

## Firm prices bring cheer to Mysuru tobacco growers

Vishwanath Kulkarni



View of the tobacco auction floor at Hunsur in Mysuru district, Karnataka. GRN SOMASHEKAR

**BENGALURU MARCH 16:** Despite a 37 per cent jump in volumes, average prices of tobacco stayed firm at last year's record levels in Karnataka, where auctions came to an end this week.

An estimated 98.72 million kg of tobacco were sold this year as against 71.94 million kg in the corresponding last year. The traded volumes this year were about 4 per cent higher than the authorised crop size of 95 million kg fixed by the Tobacco Board for Karnataka in 2016.

"The prices have been maintained in Karnataka and are comparable to those of last year, despite an increase in volumes," said Bipin Bihari Chowdary, Director, Auctions, at the Tobacco Board.

The cumulative average auction prices in 2016-17 were around ₹134.7 per kg, as against a record of ₹135.24 a kg in the previous year.

Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) is the main variety produced in the Karnataka Light Soil regions of Mysuru district. FCV tobacco, being a neutral variety is used as a filler as it blends well with other varieties.

"The auction prices were very good this year, despite a higher output in the state. Perhaps, a lower output in South India helped the prices to remain firm this year," said Vikram Urs, Secretary, Federation of Virginia Tobacco Growers Association in Karnataka.

FCV tobacco, because of its neutral character, has a high demand in the overseas market and about 60-70 per cent of the produce from the State is exported, Urs said.

Meanwhile, tobacco auctions have commenced in Andhra Pradesh on a promising note with the bright grades fetching a price of ₹ 161 per kg. The auctions have commenced on about 19 platforms in the State, where the crop is seen lower at around 105 million kg as against the authorised crop size of 130 million kg. Sources said expectations of a lower crop could keep prices firm in the auctions.

Officials of the Tobacco Board are expected to meet in Bengaluru over the next few weeks to fix the crop size for 2017-18. Buoyed by the good prices this year, farmers in Mysuru are gearing up to take up planting of tobacco for the next season, starting May.

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