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Govt plans stringent measures to cut pulses, edible oil imports

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Govt plans steps to cut import of pulses

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The Centre is planning to pay special attention to reducing the import of pulses and edible oil, increasing ethanol supply and stabilizing food prices as part of its 100-day agenda, a senior official said.

This will involve introducing stringent policy measures similar to those taken over the past one-and-a-half years.

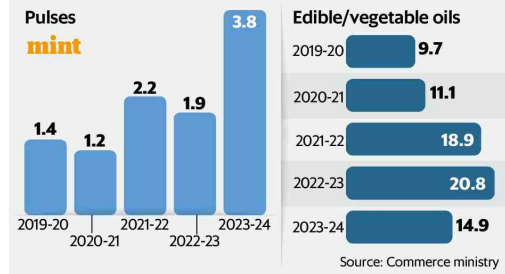
The agriculture ministry is drafting a new scheme to achieve self-sufficiency in pulses by 2027 in a bid to cut the government's huge outgo in importing pulses and edible oil to boost domestic supply.

In FY24, India's import bill was \$854.8 billion as against \$898 billion in FY23. Agricultural exports alone in FY24 touched \$48.9 billion, registering an 8% decline from \$53.2 billion in FY23.

Though agricultural imports fell due to a dip in edible oil imports, the import of pulses hit a six-year high. The country spent \$3.75 billion on importing pulses and \$14.8 billion on vegetable oils compared with the previous year's \$1.94 billion and \$20.84 bil-

Costly reliance

Indian government's import burden for pulses and oilseeds over the years (in \$ billion)



PARAS JAIN/MINT

lion, respectively, according to the commerce ministry.

"Our 100-day agenda will surely focus on oilseeds, pulses, and biofuel other than welfare of 140 million farmers.

However, a major focus will be on reducing the import bill. Another very important thing is price stabilization of agricultural commodities," a senior official said.

"We are trying to gain self-sufficiency in pulses in the coming 3-4 years. We are open to all kinds of support

like we have in oilseeds. A new programme focusing on development is being prepared to promote pulses production in a big way and it is expected to come out in the

next few days. We are working on SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) and depending on budgetary allocation; we will take the programme forward," the official added.

India is a net importer of edible oils, with 57% of the total bought from various countries, notably Indonesia

and Malaysia. This is negatively impacting India's foreign exchange by \$20.56 billion, the official said.

The government launched the National Mission for Edible Oils-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) in 2021 to increase oil palm cultivation and boost crude palm oil production to 1.1 million tonnes (mt) by 2025-26.

Similarly, the government has been taking measures to make the country self-sufficient in the production of pulses and is implementing the National Food Security Mission (NFSM)-Pulses. In January, cooperation minister Amit Shah said Indian farmers produced 19mt of pulses in 2013-14 which rose to 26mt in 2022-23. "But we...must create such a system in which by 2027 we can not only stop the import of pulses but also export it," he said.

India relies on imports from Australia, Canada, Russia, Myanmar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Sudan, and Malawi to meet its domestic demand of about 28mt for tur (pigeon pea), urad (black gram), and masur (lentil). Despite some improvement since 2011, India has been importing 2.5-3mt of pulses over the past few years to meet demand.

The agriculture ministry is to take measures for self-sufficiency in pulses by 2027 to cut imports and to lift local supply