

Gill demands bonus on wheat

Asks Centre to allow open trade

VIBHA SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

A notification issued earlier this year under the Essential Commodities Act 1955 states that any company or individual that purchases wheat beyond 10,000 tonnes during 2008-09 will furnish details to the state from where the maximum quantity has been purchased, while for purchase of wheat beyond 25,000 tonnes specifics will have to be furnished to the Central government.

In other words, private companies are free to buy wheat in Punjab and Haryana during the current rabi season and if they exceed the limit they are just required to furnish the details of the purchase to the government. It also means that farmers can sell their produce to whosoever they want.

"There is no ban on corporates in Punjab and Haryana on purchasing wheat from farmers. Farmers are at liberty to sell their produce to anyone they want - corporates or government procurement agencies. The notification is just a check measure in the interest of India's food security to ensure that the government is in the picture in case of large-scale purchases and there is no hoarding," explains an Food Corporation of India (FCI) official.

Farmers, however, disagree saying the reality is vastly different from what is being projected. According to Bharti Kisan Union (Punjab) president Balbir Singh Rajewal, no corporate will be able to make any major purchase because they have

been "instructed verbally by the government to keep away from mandis."

"No corporate will be buying, at least on large-scale. This happened last year as well. It is the farmer who will suffer because of unreasonable MSP set by the government along with such control measures," Ludhiana-based farmer Amarjit Singh rues.

Former agriculture commissioner M.S. Gill is clear that the methodology of imposing "control on open trade" in Punjab and Haryana mandis to ensure that the government procurement agencies are able to meet the target will be detrimental for the health of agriculture in the country. "This methodology will not work," he adds.

Demanding the immediate announcement of bonus to farmers before April 13, he stressed that if the government wanted to meet the procurement target during the current Rabi in Punjab and Haryana, the farmers should get the true market price.

The FCI says for Punjab the target this year is 85 lakh MT and for Haryana 40 lakh MT. It also admits that with each year wheat procurement has been coming down.

The Rajya Sabha MP said the world over the situation on wheat was critical. "Either the grain is not available or is available at a much higher price than the MSP of Rs 1,000 set by the government. If you want to feed the food deficit India then this type of control measures will not work. You cannot tell the farmer that you give your grain at a low price and expect that he will continue growing wheat for you."