

# The Successful Punjab Sugarcane Farmers' Protest

The situation of sugarcane farmers of Punjab and Haryana is similar to that of sugarcane farmers across the country. In Punjab, sugarcane prices have not changed much in the last four years. Last year the government there increased the price by just Rs. 10 per quintal from Rs. 300 to Rs. 310/quintal whereas it is Rs. 358 in the adjacent Haryana. This situation forced the farmers of Punjab to go for protests.

Representatives of various farmers' unions while protesting against the three black farm laws under the banner of Samyuth Kisan Morcha also met the concerned Punjab Minister on 18<sup>th</sup> August to apprise him over the price of sugarcane. As no positive response came from the government, they gave a call for indefinite protest on the GT Road.

On 20<sup>th</sup> August, around 25,000 farmers from the sugarcane belt-Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Pathankot districts- blocked the GT Road and declared that they will vacate the road only when their demands are met. The same day Punjab CM has announced that Rs. 15 will be increased per quintal. This further embroiled the already anger farmers. By the evening they picketed on the nearest railway track, blocking the railway line. They didn't heed to the officers who came there to vacate them but rather intensified their protests. At last the government came down and declared the support price as Rs. 350/- based on experts' calculations. Farmers showed them the actual production costs as Rs. 470/- . The experts who came there on the side of government agreed that the calculations are correct but expressed their inability. Then the peasantry gave a call for indefinite state bandh.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August the government gave in and agreed for a price of Rs. 360/- per quintal with Rs. 50/- increase every year. Also it agreed to pay the dues towards mills amount of Rs. 158 crores within 15 days. Farmers felt this as a victory for them and for their struggles.

Immediately the Centre made a ridiculous announcement – that it increases the support price [FRP] of sugarcane to Rs. 290/- per quintal based on its calculation of production costs at Rs. 150/-. This, while the same BJP government in UP is providing Rs 315/- per quintal.

Governments of different states may make different statements on agriculture. But what matters are the statements made by farmers, the true producers. The information in the following table provided by a Punjab farmer to 'Class Struggle' shows the real costs. It comes out that Rs. 470/- is the actual cost of their production.

The costs of cultivating sugarcane in Punjab on an annual lease basis per acre:

Item	Cost in Rs.
Land Lease	42,000
DAP, 3 bags	3,600
Manure/Fertilizer	5,500
Urea - 5 bags	1,330
Seed sugarcane (35 q/acre)	13,020
Machinery, Diesel Costs	7,000
Hired labour	25,250
Pesticides	3,500
Herbicides	2,360
Interest on loans (from banks&private lenders)	3,200
Cost on Bore wells	3,200
Sugarcane Transportation	1,000
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>1,10,960</b>

The average acreage of sugarcane is 300 for quintal, if we add a minimum of 20% to compensate for any losses, the production cost turns out to Rs. 470/- per quintal. If we use the Swaminathan Commission's formula for arriving at the support prices, which adds 50% to the production costs, the support price per quintal turns out to be Rs. 705/-. But what they are getting is not even half of this. This is the anguish of the farmers.

The protest of these Punjab sugarcane farmers and the small victories they achieved prove one thing - whatever be the crop and whatever be the region, famers will get the minimum support price only through continued united struggles.