

Knowledge Paper



Minimum Wages in Corn Seed Production in Andhra Pradesh: Learnings from a Three-Season Pilot (2022-23 to 2024-25)

About ECHO

Enabling Child and Human Rights with Seed Organizations (ECHO) represents a pioneering collaboration between the seed industry and non-governmental organizations, united in their mission to foster ethical practices within the hybrid seed industry. Established in December 2019, ECHO has built upon the foundational work of earlier initiatives such as the Child Labor Elimination Group (CLEG) and the Child Care Program (CCP) forum, which began around 2003. These initiatives laid the groundwork for what has now become the largest multi-stakeholder forum dedicated to promoting child rights and decent workplace standards within the seed industry as a coalition of national and multinational seed companies, NGOs, and research institutes.

ECHO brings together diverse stakeholders, including public and private seed companies, voluntary organizations, and professional associations. They collaboratively protect human rights and ensure decent work conditions throughout the seed production supply chain. Through the collective efforts of its members, ECHO has become a beacon of ethical commitment and action, addressing pressing human rights issues and setting new standards for social responsibility in the agricultural sector.



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Introduction

This knowledge paper presents key insights from a three-season pilot project (2022–2025) on implementing minimum wage practices in corn seed production fields near Eluru, Andhra Pradesh. The initiative aimed to explore practical approaches for aligning field-level wages with statutory minimum wage standards, particularly in detasseling operations. Corn seed production in India, especially in Andhra Pradesh, depends heavily on seasonal labor, primarily women workers, for tasks such as detasseling. However, challenges such as informal hiring practices, limited documentation, and varying local norms have often resulted in inconsistent minimum wage compliance. Field studies have revealed that there is a significant gap between actual wages paid vis-a-vis stipulated legal wages for farm labour participating in corn detasseling activity.

To address this, ECHO taken up a pilot project by partnering with four companies - Bayer, Syngenta, Advanta and Limagrain who have predominant corn seed production in Eluru and surrounding locations.

Through this pilot, ECHO sought to better understand the barriers and opportunities in achieving minimum wage compliance and to gather insights that could inform future efforts in the seed sector.

Participating Companies

Pilot Project by Corn MW Companies: Bayer, Syngenta, Advanta and Limagrain.



Project Design and Methodology

The pilot was implemented across three crop seasons, engaging seed producers, labor contractors, farmer networks, and local government agencies. The approach included:

- Stakeholder consultations to align perspectives
- Capacity building through training programs for field staff, seed organizers, and community leaders
- Field-level pilots in selected villages, documenting wages, working hours, and compliance metrics
- Regular monitoring and audits to surface challenges and best practices

The pilot aimed to accommodate diverse operational models while identifying pathways for gradual improvement in minimum wage practices.



Season-Wise Insights

2022–23: Laying the Groundwork

The first season initiated dialogue on minimum wage compliance. Pilot villages implemented minimum wage practices, with adjustments for shorter shifts (e.g., Rs 290 for a 4-hour day, compared to the statutory Rs 435 for a 6-hour day). While basic records were introduced, data collection challenges persisted. Cultural and logistical factors influenced worker availability, with a notable preference for half-day work, particularly among female workers.

2023–24: Structured Implementation

The second season saw revised wages of Rs 480 for 6-hour shifts, in line with statutory updates. More villages participated, and NGOs supported worker awareness programs.

While documentation improved, payment practices remained largely informal. Challenges included worker reluctance for longer shifts, increased transportation costs, and concerns over wage parity across tasks.

2024–25: Scaling and Refinement

The final season expanded to new regions, including Rajahmundry, Darsi, Bhadrachalam, and Porumamilla. Wages were updated to Rs 528 for 6-hour shifts per government guidelines, though variations in actual implementation were observed.

Persistent issues included:

- Low adoption of digital payments, limiting traceability
- Worker reluctance for full-day shifts due to household responsibilities and heat stress
- Variations in wage rates across locations create risks of wage inflation or local unrest

Good practices included proactive labor mapping, introduction of grievance mechanisms, and provision of PPE, though customization for local conditions remained necessary

Corn Minimum Wages (MW) Pilot Project (2024-25 crop season) - ECHO Field Visit Observations in Eluru region (Applicable MW for Zone 2 in AP is Rs 528/- for 6 Hours of working)

Company	Actual Working hours (Excluding lunch /rest break)	Actual daily wage paid to worker	Other benefits (free transportation, food/snacks)
Pilot Project Partner 1:	6 hours (8.30 am to 4.30 pm, with 2 hours lunch break)	Rs 450/-	Rs 100 (travel + food)
	4 hours (8.30 am - 12.30 pm)	Rs 250	Rs 50 (travel)
Pilot Project Partner 2:	6 hours (9 am to 5.00 pm, with 2 hours lunch break)	Rs 550	
Pilot Project Partner 3:	6 hours (9.00 am to 4.30 pm, with 1.30 hours lunch break)	Rs 420-450	Rs 75-100 (travel+ food)
Pilot Project Partner 4:	4.5 hours (8.00 am to 1 pm, with half an hour break)	Rs 300-350	Rs 50 (travel+snacks)

Note: a) The data in above table relates only wages paid for workers in daily wage model. b) the names of pilot project partner companies anonymised to mask the business sensitive information.

Key Learnings

The pilot highlighted several important considerations:

- Women workers form the majority of detasseling crews but face barriers to full-day engagement.
- While attendance and wage records exist, reliance on cash-based transactions through contractors limits transparency.
- Adjustments in detasseling wages can influence wage expectations across other agricultural tasks.
- Local cultural norms, such as preferences for half-day work, play a significant role in shaping compliance outcomes.
- PPE provision is essential but must be adapted for high-heat, labor-intensive fieldwork.

Areas for Future Exploration

The insights from this pilot offer valuable directions for future efforts in the seed sector:

- Exploring how detasseling cost structures can transparently reflect statutory minimum wages while accounting for additional factors such as transport and food.
- Strengthening digital tools and templates for standardized wage tracking, attendance, and grievance reporting.
- Enhancing community engagement through awareness-building among farmers, workers, and local influencers to foster shared understanding.
- Encouraging cross-learning from parallel initiatives in other seed production contexts.
- Focusing on worker safety, including PPE and heat stress mitigation measures, an essential component of minimum wage compliance.
- Building collaboration with local labor authorities for supportive policy environments.

Conclusion

This knowledge paper presents insights from a multi-season exploration of minimum wage practices in corn seed production. While challenges remain, the pilot has provided valuable learnings for the seed sector in its pursuit of consistent and transparent wage practices. ECHO remains committed to sharing knowledge, fostering dialogue, and supporting collaborative efforts towards improved labor practices in agricultural supply chains.

Glimpses





Let's collaborate to shape strategies and a road map towards decent work standards