

Intervention prices of pulses and decaying production

By Irfan Ghauri

ISLAMABAD: The 'intervention prices' of pulses that the government has recently announced are lower than what brokers gave to the most of the farmers in the last harvesting season of these crops.

An intervention price is a kind of support price, which is aimed at encouraging farmers to increase growth of certain crops.

The Network for Consumer Protection (NCP) surveyed Bhakkar and Narowal districts, which are the main producers of pulses in the country.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) set support price of gram (chana) at Rs 750 per 40 kilogramme, Rs 1,200 for

moong and Rs 1,300 for 40 kg maash. The government did not set support price for lentils (masoor), which is one of the four most important pulses, said the survey report. It says that gram's price was Rs 1,000 per 40 kg last year but the government lowered the price this year. It says farmers claimed that moong was sold at about Rs 2,000 per 40 kg while maash was sold at Rs 1,600 per 40 kg in the market last year.

The farmers told the NCP that brokers paid them more than the government-set "intervention price". The report says, "Farmers have already low interest in growing these crops (pulses). The government's decision (to set the support prices very low) will force them abandon growing pulses."

The report claimed that utility stores and other market movers were pocketing profits manifold while the farmers could not earn money enough to afford a family.

It claimed that pulses were winnowed in a simple manner, which cost Rs 1.40 per kg. Hence, the brokers had no solid reason to buy pulses cheap from farmers because they were not be treated costly, it said.

It says that pulse production is a risky business. "The production quantity and market prices both are able to take giant leaps upwards and downwards. Some of the factors causing these changes are natural but most of them are 'man-made'. Local farmers are loosing interest in these traditional crops and production is increasingly falling behind the demand," it says.