

Cotton output set to fall by 25% in state

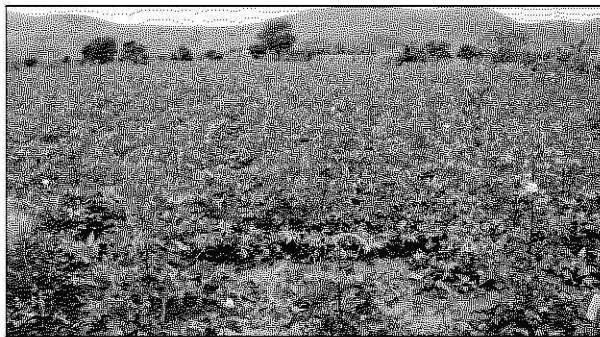
Officials Blame Centre's Lopsided Policy

Rajiv Shah | TNN

Gandhinagar: After experiencing a sharp rise in cotton production for two years in continuation, top Gujarat government officials estimate the possibility of an abrupt fall in 2012-13. "The fall may be 25 per cent or more", a senior state government official told TOI. In fiscal 2011-12, cotton production in Gujarat was around 112 lakh bales, up from 98 lakh bales in the previous year. The rise of 14 per cent took place after cotton production experienced a whopping 33 per cent rise in 2010-11.

"Already, there is a fall in the area being brought under cotton cultivation. As against 30 lakh hectares (ha) brought under cotton cultivation last year, this year it would not cross 25 lakh ha," the bureaucrat said, adding, "Much would, of course, depend on rains. But even if it rains normally cotton production will go down by at least 15 per cent. Field reports suggest that increasing number of farmers are moving away from cotton to other crops, especially groundnut."

During discussions at Planning Commission early this month, state officials were told that rise in the output of cotton and castor crops was the main reason why Gujarat's agriculture grew so significantly in the



BITTER HARVEST AHEAD

RISE AND FALL

Year	Production	% rise
2009-10	74.01	—
2010-11	98.25	32.75
2011-12	112.00	13.99

(Bale production in lakh)

recent past. As for other crops, there was not much of rise. Even the average 5.08 per cent per annum growth in the 11th five year plan (2007-12) was achieved because of these two crops, it was suggested. Gujarat accounts for one-third of all cotton produced in the country.

Already state officials are busy finding fault with Government of India's "lopsided textile policy" which may be the main reason why farmers are shifting from cotton. Describing the policy a "complete disaster", a top state official said,

"The policy virtually ruined the state's farmers, who were forced to sell their cotton for as low as Rs32,000 per candy (355.6 kg) as against the price they got a year earlier, Rs 62,000 per candy. Early trends suggest there is a 15 per cent fall in the sale of cotton seeds."

"Top Central ministers are in hand-in-glove with the textile lobby of South India. They forced a complete ban on cotton exports to divert cotton to industry. This led to hue and cry, especially by chief minister Narendra Modi, which led to partially lifting of the ban. Last year, 80 lakh bales of Gujarat cotton was exported, but following the ban they got a very low price. Gujarat does not have the required cotton spinning and weaving units to absorb cotton produced in the state", the official said.