

Cotton output falls 25pc to 10.8mln bales in 2018/19

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LAHORE: Cotton production is estimated to fall 25 percent short of its target of 14.37 million bales in the current season as water shortage and pest attacks have squeezed the crop yields –

signaling hard time ahead for the already struggling economy that is heavily reliant on fibre.

Official data on Wednesday revealed that cotton output for 2018/19 is estimated at 10.847 million bales as water shortage and cotton leaf curl virus (CLCV) held back overall gains of areas under cultivation.

The data showed that cotton production in the Punjab is estimated at 8.077 million bales as against the target of 10 million bales, while Sindh's output is feared to be just 2.60 million bales against the target of 4.20 million bales.

The country achieved a decade-high growth of 5.8 percent during the last fiscal year, but analysts feared the economy is likely to slide off on external pressures.

An estimate said one million bales have an impact of 0.5 percentage points on GDP and the effect of cotton shortage on the economy due to the sector's backward and forward linkages with textile industry could simply be assessed.

There are pest onslaught of white fly, jassid, thrips, mealy bug and CLCV in some districts of the Punjab, which is the biggest cotton producer.

Relatively dry weather made cotton growing areas vulnerable to infestation of whitefly, which is a vector of CLCV.

A latest report said the incidences of CLCV were reported at 29.28 percent of the areas this year as against 21 percent a year ago. The assault of whitefly is also on the rise compared to the last year.

Cotton crop in the Sindh remained under severe water shortage due to low river flows and below-normal rainfalls in crop growing areas of the province.

Hot weather at early stage of crop is likely to have a negative impact on production.

Cotton cultivation in Sindh decreased 31 percent as compared to corresponding period of the last year mainly due to water shortage.

Even better cotton prices have failed to encourage farmers to apply pesticides on the crop.

Cotton crop was cultivated over 2.7 million hectares in the country this year as against the target of 2.95 million hectares, showing an increase of about two percent over the previous year.

An official of Punjab Agriculture Department said cotton production in the province is expected to be around 7.8 to 8.2 million bales as against the target of 10 million bales. The official foresaw yield at around 21 bales per acre.

The official said whitefly and CLCV emerged as biggest threats to the standing plants. Water deficiency at early stage remained a problem in Punjab, the official said.

“Rain in the next few weeks especially in September could create problems and lead to greater attack of pests,” he added. “Anyways, actual crop size can be determined in November.”

Low availability of cotton has already forced textile millers this year to ramp up imports. A report by the United States Department of Agriculture Report said US cotton exports to Pakistan are rapidly growing.

US cotton imports to Pakistan spiked 115 percent to \$500 million in the first six months of the current calendar year due to restrictions imposed by the former on India’s shipments.

Pakistan’s cotton imports are forecast at 2.7 million bales during the marketing year of 2018/19.