

Low quality, inadequate seeds may hit cotton output negatively

LAHORE: Low quality and inadequate seed may hit cotton production badly in the upcoming Kharif sowing season, portraying a bleak outlook for farmers and the textile industry.

Following two back-to-back bad years in terms of one of the lowest yields, the sufferings of cotton growers might not end this year either, as it seems there would be tougher times ahead due to below-par cotton seeds.

The grim situation in this regard was acknowledged in a meeting held in the national capital on Monday under the chairmanship of federal Minister for National Food Security and Research.

The participants gave a go ahead in the moot to lower seed germination rate to increase the availability of certified cotton seed at the time of sowing.

A participant of the meeting claimed that after consultation, the government decided in principle to formally allow sale of cotton seed with a germination rate of as low as 50 percent, instead of standard 75 percent.

Against the total demand of cotton seed, only about 70 percent is available this year and germination of most of this seed is below 50 percent, he added. Last year's less than 10 million bales of cotton and bad weather at critical stage have been blamed for inferior quality seed.

Owing to short supply of cotton seed, its price has jumped from Rs5,000/bag to Rs8,000-Rs10,000 much to the dismay of growers. This is a direct loss of farmers, he said, and added that costly seed would further multiply the cost of production of grower.

The Punjab Seed Corporation (PSC), a public sector entity, miserably failed to buy healthy cotton seed from growers as per set target, sources said.

Against the purchase target, only 46 percent quantity could be bought and out of it, standard germination has been just 10 percent of the purchased quantity.

Most of the procured seed has only 35 to 40 percent germination rate, which was unprecedented. Such pathetic performance of PSC should be an eye-opener for the high ups and strict action should be taken against the culprit, a farmer representative said.

PSC is a public sector enterprise working in Punjab, and its main responsibility is to ensure smooth supply of certified seed to farmers. Though is PSC supposed to make profits, it astonishingly increased price of cotton seed last week.

The move was strongly criticised by the farming community which prompted PSC management to announce slashing of price hike on Monday.

As per an announcement, PSC has decided to keep the approved seed price of cotton lower than the open market to reduce the cost of production of cotton farmers, despite the economic challenges the enterprise was facing nowadays.

The decision was taken on directives of provincial Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial. Elaborating the decision, PSC Managing Director Mahmood Javed Bhatti said the prosperity of the cotton farmers and restoration of the cotton industry was the government's top priority, and every possible step was being taken for this purpose.

He said cotton seed rates have been revised downward as under: Certified fuzzy Rs 4,300/20kg (instead of Rs6,500). Basic fuzzy Rs4,500/20kg (instead of Rs6,700). Certified delinted Rs3,300/10kg (instead of Rs5,250).

Basic delinted Rs3,650/10kg (instead of Rs5,600). Certified delinted Rs1,650/5kg (instead of Rs2,650). Basic delinted Rs1,825/5kg (instead of Rs2,800).

He said that PSC has been a leader in the seed industry, which provides certified seed to farmers at lower prices if compared with private seed companies. The standard seed is being provided at affordable prices and with this the current government's dream of a green Punjab is being fulfilled.