

PCS aspirant to millionaire: How a hybrid melon gave this Punjab farmer the sweet taste of success

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



He gradually began cultivating premium varieties of muskmelon and watermelon on his 22 acres. Sooner, his efforts bore fruit — literally and also financially. Now every year, between mid-February and June end, he earns Rs 36 to Rs 37 lakh. Of the total 40 acres that he owns, Gurnam dedicated 20 acres to muskmelon and 2 acres to watermelon this season. He has also taken an additional 45 acres on lease, and is currently farming mostly cash crops. His annual sales from various crops, including melons touch nearly Rs 2.5 crore, with a net profit margin of 40–45% after all expenses, depending on weather conditions and the market. He grows three seasonal crops — Kharif, Rabi, and Spring/Summer — rotating four different types of crops annually. Despite allocating only 25% of his total land to melons, they bring him the highest returns. “I sowed the crop between February 15 and March end, and harvesting starts in early May and continues till June end,” he says, adding, “With good weather and proper planning, muskmelon has proved to be a highly profitable crop.” He primarily grows the Bobby variety of muskmelon, known for its sweetness. This hybrid, developed by Taiwan-based company Known-You, is widely appreciated for its sweet taste and long shelf life. Due to its superior quality, his entire melon crop is purchased directly from the field. He uses 200-250 grams of premium muskmelon seed per acre, which cost him around Rs 22,000. Earlier, he cultivated regular varieties, but their market performance was highly unpredictable and less profitable. With hybrid varieties, however, he has found a lucrative market. The total input cost per acre, including seeds, fertilisers, mulching sheets, labour, and other expenses, ranged from Rs 70,000 to Rs 80,000. On average, he achieved a yield of 100–110 quintals per acre, selling muskmelons at Rs 25 per kg in the wholesale

market. Each fruit typically weighs between 800 grams and 1 kg, and consumers appreciate the convenient size. "The bobby variety stands out for its taste. Those who try it once tend to become regular buyers. I also experimented with Punjab Agricultural University's (PAU) variety, Punjab Amrit, and grew it on a small patch of 2-3 kanal during the current season," he says. He adds that one can sell bobby muskmelon for Rs 2.50 lakh to Rs 2.75 lakh per acre after covering all expenses, the net profit can range from Rs 1.70 lakh to Rs 2 lakh per acre. "Compared to spring maize, which is grown in the same season, muskmelon and watermelon crops require only about one-seventh of the water. I'm also planning to install drip irrigation, which will further reduce water consumption," he says, adding that rain close to harvest can cause leaf rot, so preventive, non-harmful sprays and proper drainage are crucial. For watermelon, he has experimented with visually appealing and flavourful varieties such as: Jannat (tomato red flesh, light green skin), Mannat (red flesh with dark green skin), Vishala (red inside, yellow outside), and Aaroahi (striking black skin and yellow-red flesh). "I'm a farmer's son and have been into farming since childhood, but my academic background and analytical mindset have helped me adopt scientific methods and market-driven cropping patterns," he says. In addition to melons, he also grows Spring maize on 63 acres (February to June), Potatoes (October to February), and Basmati and PR 126 (a short-duration paddy variety) from June to October on all 85 acres. These three crops together generate revenue around Rs 2 crore annually, with net returns of 40–45%, excluding melons, which earn the maximum profit. "I could expand the area under melons to increase profits, but these are risky crops, heavily dependent on weather. If the government supports farmers with marketing and risk coverage, the area under melons could increase manifold. There is a high demand for these fruits, especially in the Middle East and Europe and export can be increased manifold if the government helps in exports, maintaining a cold chain etc. If that happens then even small farmers can earn lakhs from small landholdings in a small time," he adds.