

Mechanised cotton farming boosts crop productivity, farmers' income

INITIATIVE Punjab first off the blocks with pilot project in districts of Fazilka, Muktsar and Bathinda

Prabhjit Singh

prabhjit.singh@hindustantimes.com

CHANDIGARH: Punjab has become the first state in the country to adopt mechanisation in cotton farming as a pilot project.

According to government officials, the move has led to an increase in the yield as well as farmers' income, besides resolving the problem of labour shortage this kharif season that ended in December 2014.

About 1,500 acres were brought under "complete mechanisation" in selected villages of Fazilka, Muktsar and Bathinda districts through seed planters and cotton-picking machines imported from China. These were given to farmers on custom-hire basis through cooperative societies.

"There has been 11 to 18% increase in the farmers' overall income through mechanisation. We still have a long way to go in



■ The cotton-cleaning and drying plant installed at a cost of ₹1.25 crore in the Malout grain market of Muktsar.

HT PHOTO

the entire cotton belt of southern Punjab," financial commissioner development (FCD) Suresh Kumar told HT.

Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, would be roped in "to improve the packages and practices"

required for cotton cultivation under the new mechanised production regime, he added.

Five hydraulic seed planters were provided to farmers at a hiring price of ₹4,000 per acre, along with growth chemicals, with a view to fix the plant

GAIN TIME

The mechanisation has led to an increase of ₹4,000 per acre in the farmers' overall income, as per a study report of the pilot project that has been submitted to the state government. The study was conducted by PAU and John Deere officials. The crop yield, which is 6-7 quintals per acre through manual farming, has risen to 9-9.5 quintals through mechanisation.

of Fazilka, where farmers having less than 5 acres' land were also involved, said Umesh Patil, regional executive of the US-based John Deere Tractors, which has been instrumental in the supply of cotton farm machinery manufactured and assembled in China.

A cotton dryer plant has been installed at the grain market in Malout (Muktsar) so as to facilitate farmers and purchasing agencies in speedy procurement of cotton arrivals.

"Although the weather remained inclement, the experiment was successful, leading to a 25% increase in the yield," said Punjab Agro Industries Corporation managing director Kahan Singh Pannu, who drafted the pilot project during his tenure as secretary, agriculture.

Pannu ruled out that mechanisation would hit the interests of the landless peasantry, mainly cotton-plucking women.

height at 4.5 ft to suit plucking machines for easy harvesting.

Of the 1,452 acres targeted under the project, 975 were covered in Fazilka district, 375 in Muktsar and 102 in Bathinda.

A maximum of 274 acres were covered in Dutarawali village