

Centre decides to discourage cotton, jute sowing

Technological missions for both to end in next five-year Plan, though existing allocations to specific states to continue

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To give priority to foodgrain production, the Union ministry of agriculture has decided to discontinue the technological missions for cotton and jute in the 12th five-year plan, to commence from April 1.

Officials said existing allocations for specific states would continue. "Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh heavily depend on cotton and, similarly, the eastern states for jute. Therefore, while there will be no further allocation from the central government directly, states will continue to get their individual allocation, depending on the requirement," said one.

Sources said the move was partly prompted by farmers growing more and more cash crops, much beyond domestic demand. "In cotton, the acreage has gone up sharply year over year in most states, in anticipation of higher prices. However, industrial domestic demand is not much. Now producers eye the export market and there is no reason why the government will fund a crop to meet overseas demand," was the explanation.

State governments had also been advised to ensure development of genetic varieties in home-grown (desi) cotton. Also, to ensure availability of at least one genetic variety of desi cotton before they allow seed companies to sell. "We have asked states to have it as a mandatory requirement during the seed certification process," said officials. "Most of the output is the Bt (genetically modified) variety — extra long staple. It is good for export and not for the general domestic demand. We



PROMOTING FOOD GRAINS The central government has advised states to encourage intercropping of foodgrain between two cash crops

do not have enough cotton for denim, babyware, towels, etc, which need the desi (and less costly) variety."

Also, to address the agitations on falling cotton prices in various states, the central government has advised states to encourage intercropping of foodgrain between two cash crops. This could help the farmers recover some of the losses they face in growing cotton or jute. Beside helping to meet foodgrain demand, to grow manifold in the wake of passage of the Food Security Bill.

Cotton prices, which were soaring as 2011 began, have been falling. The benchmark Sankar-6 variety rose to a high of ₹67,000 a candy (356 kg) in March; it is now quoted at ₹34,500 a candy. The Cotton Advisory Board estimates the sown area during the 2011-12 season was up at 12.2 million hectares compared with 11.1 mha in the previous one. Output for the year has been pegged at 35.6 million bales (a bale is 170 kg), compared with 32.5 million last season, the CAB said.