Crop size is set to go up this rabi season in Prakasam district

Tobacco crop is the flavour of the season in Prakasam district this winter as the extent of the crop, much in demand in the global market, goes up in the wake of bountiful rains.

Thanks to unimaginative EXIM policy, farmers have switched from Bengal gram to tobacco in a big way during the rabi cropping season as there are no takers for the pulse crop in the wake of the market price ruling below ₹4,000 per quintal following more imports from African and other countries.

This is despite incessant rain in at least three spells damaging tobacco seedlings in about 500 hectares raised in October in the traditional tobacco growing areas especially in the areas coming under Southern Black Soil auction platforms.

Tobacco has already been raised in about 18,700 hectares including over 11,000 hectares in the southern light soil (SLS) region which includes Kaligiri and D.C. Palli in neighbouring SPSR Nellore district, says Tobbaco Board SBS regional manager G. Umamamehswara after visiting the farms coming under the Ongole I auction platform.

The crop coverage is likely to cross the authorised extent of 22,093 hectares in the SBS region and 26,669 hectares in the SLS region. Productivity is also set to improve
significantly in view of the congenial climatic condition. “With no other viable economic alternative we are raising tobacco,” says a farmer, V.V. Prasad, while overseeing transplantation of the seedlings in progress in Mangamuru village.

**Wet spell advantage**

“If there are no untimely rains in the next couple of months, the crop production is likely to go up to 100 million kg as against about 85 million kg last year in the traditional tobacco growing areas,” according to industry sources.

While the big farmers are reducing the extent of tobacco crop in view of the acute labour shortage, the small farmers are growing the crop in an additional 1/2 to 1 acre taking advantage of the wet spell. Usually, farm workers from upland areas in neighbouring Guntur district like Narasaraopet and Macherla used to migrate to tobacco farms here during the rabi cropping season. But this is not so now as brisk agricultural activity has been witnessed there also.

“Low grade accounted for more than 60% of the crop last year. A majority of the crop will be bright grade this time,” hopes another farmer N. Chimpiriah from Vellampalli village.

Farmers should cut down on tobacco cultivation by at least 15% over the authorised acreage decided by the Tobacco Board for them to realise better price for their produce, suggests former Tobacco Board member Ch. Ranga Rao after visiting tobacco farms in Maddipadu.