

Help from the skies for Basmati growers

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THIS MONSOON Basmati growers in the country will get satellite-aided farm inputs as sowing begins amid strong export competition from Pakistan and higher internal demand.

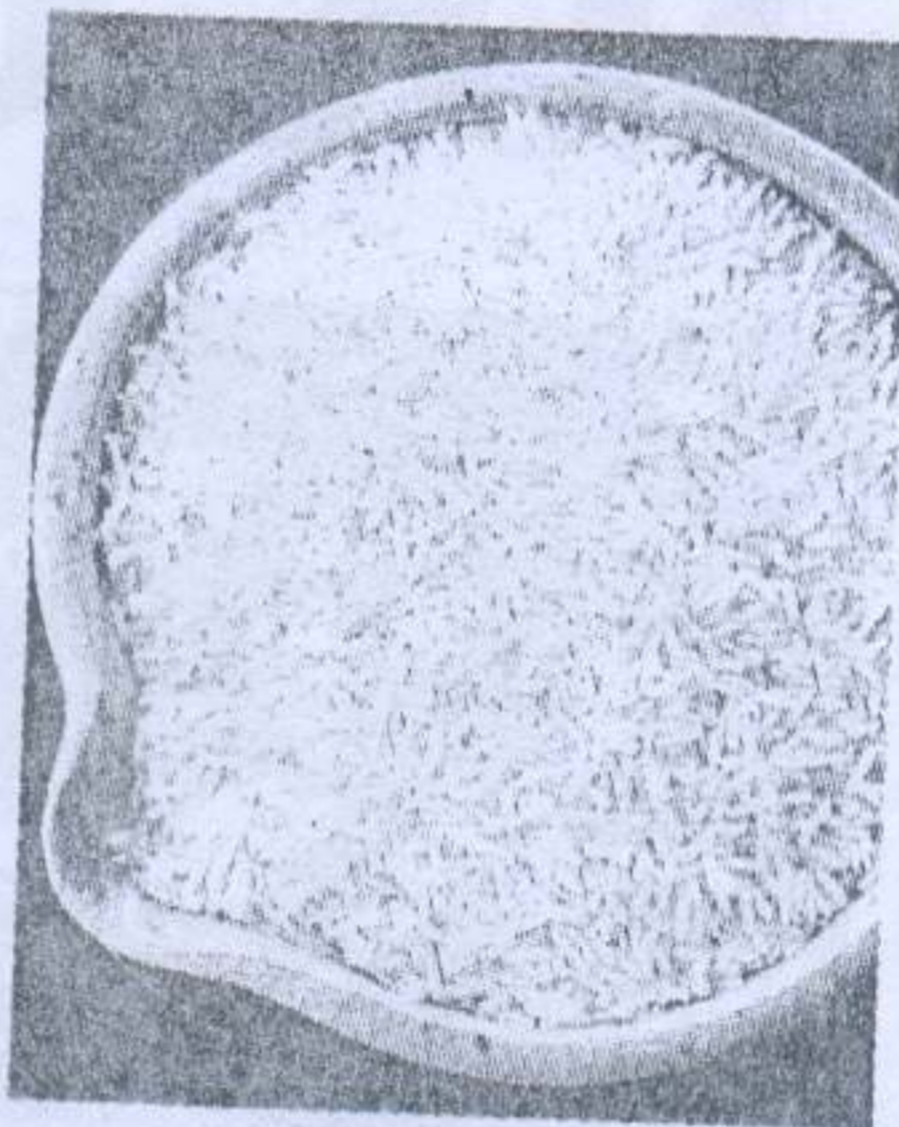
The government has roped in a private satellite technology firm, selected through nationwide bidding, to carry out sky studies on acreage, crop health and yields of basmati.

It will also study non-basmati rice for the ensuing 2009 kharif season — June to October.

The study will not only focus on Indian basmati-growing regions but will also map out total area under non-basmati and basmati rice in the Punjab area of Pakistan, which has been trying to outsell India in the hot basmati markets of EU countries.

These essentially remote-sensing studies will be conducted in Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir and 26 districts of Uttar Pradesh.

A satellite-based imagery study to monitor crop health is more precise and will do away with the need for time-consuming



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and expensive labour-intensive field surveys.

It will also help exporters collate data to devise export strategies.

The reports will be submitted for the months of July, August, September, October and November 2009 and a final report along with post-harvest reports will be turned in by December 2009.

“The studies will help exports and trade and the end gainer will be the farmer. Basmati farmers mainly grow to export,” A.K. Gupta, advisor with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Exports

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- Remote sensing satellite studies will map out basmati crops in six states as well as Punjab in Pakistan
- Comparative study will give India an edge over Pakistan
- Demand for Indian basmati has shot up by 13 per cent in the European Union
- India and Pakistan are fighting to claim GI tag for basmati

Development Authority (Apeda), a government wing, told *Hindustan Times*.

India's basmati rice exports are estimated to have jumped by 13 per cent despite a cess of Rs 8,000 a tonne in the last crop year, ending September 2008, according to official figures.

India and Pakistan are currently locked in an international wrangle to claim Geographical Indication or GI status for basmati. A GI tag for Indian basmati would mean that no other country would be able to lay claim, patent or sell rice under the basmati name.

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