**SUGAR PRODUCTION IN STATE DROPS BY 17%**

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(HINDUSTAN TIMES; MUMBAI: APRIL 25, 2023)

MUMBAI: AFTER registering the highest ever output last year, the sugar production in the state has dipped by 17.4% this year owing to the substantial drop in recovery rate of sugarcane.

The recovery rate is the percentage of sugar produced in tons per ton of sugarcane crushed. The drop in the recovery rate is because of unequal rainfall and climate change. The drop in the production of sugar could lead to a rise in its retail price.

After the recent conclusion of the crushing season, the production of sugar in the state has been reported at 1,053 lakh quintals in 2022-23. It was 1,275.3 lakh quintal in 2021-22. Last year’s production was the highest in the history of the sugar sector of the state. The production of sugar in 2020-21 was 1,064 lakh quintals.

An official from the cooperation department said, “The drop in the production is due to the reduction in the recovery rate of sugarcane. It has dropped to 9.98% from 10.40% last year and 10.50% a year before it. The drop in the recovery rate was because of the continuous rainfall that affected the growth and the weight gain of sugarcane.

“The prolonged dry spells and late commencement of the rainfall also contributed to the drop in the production,” added the official. More than half of the sugar factories in Maharashtra are run on a cooperative basis by farmers’ representatives.

“There was a dry spell in June and July when the cane needed heavy rain for the development stage. In subsequent three months, the states reported continuous rainfall reducing the production, which had dropped to 800 quintals from average production of 1,100 quintals per hectare,” said Shekhar Gaikwad, sugar commissioner.

Area under cultivation of the sugarcane has been 14.5 lakh hectares for the last two years. Maharashtra has 209 private and cooperative sugar factories that completed the crushing of cane last week.

The Government incentives for the conversion of sugar to ethanol has led to the diversion of sugar to 160 lakh quintals from last year’s conversion of 120 lakh quintals. It led to a further drop in sugar production.

“Maharashtra will remain at the top as production in Uttar Pradesh is expected to be 1,020 lakh quintals. The prices of sugar in the retail market are expected to increase because of multiple reasons,” said Gaikwad.

Jayprakash Dandegaonkar, Chairman of National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories, said that the retail prices of sugar are expected to increase by ₹1 to ₹2 per kg. “It is not because of the reduction in the production as the opening stock of sugar is expected to remain the same at 650 lakh quintals even at the beginning of the next crushing season in October at national level. We have been selling sugar at ₹32 a kg against ₹31 given to the farmers. To maintain the feasibility of business, a ₹2 rise in the selling price is imperative.”

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