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Organic Farming in India: Current Perspectives and Certification

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Abstract

The food production is contending with many problems of declining soil health, water level, environment concern, new pest/ disease problems and health concerns due to excessive use of resources. On the other side, it is scientifically and philosophically proven that use of natural practices like organic manures and non-chemical farming can be a long term solutions to such problems. Organic agriculture is practiced in 170 countries with total area of 78 million ha (both in the form of cultivated and wild harvest). Currently, India ranks 10th among the top ten countries having the cultivable land under organic certification. Organic standards vis-a-vis certification of organic field and products are systemizing progressively in India following global standards. These not only make it resilient and sustainable, but also make the system intrusted for marketing and end use consumers.

Introduction

The organic farming system is a traditional method of farming which focusses on growing crops in a way that soil is alive and the food that we consume is healthy. Organic farming uses organic fertilizers and farming methods that result in the sustainable production of crops without affecting the quality of the production. Currently, India ranks 10th among the top ten countries having the cultivable land under organic certification. Around 6.50 lakhs organic producers are engaged in the country in various forms.

Concept and Principles of Organic Farming

- Nature is the best role model for farming, since it does not use any inputs nor demand unreasonable quantities of water.
- The entire system is based on intimate understanding of nature's ways. The system does not believe in mining of the soil of its nutrients and do not degrade it in any way.
- The soil in this system is a living entity and the soil's living population of microbes and other organisms are significant contributors to its fertility on a sustained basis and must be protected and nurtured at all cost.
- The total environment of the soil, from soil structure to soil cover is more important.

The organic community has adopted four basic principles,

1. The principle of health
2. The principle of ecology
3. The principle of fairness
4. The principle of care

Current Status of Organic Farming in India

Organic farming is in a nascent stage in India. About 2.78 million hectare of farmland was under organic cultivation as of March 2020, according to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. This is two percent of the 140.1 million ha net sown area in the country. A few states have taken the lead in improving organic farming coverage, as a major part of this area is concentrated only in a handful of states. Madhya Pradesh tops the list with 0.76 million ha of area under organic cultivation - that is over 27 percent of India's total organic cultivation area. The top three states - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra - account for about half the area under organic cultivation. The top 10 states account for about 80 percent of the total area under organic cultivation. Sikkim is the only Indian state to have become fully organic so far. A majority of the states have only a small part of their net sown area under organic farming. Even the top three states that account for the largest area under organic cultivation - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra - have only around 4.9, 2.0 and 1.6% of their net sown area under organic farming respectively.

Initiatives Taken by the Government of India

1. Launching of National Programme of Organic Production (NPOP) 8th May, 2000 to Promote, protect and develop the Indian Organic Movement, install accreditation & certification processes.
2. The Accreditation and Certification programme, 1st October, 2001.
3. Organic Logo released by GOI, 26th July, 2002.
4. NPOP: National Standards (2005; 2014), accreditation criteria for accrediting inspection and certification agencies

Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India)

Participatory Guarantee System of India (PGS-India) is a quality assurance initiative that is locally relevant, emphasizing the participation of stakeholders, and operates outside the frame of third-party certification. As per IFOAM (2008) definition "Participatory Guarantee Systems are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange". In the case of organic agriculture, PGS is a process in which people in similar situations (in this case producers) assess, inspect and verify the production practices of each other and collectively declare the entire holding of the group as organic (PGS, 2022).

PGS-India has a number of basic elements which embrace a participatory approach, a *shared vision, transparency and trust*. Participation is an essential and dynamic part of PGS.

Organic Farming Certification

Organic farming certification in India is governed by The National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry. The National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) provides for Standards for organic production, systems, criteria and procedure for accreditation of Certification Bodies, the National (India Organic) Logo and the regulations governing its use (NCOF, 2022). The standards and procedures have been formulated in harmony with other International Standards regulating import and export of organic products. Farms that have obtained Organic Farming Certification and adhering to the norms specified by the National Programme for Organic Production will be allowed to use the following India Organic logo on the produce.

Procedure for Obtaining Organic Farming Certification

Any person looking to obtain organic farming certification for agricultural produce must submit an application in the requisite format along with the fee and complete field verification. Before submission of application, it is important for the applicant or farmer to ensure that his/her farm conforms to the standard laid out by the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) for organic crop production.

Applying for Organic Farm Certification

Once the requirements for organic farming are satisfied, the applicant can prepare and submit an application.

Fee for Organic Farm Certification

The fee for issuing organic farm certification differs based on the certifying authority. The following is the fee charged by the Department for organic certification (Table 1).

Scheduling of Inspection

Before sanctioning of accreditation, an initial field inspection would be fixed at a reasonable time so that the operator can verify the capacity to comply with the standards while conducting the inspection of land, facilities, and activities. The preliminary inspection can be delayed up to six months from the date of registration to give time for the operator to comply with required standards including record keeping. All onsite inspection must be conducted only in the presence of operator or an authorized representative of the operator who is educated about the operation. However, this requirement does not arise in the case of unannounced inspections. There should be one annual inspection and additional inspections can be fixed based on the risk assessment carried out during the initial inspection.

Table 1: Fees charges by the certification agencies for organic certification

Item (in Rs.)	Certification only on NPOP	Certification on Foreign Standards (in Rs.)	Remarks
Fee Structure per farm Unit of a farmer			
Registration fee	Rs. 5,000.00	Rs. 5,000.00	Annual renewal fee 25% of original
Inspection and Certification	Rs. 1,000.00 per day	Rs. 1,200.00 per day	
Scope certificate	Rs. 1,000.00	Rs. 1,500.00	widely recognized certificate
Fee Structure for Group of farmers			
Registration fee	Rs. 500.00 (Small) Rs. 1,000.00 (others)	Rs. 5,000.00	Annual renewal fee 25% of original
Inspection and Certification	Rs. 1,000.00 per day	Rs. 1,200.00 per day	
Fee for scope certificate.	Rs. 1,000.00	Rs. 1,500.00	widely recognized
Chemical analysis	Actual cost	Actual cost	Soil, water, product



Figure 1: Labelling of Organic Logos on Organic Products

Verification during Inspection

During field inspection, the concerned authorities would verify the compliance with the NPOP standards. The authorities would ensure that the prohibited substances/ materials are not used and in case of doubt, they can draw samples of soil, water, wastes, seeds, plant tissues, plant, animal, and processed products. The samples should be tested in NABL accredited ISO 17025 laboratories. The operator would bear the cost of samples sent for analysis. The inspector can also collect other required information. After inspection, the concerned authority would draft a checklist, inspection report and obtain the signature of the operator or his representative. A copy of the checklist and inspection report should be sent to the concerned operator and evaluator.

Granting of Organic Farm Certification

On conformance with the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), the accreditation agency would issue the Certificate of Registration, Transaction Certificate and Product Certificate to the eligible operators. The issue of this certificate shall be based on the decision made by the certification committee. If the operation does not comply with the standards, the operator would be intimated about denial of certification stating the reasons. Upon receipt of such reports, the operator can correct the noncompliance and submit the report to the accreditation agency. In case of denial, the operator can also file an Appeal to the Appeal Committee.

Agencies Involve in Organic Farming

- *International agencies:* IFOAM, Europe, Australia, FiBL, USA, Asia, Thailand.
- *National agencies:* APEDA, NCOF, ICAR-NOFRI (Sikkim), ICAR-Network Project on Organic Farming, SAUs.
- *APEDA-* Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority.
- CONFLICTS with organic farming.
- Safety and quality of food, Sustainability and Productivity, GM crops, Soil, Water and Air quality/ health Certification, Marketing and Economics/ Income and Organic standards.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that scientific organic farming packages with ecological perspective needs to be maintained for obtaining comparable or higher yield of crops and income with that of chemical farming. Further, accelerated adoption of “towards organic” (integrated crop management) approach in intensive agricultural areas (food hubs) and “certified organic farming” with combination of tradition, innovation and science in the organic areas (hills) and rainfed/ dryland regions can contribute towards safe food security and climate resilience, besides increased income of farm households. This approach will also positively contribute to the cause of human, livestock and eco-system health, the basic objective of organic agriculture.

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