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How many farmers are there in India? Government has no clue

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While the Centre counted 14.5 crore farmer families while provisioning for PM-KISAN, in the last one year only 9 crore farmer families have been identified

Crores of rupees are spent every year on food subsidy and on subsidizing farm inputs, but there is no accurate record of these farmers or their total count. While announcing the PM-Kisan scheme, the Centre made a provision for ₹87,000 crore for a year for paying ₹6,000 each to 14.5 crore families. However, over the last one year, only 9 crore farmer families have been identified.

It could be that not all farmers have enrolled for the scheme. But, even if one assumes the number of left-out farmers to be 1.5-2 crore, the numbers still do not add up to 14.5 crore.



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In a way, this is good news for the Centre that is trying hard to mop up money to spend in the coming fiscal to kickstart the economy. But then, where did the figure 14.5 crore come from actually?

The number of farmers that the Centre assumed for calculating the cost of PM-Kisan scheme is from the Agriculture Census 2015-16 which had put the number of operational agriculture landholdings in the country at 14.5 crore.

Numbers don't match

According to the Agriculture Census 2015-16, Uttar Pradesh has 2.382 crore agriculture landholdings – the highest in the country, followed by Bihar – 1.641 crore, Maharashtra – 1.529 crore, Madhya Pradesh – 1.0 crore, Karnataka – 0.8 crore, Andhra Pradesh – 0.852 crore, Tamil Nadu – 0.794 crore and the remaining in other States.

In the States above, however, the number of farmers registered for PM-Kisan is much less.

In Bihar, for instance, against the 1.64 crore farmer families that the Census claims, only 52.5 lakh farmers have been traced by the State government and data provided to the Centre. In the case of Maharashtra, where the Census said there are 1.5 crore operational land holdings, only 86.7 lakh farmers are on record now. In Madhya Pradesh, against the 1 crore farmer holdings, only 55.05 lakh farmers are registered for PM-Kisan. In UP, against the Census number of 2.38 crore farmer families, 2 crore farmers have registered for the scheme.

Given that any relief is welcome, why have all farmers not registered for the scheme? One reason could be that the State governments were not able to make a list of all their farmers in one year (West Bengal has not yet provided even partial data of its farmers till now). Or, it could well be that the actual number of farmers in the country is lower than 14.5 crore.

Outdated data

The Agriculture Census in India is conducted at five-year intervals. The latest one was done in 2015-16. So, this number cannot be used now. Migration of farmer families has to be accounted for, to know the actual number of farm landholdings. Also, as per the Agriculture Census, operational landholding is defined as: all land which is used wholly or partly for agricultural production and is operated as one technical unit by one person alone or with others without regard to the title, legal form, size or location.

So, the Agriculture Census has only counted the number of land parcels and not the farmers operating it.

In reality, one farmer may operate two pieces of land or one land may be operated by two families with both of them sharing title of the land, which can bring a difference between number of actual farmer families and number of operational farm holdings.

Ambiguity

The numbers gleaned from the Agriculture Census could be different from the count of farmers from other surveys and reports. For example, according to the Population Census 2011, the number of cultivators in the country is 11.8 crore. The number of farmers as per the soil health cards issued is also different.

The Centre has to resolve the ambiguity in numbers and create a digital land record before jumping into any DBT scheme for farmers.

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Published on January 21, 2020

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