



# Decreasing Cotton Cultivation area in Punjab

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**Why in News:** Despite the state government releasing water in the canals on time since the beginning of April this year and providing subsidised seeds, Punjab has recorded its lowest-ever area under cotton cultivation in over six decades

## Trends in decreasing Cotton Area

The decrease in the cotton area has been noted in the last seven to eight years, even as neighbouring states like Haryana and Rajasthan show better results in terms of production of the cotton crop.

This year Punjab managed to bring 1.75 lakh hectares of land under cotton cultivation, falling short of the state government's target of 3 lakh hectares by 42%, with the lowest-ever area recorded under cotton farming.

The state's cotton yield has decreased by 45% compared to the previous year. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) for cotton this year is Rs. 6,600, while the market rate is Rs. 7,000 per quintal.

The decline began in 2015, when the cotton crop was severely attacked by whiteflies. These are tiny white insects that suck sap from the cotton plant's phloem or living tissue, which transports food made in the leaves (through photosynthesis) to other parts.

The insect is also a carrier for the leaf curl virus. The disease-affected plants get stunted and lead to reduced yields. Since then, the area under cotton has stayed under 3 lakh hectares, except in 2019.

## Reasons behind the decreasing area under cotton

Experts believe that farmers have lost confidence in the crop due to its lower yield of late.

After the whitefly infestation, which prevented farmers from expanding their cotton cultivation for the next 3-4 years, there was more optimism over its chances in 2020.

However, the Pink Bollworm insect also caused disease among the crop in 2021 and farmers were unaware of the means to deal with it. The information on controlling the disease reached them after a delay, causing substantial losses.

Consecutive disease attacks have burdened many farmers with substantial financial losses, forcing them to switch to paddy and Basmati crops

The government could assist farmers by aiding them with relevant information for improving cotton cultivation.

Only 10 to 15% of the usual cotton cultivation took place this year and fell further below the recent years' already reduced yield.

In Jhunir Block of the Mansa district that borders Haryana, mentioned that his village used to cultivate cotton on 1,400 acres of land.

However, over the years, the cotton area decreased drastically. This season, only 200 acres were dedicated to cotton cultivation, as farmers were not equipped to handle the diseases

The farmer who cultivated cotton on a 7-acre plot, emphasised the need for information being made available to farmers for dealing with crop diseases.

### Way Forward

Bhagwan Bansal, a cotton expert and owner of SS Cotgin Pvt Ltd, a cotton processing unit in Bathinda, estimated that this year the area under rice cultivation would increase by approximately 30% in the district that previously had a significant cotton cultivation area.

Bansal suggested that the Punjab government should establish a Cotton Research Centre in Bathinda, where farmers should have access to soil and seed testing facilities. It could provide farmers with technical knowledge about the crop and raise awareness about diseases.

He added that neighbouring states such as Haryana and Rajasthan have been performing well in this regard due to the presence of such research centres. In Haryana, approximately 11 lakh bales were produced this year, while Rajasthan had 27 lakh bales. In contrast, Punjab produced 2.50 lakh bales as of March 2023

| Year | Area under cotton cultivation<br>in Punjab (in lakh ha.) |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2016 | 2.95                                                     |
| 2017 | 2.91                                                     |
| 2018 | 2.68                                                     |
| 2019 | 3.35                                                     |
| 2020 | 2.50                                                     |
| 2021 | 2.52                                                     |
| 2022 | 2.48                                                     |
| 2023 | 1.75                                                     |