

STUBBLE BURNING INCIDENTS COME DOWN

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Agriculture Issues and related constraints

Smouldering issue:The number of fire events peaked from mid-October till the first week of November, 2019.

The number of stubble-burning incidents in 2019 were the least in four years, the Economic Survey says.

According to satellite data, there were 61,332 instances of stubble-burning in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh between October and November, 2019. There were 75,532 instances in 2018, 88,948 in 2017 and 127,774 in 2016, according to data sourced from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Serious concerns

“With various efforts, overall, the total number of burning events recorded a significant reduction. However, the continuation of this practice by farmers is reported every year starting winter, and the serious concerns about its impact on air quality are raised,” the Survey noted. The number of fire events peaked from mid-October till the first week of November, 2019. This led to an increase in the levels of particulate matter in Delhi in October and November, compared with September 2019. In September, the highest levels of PM10 and PM2.5 were 134 microgram and 80.34 microgram respectively. In October, the highest level of PM10 was 384 and the highest level of PM2.5 was 306. In November, PM10 crossed 550 and PM2.5 crossed 510. PM10 and PM2.5 started falling in December 2019 and the lowest levels recorded of PM10 and PM2.5 were 188 and 153 respectively, the chapter emphasised.

The pollution levels spike when farmers in these three States burn the residue after harvesting paddy to clear the fields of the summer harvest and make way for wheat sowing. The smoke from these fires travels to Delhi, leading to a gaseous cocktail that causes air quality to plummet.

Ban not enforced

There has been a ban on burning this agricultural residue, but the State authorities have not been able to entirely stop it.

Agriculture conservation should be promoted with “low lignocellulosic” crop residues such as rice, wheat and maize. Crop residue-based briquettes ought to be encouraged and thermal power plants in the vicinity ought to be encouraged to undertake co-firing of crop residues with coal, the Survey noted.

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