

# Rabi sowing clocks four times higher acreage than last year

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WITH THE south-west monsoon retreating from the state almost on its normal date, Rabi sowing in the state has started early this season as compared to last year, and farmers have already completed planting operations on 5.53 lakh hectares (lh) of land.

Latest data available with the Directorate of Agriculture of Gujarat shows that farmers completed sowing of Rabi crops in 5,53,943 hectares by November 9. This is almost four times higher, compared to 1,64,882 hectares covered under Rabi sowing during the corresponding period last year when the monsoon extended to late October.

But this year, the monsoon retreated around end of September, the normal schedule, allowing farmers to start sowing winter crops early. Rabi sowing starts in October and goes on till December.

This year, chana (chickpea) is leading the charts with farmers sowing this pulse crop on 1.23 lh of land by November 9, representing 42.44 per cent of its normal acreage over the past three years but much higher than



**A farmer stacks rice straw at a paddy field on the outskirts of Ahmedabad.** *Nirmal Harindran*

8,359 hectare sowing done by this time last year. Sugarcane is second with sowing having completed in 77,944 hectares — 52.26 per cent of its normal annual acreage. But it is more than seven times that of the corresponding period last season.

Overall, sowing of pulses stands at 1.64lh (51.51 per cent of normal annual average) and oilseeds in 73,586 (36.96 %). Mustard is the single largest oilseed crop, accounting for 73,494 ha of the total area under oilseeds.

Jeera (cumin seeds), coriander and tobacco, other important cash crops of the state have been sown in 10,743 (2.65%), 12,396 (19.79%), 14,941 (12.76%) respectively. However, sowing of wheat, the largest Rabi crop of Gujarat, is yet to pick up. Farmers have completed sowing of wheat in 59,947 ha or 5.52 per cent of its normal annual acreage. Sowing of wheat continues till the end of December.

The highest sowing is reported from Saurashtra where farmers have completed plant-

ing operations in 1.98 lh, followed by north Gujarat with 1.40 lh. South Gujarat, the sugarcane belt of the state has reported sowing in 1.26 lh hectare so far while central Gujarat, the tobacco and wheat belt, sowing has completed in total 86,700 ha.

Saurashtra also accounts for 87,800 ha acreage of chana, a crop which is not water intensive and therefore choice of a number of farmers in water-starved Saurashtra region. Central Gujarat is second with 23,600 hectares under this crop. Bhal area in central Gujarat is known for producing high-quality chana and wheat.

Farmers of north Gujarat, the region known for mustard and spice crops such as jeera, too, have sown chana in 11,400 ha and at this state of sowing, is the second largest crop in the region after mustard (72,200). Entire coriander acreage is reported from Saurashtra, with only other plantation of 100 acre of this crop being reported from Banaskantha.

Interestingly, farmers seem to prefer pulses such as green gram and black gram this year to crops other than chana, recording sowing in 40,742 ha or almost 147 per cent of their normal annual average.