

Role of monsoon lessens with swelling granaries

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IT is a truism that the monsoon remains critical to the country's agricultural output. However, successive years of bumper rice and wheat production leading to huge stocks, an improvement in irrigation facilities and a thrust on horticultural crops mean that in the event of deficient rainfall, the impact on grain supplies will be moderate.

As of June 1, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) held an all-time record of over 82 million tonnes (mt) of grain (mostly rice and wheat). This is well over the combined buffer stock and strategic reserve norms of 31.9 mt.

"The monsoon rain does

impacts agricultural activities, particularly in the rain-fed regions of the country. But with huge stocks of foodgrains at the government's disposal, the impact on supplies would be minimal," said PK Joshi, director (South Asia), International Food Policy Re-

search Institute.

This was borne out in 2009-10, when the monsoon rainfall was 21.8% below normal between June and September, leading to drought-like conditions in many parts of the country. Rice production de-

clined to 89 million tonnes (mt) from the previous year's record output of 99.18 mt. Yet this 10-mt drop in output did not disrupt supplies because of the government's massive stockpile of the grain.

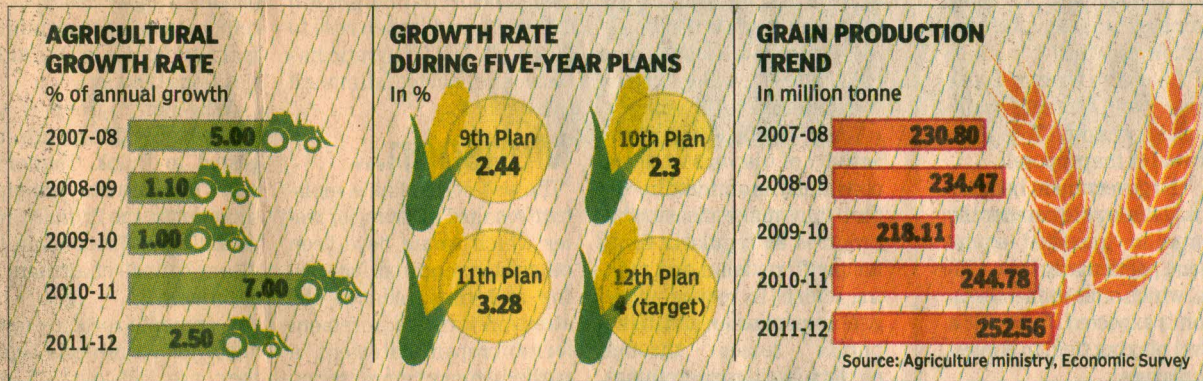
Another factor aiding the

government was a better winter or rabi output. "The contribution of rabi crop in total foodgrains production has been rising steadily during last few years," Ramesh Chand, director, National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research said.

Rabi crops such as wheat and coarse cereals, maize, and oilseeds such as soybean, groundnut and mustard, which contribute more than half of the total agricultural output, are grown mostly in irrigated regions such as Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This is one reason that even during the rain-deficient 2009-10 season, wheat production did not decline.

States, too, have been pitching in. During 2009-10, the state governments — particularly the states in northern and northeastern region — initiated early sowing of rabi crops to better utilise the residual moisture in the soil.

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