

BUSINESS LINE CHENNAI 29/07/2020

# Labour shortage: Sugar mills opt for mechanised harvesting

**RADHESHYAM JADHAV**

Pune, July 28

A large number of sugar mills across India are moving to mechanised sugarcane harvesting this season with Covid-19 likely to affect the availability of sugarcane cutters. Prakash Naiknavare, Managing Director, National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories, told *BusinessLine* that mechanised harvesting will get a major push this year.

“Mills are purchasing sugarcane harvesters in big numbers. Mills in Maharashtra have already placed orders for about 200 harvesters and a similar trend is

seen in Karnataka and Gujarat where mills are dependent on cane cutters,” said Naiknavare.

He added that sugar mills are going to face a major challenge to get skilled cane cutters in the future. “About 7-9 lakh labourers (cane cutters) are into cane cutting in Maharashtra. Earlier, there were issues about the huge size of harvesters that were not suitable for Indian conditions. But now medium-size harvesters are available in the market which are in good demand,” Naiknavare added.

Mechanisation of cane cutting might affect lakhs of cane cutters. In Maharashtra,

cane cutters from the drought-prone areas of Marathwada migrate to western Maharashtra and parts of Karnataka for cane cutting. Sugar industry players say that as cane cutting is a strenuous task, many cane cutters are opting for other work and do not want their next generation to get into cane cutting.

But activists fear that if mills do not provide cane cutting tasks to cane cutters, many would face a major challenge to earn a living. Already Covid-19 has deprived them of work and mechanisation will push them into a deeper crisis.