

Sugarcane Institute develops drought-proof varieties

Need not be watered for three months, saving six rounds of irrigation

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The Coimbatore-based Sugarcane Breeding Institute (ICAR-SBI), a constituent laboratory of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, is currently evaluating several drought-resistant sugarcane varieties in six different locations in Maharashtra, said its director Bakshi Ram on Friday.

"The first year trial would be completed in a month

and we expect the data to be available for evaluation in 2-3 months," Ram told reporters on the sidelines of Indian Sugar Mills Association annual general meeting here. The trials are being conducted in collaboration with Vasantdata Sugarcane Institute, at Manjari Budruk in Pune district.

There are as many as 18 varieties, he said adding that these clones do not require irrigation between 60 days

and 150 days of planting, effectively, farmers do not need to water them for three months. They can save at least six rounds of irrigation, said Ram, famed for breeding the sugarcane variety Co-0238, known for its high yield and sugar content. Sugarcane is a water-guzzling crop and any reduction in its water consumption is always welcomed by farmers.

The Co-0238 variety accounts for more than 50 per cent sugarcane grown in North India. According to him, last year 11 mills in North India reported a

sucrose recovery rate of more than 13 per cent from Co-0238, one of the highest for Indian commercial varieties.

For peninsular sugarcane region, where traditionally yields are low as compared to North India, ICAR-SBI has developed a new variety. "We have tried the Co-11015 variety in Tamil Nadu. We have tested it for a year. This year, it will be entering the trials," Ram said. It has a potential to give 10 per cent sugar recovery in eight months, going up to 13 per cent in 12 months, he said.