

From debt to riches: In debt, he mortgaged wife's earrings, then he sowed 'seeds of prosperity' and now makes Rs. 25 lakh /annum

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



Manjeet Singh (40), a small farmer from Gharangna in Mansa district, was once burdened with Rs 7 lakh debt. In a bold move, he mortgaged his wife's earrings a decade ago to start a new venture on just one marla land (160th part of an acre). Today, Manjeet earns five times more from a single acre than what he earned from traditional paddy and wheat farming. He now earns Rs 20 to Rs 25 lakh annually from his 5 acres after covering all expenses.

So how did he achieve this success? The answer lies in his innovative farming practices — growing onion seeds, nurseries of onion, and seasonal vegetables, all while saving over 90% of the water he once used for paddy and wheat. “In 2013-14, I started cultivating various vegetables and onion nurseries on one marla. I needed at least Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 for cultivating such nurseries but I didn't have even that. I started mortgaging my wife's earrings, and my gamble paid off. In less than a year, I was able to recover the earrings, and in just 1.5 years, I cleared my family's debt,” he says, adding that now he earns around Rs 5 lakh per acre after covering all input costs. His 5 acres — Harjot Nursery Farm, named after his son, provides both permanent and temporary employment to 10 people, including women round the year. “The onion seed variety, X 1004, is over 100 years old and is famed for its copper colour and exceptional flavour,” he says. He explains that he grows onion on 2.5 acres for making seed. “I need 12 quintals of onions as seed for one acre, costing me around Rs

70,000. For other expenses such as labour and sprays, I spend **total** Rs 1.25 lakh per acre. From each acre, I produce 2.25 quintals of onion seed, which I sell for Rs 2.5 to Rs 3 lakh per quintal, earning around Rs 6 lakh per acre,” he says, adding that after meeting all expenses, he brings home around Rs 5 lakh from each acre dedicated to onion seed. He grows onion nursery plants on 1.5 acres, which he sells to farmers across Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan. “One acre of onion nursery is enough to plant around 35-40 acres,” Manjeet explains, adding, “To grow an onion nursery on one acre, around 32 kg of onion seed is required, costing approximately Rs 96,000. After factoring in other expenses, the total cost comes to around Rs 1.25 lakh per acre. From this, a nursery worth about Rs 6 lakh can be prepared from just one acre.” He grows onion nursery plants on 1.5 acres, which he sells to farmers across Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan. After selling the nursery by January, he reuses the land to grow onions for personal use and for producing seeds for the next season. From one acre, 150 to 200 quintals of onions can be harvested. After keeping around 35-40 quintals for seed production and personal consumption, he sells the remaining to villagers at a lower rate than the market price. He explains that if a farmer grows table onions to sell in the market, they can sell the crop for between Rs 2 to Rs 3 lakh per acre, earning a profit of Rs 1.5 to Rs 2.5 lakh per acre, depending on the crop’s yield, after covering the costs of seeds, labour, and harvesting. The seed and onion crops are harvested in May, after which he prepares the land to grow seasonal vegetable nurseries such as cauliflower, brinjal, and tomatoes, chillies, basmati and short duration paddy varieties leaving the fields vacant for a few weeks. These nursery plants sell for anything between Rs 0.50 to Rs 2 per plant, earning a substantial income from these nurseries apart from onion. Compared to traditional crops that can get a farmer less than Rs 1 lakh annually per acre after meeting the expenses even with the benefit of MSP, Manjeet’s work is far more rewarding, though labour-intensive. “There’s a lot of hard work, but the results are satisfying,” he adds. His nursery has become a hub for farmers seeking onion and vegetable plants, with most farmers visiting him to purchase seeds and nurseries. Manjeet attributes his success to attending Kisan Melas organised by Punjab Agriculture University (PAU) and the agriculture department. As a young man accompanying his father, he observed farmers showcasing innovative farming practices there. Inspired by this and recalling how his father grew vegetables on a small scale, he decided to move beyond traditional paddy and wheat farming. His efforts have not gone unnoticed — his onion seed variety, X 1004, won first prize in both Punjab and Haryana. From

one acre, 150 to 200 quintals of onions can be harvested. In 2023-24, he expanded his ventures by growing soybean seeds for the first time, receiving a tremendous response. Manjeet believes Punjab's fertile land holds great potential for innovative crops. "With the right guidance and knowledge, farmers can grow a variety of crops," he says. He has received multiple training sessions from PAU and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) in Mansa and Ludhiana. He also visits several states to gain knowledge about seeds of staple crops of the respective states to experiment in his fields by growing seeds of different crops suitable in Punjab's land. Gurdeep Singh, deputy director (Training) and (Extension Education) at KVK Mansa, says, "Manjeet is doing a remarkable work for Punjab's land and farmers. He has inspired many, and even the youth in his village have begun to follow his example. His story is paving the way for other small farmers looking for a more sustainable and profitable path." While Punjab imports most of its onions from Maharashtra and Gujarat, Manjeet's success highlights the potential for cultivating this crop locally. He adds that there is a huge demand for onion seeds in the state, which he is unable to meet.
