

Direct seeding of paddy: Pepsi honours tillers

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BARNALA: To save the water table from sinking, the government and private companies have been working on methods to reduce use of water in paddy cultivation. PepsiCo India, one of such private companies, honoured some farmers who have been working in cooperation with the company for direct seeding of paddy, at Sekha village near here on Monday.

The company claims to have brought an area of 10,500 acres under direct seeding in Punjab. Jaideep Bhatia, vice-president, Agronomy, PepsiCo India, said at the function, "The direct seeding technique saves Rs 1,500 per acre in cultivation cost. And we have seen a 20-fold increase in area under direct seeding as compared to 2008. We have been working with farmers from Barnala, Faridkot, Muktsar, Sangrur, Moga and Bathinda districts."

The total area under paddy cultivation in the state exceeds 26 lakh hectare, which touches the 65 lakh mark in acres. But PepsiCo officials are upbeat and claim that the direct seeding of rice (DSR) not only saves 30% water but also reduces cost of cultivation and labour requirement.

Claimed the activity is a corporate social responsibly (CSR) activity, with no commercial leaning, Bhatia added, "Apart from teaching how to use the direct seeding method, we pro-

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vide machines to selected farmers free of cost. The results have been vetted by leading institutes like the Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)."

One of the farmers at the function, Sukhdev Singh from Thandeval village in Muktsar, said, "Earlier I used DSR only on one acre after PepsiCo officials motivated me. But when I calculated the savings and saw no decline in quality, I have been cultivating 12 acres through DSR."

Dr Harjeet Singh Dhaliwal, additional director, extension education, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), said, "DSR saves 10-15% water at least. But we do not recommend it for light soils as it can have iron deficiency. It's good but farmers should use herbicides recommended by PAU while practising DSR."

The PAU's extension department has also formed six clusters of 250 acres each for water conservation methods, which includes direct seeding and mechanical transplantation, in Ferozepur and Bathinda districts.