

Erratic monsoon rains threaten key cotton crop in Sindh

KARACHI: Cotton crop in Sindh has come under severe threat as moderately above normal monsoon rainfall caused accumulation of water on the fields, growers said on Tuesday.

Mehmood Nawaz Shah, senior vice president of Sindh Abadgar Board told The News that rains were little less than the damaging level till Monday evening.

"Since then, there had been an average rain of above 100 millimeters – four inches," said Shah. "Standing cotton crops are definitely damaged by four inches of water on the fields."

Shah further said such crops will fetch lower prices in the market. Future picking of cotton will also be suffered, as flowering will be affected. "There is little rain in upper Sindh but central Sindh and lower Sindh will suffer a lot."

August is the main harvesting month for cotton. The Punjab government estimated cotton crop of 7.5 million bales this year and if Sindh produces 3 to 3.5 million bales the overall production would reach 11 million bales.

Stakeholders said cotton has been sown over 4.6 million acres in the Punjab. Some cotton growing areas in Punjab are facing pest attacks on crops.

Considering the cotton production trend in the Punjab, the private sector expects 8.7 million bales in the country. Sowing has already been down by 1.3 percent in the country compared with the last year. Since 2010, the cotton cultivation area has declined by 20 percent in the country, while corn and sugarcane production have increased instead of cotton.

Sanghar is the largest cotton producer in Sindh, which is also under rains where cotton crop is under threat. Stakeholders said water is being stored in the fields, which is damaging the plant while flowers are also dropping in the heavy rain. "There is fear of heavy losses in Sanghar," said one stakeholder. "Picking is also stopped due to rain."

Ahsanul Haq, chairman of Cotton Ginners Forum said several factories in Sindh were closed because of a stoppage of picking of cotton in the fields. "Due to rain cotton quality would decline and overall cotton production in the country will be affected."

Because of unavailability of quality cotton, there are chances of an increase in the prices and exports of the country will suffer. Cotton prices have increased by Rs100 to Rs150 in the last couple of days. Price of lint from Punjab has reached Rs8,850 per maund and lint from Sindh was sold at Rs8,500 per maund.

Naseem Usman, chairman of Karachi Cotton Brokers Association, said cotton sowing has already been affected due to substandard seed while rain has completed the damage while it has become difficult to estimate cotton crop in the country. Prices of lint increased in the market because of a decline in cotton supply due to rain. Rains also damaged vegetable crops in Sindh. Onion, cauliflower and other vegetables are affected and only sugarcane and paddy are safe, Shah said.