

Lockdown pushes Prakasam tobacco ryots to the brink

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Uncertainty looms large for the farmers in the traditional tobacco growing areas of Andhra Pradesh as the lockdown to fight against novel coronavirus has coincided with the marketing season for their produce.

Any delay in marketing of the produce at this crucial juncture would inflict an irreparable loss since the crop quality would deteriorate, felt the farmers who have been suffering successive years of unfavourable weather since 2015.

“We have incurred additional costs for producing the rabi crop this year due to unseasonal rains in January affecting crop productivity and quality,” said a group of farmers in Prakasam district, after taking stock of the situation arising out of the suspension of e-auctions by the Tobacco Board.

Exports stalled

All export shipments have come to a standstill leading to disruption in the supplies to overseas customers. The loss on account of suspension of tobacco exports from the country is estimated at ₹350 to ₹400 crore, according to the Indian Tobacco Association sources.

Moreover, there was a possibility of India losing ground to many African and South American countries competing with it in tobacco exports, they feared.

The extreme dry conditions in summer add to their woes as the produce would lose weight, explained former Tobacco Board member P. Bhadri Reddy.

Almost the entire produce was still with ryots, most of them small and marginal farmers, said Ongole II Farmers' Association president V.V.Prasad.

Payments to lakhs of farm labourers remained pending, added farmer leader from Kandukur T. Ramanaiah, who wanted resumption of e-auctions from April 15. The government should come out with an action plan to bail them out, said farmer leader P. Narasimha Rao.

Lion's share

Prakasam district accounts for over 90 million of 140 m kg of flue cured virginia (FCV) tobacco produced in the State worth ₹1,750 crore, officials said.

About 45.7 million people, including 6 million farmers, 4 million grading labour, 8.5 million processing, manufacturing and export division workers and 7.2 million trading division workers are dependent on FCV tobacco sector, according to ITA sources.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/lockdown-pushes-prakasam-tobacco-ryots-to-the-brink/article31323419.ece>