

## **A stubble to success story: How a marginal farmer in Ludhiana built a debt-free future through paddy straw management**

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



While most small and marginal farmers in Punjab, along with farm organisations, claiming they lack finances to manage stubble after paddy harvesting and demand at least Rs 5,000 per acre for the task, Amandeep Singh Mangat, a 42-year-old marginal farmer from Jatana village in Khanna tehsil, Ludhiana, has emerged as an inspiration for sustainable stubble management. Despite owning only 1.5 acres, Mangat takes an additional 30 acres on lease. He began managing stubble on just a few acres six years ago and now oversees paddy stubble management on 150 to 180 acres annually, excluding his own land. Alongside this, he operates a successful custom hiring center for agricultural machinery. Mangat's innovative approach has allowed him to maintain a debt-free farming model, a stark contrast to the many farmers in Punjab burdened by heavy debts. Amandeep saw the opportunity in 2018 when he purchased a Happy Seeder, a machine that sows wheat directly into standing paddy stubble, on a 50% subsidy under the central government's Crop Residue Management (CRM) scheme. He began by using the machine on his own fields, and by the following year, he expanded his operations to manage stubble on 150 to 180 acres by renting out his Happy Seeder to fellow farmers in his village and neighboring areas. "For the past six years, I haven't burned a single straw of stubble on my fields, and now, many farmers in my village are also managing their stubble with CRM machines," he says, adding, "Our village is almost stubble-burning free because many farmers have acquired these machines, and those who haven't,

rent them from farmers like us.” He says, “I purchased another Happy Seeder as the old one was wearing out. After that, I bought a Smart Seeder and a Super Seeder under the same scheme with a 50% subsidy provided by the government. Both the Super and Smart Seeders are used to sow wheat in fields without burning paddy stubble, which is instead incorporated into the soil.” “I charge Rs 2,200 per acre for sowing wheat with the Happy and Smart Seeders, and Rs 2,500 per acre with the Super Seeder. In just 20-30 days, I manage to cover 140 to 180 acres, earning Rs 700-800 per acre after covering the costs of diesel, maintenance, and labour,” he says. He also assisted his village’s cooperative society in acquiring these machines free of cost through a company promoting stubble management equipment. “My goal is to bring more and more fields under stubble management,” he says. Mangat’s business extends beyond wheat sowing and paddy stubble management. He runs a year-round operation, using a Tudi (straw) reaper to convert wheat straw into dry fodder for livestock. This covers 180 acres and earns him Rs 1,400 per acre after expenses. Each season, he produces around 350 trolleys of tudi, effectively managing wheat stubble on about 180 acres, as many farmers in Punjab burn wheat straw after harvesting. Then during the paddy sowing season, his other farm machines are also busy preparing fields, earning him around Rs 1,500 per acre for puddling operations before transplantation paddy nursery. In addition to stubble management, he rents out his machinery for sowing other crops and provides trolleys for transporting produce and materials to markets. His versatile equipment includes a Taralla (Big truck), further boosting his income throughout the year. What sets Amandeep apart from many farmers in Punjab is his debt-free status. “Despite owning over a dozen farming machines, including a 55 HP tractor—something that even a farmer with 10 acres might not have—and renting 30 acres at Rs 55,000 per acre annually, I manage to earn Rs 17-18 lakh per annum, and I own all my machines outright,” he says. Karun Sharma, Assistant Professor (Agricultural Engineering) and in-charge of Farm Machinery and Power Engineering at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Samrala, says, “By incorporating stubble into the soil, he has enriched his fields, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers and boosting wheat yields. He has been in contact with KVK Samrala for the past eight years, where he learned to operate stubble management machines. Farmers of not only his village, but in neighboring villages such as Begowal, Jaspalo, and Mehdood, have followed his example.” When asked about his message to other farmers, Amandeep says, “Farmers today are becoming lethargic,

but with proper planning and dedication, there's so much potential to make debt-free farming, which is rare in an agriculture-dependent state, especially for a marginal farmer like us."

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