

Tobacco board halts auctions for a week

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Guntur: The Indian Tobacco Board has temporarily suspended operations at auction centres in view of the increasing Covid-19 cases across the state. The decision has been taken after discussions with representatives of tobacco growers and traders.

The board had launched auctions in 21 centres on March 15. Although it continued auctions for about two months, the board has finally decided to put off the proceedings in view of the appeals from the officials and stakeholders.

The farmers have so far sold about 27 million kg of stock against the total expected production of 110 million kg during the current season. Although the board has permitted growers to produce about 115 million kg, the production has dipped by about 5 million kg due to weather conditions. However, the board officials noted that the farmers produced fine quality leaf during the current season helping them get reasonably good price.

According to the board chairman Yadlapati Raghunatha Babu, the growers fetched an average price of Rs 161.80 per kg against Rs 143.20 they got last season. The farmers got nearly Rs 19 per kg more than the previous year's price, said Raghunatha Babu.

He said that the tobacco auction season faced similar ordeals last year due to the first wave of Covid-19 as growers could sell only around 7 million kg by May 15. He said that they have launched the auctions well in advance by following Covid-19 protocols at all auction platforms.

"With the situation going bad to worse, we have decided to put off the auctions keeping in view of the welfare of all those involved in the process including growers, traders and officials," said the board executive director Addanki Sridhar Babu. He said that about 68 employees of the Tobacco Board tested positive and one died due to Covid during the auction season.

He said that the auctions have been stalled only for one week to assess the situation. He said that the board would take a call on resuming the operations on May 24 if the situation eases in the state.

TIME FOR TOUGH DECISIONS

> Tobacco auctions put on hold for a week due to surge in Covid-19 cases

68 tobacco board staff lost their lives to the pandemic this auction season

> Tobacco board has authorised a crop size of **115 million kg** for 2020-21 cycle

> Expected production around **110 million kg**

> In the last two months, farmers have sold **27 million kg**

> Farmers got an average price of **₹161/kg**, **₹19** more than last year



Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vijayawada/tobacco-board-halts-auctions-for-a-week/articleshow/82688509.cms>