

EXCESS RAINFALL LIKELY TO HIT CANE OUTPUT THIS SEASON

MUMBAI; OCTOBER 7: EXCESS rainfall in almost all agrarian States across India may have damaged kharif crops and the same holds true for sugarcane crop. However, farmers and traders are hopeful that surplus rains this year has raised prospects of a bumper sugarcane crop as well as sugar output for the 2020-21 season.

Sugar season starts from October and ends in September. Based on the long period average (LPA), the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has reported that rainfall between June 1 and September 30 at 968.3 mm was 10 per cent higher than normal range of 880.6 mm. According to the IMD, last year had seen a normal rainfall.

The occurrences of sudden downpour created havoc almost throughout the country, with most agrarian regions reporting damage to sown kharif crops. The key among them was sugarcane crop.

“The overall sugarcane output is likely to decline this year (2019-20) due to the crop damage caused by floods, followed by the diversion of standing pre-matured plants for fodder, especially in Maharashtra. But, next year, i.e. 2020-21, will certainly be a bumper year in terms of sugarcane output in India, with reservoirs being full and groundwater level favourable, which suit cane planting,” said Prakash Naiknavare, Managing Director the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSF).

Meanwhile, a recent survey carried out by private crop assessment and agri-warehousing company national Bulk Handling Corporation (NBHC) projected India’s sugarcane output to decline 12 per cent to 351 million tonnes (mt) for the crushing season 2019-20, as against 400 mt in the previous year. For the crushing season 2017-18, the cane output was reported at 380 mt.

The survey concluded the total sugarcane area to increase 14 per cent to 5.89 million hectare (ha) for the current season; it was 5.16 million ha in the previous year.

With a conservative estimate of 15 per cent for replanting and another 15 per cent for jiggery and khandsari production, including a limited quantity of pre-mature cane diverted as fodder in flood hit Maharashtra, the quantity of cane left for crushing in sugar mills is estimated around 250 mt. At an average recovery rate of 10 per cent across country, India’s sugar output is estimated to remain around 25 mt in 2019-20, India’s sugar output was estimated at 32.95 mt.

Indian body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) had in July estimated India’s sugar output at 28.2 mt, based on normal monsoon and other optimum conditions.

We are estimating a sugar surplus of around 15 million tonnes this year. Considering 6 mt of exports during the crushing season 2019-20

ending on September 30, 2020, the overall ending stock is set to remain around 8 mt for this next season also,” said a senior industry official.

Praful Vithalani, President of the All India Sugar Trade Association (AISTA), said: “The sugar output will remain low this year, i.e. for 2019-20 but bounce back for a bumper in 2020-21.”

Mills in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, India’s two leading sugar producers, are preparing to commence cane crushing in the first fortnight of November. With an estimated sugar production between 5-5.5 mt this year, as against 10.2 mt last year, the sugar crushing season in Maharashtra is estimated to decline by half to three months this year, as against over six months in a normal season.

- By Dilip Kumar Jha

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