

Tobacco farmers oppose efforts to replace existing auction with contract system

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Tobacco farmers in the State have voiced their opposition to reported efforts to replace the existing system of auction of tobacco produce with contract system for the crop cultivation.

Speaking on the occasion of World Tobacco Growers' Day at a programme organised by Federation of Virginia Flue Cured (VFC) Tobacco Growers Association of Karnataka at Periyapatna near here on Thursday, Vice-President of the Federation Paramesh said the traders were cheating the farmers in payment and weighment before the present system of auction was introduced by the Tobacco Board in 1984.

After a lot of struggle and hardship during the pre-auction era, the system of auction was introduced, guaranteeing the farmers not only fair weighment, but also transparent pricing and payment to their bank accounts within 10 days of selling their produce.

Also, since the Board is facilitating production and marketing, banks are extending loans to the farmers the recovery of which is 100 per cent, which is not possible in any other crop, said Paramesh, who is also the ex-President of the Committee of Fertilizers constituted by the Tobacco Board.

“We don't want any system other than the current e-auction system. In fact, the government should strengthen the present auction system by filling the vacancies for the posts of technical officers”, he said.

President of the Federation Javare Gowda said a number of multinational tobacco companies were batting for introduction of contract system on the lines of the system prevalent in countries such as Brazil.

Since the crop is rain-fed, there is no guarantee on the quality or quantity of the crop. The contract system will make the farmers susceptible to exploitation by traders.

Identifying tobacco as one of the most important commercial crops in Mysuru, Mr. Gowda said farmers have been growing the crop for more than 50 years under rain-fed conditions and earning their livelihood. Tobacco cultivation not only provides direct and indirect employment to more than three lakh people in Mysuru region, but also empowers the farmers economically and socially.

While tobacco is cultivated even in the midst adverse weather conditions and labour issues, Mr. Gowda called upon the farmers to focus on quality and productivity to reap improved profit from tobacco cultivation. He advised the farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices recommended by the Tobacco Board and Central Tobacco Research Institute that included “timely planting with correct spacing, proper application of recommended fertilizers, use of need-based recommended pesticides, proper topping and desuckering, and harvesting of right leaves at the right time”.

Though tobacco grown in Mysuru region does not have pesticide residue problem, farmers should take care while curing, bulking, grading and baling. “One should not use plastic fertilizer bag tarpaulin to cover the bulk and always use canvas tarpaulin provided by the Tobacco Board”, he said.

A number of Tobacco Board officials, farmers’ leaders and tobacco growers participated in the World Tobacco Growers’ Day celebrations.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/tobacco-farmers-oppose-efforts-to-replace-existing-auction-with-contract-system/article37213316.ece>