

Cash scheme for farmers with land as on Feb 1: Govt

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NEW DELHI: The Modi government's cash-transfer scheme for small farmers announced in the Budget on Friday will apply only to those who own land in accordance with official revenue records as on February 1 2019, a document reviewed by HT states.

This clears the confusion whether cultivators who don't directly own land parcels will be covered. The cash transfer will be given to every farming household, not individual farmers, the document states. A family commonly has more than one farmer.

There is no legal definition of who is a farmer in the country. As per the 2011 national census, 68.8% of the population lives in the countryside and many earn a living by taking farming lands on rent or working as farm labourers. In a populist step to address falling income of farmers, the budget announced an income-support programme, PM-KISAN, to give ₹6000 to small and marginal farmers in a financial year

in three instalments of ₹2000.

"A small and marginal landholder farmer family for the purpose of calculation of the benefit (cash transfer) is defined as a family comprising of husband, wife and minor children (up to 18 years of age) who collectively own land up to 2 hectare as per land records of the state/UT concerned," a letter from agriculture secretary Sanjay Agarwal to all state governments reads. 'Collectively' means land owned by both husband and wife would be taken into account, which mustn't exceed 2 hectares.

"This leaves out all tenant and agricultural labourers. The government is basically saying that, like in Telangana, they are going by land records that apply to only those who have land, not those who cultivate land," said economist Abhijit Sen, who oversaw agricultural policy-making in the erstwhile Planning Commission.

Small and marginal farmers, who have very little food surpluses to sell in markets and mostly consume what they grow, make up 86% of all land-owning

farmers, as per official data.

"The existing land-ownership system in the states/UTs concerned will be used for identification of beneficiaries," the letter states. Those whose names appear in land records as on February 1, 2019 shall be eligible. A household's land scattered in different villages will be counted.

The letter also mentions that for northeastern states, a tribal-dominated region where land assets are often owned by the community as a whole, a different methodology will be developed.

For the first instalment, Aadhaar card may be used, or else other documents, such as voter IDs, will do. Subsequent cash transfers will require beneficiaries' Aadhaar details. Any changes in land ownership made after February 1 2019 will not be considered for the cash transfer for the next five years.

The number of landless farmers varies from state to state. "Of all agricultural households, those who cultivate land on rent or work as labourers should be about 30%," Sen said.