



Organic farming in Indian perspectives

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Organic agriculture is one among the broad spectrum of production methods that are supportive of the environment. Organic production systems are based on specific standards precisely formulated for food production and aim at achieving agro ecosystems, which are socially and ecologically sustainable. Organic farming has the potential to provide benefits in terms of environmental protection, conservation of non-renewable resources and improved food quality. India is bestowed with lot of potential to produce all varieties of organic products due to its diverse agro-climatic regions. In several parts of the country, the inherited tradition of organic farming is an added advantage. This holds promise for the organic producers to tap the market which is growing steadily in the domestic market related to the export market. In India, the land under certification is around 2.8 million ha. But, there is considerable latent interest among farmers in conversion to organic farming.

Basic concept of organic farming:

– It concentrates on building up the biological fertility of the soil so that the crops take the nutrients they need from the steady turnover within the soil nutrients produced in this way are released in harmony with the needs of the plants.

– Control of pests, diseases, and weeds is achieved largely by the development of an ecological balance within the system and by the use of bio-pesticides and various cultural techniques such as crop rotation, mixed cropping, and cultivation.

– Organic farmers recycle all wastes and manures within a farm but the export of the products from the farm results in a steady drain of nutrients.

– In a situation, where conservation of energy and

resources is considered to be important, community or country would make every effort to recycle to all urban and industrial wastes back to agriculture and thus the system would be only be a small inputs of new resources to “top up” soil fertility.

Definitions of organic farming : According to Funtilana (1990), “Organic farming is giving back to the nature what is taken from it”. It is not mere non-chemicalism in



agriculture; it is a system of farming based on integral relationship. Therefore, one should know the relationship among soil, water, plant and micro flora and overall relationship between plants animal kingdom. It is the totality of these relationships, which is the backbone of the organic farming.

Characteristics of organic farming systems:

– Protecting the long-term fertility of soils by maintaining organic matter levels, soil biological activity and careful mechanical intervention.

– Nitrogen self-sufficiency through the use of legumes and biological nitrogen fixation, as well as effective recycling of organic materials, including crop residues and livestock wastes.

– Supplementing crop nutrients, where necessary, by using nutrient sources which are made available to the plants indirectly but the action of soil micro organisms and chemical reactions of the soil.

– The extensive management of livestock, paying full regards to their evolutionary adaptations behavioural needs, and animal welfare issues with respect to nutrition, housing, health, breeding and rearing.

– Careful attention to the impact of the farming system on the wider environment and the conservation of wildlife and natural habitats.

Organic farming in India: India, only 30 per cent of total cultivable area is covered with fertilizers where irrigation facilities are available and in the remaining 70 per cent of arable land, which is mainly rain-fed, negligible amount of fertilizers is being used. Farmers' in these areas often use organic manure as a source of nutrients that are readily available either in their own farm or in their locality. The North Eastern region of India provides considerable opportunity for organic farming due to least utilization of chemical inputs. It is estimated that 18 million hectare of such land is available in the NE, which can be exploited for organic production. With the sizable acreage under naturally organic/default organic cultivation, India has tremendous potential to grow crops organically and emerge as a major supplier of organic products in the world's organic market.

In India, there are three types of farmers engaged in organic production:

– Farmers who mostly follow the indigenous knowledge and technology developed over the past thousands of years. They normally grow for their own consumption and have little surplus.

– Farmers with small to medium sized holdings. These can be divided into two groups: those working to revive the Vedic practices, coupled with Ayurvedic tradition of health system with scientific exposition and others who follow modern organic agriculture systems, like Steiner's

biodynamic agriculture or Fukuoka's "nature farming", for example. They usually have market surplus and sometimes export their goods.

– Private companies that have responded to market demands in the North by organizing large scale conversions to organic systems. By going organic, they add more economic value to the crops, which are already cultivated in a manner similar to organic systems.

Organic versus conventional agriculture

: In recent years, there is a lot of debate between the proponents of organic farming and a section of the community who questioned the scientific validity and feasibility of organic farming. The most often debated issues on organic



agriculture fall under the following six categories:

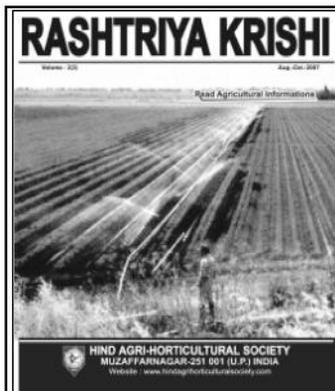
- Can organic farming produce enough food for everybody?
- Is it possible to meet the nutrient requirements of crops entirely from organic sources?
- Are there any significant environmental benefits of organic farming?
- Is the food produced by organic farming superior in quality?
- Is organic agriculture economically feasible?
- Is it possible to manage pests and diseases in organic farming?

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