

# FLOODS MAY LOWER BASMATI RICE OUTPUT BY 15%

*Decline in acreage following heavy rain in Punjab and Haryana*

DILIP KUMAR JHA  
Mumbai, 13 July

India's basmati rice output is likely to fall 15 per cent this year due to a massive decrease in acreage following floods in Punjab and Haryana.

Though a final assessment of losses is yet to be carried out, experts estimate a 15-18 per cent decline in crop area in the two states, which contribute about 75 per cent to India's basmati rice output.

"Our assessment is that the crop area will fall by 2,50,000 hectares (ha), as this much area is still under water in Haryana," said Anil Mittal, chief mentor of the Basmati Rice Farmers and Exporters Development Forum.

India, the largest producer and exporter of basmati rice, produced a record 4.5 million tonnes in 2009-10. The area under basmati rose 10 per cent to about 1.7 million ha in 2009-10, according to data by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda).

Out of 3.2 million tonnes contracted for exports, Indian traders shipped about 2.5 million tonnes in the financial year ended March 31, around 60 per cent more than the previous year.

About 75 per cent of the flooded area was under paddy. "We have developed some late-sowing varieties just for environment protection, as they consume less water. Sow-



India, the largest producer and exporter of basmati rice in the world, produced a record 4.5 million tonnes in 2009-10

ing of that can only be possible if water recedes fast and there is no further rain in this area," said Mittal.

Over 250,000 hectares in these states is still submerged under waist-deep water and sowing will not be possible at least before a month.

All India Rice Exporters' Association President Vijay Setia said the next fortnight would be crucial for the crop. Farmers will re-cover all the area meant for paddy in the next 15 days. He, however, said low-lying areas would continue to be under water and re-plantation would be difficult if water was not drained out soon.

The Haryana Agriculture Department said paddy (basmati) could be sown till the end of July. So, if water is drained out in the next two days, the farmers can replant. But, the department said, availability of saplings could be difficult. Even if the government provides saplings, the farmers would bear a loss of Rs 10,000 per hectare as additional cost of re-plantation.

Punjab and Haryana share around 1.1 million hectares of cultivation area with an average yield of four tonnes per hectare. Setia says there will be a negligible fall in overall acreage and output in case of

paddy but a substantial loss in case of wheat. "The late variety of paddy will mature in late November and, therefore, fields will not be available for sowing wheat in the next rabi season."

Karan Chanana, managing director of Amira Foods (India) Ltd, producer of Amira brand of basmati rice, said, "Nothing can be said for sure at this point in time."

"We will get the final assessment by this weekend," he added. Despite the governments of both states announcing restoration of normalcy in the flood-hit areas, they estimate a total loss of Rs 2,000 crore.