

Purchase woes: Punjab rice growers may shift to basmati

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Basmati farmers in Punjab are happy despite receiving prices lower than last year. The reason is the problems with the current procurement situation in the State amid a late purchase of non-basmati paddy after a fortnight-long protest by rice millers and commission agents that created uncertainty.

“The current year’s situation of procurement will definitely motivate some farmers to shift to basmati from non-basmati,” said Vi-

jay Setia, a former president of the All India Rice Exporters Association. He said only a holistic approach will correct the situation and suggested crop planning for basmati rice.

The government’s export promotion body Apeda, which used to conduct crop survey and estimate the basmati production in different phases on behalf of the Basmati Export Development Foundation (BEDF) discontinued it this year.

Last year, basmati rice production was estimated at 9.85 million tonnes (mt) out of an area of 2.1 million hectares.



PRICES DOWN 10%

According to trade sources, farmers are selling the basmati crop at ₹2,800-2,900/quintal in Haryana and about ₹3,000 in Punjab for the Pusa 1509 variety whereas the farm-gate rates of Pusa 1121 are ₹3,800-4,000 in both Haryana and Punjab. Setia

said prices are 10 per cent down this year from year-ago as the expectation is for a higher crop size.

Last year around mid-November, farmers of traditional Basmati CSR 30 were getting between ₹6,300 and ₹6,600 a quintal whereas Pusa 1121 was commanding ₹4,300-4,500 and Pusa 1509 ₹3,200-3,600 in Haryana, depending on the quality and how the paddy was harvested. If combined harvester is used, the prices of basmati are ₹300-500/quintal lower than manually harvested crop since the broken percentage is less when the machine is not used.

Recently, media reports said that commission agents (*arhtiyas*) in one of the *mandis* in Punjab had asked farmers not to bring basmati crop for one week due to lack of space since the official procurement of non-basmati crop was in full swing. But exporters said there is no problem in buying basmati anywhere in Punjab and arrivals are on.

“There is no issue with arrivals. The crop is very good this year and the Pusa 1121 variety has started arriving in markets a week ago,” said Ashok Sethi, Director of Punjab Rice Millers Exporters Association.