

This year's tobacco crop size leaves growers, activists unhappy

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The Tobacco Board's decision to fix figure at 99 million kg earns brickbats

The Tobacco Board's decision to increase the crop size for Karnataka from last year's 95 million kg to 99 million kg during 2017-18 has left the tobacco farmers as well as the anti-tobacco activists dissatisfied.

While the anti-tobacco activists are livid with the board increasing the crop size in contravention of India's commitment to WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and progressively reduce tobacco cultivation, tobacco farmers are also far from satisfied for the restrictions placed on the crop size — particularly when the international demand was high and the prices were attractive.



Restrictions: The Tobacco Board has resolved to limit the horizontal expansion of tobacco and has issued instructions against allowing new barns to be constructed. | Photo Credit: M.A. Sriram

The Indian Tobacco Association (ITA), comprising manufacturers and exporters, had submitted an indent to the board for an increased demand of 105 million kg of tobacco from Karnataka during 2017-18.

“The board should have fixed the crop size in accordance with the demand, which has come particularly from the exporters. If the crop is restricted, farmers will be forced to pay a penalty for growing more than the authorized size. Last year (2016-17), the farmers paid a whopping ₹24 crore in penalties,” complained Javare Gowda, president of the Karnataka FCV (Flue Cured Variety) Tobacco Growers' Federation. Also, he said India will lose valuable foreign exchange if exporters look to China, Brazil, and Zimbabwe to meet their tobacco requirement.

But, the four per cent increase in crop size for Karnataka came under fire from Vasanthkumar Mysoremath, who is the convener of the Anti-Tobacco Forum of Mysuru and the Honorary Advisor to the Cancer Patients Aid Association (CPPA). “The increase is detrimental to people. It proves that the government is not serious about tobacco control. It is adopting a dual approach,” he said.

When the Parliament has ratified FCTC, the Tobacco Board, which is an arm of the Commerce Ministry, is bound to honour the protocol, he said. Mr. Mysoremath also came down heavily on the board for purchasing tobacco grown in excess of the authorized size by collecting a penalty. “There is a tacit understanding between the board and the farmers,” he said.

Meanwhile, the board officials said the crop size was fixed only after considering the requests of the growers and their representatives, indents given by the manufacturers and exporters, export and domestic performance, global supply and demand position among others. The uncertainty about purchases of Philip Morris International, a major customer of Karnataka tobacco, has also been cited by the board among the aspects that were considered.

While determining the crop size, the board also noted that the small farmers of tobacco had no other alternative crop, which fetched a decent price like tobacco did even during successive droughts.

However, the board, at its meeting in Bengaluru last week, has resolved to limit the horizontal expansion of tobacco and issued necessary instructions against allowing new barns to be constructed. Citing a decision by the Centre, the board said it will not allow transfer of barns from one grower to other.

Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/this-years-tobacco-crop-size-leaves-growers-activists-unhappy/article18186944.ece>