

NAFED suspends procurement of pulses, oilseeds due to lockdown

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NEW DELHI – The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India has suspended procurement of pulses and oilseed produced in the 2019-20 (Jul-Jun) owing to lockdown in the country, a senior official with the agency said.

"We have to halt our operations. We have to comply with the government's directions. The procurement may resume shortly after the lockdown period gets over," the official said. Procurement was being carried out under the price support scheme.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Tuesday, announced a 21-day nationwide complete lockdown from today to curb the rapid spread of the coronavirus in the country. He asked citizens to stay at home for the next 21 days as social distancing was the only hope against the pandemic.

The coronavirus has infected 570 people in India. Across the globe, over 16,000 people have died and around 372,000 have been infected by the deadly virus.

Till Tuesday, procurement was underway in Andhra Pradesh, the official said.

The agency has procured 227,500 tn tur from Karnataka, 58,479 tn from Maharashtra, 51,625 tn from Telangana, 5,295 tn from Gujarat, 26,949 tn from Andhra Pradesh, 453 tn from Tamil Nadu, and 52 tn from Odisha last week, he said. It also procured over 25,000 tn of chana from farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka till the middle of this month, the official said.

NAFED halted groundnut procurement in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. However, it has already concluded procurement in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan as the sanctioned quantity has been purchased and the procurement period is over, the official said. The agency bought over 720,000 tn of groundnut from the five states.

The agency has started procurement of mustard harvested in 2019-20 in Rajasthan early last week, he said. It procured around 12 tn of mustard in the state from 6 farmers, the official said.

NAFED was procuring these crops from farmers under the price support scheme, in which it procures the crop if market prices fall below the minimum support price.

Prices slumped in spot markets as arrival of new crops started in large quantities amid lower demand from millers, the official said.

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India is the nodal procuring agency for oilseeds and pulses. It also procures sesamum seeds, sunflower seeds, and mustard seeds across the country on request of state governments when market prices slip below the minimum support price.

The Centre through NAFED is selling pulses from the 2.2 mln tn of stock it had bought from farmers under the scheme during the current and previous seasons—2018-19 and 2019-20—to ensure supply during the lockdown by states to contain the spread of coronavirus, a government official said earlier. This data does not include around 1.4 mln tn of pulses buffer.

"We are ensuring that supply in domestic markets shall remain in place despite the lockdown," said Sanjeev Kumar Chadha, NAFED's managing director. Pulses are being sold to states for welfare schemes.

The Centre is facilitating the supply of food grains from godowns to delivery points during the lockdown or curfew in some states, Chadha said. This is to ensure that supply isn't hit and beneficiaries do not suffer, Chadha said.

Edited by Maheswaran Parameswaran

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