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Labour shortage to delay crop harvest

BY PARSHANT KRAR, SUTANUKA GHOSAL & MADHVI SALLY, ET BUREAU | APR 09, 2020, 08.31 AM IST

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Acute scarcity of **labour** has posed a serious challenge to crop procurement and is threatening to leave a lasting impact on agriculture as it will delay the harvest of winter-sown crops, particularly wheat, and is delaying the planting of the next crop.

Apart from procurement, planting of cotton and summer 'moong' pulses is a challenge for **farmers** in Madhya Pradesh, UP, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan because of concerns of labour shortage as well as availability of fertilizers and seeds.

Labour scarcity is also hurting farms in UP, which is a big supplier of farm hands to Punjab and Haryana. "Apart from threat of getting infected by disease the fear of getting quarantined is playing big on minds of workers who are not willing to move away from their villages," said Farhan Hamed, labour contractor based in district Bahraich.



Labour scarcity is also hurting farms in UP, which is a big supplier of farm hands to Punjab and Haryana.

"Despite loss of work most workers are determined to stay put in their villages and sustain their livelihood on government welfare scheme that have widened their network post outbreak of pandemic," Hamed said.

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In the absence of adequate labour, farmers are scrambling for harvesting machines. "There is dire shortage of combine harvesters as the number of machines that use to come from other states have come down due to lockdown," a Bundelkhand based farmer said.

This will hamper procurement operations that needs labour for loading, cleaning and packaging. "Just the permanent workers are available and there is no scope of workers coming back during the current procurement season," Pawan Garg, president, Hisar APMC Grain Mandi.

Wages are already rising. "In this situation there will be a scramble for available labour and wages are bound to rise to Rs 600-700 from Rs 400-500," Garg said.

Farmers are struggling to plant crops. "There is a 50% labour shortage to plant moong and family member have joined in to help in planting of moong. If the lockdown continues, I am concerned about planting cotton, chillies, maize and arhar," said Kedar Sirohi, a farmer and member, Agriculture advisory council, Madhya Pradesh. He said planting of papaya and vegetables would also be hit.

Experts said government welfare measures may keep labourers in their villages.

Atul Chaturvedi, director and president of the Solvent Extractors' Association of India said in the short run industries will suffer due to labour shortage.

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