

Mustard is farmers' favourite this rabi

SAFE BET. Overall coverage up three per cent, but wheat area up a meagre 0.4 per cent

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As the sowing of all rabi crops except paddy is coming to a close, farmers' message is clear — they prefer to stick to a crop which is least susceptible to government controls and can provide them with the best price. The rise in the acreage of mustard is more than that of competing crops such as wheat and *chana* (gram) this year. It may end up a tad lower than 100 lakh hectares (lh).

According to the Agriculture Ministry's weekly update released on Friday, the total area under all crops has increased by 2.9 per cent to 696.35 lh against 676.97 lh in the year-ago period. The coverage of wheat has gone up by 0.4 per cent to 341.13 lh and *chana* acreage is down by 1.6 per cent to 110.91lh.

YIELD HIGHER, TOO

On the other hand, mustard acreage is up by 7.7 per cent at



said the acreage in the year-ago period is not the actual data, but rather the provisional weekly data collected last year. The actual sowing area under mustard in the entire season in 2021-22 was 80.58 lh after reconciliation of data, sources said.

“Even if final area reaches at 90 lh this year (after reconciliation), it will be a big increase, compared to only 68-69 lh in 2019-20. Besides, the productivity has also been increasing regularly with the adoption

crop management practices,” said an Agriculture Ministry official. He said mustard prices are stable for the last two seasons and have ruled above minimum support prices (MSPs) as the government disallowed blending (mixing) of any other edible oil with it.

“Farmers know that mustard rates may be around that level when they harvest the current crop whereas the high prices of wheat may not sustain. Wheat prices could drop to MSP levels when the new

Robust coverage

Rabi area as on Jan 20 (lakh hectare)

	2021-22	2022-23	% chg
Wheat	339.87	341.13	0.4
Rice	23.64	31.54	33.5
Pulses	163.7	164.12	0.3
Coarse cereals	49.36	51.46	4.2
Oilseeds	100.4	108.11	7.7
All Crops	676.97	696.35	2.9

Centre buys the cereal at that benchmark price,” said SK Singh, an agriculture scientist. The government has fiscal constraints to pay more than the MSP and since it is the biggest buyer of wheat, procuring 35-40 per cent of annual production, Singh said.

Rates of *chana* also depend to a large extent on government policy and it has already allowed the import of certain pulses until next year, Singh said.

Mandi prices of wheat currently are ruling at ₹2,560-2,648 per quintal in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, whereas mustard is

quintal and *chana* at ₹4,522-5,261 per quintal in these States.

The MSP for the current season has been fixed at ₹5,335/quintal in *chana*, ₹2,125 in wheat and ₹5,450 in mustard.

Traders in Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan, the largest producer with 50 per cent share in acreage, are said to have contracted to buy mustard at ₹5,900-6,000 a quintal for April delivery.

PADDY AREA UP 33%

Meanwhile, rabi-grown paddy acreage has increased by 33.5 per cent to 31.54 lh as of January 19 compared with 23.64 lh in the year-ago period. Pulses acreage has risen to 164.12 lh (163.70 lh), while coarse cereals have increased by 4.2 per cent to 51.46 lh. Area of oilseeds has surged to 108.11 lh (100.40 lh). The acreage under masur (lentil) is up by 5.8 per cent at 18.46 lh and that of maize by 18.9 per cent to 21.09 lh. The coverage of barley has