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Provide viable option to tobacco cultivation, say growers

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SHANKAR BENNUR

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Tobacco growers in Mysuru district have volunteered to lease out their land for free to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) carrying out anti-tobacco campaigns or government agencies to demonstrate a practicable alternative crop for cultivation.

They have invited the NGOs to visit their villages and demonstrate an alternative crop that is equally remunerative as tobacco in the existing rain-fed conditions.

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“We offer to quit tobacco cultivation and switch over to alternative crops if they give returns like tobacco. Until viable options are found and demonstrated, we will continue with tobacco cultivation unmindful of the opposition from activists,” the Virginia tobacco growers said here on Saturday.

The Federation of Karnataka Virginia Tobacco Growers' Association on Saturday maintained that tobacco growers, who switched over to other crops in the district in the recent years, suffered heavy losses as the substitute crops turned out to be unsuitable for the local farm conditions.

“Tobacco production has not crossed the crop size fixed by the Tobacco Board for Karnataka. In 2014-15, the crop size was fixed at 104 million kg but the production was 101 million kg. Efforts are on to minimise the crop but the alternatives suggested are turning out to be unviable,” claimed association president B.V. Javare Gowda.

Speaking to presspersons here, he said no alternative crop was commercially viable in the rain-fed conditions. Moreover, no proper substitute had been suggested and demonstrated by the competent agencies, he argued.

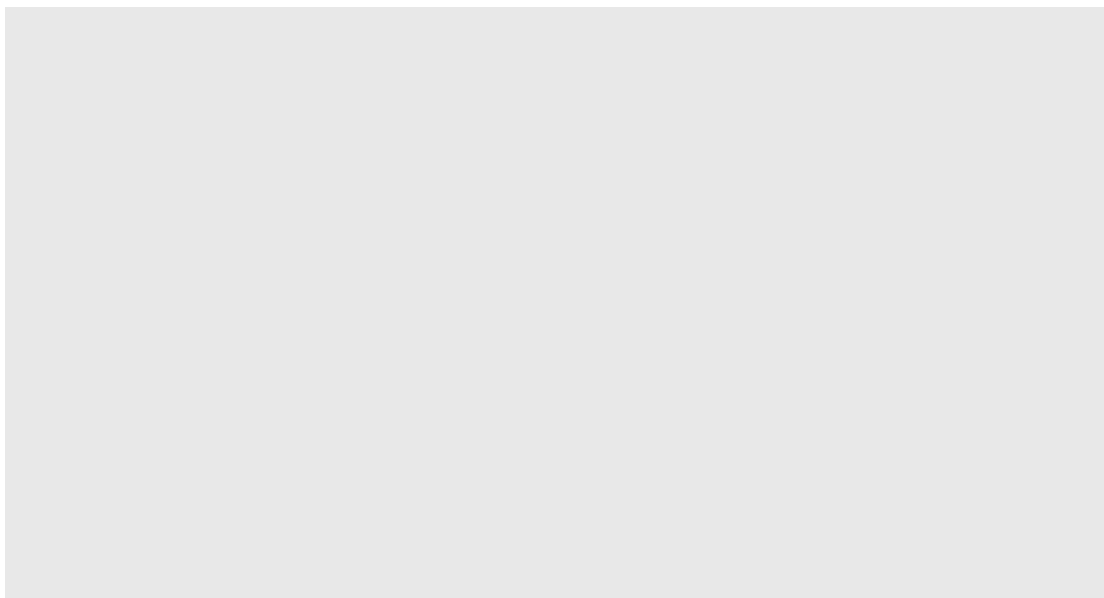
More than one lakh small and marginal farmers in Mysuru, Hassan and Chamarajanagar districts are dependent on Flue Cured Virginia Tobacco (FCV) crop for their livelihood. Apart from farm families, over four lakh farm workers are depending on the crop.

Tobacco is cultivated in about one lakh hectares in Mysuru district by over 45,000 farmers. At least, 80 percent of the tobacco

grown in Mysuru is exported. An average price for a kg of tobacco in Mysuru market is around Rs. 130 and the average yield per acre is around 600 to 700 kg, he explained.

Referring to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Cultivation, Mr. Gowda asked: "How can we adopt FCTC as it is framed for the western countries where tobacco consumption is to the tune of 90 percent in the form of cigarettes. In India, the consumption is only 12 percent in the form of cigarettes. This shows the unfair regulations on FCV farmers by the government."

Farmers offer to lease out land to NGOs for free to demonstrate practicable alternative crop cultivation



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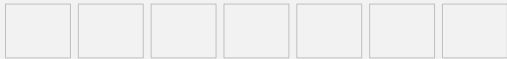
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