

In wake of COVID-19 spread, ICAR issues Advisory to farmers for Rabi crops

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has issued following Advisory for harvesting and threshing of Rabi crops and post-harvest, storage and Marketing of farm produce in the wake of COVID-19 threat:

Harvesting & threshing of crops

Amidst the threat of COVID-19 spread, the rabi crops are approaching maturity. Harvesting and handling of the produce including its movement to the market are inevitable as the agricultural operations are time bound. However, farmers are to follow precautions and safety measures to be taken to prevent the disease spread. Simple measures include social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene by washing of hands with soap, wearing of face mask, protective clothing and cleaning of implements and machinery. Workers to follow safety measures and social distancing at each and every step in the entire process of field operations.

- Harvesting of wheat is approaching in several northern states through combine harvesters and their movement within state and between states has been permitted. Precautions and safety measures of workers engaged in repair, maintenance and harvesting operation is to be ensured.
- Mustard is the second important rabi crop, manual harvesting is in progress and threshing is due wherever already harvested.
- Harvesting of lentil, maize and chillies is in progress and gram is fast approaching.
- Sugarcane harvesting is at peak and is also time for manual planting in the north.
- Measures of personal hygiene and social distancing to be followed by those engaged in harvesting of all field crops, fruits, vegetables, eggs and fishes before, during and after executing the field operation.
- In case of manual field operations of harvesting/ picking, accomplish the operation in 4-5 feet spaced strips assigning one strip to one person. This will ensure adequate spacing between the engaged labours.
- All the persons engaged should use masks and ensure hand washing with soap at reasonable intervals.
- Maintain safe distance of 3-4 feet during rest, taking of meals, transfer of produce at collection point, loading/unloading.
- Stagger the field operations wherever possible and avoid engaging more number of persons on the same day.
- Engage only familiar persons to the extent possible and after reasonable enquiry as to avoid the entry of any suspect or likely carrier during field activity.
- Prefer mechanized operations over the manual wherever feasible. Only the essential numbers of persons should be allowed to accompany the machine.
- All machines should be sanitized at the entry point and at regular intervals. All transport vehicles, gunny bags or other packaging material should also be sanitized.
- The collection of the produce may be done in small heaps spaced at 3-4 feet and field level processing should be assigned to 1-2 persons/heap to avoid crowding.

- Proper sanitation and cleanliness of threshers for harvested maize and groundnut is to be maintained especially when machines are shared and used by farmer groups. Copious washing of machine parts frequently touched with soap is advised.

Post-harvest, storage and Marketing of farm produce

- While performing drying, threshing, winnowing, cleaning, grading, sorting and packaging operations at the farm level, wearing of protective face mask may help against aerosols and dust particles to prevent respiratory difficulties.
- Ensure proper drying prior to storage of harvested grains, millets, pulses at farm/home and do not use reuse previous seasons jute bags to prevent pest infestation. Use treated and dried gunnies after soaking in 5% neem solution.
- Adequate pre-cautions to be taken for storage of produce at the farm in jute bags that are made available in sufficient numbers to farmers or in nearby cold storages/ godowns / warehouses, if needed for better price realization.
- Adequate personal safety measures to be taken for loading and transporting of farm produce and while participating in sale at market yards/ auction platforms.
- Seed producer farmers are permitted to transport to seed companies with supporting documents and to follow precautions while receiving payments.
- Seed processing/packaging plants and transportation of seed from seed producing states to growing states (South to North) is essential to make available seed for ensuing *kharif* crops, eg. SSG seed for green fodder for sowing in April in North comes from Southern states.
- Precautions to be followed for direct marketing/ supply of vegetables such as tomato, cauliflower, green leafy vegetables, cucumbers and other cucurbits from farms.

Standing field crops

- The temperature in the most of wheat growing areas is still below long-term average and therefore likely to delay wheat harvesting by atleast 10-15 days beyond April 10, therefore, farmers can delay wheat harvesting till April 20 without incurring any significant loss, which gives enough time to manage logistics for procurement and announcement of dates.
- Rabi Paddy in grain filling stage in southern states is widely affected due to neck blast incidence, adequate precautions to be taken while spraying of recommended fungicide by contract sprayers/ farmers.
- In case of any unseasonal rain at harvesting stage in paddy, spray 5% salt solution to prevent seed germination.
- In horticultural crops at fruiting stage such as mango, while carrying out field operations related to nutrient sprays and crop protection adequate precautions in handling of inputs, mixing, delivery and washing of equipment is to be undertaken.
- In summer pulses in rice fallows, whitefly management with proper safety measures may be taken up to prevent yellow mosaic virus incidence.

As per Government of India Guidelines applicable for farmers and farming sector during lockdown period due to COVID-19, the following Agricultural and allied activities have been exempted from the lockdown:

- i. Veterinary hospitals
- ii. Agencies engaged in procurement of agriculture products, including MSP operations
- iii. Mandis operated by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee or as notified by the State Government

- iv. Farming operations by farmers and farm workers in the field
- v. Custom hiring centres (CHC) related to farm machinery
- vi. Manufacturing and packaging units of Fertilizers, Pesticides and Seeds
- vii. Intra and inter-state movement of harvesting and sowing related machines like combined harvester and other agriculture/ horticulture implements

These exemptions will facilitate unhindered activities related to agriculture and farming so as to ensure essential supplies and farmers do not face any difficulty during the lockdown. Necessary directions to the concerned Ministries/ Department of States and UTs have been issued for implementation during lockdown as per guidelines of Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI vide No.40-3/2020-DM-I(A) dated 24th, 25th and 27th March 2020, additions to clauses 2, 4, 5 and 6 in exceptions based on request of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, GoI.

Based on the policy directions of GoI, various Ministries/ Departments of State Governments have issued implementation guidelines to facilitate continuation of activities related to Agriculture and allied sectors.
