

Unseasonal rains damage crops as farmers battle multiple setbacks

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HT Correspondent | Apr 27, 2020



Heavy unseasonal rains have caused damage to standing crops in a setback to farmers bracing for the busy agricultural season amid the coronavirus disease pandemic and lockdown that have already reduced the availability of farm labour and transport of their produce in parts of India.

An exact estimate of the damage caused by the rain in six states – Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal --- would be available only after surveys are conducted, government officials said, expressing concern that the damage could result in less-than-expected pro-curement of foodgrains.

Food Corporation of India had expected to procure 35 million tonnes of foodgrains from the rabi season harvest, compared to 34 million tonnes last year because of an anticipated bumper crop. It may now have to revise its procurement estimate.

According to officials, the worst hit appear to be the food bowl states of Punjab and Haryana, where the harvest season was in full swing when heavy rains pounded the ripe standing wheat crop.

In Bihar and West Bengal, the rain has damaged the maize crop and the soon-to-be harvested litchi and mango crops. “Around 10-15% of the wheat crop has been damaged in Seemanchal, Kosi and north Bihar,” a state government official said.

Moisture worsens the quality of wheat and maize, which could mean lower price at the wholesale markets and delays in procurement.

“Moisture more than permissible limits of 12% leads to delay in procurement as the crop has to be dried first. It damages the grain, leading to its discolouration,” said Punjab’s principal secretary (food and civil supplies) KAP Sinha.

Sinha said procurement had to be stalled in two districts – Moga and Ferozpur -- because the discolouration exceeded permissible limits.

In neighbouring Haryana, crop loss has been reported from districts such as Karnal, Kurukshetra, Yamunanagar and Kaithal, leading to the government stopping the procurement on Sunday, officials said.

“Like several other farmers, I could not sell my produce as there were no buyers due to rains,” said wheat farmer Raghbir Singh of Karnal district. Officials said the procurement had been tardy because no arrangements had been made to protect the grains from rain.

Mukesh Tiwari, a farmer from Bundelkhand’s Dhana village in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, said the traders were not offering more than Rs 1,900 to Rs 2,100 for sharbati (sweet) wheat as against the 2019 price of Rs 2,700 per quintal because of discolouration caused by the rains.

“Even the government refused to buy, citing the poor quality of wheat,” he said.

Farmer Devaki Nandan Pandey of Janakpur village in Sagar district said he had not even visited any government procurement market because he knew they would reject the wheat he had grown because of the moisture content.

“This year’s work is gone. I don’t know the price I will get for the wheat now,” said Mohan Lal Nagda, a farmer from Rewali village in Neemuch district of southern MP. Sanjeev Singh, director of MP’s directorate of farmer welfare and agriculture, said: “We are collecting the information from the entire state about the impact of unseasonal rains on wheat and procurement. It’s only after the reports {come in} that I will be able to make any comment.”

Most states have delayed procurement of foodgrains because of the lockdown that started on March 25. Punjab, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh started procurement on April 15.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/unseasonal-rains-damage-crops-as-farmers-battle-multiple-setbacks/story-XQZx6Qshzv0tKRJIaU5KML.html>