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Late monsoon revival may help recover deficit in kharif output

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NEW DELHI: A late revival of the monsoon has brightened farm prospects, enabling a swift catch-up in sowing deficits of kharif crops that supply half of India's annual food output, data from the farm ministry show.

The overall area planted with a range of crops, which was smaller due to erratic rains just weeks ago, now stands slightly above the normal limit, which is an average of the past five years.

At 109.2 million hectares, acreage has surpassed the average of 108.5 million hectares, the data show as on September 16.

To be sure, the area under rice, oilseeds and pulses is still lower than last year as heavy rainfall in some states and dry conditions in others hammered crops. But the sowing deficits in each of these have narrowed. As rainfall recovered, farmers acted swiftly to sow crops, especially



The area under rice remains lower than last year. PTI FILE

millets, whose area has jumped 4.2% to 18 million hectares.

The area under pulses stood at 13.1 million hectares, the data showed, bridging the deficiency of about 6% in August to 4.1% now.

The sowing deficit in paddy, which was nearly 18% in July, has been gradually tapering, and narrowed to 4.5% at 39.9 million hectares. The shortfall in oilseeds is just 0.6% now, to stand at 39 million hectares.

The paddy gap will remain because not much rice can be grown in August. The country is

unlikely to see any serious shortage of key items as kharif acreage in most states is at normal levels, a farm ministry official said, requesting anonymity.

"The revival in monsoon is very good news not just because it narrowed sowing gaps, but also because large reservoirs are getting filled, soil moisture is being replenished and this is crucial for the rabi season," said KK Singh, head of agricultural meteorology at the India Meteorological Department.

The Reserve Bank of India, in a report released on Friday, said: "With the late revival and spread of the monsoon to the deficit regions and predictions of a delayed withdrawal, kharif sowing is set to exceed last year's acreage. Even paddy and pulses are swiftly catching up."

Extreme weather this year hit farm output prompting the country to ban export of the grain in May and put restrictions on shipments of rice this month.