

## No End to Despair: A Trend Analysis of Farmers Suicides in India from 1995-2015

Suman Chauhan and Kiran Mann, Kurukshetra, Haryana.

### Abstract

*Farmer's once the pride of nation, today is a national concern. The large number of farmer's suicide in recent years is a clear indication that there is going something wrong with the Indian agriculture system. In India where more than 60% population either directly or indirectly depends on Agriculture and its allied sectors, but in the race of development of industrial and service sector, India has neglected the agriculture sector and its negligence resulted to increase in some major issues in farming sector, one of them is farmer suicides. Between 1995 to 2015, more than 3,00,000 have committed suicide(NCRB,2015).According to the united commission on sustainable development(UNCSD),one farmer suicide every 32 minutes between 1997 and 2005 in India. Major cases has been reported from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Bankruptcy or indebtedness (38.7%, NCRB, 2015) is considered as the main cause of farmers suiciding. So there is need for a comprehensive nationwide picture to investigate the paradox of Agrarian crises. This paper is a modest attempt to analyze the trends in farmer's suicide from 1995-2015 and reasons that are responsible for farmer suicide by using secondary data sources.*

**Key Words:** *National crime records bureau (NCRB), United Nation Commission for Sustainable Development(UNCSD), Agrarian Crisisand Indebtedness.*

### Introduction:

The first incidence of farmer suicide was reported in Kerala in 1986, the incidence was totally ignored by the state government. But after 1995 the incidents were reported from various regions. This is the time when the issue of farmer suicide got recognition at national level and seeing the intensity of the incidence, government of India decided to enquire the problem through several committees, one of them was the Expert committee on agrarian crises under the chairmanship of R.Radhakrishan and committee claimed that 'Indian agriculture is currently passing through a period of

severe crisis. According to the official data published by NCRB reported that more than 3, 00,000 farmers committed suicides till 2015. These incidents grab the attention of scholars and academic community and they started figuring out the real causes behind this terrific situation of farmers. The insight review of various research findings claimed that there are regional differences found in the causes of farmer suicides which are as follows, in Maharashtra, 'the graveyard of farmers suicides', lack of irrigational facilities, no-availability of formal credit system, fluctuations in crop prices and indebtedness among farmers are reported

as main causes. In Karnataka, decline in productivity, increasing cost of cultivation, crop failure, market disturbances and indebtedness leads to farmer's suicide. In Punjab, increasing non-agricultural expenditure, high input of fertilizers and pesticides were found responsible for such a pathetic situation.

### Objectives:

- To Study the trend of Farmer suicide in India from 1995 to 2015
- To Study the causes leading to Farmer suicide

### Database and Methodology

The present report is based upon the secondary data sources. The report titled 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India' published by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India is being used. The report has been published from 1967 onwards with the basic data on suicides but from 1995, the reports have become more detailed with 12 categories-wise

suicide data distribution and one of them is Self-employed (farming / Agriculture). Secondary data is tabulated and presented in the form of tables, graphs and other needed form.

### Results and Discussion

Table: 1 Suicides among Farmers in India (1995-2015)

Year	No. of Farmer suicide (Thousand)	Year	No. of Farmer suicide (Thousand)
1995	10720	2006	17060
1996	13729	2007	16632
1997	13622	2008	16196
1998	16015	2009	17368
1999	16082	2010	15964
2000	16603	2011	14027
2001	16415	2012	13754
2002	17971	2013	11772
2003	17143	2014	5650
2004	18241	2015	8007
2005	17131		

Source: National crime Records Bureau, 1995-2015

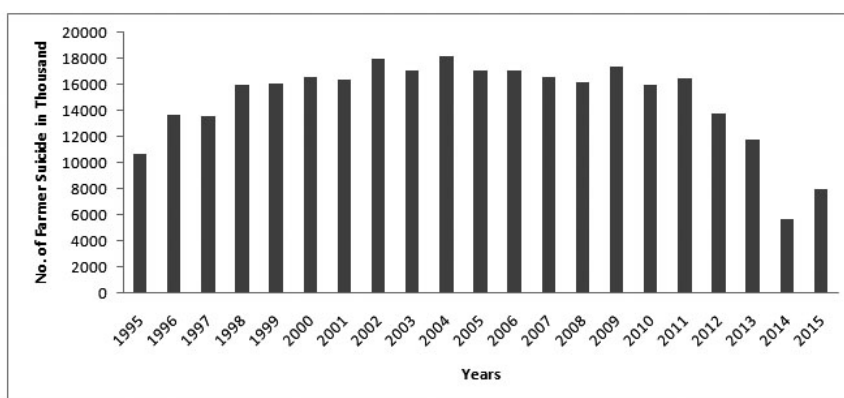


Fig. 1 Suicides among Farmers in India (1995-2015)

Source: National Crime Records Bureau,(1995-2015)

The temporal analysis of Farmer suicide shows variations in terms of numbers, as the incidence of Farmer suicide is not affected by one or two reasons but it is a collective result of natural disturbances, market fluctuations, outstanding loans taken by farmers for agricultural inputs and family problems. Farmer suicide experienced phenomenal increase in 2002, 2004 i.e. 17,971 and 18,241 resp. and reason being that both are drought years and in 2004 WTO have changed its export and import policies and as recommended by WTO India has reduced its import tariffs also that

increased the import of cheap agricultural products. After 2011 Farmer suicide shows decreasing trend because the monsoon was normal during these particular year and 2014 recorded lowest incidence of farmer suicide due to large underreporting of farmersuicide. Till 2011 the cases of farmer suicide were mainly from the central and southern India especially from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh etc but post 2011 period shows that the phenomena of farmer suicide extending its grip to the so called green revolution benefitted states e.g. Punjab and Haryana.

Table: 2 Gender wise Composition of Farmers Suicide

Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female
1995	8295	2425	2006	14664	2396
1996	10897	2832	2007	14509	2123
1997	11229	2393	2008	14145	2051
1998	12986	3029	2009	14951	2417
1999	13278	2804	2010	13592	2372
2000	13501	3102	2011	14588	1956
2001	13829	2586	2012	11951	1803
2002	15308	2663	2013	10489	1283
2003	14680	2463	2014	5178	472
2004	15929	2312	2015	7566	441
2005	14973	2158			

Source: National Crime Records Bureau, 1995-2015

Figure 2 shows that the Farmer suicide is dominated by Male farmers. Considering the time period from 1995-2015, almost 85 per cent of all farm suicides were by male farmers. Suicides in general, among the population as a whole, were also largely concentrated among males. The reason of concentration of farm suicides among male may be the undercounting of female

farmers in police records. It was noted that the criterion generally adopted in these records for identifying the farmer is title to land and since the title is generally in the name of male head of the household that is why female farmer who committed suicides will not be recorded as a farmer suicide in these records.

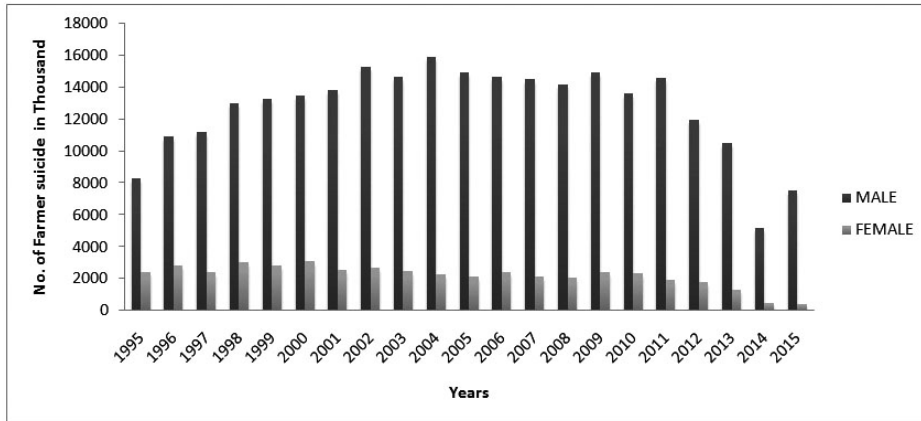


Fig.2: Gender wise Composition of Farmers Suicides (1995-2015)

Source: National Crime Records Bureau, (1995-2015)

**Table: 3 Land holding Statue wise Suicides**

Categories of Farmers	Suicides
Marginal (up to 1 Hectare)	2195
Small(1-2 Hectare)	3618
Medium(2-4 Hectare)	2034
Large(Above 4 Hectare)	160

Source: National Crime Records Bureau,2015

The above figure shows that the condition of Small and Marginal farmers is very pathetic among the farmer's community. This particular section is prone to increasing size and land fragmentation.

One farmer suicide might be an unfortunate incidence but more than 15,000 a year is a crisis and when the number is so epidemic .it means there must be some reasons contributing to this plight of farmers. Here are some possible reasons

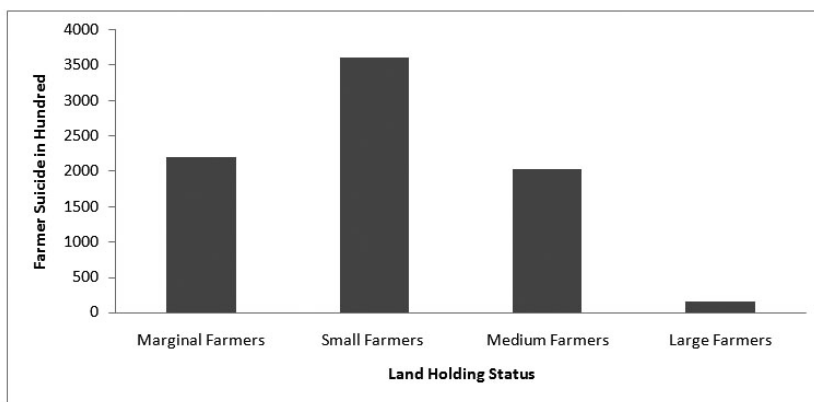


Fig.3: Land Holding status wise Farmers Suicide,2015

Source: National Crime Records Bureau,2015

- i) Neglected Agriculture Sector,
- ii) Faulty Credit System,
- iii) Unreasonable Prices for Agricultural Produce,
- iv) Globalization,
- v) Increasing Cost of Production,
- vi) Bankruptcy/Indebtedness,
- vii) Lack of Awareness about MSP (Minimum Support Price)

Table: 4 Neglected Agricultural Sector

Plans	Total Plan Outlay (In Crores)	Agriculture Share (in crores)	% of Agriculture to Total
I Plan (1951-56)	2378	354	14.9
II Plan (1956-61)	4500	501	11.1
III Plan (1961-66)	8577	1089	12.7
Annual Plan (1966-69)	6625	1107	16.7
IV Plan (1969-74)	15779	2320	14.7
V Plan (1975-79)	39426	4865	12.3
Annual Plans (1979-80)	12177	1997	16.4
VI Plan (1980-85)	109292	6624	6.1
VII Plan (1985-90)	180000	10525	5.8
Annual Plan (1990-91)	58369	3405	5.8
Annual Plan (1991-1992)	64751	3851	5.9
VIII Plan (1992-1997)	434100	22467	5.2
IX Plan (1997-2002)	941041	37239	3.9
X Plan (2002-2007)	1525639	58933	3.8
XI Plan (2007-2012)	1525639	56448	3.7
XII Plan (2012-2017)	1969920	92586	4.7

Source: Planning Commission/NITI Aayog

Public investment in agriculture has consistently falling, this lead to low expenditure on research and development in agriculture sector. The change in focus during the second plan period (1956-61) towards heavy industries, led to decrease in investment in the farm economy. There should be sufficient investment in

agricultural sector so that it could help the farmers in improving their life. All other sectors of economy are equally important for the sustainable development but not by the negligence of the basic sector that provides livelihood to more than 60 per cent of population.

## 2. Faulty Credit System

Presently there are many such agro services providers in many regions, which act as moneylenders and exploit the farmers in following ways: i) seeds and pesticides are supplied on credit basis which is 10-20% higher in price, ii) inferior quality seeds are supplied to farmers, iii) seeds and pesticides given to farmers on credit are treated as a loan to the farmers with an interest of 36% per annum (An Action Plan For Agriculture Development of Maharashtra, GOVT. of

Maharashtra 2008). These service providers typically go to the fields immediately after harvesting and cheat the farmers in weight and prices. Since these moneylenders are always surrounding the farmers putting pressure on them. Another study conducted by the World Bank and National Centre for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) on rural access of finance, showed that 48% of landless and marginal farmers borrow from private moneylenders, a source that cannot be controlled by government.

Table: 5 Issues Related with Formal and Informal Credit System

	Relatives	National Banks	Co-operatives	Moneylenders
Ease of Availing	Not Easy Now	Procedure Locked	Manageable	Easy to Get
Time Factor	Some Delays	Long Delays	Delayed	Instant
Amount Available	Depends	By rule ,Less	Influence Matters	Highest
Rate of Interest	Low	Up to 14% p.a	18% p.a Average	60% to 120% p.a
Recovery Methods	Emotional	Relatively Mild	Severe	Harassment/Sale Deed

Source: Guha Jennifer, "Farmers Suicides in Maharashtra, India: facts, factors and possible fixes" University of Connecticut", 2012

As shown in the table above, taking loans from moneylenders has two extremes: it is easy to attain and paired with high interest rates and painful recovery methods. The harassment is also coming from co-operatives as well, but moneylenders being community member have a stronger influence over the reputation of the farmer. According to Gruère in his paper (2011): "another factor enhancing indebtedness is the lack of access to institutional credit. Most of the farmers who committed suicide in both states had high, unpaid loans."

As long as the influence of moneylenders remain, the pressure for committing suicide would continue.

## 3. Unreasonable Price for Agricultural Produce

Citing an example of cotton, the mainstay crop of the region, former MLA Wamanrao Chatap said calculations put up by the state's four agriculture universities show the cost of production of cotton at over Rs7, 240 a quintal. As against this, the MSP stands at Rs4, 320 for a quintal for the crop.

Similarly, the MSP for a number of crops grown in the region like soybean, paddy and Tur is less than the cost of production pegged by the state's universities. ("To Cover Actual Cost, MSP Needs to Be Double"),TIMES OF INDIA,12/09/2018). Farm activist Amitabh Pawde said the cost is pegged by state government as well as universities. However, the MSP is fixed by the Centre, which takes into account a much lesser figure. For cotton, if the cost of production according to the state government comes to nearly Rs7, 000, by the Centre's standards it comes to around Rs4, 000. The latest example is covered in India's reputed newspaper that claims that our farmers are not getting what they deserved. An onion grower from Maharashtra had to sell his produce at just Rs. 1.40 and received Rs. 1064 for 750 kg.(Times of India,2 Dec.2018).The toil of farmer for four months is minimal. And another example is from Hindustan Times(3 Dec. 2018) that a Maharashtra farmer destroys brinjal plantation because the crop fetches just 20 paisa per kg.

#### **4. Globalization**

Prior to economic reforms in 1991, India's economy was limited by restrictions and protectionist tariffs. The average tariff in 1990-91 was 93.3%(WTO,2004).In 1991 India implemented economic reforms, which liberalized its economy, increased privatization and decreased the govt's role in regulation, as a result the tariff after the reforms was down to 34.62%(WTO,2004). Due to this, the agricultural import items became cheaper than the local agriculture, which resulted in more purchased of

imported rather than locally grown goods. The excess supply leading to dumping by developed countries and therefore neglect the domestically grown crops. (Mishra,2008).The government gave roughly 1.6 to 1.9 of GDP as subsidies on inputs in early 1990's, which reduced to about 1.3 to 1.4 in 2003-04 because agreement with

WTO.Import duty on cotton was reduced to almost zero ,a survey of cotton prices in Warangal(ANDHRA PRADESH) found the price of quintal of cotton swinging between Rs. 2200 to Rs 1450 in period of 45 days and further to Rs. 1200(Posani,2009).

#### **5. Increasing Cost of Production**

Increasing cost of inputs is another major issues dealt by farmers. The cost of cultivation increased nearly 17 times between 1975-76(Rs. 1,047/hectare) and 2001-02 (Rs.17,234/ hectare), whereas farmers income increased by 11 times from Rs.1, 252 to Rs. 13,775/hectare) (Deshpande, 2010). There is a sharp rise in the overall cost of production for e.g., the price per tonne of urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash (MOP) were Rs.2350, Rs.3600 and Rs.1300 respectively in 1990-91, which increased to Rs. 4830, Rs.9350 and Rs.4455 respectively in 2003-04. The prices of cotton and chilli seeds went up to by 400% (Rao and Suri,2006).And apart to this, the new intellectual property rights regime restricts the reusing, storing, and sharing of seeds and compels the farmers to purchase the new seeds each time. (Shiva et al,1999).

Table: 6 Income and Consumption Land Holding Wise

Size Class (in Hectares)	Income (Rs.)	Consumption (Rs.)
<0.01	1380	2297
0.01-0.40	1663	2390
0.41-1.00	1809	2672
1.01-2.00	2493	3148
2.01-4.00	3589	3645
4.01-10.00	5681	4626
>10.00	9667	6418

Source: National Sample Survey, 59th round, 2003

## 6. Bankruptcy as a Main Cause

Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai on the request Mumbai High Court conducted a study of Maharashtra. The report stated that, 'repeated crop failures, inability to meet the rising cost of cultivation and most crucial indebtedness seem to create a situation that forces farmers to commit suicide. Another important study on farmer's suicide was conducted by Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai, the study commissioned under Mumbai government. The report found that indebtedness was the main culprit behind farmer's suicides.

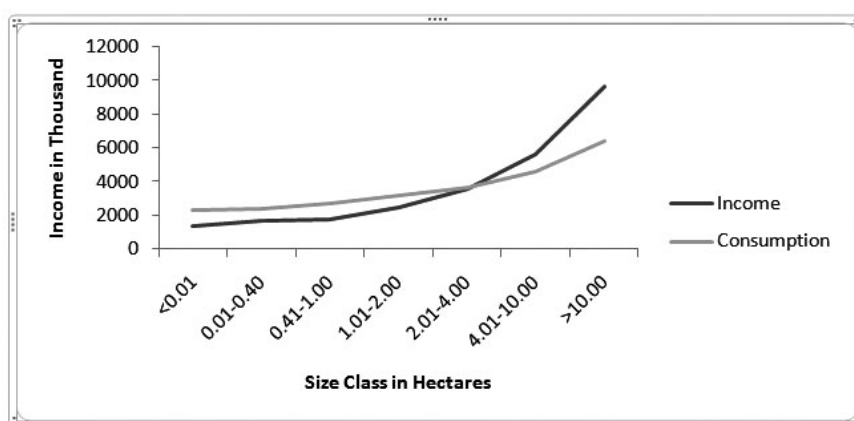


Fig.4 Income and Consumption Land Holding wise

Source: National Sample Survey, 59th round, 2003

Table: 7 Reasons for Farmers Suicide

Causes	(IN %)
Bankruptcy/Indebtedness	38.7
Farming related Issues	19.5
Family Problems	13.7
Other Causes	13.5
Illness	10.5
Alcoholic Addiction	4.1

Table 7 records and shows that apart from bankruptcy, farming related issues (19%) like pest attack, unperiodic climate changes, market fluctuations etc. reported important cause for farmers suiciding followed by family problem (14%) marked as reasons associated with farmers suicides.



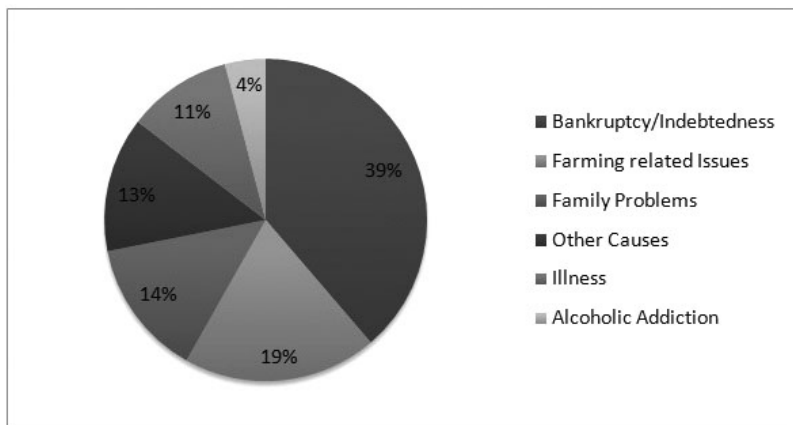


Fig.5 Reasons for Farmers Suicide

Source: National Crime Records Bureau,2015

Table: 8 No. of Indebted Farmers

State	No. of Farmer Households (millions)	No. of Indebted Farmers (millions)	% of Indebted farmers	State	No. of Farmer Households (million)	No. of Indebted Farmers (million)	% of Indebted farmers
Andhra Pradesh	60339	49493	82	Haryana	19445	10330	53.1
Tamil Nadu	38880	28954	74.5	Rajasthan	53080	27828	52.4
Punjab	18442	12069	65.4	Gujarat	37845	19644	51.9
Kerala	21946	14126	64.4	Madhya Pradesh	63206	32110	50.8
Karnataka	40413	24897	61.6	West Bengal	69226	34696	50.1
Maharashtra	65817	36098	54.8				

Source: Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers, NSSO, 59th round, 2003

At all-India level, an estimated 60.4% of rural households were farmer households and out of them 48.6% were reported to be indebted. The incidence of indebtedness was highest in Andhra Pradesh (82.0%), followed by Tamil Nadu (74.5%), Punjab (65.4%), Kerala (64.4%), Karnataka

(61.6%) and Maharashtra (54.8%). Moreover, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal each had about 50 to 53% farmer households indebted.

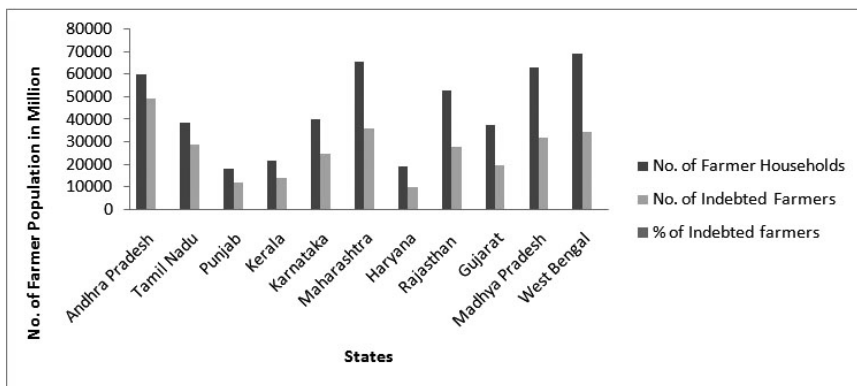


Fig.6 Indebted Farmers in Proportion of Total Farmers Population

Source: Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers, NSSO, 59th round, 2003

### 7. Lack of Awareness about Minimum Support Price (MSP)

Even after more than 40 years after its implementation, less than 25 per cent of farmers knows the MSP of crops they grow. Further, 27.83 and 30.48 (for Rabi and Kharif resp.) per cent of farmers are reported

of being unaware about the agency that procures the food grains at MSP. Except for crops like rice and wheat, quantity procured is very limited leading to low level of awareness. Even for rice and wheat, procurement takes place only in few states, and more farmers are aware of MSP in those states.

Table: 9 State wise Awareness of MSP among Farmers (%)

State	Rabi	Kharif	State	Rabi	Kharif
Nagaland	2.0	3.9	Tamil Nadu	15.1	14.6
Assam	3.9	4.1	West Bengal	19.3	15.1
Jharkhand	5.0	1.3	Kerala	19.5	22.1
J & Kr	6.0	6.5	Rajasthan	20.9	12.2
Arunachal	7.4	8.2	Tripura	21.5	26.2
Maharashtra	8.0	8.2	Uttar Pradesh	22.4	36.2
Uttarakhand	9.1	13.3	Bihar	22.8	27.6
Odisha	9.9	9.8	Madhya Pradesh	30.5	27.5
Gujarat	10.0	12.0	Telangana	30.8	25.3
Himachal	10.2	7.7	Haryana	32.1	27.8
Meghalaya	12.5	13.2	Chhattisgarh	37.1	47.2
Andhra Pradesh	14.4	6.0	Punjab	52.9	48.9
Karnataka	14.6	14.0			

Source: Situation Assessment Report on Agricultural Households, 70th round, 2013

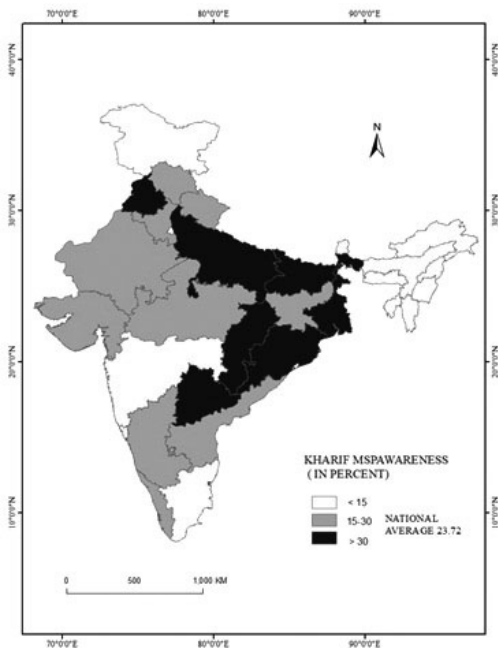


Fig.7 Level of Awareness about MSP of Kharif

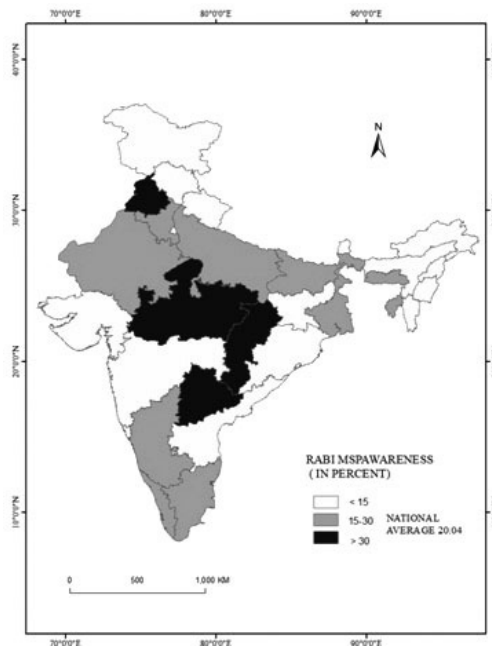


Fig.8 Level of Awareness about MSP of Rabi

Minimum Support Price of rice and wheat is known to the majority of the farmers in Haryana, Punjab and Chhattisgarh; major states from where food grains are procured for buffer stock or PDS. Knowledge of MSP of rice and wheat is less in other growing regions like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Bihar. The awareness about pulses like Tur and Gram, is very less across all states. Less than 10 per cent awareness for most the pulses is another cause of concern.(NSSO 70th round,2013)

Table: 5 Farmers Awareness about Procurement Agencies (%)

Procurement Agency	Rabi	Kharif
Food Corporation of India	18.80	19.02
Jute Corporation of India	1.02	1.35
Cotton Corporation of India	0.62	2.13
National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd.	5.24	3.30
State Food Corporation	17.74	13.23
State Civil Supplies	7.73	9.13
Others	21.03	31.36
Did not know	27.83	30.48

Source: Situation Assessment Report on Agricultural Households,70th round, 2013

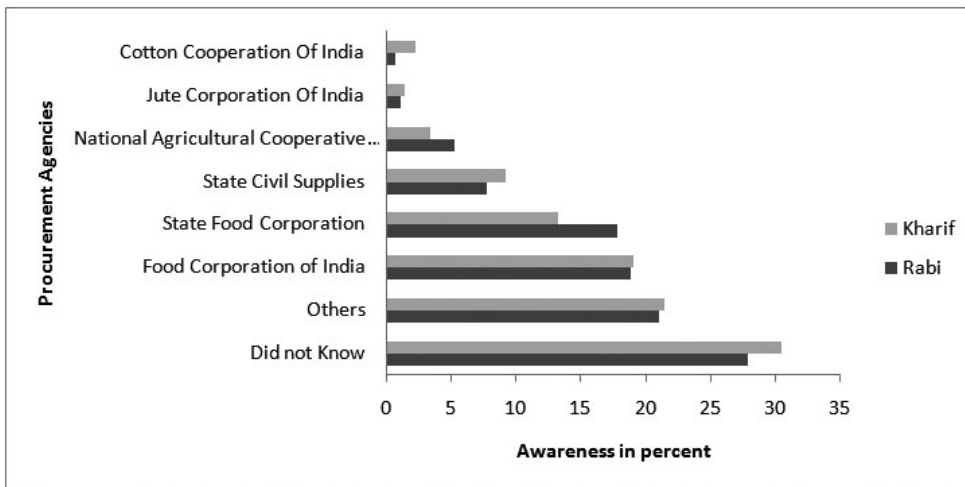


Fig.9 Farmers Awareness of Procurement Agencies

Source: Situation Assessment Report on Agricultural Households, 70th round, 2013

Out of meager proportion of farmers who were aware of MSP, 75.09 and 75.58 per cent of farmers (in Rabi and Kharif, respectively) have not sold the produce to procurement agencies. The reasons for not selling to procurement agencies are lack of procurement agencies, poor quality of crops, no local purchaser found, sometimes get better prices in market and delay in payments by procurement agencies. (NSSO 70th round, 2013)

### Suggestions

- 1) Reorganise Financial Institutions  
There is dire need of restructuring rural financial institutions and making them socially more sensitive.
- 2) Provide Low-Cost Health Care Facilities to Farmers  
According to NCRB, 2015 about 10.5% farmers committed suicide

due to illness because they are not in position to bear the cost of treatment. “When income is neither adequate nor consistent, how can one time relief measures heal the wounds of farmers?”

- 3) Need to Raise the Income of Farmers  
According to the NSSO 70<sup>th</sup> round, average monthly income of agricultural household including net receipts from cultivation, farming of animals, on-farm business etc during the agricultural year July 2012-June 2013 was estimated as Rs.6426 per month.
- 4) A Complete Special Parliament Session to discuss the Problem of Farmers.
- 5) The price of cotton is determined by the international market, for our farmers to stand somewhere in the market they need to meet international standards. That level of technology is given to the farmers then their conditions will improve. (P. Sainath)

## Conclusion

- This paper concludes that number of suicide among farmers has reached the maximum level in 2004. Considering the period of 1995-2015 as a whole, close to 85 per cent of all the farm suicides were by male farmers. The incidence of farmer's suicide is higher in the region which is cultivating cash crops.
- Indebtedness is considered the main cause of suicide.
- There is huge gap in calculating the MSP prices by state government and central government i.e Rs. 7240 at state government calculations, as against this MSP stands at Rs. 4320 according to central estimation.
- The role of moneylenders is very dominant. Even after 70 years of independence, government is unable to liberate farmers from the exploitation of moneylenders which fetches interest rate nearly 60 % to 120 % p.a from poor farmers.
- The communication of government is very poor that even after 40 years of implementation of MSP, less than 25 % farmers knew about assured prices of their crops.

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**Dr. Suman Chauhan,**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of Geography,  
Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra,  
[chauhansuman132@gmail.com](mailto:chauhansuman132@gmail.com)

**Kiran Mann**

Research Scholar  
Department of Geography  
Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra,  
[kiranmaan08@gmail.com](mailto:kiranmaan08@gmail.com)