

Rains cloud cotton prospects

Experts fear loss of crop and poor quality due to damage to bolls in North India

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Ahmedabad, September 24

The heavy rains over the cotton growing regions of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan have cast a shadow over crop prospects. Experts see quality getting hampered due to the 'ill-timed' rains during the harvest period.

According to information from various sources in the trade in North India and the Cotton Association of India (CAI), the cotton belt of North India received heavy rains during the last three days, which could prove detrimental for the standing cotton crop, which was at the harvest stage.

"Due to the rains around this time, the crop is likely to get hampered to the extent of about 10 lakh bales in the North region. Earlier the crop expectations was at 60-65 lakh bales, which is feared to come down to around 50-55 lakh bales. There is greater concern over flower shedding because of rains joined by winds. Also, there is an increased risk of pest attack due to a cloudy and wet weather," said a source privy to the condition.

The water-logged farms and increased moisture level in the bolls, which open around September, has increased the possibility of deterioration in quality and also in the crop.

"It is difficult to say at this juncture about the possible damage because rains continued till today.

Only now has the sky has started to clear in the cotton belt. But rains at the time of picking will hurt crop prospects. There could be damage of about 5-10 per cent in some areas, while in some places this rain has benefited the crop. So, currently there is no clarity about the extent of loss," said Ashwani Jhamb, a cotton expert and director at Indian Cotton Association.

Cotton Association of India (CAI) is conducting its meeting on October 1 for estimation of the cotton crop.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) reported that extremely heavy rains occurred over isolated places in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, while Haryana, Gujarat and East Rajasthan saw heavy to very heavy rain during the past 24 hours. The IMD has predicted heavy to very heavy rains at isolated places in Haryana, and heavy rains in Punjab and East Rajasthan over the next 24 hours.

Per Agriculture Ministry data, as on September 20, cotton acreage stood at 120.64 lakh hectares,

about 0.89 per cent down from 121.72 lakh hectares in the same period last year. The area in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan stood at 2.84 lakh hectares (3.85 lakh), 6.65 lakh hectares (6.56 lakh) and 4.96 lakh hectares (5.03 lakh).

According to farmer sources, heavy rains around September will adversely affect arrivals, as picking may be delayed by a week. Normally, farmers in North India pick up to November, post which they take off the cotton plants and switch to winter crops.

Kharif crops in Punjab may be damaged

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, September 24

Incessant rain in Punjab and Haryana could cause damage to kharif crops and dips in their yield, farm experts said Monday. With the rains set to delay paddy harvesting for a few days, farm experts are also apprehending that there will be only a short window to manage the crop residue, before sowing wheat.

A few parts of the northern region, including Punjab have been witnessing widespread rains for the last two days. According to the weatherman, rainfall activity will start receding tomorrow. Though Punjab and Haryana are in the process of assessing damage to kharif crops, farm experts anticipate a dip in yield due to continuous rains. "Paddy grown in low-lying areas is vulnerable to damage due to rains as it usually gets submerged in water," Director at Punjab Agriculture Department JS Bains said.

According to farmers, paddy, which is at maturing stage, has got flattened at several areas because of rains. "We have asked district agriculture officers to assess the damage caused by rains," Bains said. Punjab fears a 1-2 per cent impact on the paddy yield if inclement



Farmer Jadish Singh looks at damaged rice crops after heavy rains, on the outskirts of Amritsar. AFP

weather conditions continue. The state has set a target of 200 lakh metric tonne of paddy output this season from 30 lakh hectares of area under sowing.

Bains further said rains at this stage will lead to a delay in harvesting as the moisture level in the crop will increase and farmers may face problems in the crop procurement process.