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No govt support, Chamba's Gujjars struggle to sell milk

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Thanks to a lack of government support, the Gujjars living in Chamba district are struggling to sell milk produced by their cattle. They are left with no choice but to sell milk at throwaway prices or its byproducts, like khoa, in the local market.

Uppinder Kumar, Assistant Director in the Department of Animal Husbandry in Una, told The Tribune that he had collected milk samples from Gujjars in the Chowari area of Chamba district and got them tested at an IDMA lab in Panchkula. The test results indicated that buffalo milk was free of all kinds of antibiotics and pesticides.

He said, “Chamba district is home to nearly 40,000 tribal Gujjars, an ethnic group rearing buffaloes. As Gujjars lead a nomadic life, the community remains mostly uncovered by government development schemes. Gujjars mostly depend on the sale of milk and other dairy products to earn their daily bread. They go door to door every morning to sell their products. But since the prices of their products are not fixed, they end up incurring losses.”

Uppinder said, “As the quality of milk produced by buffaloes owned by the Gujjars is good, it could fetch high prices if an agency procures and markets it. Their milk products are also free of antibiotics and pesticides.”

Since the Gujjars in Chamba district often struggle to sell milk, many of them convert it into khoa, which is used as an ingredient in many Indian sweets, and sell it to tourists. A communal conflict involving Gujjars recently has also affected their milk sales.

Animal Husbandry Department experts say that buffalo milk of local Gujjars is organic in nature but they do not get good prices for it in the absence of a government scheme to support them.

Meanwhile, the government has announced a scheme to purchase buffalo milk for Rs 100 per litre and cow milk for Rs 80 per litre.