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Organic Farming during Pandemic in India: Issues & Challenges

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 time, the Indian predominant sector has exhibited remarkable resilience, especially in organic farming. This article highlights the significant achievements of practicing organic farming even before the outbreak of COVID-19 and assesses those new emerging challenges warrant quality nutrient-rich foods. Despite the success in terms of production that has ensured food quality, food security, and environmental stability in the country, food inflation and its volatility remain a challenge, which requires supply-side interventions such as issues related to higher public investment, storage facility as a challenge, challenges related to the implementation of government policies and promotion of food processing are the empirical findings of this article. These issues are analysed in this paper based on various reports and data available from the existing body of literature and the case study approach, the opportunities and challenges have been identified, which are India specific.

Keywords: Organic Farming, COVID-19, Food security, Food quality, environmental stability.

Introduction:

India has undergone a quiet revolution, transitioning from a food-insecure and import-dependent nation in the early 1960s to a worldwide agricultural powerhouse today. India is the world's leading producer of milk, pulses, jute, and spices, as well as having the world's largest captive population (buffaloes). Rice, wheat, cotton, sugarcane, tea, peanuts, fruits, vegetables, and goat meat are among the country's top exports. Despite the fact that agriculture's share of India's total gross value added (GVA) has been dropping, it continues to increase in absolute terms, employing about 49% of the country's total households (PLFS, 2020). Even though the entire economy (real GVA) declined by 6.2 percent in 2020-21, the agriculture sector was able to overcome the COVID-19 shock and posted above-average real growth of 3.6 percent.

Today, Indian agriculture faces a number of issues related to the adoption of the green revolution in the 1960s, including adaptation to climate change disturbances, fragmented

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landholdings, low farm productivity, and high food price volatility, all of which demand next-generation reforms such as the adoption of environmentally sustainable and climate-resistant new farm technology, the development of land consolidation markets, and improvements in post-harvest practices (Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) – Annual Report, 2020).

The present pandemic crisis has raised a number of concerns about the continuous use of pesticides and chemicals in agriculture across the country. First, it exposed small and marginal landholder farmers to the risks of abrupt lockdowns and travel restrictions, which affect procurement and financial availability for a relatively useful crop, produce—fertilizers and pesticides. Second, because India is a significant exporter of spices, tea, and coffee, the national lockdown disrupted the supply chain and harmed the food processing industry. These two issues have increased public support for organic farming and the avoidance of genetically modified crops and seeds, which are essentially monoculture in nature and hence more susceptible to pest attacks, which have a direct impact on human health. As a result, organic farming may be a viable option (Kaushiki, 2020). This article contains all those challenges, issues and their personal opinions which faced by farmers, businessman and all those who engage in organic farming particularly during COVID 19 pandemic.

Review of Literature:

(Patidar, 2015) his research looked at farmers' perceptions of organic farming and the challenges that come with it. The research was carried out in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The state of Madhya Pradesh is divided into 39 districts, from which 100 respondents were chosen from 50 villages in the Khargone district in the Nimar area using a convenient and selective sampling technique. The study outcomes were presented using descriptive statistics and factor analysis, while the study hypotheses were tested using Chi-square analysis. According to the study, 67 percent of respondents have a favourable opinion of organic farming. A favourable attitude toward organic farming was discovered, with strong connections between age, educational background, farm size, organic farming benefits, and social factors. This means that the communities will have a high rate of adoption of the technology. This signifies those improvements related to organic agricultural practises will be widely adopted in the community.

(Das, Chatterjee, & Pal, 2020) their article was a review article which was based on secondary data available in the form of articles, research papers, and reports which discussed the current situation of organic farming in India and how it is necessary for the development of society socially, ecologically, and economically to attain sustainable development. This article focuses on the recent government policies and schemes implemented by the government of India to promote organic farming in India, like PKVY, the Organic Value Chain Development in the North Eastern Region Scheme, etc. They concluded that organic farming keeps soil healthy and maintains ecological balance, which leads to sustainable development. India has a better future in organic farming.

(Mondal, Tripathy , & Dinda, 2020) they investigate the organic cotton supply chain in the Madhya Pradesh area of Chhindwara. The authors of this study discovered some previously unknown facts about the organic farming supply chain, particularly in cotton crops. Sausar, Mahkhed, and Pandhurna are the four blocks in Chhindwara district where they collect primary data. They select study locations with care, keeping organic farming in mind. They collect primary data from 90 respondents from 18 villages from these 4 blocks using random selection and purposive sampling techniques, and farmers' categories are divided into three groups based on land holding as marginal, small, and large farmers. A part from that, the researchers collect data using a standardised questionnaire that includes both open-ended and closed-ended questions. In comparison to organic cotton farming, which requires a large investment and does not yield the best

return because all farmers in the study area are not certified, the researcher concluded that inorganic cotton farming is more common and yields higher productivity in the study area. Those who practise organic cotton farming, however, get nearly six times their investment back. According to the researcher, cutting out the intermediary can help organic farmers in the study area enhance their profits.

(Debnath, 2021), her study is unique which deals with the opportunities and challenges faced by the organization and farmers involved in organic food sector in India. This study is based on secondary data and a case study specific to Indian states. The focal point of her study is the supply chain of organic food from all over states of India and market expansion due to increase in demand of the consumer for organic food.

According to UN report, “Covid-19 pandemic may add 83-132 million to undernourished population in 2020” the present corona virus pandemic is expected to hasten the projected rise in the number of people going hungry. In 2020, the pandemic might add 83-132 million people to the world's total population of undernourished. Hunger might afflict over 840 million people by 2030. Over the last 15 years, a number of factors have contributed to rising undernourishment, including an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events, changing environmental conditions, and the expansion of pests and diseases. For India, there is some positive news. The number of people who are undernourished in the country has decreased by 60 million. Undernourishment has decreased in percentage terms in the country's entire population, from 21.7 percent in 2004-06 to 14 percent in 2017-19. In addition, there has been some success in fulfilling nutritional goals. Stunting among children under the age of 5 years has decreased from 47.8% in 2012 to 34.7 percent in 2019. In addition, more babies are being nursed now than ever before.

Objective:

The main objective is to examine the issues and challenges, and Perception of the farmers and businessmen on organic farming status before and after COVID 19.

Status of Organic Farming during Pandemic:

According to 2020 data, India ranks eighth in the world in terms of organic agricultural area and first in terms of overall number of producers (FIBL & IFOAM Year Book, 2020) As of March 2020, 2.78 million hectares of cropland were under organic farming, which is accounting for 2% of the country's total net sown area of 140.1 million ha. Madhya Pradesh is one of the top state with coverage of 0.76 million ha. under organic cultivation which is about one fourth of India’s total organic cultivated area (Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare Report, 2020).

Year/ Area	Cultivated Area (Organic + In conversion)	Wild Harvest Collection Area	Total Area (Cultivated + Wild Harvest)
2019-20	2299222.37 ha	1370578.95 ha	3669801.32 ha
2020-21	2657889.33 ha	1681295.61 ha	4339184.93 ha
Increment over Year	7.23%	10.18%	8.35%

Source: APEDA

We can see that as the pandemic progresses, the adoption rate of organic farming increases. As per the above table, between 2019-20 and 2020-21, the rate of conversion of organic cultivated

area increased by 7.23 percent, from 2.299 million ha to 2.657 million ha, implying that farmers are adopting organic farming more than conventional farming.

Issues and Challenges:

Major issues faced by Indian organic farming are lack of awareness, output marketing, shortage of biomass, inadequate supporting infrastructure, high input costs, marketing problems of organic inputs, low yields, etc. Some of the issues faced by farmers and businessman as they expressed in their blogs. There are several initiatives taken by government in the form of policies to get a greater coverage under organic but do not mean that there should be a good organic coverage for example Karnataka and Kerala these two states have had an organic policy since 2004 and 2010 but still the conversion rate is very low 2 or 2.5 per cent approx. (Ministry of Agriculture and welfare).

Opportunities:

According to Naman Bhurani 2021, Much to his surprise, the pandemic's overall effect on organic farming has been a net positive. He even goes so far as to argue that the pandemic has catapulted the organic food business to new heights. The demand is at an all-time high. Organic fruits, vegetables, pulses, cereals, and other foods are proving to be the perfect food for home as people hunt for nutritious food to feed their families. Organic foods are made out of natural and organic materials grown according to organic farming standards. They don't have any artificial preservatives; therefore, they can last a long time. We are gaining more and more traction in the COVID age with each passing day (Bhurani, 2021). Buyers are becoming more aware of the dangers of chemicals and pesticides. People have begun to seek out organic items for themselves specially during Pandemic. Also, as disposable income and awareness rise, families are spending more and more on their well-being and are willing to pay a higher price for a premium quality product. Demand not limits up to domestic demand its get wider during COVID time which we can see with the help table below of rise in export of organic.

Table 2: Organic Exports During 2019-20 to 2020-21			
Year/ Quantity Export	Total exports quantity	Total Export Value (INR)	Total Export Value (US\$)
2019-20	638998.39 MT	4685.908 crore	689.10 million \$
2020-21	888179.68 MT	7078.495 crore	1040.95 million \$
Increment over Year	249181.29 MT	2392.587 crore	351.85 million \$

Source: APEDA

With the help of the aforementioned schedule, it is obvious that the overall volume of organic exports in 2019–20 is 638998.39 MT, which is less than the entire volume of organic exports in 2020–21, which is 888179.68 MT. Organic exports increase during a pandemic since demand for organic food rises due to its high nutrient content, which aids in boosting immunity and combating health issues.

Government Policies:

According to Kumar (2020), the eco - friendly farming sector received Rs 687.5 crore in the Union Budget 2020–21, up from Rs 461.36 crore the previous year. (Kumar, 2020). There are more

than five policies launched by government of India related to organic farming such as Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER), National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), etc. When we talked about Union Budget 2022-23, the government of India has pushed for safer agricultural practises, and will emphasise organic and natural farming beginning with areas along a 5-kilometer stretch of the Ganga River. "The year 2023 has been designated as the year of millets," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated during the presenting of the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2022-23. Government passes order that state agricultural universities will be urged to update their curricula to fit the needs of natural, zero-budget, and organic farming, modern-day agriculture, value addition, and management. All these steps show near future there is a golden ere for organic farming as well as for farmers and businessmen those who deal in organic farming. It is a positive and strong approach to lead towards sustainable development in the economy.

Future Possibilities:

The Indian organic market is anticipated to reach Rs 2,000 crore in 2021, according to the Manarcadu Social Service Society (MASS), nearly 5,000 organic farmers across Kerala (Gupta, 2021). According to a report by Research and Markets, India's organic food market is expected to increase from \$177.14 million in FY2020 to \$553.87 million in FY2026, with a CAGR of 21.00 percent. The organic food market in India is predicted to rise by more than 23% by 2023, due to supportive government regulations that support organic farming and increasing land area under organic farming.

Conclusion:

During the COVID-19 period, Indian organic farming reached new heights with record output of diverse food grains, commercial and horticultural crops, demonstrating resilience and providing quality food with food security. The industry, on the other hand, has faced a number of obstacles, the mitigating of which necessitates a comprehensive policy approach. All these issues resolved with help of focusing on proper implementation of government policies and yojanas. As government gave special focus on natural farming and Indian agricultural universities in 2022-23 budget which gives better future in terms of economy as well as ecologically. These initiatives lead to sustainable development.

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