

Cotton sowing takes a beating on delayed rains

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According to latest data collated by the ministry of agriculture, cotton sowing across the country at the start of the kharif season for 2012-13 has taken a beating. It has fallen to 1.3 million hectares, down two lakh hectares from 1.5 million hectares in the previous year.

Ministry officials say delayed rain has resulted in slow sowing in parts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat. Sowing in these regions has been lower by 449,000 hectares year-on-year compared to last year. On the other hand, sowing is complete in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. Most of the regions are facing a fall in acreage — Punjab by 60,000 hectares, Rajasthan 54,000 hectares and Haryana 59,000 hectares.

In order to cope up with the decline in acreage, the government is looking to increase production per unit area rather than increase the absolute area of cotton pro-

duction. Taking a cue from Brazil, India is aiming at high density planting with a target production per unit area of 550 kg/hectare. In collaboration with the government of Maharashtra, a pilot project in this regard has been launched in Nagpur.

Officials say the fall in cropping has not been a phenomenon of this year alone — it has been observed over the last two to three years. While the growth in cropping is rising year-on-year (y-o-y), the rate of growth has been stagnating. As against 25-30 per cent rise y-o-y in 2008-10, the incremental growth in cropping has been 12-15 per cent.

Farmers in Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana have shifted from cotton to paddy, guar and pulses. Farmers in Maharashtra too, are expected to devote a part of the cotton acreage to sugarcane, as its prices are stable and payments assured. In Gujarat, pulses and groundnut may be more attractive for farmers, as there has been a rise in the prices of these commodities, said sources.