

Farmers say IMD predictions more reliable in past four years: report

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More than two-thirds of the farmers felt that the accuracy, frequency and utility of forecasts have improved. Photo: Reuters

New Delhi: The weatherman is getting better at his job. Or so the farmers feel.

Reliability of weather information has improved in the past two to four years, according to nine out of ten farmers in six states and a Union Territory.

The only two exceptions were Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, where more farmers said the reliability of weather forecasts by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had not improved.

In 2014, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) surveyed 918 agricultural households in 35 districts, in partnership with the Reliance Foundation. The ministry of earth sciences, which commissioned the report, published it in August last year. *Mint* has seen a copy of the report.

The results showed that overall, roughly 57% of the farmers felt there was an improvement in timeliness of the forecast. However, a significant segment of farmers in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat were

not satisfied with it.

Almost 60% of the farmers in both states did not think the reliability of the weather information had improved in the past four years.

“There used to be jokes about weather forecasts and how inaccurate they were. From that stage, farmers saying this is the best thing that happened is a great improvement,” said R. Venkatesan, one of the authors of the report. “The benefits are significant even for other stakeholders such as the navy, fishermen and oil rigs who can save great expenses if there is accurate weather forecast,” he added.

More than two-thirds of the farmers felt that the accuracy, frequency and utility of forecasts have improved.

Last month, the earth sciences ministry said there had been a significant improvement in IMD’s short and medium-range forecasts. The critical success index improved by 46% and false alarm rate fell by 77% in 2013-15 over 2002-12 for heavy rainfall warnings during the monsoon season. The ministry attributed the success to improved forecast models after the commissioning of high-performance computing systems.

“Accuracy has definitely improved in the past few years. One can now get location-specific forecasts for up to 20-25 km which is much more useful for stakeholders, especially farmers,” said Venkatesan.

The report also analysed the benefit of weather prediction to various crops and concluded that wheat, paddy, sugarcane and cotton are four principal crops that have the potential to use the weather prediction information of the government forecaster to generate an annual economic profit of ₹42,000 crore.