

Cotton Mission eyes new tech to boost yield, tackle pest

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The 5-year “Mission for Cotton Productivity” announced in the Budget 2025-26 will look at technologies beyond the transgenics, such as gene editing and others, to develop the new seeds that will not only boost yields, but also resistant to dreaded pests like pink bollworm.

The ICAR-Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR) along with the Agriculture Ministry will be leading the productivity-related initiatives of the Mission, for which ₹500 crore has been allocated for FY25-26.

“The mission aims to address the gap between production and consumption. Currently, the supply gap is

estimated at 25 lakh bales. Our immediate concern is to address this supply gap. Ultimately, we need to have a cushion of 40-50 lakh bales to have a healthy demand-supply. This means we should be producing 360 lakh bales in three years, and may be touch 400 lakh bales in another five years,” said YG Prasad, Director, ICAR-CICR.

India’s cotton output, which touched a high of 360 lakh bales in 2019, is now estimated at a 299.26 bales, per the Agriculture Ministry’s first advance estimates.

TRANSGENIC RESEARCH
Elaborating on the proposed initiatives, which will focus on domestic and indigenous efforts, Prasad said there was a need to look at new techno-



THREADING THE NEEDLE. India’s cotton output, which touched 360 lakh bales in 2019, is now estimated at a 299.26 bales

logy solutions such as gene editing and others. The already initiated projects in this area will be strengthened and fast-tracked, he said, adding that research efforts in transgenics will also continue.

“We are now working with some indigenous institutes and continue that work. We will fast-track those things, if

at all some product is there for pink bollworm. Technology has to be developed by different players. One technology is no solution for pink bollworm.” he said.

Commenting on the cotton mission, Prasad said, “It is complete package — from farm to foreign, 5F — farm to fibre to factory to fashion to foreign,” he said.

Besides aiming at productivity, the Mission will also look at addressing the issue of contamination in cotton, because its mechanical harvesting is not there. “We need to move towards mechanisation. From sowing to harvest — this mission will facilitate that also. A lot of sowing equipment, precision planting. Precision planting is required, precision agronomy is required. Precision resource use efficiency is required. All those will be part of this mission.” he said

Around 60 lakh farmers are dependent on cotton, which is a dry land crop. “So, cotton should, if it has to be there, the price has to be there. Then production has to be there, the industry will be happy, otherwise, there will be imports,” he said.