

Hinda Business Line P.17/ Date 22/7/2016

# Gujarat cotton growers sound pink bollworm alert

## Farmers in affected areas begin uprooting plants; agri experts blame early sowing

RUTAM VORA  
Ahmedabad, July 21

At a time when cotton acreage has taken a beating owing to the monsoon's delay in reaching Gujarat, the appearance of the pink bollworm in the early-sown plants has compounded woes and made farmers across the State jittery.

With the pest attack coming back to haunt cotton growers in Saurashtra for the third consecutive year, many have decided to uproot the plant to make way for alternate crops such as pulses or castor.

Cotton growers from the districts of Rajkot, Junagadh, Amreli, Bhavnagar and Jamnagar have also faced sporadic pest attacks in their mature cotton plants, said farm sources.

Those with irrigation facilities had taken up sowing of cotton early, in May, while the monsoon arrived late June.

Gujarat is the second State where pest attacks on cotton sown this kharif has been reported. Recently, the white flies that had ravaged the cotton crop in

Punjab last year reappeared, triggering concerns among farmers in the Northern state. The Central government has rushed a team of scientists to study the whitefly attack in Punjab.

### Early sowing hurts

"Farmers who had access to irrigation — either ground-water or other water sources — began sowing cotton in May itself, as it gave an additional crop cycle to the farmers," said Ramesh Bhorania, a farmer based in Rajkot.

A cotton grower in Jamnagar added: "We had used Bt seed of cotton, still it did not save the boll from the pest attack. This plant is useless now. Therefore, we are uprooting it and will think of an alternate crop such as pulses or castor."

Experts attribute the early sowing of cotton as being responsible for the attack of pink bollworm, which survives and develops during the high temperatures of summer. A monophagous insect (single host pest), pink bollworm has emerged as a menace mainly in the Gujarat region, while Maha-

rashtra's Vidarbha and Telangana — the other two main cotton growing regions, have largely remained unaffected from the worm.

The Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR) has highlighted the key factors responsible for survival of pink bollworm in Gujarat.

"Due to increased access to irrigation, farmers started keeping the cotton crop beyond the traditional period of June to December. This is primarily the reason behind cotton becoming a double-season crop — kharif and rabi. The Bt-II technology initially provided excellent yields, but later the insect developed immunity to it," said KR Kranthi, Director, CICR, Nagpur.

### Rain-fed areas gain

Studies have revealed that the incidence of pink bollworm in Bt cotton sown on rain-fed region is less.

According to Kranthi, regions like Vidarbha and Telangana are completely dependent on rains, but there are hardly any reports of pink bollworm attack.

"Agricultural scientists had repeatedly asked farmers to wait until the rains before sowing cotton. But they never paid heed to these



Farmers from Padadhari taluk, Rajkot district uprooting cotton plants following the pink bollworm attack

directives. And now, every day, several farmers are uprooting cotton. This will further reduce the already low cotton acreage in the State," said Bhorania.

According to Gujarat government data, cotton sowing has fallen by 25 per cent so far to 17.6 lakh hectares (1h) from 23.45 1h last year. Amid falling acreage and weakening quality due to pest attacks, cotton production in Guja-

rat is likely to be a major concern. "The pink bollworm menace will become graver after the first picking as it will spread to subsequent picking as well," said Kranthi.

RajShree  
92-7-9016