

Growers demand end to tax-free cotton import

MULTAN: The cotton crop prospects for the year 2017-2018 showed that the crop production went down by 7.74 per cent, which means a shortfall of 8,77,800 bales during the season, which mainly happened due to lack of guaranteed prices of cotton, said the ginners.

Growers feared massive decline in the crop prices after the import of duty/tax-free import of cotton from February 1 while the stock of more than one million bales is lying with the growers.

Malik Kashif Arian, a farmer of a village on Shujaabad Road and the owner of 27 acres of land, said he was waiting for better prices but the government had announced import of duty-free cotton from the next month that would reduce the domestic cotton prices. He said the policy would affect the cotton sowing in 2019-2020 and the under-cultivation area feared to decline this year.

Ginner Shahzad Ali Khan said that phutthi prices had declined to Rs400 to 500 since the government had announced duty-free import of cotton. He said the government had imposed 30 per cent Regularity Duty on the import of sugar to oblige the millers. It allowed the import of duty-free cotton under the pressure of textile millers without protecting the financial interests of the local growers. He said that unfortunately, nobody was thinking about the financial stakes of the cotton growers.

Former speaker National Assembly and grower, Syed Fakhar Imam said that growers should be given the international price of cotton, which had never ever been awarded to them. He said the fall in domestic cotton prices largely affects the sowing of next season crop. The country had produced 14 million bales in the past which is now declined to 10 million bales due to the lack of a guaranteed price of phutthi. He said the domestic research on cotton crop was not meeting the international standards.

Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association officials said that the number of 10.456 million bales of seed cotton (phutti) reached the gineries across Pakistan until the January-mid, registering a shortfall of 7.74 per cent as compared to the corresponding period of last year. Out of the total arrivals, the ginning factories have ginned over 10.358 million bales.

In Punjab, cotton production observed massive decline. Arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 6.324 million (6,324,540) bales, showing a 10.79 per cent shortfall, and over four million (4,132,385) bales in Sindh, registering 2.66 per cent shortfall as compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Sanghar district of Sindh continued to remain on top with cotton arrival figures of over 1.28 million bales while Rahimyar Khan secured second with the arrival figure of 1.16 million bales. At least 225 ginning factories are now operational in the country including 190 in Punjab and 35 in Sindh, said the PCGA officials.

Talking to The News, Central Cotton Research Institute Director Dr Zahid Mehmood said the government was making efforts to achieve the target of 15 million bales in 2019-2020 crop seasons. He said the senate standing committee on National Food Security has deeply discussed the measures to boost cotton production. The lawmakers have taken a notice about reduction in cotton cultivation and problems being faced by the growers need immediate attention of the policy-makers. They advised the ministry to hold a consultative session with all the stakeholders to improve cotton productivity, resolve issues and assist the growers to get more profit. It was proposed that the growers should be given subsidy on machinery.