

Recent rain likely to expand cotton farming in the north

Government has set a target to cover seven lakh hectares this summer in Haryana and three lakh hectares in Punjab; parts of Rajasthan could also see a switch from bean and pulses cultivation

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Agriculture experts have predicted an increase in the acreage for cotton plantations this year in the northern States as a result of the recent untimely rain.

In Haryana, cotton – a key summer (kharif) crop – has so far been sown on 3.5 lakh hectares. The government has set a target to sow cotton on 7 lakh hectares this summer. According to data released by the government, cotton was planted on 5.74 lakh hectares in Haryana last summer.

In Punjab, cotton has been sown on 30,000 hectares so far and the government aims to cover 3 lakh hectares as against 2.48 lakh hectares last year.

Ram Pratap Sihag, Joint Director of the Haryana Agriculture Department, told *The Hindu*, “The re-



The increase in soil moisture would benefit the cotton crops and bring down the use of groundwater. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

cent rain is a good sign as it will prevent the problem of ‘burning’ due to high temperatures. Last year, we saw a substantial loss in cotton acreage due to this burning. Rain also helps in pacing up the sowing, especially in those regions which lack irrigation facilities. We are hopeful that the area under cotton would surpass last year’s acreage as the government is discouraging sowing of

water-guzzling rice and going for crop-diversification this year.”

Gurvinder Singh, Director of the Punjab Agriculture Department, said, “The recent spell of rain has been unusual but it’s not bad. The rain will help in increasing the soil moisture content, which eventually would benefit the crop. The groundwater usage will also be less. The overall input cost is bound

to go down which would be a benefit for farmers.”

In Punjab and Haryana, Bt cotton is sown in over 95% of the total area under cotton cultivation, with the remaining 5% of the cultivable area used for indigenous cotton varieties. Cotton is usually planted from mid-April to late-May in most parts of Punjab and Haryana.

Rakesh Rathi, former president of the India Cotton Association Limited (ICAL), said that cotton acreage is also likely to increase in north Rajasthan this year in comparison to last year.

“In Haryana and Rajasthan, farmers are likely to shift to cotton from crops like *guar* (cluster bean) and pulses such as *moong* (green gram) as cotton is expected to fetch a better price. In Punjab, we are hopeful that the cotton acreage would be close to last year’s,” he said.