

For 2 yrs, no relief for farmers in 'sandwich zone'

While farmers in Punjab have been agitating for guaranteed MSP, tillers whose farms are in the 'sandwich zone' between the border fence and actual international border with Pakistan have another grouse — they haven't received their promised annual inconvenience compensation of Rs 10,000 an acre for the last two years.

The state and Centre are supposed to share the compensation burden equally, but New Delhi releases fresh payouts only after a utilisation certificate has been submitted by the state for the earlier released amount. Sukhjinder Singh of Rajamohtam in Ferozepur district has more than 2 acres in the zone beyond the fence. He

hasn't received his compensation for 2022 and 2023. "There are many like me in nearby villages. We'd last got this compensation in 2022, after a four-year gap and following protests," he said.

Sukhjinder's family harvested wheat a few weeks back on the restricted side; they grow chillies on the other side of the fence. An 11-foot-wide village strip on the Indian side is the BSF patrolling zone. Crops in the restricted zone can't be above 4ft high for security reasons. In Hazara Singh Wala village in Mamdot block, former panchayat secretary Sandeep Kumar said farmers "have to stick to wheat, paddy and chilli and bear with a limited produce." The state and Centre have

been sitting on their land-acquisition request for decades. Fazilka and Ferozepur Border Area Sangharsh Committee district president Ramesh Vadhera (67) said: "The land along the zero line in Ferozepur is worth between Rs 10-12 lakh an acre, but for two years, there's been no compensation for tilling it."

"We had released inconvenience compensation for 2022. Many farmers in Guru Har Sahai tehsil have received it and the process is close to completion in Ferozepur. This district has 3,000 acres beyond the barbed-wire fence. The office is yet to receive the compensation money for 2023, so far," a senior official said on condition of anonymity.

— Sanjeev Verma