

Punjab sees increase in private wheat purchase

Farmers say they have not received much financial benefit

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As the wheat procurement continues in the key grain-producing State of Punjab, the private purchase in the ongoing season has been significantly higher than the last year, even as farmers assert that, they have not reaped much financial benefit.

Agriculture officials, farmers and traders say that expectation of a rise in the export of wheat and fetching a better price following the worldwide shortage of the grain on account of the Russia-Ukraine war has been a key reason behind the rise in the purchase by private traders.

Till April 25, during the ongoing Rabi Marketing Season (RMS), the markets (*mandis*) in Punjab have seen an arrival of a little over 91 lakh tonnes of wheat, out of which close to 86 lakh tonnes have been purchased by government agencies. Over 4.6 lakh tonnes have been purchased by private buyers this year (2022-23) as against 2,376 tonnes during the corresponding period of 2021-22.

Punjab Agriculture Department Director Gurvinder Singh on Tuesday told *The Hindu* that private traders have been prompted to buy more wheat from farmers as the price of wheat at the international level has shot up and is expected to rise due to the ongoing conflict between Russia-Ukraine. "On expectations of global wheat price to move further, the private



A worker sorting wheat grains at a market. ■ FILE PHOTO

traders are buying more wheat this year from farmers mostly at the MSP (₹2,015 per quintal). We don't have any report that farmers are being offered a very high rate above the MSP for their produce by private buyers," said Mr. Singh.

Punjab is expecting a wheat production likely to touch 150 lakh tonnes. Out of this, according to government estimates around 110 lakh tonnes of wheat would arrive in the market. Wheat was sown on around 35 lakh hectares in the State.

Bumper harvest

Punjab is expecting a bumper wheat harvest crop this season with production likely to touch 182 lakh tonnes. Out of this, according to government estimates around 130 lakh tonnes of wheat would arrive in the market. Wheat was sown on over 35.02 lakh hectares in the State.

Mulraj Gupta, president of Arthiya Association, Patia-

la new grain market said that even though private buyers are buying more wheat this season, they are not purchasing the crop at a higher price than the MSP. "Buying by private traders has been more this year against the last year, but they are largely paying farmers the MSP and not beyond that price. Maybe in a few cases, the private buyers have paid ₹5- ₹10 per quintal over the MSP," he said.

Amarinder Singh, a farmer in Ludhiana's Lakhawal village, who recently harvested his wheat crop in 18 acres, said he sold his entire crop to government agencies as private buyers were not offering a price over and above the MSP.

"Private traders had been offering to buy wheat at the MSP only, nothing beyond that. Although the local flour mills do pay around ₹25-50 per quintal above the MSP, but then most of them buy only a limited quantity," he said.