

# Punjab farmers are adopting direct seeding to save water

GYANENDRA KESHRI

Barnala

The farmers in Punjab are increasingly using the direct seeding method of rice cultivation that reduces water consumption by 30 per cent and labour costs substantially. Over 2,000 farmers in the state have used the method on nearly 10,500 acres this year. In neighbouring Haryana and distant Karnataka also, this method is becoming popular.

The water table is depleting fast in many areas of Punjab as a result of cultivation of the water-intensive rice crop. Keeping this in view, global food and beverage maker PepsiCo has been supporting and promoting the use of direct seeding method as part of the company's agenda to help save water and reduce greenhouse gas emission. "Our

efforts are bearing fruits. We started with a small area in 2006. This year it has crossed 10,000 acres mark in Punjab alone," said Jaideep Bhatia, Vice President, Agronomy, at PepsiCo India.

PepsiCo provides financial and technical support to farmers to encourage the use of the method. Traditionally, paddy is grown by planting seeds in a small nursery and then the saplings are manually transplanted after four to five weeks to the main cultivation area. Under this methodology, puddling of soil is done to kill weeds and make transplantation easy. This requires at least three to four inches of standing water in the cultivation area. With direct seeding, rice seed is sown and sprouted directly into the field. This substantially reduces the requirement of water. Labour cost comes down substantially

because transplantation is not needed in direct seeding.

"Almost 400,000 million litres of water is used annually for paddy cultivation. If direct seeding is done across the country, we can save over 100,000 million litres of water," Bhatia told IANS. Direct seeding, Bhatia said, cuts overall cost of cultivation by an average around Rs 1,500 per acre and water consumption by 30 per cent, and the requirement of labour is reduced by over 50 per cent. "Labour is a big problem these days. Most of the farmers are dependent on migrant labour. For the last few years, they have not been coming. So we are relying on direct seeding now," said Mohkam Singh, a farmer from Mansa district. Direct seeding methodology is used over a very small fraction of the total area under paddy cultivation.