

## Agro Tech in Chandigarh attracts more city folks than farmers

Agriculture technology and business fair, 'Agro Tech 2008', underway in Chandigarh seems to have caught the fancy of the urban population and entrepreneurs more than that of farmers.

With all the leading companies active in this sector in the country showcasing their products and services at the event, the Agro Tech is drawing huge crowds, even though they are mostly of people who are not related to agriculture in anyway.

Scattered groups of farmers, who have come from far away villages in Punjab, Haryana and Tamil Nadu, with queries about certain products are outnumbered by people from the city, mostly youth, satisfying their curiosity.

'We have only come here for an outing otherwise the gigantic tractors and agricultural equipment displayed over here are of no use to us', said Darshan Singh, who came here in a group of 50 farmers from Barnala district in Punjab, about 100 km from here.

Moreover he said that the youngsters at the various stalls could not speak the Punjabi language and were thus unable to explain things to them.

'I have been farming for the last 50 years, and over these years we have observed that the size of the land holdings have decreased drastically while the size of the machines and farm equipment has increased substantially,' said Jaggar Singh Khokhar, a 70-year-old farmer from Patiala district in Punjab.

'These big machines, exhibited here are meant for fields that are at least 100 acres. However, the average land holding of farmers in Punjab is less than 10 acres so such kind of exhibition is of no use for us', he added.

The 'Kisan Goshtis' (farmers' conclaves), where farmers are being taught about developments in areas like crop nutrition, organic farming, and contract farming through films, special talks and interactive question-answer sessions, also saw a lukewarm response as the special pavilion earmarked for them was mostly deserted.

However entrepreneurs and businessmen thronged the event.

'I came to Agro Tech just to gain knowledge about the prospects of horticulture in Punjab and how to go about green house farming here,' said Kanav Saluja, a young entrepreneur based in Mohali district in Punjab, around 10 km from here.

He said he plans to buy land in Punjab and establish a horticulture business. 'Here one cannot rely on the weather, which is why I want to grow vegetables and flowers in green houses,' he added.

'I have visited this agriculture fair to explore the possibilities available in agri-sector in both India and abroad. As there are many representatives from countries like the UK, Germany and Japan, there is a healthy exchange of knowledge between us,' said Raghu Sharma, a student of business management.

For Chandigarh businessman Sanjeev Mahajan, the event represented a good experience to see many things like latest agricultural technology, agricultural products, processed food, and a poultry and livestock exhibition under one roof, even when he was not connected to agriculture.

The Agro Tech is a good platform for the signing memorandum of understandings and business deals. In 2006, it saw the trade inquiries to the tune of the 585 million US dollars and a direct business of 170 million US dollars.

The eighth edition of the biennial four-day Agro Tech 2008 started Nov 28 here at Parade Ground. Spread over an area of 5960 square metres, it has 204 stalls. States like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir as well as seven other countries are participating in the event.

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