

Wheat norms eased for MP, others may get benefits soon

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NEW DELHI: In a relief to farmers, the Centre has relaxed quality specifications of wheat eligible for procurement from Madhya Pradesh and more states are likely to be given the benefit based on assessments, following crop-damaging torrential rains in key food bowl states.

In a letter sent to the Madhya Pradesh government on Friday, the Union food ministry said it would ease quality standards of wheat pertaining to "loss of lustre" for procurement from the whole of the state. Lustre refers to the natural gloss of wheat grains, a key indicator of its quality. Procurement refers to the Centre's purchases of cereals at federally fixed floor prices, which are then redistributed to nearly 800 million beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act 2013.

"Similar relaxation could be considered based on assessments and requests from other states. Teams from the Centre are still touring wheat-growing states to assess grain quality and impact of



A farmer inspects the damage to wheat crop, on the outskirts of Amritsar on Friday. PTI

the rains," a person aware of the development said, seeking anonymity. On March 29, HT had first reported that the Centre was likely to relax procurement norms.

Madhya Pradesh is the country's second-largest wheat producer after Uttar Pradesh. Punjab and Haryana are the third and fourth biggest producers, respectively.

Stormy weather, along with heavy rain and hailstorms, have battered wheat belts of northwest India since mid-March, soiling a variety of rabi or winter-sown crops. Farmers and traders from states such as Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pra-

desh have said rough weather has caused extensive damage to wheat, the main winter staple.

The Madhya Pradesh government had requested tweaking of grain quality on March 28 and the food ministry on Friday said the Centre would grant concessions "in order to reduce the hardship of farmers and to avoid distress sale of wheat".

Bountiful harvests are crucial this year, as the country is running low on cereal stocks after a heatwave crimped wheat output by 2.5% to 106 million tonne in 2022, stoking shortages. India has officially forecast a record wheat output of 112 million tonne. Wheat is sown in November and harvested in March-end.

The Centre, in its letter to Madhya Pradesh, which HT has seen, said wheat with lustre loss up to 10% would be procured without any cut in the value of minimum support prices (MSP). Wheat with lustre loss of more than 10% and up to 80% will be procured with a cut in value of 0.25 of MSP. The MSP of wheat for the current crop stands ₹2,125 per quintal (100 kg).