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SmartBarley by AB InBev India: Empowering Farmers and Strengthening India's Barley Supply Chain

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AB InBev

Barley cultivation in India plays a critical role in supporting the livelihoods of thousands of farmers across rural communities. However, over the years, several challenges have hindered consistent productivity and profitability in this sector.

Farmers frequently face unstable weather patterns, irregular rainfall, and environmental changes that directly affect planting and harvesting cycles. Additionally, a lack of exposure to modern farming methods, limited access to updated agricultural resources, and outdated supply chain systems compound the problem.

The persistence of traditional practices—passed down over generations—often doesn't align with current climatic and market demands. As a result, farmers experience frequent crop failures, unpredictable income, and low confidence in their farming operations.

Recognizing these barriers, AB InBev India, the country's leading beer and beverage company, launched the SmartBarley Program as a focused initiative to deliver hands-on support, practical tools, and locally adapted farming strategies.

First introduced in India in 2016 in Sirsa, the program forms a cornerstone of AB InBev's global Smart Agriculture initiative, which has been active since 2009. It aims to help farmers overcome their daily operational hurdles and elevate both crop quality and market access, thereby creating a more resilient and sustainable barley ecosystem in India.



## Addressing Challenges in Barley Farming

Barley farmers in India encounter a wide range of agronomic challenges that limit both yield and quality. Uncertainty around weather conditions, soil fertility, and pest management forces many farmers to rely heavily on ancestral methods that are no longer effective in modern conditions.

Without access to timely, credible information, farmers often miss critical planting windows or use inefficient techniques that reduce the productivity of their land.

The SmartBarley program directly tackles these issues by equipping farmers with user-friendly, locally adapted tools and guidance. Instead of offering complex, technology-heavy solutions that may be difficult to implement in rural settings, the program simplifies essential agricultural knowledge into practical steps. Farmers are given clear, actionable advice on crop planning, seed selection, fertilization, and irrigation practices that suit their specific regional needs.





Through regular training sessions and community engagement, the program also fosters a knowledge-sharing ecosystem where farmers can learn from one another's experiences.

This peer-based approach strengthens local networks and builds collective confidence in adopting sustainable practices. As a result, farming becomes more predictable, less risky, and better aligned with modern agricultural expectations.

## Modernizing the Supply Chain

A robust supply chain is essential for the success of any agricultural sector, and barley is no exception. In India, however, the barley supply chain has long suffered from inefficiencies at nearly every stage—from harvest to distribution.



Poor storage conditions, inadequate transport infrastructure, and fragmented distribution channels often lead to post-harvest losses, lower product quality, and delayed payments to farmers. These systemic issues not only affect farmer profitability but also weaken market trust in barley as a reliable raw material.

SmartBarley addresses these problems by implementing affordable, practical improvements to supply chain processes. The program introduces low-cost solutions that enhance storage efficiency, streamline transportation, and promote transparent sales processes.

For example, basic yet effective warehousing methods are shared with farmers to prevent moisture damage and preserve crop quality during storage. Simple transportation coordination techniques help ensure the timely delivery of produce to local buyers or processing units.

What sets SmartBarley apart is its inclusive approach. Local stakeholders—including farmer groups, community leaders, and logistics providers—are invited to participate in the supply chain improvement efforts.

This bottom-up model ensures that the proposed changes are realistic and easy to implement. Moreover, involving stakeholders at every stage increases accountability and encourages shared ownership of outcomes.



By building a reliable and consistent barley supply system, the program not only strengthens rural economies but also instills greater trust among end-users such as breweries, food companies, and exporters who rely on high-quality barley inputs.

## Enhancing Farming Practices

The core of the SmartBarley initiative lies in enhancing everyday farming practices without requiring farmers to abandon their traditional knowledge completely. The program introduces incremental changes that complement, rather than replace, what farmers already know and do. This strategy reduces resistance to change and facilitates smoother adoption of new techniques.

Farmers are introduced to better soil management practices, disease-resistant seed varieties, and crop rotation strategies that can be implemented using existing resources. These practices are designed to reduce environmental impact while improving yield and soil health.

Additionally, the program emphasizes water conservation methods, such as efficient irrigation scheduling and the use of soil moisture indicators, to help farmers navigate water scarcity and climate unpredictability.



Training sessions are delivered in local languages, often through community-based workshops, demonstrations, and farmer field schools. These sessions focus on real-world scenarios that farmers can relate to, ensuring that the knowledge shared is immediately applicable.

For instance, a farmer may learn how to identify early signs of pest infestation and take preventative action using natural remedies, which not only protect the crop but also reduce chemical dependency.

Thanks to AB InBev India's holistic approach, the program has seen consistent yield improvements of 5–15% and an impressive 99% compliance with industry quality standards, a testament to its practical effectiveness and farmer-centric model.

## Impact Created

The SmartBarley program has already made a measurable difference in several barley-growing regions across India. Farmers involved in the program report a newfound confidence in managing their fields, thanks to the simplified instructions and accessible tools provided.

The clear scheduling frameworks introduced by the initiative help farmers plan sowing and harvesting activities with greater accuracy, resulting in better-aligned agricultural cycles.



Operational enhancements have also led to noticeable improvements in barley quality, which is reflected in better pricing and greater market demand. With more control over farming outcomes, households have experienced increased and more stable incomes.

Local markets benefit from the availability of consistent and high-quality barley, while farmers enjoy stronger buyer relationships based on reliability and transparency.

Additionally, the program has had a social impact by reducing stress and uncertainty among farming communities. Families can now rely on clearer crop forecasts and avoid the economic shocks caused by failed harvests or storage losses.

Through simple, scalable, and cost-effective interventions, the initiative has created a solid foundation for both economic and environmental sustainability in barley farming regions.

A standout social initiative includes a vision care program launched in Farrukhnagar, Haryana, aimed at supporting farmer health, an often overlooked component of productivity.

The program will offer vision screenings for 400 farmers, distribute eyeglasses, and provide referrals for specialized care. Studies show that improved vision can increase productivity by up to 32%, making this initiative a strategic enhancement to overall agricultural efficiency.



## Way Forward

Looking ahead, the SmartBarley program is poised to expand its footprint into major barley-producing states such as Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. These regions already contribute over 50% of India's barley production, and AB InBev India is committed to scaling up its efforts while staying rooted in sustainability and empowerment.

During the 5th Annual Barley Growers Day in Farrukhnagar, the company reaffirmed its commitment to building resilient farming communities through deeper engagement, showcasing success stories from more than 350 progressive farmers and displaying cutting-edge agricultural technologies and trials.

With over 2,000 farmers currently engaged and 100% performance across all key metrics for three consecutive years, the SmartBarley initiative continues to demonstrate the powerful synergy between traditional farming knowledge and modern agricultural innovation.

As India's barley sector grows, with domestic demand expected to rise by 15% over 2015 levels, AB InBev India's integrated approach—combining technology, training, and health support—stands as a replicable model for driving rural prosperity and environmental stewardship across the country.



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