

## Cashing in on a cash crop: Sowing seeds of success, Moga farmer hits goldmine with garlic

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



Bhupinder Singh Rode, a 41-year-old farmer from Rode village in Moga district, has found a profitable niche in garlic seed farming, a Rabi season crop. He grows garlic on just 2.5 acres but it generates more revenue than the remaining 17.5 acres where he grows traditional crops such as wheat, potatoes, mustard, and pulses. Talking about the costs and profit potential of garlic farming, he explains that growing garlic seed requires a considerable initial investment, with 4 quintals of seed (garlic cloves) costing about Rs 1.6 lakh per acre. Bhupinder spends around Rs 15,000 on labour and field preparation at the time of sowing, Rs 5,000 on fertilizers and sprays, and another Rs 15,000 on labour costs for harvesting. Additionally, Rs 26,000 is required to separate the garlic bulbs from the stem manually, as no bulb-separating machinery is available in Punjab. There are further miscellaneous costs, around Rs 25,000 per acre, for tasks like bundling 2-4 kg bunches, transportation, etc. In total, he spends approximately Rs 2.5 lakh per acre. Despite these expenses, the returns are impressive. Bhupinder's garlic fields yield 80 quintals at harvest, which reduces to 37-42 quintals after drying — a necessary step for producing quality seed. Last season, he sold his garlic seed at Rs 400-450 per kg, a very good rate, allowing him to earn Rs 16-18 lakh per acre and clear a profit of more than Rs 14 lakh per acre after expenses. Even in less favourable seasons, earnings can still reach Rs 6-7 lakh per acre after expenses—far exceeding the profits from traditional crops which he grows on 17.5 acres. In a favourable season, he earns double from

growing garlic on 2.5 acres than what he does from growing traditional crops on 17.5 acres. Sharing details about the varieties and farming techniques he uses, Bhupinder says that he grows two garlic varieties: “big-size clove” (G-386), a local variety, and “small clove” (G-323). Known for their robust flavour, these varieties are more popular than hybrid garlic, which lacks the same taste and aroma and is not healthy for consumption, he adds. For optimal yield, garlic requires seven to nine rounds of irrigation during its six-month growing cycle from November to April. Bhupinder creates around 42-43 raised beds, each 3 feet wide and 200 feet long, per acre, with small trenches between these beds filled with water for irrigation. “I use paddy straw for mulching, a technique to cover the freshly sown crops to improve water retention and control weeds,” he says, adding that garlic needs four operations of hoeing but with mulching method he does not require even to do a single operation of hoeing. Having cultivated garlic for eight years, Bhupinder says that high upfront costs, lack of machines, and absence of local processing and marketing networks make it challenging to expand operations. “If the government supported us with better machinery subsidies, marketing infrastructure, and processing facilities, we could easily find customers willing to pay a premium for high-quality garlic seed, ready-to-use paste, and peeled garlic cloves,” he says. Currently, Bhupinder handles his own sales, navigating fluctuating market prices independently. “To scale up production, I also need modern machinery. While states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat provide subsidies for garlic planters and bulb separators, Punjab lags even in making the machines available to farmers. Processing machines to produce garlic paste or packets of peeled garlic cloves, which are in demand among hotels, restaurants, and households, could also open new avenues for profit if made accessible to farmers and could enhance farmers’ profit manifold,” he says. Bhupinder expressed disappointment over the lack of government interest in supporting garlic farmers. “There is limited government outreach; in all my years of garlic farming, only Chief Agriculture Officer Amrik Singh posted in Faridkot visited us,” he says. Despite these challenges, he remains optimistic about the future of garlic seed farming in Punjab. “The land here is suitable for this crop and with the right support, garlic farming could become a major income source for small and marginal farmers, who can earn lakhs from one to two acres and that two in a single crop season. But we need the government to recognize the potential and invest in developing the infrastructure,” he says. Bhupinder has customers across Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan. “A shift from traditional crops to high-value crops can

change the fate of any farmer in Punjab, where most farmers remain stuck in the cycle of two traditional crops, leading to stagnant incomes and huge debt nets. By dedicating even a small portion of their land to high-value cash crops, they could significantly boost their earnings,” says Bhupinder, who first got the idea of growing garlic seed from social media.

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