

INCOME SCHEME TO COVER FEWER FARMERS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Agricultural Finance & Insurance

Safety assured: The scheme gives land-owning farmer families an annual sum of Rs. 6,000. File Photo D_K_Kishan Rao

One year after the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, the Centre has revised the farmer income support scheme's beneficiary target down to just under 12 crore from 14 crore.

In fact, empirical evidence suggests that saturation level will reach around 10 crore families. So far, almost 8.5 crore farmers have benefited.

Speaking at an event to mark the first anniversary, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar pointed to West Bengal and Bihar as the major culprits for the lag. While the West Bengal government has refused to join the scheme at all, the Bihar government's approach of waiting for applicants means more than 60% of potential beneficiaries are yet to register.

The scheme, which gives land-owning farmer families an annual sum of Rs. 6,000, was launched in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha election, and new registrations have slowed after the election.

The Centre's beneficiary estimate of 14 crore was initially based on the number of landholdings recorded in the agricultural land census.

The revised estimate of 11.97 crore is based on the 9.84 crore who have registered themselves on the portal so far (although only 8.45 crore have received money so far), plus an estimated 2.13 crore beneficiaries left out, mostly from West Bengal and Bihar. However, "empirical evidence suggests that saturation level will reach around 10 crore farmer families," according to a presentation made at the event.

'No reply from Bengal'

Mr. Tomar pointed out that of West Bengal's 70 lakh farmers, 10 lakh have already self-registered through an online process. However, they cannot receive the cash benefit until the database is verified by the State government, he said.

"Central government officials have approached the State government about this many times and I have also written to the Chief Minister twice, urging the State to join the scheme. But we have not received any reply as yet," Mr. Tomar said, pointing out the State's economy would stand to benefit with a potential annual payout of Rs. 4,000 crore if all the State's farmers registered themselves for the scheme.

In Bihar, the potential beneficiaries number 158 lakh. However, only 59.7 lakh farmers have uploaded their data on the PM-KISAN portal so far. "The State has adopted a beneficiary application-based approach, which is delaying identification and upload," said the presentation.

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