

## Tarn Taran farmer turns pandemic losses into a thriving cold-pressed venture

Courtesy: Anju Agnihotri Chhaba



Kuldeep Singh, a 50-year-old farmer from Koharka village in Punjab's Tarn Taran district, pivoted to farming after his transport business suffered heavy losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2021, he transformed his career by launching Ekam Kisan Hut Private Limited, a venture focused on producing cold-pressed food products. Today, Singh's enterprise not only secures fair prices for farmers but also promotes crop diversification and self-sufficiency. Singh's company processes wheat, maize, gram flour (besan), mustard and coconut oils, and spices like turmeric using cold-press techniques. Unlike the more common hot-press methods, cold pressing preserves the nutritional value of the produce, offering consumers healthier alternatives. "Cold-press methods retain fibre and nutrients, unlike hot-press processes, which prioritise quantity over quality," Singh explained. For instance, cold-pressed wheat flour takes longer to grind—producing 30 kilograms per hour compared to 100 kilograms per hour in conventional mills—but the result is far superior in taste and nutrition. Similarly, his cold-pressed mustard oil yields only 20 litres per 100 kilograms of mustard seeds, compared to 35 litres through hot pressing, but offers unparalleled quality. Singh began his venture with three partners in December 2021, investing ₹8 lakh in machinery, including a flour mill, oil extraction unit, and spice-grinding equipment. By purchasing crops from farmers at the [Minimum Support Price \(MSP\)](#)—even when market rates drop—Ekam ensures fair prices. The company also shares 13% of its profits with farmers, creating a

collaborative model that has attracted around 90 members and nearly 200 farmers. “Our goal is to build a system where one farmer’s crop fulfils another’s needs,” Singh said. “This ensures fair prices, reduces dependency, and fosters sustainable practices.” He added that farmers often sell their produce raw at mandis, incurring losses, while corporates profit by processing and packaging the same crops for retail sale. “By processing and marketing their own crops, farmers can reverse this trend and earn significantly more,” Singh said. Ekam encourages farmers to diversify their crops, dedicating portions of land traditionally used for wheat and paddy to grow pulses, spices, organic items, and oilseeds. Singh emphasised that diversification not only boosts earnings but also helps address Punjab’s pressing water crisis. Despite the potential of such models, Singh noted challenges in convincing farmers to collaborate. “When we present our model, some focus more on what we might gain instead of realising their own benefits,” he said. However, Singh remains optimistic, recalling how similar ideas were discussed during the 2021 farmers’ protests against the controversial farm laws. Ekam Kisan Hut’s products have carved out a niche in the market. Cold-pressed wheat flour is priced at ₹35-40 per kilogram, slightly higher than hot-pressed flour at ₹26-27, but the superior quality justifies the cost. Similarly, Ekam’s mustard oil, priced at ₹250 per litre, and coconut extra-virgin oil, sold at ₹400-500 per litre, outperform hot-pressed counterparts in both quality and nutritional value. “Once customers taste our cold-pressed products, they never go back to regular ones,” Singh said, adding that their rates are competitive within the cold-pressed segment and often lower than similar premium products. Agriculture Development Officer Reenu Viridi, who recently visited Ekam Kisan Hut, lauded Singh’s initiative. “Such models should be adopted statewide to provide nutritious food to consumers and improve farmers’ earnings,” she said. Summing up his mission, Singh remarked, “Farmers will never get a fair price for their crops unless they enter healthy processing and marketing of their products. Ventures like Ekam Kisan Hut show that hard work, unity, and trust among farmers can create a new era of farming in Punjab.”

\*\*\*\*\*