

No bonus as wheat procurement begins in state

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JAIPUR: Amid crop losses, the state government has started the procurement of wheat from Wednesday. The minimum support price (MSP) set for the wheat this year is Rs 1,450 per quintal. However, bonus of Rs 150 per quintal over MSP given last year has been withdrawn.

Setting the target to procure 18 lakh tonne of wheat, Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been roped in by the state government in 32 districts. For Alwar, the procurement process has been decentralized and Rajasthan government purchasing it through RAJFED.

With fear of unseasonal rains still hovering at certain places, the government officials claimed to make necessary arrangements to deal with the situation. "Transportation and storage facilities would be provided to the procurement centres," said the official of food and civil supplies.

However, farmers from Rajasthan may be tempted to sell their produce in Haryana or Punjab if their state governments announce bonus over MSP. "The state government is not providing bonus like last year. But Haryana and Punjab has the history of announcing it every year. This will lead to outflow of wheat from state to neighboring states procurement centers," said one of the district food and civil supply officers.

Meanwhile, storage capacity remains an issue like every year. Against the procurement target, the storage capacity of Rajasthan State Ware Housing Corporation (RSWC) is restricted at 8.5 lakh MT. To meet out the gap, the agriculture department is now looking for different alternatives. Adding to the woes, there is a huge shortage of gunny bags to keep it.

In the state, FCI though is responsible for the storage but it's interstate transfer policy has hurt the interest of Rajasthan. In past few years FCI still allowed transfer of wheat from Punjab and Haryana to store houses in the state giving them over Rajasthan. The FCI generally follows the transfer policy when there is a surplus stock in one state and there is space for storage in nearby state.

Double whammy for farmers

Farmers in several mandis are facing double whammy. Due to recent rain and hailstorm, water and moisture has entered in to the standing crop, thereby reducing its quality. With state government procuring only high quality wheat, farmers are forced to sell their slightly inferior product in the open market at very low prices. Traders are not buying wheat from these farmers beyond Rs 1,200 per quintal which is Rs 250 less than MSP. In the coming months as the arrival will increase, the rates are likely to dip further. The state government too has reduced its procurement target from Rs 21.5 lakh tonne to 18 lakh tonne for the current Rabi season, pushing farmers in the open market to sell.

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