

Tobacco farmers in Karnataka seek reduction in penalty for excess cultivation

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With tobacco crop in Karnataka expected to cross the ceiling fixed by the Tobacco Board this year, farmers have urged the Centre to reduce the penalty imposed on them for cultivating excess.

Anticipating a production of close to 100 million kg, as against the ceiling of 88 million kg, because of favourable weather conditions, the tobacco farmers, wary of coughing up large sums in penalties, have urged the Centre to reduce the penalty for excess cultivation from the existing 15% on the proceeds of the sale to 5%.

Earlier this year, the Tobacco Board fixed 99 million kg as the crop size for Karnataka, but weeks later revised it to 88 million kg, fearing a dip in the global demand for the commodity because of COVID-19. It reduced the quantum for each of the 56,000 licensed growers from 1,700 kg to 1,552 kg.

However, Javare Gowda, president of Virginia Flue Cured (VFC) Tobacco Growers' Federation of Karnataka, argued that the farmers had completed sowing operations by the time the board revised the crop size. "As tobacco in Mysuru region grows under rain-fed conditions, productivity varies depending on the weather. Ideal weather conditions and good agricultural practices by the growers have resulted in improved productivity per unit area," he said. Questioning the rationale behind penalising farmers when nature is benevolent to them, Mr. Gowda expressed fear that growers would have to pay a penalty to the tune of ₹30 crore for excess production.

An estimated 90,000 farmers are believed to cultivate tobacco on more than 85,000 hectares in Periyapatna, Hunsur, K.R. Nagar, and H.D. Kote taluks in Mysuru district, besides in Arkalgud and Holenarsipur in the neighbouring Hassan district.

Meanwhile, auction of tobacco for the year 2020-21 have begun across all 11 platforms in the State, with the board taking the necessary precautions against the spread of COVID-19. While auctions at the large platforms in Periyapatna and Chilkunda began on September 30, operations at the remaining nine platforms began on October 7.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/tobacco-farmers-in-karnataka-seek-reduction-in-penalty-for-excess-cultivation/article32838526.ece>