

## ‘Show viable alternative to tobacco’

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High hopes: Tobacco being raised by farmers on the outskirts of Ongole. Kommuri Srinivas Kommuri Srinivas

Tobacco growers have urged the Centre to take them into confidence before taking a stand on tobacco control strategies ahead of the 8th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP8) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) scheduled to be held in Geneva in October 2018.

“Tobacco industry provides livelihood to over 45.7 million people in the country, including farmers and farm workers and any decision that will impact them should be taken only in consultations with us,” says Federation of All India Farmers Associations general secretary Srinivas Murali ahead of the visit of a farmers’ delegation to New Delhi later this week to plead their case with Union Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu and Union Labour Minister Santosh Gangwar.

New Delhi’s stand should be finalised by the Centre by taking inputs not merely from officials of the Union Health Ministry but also from the Union Commerce and Labour Ministries, he told The Hindu here ahead of the Geneva meet to chalk out tobacco control strategies for the next five years.

Any effort to curb tobacco cultivation without showing a viable alternative would not only spell doom to farmers and farm labourers but also render useless the tobacco control efforts by creating demand for smuggled cigarettes which came without any statutory warning, he explained.

## Better returns

It was the tobacco growers who got a relatively better price with the demand for low grade variety and greens picking up thanks to confirmation of orders to exporters from overseas buyers last fortnight, former Tobacco Board member Ch.Ranga Rao explained, adding the farmers who grew Bengal gram in a record 1.07 lakh hectares in the district this year rue their fate in view of the depressed market condition in the wake of large-scale import of the commodity from abroad.

## Illegal trade

Meanwhile, Indian Tobacco Association sources here said concerted efforts should be made to curb the illegal cigarette trade which, according to an estimate, accounted for over 25% of the cigarette industry in the country. While the government lost revenue to the tune of Rs. 13,000 crore per year, it crippled the organised tobacco sector on which farmers, workers and traders were dependent besides undermining the tobacco control strategies, the sources added.

*Source:* <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/growers-plea-on-tobacco-control-steps/article24610644.ece>