



Enforcing a ban will not end the menace of stubble burning, say researchers

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'Farmers must be educated on its monetary costs'

- Only educating farmers about the monetary costs of burning stubble can address the environmental crisis triggered every year in Punjab, says a team of Swiss and Indian researchers who interviewed 600 farmers over two years.
- Burning stubble, the rice chaff left over after harvesting, is linked to winter air-pollution in the State as well as down-wind Delhi.
- According to the team, the government's efforts — earmarking funds for specialised farming equipment (for straw management) or enforcing the State-led ban on the practice — are unlikely to solve the problem.
- Farmer cooperative groups — a key link between the government and farmers — ought to be playing a more active role in educating farmers, say key authors associated with the study.

Cheap solution

- On average, about 20 million tonnes of straw are generated in Punjab, and they barely have two to three weeks to dispose them of and prepare the fields for the next crop.
- Hence the popularity of deploying stubble-burning as a quick and cheap solution.
- For about a decade now, the Delhi and the Centre have held this practice responsible for the abysmal air quality in the capital in winter.
- In 2013, the National Green Tribunal issued a directive to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh asking them to ban stubble burning.
- The Environment Ministers of these States as well as top officials at the Centre declared a "zero tolerance" policy on the burning of

stubble, which has been estimated to contribute anywhere from 7% to 78% of the particulate matter-emission load in Delhi during winter.

Mixed results

- However, the success of these efforts has been mixed, even though stubble-fires in 2018 were fewer than in 2017 and 2016, according to satellite maps by independent researchers.

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