

Early onset of pink bollworm in cotton triggers alarm in Telangana

Agri Varsity: Late picking, infestation in stocks held by ginning mills are key causes of trouble

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Perhaps for the first time in the country, incidence of pink bollworm has surfaced in the first 30 days of the kharif season in Telangana, one of the major cotton producing States, triggering alarm among agricultural scientists and farmers.

Scientists say this early cycle of pink bollworm incidence is unprecedented and surprising. Both the cotton farmers and the Department of Agriculture were anticipating the pest attack during November-December as it



A farmer showing pink bollworm-infested Bt cotton at his fields in Peddavaduguru Mandal, Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh (file photo)

developed resistance to the Bollgard-II.

With reports of early incidence reaching the State Capital, Prof Jayashankar Telangana State Agriculture University (PJT-

SAU) rushed a team to the areas where the incidence was reported.

Reasons for attack

"We found three reasons: First, the incidence has been reported in areas surrounding the ginning mills, which ended up as major sources of the worm, gathered through the cotton stocks they procured from farmers in the previous season," Jagadeeshwar, Director of Research of PJTSAU, has said.

The second reason, according to him, is the extension of the crop beyond December, which is not advisable.

"We have been advising the farmers not to keep the crop beyond December. We ask them to burn the remains. But they continue to keep it, hoping to reap a final pick," he said.

The third reason is the farmers don't go for a deep ploughing immediately. "We advise them to go for greengram. But they wait

for the rains for ploughing, giving chance for the dormant remains of the worm to resurface again," he said.

Cotton acreage jumps

Despite heavy losses due to the pink bollworm attack last season, the farmers went for a record sowing of the fibre crop on about 46 lakh acres.

Though the early incidence was reported in Adilabad and Vikarabad initially, it spread to over 15 districts, engulfing all the major cotton growing districts, by now.

"But the early cycle in the pink bollworm incidence is alarming. First, it used to be beyond December. The cycle later advanced to October-November. Now, this year we are witnessing it in August itself," GV Ramanjaneyulu, agricultural scientist, told *BusinessLine*.

The University scientists, however, contended that the extension of the incidence is not very high and farmers could reduce the spread of the infestation by natural pest management methods and using pheromone traps.

"It has been reported only in areas surrounding the ginning mills," Jagadeeshwar asserted.

With late rains delaying the sowings and heavy rains hitting the crop at a later stage, farmers in some districts are saddled with excessive vegetation with smaller bolls.

"There's no flowering on about 5-6 lakh acres. We see lack of timely extension advisory from the Agriculture Department," S Malla Reddy of Telangana Rythu Sangham, said.

USDA sees lower closing stock, exports from India

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The US Department of Agriculture has revised downwards its forecast for India's cotton ending stock for 2018-19 (August-July) to 11.9 million bales (1 US bale is 218 kg) from 12.9 million projected in August, the department said in its monthly report.

The forecast for India's cotton exports has been lowered to 4.4 million bales from 4.5 million bales and has kept the

estimate for imports steady at 1.5 million bales.

For the period, India's domestic consumption forecast has been revised upwards at 25.5 million bales in September, from 25.2 million estimated a month ago.

The US Agriculture Department has kept India's production estimate steady at 28.7 million bales, while production in the US has been revised to 19.7 million bales from 19.2 million projected in August.