

Parliamentary panel for direct payments to farmers

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 13

With one voice, all Members of the Parliament's Standing Committee on Agriculture today urged the Union Government to direct the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to make payment direct to farmers.

"The present system of routing the payment through commission agents should be immediately done away". This was clearly conveyed to Ms Radha Singh, Union Secretary for Agriculture, by Members. Those who spoke at the meeting included Mr M.S. Gill, Member of the Rajya Sabha from Punjab, Mr Deepender Hooda, MP from Haryana and Mr Shard Joshi from Maharashtra. The meeting was held under the Chairmanship of Mr Ram Gopal Yadav, MP from Uttar Pradesh.

Mr Gill told The Tribune on the phone that all Members were of the view that

there was no logic of making the payment to farmers through commission agents. "This system was highly exploitative and should be dispensed with immediately".

Mr Hooda informed the committee that the Haryana Government had given instructions to the authorities concerned not to arrest any farmer with regard to the loan case. Mr Gill and Mr Hooda urged the government to enforce the laws which were enacted following an agitation launched by late Chhotu Ram in the north India against heavy indebtedness caused because of loans advanced by "shahukars" in 1930s.

What surprised the members was the information provided by the Union Agriculture Ministry with regard to the suicides by farmers in Punjab.

"Officials told us that there were only two officially reported cases of suicide by

farmers from Punjab and there is no other information available in this regard", said Mr Gill.

The information provided by the ministry officials at the meeting with regard to suicide by farmers in Punjab is at a huge variation from cases of suicides documented by various organisations, including the Movement Against State Repression (MASR) headed by Mr Inderjit Singh Jaijee.

"I have affidavits from nearly 1,300 families of farmers, who committed suicides in certain blocks of Sangrur district from 1987 to 2005, to testify my claims regarding this tragic phenomenon", said Mr Jaijee. The BKU says that number of suicides was in the range of 13,000.

Mr Gill said he had asked officials of the Agriculture Ministry to update their information regarding farmer suicides in Punjab and to give clear picture to all concerned in this regard.