

# Rains trigger paddy sowing, farmers worry yield quality

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**AS THE RAIN** has come a couple of weeks later than its usual schedule, paddy growers in West Bengal have been rushing in to sow the kharif crop despite being worried over the yield.

Farmers are concerned that the seeds may not get enough time to grow properly because of delayed sowing and yield may be lesser than expected.

"We started sowing late because neither there were rains till August 15 nor could we get water for irrigation because of very low groundwater level. But the heavy downpour from August 16 onwards has brought us back to the fields and we have sown the Amon seeds (the second crop of kharif season)," said Dibakar Ghosh, a farmer in Boinchi of Burdwan district.

Generally, farmers sow their paddy seeds for the Amon crop within the second week of August with the rain arriving between July-end and first week of August. But due to lesser rainfall till that time of this season, farmers could sow only 65% of the total cultivable lands.

However, continuous spell of rain from August 16 onwards prompted farmers across the districts of Hooghly, Howrah, Burdwan, Nadia West and East Midnapore to sow their seeds. And this may help in reducing the possible shortfall in production, which is a concern for the state agricultural department.

According to agriculture department officials, paddy seeds have been sown in 90% of the agricultural land in Hooghly district, while it had been near 100% in Howrah. Sowing in Burdwan and Nadia districts has also started picking up and it will cover more than 90% of the arable land. This may result in meeting the projected target.

While the state has not fixed any target in terms of producing paddy, it aims to cultivate 42 lakh acre in Amon season, for which seeds have been kept for distribution, Sampat Ranjan Patra, director, agriculture, said. With the latest spell of shower, news of more and more land being cultivated is pouring in. "We expect 90% of the targeted land to be covered," he said. However, farmers say that their crops may not fetch good money due to lower quality.

Mahadeb Sarkar of Naksa in Hooghly



district, said the MSP is ₹1,750 per quintal but low quality crops fetch lesser price. "Even mandis refuse to take low quality yield and we are forced to sell at distressed rates," he said.

West Bengal produces on an average 105 million tonne of rice per annum, 70% of which is reaped in Amon season. This production comes from 5.8 million hectare with the districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, Nadia, Birbhum and parts of Howrah, popularly known as rice bowl, giving the highest productivity with more than 32% of the state's total rice production covering around 27% of the acreage.

In Howrah district paddy has been sown in 55,000 hectare but proper quality yield is expected from 35,000 hectare only since it was done before August 15, a district agricultural department official said.

State agriculture minister Ashish Banerjee said the downpour in the last four-five days has given the state a sigh of relief. It was estimated that the yield would come from 65% of the total acreage.

"Until August 15 we have got the records of only 26 lakh hectare being covered. Now it may reach the targeted mark. But we are not sure of the yield," Patra said. The districts of Purulia and Bankura remain affected with low rainfall. The government is encouraging alternative farming there. "I myself along with the agriculture department officials have visited villages encouraging farmers to indulge in alternative farming like oil seeds, maize, pulses and ground nuts. The government will supply good seeds for those. Although we are focused in jute cultivation in North Dinajpur, we are expecting good paddy yield from the district this season. Around 10% of the targeted land couldn't be brought under Amon cultivation, in North Dinajpur this season," Banerjee said.