



Prospects And Problems Of Organic Farming In Northeast India

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Abstract:

Now-a-days people are very health conscious because every day the new generation is facing, new health problems. People intake slow poison daily in terms of hybrid food, and slowly everybody's health is at risk. Simply the environment changes from a healthy nation to an abnormal nation due to the consumption of manmade chemicals. So human health is threatened by three dangerous food security, which are Chemical fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified crops. Therefore, there is a need for high attention towards human health consciousness so that people can be aware of paying at least a premium price for a good chemical-free product. In this paper, we mainly tried to focus on the prospects and problems of organic farming in North-East India.

Keywords: NER, organic farming, prospects, and problems.

Introduction

Organic farming is also known as ecological or biological farming. The farming uses fertilizers of organic origin such as compost manure, green manure, and bone meal and places emphasis on techniques such as crop rotation and companion planting. The relevance of organic farming is it helps to maintain a healthy environment by reducing the level of pollution. It reduces human and animal health hazards by reducing the level of residues in the product. It also helps in keeping agricultural production at a sustainable level. Similarly, it reduces the cost of agricultural production and improves the health of the soil (Sing & Dabas 2020).

The North Eastern Region of India comprises eight states. It is largely unspoilt by modern agricultural practices, which involve heavy use of agrochemicals and chemicals. Therefore, the region is a natural choice for promoting organic farming in the country. Sikkim is the first organic state in India and has already shown the way for the other states in the region (FAO Report -2003).

The North Eastern (NE) Region has a total area of 18.37 million hectares, out of which 5.5 million hectares is so far cultivated land, but organic farming covers only 3 per cent. Hence, the potential is very high for the farmers to choose organic farming in the region. For farmers whose farms are located in remote areas, such farming practices can emerge as a natural choice. It is mainly because of the high cost of chemical inputs. Moreover, organic matter in the soil in the NE region is significantly high as compared to other parts of the country. The NE states are unspoiled by modern agricultural practices, so the region is a choice for organic farming in India (DIPR Report 2022).

According to the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), nearly 90,500 hectares of land in the NE region were under organic cultivation in 2017-18. The state of Sikkim accounts for more than three-fourths of the said areas. Similarly, other states such as Meghalaya and Assam have shown tremendous progress in embracing organic farming. Again, as per the available statistics, another 77,600 hectares is in the process of switching over to organic cultivation. The conversion process normally takes three years (APEDA 2017-18).

History of Organic Farming in India

Organic farming has been practised in India for thousands of years back. The great Indian civilization thrived on organic farming and was one of the most prosperous countries in the world till the British ruled it. In traditional India, the entire agriculture was practised using organic techniques, where fertilizers, pesticides, etc., were obtained from plant and animal products. The farmers used the bullocks for farming along with dung which was used as fertilizers in the production process (Raj et.al-2014).

The growing population of India and several natural calamities lead to a severe food scarcity in India during the period of 1950-60. As a result, the government was forced to import food grains from foreign countries. The government had severely increased the production of food grains in India to increase food security. Therefore, the Green Revolution became the most important program of the government in the 1960s (Sebby-2010). A large area of land was decided to cultivate as a part of the Green Revolution. The government of India introduced hybrid seeds in such land for the said purpose. Natural and organic fertilizers were replaced by chemical fertilizers. Similarly, locally made pesticides were replaced by chemical pesticides. Large chemical factories such as the Rashtriya Chemical Fertilizers were established (RCF) (Nelson et. al- 2019).

Organic exports from India increased by 50 per cent in 2021-2022 as compared to the previous year. Major states of India, such as Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, and Haryana, dominated the country's organic exports. Processed food topped organic exports accounting for 56 per cent of the total, followed by oilseeds at 9 per cent and cereals and millets at 7.30 per cent. Millet exports increased by 23.07 per cent year-on-year, primarily due to government initiatives. The Indian government even declared 2022-23 as the international year of millet (FiBL & IFOAM-Organics International Report 2021-22).

Benefits of Organic Farming:

- Environment-friendly
- Promotes sustainable development
- Healthy and tasty food
- Inexpensive process
- It uses organic inputs
- Generate income
- Generate income through exports
- Source of employment
- Organic farming is more labour-intensive. Hence, it generates more employment. (Finly et.al 2017)

Prospects of Organic farming in the North Eastern Region of India

The farmers of the NER region of India still used traditional farming methods. The region has a huge potential for organic farming. It is because it assigns land as the best organic farming region. Sing and Ray (2015) stated that the North-eastern Region (NER) is home to some niche crops like Assam Lemon, Joha Rice, Medicinal Rice and Passion fruit which have high market demands. The NER was considered as an organic farming region in 2003. The state Sikkim became the first state in India to officially announce the adaptation of organic farming to ensure the long-term substance of fertility, protection of environment and ecology, healthy living, and decreasing the risk of health ailments by implementing organic practice on approximately 76,000 hectares of the agriculture land. Mizoram is also hand on hand with Sikkim.

The North Eastern region has a large potential for organic farming. Firstly, the region receives sufficient rainfall to adopt organic farming (2000 mm to 11000 mm per annum). The production of organic farming is good when the area receives extreme rainfall and less run-off water in the field. The region has a great opportunity to offer in the formation of organic matter in soils. It is also capable of storing significant amounts of carbon in the soil, which is an effective way of combatting climate change. The emerging demand for safe and healthy organic food with the added flavour of being grown in a pristine environment and virgin soils of North Eastern states is fast emerging as a unique opportunity for the farmers of the region. The disadvantage of not being able to pick up the green revolution is now proving a boon, and the region, with its renewed vigour on modern organic agriculture, is poised to become a hub for the organic production of its unique heritage crops. Realizing the potential, the Prime Minister initiated a scheme for the development of commercial organic farming in the region in 2015, which later became to be known as "Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region" (MOVCDNER). Since then, MOVCDNER has been an instrument in bringing a definite change in the lives of the organic growers in the region. The scheme provides end-to-end support to the farmers from farm to fork, including quality production, effective postharvest management, and value addition through processing and direct market linkages to national and international markets (Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare- 2021).

Need for Strategic Change in Policies

The North Eastern states have been gifted with enormous resources such as fertile land, abundant water, rich bio-diversity, etc. However, due to remoteness, marginality, and inaccessibility, the economic upliftment of the people is not developed by sustained resources (Rajkhowa 2022).

The following strategies need to be changed for the upliftment of organic farming in the North Eastern Region.

- Water harvesting technology needs to be promoted in the entire NE Region.
- Certification Mechanism, the intervention of certification can export a large amount of production.
- Awareness should be the utmost strategy that needs to be implemented among educated youths and farmers with the right type of technology and the right information.
- Skill development and capacity are also another important strategies that need to be followed so that every aspect of the production and processing of agri-allied products can create a marketing surplus.

The problem of Organic Farming in the North Eastern Region of India

The primary problem of organic farming in the NER of India is the marketing problem. The lack of awareness among the people is the main hurdle to selling organic products. Further, the price of the organic product is high enough. The higher price rate attracts only a few portions of people to afford it on a daily basis (Sing et.al 2017). Although NER has many advantages for the cultivation of organic farming, but it attached with many challenges, as mentioned below-

- Output Marketing problem
- Inadequate supporting infrastructure
- High input Costs
- Marketing Problems of organic inputs
- Absence of an appropriate agricultural Policy
- Lack of financial support
- Lack of training on organic practices
- The inconvenience of the organic technique
- Lack of price advantage
- Small holding size
- The remoteness of the region
- Difficulties in managing insect pests and diseases in organic condition
- Supply of a quality organic seed (Sing et.al 2017)

Growth of Organic Farming in the North Eastern Region of India

Organic farming is the way forward for agriculture in India, and the North-Eastern region is an example of it. The presence of health consciousness increases the trend of the adoption of organic farming in the North-Eastern states. The government of India takes the necessary steps to promote organic farming in each state in the country.

Table 1: Organic cultivation in North-East Region:

States	Area (in Hectares)	In Conversion
Sikkim	74,094	1,982
Meghalaya	2,580	37,756
Assam	9,883	18,129
Nagaland	3,526	5,314
Arunachal	51	6,129
Manipur	158	5,240
Tripura	204	2,048
Mizoram	0	999
Total	90,496	77,597

Source: Agricultural and Processed Food Product Export Development Authority.

Table 2: Growing trend of Organic Farming in North-East India

Organic Farming Performance area and Production (2000-21&2017-2018)				
States	2000-2021		2017-2018	
	Area (Lakh ha)	Production (lakh ton)	Area (lakh ha)	Production (lakh ton)
Arunachal Pradesh	1.84	2.03	2.01	3.33
Assam	28.88	41.67	27.67	48.76
Manipur	1.64	3.78	2.64	5.92
Meghalaya	1.31	2.03	1.32	2.39
Mizoram	0.61	1.24	0.53	0.66
Nagaland	2.11	2.77	2.98	5.68
Sikkim	0.76	1.03	0.76	1.10
NER	39.69	59.78	40.67	74.99

Source: Roy et al. (2014), 1 lakh =0.1 million; NER-East Region

Conclusion

The North-eastern Region of India has a good grace potentiality for organic farming. However, the region is unable to take advantage of the potentiality, and NER is far behind from national average in the case of organic production/exports. Therefore, there is a need for suitable policies to upgrade NER towards the development in case of exploring virgin natural potentialities. The adoption of suitable agro-techniques is indispensable to accessing opportunities in the region.

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