in the North and no rains during October-November," said Ganatra.

In Karnataka, where there has been a sharp rise in acreage, sowing has increased for both long staple and medium staple varieties. "Looking to the present scenario of the overall crop sowing

pattern, the state-wise coverage seems to be very positive and the present status of the crop prospects is very much encouraging. If everything goes well and climatic conditions favour, we feel this year we will get a record crop," said Ramanuj Das Boob, of Bankatlal Boob Cottons Pvt Ltd in Raichur, Karnataka.

In Telangana, the third-largest grower, sowing has been completed on about 18.40 lh so far, even though it appears a tad lower than 20.23 lh a year ago. There is a likelihood of farmers going for more planting once the rains and floods abate.

Pink bollworm concerns

In Andhra Pradesh, farmers have crossed the normal sowing numbers as they planted the crop on 4.67 lh against the as-on-date acreage of 3.56 lh.

In Maharashtra, the second largest in cultivating cotton, Marathwada and Vidarbha are the two major cotton-growing regions. The first round of sowing was affected by heavy monsoon rains. According to primary estimates, a majority of the over 8 lh area affected by the heavy rain has been under cotton.

The second round of cotton sowing is underway, but in some places, sowing has not been possible due to inundation.

In North India, concerns over the cotton crop have been

raised over extended moist weather and pink bollworm attack. Sushil Phutela, director, Indian Cotton Association Limited, said "Punjab has big worry on pink bollworm. There is a widespread presence of the pest."

(With inputs from Vishwanath Kulkarni, Bengaluru; KV Kurmanath, Hyderabad; Radheshyam Jadhav, Pune; and Subramani Ra Mancombu, Chennai)

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