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Organic Farming in India: Present Status, Opportunities and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy and provides livelihood to a large proportion of the population. However, excessive dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides has resulted in soil degradation, environmental pollution, biodiversity loss and health concerns. Consequently, there has been growing interest in sustainable agricultural practices that can ensure long-term productivity while protecting natural resources.

Organic farming is a production system that promotes the health of soils, ecosystems and people by relying on ecological processes, biodiversity and natural cycles. It avoids synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators and genetically modified organisms and instead utilizes organic manures, compost, green manuring, crop rotation and biological pest control methods. Organic farming not only contributes to environmental sustainability but also provides consumers with safe and nutritious food products.

Principles of Organic Farming

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has identified four major principles of organic farming:

Health: Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plants, animals, humans and the planet.

Ecology: Organic farming should be based on ecological systems and natural cycles and work in harmony with nature.

Fairness: Organic agriculture should promote fairness among farmers, consumers and the environment.

Care: Organic farming should be managed responsibly to protect present and future generations and the environment.

Present Status of Organic Farming in India

India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing countries in the organic farming sector.

The National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), launched in 2001, laid the foundation for the systematic development of organic agriculture in the country. Sikkim became India's first fully organic state in 2016 after converting its entire cultivable area into certified organic farming.

According to FIBL and IFOAM (2024), organic agriculture is practiced in 188 countries covering about 96.37 million hectares of land globally. India ranks second in the world in terms of organic agricultural land and first in terms of the number of organic producers with nearly 2.5 million organic farmers.

Table 1: Organic Farming Scenario in India (2023–24)

Particulars	Value
Cultivated Area (Organic)	17.11 lakh ha
Cultivated Area (In Conversion)	27.64 lakh ha
Total Area	44.75 lakh ha
Wild Harvest Collection Area	28.50 lakh ha
Total Organic Production	35.50 lakh MT
Organic Export Quantity	2.61 lakh MT
Organic Export Value	₹ 4,007.91 crore

Source: APEDA, Government of India (2023–24).

Among Indian states, Madhya Pradesh occupies the largest area under organic farming followed by Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. These states have played a significant role in expanding organic cultivation and promoting certified organic products.

Table 2: Top States under Organic Farming in India (2023–24)

State	Total Area (Lakh ha)
Madhya Pradesh	11.48
Maharashtra	10.01
Gujarat	6.80
Rajasthan	5.80
Odisha	1.81

Source: APEDA, Government of India (2023–24).

Organic exports from India have also shown encouraging growth. During 2023–24, India exported 2.61 lakh metric tonnes of organic products worth ₹4,007.91 crore. Major export destinations included the United States, European Union, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Government Initiatives for Promotion of Organic Farming

Recognizing the environmental and economic benefits of organic agriculture, the Government of India has launched several schemes and programmes to promote organic farming across the country. These initiatives provide financial assistance, certification support, capacity building and market linkage facilities to farmers.

Major Government Schemes Promoting Organic Farming

1. Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)

The Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana was launched in 2015 to encourage farmers to adopt organic farming practices through cluster-based

approaches. Under this scheme, financial assistance of ₹50,000 per hectare for three years is provided for training, certification, value addition and marketing activities.

2. Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER)

The scheme focuses on promoting certified organic farming in North-Eastern states through farmer organizations, value addition and market development. It supports farmers in adopting organic production practices and obtaining certification.

3. Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP)

Introduced under PKVY in 2020-21, BPKP promotes natural farming based on indigenous knowledge systems. The scheme encourages the use of cow dung, cow urine, biomass mulching and other locally available resources while completely eliminating synthetic chemicals.

4. National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)

NMSA supports organic farming through financial assistance for organic input production, capacity building programmes and sustainable agricultural practices.

Organic Certification System in India

Certification is essential for ensuring the authenticity and credibility of organic products. India has established a robust certification framework to facilitate domestic marketing as well as exports of organic products.

The **National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)**, implemented by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), serves as the primary regulatory framework for organic certification in India. NPOP establishes standards for production, processing, labeling and certification of organic products.

In addition to NPOP, the **Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-India)** under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare provides a low-cost certification mechanism for small and marginal farmers. PGS certification is based on mutual trust, social networks and knowledge exchange among farmers.

Economic Prospects of Organic Farming

Organic farming has emerged as an economically viable option for many farmers due to increasing consumer demand for chemical-free food products. Although organic farming may involve lower yields during the initial conversion period, it often reduces expenditure on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides while providing premium prices in the market.

Several studies have reported that organic farming can improve farm profitability through lower production costs, improved soil fertility and higher market prices. The growing domestic and international demand for organic products has further enhanced income opportunities for organic farmers.

Case Study: Economic Impact of Organic Agriculture in India

A nationwide study conducted by Reddy et al. (2022) revealed that organic farming significantly reduced cultivation costs compared to conventional farming. The study found that although yields were slightly lower under organic farming, farmers benefited from reduced input costs, higher use of farm-produced organic inputs and improved profitability in the long run. The study concluded that organic farming can be a sustainable and economically viable alternative for Indian agriculture.

Challenges and Constraints in Organic Farming

Despite its numerous benefits, organic farming faces several challenges that limit its widespread adoption in India.

One of the major constraints is the limited availability of organic inputs such as farmyard manure, vermicompost and bio-fertilizers. Many farmers face difficulties in obtaining sufficient quantities of quality organic inputs at the right time. Organic farming is also labour-intensive and requires

greater management skills compared to conventional farming.

Another major challenge is the transition period. Farmers shifting from conventional to organic farming often experience a temporary decline in crop yields before soil fertility and biological activity are restored. This discourages many farmers from adopting organic practices.

The certification process is another important issue. Although certification ensures product authenticity, it is often considered time-consuming, costly and complicated, particularly for small and marginal farmers. Limited awareness regarding certification procedures and standards further restricts participation in organic farming.

Marketing and market access also remain critical concerns. Farmers frequently face difficulties in obtaining premium prices due to weak supply chains, inadequate processing facilities and lack of organized marketing systems for organic products.

Table 3: Major Constraints in Adoption of Organic Farming

Constraint	Farmers Reporting (%)
No availability of sufficient organic manure	81.50
Problem in selling organic produce	81.03
Certification facility not available	80.55
High price of organic inputs	77.94
Low productivity of organic farming	76.29
Lack of awareness about organic farming	65.86

Source: Saran and Sharma (2020).

Future Prospects of Organic Farming in India

The future of organic farming in India appears highly promising due to increasing consumer awareness regarding food safety, environmental sustainability and healthy lifestyles. The demand for certified organic products is growing rapidly in both domestic and international markets.

India possesses several advantages for the expansion of organic agriculture, including diverse agro-climatic conditions, traditional farming knowledge, abundant livestock resources and increasing policy support. Government initiatives such as PKVY, MOVCDNER, BPKP and PGS-India are expected to accelerate the adoption of organic farming in the coming years.

The rapid growth of e-commerce platforms, organic retail chains and export markets has created new opportunities for organic farmers. Additionally, increasing demand for residue-free fruits, vegetables, cereals and processed food products is expected to enhance profitability and encourage greater participation in organic agriculture.

Organic farming can play a significant role in achieving sustainable agricultural development, improving soil health, conserving biodiversity and enhancing climate resilience. Therefore, strengthening certification systems, market infrastructure, extension services and farmer awareness programmes will be essential for realizing the full potential of organic farming in India.

CONCLUSION

Organic farming has emerged as an important pathway towards sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation in India. By

emphasizing ecological balance, biodiversity conservation and the use of natural inputs, organic agriculture contributes to healthier food systems and long-term agricultural sustainability. India has made remarkable progress in organic farming, with substantial growth in certified area, production and exports.

Despite challenges such as certification costs, lower initial yields, inadequate market access and limited availability of organic inputs, the sector continues to expand due to growing consumer demand and supportive government policies. Strengthening institutional support, improving market linkages, promoting farmer awareness and simplifying certification procedures can further accelerate the growth of organic farming. With appropriate policy interventions and technological support, organic agriculture can contribute significantly to food security, environmental sustainability and farmers' income enhancement in India.

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