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# Barley Cultivation in India

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**Barley's split story:** a hardy Rabi crop whose farmed area has shrunk by over 70% since 1960, even as brewers now bet hundreds of crores on it.



Village women hoeing a barley field near Chicham, Spiti, Himachal Pradesh. Photo: Timothy A. Gonsalves, Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).

At a glance

India’s barley story, in four facts

01
Top State

Rajasthan grows over half of India’s barley.

02
Area Decline

Sown area fell from 3.2 million hectares in 1960-61 to under 1 million today.

03
2025-26 Estimate

Production projected at 18.60 lakh tonnes.

04
New Demand

Malting and brewing firms are investing to reverse the decline.

**Rabi crop**Sown in October-November, harvested in February-March.
**MSP**Minimum Support Price: the government’s guaranteed procurement price for a crop.
**Malting**Processing barley into malt, the key raw material for brewing beer and whisky.
**Saline soil**Salt-affected soil that most cereals struggle to grow in.

## A crop that shrank, then found new buyers

Must Know

## From 3.2 million hectares to a malting bet

**Barley once covered 3.2 million hectares of India, back in 1960-61.** Today, that land has shrunk by over 70%. Yet a new wave of malting investment is now betting on the crop's comeback.

- 1960-61: India grows barley on about 3.20 million hectares, the crop's historical high.
- 2024-25: national barley production reaches about 16.99 lakh tonnes.
- October 2025: the government raises barley MSP by ₹170, to ₹2,150 per quintal, for the 2026-27 season.
- February 2026: Soufflet Malt announces a €100 million malthouse investment in southern Rajasthan.
- 2025-26: sown area rises to about 7.37 lakh hectares, with production projected at around 18.60 lakh tonnes.

> **Quick check 1.** Q1. True or False: Barley's cultivated area in India has fallen by more than 70% since 1960-61. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

# A Rabi crop, sown in autumn

Must Know

## Season and growing states

Barley is mainly grown as a **Rabi crop**, sown in October-November and harvested in February-March. Major growing states include Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, and Jammu & Kashmir.

## One state dominates

Must Know

### Rajasthan leads by far

**Rajasthan is by far India's leading barley producer, growing more than half the country's total.** In 2023-24, the state produced about 1.02 million tonnes from just 0.28 million hectares. Key producing districts include Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Bikaner.

## A hardy crop, three uses

Good to Know

### Salt and drought tolerance

Barley is unusually hardy. It tolerates saline and sodic soils better than most cereals, growing in the saline coastal soils of the Sundarbans and the saline black soils of northern Karnataka. It also tolerates drought

better than most cereals, thriving in Rajasthan's semi-arid, rain-shadow areas.

### Food, fodder, and malt

Barley serves three separate uses in India: human food, animal fodder, and the malting industry, which supplies brewing.

**Watch for this trap:** a crop's toughness doesn't guarantee it stays widely grown. Barley tolerates conditions most cereals can't, yet farmers still walked away from it for decades.

## A crop that collapsed

Great to Know

### A 70%-plus fall since 1960-61

Despite its hardiness, barley's cultivated area has collapsed over the decades. It fell from about 3.20 million hectares in 1960-61 to roughly 0.54-0.74 million hectares today, a fall of well over 70%.

Weak market demand is the main reason. Outside Rajasthan, where the crop stays commercially strong, many farmers now grow barley mainly to feed their own livestock, not to sell.

> **Quick check 2.** Q2. True or False: Barley's cultivated area has grown steadily since 1960-61 because of its drought tolerance. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## Hardy doesn't mean widely grown

Great to Know

### Why farmers switched to wheat

Many farmers have simply switched to wheat, which offers better and more reliable market returns. Yet barley's malting segment is doing the opposite, attracting real new investment even as total acreage keeps falling. See Wheat Cultivation in India for the crop most barley farmers moved to.

Exam Edge

## The hardiness trap

These papers can test whether a crop's genuine hardiness translates into wide cultivation, when the real story is closer to the opposite. Barley tolerates saline soil and drought better than most cereals, yet its cultivated area has fallen by more than 70% since 1960-61. Hardiness didn't protect it from weak market demand. When a question highlights a crop's tough growing conditions, don't assume that also means the crop is expanding or widely grown today.

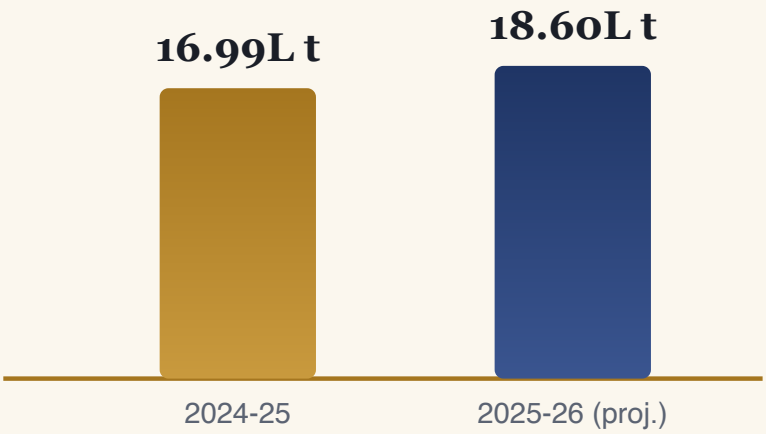
## The MSP rise, and brewers' bet

Current Affairs

### A price increase for 2026-27

In October 2025, the government raised barley's Minimum Support Price by ₹170, to ₹2,150 per quintal for the 2026-27 marketing season, part of a wider Rabi MSP package.

Figure 1 — National barley area and output, 2024-25 vs. 2025-26 (projected)




## Brewers place a real bet

AB InBev plans to procure over 16,000 tonnes of domestically grown barley in 2026, through its SmartBarley farmer programme active in Rajasthan, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh. Soufflet Malt, a partner to United Breweries and Heineken, is investing €100 million in a new malthouse in southern Rajasthan. It aims to source up to 250,000 tonnes of barley a year and train over 50,000 farmers.

National barley production rose from about 16.99 lakh tonnes in 2024-25 to a projected 18.60 lakh tonnes in 2025-26, with sown area rising from 6.08 to 7.37 lakh hectares.

## Quick Q&A

Why has barley’s cultivated area collapsed?

Weak market demand pushed most farmers toward wheat. Only in Rajasthan does barley remain commercially strong.

Which state grows the most barley in India?

Rajasthan, producing more than half of India's total, mostly from districts like Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Bikaner.

What makes barley unusually hardy?

It tolerates saline and sodic soils, and drought, better than most other cereals.

Why are brewers investing in Indian barley now?

Firms like AB InBev and Soufflet Malt are betting on growing malting demand, even as the crop's total acreage keeps shrinking.

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## ✅ MCQ on Barley Cultivation in India

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## Practice MCQs

**1. Barley is mainly grown in India as which type of crop?**

**A.** A Rabi (winter) crop

**B.** A dryland-only crop with no fixed season

**C.** A perennial plantation crop

**D.** A Zaid (summer) crop only

See answer ↓

**2. Which state is by far India's leading barley producer, growing more than half the national total?**

**A.** Bihar

**B.** Madhya Pradesh

**C.** Punjab

**D.** Rajasthan

See answer ↓

**3. Besides food and animal fodder, which industry is a major user of Indian barley?**

**A.** The cosmetics industry, for oil extraction

**B.** The paper industry, for pulp production

**C.** The malting industry, which supplies brewing

**D.** The textile industry, for fibre extraction

See answer ↓

**4. Barley's tolerance for saline and sodic soils lets it grow in unusual locations. Where has it been grown successfully?**

**A.** Only in the high-altitude glaciers of Ladakh

**B.** Exclusively in greenhouse conditions

**C.** Only in the deep black soils of the Deccan Plateau

**D.** The saline coastal soils of the Sundarbans, and saline black soils of northern Karnataka

See answer ↓

**5. By roughly how much has India's barley-cultivated area shrunk since 1960-61, and to what level?**

**A.** Stayed roughly the same, near 3 million hectares throughout

**B.** Fallen about 20%, from 3.20 to 2.56 million hectares

**C.** Fallen more than 80%, from 3.20 to about 0.54 million hectares

**D.** Actually grown by 50%, from 2 to 3 million hectares

See answer ↓

**6. Consider the following:**

**1. Areca nut**

**2. Barley**

**3. Coffee**

**4. Finger millet**

**5. Groundnut**

**6. Sesamum**

**7. Turmeric. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has announced the Minimum Support Price for which of the above? (UPSC CSP 2018)**

**A.** 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only

**B.** 2, 4, 5 and 6 only

**C.** 1, 2, 3 and 7 only

**D.** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

See answer ↓

# Answer Key

1. **A.** Barley is mainly grown as a Rabi (winter) crop, sown in October-November and harvested in February-March. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** Rajasthan is by far the leading barley producer, growing more than half of India's total barley, with key districts including Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Bikaner. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** Barley is used for human food, animal fodder, and the malting industry, which supplies brewing. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** Barley can be grown in both places named in the right option. Barley can now be grown on the saline coastal areas of the Sundarbans in West Bengal. It also grows on saline black soils in canal-irrigated parts of northern Karnataka. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** India's barley-cultivated area has collapsed by more than 80%, from about 3.20 million hectares in 1960-61 to only about 0.54 million hectares today, driven by weak market demand outside Rajasthan and farmers shifting to wheat. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** The correct answer is (b) 2, 4, 5 and 6 only. Barley, finger millet (ragi), groundnut, and sesamum (til) are all CACP-recommended MSP crops. Areca nut, coffee, and turmeric are plantation or spice crops with no MSP cover. ↑ Q6

## Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2

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