



**COVID- 19**  
**HURTING**  
**“FARMER’S MENTAL HEALTH”**

**PREPARED BY :**  
**SONALI SARKAR**



## HOW COVID-19 IS HURTING FARMER'S MENTAL HEALTH

India has seen a rise in the number of deadly Coronavirus cases in the past two months. To prevent the spread of the virus, lockdown was announced by the central government. Around 80% of the country depends directly or indirectly on the agriculture sector. This is the peak of rabi season in India and crops like wheat, gram, lentil, mustard, etc. are at harvestable stage or almost reaching maturity. This is also the time when the farm harvests reach the market yards for assured procurement operations. But covid-19 has switch on the pause button.

As we had good rain this year and the bumper crop has grown but due to coronavirus and social distancing the entire chain of the food supply has been broken up because there is no labour to cut the crop and then process it and sells it in the mandis and then to the shops. As our transportation and exports are also closed, farmers are unable to earn money that they can earn from this bumper growth.

The rural and established farmers have other worries also to think about. The fields are filled with wavy crops and continuous rain and hailstorm have destroyed the harvest in different regions including eastern Madhya Pradesh, several districts of Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. So this are the impact of coronavirus on the farmer.

### MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY OUR FARMERS

- Rabi crop harvest season coincides with the coronavirus pandemic lockdown and the ready to be harvested crops unabatedly stands in the fields because of scarcity of agricultural labourers.
- The process of planting, harvesting, shipping, cleaning, grading, bundling, and staking requires a large amount of manual workforce and manual workforce has fled and are not available to the farmers.
- Because of covid-19 lockdown most of the agricultural labourers available fled to their home town.
- April-June is the time of harvest for Rabi crops like wheat and maize along with potatoes and onions and this is also the time when farmers prepare their field for the next season's sowing but due to lockdown every thing is in halt.
- Farmers growing wheat, mustard and pulses already complained about their crops damage due to untimely and heavy rainfall recently.
- Due to a lack of transportation and logistics facilities the produce remains to lie on the fields at the grace of Almighty.
- Covid-19 lockdown has impacted the supply chain of agricultural commodities and also hampered the movement of trucks conveying agricultural produce.
- Much of the harvesting in Punjab, Haryana and parts of western Uttar Pradesh is mechanised but the harvester combines are normally custom-hired first to the early harvesting states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- This year the machines could not return in time due to the nationwide lockdown, forcing Punjab and Haryana farmers are forced to employ expensive labour to harvest their crop.

- Many farmers are forced to sell their produce outside of grain markets to private traders and flour millers at low rates and will not be able to recover even input costs of sowing, leave alone be able to repay loans.
- Covid-19 has proved a double hit for farmers who already suffered a loss due to hailstorms and unseasonal rains this winter.
- Vegetable farmers of Punjab have endured a gigantic misfortune as the wholesale demand from restaurants, eateries and hotels halted.
- The restrictions on APMC yards sale of fruits and vegetables in Karnataka took a hit on the farmers' earnings.
- With markets not open and lack of storage facility has raised further complications of farmers in all states.
- This leaves the discouraged farmer with no option other than feeding the fresh produce to the dairy cattle.

### **STEPS TAKEN BY OUR GOVERNMENT TO HELP OUR FARMERS IN THIS TOUGH TIME**

- Advance release of INR 2000 to bank accounts of farmers as income support under PM-KISAN scheme.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has also announced specific measures that address the “burden of debt servicing” due to COVID19 pandemic.
- Agricultural term and crop loans have been granted a moratorium of three months (till May 31) by banking institutions with 3 percent concession on the interest rate of crop loans up to INR 300,000 for borrowers with good repayment behavior.
- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has issued state-wise guidelines for farmers to be followed during the lockdown period. The advisory mentions specific practices during harvest and threshing of various rabi (winter sown) crops as well as post-harvest, storage and marketing of the farm produce.
- Agriculture Ministry started All-India Agri Transport Call Centre for coordinating between states for inter-state movement of agricultural produce and inputs.
- Agriculture department has declared to provide subsidy for the varieties of less than 10 years. This will ensure the supply of seeds to the states under the National Food Security Mission.

HARVEST	CROP	PROGRESS
Wheat	Rabi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Harvesting of wheat is approaching in several northern states through combine harvesters and their movement within state and between states has been permitted.</li> <li>➤ Precautions and safety measures of workers engaged in repair, maintenance and harvesting operation is to be ensured.</li> </ul>
Mustard	Rabi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mustard is the second important rabi crop, manual harvesting is in progress and threshing is due wherever already harvested.</li> </ul>
Lentil	Rabi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Harvesting of lentil, maize and chillies is in progress and gram is fast approaching.</li> </ul>
Sugercane	Rabi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sugarcane harvesting is at peak and is also time for manual planting in the north.</li> </ul>

## **In wake of COVID-19 spread, ICAR issues Advisory to farmers for Rabi crops**

As per Government of India Guidelines applicable for farmers and farming sector during lockdown period due to COVID-19, the following Agricultural and allied activities have been exempted from the lockdown

- Personal cleanliness and social separating to be trailed by those occupied with harvesting of all field crops, fruits, vegetables, eggs and fishes before, during and after executing the field operation.
- In instance of manual field activities of reaping or picking, accomplish the activity in 4 to 5 feet spaced strips assigning one strip to one person because it will ensure adequate spacing between the engaged labours.
- All the persons engaged should use masks and ensure hand washing with soap at reasonable intervals.
- Maintain safe distance of 3-4 feet during rest, taking of meals, transfer of produce at assortment point, stacking/emptying.
- Stagger the field tasks at every possible opportunity and abstain engaging more number of persons on the same day.
- Engage only familiar persons to the degree possible and after sensible enquiry, as to keep away the entry of any suspect or likely carrier during field movement.
- Prefer automated or mechanized activities over the manual wherever feasible. Just the essential numbers of people should be allowed to go with the machine.
- All machines should be sanitized or sterilized at the entry point and at regular interims. All transport vehicles, gunny sacks or other bundling material should also be sanitized or disinfected.
- The assortment of the produce might be done in small heaps dispersed at 3-4 feet and field level handling should be allocated to 1-2 people/stack to abstain from swarming.
- Proper sanitation and tidiness of threshers for harvested maize and groundnut is to be maintained particularly when machines are shared and utilized by farmers groups. Copious washing of machine parts frequently touched with soap is advised.
- Post-harvest, storage and Marketing of farm produce
- While performing drying, threshing, winnowing, cleaning, grading, sorting and packaging operations at the farm level, wearing of protective face mask may help against aerosols and residue particles to forestall respiratory challenges.
- Ensure appropriate drying before storage of harvested grains, millets, pulses at farm/home and don't utilize reuse past seasons jute sacks to prevent pest infestation. Use treated and dried gunnies after soaking in 5% neem solution.
- Adequate pre-cautions to be taken for storage of produce at the farm in jute sacks that are made available in adequate numbers to farmers or in close by cold storages, godowns, warehouses, if necessary for better price realization.
- Adequate personal safety measures to be taken for stacking and shipping of farm produce and while participating in sale at market yards/ auction platforms.
- Seed producer farmers are allowed to move to seed companies with supporting documents and to follow precautionary measures while receiving payments.

- Seed processing/packaging plants and transportation of seed from seed producing states to growing states (South to North) is essential to make available seed for ensuing kharif crops, eg. SSG seed for green fodder for sowing in April in North comes from Southern states.
- Precautions to be followed for direct marketing/ supply of vegetables such as tomato, cauliflower, green leafy vegetables, cucumbers and other cucurbits from farms.
- The temperature in the most of wheat growing areas is still below long-term average and therefore likely to delay wheat harvesting by atleast 10-15 days beyond April 10, therefore, farmers can delay wheat harvesting till April 20 without incurring any particular loss, which gives sufficient time to manage logistics for procurement and announcement of dates.
- Rabi Paddy in grain filling stage in southern states is broadly influenced because of neck blast incidence, satisfactory and adequate precautionary measures to be taken while spraying of recommended fungicide by contract sprayers/ farmers.
- In instance of any unseasonal rain at harvesting stage in paddy, spray 5% salt solution to prevent seed germination.
- In horticultural crops at fruiting stage such as mango, while carrying out field operations related to nutrient sprays and crop protection adequate precautions in handling of inputs, mixing, delivery and washing of equipment is to be undertaken.
- In summer pulses in rice fallows, whitefly management with proper safety precautions have to be taken up to prevent yellow mosaic virus incidence.

The Center and State Governments are now working in harmony to solve the problems of farmers by introducing a hantle of measures every day such as:

- Subsidies,
- Crop insurance to farmers,
- Free flow of agricultural credit,
- Unemployment allowance to rural landless/migrant workers under MANREGA, etc.

The govt. is using every arrow in its quiver to ensure the health of farmers by continuously sensitizing the farmers about working in fields with covered faces while maintaining social distancing.

Although equipped with smartphones, the uneducated and naïve farmers are not able to reap the benefits of this ingenious measure. As a result, streamlining of crop procurement and mandi operations continues to be a challenge. NGOs can volunteer to educate the farmers on the usage of these new features of the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Platform.

### **MY OPINIONS ON THIS CRISIS**

- Government can transfer the harvested crop by running goods trains instead of truck.
- Officers from agricultural sector should take initiative to educate or train farmers on how they can harvest crops with less number of labours efficiently.
- Agriculture solution applications should help the farmers through ther advisory.
- Government should setup call centers in every state, where farmers can call and clear their doubts from agricultural expert.
- NGO's can volunteer to educate non agricultural labourers on harvesting method. Due to lockdown labourers are fleeing to their home town so with the harvesting training

then can get work in this harvesting season and the shortage of labour problem can be solved to an extent.