THE HINDU

Digital kiosk to curb middlemen at tobacco auctions

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A s part of a farmer-friendly initiative, the Tobacco Board has installed a digital kiosk at the tobacco auction centre in Kattemalavadi, Hunsur, to enhance transparency in the auction process, provide farmers with accurate information on the sale of their produce and prevent unauthorised interference.



This digital kiosk is aimed at reducing discrepancies, and minimise delays at the auction centre. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

This digital kiosk also aims to reduce discrepancies, and minimise delays at the auction centre.

Earlier, information gaps often forced tobacco growers to wait for long hours at the auction centre till the auction was completed. Farmers also received misinformation about the cancellation of their sales. Fear of cancellation reportedly led to a lot of untoward practices at the auction platform.

Under the new system, growers will be able to access comprehensive auction-related information, mainly the sale price concerning their tobacco bales. Tobacco growers can access the kiosk by entering their Tobacco Board Grower Registration (TBRG) number. An OTP will be sent to their registered mobile number, enabling them to log in and track the details of their auction.

The auction process involves the allocation of a lot number (serial number), weighing of the baled tobacco, classification, and sales, which will be entered into the digital system immediately after the completion of each step and reflected on the kiosk screen when growers log in using their registered number.

The system also provides farmers with a rate analysis based on the classification of their produce. It displays details of each transaction, along with an overall analysis of the sales made by a farmer at the auction. The code of the buyer company is also displayed on the digital screen, as per information provided by the Tobacco Board.

Farmers can also send the details available in kiosk to their email.

Earlier, authorities at the auction centre generated two slips containing the auction details, one of which was retained by the centre while the other was handed over to the farmer.

The newly installed kiosk is expected to eliminate interference by middlemen and empower farmers to question authorities at the auction centre if they find any mismatch between the sales price and the amount transferred to their bank account.

The kiosk has been introduced on a pilot basis. The Tobacco Board said the digital platform would be further upgraded based on feedback received from farmers.

To prevent the mixing of low-grade tobacco bales with higher-grade produce, the auction centre intends to introduce a technology-based classification system this year.

Enhancement of CCTV surveillance and strengthening of security are being given priority to prevent unauthorised entry into the auction centre.

Identity cards will also be issued to registered farmers. Using these ID cards, each licence holder can nominate two persons to participate in the auction process on his or her behalf, as per information given by the Tobacco Board.

“To foster transparency and accountability at the auction platform, we have introduced this initiative. There was a lack of information and communication at the centre, and we are now bridging that gap. We want farmers to have access to all the information they need to make informed decisions,” said Srinivas B.C., Director of Auctions, Tobacco Board.

In Karnataka, tobacco auction centres are located in Mysuru (Hunusur, Chilkundi, and Periyapatna) and Hassan districts. The Tobacco Board plans to upgrade the facilities at other auction centers as well as at its centres in Andhra Pradesh.

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