



BASAI News Updates

Oct. 21, 2022

85% paddy area in Punjab yet to be cleared of stubble; late spike likely

Jasjeet Gandhok

jasjeet.gandhok@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Only 15.26% or 0.46 million hectares of the 3.028 million hectares of land on which paddy has been cultivated this year in Punjab was cleared till October 14, according to a satellite analysis by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), suggesting that there may be a spike coming in farm fires in the region – at the cost of Delhi's air.

The analysis shows that paddy on 0.36 million hectares has been harvested and the stubble managed (or cleared), and that farm stubble was burnt on only 92,624 hectares. Experts say delayed rains, which, in turn, delayed sowing, may mean later-than-normal harvests this year.

The latest analysis, of October 14, "shows that only 15% of the land under paddy cultivation has been cleared out", said VK Sehgal, Professor & Principal Scientist at IARI, the head of Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modelling from Space (CREAMS), which collates data from each state in terms of the actual farm fires before sharing it with the Union Environment Ministry and the Commission for Air Quality Management.

Sehgal said that there is a "slight delay" in harvests. Usually, by October 14, "at least 25% of the fields should have ideally been cleared out. This year we appear to be slightly behind." But he added that most farmers, particularly in the Malwa region of Punjab, anyway harvest their crop between October 15 and November 15.

"Based on this harvesting pattern, we normally see farm fires peaking around October 26-27, and this year we may see a similar spike by the end of October. We are seeing a gradual increase in numbers over the last few days," he said.

According to the daily farm fire data being recorded by CREAMS, Punjab has recorded a total of 2,625 farm fires between September 15 and October 19. However, 1,758 of these have been recorded in the last seven days alone.

Punjab recorded 120 fires on October 13, 82 on October 14, 169 fires on October 15, 206 on October 16, 403 on October 17, 342 fires on October 18 and this season's

highest single day count of 436 fires on October 19.

Between September 15 and October 19 last year, Punjab had recorded 2,625 fires, while in 2020, the figure was 8,509 fires for this period.

In the winter harvest season of 2021, a total of 71,304 farm fires were recorded in Punjab, while 79,293 fires were recorded in 2020.

Comparisons with past years have been made difficult by the rains – their delayed onset delayed sowing; and unseasonal rains when the crops were ready or nearing readiness have delayed harvests.

Anamita Hoyschowdhury, executive director, research and advocacy at the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) says two late spells of rain in September and early October are likely to have delayed stubble burning in Punjab, leading to a narrower window for stubble burning. She too warned that the worst is to come.

"The total radiative fire power of farm fires in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi beeched just around 2,000 Watt on October 16. This is less than half of the value recorded in 2020 and 2021 for same period, implying massive burning is in store in coming few days. Based on previous years' observation, it can be said that situation can worsen if business as usual scenario continues."

Kranesh Garg, member secretary, Punjab Pollution Control Board, said Punjab is making progress this year, both in terms of the fire count and the area burnt. "We have already shared data with CAQM that farm fires are reducing as compared to previous years. We have also tried to analyse the data of the total area being burnt this year and have found that till October 16, only around 0.105 million hectares of paddy has been burnt this year as compared to 0.150 million hectares at the same time till last year. This is a reduction of around 30%", he said, admitting that while considerable area is yet to be harvested, efforts on the ground will ensure a majority of it is not burnt.



'Let people breathe clean air': SC on plea against cracker ban

Utkarsh Anand

utkarsh.anand@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Let people breathe clean air, the Supreme Court said on Thursday, refusing to urgently hear a petition that challenges the blanket ban on firecrackers in Delhi and some other states.

A bench of justices MR Shah and NM Sundresh expressed its indisposition to speed up the hearing of the petition, which sought a clarification from the apex court over the approval of green crackers.

"Please, let people breathe the clean and fresh air. There are so many other ways to celebrate. You can spend your money on sweets," justice Shah told advocate Shashank Shekhar Jha, who demanded the urgent hearing on behalf of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) member of Parliament Manoj Tiwari.

Responding to the court's remarks, Jha said that firecrackers are not the only cause of pollu-

tion in the National Capital Region (NCR) and that stubble burning is a major contributor too.

"That, we can hear later. We will hear you but not now," replied the bench, turning down the plea to list the petition for a hearing on Friday – the only working day before the top court breaks for a week-long Diwali holiday. Diwali will be celebrated in the country on October 24.

This was the second occasion when Tiwari's request for hearing of his petition before Diwali failed to find favour. Earlier, the bench on October 10 declined the plea for assigning a date of hearing.

"You are a permanent resident of NCR, right? Why do you want to increase pollution?" the bench asked Tiwari's counsel Jha then.

The BJP MP's plea has argued that a blanket ban on firecrackers is not the best solution, pointing out that green crackers should be permitted in accordance with previous Supreme Court orders. It cited a 2021 order of the top court which permitted green crackers. Despite the court order, Tiwari complained, various state governments, including

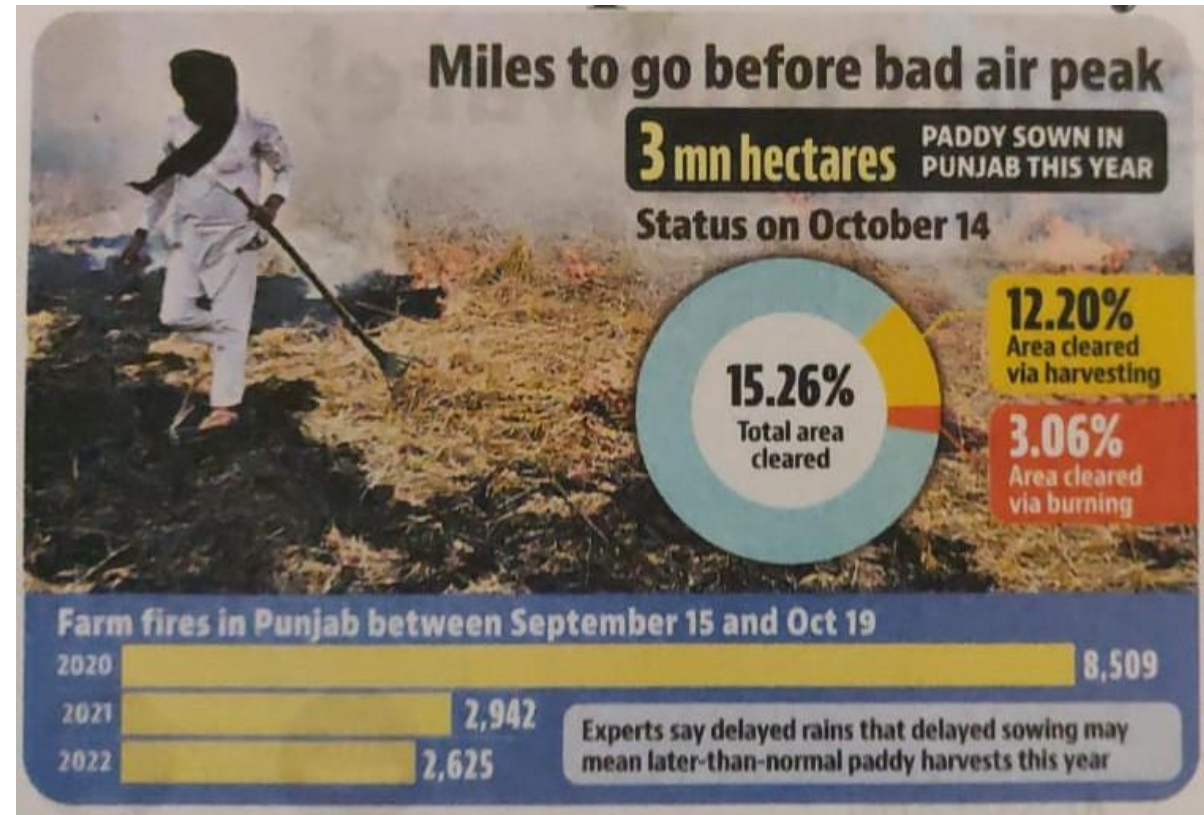
Delhi, have gone ahead to impose an absolute ban on all kinds of firecrackers.

The petition further contended the Delhi government's move to issue a blanket ban on firecrackers would result in innocent people being harassed during festivals. "Arrests and FIRs on the festive season like Deepavali and others had not only brought a very bad message to the society at large and had unnecessarily created fear, panic and anger among the masses," it stated.

The Delhi government imposed a complete ban on the production, sale and use of all types of firecrackers, including green crackers, till January 1, 2023.

Meanwhile, the Delhi high court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea that sought to overturn the blanket ban on the sale, manufacture and use of firecrackers in the city, noting that the Supreme Court is seized of the matter.

Justice Yashwant Varma said that "it would not be appropriate for the court to entertain an independent challenge".



Least in 2 years, state records 2,721 farm fires

AMAN SOOD

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

PATIALA, OCTOBER 20

The state has recorded 2,721 incidents of stubble-burning till October 20. The number is 1,066 less than the last year. According to data, Punjab recorded 96 farm fires on October 20, with Tarn Taran at the top with 14 such incidents. Last year, 635 farm fires had taken place on October 20.

In 2020, as many as 8,965 incidents were recorded till October 20, while the count was 3,730 and 2,721 in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

According to the government data, the state recorded 71,304 cases of stubble-burning in 2021, 76,590 in 2020, 55,210 in 2019 and 50,590 in 2018.

Many districts, including Sangrur, Mansa, Bathinda and Amritsar, recorded large number of stubble-burning incidents.

Meanwhile, the air quality index (AQI) in various cities of the state is worsening.

The AQI in Jalandhar was

3,730 cases recorded till Oct 20 in 2021

Decline in number

Year	Cases
2018	50,590
2019	55,210
2020	76,590
2021	71,304
2022*	2,721

*TILL OCT 20



142, 133 in Ludhiana, 144 in Patiala, 168 in Amritsar and 124 in Khanna.

Interestingly, despite farm fires being a regular practice in Punjab every year, there is no fixed mechanism to check air quality in villages.

"For measuring the AQI, the six stations in the cities depend on the flow of air through their machines despite the fact that the wind velocity is as low as 2 km per hour for most part of the day," say officials of the Punjab Pollution Control Board.

"Due to the short window between paddy harvesting and sowing of wheat crop, we have no option but to resort to burning stubble. If we sow wheat without removing the straw, the rabi crop gets infested with pests and weeds," said a farmer.

Officials of the Agriculture Department said they would create awareness about stubble-burning and "low yield cannot be linked to in-situ management of crop residue".

Even though the government has rolled out a slew of

HARVESTING-SOWING WINDOW SHORT

Due to the short window between paddy harvesting and sowing of wheat crop, we have no option but to resort to burning stubble. If we sow wheat without removing the straw, the rabi crop gets infested with pests and weeds. A farmer

subsidies and incentives, these have failed to bring about a change. Farmers complain of problems with the efficiency of machines, their availability and high cost.

In August this year, the Punjab Government reported to the Supreme Court that it had not been able to provide cash incentives to farmers owing to Covid-related financial constraints.

Every season, over 15 million tonnes of paddy straw is burnt in open fields ahead of the winter sowing.

Fewer cases in Doaba

DEEPAKAMAL KAUR

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

JALANDHAR, OCTOBER 20

Delay in harvesting due to late sowing this season as well as the recent spell of rains have led to fewer cases of stubble-burning in comparison to previous years in the district.

While Nawanshahr district has reported only one case of stubble-burning so far against over 300 cases last year around the same time, Hoshiarpur has reported three cases.

"The situation is relatively bad in Kapurthala with nearly 70 cases of paddy straw burning and worst in Jalandhar with as many as 107 incidents this year.

Nawanshahr Deputy Commissioner (DC) Navjot Pal Singh Randhawa said 'red entries' made last year were perhaps the reason of fewer farm fires this year. "We will take strict action against the lone case," the DC said.

Hoshiarpur Chief Agricul-

Situation worrisome in Jalandhar, Kapurthala

MINISTERS BLAMED

Officials in Kapurthala and Jalandhar are of the view that the statements issued by the ministers upon their visits to the districts that no action will be taken against farmers burning stubble has led to more incidents of farm fires

ture Officer Gurdev Singh said: "Of the three cases of farm fires we spotted, we have imposed a fine of Rs 2,500 per acre on farmers."

Jalandhar DC Jaspreet Singh said cases of stubble-burning were less than the previous years.

"There are reports that farmers are waiting for Diwali to burn stubble, showing it to be a case of accidental fire-caused due to bursting of crackers.

Of farm fires & mishaps

MANMEET SINGH GILL

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, OCTOBER 20

Apart from being a serious health hazard and a cause of soil and air pollution, the burning of crop residue also leads to numerous road mishaps every harvesting season. The fire in the fields causes a dense smoke in the area hitting visibility on the roads.

Of the several incidents reported every harvesting season, death of Sukhwinder Singh (55) of Jodhpur village on May 4 this year needs special mention as he had even stopped his bike and decided not to commute through the smoke blind caused on the road by a nearby farm fire.

However, the motorcyclist coming from the opposite side was not cautious enough and hit Sukhwinder's stationed bike at a high speed. While the other biker sustained injuries and was discharged after a few days of hospitalisation, Sukhwinder and his family were not so lucky.

In another accident reported on May 5 this year from Bijliwal village near Batala, two school students had sustained burn injuries as the school bus driver lost control due to

Every year, smoke rising from burning fields hits visibility

PENALTY IMPOSED

To date, a penalty of ₹3.80 lakh has been imposed on the violators. Awareness campaigns are being run extensively and activity in the fields is being monitored.

Jatinder Singh Gill, CHIEF AGRICULTURE OFFICER

heavy smoke and entered burning wheat fields. A major mishap was averted due to the prompt rescue efforts made by local residents as 32 students were on board.

However, no lessons have been learnt from the numerous accidents reported in the recent memory as farm fires in agricultural fields are being reported daily. The rural residents stated that lack of strict action against the violators emboldens others too.

While the district has reported 657 fire incidents so far this year, a visit to the rural areas reveals that there is no decrease in the incidents of stubble-burning.

Left without 'option', farmers to burn stubble

PARVESH SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SANGRUR, OCTOBER 20

Despite repeated warnings against stubble-burning, farmers of the district are resorting to the practice after harvesting paddy.

During an indefinite protest near the Chief Minister residence here, farmers said since the Punjab Government had failed to provide them with financial aid and the required machinery, they were left with no option but to burn stubble.

"I am a patient of asthma and face a lot of problems while burning stubble every year. We are compelled to burn stubble on our four-acre farm every year as the government has failed to provide us with any alternative," said Niranjan Singh, a farmer.

Many farmers, while talking to *The Tribune*, admitted that they would resort to burning stubble if the government failed to give them Rs 200 per quintal

PROTESTERS BLOCK ROAD LEADING TO CM'S HOUSE

- Farmers sitting on an indefinite protest in Sangrur near the CM's residence from October 9 blocked a road leading to the residence from the Patiala road on Thursday
- The Sangrur-Patiala road had already been blocked by them since the start of the protest
- They also threatened to block another road if the government failed to take quick action on their demands



Farmers protest near the CM's residence in Sangrur. FILE

bonus to manage the stubble. Besides financial aid, farmers are also demanding machines in each village. Farmers said only a few of them had got machines to date.

"I have suffered losses due to repeated crop failures. Officials of the Agriculture Department visited my fields and prepared reports, but I have not received any financial aid from the government even once. The debt of private money lender is increasing and now the government wants me to spend extra to manage stubble. It is not possible," said Darshan Singh, a farmer from Moonak area.

In many villages, farmers

have started preparations to stop government officials from visiting their fields after they have burnt paddy stubble. Farmers of some areas are also planning to form special committees to keep round-the-clock watch over the entry of government officials in their villages.

"Government officials are our brothers, but they are being compelled to take action against us. Though we will not allow them to

visit our fields, we will also not create any problems for them as we plan to stop them politely," said Gurdhoo Singh, a farmer from Sunam area.

Sukhdev Singh Kokri Kalan, general secretary, BKU Ugrahan, said: "Farmers do not want to burn their fields, but they are being compelled to do it. The government should give farmers the required number of machines to prevent stubble-burning in the state."

TOP HAVEN DEVELOPE

Applications are invited from general public for booking of Residences proposed to be developed by Top Haven Developers Pvt. Ltd at Sector Gurugram, Haryana for 2ND E-DRAW as per terms and conditions of the Govt. of Haryana vide notification no. PF- 27/48921 dated 19.08.2013 at www.tcpharyana.gov.in

No stopping farm fires in Amritsar, Tarn Taran

AMRITSAR, OCTOBER 20

The efforts being made by the Punjab Government to check burning of crop residue in fields seem to have miserably failed as the Punjab Remote Sensing Centre has so far reported a whopping 187 farm fire incidents from the district.

The farm fire incidents reported for the corresponding period during the previous year were nearly 8 per cent low. District officials attributed the higher incidents of farm fires to early harvesting this year.

Chief Agricultural Officer Dr Jitender Singh Gill said, "Last year, till October 20, crop in only 32 per cent of the area under paddy was harvested. However, this year, the area under early sown basmati varieties has increased and so far, crop on 54 per cent of the area under paddy has been harvested."

Of the 1.88 lakh hectares

Officials attribute higher count to early harvesting of paddy

₹4.20 LAKH FINE IMPOSED

- 787 farm fire incidents reported from Amritsar district
- A fine of ₹4.20 lakh imposed on farmers for violating ban
- In adjoining Tarn Taran district, the fire count has reached 683

RED ENTRIES

Red entries have been marked in revenue records of 214 farmers in Amritsar, Dr Jitender Singh Gill, 087 438 0923

under paddy this year, the early sown basmati varieties were cultivated on over 50,000 hectares. The district officials said efforts were being made to check the farm fires and the administration had imposed a cumulative fine of Rs 4.20 lakh on farmers for



violating the ban on burning of crop residue. The administration has also marked "red entries" in the revenue records of 214 farmers.

In the adjoining Tarn Taran district, the number of farm fire incidents has increased as compared to last year. This

year, the district has reported 660 farm fire incidents, while it had reported 606 cases during the corresponding period last year. In both districts, fines have been imposed for violation, but no FIR has been registered against any farmer so far—TNS

comparisons to data of the Haryana Space Application Centre. However, the authorities claimed that the cases this year were 46 per cent less in comparison to the corresponding period last year when the state had recorded 1,207 cases.

In Haryana, 496 cases in 5 days

KARNAL, OCTOBER 20

After witnessing fewer cases of stubble-burning in the first fortnight of this month, Haryana has recorded a sudden increase in farm fire cases. As many as 496 cases have been reported in the past five days across the state, nearly 74 per cent of the total 664 cases reported till Thursday.

Haryana witnessed 78 cases on Thursday, 122 on Wednesday and 134 on Tuesday, the highest so far this season. Besides, 88 cases were reported on Monday and 76 on Sunday, according to data of the Haryana Space Application Centre. However, the authorities claimed that the cases this year were 46 per cent less in comparison to the corresponding period last year when the state had recorded 1,207 cases.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 1

Karnal bans arrival of paddy from other dists

PARVEEN ARORA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KARNAL, OCTOBER 20

Days after the surfacing of the "proxy procurement" of paddy in the district, a fresh case of using state's farmers to sell paddy from neighbouring states has come to light in various grain markets of the district.

Sources said paddy from neighbouring states was being sold on the gate passes issued in the names of the farmers of Sonapat, Panipat, Palwal, Hodal and other districts of Haryana in various grain markets of Karnal, prompting the authorities to put a ban on the arrival of paddy from other districts of the state except Karnal.

Farmers from Karnal district are allowed to bring their produce in grain markets after proper verification, said an official of the Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board (HSAMB).

The sources said several vehicles, including canters, loaded with paddy in gunny bags, were brought from neighbouring states and sold in different mandis on the name of farmers from various districts of the state. The authorities gave reasons that



Paddy being loaded on trucks at the grain market in Karnal. SWEED AHMED

GOOD PRICE IN LOCAL MARKET

“Farmers are getting good prices here, so farmers from Sonapat, Panipat and other districts came here to sell their produce. Now, we have put a ban on the arrival of paddy from other districts.” Naresh Mann, SECRETARY, GHANIMA MARKET PALAL

palwal varieties were being procured above the MSP in Karnal grain markets, so farmers from other districts of Haryana had come here to sell their produce, but when inquired about the matter, it came to the fore that paddy was brought in canters packed in gunny bags. Apart from paying the fare of the canters, toll tax, ranging between Rs 400 and Rs 1,500, was also paid for

one side to come to various grain markets of the district from Palwal, Sonapat, Hodal and Panipat, besides other places. When checking the records of the HSAMB, no rate above the MSP was mentioned. The sources said procurement from these districts had been done at Gharaunda, Karnal, Indri, Kunjpura, Nissing, Taraori, Assandh and other grain markets of the district.

Paddy purchase scam detected in Palwal

PALWAL, OCTOBER 20

A case of corruption has been registered in connection with an alleged scam in the purchase of paddy at the Hodal grain market here.

Sources in the Police Department said the case was registered following a complaint by the CM flying squad that raided the mandi on recently.

A team comprising mem-

Complaint filed by CM flying squad

bers of the CM flying squad and other officials detected the scam.

According to an official, the mandi officials have shown a purchase of 20,000 quintal paddy on the basis of 120 "fake" gate passes.

The involvement of local market committee officials, commission agents, procurement agencies and rice millers is suspected. It is claimed that around 297 quintal paddy was shown loaded on a tractor-trailer, while its capacity was only around 50-60 quintals. "An FIR has been registered against unidentified persons," said an official. — TNS