

## Dry spell badly affects tobacco coverage in Prakasam district

S. Murali | ONGOLE, NOVEMBER 20, 2017

### Production may dip to 70 million kg as against the authorised 86 million kg

Farmers in the traditional tobacco-growing areas in Prakasam district are keeping their fingers crossed in view of the dry spell during the northwest monsoon season so far. The crop coverage is a mere 15,000 hectares in the Southern Light Soil (SLS) region as against the authorised area of 27,600 hectares, as the district received 90% deficit rainfall during October and 45% deficit rainfall during November so far.

If there are no rains in the next 10 days or so, the crop coverage will fall short by about 6,000 hectares in the region, says SLS regional manager G. Ratnasagar in a conversation with The Hindu. In the Southern Black Soil (SBS) region, farmers have taken up tobacco cultivation much against odds in 10,000 hectares by arranging water through tankers.



*Fingers crossed: If there are no rains in the next 10 days, the crop coverage will fall short by 6,000 hectares in the SLS region. Kommuri SrinivasKommuriSrinivas*

“At least a 2 cm rainfall is badly needed for the crop coverage to pick up and touch the authorised acreage of 21,000 hectares fixed by the Tobacco Board for this season,” says SBS regional manager G. Umamaheswara Rao. Though the board has increased the crop size by two million kg to 86 million kg in the SLS and SBS regions, farmers are not in a position to take advantage of it in view of the dry weather.

### ‘Drizzle will do’

While the farmers in SBS region can wait till December 15, their counterparts in the SLS region will have to complete transplantation before this month-end, or else there will be both fall in productivity and deterioration in quality, explains Mr. Ratnasagar. Farmers in the Kandukur, Kanigiri, and Podili areas, where plantations had been taken up in the last one month, are struggling to ensure irrigation to the crops, says Prakasam District Development Forum president Ch. Ranga Rao.

“A drizzle will be sufficient for the sowing to pick up and provide irrigation for standing crops,” he adds, hoping against hope for some precipitation in the next 10 to 15 days. Meanwhile, thanks to bad cropping condition in the last three years, the tenant farmers have firmed up an agreement with the landlords by paying a lease rent of Rs. 25,000 per acre as against Rs. 35,000 in the previous years.

Similarly, tobacco barns are now available for rent between Rs. 35,000 and Rs. 50,000 per barn as against between Rs. 1.20 lakh and Rs. 1.50 lakh earlier, explains farmer leader from Ongole II auction platform V.V. Prasad. Going by the present situation, production may dip to 70 million kg from an anticipated crop in about 40,000 hectares in the SLS and SBS regions as against the crop size of 86 million kg allowed, say Indian Tobacco Association sources.

Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/dry-spell-badly-affects-tobacco-coverage-in-prakasam-district/article20558005.ece>