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Maharashtra to shun water-intensive crops, to support pulses production

State to give extra 5% to 10% incentive over the procurement prices announced by the Centre

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MUMBAI: The Maharashtra government has taken steps to promote pulses over other crops as the clamour to bring down water-intensive farming in the State grows following three consecutive years of drought.

In the bid to encourage farmers to grow more pulses amidst falling sugarcane rates, the State has decided to give an additional 5% to 10% of incentive over the procurement prices announced by the Centre annually. The incentive will also be over and above the one-time bonus of Rs. 75/quintal already granted for chana (gram) and masur (lentil) last Rabi season, officials said.

The proposal to grant additional incentives from the State's side has been prepared by the Agriculture Department, which is now seeking



BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY: The idea is to encourage farmers to invest in improving production of pulses. — FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

to answer questions raised over growth of water-intensive crops in drought-hit regions like Marathwada, where some experts have pointed out excess consumption of water, attributing to crops like sugarcane, banana, grapes and oranges, which

are mostly groundwater dependent. Senior officials said the decision taken will give a strong price signal to farmers to increase acreage and invest in improving production of pulses. "It was about time we took a strong stand from our

side to send a message to farmer to increase acreage in other crops and not only sugarcane. Merely telling him not to grow any particular crop does not make much sense anyway," said a senior official.

The Centre's current minimum support price (MSP) for tur (pigeon peas), urad (black gram whole), moong (green gram), masur (lentil), currently stands at Rs. 4,625/quintal, Rs. 4,625/quintal, Rs. 4,850/quintal and Rs. 3,425/quintal.

However, experts said the State intervention is too little too late. With market prices for pulses hovering two times the MSP — tur trading over Rs. 10,000 and Urad around Rs. 15,000 — increasing the MSP or even adding an incentive over and above that will not serve as a motivating factor for the farmers, experts said.

"The government's intentions are good, but even if assuming that the Centre increases the MSP next season by say 10% and we add another 10% incentive of the State, it will still be way below the market price to influence the planting decisions of the farmer in October when he actually takes a call on what to sow," said Nitin Kalantari, of Kalantari Foods Ltd, a prominent trader in the State.

Some others pointed out that procurement must continue even as the government was looking at bonuses and incentivising the use of pulses.

At most times, the State machinery does not procure even when prices hit below or around MSP. "We have to petition the local collector to start procurement but the implementation of the MSP is poor in the districts," said Lalit Shah, of the APMC, Latur.

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