**SUGAR PRODUCTION DECLINES 16 PER CENT TO 23.71 MILLION TONNES**

INDIA’S sugar production has declined by 16.13 per cent to 23.71 Million tonnes so far in the ongoing 2024-25 season, creating challenges for government policies which were formulated based on higher initial projections, cooperative body NFCSF said on Sunday.

The National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSF) expressed concern over the “ambiguity” in sugar production numbers as the 2024-25 sugarcane crushing season (October-September) nears its end with significantly lower output than initially projected.

Sugar production estimates have been repeatedly revised downward since the season began, creating challenges for government policies which were formulated based on an initial projection of 33.3 Million tonnes, the industry body said in a statement.

“One section of the industry submitted an estimate of 33.3 million tonnes of sugar production to the central government. Based on that, the central government started formulating its policies,” NFCSF said. The central government had permitted exports of 1 million tonnes of sugar in January 2025 based on the initial production estimate, but now faces a supply-demand mismatch as actual production figures trend lower.

According to NFCSF data, production in Maharashtra, India’s largest sugar producer, fell to 7.86 Million tonnes till March 15 of the current season, from 10.04 Million tonnes a year ago.

Output in Uttar Pradesh, the country’s second largest producer, decreased to 8.09 million tonnes from 8.85 Million tonnes, while Karnataka’s production declined to 3.91 Million tonnes from 4.95 Million tonnes in the same period.

NFCSF President Harshvardhan Patil said the crushing season across most states would conclude by March-end, while Uttar Pradesh mills would operate until mid-April. Patil expressed concern over the shortened crushing period, particularly in Maharashtra where the season lasted only 83 days against the economically viable duration of 140-150 days. “The entire sugar industry in Maharashtra has found itself in huge financial trouble this year. It is very difficult to correlate expenses of 365 days and load it on an 83-day season,” Patil said.

Major sugarcane growing states faced multiple challenges this season. The Co-0238 variety in Uttar Pradesh suffered heavy infestation of “Red Rot” disease and “Top Shoot Borer” pests, while standing cane in Maharashtra and Karnataka experienced premature flowering, resulting in stunted growth and reduced sugar yields. NFCSF has projected the country’s total sugar output to be lower at 25.9 million tonnes in the ongoing 2024-25 season, compared to 31.9 million tonnes in the previous season. Despite current challenges, NFCSF Managing Director Prakash Naiknaware expressed optimism about the 2025-26 season, citing increased plantings due to satisfactory rainfall in 2024 and favorable weather predictions.

“If that happens, the availability of sugarcane and sugar production will be much better not only in the ensuing 2025-26 season but may also extend into 2026-27,” Naiknaware said.

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