

## How Sahiwal cows made a Faridkot farmer turn to tradition, reap benefits

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



In the heart of Punjab, where Holstein Friesian (HF) cows dominate the dairy landscape with its high milk production, farmer Satkar Singh Romana (48) from Romana Albel Singh village in Faridkot is proving that tradition can still thrive. While the state boasts over 2.5 million cows, including around 1.4 to 1.5 million HF cows and only 40,000 indigenous Sahiwal cows, Romana found the latter to be a more profitable and sustainable choice, despite its lower milk yield. Coupled with organic farming on just 4 of his 22-acre farm, focusing on quality over quantity has enabled him not only to survive but to flourish. His journey started in 2015, when Romana entered into dairy farming and purchased three Sahiwal calves. Today, he has 18 cows, with 10 in lactation. He explains that though Sahiwal cows produce less milk compared to HF cows—around 8-9 liters daily compared to 20-25 liters, its milk is richer in fat (4-5%), making it far more valuable. He sells Sahiwal cow milk at almost double the rate of HF cow milk, and his 'Desi Ghee' is priced at Rs 2,500 per kg, driven by its purity and demand, while most of the desi ghee's are available in the market between Rs 400 and Rs 1500 per kg. Romana, who holds 22 acres jointly with his brother and Veerpal Kaur, handles the marketing of milk and Desi Ghee himself. "The demand is so huge that we can't fulfill it," he says, adding that his customer base values the quality and purity of the products. He explains that Sahiwal cows are more economical than HF cows, especially in Punjab's climate, which ranges from scorching summers to chilly winters. While HF cows suffer from heat stress and require expensive cooling systems, Sahiwals thrive in both heat and cold. The cost of maintaining

Sahiwal cows is significantly lower, as they require less high-quality feed and veterinary care. Despite lower milk production, Sahiwal cows have a longer productive life. "A Sahiwal cow can deliver up to 10 calves in her lifetime, while an HF cow usually can't go beyond 4-6," he says, adding that he sells around 750-800 liters of cow milk in the market every month at Rs 80 per kg and 5-7 kg ghee every month which comes to around Rs 72,000 to Rs 80,000. He spends Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 on fodder. On four of his 22 acres, he practices organic farming, cultivating pulses (both summer and winter seasons), sugarcane, and oilseeds. The remaining 18 acres are dedicated to conventional paddy and wheat. He sells organic jaggery and jaggery powder for around Rs 4 lakh per year, all from just one acre of sugarcane cultivation. The organic produce is in high demand, and those who buy his jaggery, Romana says, never go elsewhere. Under the guidance of Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) and the district Agriculture Department of Faridkot, his organic farming operations are flourishing. The cow dung and urine from his Sahiwal herd are integral to his organic farming practices, enriching the soil without the need for chemical fertilisers. This sustainable cycle ensures that 80% of the food his family consumes is grown on their land. Only items such as salt, tea, and a few pulses are purchased from the market. "We are sell our organic pulses around 1.5 times higher rate than the market as on an average we produce 17-18 quintals pulses and oil seeds in each Rabi and Kharif season are easily able to sell at the rate of Rs 130 to Rs 150 per kg," said Veerpal. One of the farmer's proudest achievements is being debt-free. "Farming requires hard work and personal interest. But it is rewarding if you're dedicated," Romana says. By growing organic crops and managing a herd of Sahiwal cows, he has created a profitable venture without relying on loans. His success, he says, is the result of relentless hard work and staying close to the land. "We are not only selling in the market but also meeting 80% of our household needs, which most of the farmers purchase from market despite having own fields, and investing in our future from our fields, but this is possible because we are in the fields every day, putting in the hard work." He adds, "If we grew wheat and paddy on all our 22 acres, we would be able to sell the crop at MSP for around Rs 24 to Rs 25 lakh annually. After meeting the input costs, we would earn around Rs 17 to Rs 18 lakh. But with our dairy business and four acres under organic farming, we are earning almost 60% more." "The decision to rear Sahiwal cows isn't just about making a living. It was about preserving a tradition that's as valuable as the milk and ghee I sell," he says.

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