

Struggling cotton industry braces for uncertain future

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Aurangabad: The ongoing lockdown and the absence of a fresh stimulus package so far could severely impact the agricultural sector, and especially the cotton industry, farmers' groups have warned.

There have been no restrictions on transport or sale of farms produce like fruits, vegetables, pulses . But farmers said they have been hit by losses because of the curbs on movement of buyers. Exports have been shut and many of the Agriculture Market Produce Committee markets have closed.

According to Kailash Tawar of the Shetkari Sanghatna, the farming community has suffered a severe blow. He also slammed the government for not declaring a stimulus package.

“The only announcement for farmers was the advance payment of Rs 2,000 under the PM-Kisan scheme. But this works out to only Rs 500 a month for farmers. Also, not all farmers are covered under the scheme,” he said. The Shetkari Sanghatna has demanded that the state pay a compensation of Rs 25,000 per hectare.

Cotton farmers have been particularly affected. Mahesh Daga, the MD of Cottonguru LLP, which works with 50,000 farmers across India to improve yield and quality, said because cotton is a non-essential commodity, farmers growing the crop are extremely worried.

“As much as 15% of cotton produce, which includes the harvested and the non-harvested crop from the last season, is currently stuck with farmers as they are not able to transport or sell it. Limited farming operations to meet the minimum support price were on until last week. But they too have stopped now,” Daga said.

As far as the forthcoming kharif season is concerned, the production of cotton — a cash crop — remains in limbo because the seed packaging operations have ground to a halt.

A key amendment in a state government circular from March 27 includes logistics and packaging of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides in the list of essential commodities.

“Retail of seeds was allowed, but there was no provision to manufacture or package these seeds. After Cottonguru made a presentation before the agriculture commissioner, the government allowed these processes in the seed industry ,” Daga said.

The byproducts of cotton ginning are essential commodities with multiple uses.

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