

# CLIMBING MERCURY RAISES ANXIETY IN FARMERS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

Fruits of labour: A farmer inspects his wheat field before harvesting in Amritsar, Punjab. PTI

Unusually warm weather in a prolonged dry spell in Punjab and Haryana has left farmers and experts anxious, who fear that prevailing climatic conditions would not just harm the quality of the ready-to-harvest wheat crop but also delay and increase the cost of cultivation for sowing cotton, the summer (kharif) season crop.

Maximum and minimum temperatures have been hovering appreciably above normal in most parts of Punjab and Haryana, and any respite is unlikely in the coming days. The prevailing maximum temperature is 7-9 degrees Celsius above normal over Haryana and 8-9 degrees Celsius over Punjab. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), dry weather will continue across both the States during the next five days.

In Punjab's Bhaini Bagha village in Mansa district, Mahinder Singh has started harvesting his wheat crop sown on around 10 acres of land. He is concerned over two counts — first, the reduced yield (productivity) and quality of his wheat produce, which he says have been adversely affected by the sudden rise in temperature over the past month, and second, if the weather continues to be dry, the cost of cultivating the cotton crop in his field would rise sharply.

"Wheat is a temperature-sensitive crop, which thrives in cold conditions. Warm temperature is required only during the harvesting. But this year, the temperature has been unusually higher in comparison to the previous years and due to this sudden rise, the ripening process was advanced, disturbing the growing pattern, which has shrivelled the grain and hit the yield and quality," he said.

## Increased expenses

"My bigger worry is how to sow cotton in the field by next week. With dry and hot winds blowing for the past many days, the moisture from the soil has already gone. In my village, the canal is almost dry at present, so the option would be to fetch groundwater from tube well, this will increase the sowing expenses as I'll have to use a diesel generator. I'll have to shell out around Rs. 6,800 per acre to plant cotton," he said.

Anand Sharma, former Deputy Director-General of the Agromet Advisory Service Division at the IMD, said, "The dry weather conditions will have implications, the regions which lack irrigation facility will have to bear the brunt."

In Punjab and Haryana, Bt cotton (genetically modified cotton) is sown in over 95% of the total area under cotton cultivation, the remaining 5% of the cultivable area usually has indigenous [ *desi* ] cotton varieties. Cotton is usually planted from mid-April till late May. Both Punjab and Haryana are the major contributors of wheat to the central pool.

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