

Better grade out-turn brightens tobacco growers' prospects

Ongole | February 20, 2021



The farmers also see an improved demand for tobacco following the 'v-shaped' recovery of the global economy. | Photo Credit: **BY ARRANGEMENT**

Last year, growers had to face many odds to grow tobacco, which was only aggravated by rains in several spells, including the cyclonic storm 'Nivar', that damaged the standing crops in Prakasam and Nellore, requiring replantation.

However, now at the time of curing, tobacco growers are a happier lot as bright grade accounts for a majority of the crop this year in contrast to the previous year when low grade varieties flooded the market, leading to first-of-its-kind intervention in the market by the Markfed to bailout the growers.

Going by the present trend at the auction platforms in Karnataka, where it is a kharif crop, farmers expect a premium price for F1 and F2 grade varieties of tobacco this year.

The price for bright grade varieties went up to ₹250 per kg in the neighbouring State during this month in view of the shortage in the region, Tobacco Board sources said.

The farmers also see an improved demand for tobacco following the 'v-shaped' recovery of the global economy after the coronavirus-driven slump last year and closure of market during the lockdown.

Though the grade outturn is highly encouraging, there has been a fall in productivity by a couple of millions of kg of the produce following the unseasonal rains. "We want the crop regulator to ensure an average price of ₹175 per kg for the reduced crop for us to break even," says Tobacco Farmers Association leader from Kandukur T. Ramanaiah.

Anticipating a fall in demand for tobacco in the wake of the pandemic, the Tobacco Board had reduced the crop size in the Southern Black Soil(SBS) and Southern Light Soil(SLS) regions to 69 million kg as against 83.8 million kg in the previous year. "We see a fall of one to two million kg per acre over the authorised crop size due to stunted growth suffered by the crop in the wake of unseasonal rains and 'Orobanche cernua', a parasite infestation," explained another farmer leader from Ongole II auction platform V.V.Prasad, who expects the demand-supply situation to work in favour of farmers this time.

Meanwhile, YSR Congress Party farmers wing Prakasam District president Mareddy Subba Reddy urged the Tobacco Board to activate the vigilance wing to prevent sale of the produce outside the auction platforms as dealers made a beeline to the growers barns in view of the shortage of bright grade crop in Karnataka.

Tobacco Board SBS Regional Manager R.Srinivasulu Naidu said the vigilance sleuths were fully active in the region to prevent any illegal sale of tobacco. He advised the farmers to sell their produce only on the auction platforms and promised to put more number of bales for auctions from the beginning the auctions, which had been delayed by about a month this year.

Bright grade is expected to account for 60% of this year's total crop size, Medium and low grades are expected to be 20% each.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/better-grade-out-turn-brightens-tobacco-growers-prospects/article33884427.ece>