

## Why marginal and small farmers are so attached to their land?

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In the post liberalization era after 1991, a consistent effort is on to shape the national thinking in way that the solution of the problems of small and marginal farmers is impossible while keeping them in agriculture. There is a strong need to push and/or pull out these unviable farmers out of agriculture and pave the way for commercialization and corporatisation of agriculture. But despite these loud talks, the small and marginal farmers are in no mood to move out of agriculture rather they are resisting any effort to push them away from their land. The present phase of land acquisition in Punjab, Haryana and West Bengal for setting up special economic zones (SEZs) and for other public purposes is being opposed tooth and nail by these farmers. Why it is so? Why are the farmers not ready to sell their land even if the compensation being paid is higher than the prevailing market price of their land? Why farmers are even reluctant to lease out land on long-term basis to corporate firms?

Economic literature tells us that the movement of labour away from agriculture to other sectors is determined by the push as well as the pull factors or a combination of both (Basant, 1993; Chadda, 1993; Eapen, 1995). In the absence of strong economic pull factors, there is a trade off between the push factors and the hold back factors. The main hold back factors are the continuous and assured (though meagre) year-to-year income, assured employment and the possibility of enterprise symbiosis *i.e.* the integration of dairy enterprise with crop production to enhance income and employment. The farmers earn the farm business income by working on farm which includes the imputed land rent for their owned land, wages for the labour put on by them and their families on their own farm and a surplus over and above these two. A farmer can be parted away from land by three ways. First his land is acquired for public purposes and compensation is paid. In this case, the big

question is that what a farmer will do with the compensation amount and where he and his family will work and earn for their labour? Second, a farmer sells his land and the big question is the same as stated above. Thirdly the farmer leases out his land on short or long-term basis and the question of getting or not getting employment somewhere else still stands.

Let us discuss the first two ways where the big question is that what the farmer will do with the money he will receive either as compensation for acquired land or by voluntarily selling land. The farmer who sells land or his land is acquired for public or other purposes has two options before him. First the money received can be invested in purchasing land somewhere else away from the periphery of cities/SEZs locations. It is perceived that the farmer can purchase bigger piece of land in this way, as the land is cheaper at far away regions. But it has been observed in Punjab that an increase in the price of land in cities and their peripheries has led to sharp increase in the price of agricultural land even in the remotest areas. Therefore, the farmers find a little scope of increasing their land ownership by shifting in remote areas rather perceive the social and economic displacement costs too high. Second option before the farmers is that the sum received can be invested in some business or setting up of other enterprises. The possibility of doing so is very limited because these farmers lack capabilities due to low economic and social access to education and training. In a study on marginal and small farmers (Singh, 2006), out of 240 sample farmers only 63 were matriculates, 51 were middle pass, 46 attained the education up to primary level and remaining were illiterate. The third option is that the farmers lease out land on short or long term basis and get employment somewhere else. A general perception is that the prevailing tenancy laws are in favour of land takers and the farmer, if leases out land,

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