

# Why farmers stick to cane despite dues

## Mills Owe ₹8,200cr To Farmers In UP Alone But Peasants Not Likely To Switch To Other Crops

Satyajit Joshi, Vivek Waghmode & Sandeep Rai | TNN

**Kolhapur/ Meerut:** Unrest simmers in districts of western Maharashtra and parts of UP, the sugar bowls of India, over unpaid cane dues. But despite the problems which beset farmers, they have continued to cultivate a crop that means more to them than just livelihood.

Anger among farmers in Maharashtra spilled out into the streets on January 12. A mob gathered outside Kranti Sugar Factory in Sangli and Krishna Sugar Factory in Satara and set the office gates on fire. Four other factories were ransacked. There were fresh protests on Monday too.

Farmers in western Maharashtra have cultivated sugarcane for decades, thanks to the fertile land, ample water and "assured money". The government announces a fair and remunerative price (FRP) every year that mills must pay farmers after purchasing cane. The mills have, however, struggled to do so for many years. This crushing season

### CHEENI COUNTRY: CANE IN UP



- ▶ UP largest sugarcane producing state in India
- ▶ Over 45 lakh farmers linked to cane cultivation
- ▶ Area under cultivation increased from 22.9 lakh hectare in 2017 to 26.7 lakh hectare in 2018
- ▶ Total cane production up from 1,800 lakh tonnes in 2017 to 2,130 lakh tonnes in 2018
- ▶ Sugar mills owe ₹ 8,200 crore to farmers

### Bitter Taste in Maharashtra

- Number of sugarcane-growing farmers | 25 lakh
- Number of cooperative and private sugar factories | 196
- Sugar factories that have not paid farmers\* | 172
- Estimated arrears payable to farmers | ₹ 4,576 crore
- Estimated cane crushed till December 15 | Over 400 lakh metric tonnes
- (\*till January 9)

alone, since October 2018, mills owed Rs 4,576 crore to farmers till December 9.

The violence came hours after farmers got to know that private and cooperative sugar factories had unilaterally deposited 80% of the payment in their bank accounts. FRP is Rs 2,800 per tonne.

Pradip Godase, a farmer

### Thousands march to protest non-payment by Maha mills

not paid FRP to farmers. These dues come to around Rs 5,300 crore," Shetti said.

"The CM had said cane farmers should get FRP plus Rs 200 and that the government will do everything to clear the dues. However, no dues have been cleared by the sugar mills," he added.

He said these dues were pending even after 90 days had passed since cane-cutting, despite the Sugarcane Act laying down that farmers should be paid within 14 days of the cane-cutting. In

ern UP districts of Baghpat, Bijnoor, Muzzaafarnagar, Shamli, Bulandshahr and Meerut, being identified as a cane cultivator is a matter of pride that cannot be compromised. "We have more respect than someone who grows vegetables, which needs less land but greater amount of manual labour," says Bijnoor farmer Virender Singh.

There's no chance of that happening anytime soon. For farmers, especially in west-

In September 2018, UP CM Yogi Adityanath advised farmers to "grow other crops as too much sugar leads to diabetes". It's an advice farmers in the area take with a pinch of salt. "Sugarcane is the crop of our forefathers and we are carrying forward the legacy. Why would we grow anything else?" said Virender.

It is this persistence that has seen the area under cane cultivation in UP increase from 22.9 lakh hectare in 2017 to 26.7 lakh hectare in 2018.

Ashok Kumar, director (research) at Meerut's Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Agriculture University, said, "Pride about cane cultivation is visible among those with large landholdings, who can absorb delays in payment. Many are confident they will get paid sooner or later."

Naveen Pradhan, a Meerut farmer, added, "Besides, the crop needs very little maintenance, is robust and can survive inclement weather. In worst-case scenarios, the loss is never more than 10%. In wheat, there might be a 30% to 40% loss sometimes."

*Times of India*

29/1/2019