

### **16 Punjab districts register decline in cotton production**

MULTAN: Sixteen Punjab districts have registered decline in cotton production out of 21 cotton growing districts as compared to the last year due to different reasons.

According to the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association statistics, 16 districts have registered decline in cotton production while only three districts have witnessed increase in the production. The sixteen Punjab districts, which have registered decline in cotton production, include Multan, Lodhran, Khanewal, Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Layyah, Vehari, Sahiwal, Toba Tek Singh, Faisalabad, Jhang, Mianwali, Bhakkar, Rahimyar Khan and Bahawalpur. Only three districts have witnessed increase in production. They are Pakpattan, Okara and Bahawalnagar.

The growers said that non-feasibility of good seeds, low returns, lack of awareness among farmers regarding cotton production, unusual weather conditions and sugarcane mafia were the different reasons for decline in the cotton production. They said: "The timely announcement of support price is a guarantee to the bumper crop, which must be done before sowing of cotton, but it has not been announced before sowing."

Pakistan Kisan Committee president Malik Iqbal said that a mafia was behind the promotion of sugarcane in the cotton belt area to earn more profit. The country was already facing shortage of water for agriculture, but sugarcane was being promoted, which consumed more water, he added. The mafia was making efforts to declare cotton as a non-profit crop at the cost of promoting sugarcane, he added. Malik Iqbal said that the laws bound the Pakistan Agriculture Storage Services Corporation to procure cotton from the growers, but the Passco only procured wheat. Pakistan Kisan Ittehad president Khalid Khokhar observed that the inputs, which were the lifeline to cotton, were sold at higher rates in peak cotton season, increasing the cost of production.

Agriculture researchers said that the cotton production declined due to severe attack of pink bollworms and when the growers applied pesticides, they proved ineffective as they were spurious.

When contacted, Punjab Agriculture Information senior officer Naveed Kahloon said that the government was taking a number of initiatives to make cotton a profitable crop with strong financial incentives for the growers. He said that climatic conditions, particularly thunderstorms and unusual rains, badly affected the cotton crops last year. He said that Prime Minister Imran Khan had constituted an exclusive Agriculture Working Group to remove lacunas in the cotton sector and increase the production. The PM was very keen to promote cotton crop, he added. He said that the PM had fixed 15 million cotton bales target, but it could not be met due to the unusual weather conditions.

He said that the government had launched an aggressive crackdown on the sale of adulterated pesticides and adopted a zero tolerance policy towards the sale of spurious pesticides. Special teams of Pest Warning and Quality Control raided factories, supplying adulterated pesticides in the markets and fined them heavily, besides sealing factories, he added. The Punjab government was planning to give subsidy on pink bollworm ropes to control pink bollworms, he added.