

## **BACKGROUND**

Since September, farmers across India have been protesting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's passing of three agricultural bills that drastically change the systems for farmers by deregulating the agriculture sector without any significant protections for farmers or price protections for consumers, giving corporate entrants unprecedented control over India's food supply.

These new measures will gradually remove the minimum support price for the farmers; dismantle the government-managed markets that support village infrastructure, education and local employment; create alternative private commodity exchanges with very little government oversight; and allow huge corporations to take control of the agricultural industry at the expense of individual farmers.

Punjabi farming communities and Indian farmers elsewhere have been decimated by farmer suicides to the point where international aid agencies have stepped in to intervene. According to one [2011 report](#) from the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University, one Indian farmer commits suicide every 30 minutes. In 2019, a total of 10,281 farmers died by suicide across the country, according to statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau.

The sector needs true reform, which can only happen through dialogue with all stakeholders. However, these bills are NOT reform despite the framing as such. They are bills to advance corporate interests.

Together, the bills are an unprecedented deregulation of India's food supply for the benefit of commercial interests. They threaten the livelihood of farmers and the food security of all Indians. Further, similar laws (allowing commercial entities to bypass government marketplaces) were passed in Bihar fourteen years ago and it has made conditions much [worse for farmers](#). Pro-farmer changes to drastically improve ecological, environmental, economic concerns of farmers must be declared in a land so intimately tied with producing agricultural products for the world. However, world economists and agricultural experts agree that these bills will not accomplish that:

[Kaushik Basu](#) – Former Chief Economist of the World Bank (2012-2016)

*"I've now studied India's new farm bills & realize they are flawed & will be detrimental to farmers. Our agriculture regulation needs change but the new laws will end up serving corporate interests more than farmers. Hats off to the sensibility & moral strength of India's farmers."*

[Gurdev S Khush](#) – Renowned University of California Professor, Recipient of the 1996 World Food Prize and father of rice varieties that saved India

*“Farmers are justified in asking for the continuation of minimum support price (MSP) and mandis. This system of MSP and mandis has served the country for more than 50 years. Why change the system that has served the farming community and the country well?”*

The bill removes the [jurisdiction of civil courts](#), instead replacing it with an administrative maze, known for its corruption and delays, which the small farmer will be unable to navigate. It removes legal recourse for farmers against corporations and government agencies. Further it does not allow for anyone, for example an NGO, to intervene on their behalf either. This allows big business to trample on the rights of farmers.

The farmers’ peaceful protests have been met with a toxic mix of indifference, slanderous defamation, and active repression (including tear gas and water cannons in the cold winter) by the government.

After their concerns went unheard for months, protestors from the states of Punjab, Haryana, and elsewhere travelled to Delhi to protest at the end of November. The protestors, now reportedly numbering up to a million, have been met with violence by Indian police and military. Nevertheless, the protests continue peacefully on the outskirts of Delhi because the protestors have been barred from entry into the capital. The farmers sleep on the side of the roads or in their trolleys, make their own food and serve the same food to anyone who comes.

Farmers are not alone in their call for repeal. Sikhs, having agrarian roots (Guru Nanak himself was a farmer), are at the forefront of these protests to ensure the rights and dignity of the farmers can be preserved. Though a significant majority of farmers from Punjab and Haryana are leading the protests, it is important to note that this is a united effort between farmers from across the country. Inspired by the farmers' protest, Indians across the country have responded in solidarity and organized some of the largest labor strikes known as reported by some [outlets](#).

### **KEY ASKS**

**We are deeply concerned about the safety of the farmers and want to ensure that they can continue their protests peacefully.**

These peaceful protests were first met by the Indian government with dismissal, and then with [ongoing violence and repression](#). These predictable attempts to squash peaceful protests have included blockades, destroying roads by digging up trenches in the national highways, using water cannons and tear gas, and other forms of violence.

Earlier this year, violence was instigated against a peaceful group of 500 women protesting government legislation that risked the disenfranchisement of millions of Indian Muslims. (NRC, CAA legislation) The ensuing pogroms went on for a week and left 53 Muslims dead and several hundred injured. The same instigators --- BJP politician Kapil Mishra and self-proclaimed Hindutva leader, Ragini Tiwari --- are now making [incendiary statements](#) against the farmers. Specifically, in a [video](#) circulating on social media, Tiwari states, "I am telling all my sisters that prepare for [December] 17," she said in the video. "If the government does not free us from the farmers' movement in Delhi then Ragini Tiwari will once again create Jafrabad and whatever happens the Centre, state government and Delhi police will be responsible."

There is a real concern that the lives of protestors are at danger and will be met with further violence. Moreover, the farmers are protesting in increasingly difficult winter conditions and the ongoing threat of the pandemic because of the existential threat these bills present to them.

We would like to request the faith leaders to:

1. Amplify the voices of farmers to share information about what is transpiring with your congregations and networks.
2. Lend us a voice to be able to tell the congressional delegation from Washington that we, as faith leaders, are requesting them to stand up for the right to express dissent peacefully. Other world leaders from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada have also condemned the actions of the Indian government. U.S. lawmakers including [Representative Garamendi, Costa and Lee](#) as well as [Senator Menedez of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee](#) have also sent letters to Ambassador Taranjit Sandhu. Seattle City Council passed a resolution this week to support the farmers as well.
3. Issue a public statement on social media to show support to the community.
4. Show your presence in-person and speak at a rally organized in your city to support the Indian farmers.