

**‘My mother once lived in a house without a fan, she has an AC room today’:  
How this Punjab farmer built an empire by growing off-season crops  
Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba**



In 2017, at just 17, Harpreet, also called Happy, broke away from daily-wage work and traditional farming of wheat and paddy to try off-season vegetable cultivation on 1.3 acres, the only land not mortgaged. Despite his parents' doubts, he borrowed Rs 30,000 and grew kaddu (pumpkin), tori (ridge gourd), zucchini, and matar (green peas) in off-season windows. The gamble paid off: he earned Rs 6 lakh in 10 months from these vegetables and repaid Rs 5 lakh of the debt. "Thankfully, my uncle returned the mortgaged land without transferring it to his name," he says. By his second year, 80 per cent of the debt was gone, until Covid-19 hit. Helping hand from friend during Covid The 2020 lockdown, however, halted Harpreet's progress—vegetables rotten and unsold, and the family bartered them for wheat, but no income. But he did not give up. In late 2021, a friend, Gurpyar, leased him 0.75 acres rent-free, even covering diesel costs. Harpreet later repaid everything, except, he says, "the man's greatness." By 2023, he reclaimed all three acres and rebuilt his crumbling home. In 2024, he moved into a new 10-marla house. How could he do all this in just a few years? Off-season crops are the answer. "When the usual matar (green peas) season in Punjab ends in November, I sow them in tunnels. By early January, I start harvesting, and by that time, the market rates are excellent. I sold matar worth at least Rs 2.20 lakh from just one acre. After meeting the input cost of around Rs 50,000, I earned Rs 1.70 lakh from matar alone," Harpreet explains. "In the same field, I then sow an advance crop of lobhiya (cowpea), which is ready by March. I manage to sell around 70–80 quintals of green lobhiya at Rs 80 to Rs 100 per kg, earning a total of Rs 7–8 lakh. After expenses, I make a profit of at least Rs 4-5 lakh. After

harvesting this crop in May, I sowed lobhiya again in the same field, but this time, the yield is a little less, and the rate is also a little down, but still quite profitable,” says Harpreet. On the remaining two acres, he says he grows wheat for self-consumption on half an acre. The rest is used for vegetables like pumpkin, ridge gourd, zucchini, bitter gourd, capsicum, tomato, bitter and pickle chillies, chappan kaddu, and ladyfinger. A well-planned farming schedule key to success Harpreet says his vegetable season starts in November and goes on till the end of September on two acres, and on the remaining field, it ends in June, depending on the crop. “In June, I sow either Basmati or PR-126 paddy on one acre, which I harvest by early October. For around the next two months, October and November, I give the fields rest and prepare nurseries for the next vegetable cycle,” says Harpreet. On the economic advantage vegetables offer, he says, “Some vegetables can be harvested over eight to nine months, depending on how you manage them. Their yield is 8 to 10 times higher than that of wheat or paddy. For example, pumpkin and several other vegetables can give you around 200 to 300 quintals per acre over several months, while wheat yields only about 20 quintals per acre.” Harpreet grows most of his vegetables off-season, earning premium prices. His parents, Paramjit Kaur and Khushwinder Singh, are his backbone. While his father sells vegetables at a roadside stall near Mansa railway crossing, Harpreet makes three or four supply runs daily. His mother helps harvest the produce with a few labourers, and they even send fresh vegetables to Chandigarh by bus. Starting his day at 5 am, Harpreet uses tools like Google Pay to connect with loyal buyers. “My mother once lived in a house without a fan. Today, she has an AC room—but still prefers the fields,” he proudly says. “She even gifted me an iPhone, which I now use to make farming videos. It’s not luxury—it’s dignity.” “I gained all my knowledge by attending numerous kisan melas in Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi,” he adds. Today, Harpreet mentors others in maximising profits from small landholdings through off-season and smart vegetable farming. “I tell every farmer: give me one or two years, and I will help you become debt-free. But you must work hard.” With plans to buy more land and a vision to uplift every marginal farmer willing to learn, Harpreet is on a mission to make every small and marginal farmer in Punjab debt-free.

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