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Nilgiri tea output flat in July; 36% up in 7 months



Tea production in the Nilgiris, the largest tea growing district in the South, remained flat in July.

Tea companies in the district have informed Tea Board that their production in July totalled 1.20 million kg (mkg) in July against 1.22 mkg in July 2016. The five-year average for the month was flat at 1.21 mkg.

This arose from lower rainfall in all agro-climatic zones except Udghagamandalam.

Helped by higher output in earlier months, the cumulative production in the seven months in current calendar increased to 9.39 mkg from 6.91 mkg.

This increase of 2.48 mkg marked a growth of 35.89 per cent.

The five-year mean for the period was 8.40 mkg. This marked an increase of 0.99 mkg or 11,79 per cent.

(This article was published on August 10, 2017)

Poor rate of Basmati reduces cultivating area to half

Plunged from 8.61 L hectares in 2014 to 4.5 L hectares this year



In 2014, the area under Basmati was 8.61 lakh hectares before it went down to 7.63 lakh hectares in 2015 and then again to 4.96 lakh hectares in 2016.

THE POOR rate of Basmati (fine quality aromatic rice) which Punjab farmers have been getting for the past few years has resulted in reduced acreage and, in the past four years, the area of cultivation has decreased to nearly half under the crop. Scientists say that due to decrease in Basmati cultivation, the area under paddy rice (Parimal varieties) has increased automatically which is bad news for Punjab where 102 out of 141 agricultural blocks have already gone dry. This year, 29.26 lakh hectares were dedicated to rice cultivation in the state out of which close to 24.75 lakh hectares is under paddy (Parimal varieties) and nearly 4.5 lakh hectares under Basmati. Though Basmati is considered to be a major alternative to diverting area from paddy, the area is decreasing under it.

In 2014, the area under Basmati was 8.61 lakh hectares before it went down to 7.63 lakh hectares in 2015 and then again to 4.96 lakh hectares in 2016. “We could not go for Basmati due to downfall in the rates of the crop in the last three to four seasons as Basmati, which fetched around Rs 4,000-5,000 per quintal in 2013, the rate of the crop went down to Rs 2,000-3,000 per quintal in 2014, Rs 1,100-1,800 in 2015 and Rs 1,800-2,300 in 2016,” said

Jugraj Singh, a Basmati grower of Madaran village in Jalandhar. Though the rate of Basmati went up to around Rs 3,600 per quintal this April, farmers had already sold their crop by then and only traders reaped the benefit, said Satnam Singh, another farmer of Kapur village.

“Out of 29.26 lakh hectares area under rice cultivation, around 25 lakh hectares are under paddy rice which would be a big blow to our ground water as for growing one kilo paddy, we need at least 4,500 litres of water while half of the water is required to grow Basmati crop which is short duration and is sown in full rainy season requiring less groundwater,” said Block Agricultural Development Officer, Amrik Singh.

G S Mangat, senior rice breeder at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, said when the area under paddy is not decreasing, they are inventing short duration paddy varieties now so that groundwater could be saved as the new PR-126 variety of paddy takes around 123 days against the previous rice varieties which took 155-160 days. Punjab Agriculture Department Director J S Bains said due to poor rates of the cash crop in the past, farmers now do not want to take any risk and go for assured crops like paddy instead. More area under paddy is a cause of concern for underground water but farmers do need a secure market, he added.

Farmers said the government should fix the minimum support price (MSP) for Basmati so that they can also benefit from the fluctuation. They said currently there was no MSP and the rates are fluctuating but small farmers cannot hold the crop for long by waiting for rates to improve. Punjab needs to bring down its rice cultivation to nearly 17-18 lakh hectares against 29-30 lakh hectares at present, said experts.