

# Agri Ministry Plans to Set Up Over 7K Seed-Testing Labs

Move part of government's push to boost crop yield

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**New Delhi:** The agriculture ministry is planning a massive increase in the number of seed-testing laboratories in the country as part of its push to boost crop yield. Officials told **ET** that use of quality seeds can boost farm production by up to a fifth.

The ministry is consulting with state governments to set up 583 seed-testing labs in major towns and 6,600 labs at the block level in rural areas, the officials said, adding that sowing quality seeds leads to higher germination, resistance to pest attacks, and increase in crop yields by 15-20%.

At present, India has 130 seed-testing labs where farmers can get quality analysed for a nominal fee.

"A note has been circulated to the states to send their suggestions. We expect to roll out this project by this year," one of the officials cited earlier said. "The seed-testing labs will give a push to technology advancement in rural India. Testing for germination, purity and other seed determination will be done."

Earlier, the ministry had undertaken a soil-testing drive as part of its effort to help farmers boost their income.

Dinesh Kumar Agarwal, director of Indian Institute of Seed Sciences, which is under the Indian Council of Agriculture Research, said, "Having quality seeds will ensure higher genetic purity, possession of good shape, size, colour, higher germination, higher seedling and vigour leading to enhancement in crop yield by 15-20%."

Farmers said seed quality was to blame if crop yield failed to go up despite following experts' advice on inputs like fertilisers and irrigation.



## **SOWING THE SEEDS...**

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However, some say the government may need to do more. "Establishment of seed testing laboratories across India is a welcome step, but I see the crisis in human resource deployment and failure of governance," said Ajay Vir Jakhar, chairman of Punjab State Farmers' Commission. "Existing seed testing laboratories system is infiltrated in connivance with the seed industry. In Punjab, zero conviction for any seed-related offence has taken place in the last 10 years. Additionally, for non-performance or fake BT cotton seeds, there has been no conviction since the technology was introduced in 2002."