

# CENTRE TO HELP SET UP PADDY STRAW PELLET UNITS TO ARREST STUBBLE BURNING

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A farmer burning stubble in a field near Amritsar.AFP/AFP

With winter approaching and instances of stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana rising, the Union Environment Ministry announced a Rs. 50 crore scheme on Thursday to incentivise industrialists and entrepreneurs to set up paddy straw pelletisation and torrefaction plants.

Paddy straw made into pellets or torrefied can be mixed with coal in thermal power plants. This saves coal as well as reduces carbon emissions that would otherwise have been emitted were the straw burnt in the fields, as is the regular practice of most farmers in Punjab and Haryana.

New units set up after Thursday would be eligible for government funding in the form of capital to set up such plants. The estimated cost of setting up a regular pelletisation plant, which can process a tonne per hour, is Rs. 35 lakh. Under the scheme, the Centre will fund such plants to a maximum of Rs. 70 lakh subject to capacity.

Similarly, the cost of establishing a torrefaction plant is Rs. 70 lakh. Under the scheme, it is eligible for a maximum funding of Rs. 1.4 crore. Torrefaction is costlier but can deliver a product whose energy content is much higher and theoretically substitute for more coal in a power plant.

## One-time measure

The Centre has underlined that this would be a “one-time only” scheme and regular pellet plants would be eligible for Rs. 40 crore of the overall pie.

Every year, about 27 million tonne of paddy straw is generated in Punjab and Haryana. The problem is that about 75% or 20 million tonne is from non-basmati rice that cannot be fed to cattle because of its high silica content. “About 11 million tonne can be managed in the field and the rest is usually burnt which adds to the air pollution crisis in Delhi,” said MM Kutty, Chairman, Commission Air Quality Management (CAQM), at an event here to announce the scheme.

Through the years the government has attempted to dissuade farmers from burning straw through penalising them as well as incentivising them.

“The Environment Ministry has so far been seen as an organisation that stops everyone. But I’d like to congratulate the Central Pollution Control Board for devising this scheme that will help convert waste to wealth and provide job opportunities to our rural youth in Punjab and Haryana,” said Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav.

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