

Volatile weather may hit pulses yield, drag kharif output down

PRABHUDATTA MISHRA
New Delhi, September 20

EVEN THOUGH THE government is confident of having another record year of kharif foodgrain on the back of higher acreage under pulses, there could be a decline in the production of pulses. Farmers in Madhya Pradesh are battling a dry weather while surplus rains in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Karnataka during the first fortnight of this month have inundated fields in many areas, potentially lowering yields.

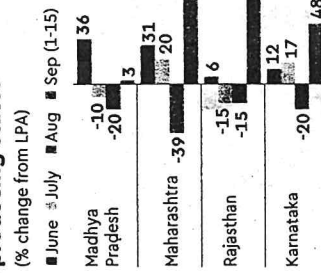
Foodgrain production may cross 150 million tonne (MT) in the kharif season of 2021-22 crop year (July-June) due to good rains, agriculture secretary Sanjay Agarwal had said on September 13. The country's kharif foodgrain output was recorded 149.56 MT last year comprising 140.87 MT of rice and other cereals and 8.69 MT of pulses.

However, with lower acreage under coarse cereals (-2%, y-o-y) and flat paddy acreage (0.2%, y-o-y), pulses crops hold the key to achieving another record in foodgrains output this year, people watching the sector said adding, even a marginal decline in pulses output may affect the production estimate. The agriculture ministry is expected to release its first advance estimate of crops output this week.

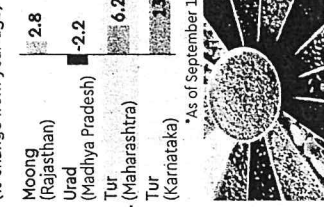
The disruption in monsoon for about three weeks between June and July, compounded by excessive rainfall in September, is expected to hamper the production of tur, urad and moong this year, Bimal Kothari, vice-chairman of India Pulses and Grains Association said earlier this week. This could result in a severe shortage in domestic production, Kothari had said.

With an average yield of 0.58 tonne per hectare (actual during kharif 2019-20) and an

Monsoon in major pulses producing states



Sowing progress*



urad are major pulses grown in kharif. "Though the urad area in Madhya Pradesh has captured a decline in official data, the extent of fall is much more as there is hardly any crop in the Vidisha and Sagar area," said a top executive of a company involved in satellite mapping of crops. Madhya Pradesh, the top producer of urad, has recorded a 2.2% drop in acreage under this pulse while the pan-India area is 2% higher from year-ago.

Tur acreage in Maharashtra has recorded a 6.2% increase at 1.32 million hectare and in Karnataka 1.3% up at 1.45 million hectare, until Friday. Both these states, the top two producers, have over 50% share in the country's total acreage under tur. Similarly, the moong area in the top producing state Rajasthan is up 2.8% at 2.15 million hectare.

"There may be a marginal fall

in yield in moong and urad which were sown early. But overall, the crop conditions are normal, so far," said NP Singh, director of Kanpur-based Indian Institute of Pulses Research.

Singh, who was travelling in Rajasthan to survey the pulses crops, also said that there might not be any problem for tur crop as its sowing window is very wide with harvesting done as late as in April and farmers decide the timing of planting based on weather conditions. "Even if there is a decline in kharif, overall pulses output may not be impacted since rabi season has 65% share in production," Singh said.

The recent decision to extend the import window of pulses and the possibility of further extension point to not-so-rosy picture of kharif output, said a trade expert. "Depending on the sowing in rabi season which will be known by Decem-

ber, the government will decide whether to allow import in 2022," the expert said.

To ensure adequate supplies of pulses, the Centre on September 13 had issued a notification extending the imports period for tur, moong and urad up to December 31. Import consignments of these items with the Bill of Lading issued on or before December 31, will be allowed by the Customs till January 31, 2022. Earlier, the import policy of free imports was to expire on October 31 with arrivals allowed till November 31.

Meanwhile, pulses prices in mandis have increased marginally in the first fortnight of September from the previous month. The retail price inflation in 'pulses and products' was up 10.01% in June, 9.04% in July and 8.81% in August. This softening in trend may be stopped from September if pulses prices continue to rise.