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Centre Overhauls PDS Rice Quality Norms

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REPORTS & SCHEMES**GS2****GS3**

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WHY IN NEWS

On July 1, 2026, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the first major upgrade of rice quality specifications for the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (<https://ujjyari.com/schemes/pmgkay/>) (PMGKAY) and other welfare schemes in nearly three decades, sharply cutting the permissible broken-grain content in rice supplied through the public distribution system (PDS).

THE DECISION AT A GLANCE

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, the apex (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/apex/>) body chaired by the Prime Minister that clears major economic proposals, approved a reform that lowers the amount of broken grain allowed in rice distributed under welfare schemes. This is the first revision of these quality norms in close to thirty years, and it signals a policy shift from merely delivering calories to delivering better-quality, more nutritious food grain to the poorest households.

The permissible broken-grain content in raw rice has been reduced from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, and in parboiled rice from 16 per cent to 5 per cent. The broken rice separated out under the tighter norms will not be discarded: it will be diverted to industrial and ethanol use rather than mixed back into edible rice.

RICE TYPE	OLD BROKEN-GRAIN LIMIT	NEW BROKEN-GRAIN LIMIT
Raw rice	25 per cent	10 per cent
Parboiled rice	16 per cent	5 per cent

Scale, Savings and Rollout

The reform benefits over 80 crore beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, and targets savings of about Rs 2,161 crore. The improved specifications will be rolled out in a phased manner across procuring states, with full implementation targeted by the Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2027-28. A Kharif Marketing Season is the annual cycle during which paddy from the monsoon (kharif) crop is procured and milled.

To strengthen accountability, the government also plans QR-code tagging of rice bags to enable end-to-end traceability across the supply chain, helping curb leakages and improve inventory management.

WHY BROKEN GRAIN MATTERS

“Broken grain” refers to rice kernels that are fragmented rather than whole. A high broken-grain percentage lowers the perceived quality, cooking consistency and, to a degree, the nutritional appeal of the rice reaching beneficiaries. By tightening the norm, the Centre aims to ensure that welfare rice is closer in quality to what an ordinary household would buy in the open market.

Crucially, the separated broken rice is not wasted. It is channelled into industrial uses and, importantly, into ethanol production under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme, which blends ethanol with petrol to cut crude-oil imports and carbon emissions. This creates a virtuous link: a food-quality reform simultaneously feeds the country’s biofuel and energy-security goals.

The Institutional Chain

ELEMENT	ROLE
National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013	Legal entitlement (https://ujivari.com/vocab/entitlement/) to subsidised food grain for about two-thirds of the population
Public Distribution System (PDS)	Delivery network of fair price shops that supplies the grain
Food Corporation of India (FCI)	Central agency that procures, stores and moves food grain
PMGKAY	Free food-grain scheme layered on the NFSA entitlement
Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme	Destination for the separated broken rice

ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

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The reform reflects a maturing food-security philosophy in India. For decades the priority was calorie sufficiency: ensuring that enough grain reached enough people. With hunger at the aggregate level substantially addressed, the focus is shifting to the quality and nutritional value of what is distributed. Better rice raises the dignity and health outcomes of welfare delivery, aligning the PDS with the broader goal of tackling “hidden hunger” and micronutrient deficiency.

The design is also fiscally and environmentally intelligent. By routing separated broken rice to ethanol and industry rather than wasting it, the policy supports farm incomes, the biofuel economy and [energy security](https://ujjyari.com/terms/energy-security/) (https://ujjyari.com/terms/energy-security/) in one stroke. The phased rollout to KMS 2027-28 is sensible, since millers and procurement agencies need time to upgrade sorting and grading infrastructure.

The way forward lies in execution. Success depends on upgrading milling capacity so that tighter norms do not squeeze procurement or hurt farmers whose paddy yields more broken grain, on ensuring the QR-code traceability system is genuinely leak-proof, and on monitoring that the diverted broken rice reaches ethanol units rather than the black market. If implemented well, the reform can become a template for quality-led welfare across other commodities such as wheat and pulses.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; issues relating to poverty and hunger; the public distribution system and food security governance.

GS Paper 3: Issues of buffer stocks and food security; public distribution system objectives, functioning, limitations and revamping; technology missions in agriculture; biofuels and energy security.

Prelims pointers:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) is chaired by the Prime Minister.
- Broken-grain limit cut: raw rice 25 to 10 per cent; parboiled rice 16 to 5 per cent.
- The reform benefits over 80 crore beneficiaries and targets savings of about Rs 2,161 crore.
- Full rollout targeted by Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2027-28.
- The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 provides the legal food-grain entitlement; the Food Corporation of India (FCI) handles procurement.
- Separated broken rice is diverted to industrial and ethanol use under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme.

Mains question: “India’s food-security policy is shifting from calorie sufficiency to nutritional quality.” Examine this statement with reference to the 2026 [overhaul](https://ujjyari.com/vocab/overhaul/) (https://ujjyari.com/vocab/overhaul/) of PDS rice quality norms and its linkages with farm income and energy security. (15 marks, 250 words)

FACTS CORNER

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Decision: On July 1, 2026, the CCEA approved the first upgrade of PDS rice quality norms in nearly three decades.

New limits: Broken-grain content cut in raw rice from 25 to 10 per cent, and in parboiled rice from 16 to 5 per cent.

Beneficiaries and savings: Over 80 crore beneficiaries; targeted savings of about Rs 2,161 crore.

Rollout: Phased across procuring states, with full implementation targeted by Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2027-28.

Broken rice use: Diverted to industrial and ethanol use under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme, not mixed into edible rice.

Traceability: QR-code tagging of rice bags planned for end-to-end supply-chain tracking.

Legal basis: National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013; procurement by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) through the public distribution system (PDS).

CCEA: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister.

Sources: Press Information Bureau (<https://pib.gov.in/>), Department of Food and Public Distribution (<https://dfpd.gov.in/>), Business Standard (<https://www.business-standard.com/>), DD News (<https://ddnews.gov.in/>)

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