

Higher yields may offset impact of lower acreage on cotton crop this kharif

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India's cotton output for the 2024-25 cropping season is likely to be similar to last year's levels despite a dip in acreage on higher yields aided by timely rain and lower pest incidence. The cotton acreage is down by 11 lakh hectares (lh) at 112.76 lh as compared to previous year's 123.71 lakh ha, with farmers shifting to other lucrative crops.

"Overall, the crop condition is better than last year and is improving. The yields are likely to be better. The crop production will be similar to that of last year despite a dip in area," said YG Prasad, Director, ICAR-Central Institute of Cotton Research in Nagpur.

As per the Agriculture Ministry's latest data, India's cotton production stood at 325.22 lakh bales of 170 kg each during 2023-24.

Prasad said the incidence of pest attacks, so far, is lower this year. "Pink bollworm (PBW) is not so much reported while the incidence of sucking pests has been lower than last year due to rains. Many hybrids now being used by farmers are tolerant to sucking pests. However, PBW is still a threat. In the North, wherever it is showing up, we are asking farmers to take up sprays, while in Central and South zones, it is yet to appear. It is a late season pest and the crop is delayed by a month. The impact of PBW will depend on how farmers manage it," Prasad said.

'TURNING POINT'

Bhagirath Chaudhary, Director, South Asia Biotech Centre, said the low infestation of PBW in the North, where cotton arrivals are gaining pace, is expected to yield good quality cottonseed. In Central and South, the PBW is in control with



The cotton acreages are down by 11 lh at 112.76 lh REUTERS

robust plant growth, adequate flowering and boll formation, with the prevalence of root rot which needs to be tackled on a priority basis to harvest bountiful cotton. "Kharif 2024 should be the turning point in cotton production to reverse the losses of previous 3-4 years," he said.

Anand Poppat, a broker in Gujarat, estimates the crop size to be around 361 lakh bales on increase in yields, which is aided by timely rain and lower pest attack.

"The crop is in good condition despite heavy rain in some areas across States such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka," Poppat said.

Pradeep Jain, President, Khandesh Gin Press Factory Owners and Traders Development Association, Jalgaon, said as of today, the crop condition looks very good in the Khandesh area and the quality and yields are expected to be better than last year. Last week, Atul Ganatra, President, Cotton Association of India had said it was too early to predict the 2024-25 crop size as there was a lot of damage due to the recent rain and the crop had been delayed by a month in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Ramanuj Das Boob, a sourcing agent in Raichur, said the expectation from the crop is good despite lower acreage, and the crop size would be similar to last year's levels.