

## Andhra moves to end crop holiday, farmers want stock to be lifted

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Close to two months into the kharif season, the Andhra Pradesh government has moved to end the 'crop holiday' by paddy farmers in East Godavari district.

According to sources in the agriculture department, the district collector has formed committees in each of the 16 mandals that have been officially accepted as under a 'holiday,' to persuade paddy growers to resume cultivation this season. This decision was taken around 10 days ago.

The government officials maintain that only 30,000-35,000 acres in East Godavari district is under crop holiday. This is far lower than the figure of 140,000 acres being claimed by the Consortium of Indian Farmers' Associations (CIFA).

Whether the government's moves will bear fruit would be known in about a week, sources said. "If farmers go for growing paddy nurseries once the water is released, the result would be clear," the official said.

According to CIFA secretary general P Chengal Reddy, 133,000 acres are not being cultivated in East Godavari alone, while smaller extents have been reported from Prakasam and Kurnool districts. He said the farmers were forming associations and the decision on a holiday was collective.

Farmers' representatives demand two major policy changes. The first is the application of the Swaminathan formula for minimum support price (MSP), which is cost of cultivation plus 50 per cent. Second, procurement by the government of all the production. MSP this year is Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,030 for coarse and fine varieties of paddy, respectively.