

Roadblocks to Climate Action: The Case of Indian Agriculture

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FARMER PROTESTS CONTINUE IN INDIA



INDIA NEWS

Haryana farmers unite to challenge ban on stubble burning, to burn paddy waste after protest in Kurukshetra

Farmers are alleging that the government's decision to ban burning of paddy stubble has resulted in a labour crisis as many farmers are avoiding harvesting with combine harvesters.

 Hindustan Times, Kurukshetra/Karnal | By [Neeraj Mohan](#), Kurukshetra/karnal
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"We will bring 50 tractor-trolleys laden with paddy waste and take a round of the city to try and find a buyer. If we fail, we will burn it," Haryana BKU president Ratan Mann told Hindustan Times.(HT Photo)



Zero emission targets

- Over 100 countries have announced such targets by 2050
- Many Fortune 500 firms have joined them
- Zero emission in the electricity sector by 2035
- Phasing out of internal combustion engine
- Very little talk about carbon footprint of the agriculture sector

Why study agriculture?

- 18% of greenhouse gas emissions
- Challenges of feeding the growing global population
- Urban-rural split on environmental issues
- Developing countries: most labor force employed in agriculture
- Water crisis will severely hit rural areas
- But moving away from water-intensive crops is politically difficult

Historical Context of the Green Revolution

- 1950s and 1960: food scarcity
- Garret Hardin: Lifeboat ethics
- Reliance on food aid (PL 480)
- Green Revolution leads to massive increase in food production
- India emerges as a food exporter

Green Revolution

- High yielding seeds + fertilizers + water + pesticides
- Massive government subsidies
- 2 crop strategy: reliance on ground water
- Free electricity
- Diesel subsidy
- Minimum support price (MSP) exceeds global price

Climate consequences

- Carbon-intensive method
- Stubble burning
- Massive drop in water table

Government response

- Crop diversification, esp moving away from rice
- But farmers do not want it
- Reinstate diesel subsidy
- Free electricity
- No stubble burning laws

Stubble burning

- Rice farming causing water table depleting.
- Hence a law to delay planting to take advantage of the monsoons
- But this means a shorter time to harvest rice and plant wheat
- Chey way to clear the stubble: burn it
- Massive air pollution in November and December
- Farmers oppose anti-burning laws

Lessons

- Climate issues are intensely partisan everywhere
- Agriculture is a sacred sector across the world. Punjab farmers are among the richest in the country
- “Climate transition” of agriculture will be a greater challenge than fossil fuels
- Not clear which technology will replace Green Revolution package and will it be able to feed the growing population
- International public opinion can confuse issues