



Organic farming: the way to a better life

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At the turn of the twentieth century, organic farming was developed as an alternative sustainable agricultural practice focusing on using organic inputs such as compost manure and green manure. It also included sustainable agricultural practices such as crop rotation and companion planting.

Demand for Organic Farming

Since the 1990s, the market for organic food and other products has grown rapidly. It has reached \$63 billion worldwide in 2012. This demand has driven a similar increase in organically managed farmland that grew from 2001 to 2011 at a compounding rate of 8.9% per annum. As of 2016, approximately 57,800,000 hectares (143,000,000 acres) worldwide were farmed organically, representing approximately 1.2% of the world's total farmland.

Advantages of organic farming

The main reasons farmers' want to go organic is their concerns for the environment. Organic farming negates the use of chemical inputs. Organic farming practices are also energy efficient. Conventional farming entails energy intensive manufacturing processes which often rely heavily on fossil fuels. Organic farmers find their method of farming to be profitable and personally rewarding.

Organic farming helps to protect the environment by minimising soil degradation and erosion. It decreases pollution and optimizes biological productivity. It is conducive in maintaining long-term soil fertility and it also helps to maintain biological diversity within the eco-system.

Disadvantages

Nitrogen leaching, nitrous oxide emissions, ammonia emissions, eutrophication potential and acidification potential are higher for organic products and excess nutrients in lakes, rivers, and groundwater can cause algal blooms, eutrophication, and subsequent dead zones. In addition, nitrates are harmful to aquatic organisms. Organic farming also requires much more land.

Organic farming in India

India has great potential in the field of organic farming with organic manures like cow dung, tree leaves and animal wastes being easily available in rural areas. The continuous

use of chemical fertilizers depletes the quality of the soil and reduces yield.

The Indian agricultural sector is taking a slow turn towards organic farming. The Indian state of Sikkim has gone completely organic. Customers too have taken to organic products due to their freshness and nutritional value. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan are also driving farmers to move completely towards natural farming.

Global scenario

The world market for organic food has grown exponentially and the global organic food market is set to grow by 16% over the next three years. In India, the organic food market is registered to grow by 25% by 2020.

Growth of retail sales in North America is predicted to be 10% to 20% per year during the next few years. The retail organic food market in Canada was estimated at over \$1.5 billion in 2008 and \$22.9 billion in the U.S.A. in 2008. It is estimated that imported products make up over 70% of the organic food consumed in Canada. Canada also exports many organic products, particularly soybeans and grains.

Future of organic farming

"Organic farming needs more knowledge, transparency and farmer-buyer relationship for the simple reason that you should know who is growing your food, where is it coming from, and how is it being grown," states Kavya Chandra, founder of A Green Venture, an eco-enterprise that curates experiences and learning that connects one to natural, chemical-free food at farms, and influences lifestyle and habits through various workshops and platforms.

While the Indian government has implemented the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) that involves the accreditation programme for certification bodies, standards for organic production and promotion of organic farming, there are still certain issues that need to be addressed.

Hansa V., who runs a hydroponic farm called Growing Greens, informed, "At a time when more and more conventional farmers are opting out of farming, but the population to feed is increasing exponentially, it is crucial that more individuals and government bodies take up farming to maintain the balance." ■