

Haryana Chief Minister Hooda gets rice brand in his name!

In Haryana, two similar sounding names - Hooda (Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda) and HUDA (Haryana urban development authority) - have competition. The chief minister's surname now is a rice brand as well!

Call it sycophancy or sheer gratitude, scores of farmers Friday landed up at Chief Minister Hooda's residence for a scheduled thanks-giving meeting.

It was here that the state's farmers launched the 'Hooda brand' of rice. The chief minister's portrait is prominently placed on the new carry-bags of the rice packing with his name being the brand name.

The paddy brand in question is the Pusa-1121 variety, which is considered close to the Basmati variety of rice. The chief minister had been working hard for the last few months to get a major demand of farmers accepted by the central government and get lifted a ban on export of this variety of rice.

The central government had last year included the Pusa-1121 variety included in the varieties of rice on which an export ban was imposed. But farmers objected to it contending that Pusa-1121 was just like basmati rice and should not be banned for export.

As per the central government rules, basmati rice varieties are exempted from rice export ban.

Hooda has met various central ministers, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and Commerce Minister Kamal Nath in recent months to demand that the export ban on Pusa-1121 be lifted.

Hooda told the ministers that the Pusa-1121 variety of paddy, which is similar to basmati variety, did not form part of the leviable pool nor was consumed by common man because it was as costly as basmati rice itself.

He said that the export of this variety would neither affect the Public Distribution System (PDS) purchases for the central pool nor would the price of common variety of rice increase in the Indian markets due to its export.

Haryana as well as Punjab had thousands of acres of land under cultivation of this paddy variety and it fetched good income to the farmers, Hooda added.

'The Pusa-1121 variety is mainly exported on premium to Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran.

'With the ban on export of non-basmati rice, the prices of this premium variety is likely to crash and the rice growers may suffer heavy losses during the current season and ultimately the country would be deprived of the huge revenue to be earned out of export. Hence the ban on the export of this variety was not desired,' said Hooda.

Jaideep Sarin (© IANS / India eNews)