

MANAGING CROP RESIDUE-II: The Tribune deep dives into factors behind annual farm-fire crisis

Biogas plants planned to check ills of stubble burning hit roadblock

MANAV MANDER
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

LUDHIANA, SEPTEMBER 20

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While the biomass power plants, bio-ethanol plants, thermal power plants and brick-kilns are all expected to use 5.42 million tonnes of paddy straw, the deadlock between the public, supported by some farmer unions, and the compressed biogas plant owners is likely to stall usage of 0.54 million tonne straw for producing biogas.

Protests are being held on the presumption that the chemicals released during the manufacturing of biogas are carcinogenic. There is, however, no scientific study to prove that. Other than protests being staged outside biogas plants in Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts, public protests have been going on outside four plants in Ludhiana, with one at Ghungrali Rajputan being forced to shut operation.

The scientific management of paddy straw is imperative in the wake of health hazards it poses to people. Last year, Ludhiana witnessed 1,801 farm fires, recording an average air quality index (AQI) of 306 till November 4.

The state government planned to set up 39 CBG plants this year, involving an investment of Rs 1,000 crore. Had these become functional



A protest being held at the Ghungrali Rajputan compressed biogas plant. FILE PHOTO

THE AIM

With state producing over 19 million tonne paddy straw, the CBG plants were planned to tackle the problem of stubble burning and to create a source of extra income for the farmers. These plants can generate clean and green energy from paddy straw and other agro-residues. Plan was to set up 39 CBG plants in the state and the government was hoping to make seven plants operational before the start of paddy harvesting season this year.

PAU DEVELOPS NEW BIOGAS PLANTS

Dr Sarabhjeet Singh Sooch, Principal Scientist (Renewable Energy Engineering) from Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), said, "The university has also developed biogas plants which use stubble, but do not have any adverse effects. These plants use 75 per cent stubble and 25 per cent cow dung. These should be installed to solve the problem of paddy straw burning. These plants do not use any chemical and there is no slurry release from these."



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Of these, four plants were to be set up in Ludhiana district at Ghungrali Rajputan, Akhara, Bhundri and Mushkabad. While the first has been forced shut for using press mud as raw material, which generates widespread foul smell, there have been protests outside other plants too.

Aman Arora, Minister for New and Renewable Energy Sources, said these plants were to produce 79 tonne CBG per day and become a source of additional income for the farmers. "Talks are on resolve the issue and satisfy those protesting against these plants," he said.

Sobhan Sahu, managing director of Farm Gas Private Limited, whose plant was operational at Ghungrali

Rajputan village, said their plant was operational for two years and suddenly villagers developed resistance after protests started emerging at different places. "In the first year, we made use of 14,000 tonne of stubble and last year 33,000 tonne of stubble was put to use. We were targeting to procure 40,000-50,000 tonne stubble per annum, but the plant was shut due to protests. The plant paid Rs 1,650 per tonne for stubble. The amount was paid to balers/aggregators who collected stubble from farmers," said Sahu.

He said there was no scientific study to support the claims being made by the opposite party and no chemical process was carried out and there was no chemical output that could prove to be a threat to environment and health, he said.

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the plant is not dumped underground. It has high carbon content that increases the soil fertility. This replenishes the soil when used in the fields," claimed Sahu.

"The samples of groundwater and slurry have been tested from our plant by the Punjab Pollution Control Board and all parameters are well within permissible limits. This reinforces the fact that the allegations of groundwater contamination being made by the protesters are baseless and motivated," added Sahu.

But farmers and residents of villages near these plants are not convinced. They fear that these plants will have adverse effect on the environment during biogas generation and contaminate the soil.

Hardeep Singh of Ghungrali Rajputan village said they got the plant shut on May 5 this year when the stench became unbearable and many residents started suffering

from constant nausea, diseases caused by the houseflies menace and release of slurry in their fields.

Balwinder Singh Aulakh, who is spearheading these protests, said the ill-effects on human health might not be visible immediately, but would lead to problems in a decade or so, when the soil was contaminated with discharged effluents. While studies are yet to be commissioned on the alleged ill-effects on human health, the immediate result of these protests is that the industrial investors are disenchanted with setting up projects in the state.

The Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) planned to set up 10 CBG projects in the state at an investment of about Rs 600 crore to produce 35,000 tonne biogas and 8,700 tonne organic manure annually, which has been put on hold as the earlier projects failed to start.



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Balwinder Singh Aulakh, who is spearheading these protests, said the ill-effects on human health might not be visible immediately, but would lead to problems in a decade or so, when the soil was contaminated with discharged effluents. While studies are yet to be commissioned on the alleged ill-effects on human health, the immediate result of these protests is that the industrial investors are disenchanted with setting up projects in the state.

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गेल की गैस पाइप लाइन आने की वजह से बढ़ गई थी लागत : परियोजना के रास्ते में गेल की गैस पाइपलाइन आने से अतिरिक्त कार्य की जरूरत महसूस हुई और इसका दोबारा एस्टिमेंट तैयार किया गया। इस बार इसकी लागत 801 करोड़ आंकी गई। इसी क्रम में व्यय वित्त समिति की बैठक में 787 करोड़ रुपये की निर्माण लागत पर मंजूरी मिली। फिर एमओयू की शर्तों के अनुसार 50 प्रतिशत धनराशि भारत सरकार की स्कीम फॉर स्पेशल असिस्टेंस टू स्टेट्स फॉर कैपिटल इन्वेस्टमेंट 2023-24 के भाग-1 के अन्तर्गत मिलने वाली धनराशि से कराने व शेष 50 प्रतिशत धनराशि प्राधिकरण की ओर से वहन किए जाने के निर्देश सीईओ नोएडा व एमडी यूपी राज्य सेतु निगम लिमिटेड को दिए गए थे।