

# Support prices for pulses not to benefit farmers: survey

By Sher Baz Khan

ISLAMABAD, July 21: The support prices announced by the government for pulses favour traders and middlemen instead of farmers and will therefore fail to stabilise prices in the market, said a survey report prepared by the Network for Consumer Protection.

These prices are lower than what brokers paid to most of farmers during the last harvesting season, the report said.

The survey has feared that lack of attraction for farmers in pulses would discourage their sowing in the next season resulting in another shortage and making the domestic consumers dependent on imported pulses.

The organisation has surveyed two major districts of Punjab - Bhakkar and Narowal - where almost half of the country's gram is produced. One third of *Moong* comes from Bhakkar, while Narowal produces one third of *Mash* and a quarter of *Masoor*.

The survey has found that support/intervention prices are lower than the rates in the open

market and could not attract farmers. The government's move is half-hearted and cannot yield positive results, the survey added.

The support prices set by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) per 40kg are Rs750 for gram (*Chana*), Rs1,200 for *Moong* and Rs1,300 for *Maash*. The government did not bother to set support price for *Masoor* (lentils), whose production was more than that of *Maash* and was one of the four most important pulses, the survey observed. This move has deprived *Maash* growers of any government support.

During last season, the rate of gram was Rs1,000 per 40kg that later touched Rs1,200 per 40kg. In sharp contrast to this, the government has now fixed its support price at Rs750 per 40kg.

Similarly, the government has set a price of Rs1,300 per 40kg of *Maash* compared to Rs1500 in the open market.

"This difference between the support and market prices

ridicules the government's stated purpose of making pulses an attractive crop for farmers, increasing supply and stabilising prices.

The government, in fact, is attempting to push prices at the gates of farms further down. The farmers already have little interest in growing these crops.

The survey says pulses are not processed through some sophisticated industrial procedures and thus cost less.

These are simply transported from farmers to the wholesale markets with a brief stop-over at splitting factories that charge Rs1.40 per kg for converting whole grains into splits.

Gram is a rain-dependent crop. Thal is the capital of gram with three-fourth of the country's production coming from the sandy lands of Bhakkar and Khushab districts alone. In 1997-98 Pakistan produced 767,000 metric tons of gram. However, five years later, the production dropped to almost half that level (362,000 metric tons).