

business today

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Less Thirsty Rice

This is good news for farmers and consumers alike especially after the Agriculture Ministry recently admitted to a 21 per cent decline in the total area for rice cultivation to 11.46 million hectares from 14.52 m ha. The scant monsoons have not helped either. But thanks to a breakthrough by PepsiCo India, 6,000 acres of paddy fields—across Punjab, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry—now hope to save five billion kilo litres of water by using direct seeding for paddy.

“Paddy is the one of the most water-intensive crops. Any technology that aids water conservation and increases productivity should be welcome,” observes Gokul Patnaik, a former APEDA chief, who now heads Global AgriSystems.

Traditionally, paddy is grown by planting seeds in a nursery and transplanting the saplings to the cultivation area when they are four weeks old. They are then kept under three inches of water, to reduce the growth of weeds. “Puddling requires high water consumption. However, the new method sows the seeds directly in the fields thanks to the “direct seeding” machine co-created by PepsiCo. It takes away the need to have them submerged in water. This has led to almost 30 per cent reduction in water consumption and lowered production costs by Rs 1,500 per acre,” says Amit Bose, Executive Vice President, PepsiCo. The one-of-its-kind machine plants paddy seeds at precise distances allowing the crop to grow unfettered.

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