

Bengal gram growers press panic button as price plunges

S. Murali | June 19, 2018



‘Unhindered’ import from Australia, Africa and other countries blamed

Keeping their tobacco barns idle, farmers took to growing of export quality Bengal gram in a big way in drought-prone Prakasam district during this year. But the unimaginative EXIM policy has put paid to the hopes of the farmers who were expecting to make a kill going by the relatively high price for the pulse crop last year.

Now they rue their decision to switch over from tobacco, the other main commercial crop grown in the district, to grow the pulse crop in a record 1.07 lakh hectares, with its price falling like nine pins in the wake of the Centre allowing ‘unhindered’ import of chick pea from Australia, Africa and other countries.

“Now we are not in a position to recover even the cost of production,” laments a group of farmers while shifting their produce to a cold storage unit at Inkollu village.

“According to our information, the country has a carryover stock of about 14 million tonnes to meet the domestic demand for two years,” says Agriculture Technology Management Agency(ATMA) Farmer Information and Advisory Committee(FIAC) chairman and Prakasam district Rythu Sangham president M.Srinivasa Rao.

‘Profits went to firms’

“It is unfortunate that no curbs have been put on imports when the prices of Bengal gram and other pulse crops are crashing in the domestic market on the pretext of meeting the commitment given to trading partners in Africa,” laments CPI(M)-led Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sangam Inkollu division secretary K.Koteswara Rao.

It was the agri-marketing firms, domestic and foreign, which made big profits while the average farmer on the field ended up making losses, he observes.

Farmers in the district have grown the protein-rich crop in a record 1.07 lakh hectares as against the normal acreage of about 80,000 hectares incurring, on an average, ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 expenditure per acre going by the market price of ₹6,000 per quintal for 'JJ11', ₹10,000 per quintal for 'KAK II' and ₹14,500 per quintal for 'Mexican bold' respectively.

Now the market prices of JJ11 has nosedived to about ₹3,200 per quintal, while KAK II attracted buyers at ₹4,200 per quintal and Mexican bold variety fetched only ₹5,000 per quintal.

Hopes on Centre

While tenant farmers had sold away the produce at the farm level itself in spite of the low prices, farmers who do not want to book losses have shifted about 60% of the freshly-harvested pulse crop to cold storages in and around Inkolli.

“We are hoping against hope that the Centre intervenes keeping the farmers interests in mind at least ahead of the next round of Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the main producers of the pulse crop in the country,” they say in a conversation with *The Hindu*.

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