

Kerala plantations suffer ₹700-crore damage from torrential rains

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PLANTATION IN KERALA is reeling under the havoc caused by heavy rains since the start of monsoon season. Association of Planters Kerala (APK), the apex body of planters, claims the sector has suffered initial damages worth ₹700 crore and the final estimates could be much higher.

Kerala is home to several plantations that produce spices, tea, coffee, rubber and coconut. It also contributes 46% of India's plantation produce, valued around ₹20,000 crore.

Crops, such as pepper, cardamom, rubber, tea and coffee, are highly monsoon-sensitive with production directly dependent on the timing and quantum of rainfall. While too much of rain damages most of the cash crops, shortlived monsoon also leads to lower production.

APK's chairman Thomas Jacob told *FE* that tea production in the state could fall by 40% due to damages caused by rains.



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"Rubber tapping has come down in the past few weeks due to heavy rains. Pepper vines will be impacted by flooding and so will cardamom. Coffee production will also be reduced, with berries dropping down in the continuous rain," he said. Heavy winds have also destroyed several shade and fruit trees in many places.

According to the data provided by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) centre in Thiruvananthapuram, South-west monsoon from June 1 to August 14 is

seen higher by 23.07% for the whole state. In Idukki, the monsoon is seen 60.33% higher, with 2,738.86 mm rain, against normal rainfall of 1,708.3 mm for the period. Wayanad, one of the worst hit, has got 15.38% more during the same period but has suffered more landslides that damaged entire estates.

APK reports that unusual winds and continuous downpour has damaged standing crops, shade trees and ancillary buildings and roads. Sources estimate that coffee production would be lower by 8-10%, natural rubber by another 40% and cardamom by 35-40% with many plants uprooted.

The state government said damage caused to the entire state is about ₹8,316 crore, with 39 people dead and more than 60,000 people evacuated to relief camps. Kerala has a substantial share in the four plantation crops of rubber, tea, coffee and cardamom. These four together occupy 7.02 lakh hectares, accounting for 34.4% of net cropped area in the state.