

No clarity on building grain storage, state in a fix

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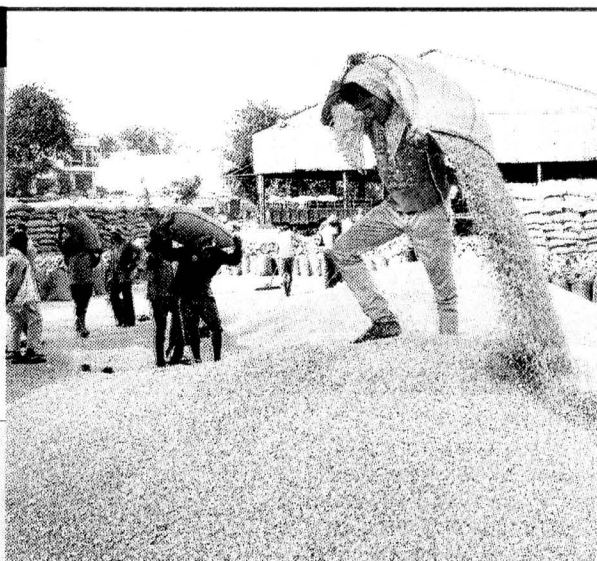
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Punjab's bid to create scientific storage space for lakhs of tonnes of foodgrain has run into "policy paralysis". With the Centre's Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) unable to come up with a policy on building silo storages, the state is in a dilemma on how to build the storage space for grain, needed most urgently.

As a result, the state has now sought permission to go in for normal covered storage to bring down damage caused to foodgrain procured for the Centre and stored in open spaces. The state urgently needs to build 80 lakh tonnes of storage space, in addition to the 150 LT of storage space available in the state.

Each year, foodgrain procured from farmers go waste because of unscientific storage. Data available with The Tribune shows that the state has seen a sharp increase in damage to foodgrain — 8 tonnes in 2016-17, 211 tonnes in 2017-18 and 318

HUGE STOCK
150 lakh tonnes space available as of now
80 lakh tonnes space needed urgently
240 LT grain added to stock every year
100 LT sent to recipient states each year
Recurring loss
8 tonnes grain damaged in 2016-17
211 tonnes in 2017-18
318 tonnes in 2018-19



tonnes in 2018-19. Though officially the state blames this damage on the slow movement of grain by the Centre from Punjab, the fact remains that had the grain been stored in silos, damage would have been minimal.

KAP Sinha, Principal Secretary, Food and Supplies, told The Tribune that each year, 240 LT of foodgrain (120 LT wheat and 120 LT rice milled from 180 LT pad-

dy) is added to the foodgrain stock of the Centre, lying in Punjab. "The amount of grain evacuated or sent to recipient states each year is 100 LT. Considering that the available covered storage space is just 150 LT and 80 LT space is created as open and plinth storage, we need to increase our covered storage capacity, ideally silo storage. The FCI has allowed Punjab to build 20

LT of storage. But with the policy on silo storage capacity building by the Centre not yet decided, Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh has sought the Prime Minister's intervention to construct covered godowns of 20 LT capacity," he said.

Punjab had earlier allotted contracts to build silos at 26 sites, but the project was scrapped last year. Pungrain, the agency for getting the

silos built, had decided against going ahead with the project. The Comptroller and Auditor General had pointed anomalies, saying that Cabinet approval was obtained for a design, build, operate and transfer model, but contracts were awarded for design, build, operate and own model. By the time the contracts were cancelled, those awarded contracts had already started work and invested crores of rupees.

Now, several of these concessionaires are up in arms. Sarvdeep Singh, director, Malbros Private Limited, says he has invested a huge sum to build silos at Faridkot and Talwandi Bhai. "The government first allotted contracts in December 2016, and in May 2018, and without any intimation, the contracts were cancelled. The government can make a new model and we are ready to accept smaller rents. Only scientific storage capacities should be built. We have been left in the lurch by the government, and are victims of change in political power."