SOLITARY REAPER

MACHINE SCENE After combine-harvesters, improved saw reapers make business sense for farmers, but for the rural labourer, agri technology is equal to no work

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MANSA: It's been a productive wheat harvest for the employing investor but Hodi village daily wage works.

Chet Ram finds himself out of sorts.

The "advancement in harvesting technology" has left him and many other rural labourers in the lurch.

"The farmer is buying wheat at Rs 1,500 per quintal. But he does not employ the labourer to harvest it," says Chet Ram.

A few years ago, he was working as a daily wage labourer and then it was easy to find work. But now, he is left high and dry.

Now harvesting wheat in this area is a job for machines.

"We used to work 10 hours a day at Rs 150 per hour. But now, machines are doing the work," says Chet Ram.

High mechanization — quality saw reapers, which collect straw from where stalks are left after combine harvesting — have reduced the need for manual harvesting. The outcome is that a number of labourers of Chet Ram's village could not even get work this harvesting season.

"The cost of reaping is Rs 1,000 per acre. But now, the machine does the work in half the time," says Chet Ram.

For the lucky ones, it wasn't sufficient to earn enough wheat and it was.

"You can't even afford to buy even a kilogram of wheat," says Chet Ram.

"I used to work 10 hours a day at Rs 150 per hour. But now, machines are doing the work," says Chet Ram.

With mechanization, the cost of reaping has gone down to Rs 2,000 per acre. But now, the machine does the work in half the time.

"The change has affected many of the labourers and they are finding it difficult to find work," says Chet Ram.

The changed scenario has forced many of the labourers to look for other jobs. As a result, many labourers are thinking of giving up reaping.

"Not just wheat or straw, many of us have to buy fodder for our livestock from the market as well now," says Chet Ram.