

1.25 lakh new tube wells may deepen Punjab's groundwater troubles

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Written by **Anju Agnihotri Chaba** | Jalandhar | Published: June 9, 2016 3:26 am



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For over a decade, the Punjab government has been taking steps to save underground water reserves by introducing policies like the Contract Farming (CF) programme (2002), New Agriculture Policy for State (2013) and passing the Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act (2009) to divert areas under the water guzzling rice crop towards other kharif crops. However, all efforts of diversion seem to have fallen flat and the area under rice cultivation still remains between 27-28 lakh hectares.

Against this backdrop , the government's initiative to pledge nearly 1.25 lakh new tube well connections this year is likely to deal a major blow to the already depleting underground water level.

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The initiative raises several questions: Is the government not giving farmers a reason to choose rice cultivation by providing free irrigation facility? What is the need of increasing the number when there already exists 12.76 lakh electricity operated and 1.50 lakh diesel operated tube wells for an agricultural land area of 42 lakh hectares, of which around 11 Lakh hectares is irrigated through canal network? Why have the schemes to promote less water consuming kharif crops fallen flat? And , most importantly, why do 11 lakh farmers in Punjab need over 15 lakh tube wells?