

How a landless farmer from Punjab's Faridkot weaved a success story by growing haldi

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



Manjit Singh, a 59-year-old landless farmer from Faridkot's Kotkapura, has rewritten the story of tenant farming with his determination, innovation and quality-focused practices. Farming on nearly 10 acres of rented land, Singh has turned turmeric cultivation into a lucrative venture, earning Rs 4 lakh per acre annually, despite paying a high land rent of Rs 80,000 per acre. His success highlights the power of hard work and strategic planning in agriculture. A graduate and skilled stenographer in English, Singh's journey into farming roots in his childhood. His family once owned 2.5 acres, but due to his mother's prolonged illness, the land was sold in the mid-1980s, leaving them landless. Undeterred, Singh began working with Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) projects for cotton and Basmati. He later took up roles in multinational pesticide companies, gaining invaluable agricultural experience. In the 1990s, Singh's life transformed after he started farming by renting small holdings. By 2010, he became fully committed to farming leasing larger plots to grow turmeric and other cash crops. He describes his motto, "Haldi is Healthy," underlining his commitment to promoting health benefits of turmeric while setting a shining example for tenant farmers. Singh has been cultivating turmeric for over a decade, dedicating all four acres of rented land to this high-demand crop. Turmeric, sown in April and harvested 10 months later in February, is a low-water crop with significant yield potential. Each acre produces 90-100 quintals of raw turmeric making 15-16 quintals of turmeric powder after

processing. Singh sells his processed turmeric powder for Rs 400 per kg in retail markets and Rs 300 per kg to wholesalers. Interestingly, he relies solely on word-of-mouth promotion, consistently maintaining high-quality standards. “Turmeric and health go hand in hand. Even the word ‘haldi’ sounds like ‘healthy’,” Singh emphasises, mentioning turmeric’s historical use as a first-aid remedy and its continued presence in modern products like toothpaste, ayurvedic medicines, and beauty products. Sharing an anecdote, he recalls, “Once, an army plane crashed near our village, and we villagers rushed to the site with haldi-mixed milk to treat the injured because of its medicinal properties.” Singh cultivates both Desi turmeric on most of his land and PH-1, a variety developed by Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), using seeds he prepares himself. His turmeric powder even garners international orders, showcasing the wide reach of his enterprise. “One acre of turmeric cultivation needs about 8 quintals of seeds, costing Rs 50,000. In addition, Rs 70,000 is spent on labour, farmyard manure, harvesting, transportation and processing, while Rs 80,000 on land rent,” Singh explains. “One acre produces 15-16 quintals of processed powder, which can be sold for Rs 5.5 to Rs 6 lakh in wholesale and retail markets. After covering all expenses, the net profit is between Rs 3.5 lakh and Rs 4 lakh per acre.” Singh, however, emphasises success requires relentless effort. “I visit the field every day, closely monitoring crops and ensuring the highest quality standards are maintained,” he says. In addition, Singh cultivates garlic for seeds and consumption on another four acres. He also experiments with ginger Basmati and barley (PL-891 variety), which he considers highly nutritious. Singh further diversifies his income by producing and selling vegetable nurseries, including onions, to meet local demand. With extensive knowledge and experience, Singh has become a trusted advisor for fellow farmers, earning the nickname ‘Kheti Da Doctor (Doctor of Agriculture)’. “Whenever and wherever farmers call me, I go,” he says, reflecting his commitment towards the farming community. His expertise has been recognised by numerous awards from institutions such as PAU, Haryana Agricultural University, and IARI, Pusa. Despite all this success, Singh faces systemic challenges as a tenant farmer. “I do not qualify for government subsidies and benefits, which go directly to landowners,” he says. “Subsidies for hybrid crop varieties and other farming incentives bypass tenant farmers, even though several landowners are not engaged in farming and receive huge rents. These benefits should go to those who cultivate crops.” Highlighting the need for policy reforms, Singh urges the government to recognise tenant farmers who constitute about 20-30 per cent of Punjab’s agricultural workforce. “The

government must provide subsidies and incentives based on crops tenant farmers grow,” he says. Singh also emphasises the importance of diversified farming. “Unlike a majority farmer, including the large-scale farmers who often focus on monoculture crops like wheat and paddy and have the resources to join protests, farmers like me prioritise diversification, which is essential. We spend most of our time in fields.” “Hard work is the only key to success. I urge farmers to dedicate themselves to producing high-quality crops, and move away from large-scale wheat and paddy cultivation,” Singh says. “Punjab needs a shift toward sustainable and diversified agriculture. There is no shortage of markets, but we must think out of the box,” he says.
