

Business Standard

India's cotton yield to decline on whitefly, pink bollworm attacks

From north to west, farmers seek protection from pest attacks to improve productivity

Dilip Kumar Jha | Mumbai August 10, 2017 Last Updated at 01:00 IST



In a major disappointment for new entrant farmers, cotton crop has come under severe pest and bollworm attacks in major producing states, which is sparking fears of a sharp decline in India's fibre productivity this Kharif season.

While a substantial cotton area came under whitefly attack in Punjab and Haryana, pink bollworm was reported to have attacked standing crop in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. Consequently, analysts have started revising estimates of cotton output growth for the current season to 4-5 per cent now from 10 per cent earlier on a sharp increase in acreage.

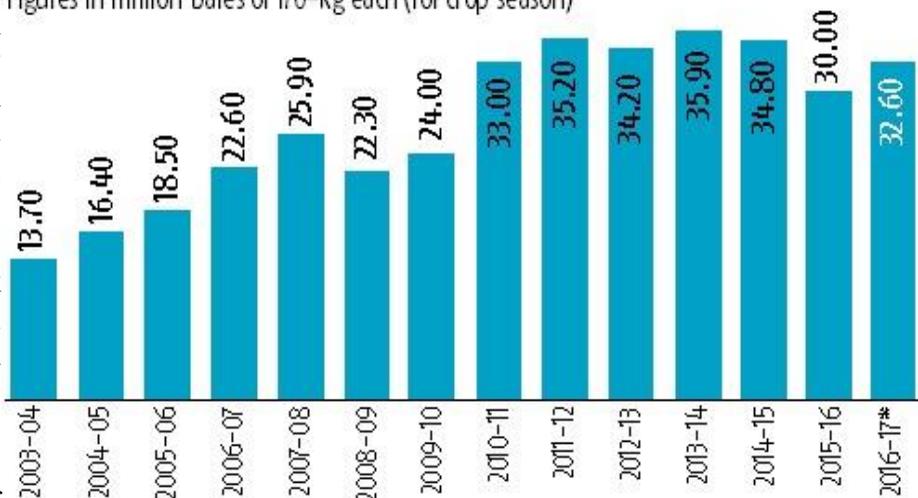
If this estimate proves true, farmers who shifted from pulses and edible oilseeds to sow cotton for better realisation would certainly get disappointed with a possible decline in their income this year due to low cotton output. Therefore, despite farmers' strategic shift for high income-oriented crops, their woos are likely to continue even this year as well.

"Cotton crop is reported to have damaged in Gujarat due to flood. There is no such report in Maharashtra. An assessment of crop damage and its overall impact on productivity would be decided in the next Cotton Advisory Board (CAB) meeting scheduled next week," said Kavita Gupta, Textile Commissioner, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

Meanwhile, the Minister of State for Agriculture Parshottam Rupala on Tuesday stated in the Lok Sabha that the Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR), Nagpur, assessed the sporadic incidents of pink bollworm damage in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. Acting immediately to avoid farmers' menace, the government of Maharashtra, according to sources, has ordered seed firms to pay a compensation of Rs 36,83,000 to farmers in the state.

COTTON PRODUCTION

Figures in million bales of 170-kg each (for crop season)



*Third Advance Estimates

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics

Compiled by BS Research Bureau

"Pest/bollworm attacks have been a regular phenomenon which appears every year," said Arun Sakseria, a city - based cotton trader and exporter.

Incidentally, high yielding cotton seeds with Bt technology are claimed to have protection from bollworm which helped farmers increase their income in initial years of its launch of around 15-year ago. But, cotton crop in India has witnessed sporadic attacks of bollworms in the last few years with over 90 per cent of farmers adopting Bt seeds. Meanwhile, many hybrid seed companies are studying to introduce seeds with better potential of cotton productivity. Meanwhile, farmers are looking for high yielding seeds for better returns from hybrid or Bt genes. The government's enactment of Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFR), to which Nuziveedu seeds is an active promoter, protects farmers' legitimate right to obtain seeds at an affordable cost.

The Union Ministry of Agriculture in its bulletin dated August 4 estimated India's cotton acreage at 11.43 million hectares (ha) so far this sowing season 2017-18, over 18 per cent increase from its level at 9.65 million ha by the same time last year. Many oilseeds and pulses farmers shifted from their perennial crop in anticipation of high returns.

Following high acreage, Gupta had earlier estimated at least 10 per cent increase in cotton output this year. Interestingly, however, analysts and spot markets traders have feared massive crop damage across Punjab and Haryana due to whitefly attacks. Crop damage was also reported in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra on whitefly attacks following excessive rainfalls and flood thereafter.

A Religare report, citing a reference from the Central Institute for Cotton Research, estimates whiteflies affect around 15,000 ha of cotton crop in Haryana, the state which witnessed a record 25 per cent increase in sowing area to 630,000 ha (500,000 ha last year) till July-end. Reflecting the trend, the benchmark Shankar 6 variety of cotton jumped by 1.5 per cent over the last two weeks in spot trade to Rs 11,923 a quintal here on Tuesday.

"Many farmers who grew pulses, such as pigeon pea, and green gram or oilseeds, such as groundnut, are going for cotton as the cash crop fetched a good price last year. However, crop damage reports from excess rains were reported later on. Heavy rains in Gujarat have created apprehensions of crop damage with 22 - 25 per cent damage in Kharif sowing as per initial estimates. Banaskantha and Patan districts are where a sizable amount of Kharif crop, sown over 600,000 ha, has been destroyed in flood," the report said.

Source: http://www.business-standard.com/article/markets/india-s-cotton-yield-to-decline-on-whitefly-pink-bollworm-attacks-117080901146_1.html