

Punjab's Urban Development Plan Faces Strong Farmer Resistance



A new land pooling policy by the Punjab government, aimed at accelerating mega urban development across the state, is encountering significant opposition from the region's farming community. Farmers are voicing strong objections, asserting that their land is not merely an asset but their fundamental livelihood, threatening to disrupt a plan intended to boost economic development and provide planned urban spaces.

The policy, which encourages landowners to voluntarily contribute agricultural land for commercial, industrial, and residential projects, has been met with a tepid response since its launch. While Chief Secretary KAP Sinha argues the plan is crucial for preventing urban slums and illegal colonies, stating that states like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have benefited from large land banks, farmers view it as a potential threat to their agrarian way of life. The government aims to aggregate over 65,000 acres for long-term land banks.

Farmers' organizations, including the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), have initiated widespread protests. They fear that once their land is pooled, they will lose permanent control and receive inadequate compensation. Sarwan Singh Pandher of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) highlighted concerns that the policy would displace farmers from fertile land. While the government recently amended the policy, increasing the annual livelihood allowance to ₹1 lakh per acre until the land is developed (a fivefold increase from previous rates), and offering developed residential and commercial plots in exchange, farmers remain unconvinced. They point to past projects, like Aerocity, where some landowners reportedly faced delays in receiving full compensation or plot allotments years after land acquisition.

Opposition parties have also criticized the scheme, alleging it favors large developers and could lead to corruption. Punjab Congress chief Amarinder Singh Raja Warring questioned the fairness of trading an acre of fertile land for a 1,000 square-yard plot. Mohali MLA Kulwant Singh, however, reiterated the government's stance that the policy is entirely voluntary, and no land will be acquired forcibly, emphasizing its aim to empower farmers as stakeholders in urban growth.

Despite governmental assurances, farmer protests are escalating, with plans for tractor marches and larger demonstrations. The standoff highlights a fundamental tension between the state's vision for modern urban centers and the deep-rooted reliance of its populace on agricultural land. The success of Punjab's development ambitions will hinge on the government's ability to address these profound concerns and build trust with the agrarian backbone of the state.