

Deficient rains bring gloomy news for rabi harvest, too



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With rains faltering during the current kharif season, fear is being expressed in some quarters that early withdrawal of the southwest rains could have an impact on the rabi harvest as well.

Though experts feel it is too early to say so, if the rabi harvest is affected along with the kharif, it could seriously impact India's overall farm production in 2012-2013. In the earlier drought, of 2009, India managed to ward off much of the kharif loss because of a good rabi harvest; each accounts for about half the country's foodgrain production. Rabi sowing starts in October-

November.

The apprehension has been lent credence by the Japan weather bureau forecast that the dreaded El Nifio weather pattern was underway and would last till winter. It was Japan's Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology and the International Research Institute for Climate and Society at Columbia University which had, for the first time in February this year, predicted that monsoon rain in India would be below normal this year, much before the India Meteorological Department did so in July-end.

Rainfall till August 8 was 17 per cent below normal, forcing Bihar and Jharkhand to join the list of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat,

Punjab and Haryana which face drought-like conditions in many parts. Low water levels in major reservoirs of north India have also contributed to the apprehension, as much of farm land in these areas is irrigated.

"If August rains are good, then the reservoirs would fill up or, else, southern India could bear the brunt of early withdrawal of the southwest monsoon, followed by subsequent low rains," Ashok Gulati, chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices told *Business Standard*.

Wheat, mustard and pulses are the main crops grown during the rabi season. In 2011-12, of the 17.21 million tonnes of pulses output, 11.05 mt was during rabi.

"There is no certainty that El Nifio will have an impact on the winter rains but if does, then rabi crops in rainfed areas will suffer," said Ramesh Chand, director of the National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research.

Early withdrawal of the southwest monsoon and poor showers during winters could further bring down the water table. "Less water will definitely have an impact on rabi sowing but not to the extent as in kharif; in rabi, most of the area is irrigated. However, it needs to be seen how much it rains during the winter season," said P K Joshi, South Asia director of the International Food Policy Research Institute.

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Low water level in some reservoirs add to fear, as most rabi sowing is done with irrigated water

- Rainfall till now is 17% below normal
- Rabi accounts for half of annual foodgrain output
- Wheat, pulses, mustard are main rabi crops

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