

## Fall in West Bengal output drags India's rice production

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According to the latest crop estimates released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, West Bengal, which used to be the top rice-producing State, has slipped to fourth place in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June). However, even if the inclusion of output from the zaid (summer) crop in subsequent estimates may improve its position, it will no longer reach the top. Telangana is walking up the ladder by improving its rice production number every year, reaching a notch below top grower Uttar Pradesh, data show.

An analysis of area, production and yield data show that the productivity of rice in West Bengal has been declining. West Bengal was the top producer at 15.88 million tonnes (mt) with a share of 13.36 per cent in the national output in 2019-20. It has slipped to 11.52 mt with 9.3 per cent share in 2023-24.

### State's share of rice production (in %)

	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Uttar Pradesh	13.16	11.89	11.80	12.48	13.05
Telangana	12.94	11.70	9.59	8.22	6.25
Punjab	11.67	9.57	9.95	10.28	9.91
West Bengal	9.30	11.41	12.92	13.29	13.36
Odisha	7.26	6.08	7.18	7.08	7.03
Chhattisgarh	6.32	7.23	6.20	5.76	5.70
Andhra Pradesh	6.20	5.85	6.00	6.34	7.28
Madhya Pradesh	5.84	5.17	3.72	3.55	4.02

Source: Agriculture Ministry

While in 2023-24, the paddy acreage was 4.01 million hectares (mh), another 1 mh has been covered under summer (zaid) season, which is after rabi and before kharif season, taking the total to about 5 mh. The acreage was 5.49 mh in 2019-20.

Woes of rain-fed areas?

“Compared to other States, the adoption of climate-resilient varieties is slow and the procurement of rice for the Central Pool is also low. Besides, the State has not grown in terms of irrigation coverage such as Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh has done to increase the water availability,” said an agriculture scientist. Since West Bengal receives a good amount of rain during the south-west monsoon – 134.42 cm normal (against 52.2 cm in Andhra Pradesh and 73.5 cm in Telangana) – the rainfed area under paddy is more there, he said.

Official sources also said with lower realisation of common variety paddy, often farmers in the State sell below minimum support price (MSP), the growers have been shifting to better aromatic traditional varieties where yield is normally lower. Intending to add premium value, the government last month notified grading and marketing rules for five non-basmati rice varieties of West Bengal – Gobindabhog, Tulaipanji, Kataribhog, Kalonunia and Radhunipagal.

The rice procurement in West Bengal was 2.18 mt (or less than 4 per cent) of all India purchase of 56.87 mt in 2022-23.

#### Need for diversification

On the other hand, the share of Telangana in pan-India rice output has been growing every year and it has reached at 12.94 per cent with a production of 16.03 mt against 13.16 per cent share of Uttar Pradesh with 16.3 mt in 2023-24, data show. Telangana was at number six with 6.25 per cent share in 2019-20.

“The need for diversification from paddy is more urgent in Punjab and Haryana due to water scarcity while Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal together can offset the production loss in the Northern states if farmers shift to other crops. However, the government has to focus on West Bengal as any slip in rice output there will not be good for the country once diversification target in the North is met,” said SK Singh, an agriculture economist.