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## Pulses support prices lower than market rates

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ISLAMABAD—The support prices for pulses recently announced by the government are lower than what brokers (arrhtee) paid most of the farmers during last harvesting season of these crops, said Rashid Chaudhry Project Coordinator Media TheNetwork for Consumer Protection in a statement here Friday.

He said that TheNetwork for Consumer Protection came to know about this during a survey visit to the major pulse producing districts of Bhakkar and Narowal. (Almost half of the country's gram production and one third of moong comes from Bhakkar while Narowal produces one third of maash and a quarter of masoor.)

He said low prices discourage farmers resulting in reduced supply in coming season that in turn hikes consumer prices.

the maximum price for the commodity. Passco is bureaucratic in its operation and farmers, especially small farmers, find it difficult to deal with them.

He said that despite all operational problems, Support prices are

helpful for the crops that have somewhat stable levels of production. Per acre produce of rain dependent crops like gram varies greatly. It can double or halve the previous years' level. Its farm gate price also varies accordingly.

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Rashid Chaudhry added that the support prices set by the Economic Coordination Committee per 40 kg are Rs 750 for gram (chana), Rs 1,200 for moong and Rs 1,300 for maash. The government did not bother to set support price for masoor (lentils), the production of which is more than maash and this is one of the four most important pulses. In the last production season the price for gram was one thousand rupees per 40 kg that later rose to twelve hundred rupees. In sharp contrast to this the government has now fixed its support price at Rs 750. Records and interviews with pulse farmers and dealers show that moong was sold at upto two thousands rupees per 40 kg yet the intervening price by the government has been fixed at twelve hundred rupees. Similarly thirteen hundred rupees is the interventional price per 40 kg for maash which was sold at sixteen hundred rupees in the last season.

The difference ridicules the government's stated purpose of making the pulses an attractive crop for farmers.

The government implements its Support price decisions through PASSCO (Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Supplies Corporation). Passco through its large nation wide network purchases the commodities, theoretically directly from the farmers at the Support price. This is supposed to discourage privately operating brokers to offer farmers a price either equivalent to or greater than the Support price. But in practice the system is full of flaws and follies.

He further said that the Support price instead of becoming the minimum price becomes the price if not

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