India's wheat area may see its steepest fall in 26 years: estimate

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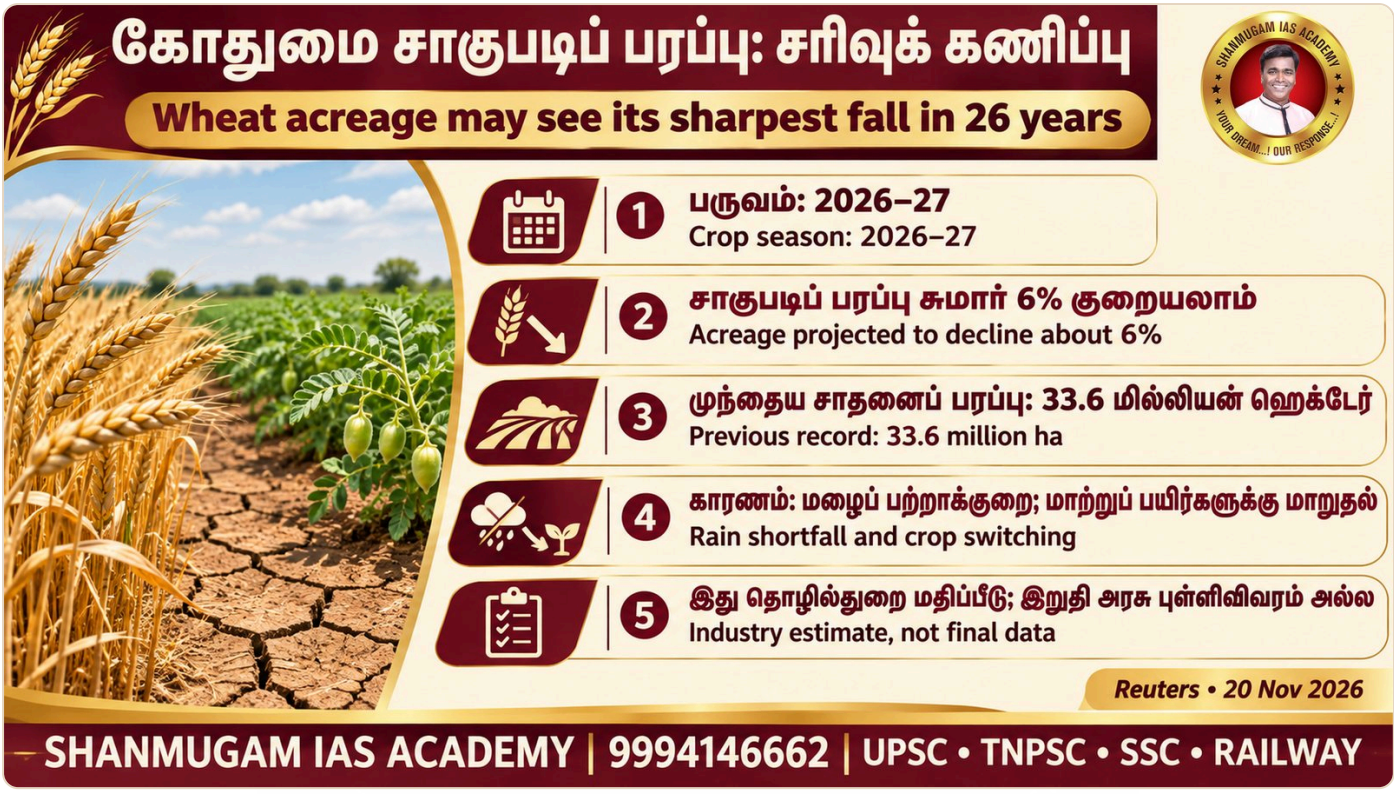

News

India's wheat area in the 2026-27 rabi season may fall about 6% from last year's record 33.6 million hectares to 31.58 million hectares, Reuters reported from Jalna, Maharashtra, on 20 November. The figure is the average of estimates by 10 industry officials; if it comes true, it would be the lowest area in four years and the steepest decline since 2000-01, i.e. in 26 years. Government data show wheat had been sown on only 5 million hectares by 13 November, 15.3% less than a year earlier. The weakest south-west monsoon in over a decade, linked to a severe El Niño, left rainfall in Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra up to 41% below average. Instead of wheat, which needs at least four to five irrigations, farmers are moving to less thirsty chickpea and rapeseed, whose prices have risen far more; Punjab and Haryana, with assured irrigation, are expected to hold steady. The minimum support price for wheat (Rabi Marketing Season 2027-28) was raised by only ₹25 (about 1%), from ₹2,585 to ₹2,610 per quintal – the smallest rise since 2002-03, against the usual 5–6% – which traders say has also discouraged planting. The report warns that lower area and possible yield losses could cut output in India, the world's second-largest wheat producer, and push up prices.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Estimate	About 6% fall – 31.58 million ha
Last year	33.6 million ha (record)

Point	Details
Comparison	Steepest fall since 2000-01
Sown by 13 Nov	5 million ha – down 15.3%
Cause	El Niño; weak monsoon (up to 41% deficit)
Switch crops	Chickpea, rapeseed
MSP	₹2,610/quintal – up 1% (smallest since 2002-03)
Basis	Average of 10 industry estimates (Reuters)

Background

- Agriculture: wheat is a rabi (winter) crop, sown in October–December and harvested in March–April. Uttar Pradesh is India's top wheat producer, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Punjab; India is the world's second-largest producer after China.
- Geography: western disturbances, which form over the Mediterranean region and move east, bring winter rain to north-west India and help rabi wheat. El Niño – abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific – usually weakens the Indian monsoon.
- Economy: the Centre announces MSP on the advice of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). A small MSP rise and higher market prices for rival crops push farmers to switch – with effects on food security, inflation and export policy.
- Research bodies: the ICAR–Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR) is at Karnal, Haryana; ICAR's All India Coordinated Wheat Improvement Project (1965) became a Directorate in 1978 and took this name in 2014. Fungal diseases such as black and brown rust threaten wheat yields, and stations across India monitor them.

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu is not a wheat-growing State. But the IARI Regional Station at Wellington in the Nilgiris tracks black and brown rust pathotypes of wheat in the Nilgiri hills and breeds resistant lines (ICAR journal). If wheat area falls and prices rise, atta and maida prices in Tamil Nadu, which relies on wheat from other States, may also be affected.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Estimate: About 6% fall – 31.58 million ha; Last year: 33.6 million ha (record); Comparison: Steepest fall since 2000-01; Sown by 13 Nov: 5 million ha – down 15.3%.

What is the background to this news?

Agriculture: wheat is a rabi (winter) crop, sown in October–December and harvested in March–April. Uttar Pradesh is India's top wheat producer, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Punjab; India is the world's second-largest producer after China.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which State is India's largest producer of wheat?

A) Punjab

B) Madhya Pradesh

C) Uttar Pradesh

D) Haryana

Answer: C – Explanation: Uttar Pradesh, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Punjab. India is the world's second-largest wheat producer after China.

2. Western disturbances, which bring winter rain useful for rabi wheat in north-west India, originate over which sea?

A) Arabian Sea

B) Mediterranean Sea

C) Bay of Bengal

D) South China Sea

Answer: B – Explanation: The Mediterranean region – these eastward-moving lows also bring snowfall to the Himalayas.

3. El Niño, blamed for this year's weak monsoon, refers to what?

A) Indian Ocean cooling

B) Arctic ice melt

C) A jet stream shift

D) Pacific Ocean warming

Answer: D – Explanation: Abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific surface; it usually weakens the Indian monsoon.

4. Where in Tamil Nadu is the IARI Regional Station for wheat rust research located?

A) Coimbatore

B) Yercaud

C) Wellington (Nilgiris)

D) Kodaikanal

Answer: C – Explanation: Wellington – it tracks black and brown rusts of wheat in the Nilgiri hills and breeds rust-resistant lines.

5. Where is the ICAR–Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR) located?

A) Karnal (Haryana)

B) Ludhiana (Punjab)

C) Pusa (Bihar)

D) Indore (MP)

Answer: A – Explanation: Karnal, Haryana – it grew out of ICAR's 1965 All India Coordinated Wheat Improvement Project and got its present name in 2014.

Sources: Reuters/Business Standard; Reuters/KFGO; Economic Survey 2023-24, Table 1.18; Down To Earth; NOAA PMEL; ICAR (Indian Phytopathology); India Science & Technology; The Tribune. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.