

Cotton growers get extra 'long staple' attention in Budget

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Extra-long staple cotton, a niche produce greatly in demand in the textile industry, received a major boost with a slew of measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for enhanced output and higher returns to farmers. "We will adopt a cluster-based and value chain approach through public-private partnerships (PPP) to enhance the productivity of extra-long staple cotton," she said. "This will mean collaboration between farmers, the State governments and industry for input supplies, extension services, and market linkages," she said.

According to trade experts, out of the total ELS cotton requirement of 20 lakh bales (each of 170 kg), India produces only about 5 lakh bales, forcing the industry to depend on imports from Egypt and



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the US to meet the demand for this high-quality fibre.

WHAT IS ELS COTTON?

Extra-long cotton or ELS in loom yarns, high-end fabrics and in sewing threads. Though a major cotton producer, India lags in the production of ELS cotton, forcing it to depend on imports. The textile industry, for long, has asked the government to make efforts to increase the availability of ELS

cotton to lower the cost of textile production. The industry, however, expected much more from the government to bolster the sector, which has been saddled with poor returns and decreasing yields. "We wanted the government to announce measures to promote research which will go a long way in promoting ELS varieties. We, however, will wait for the finer details of the announcement made in the Budget," Ram Kaundinya, Director-General of Federation of Seed Industry of India, told *businessline*.

The difficulty with ELS cotton, which belongs to a species called *Barbadens*, is that it is a long-duration crop. Yields are low and the incidence of Pink Bollworm attacks is high. Hence, farmers do not prefer to plant it.

M Prabhakara Rao, President of the National Seed Association of India (NSAI), welcomed the move and said that there is a huge potential in the country for ELS cotton.