

Government plans to fix indicative price of cotton

The government is planning to fix indicative price of cotton crop in order to encourage cotton growers and control decline in area under cultivation of the crop. "The government is planning to fix indicative price of cotton like sugarcane and wheat," said Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research (NFS&R) Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai.

Briefing the National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, Popalzai said that government is taking different steps to increase cotton production and area under cultivation but there are some issues which are not even under its control. To pursue growers to cultivate more sugarcane has resulted in a sharp decline in cotton acreage, particularly in Punjab, he said, adding, "Establishment of sugar mills in cotton growing areas by influential sugar industry owners is one of the main reasons behind decrease in cotton area," he said.

Cotton Commissioner NFS&R, Dr Khalid Abdullah while briefing the committee said that main reason behind decrease in cotton sowing was the shifting of cotton area to sugarcane, lower prices of cotton in the past few years and market fluctuation.

He said that the country produces surplus wheat and sugar due to support price of wheat and indicative price of sugarcane; therefore, it is direly need to fix indicative price of cotton to provide protection to cotton growers.

He also suggested imposing regulatory duty on import of cotton like wheat and sugar. "The imposition of regulatory duty on import of cotton would provide protection to the domestic growers," he said.

MNA Rao Muhammad Ajmal Khan, chairmen of the committee asked the ministry to take practical steps for improvement in cotton production in the country.

The committee also expressed concern over delay in procurement of potato through Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco).

Ajmal Khan asked the government to procure potato through Passco and take step for export of the commodity on immediate basis; otherwise, farmers will start staging protest demonstrations. "If the government fails to resolve the issue till March 5, farmers would face severe loses," he said.

Minister for NFS&R Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan told the committee that he had informed Prime Minister Imran Khan that potato crisis would not be resolved without intervention of the government through PASSCO. The Prime Minister agreed to his proposal but agriculture minister of Punjab opposed his suggestion and told the Prime Minister that export of the commodity is the only solution to the crisis, he said.

Sultan said that he would again raise the issue of procurement of potato through Passco in the cabinet meeting and would try to convince the cabinet.

Popalzai told the committee that no tax is imposed on the export of potato by the government. "The issue of Afghan duty which is around 25 percent, which has been imposed by Afghan authorities since 2015, has been raised with Afghan government but they are not ready to lift it," he said.

He said that China and South Korea have shown interest to import potato from Pakistan. Russia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Central Asian States import potatoes from Pakistan, he said.

While briefing the committee about the NFS&R proposed project of Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for financial year 2019-20, he said that ministry will demand Rs 19,587.62 million for 52 projects. He said that out of 52 projects, 13 are under Prime Minister's Initiatives and their worth is Rs 14,795 million.

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