

# Press Note

## **MNREGA to change the face of Cannabis growing areas**

Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh will now have wild fruit and broad leave plants in those areas where naturally-grown cannabis plants grow in huge numbers. This righteous plan would be implemented under Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Act (MNREGA).

The Deputy Commissioner of Chamba, Devesh Kumar, who is also the CEO of District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) envisaging this unique plan, has directed the Forest department to prepare the shelves of plantation works in the cannabis producing belts of the district. After the financial approval from DRDA Forest department will initiate the plantation process in collaboration with Police department. Under MNREGA, a sum of Rs. 20 lacs has already been disbursed to Police department for uprooting cannabis plants in Tikrigarh, Saproth, Choli, Kalhel, Dehra and Chanju panchayats of Tissa block and Ail, Banantar, Panjei, Chih, Himgiri and Kharjota panchayats of Salooni block in Chamba district, Devesh Kumar informed.

The DC said the plan would alternate the villagers' preference of making money by involving in cannabis business. Local people would also be engaged in plantation works. They would get employment opportunity, on the other hand, villagers would have the right to get fodder after the plantation would develop in trees. Monkeys and other wild animals and birds would get wild fruits. As a result, rural farmers could save their crops, DC added.

Pandit Deen Dayal Kisan-Bagwan Samridhi Yojna, an ambitious plan of the State Government would be another supplement to the means of livelihood of such pockets. The Agriculture department has been

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directed to focus on cannabis growing areas and make the villagers ready to set up polyhouses as the government is providing 80 to 90 percent subsidy on the erection of polyhouse. Farmers can adopt off-season vegetable cultivation in polyhouses. Off-season vegetables grown in polyhouses are in great demand and the farmers get best price of their produce.

Official report of district police underlines that since there is no commercial cultivation of cannabis in Chamba district, however villagers extract charas (a sychotropic substance produced from cannabis tree after being mashed by hands) from naturally-grown cannabis plants. Smugglers mostly from neighbouring states approach through their local agents and buy the charas from villagers at a very cheaper rate as compared to its selling price in international market. Police usually keeps an eye over the movement of suspected persons with the inputs from intelligence agencies. At the time of nakabandies, smugglers often scuffle with police parties. During the current year the Chamba police has seized 114 kgs of charas costing over one crore in international market from smugglers and registered 33 cases under Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substance (NDPS) Act , report said.

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