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FARM INCOME FELL IN FOUR STATES: PANEL

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Battling the odds:In Jharkhand, a farm family's average monthly income fell from Rs. 7,068 to Rs. 4,895.PTI-

The Centre vowed to double farmers' income between 2015 and 2022, but by the midway point, farm families in Jharkhand actually saw their average monthly income drop by about 30%.

In its report on the demand for grants for agriculture submitted to the Lok Sabha on Thursday, a parliamentary standing committee asked why the Centre remained a "mute spectator" while farmers' income declined in four States between 2015-16 and 2018-19. Over the same period, nationwide farm income rose 27%, which is still well short of the trajectory needed to achieve the goal of doubling income this year.

The committee recommended that the Department of Agriculture and Family Welfare "should formulate a special team to figure out the reasons for falling farmers' income in those States and take some course corrective measures so that the doubling of farmers income is not lost sight of."

The Doubling Farmers' Income (DFI) committee had calculated the 2015-16 baseline by extrapolating the survey data of the National Statistical Organisation from 2012-13, calculating that the national average monthly income of a farm family in that year was Rs. 8,059. By the time the next NSO survey was conducted in 2018-19, monthly income had risen 27% to Rs. 10,218.

In Jharkhand, however, a farm family's average income fell from Rs. 7,068 to Rs. 4,895 over the same period. In Madhya Pradesh, it fell from Rs. 9,740 to Rs. 8,339, in Nagaland, from Rs. 11,428 to Rs. 9,877, and for Odisha, it dipped marginally from Rs. 5,274 to Rs. 5,112.

When asked what steps the department had taken to increase farmers' income in these States, it responded that "input in this regard will need to be sought from the concerned State governments", a reply that the parliamentary panel termed "lackadaisical".

The panel also noted that while the department's budgetary allocation may have risen in absolute terms, it has consistently declined in percentage terms during the second term of the Narendra Modi-led government. In the 2019-20 Budget, announced just before Lok Sabha polls, the department received 4.7% of total allocations. That proportion has dropped every year since, and in 2022-23, the department's Budget accounted for only 3.1% of the total.

"Keeping in mind the vital role played by agriculture in overall economy of the country, the committee recommend the department to take up the issue of decline in percentage budgetary allocation in favour of the department out of Central Pool with the Ministry of Finance and ensure that this declining trend is reversed or at least gets discontinued from the next Budget onwards," said the panel.

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