Rain Brings Hope, Excess Rains Bring Tears: Telangana's Cotton Story in 2025

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ABSTRACT

Cotton, often referred to as "white gold", remains central to the agrarian economy of Telangana. In 2025, the crop presents a paradox: higher production estimates on paper alongside widespread distress in farmers' fields. While official projections suggest an increase in total output, continuous and untimely rains during critical crop stages triggered an irreversible quality crisis. Prolonged moisture during boll maturation caused pre-harvest seed germination inside unopened cotton bolls, sharply reducing fibre quality, market acceptance, and farmer incomes. This article documents field-level observations from Gunturpalli village of Warangal district and nearby regions, highlighting how excess rainfall, rather than pests or acreage decline, emerged as the single biggest factor pushing farmers away from Minimum Support Price (MSP) realization. The Telangana cotton story of 2025 underlines the urgent need to shift policy focus from production alone to quality protection under climate variability.

INTRODUCTION : Cotton at the Crossroads

Cotton has long shaped the rural landscape of Telangana, influencing farm incomes, labour demand, and regional markets. Over the years, improvements in hybrids, input use, and procurement mechanisms have helped farmers

expand cotton acreage with the expectation of stable returns. In 2025, the season initially promised success. Early monsoon showers were timely, enabling nearly 99% of the normal cotton area to be sown by mid-August. Encouraged by a higher MSP and favourable early weather, farmers invested heavily in Bt. hybrids, fertilizers, and pest management.

However, agriculture remains deeply exposed to weather extremes, particularly rainfall variability under changing climatic conditions. The 2025 season clearly demonstrated how excess rainfall can be as destructive as drought. Continuous rains during late August and September reversed early optimism and pushed the crop into a silent crisis that was largely invisible until harvest.

A Promising Start Undone by Excess Rains

In villages such as Gunturpalli in Nallabelly Mandal of Warangal district, crop establishment was uniform and vegetative growth was robust. Plants carried a good boll load, and farmers anticipated yields close to the normal 8-9 quintals per acre. Yet, prolonged rainfall coinciding with boll development and maturation created ideal conditions for moisture accumulation within the bolls.

Unlike short rain spells that cotton can tolerate, persistent wetness prevented proper drying of bolls and lint, a phenomenon widely reported under excess rainfall situations (Luo *et al.,* 2016). Fields in black soil regions suffered the most due to poor drainage and water stagnation, while red soil areas performed relatively better. The damage, however, was already set in motion inside the bolls.

Seeds Germinating Inside Bolls: The Hidden Disaster

The most serious consequence of excess rainfall in 2025 was pre-harvest seed germination inside unopened cotton bolls, a form of weather-induced quality deterioration documented by ICAR-CICR (2023). When mature bolls remain continuously wet, moisture penetrates the lint and activates the seed embryo, leading to sprouting before harvest. This phenomenon does not always show clear external symptoms, making it a silent destroyer of quality.

Farmers observed that cotton appearing healthy from the outside was severely compromised inside. Seed germination resulted in discoloration and staining of lint, reduced fibre strength and uniformity, and a sharp decline in grade, leading to rejection under standard procurement norms (ICAR-CICR, 2023; CCI, 2025; Deccan Chronicle, 2025). Such cotton failed to meet quality standards prescribed by the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), leading to rejection or heavy price deductions.

As one farmer from Gunturpalli village remarked, “The cotton looks full, but inside the boll the seed has already sprouted. No trader gives MSP for this.” Across Warangal district, seed germination emerged as the primary reason for farmers missing MSP, surpassing losses from pests or plant mortality.

Yield Losses Compound the Damage

Quality deterioration was accompanied by quantitative losses. Excess moisture triggered boll rot and seed rot, increased shedding of immature bolls, and caused stunted growth in waterlogged fields. Pest pressure also intensified under humid conditions, further stressing the crop.

Farmers across Warangal, Adilabad, Asifabad, and Nirmal districts reported yield reductions of 20-30%, consistent with earlier observations that increase in monthly mean rainfall and the average length of wet spells were found indicating negative impacts on fibre quality in cotton (Luo *et al.,* 2016). Average productivity

declined to 5-6 quintals per acre, with some black soil fields performing even worse. Thus, farmers faced a double blow: fewer quintals harvested and lower prices for whatever was harvested.

Production Numbers Hide Quality Collapse

Despite widespread field-level losses, official estimates project Telangana's cotton production in 2025-26 to increase by 5-10%, reflecting state-level aggregation of arrivals rather than quality-adjusted output, reaching around 5.3-5.5 million bales. This positions Telangana as the third-largest cotton-producing state in India.

However, aggregate production figures fail to capture the severity of quality collapse. Germinated cotton, even when produced in reasonable quantities, attracts prices ₹1,200-1,500 per quintal below MSP. For farmers, higher production without quality translates into lower net income and deeper indebtedness.

Markets Punish Rain-Damaged Cotton

News reports from Telangana during the 2025 cotton season highlighted that high moisture content and rain damage forced farmers to sell kapas at prices ₹700-1,000 per quintal below MSP, despite official procurement mechanisms being in place (Deccan Chronicle, 2025).

The MSP for medium-staple cotton in 2025-26 is ₹8,110 per quintal as notified by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (Government of India, 2025). Market realities, however, tell a different story. Prices in major markets such as Enumamula in Warangal hovered around ₹7,440 per quintal, while in places like Jammikunta they dropped as low as ₹5,500 per quintal for rain-damaged produce.

Strict enforcement of quality norms by CCI, though essential for maintaining standards, left many farmers excluded from MSP procurement when quality parameters were not met (CCI, 2025). As farmers repeatedly noted, "MSP exists, but rain-damaged cotton doesn't qualify. That's where we lose everything."

Policy Measures and Persistent Anxiety

The Telangana government initiated several measures to strengthen procurement, including the establishment of 122 procurement centres, Aadhaar-based direct payments, CCTV monitoring, and digital registration through the 'Cotton Farmer' app. Helplines and WhatsApp grievance systems were also introduced, and district collectors instructed ginning mills to remain prepared.

Despite these efforts, farmers remained anxious. Quality-related rejections due to seed germination continued to block access to MSP, revealing a gap between policy intent and climatic realities on the ground.

Voices from the Fields of Gunturpalli village, Nallabelly Mandal, Warangal District, Telangana:

In Gunturpalli village, harvested kapas appears white from a distance. On closer inspection, sprouted seeds and weakened fibre tell a different story. Farmers spread rain-affected cotton under cloudy skies, hoping to salvage some value.

As one farmer summed it up, "Rain is life for cotton. But when it doesn't stop, it destroys everything-from seed to price."

CONCLUSION: Beyond Production, Quality Must Matter

Telangana's cotton experience in 2025 highlights a critical lesson for climate-sensitive agriculture. The crisis is not merely about acreage or yields, but about quality collapse driven by excess and untimely rainfall. Seed germination inside bolls has emerged as a defining challenge, rendering conventional production statistics inadequate indicators of farmer well-being.

Future strategies must integrate climate-resilient varieties, improved drainage, harvest-time advisories, and procurement norms that realistically address rain-induced quality damage, as emphasized in national cotton research and policy frameworks (ICAR-CICR, 2023; Government of India, 2025). Without such adaptations, cotton farmers will continue to suffer income losses even in years that appear successful on paper.

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