

ORGANIC FARMING CAN BOOST THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF FARMERS IN BIHAR: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Organic farming has experienced considerable growth in recent years. Proponents of organic farming point to the environmental and nutritional benefits of organic systems, although these are contested by some. More recently, it has been argued that organic farming can provide rural development benefits through enhanced employment and through closer connections with the local economy, reconnecting consumers with producers and stimulating positive economic multipliers. Against the background of claims made for the rural development potential of organic farming, this paper considers the generation and retention of income, purchasing patterns, and direct employment impacts of a large sample of organic and non-organic farmers in Bihar. The paper reveals that how organic farming help the farmers towards uplifting the economic status.

Key Words: Organic Farming, Rural development, Integrated Farming system.

INTRODUCTION

Organic farming is an alternative agricultural system which originated early in the 20th century in reaction to rapidly changing farming practices. Organic farming continues to be developed by various organic agriculture organizations today. It relies on 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. Biological pest control, mixed cropping and the fostering of insect predators are encouraged. In general, organic standards are designed to allow the use of naturally occurring substances while prohibiting or strictly limiting synthetic substances.^[2] For instance, naturally occurring pesticides such as pyrethrin and rotenone are permitted, while synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are generally prohibited. Synthetic substances that are allowed include, for example, copper sulfate, elemental sulfur and Ivermectin. Genetically modified organisms, nano-materials, human sewage sludge, plant growth regulators, hormones, and antibiotic use in livestock husbandry are

prohibited. Reasons for advocacy of organic farming include advantages in sustainability, openness, self-sufficiency, autonomy/independence, health, food security, and food safety.

Organic agricultural methods are internationally regulated and legally enforced by many nations, based in large part on the standards set by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), an international umbrella organization for organic farming organizations established in 1972. Organic agriculture can be defined as:

An integrated farming system that strives for sustainability, the enhancement of soil fertility and biological diversity whilst, with rare exceptions, prohibiting synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, and growth hormones.

Since 1990 the market for organic food and other products has grown rapidly, reaching \$73 billion worldwide in 2016. 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 2011, approximately 37,000,000 hectares (91,000,000 acres) worldwide were farmed organically, representing approximately 0.9 percent of total world farmland.

Demand for organically grown crops is on the rise, both in domestic niche markets and in export markets. Bihar is strong in production of certain high quality crops, vegetables, fruits and spices which are suitable for organic production system. Department of Agriculture, Bihar has taken initiatives to promote organic farming on a large scale. Government of Bihar has taken up several programmes to encourage organic farming, with the objectives of promoting sustainable production, improving soil organic carbon for sustenance of soil quality, and promoting export of quality organic produce. In the first phase, based on the experience of the first organic village Pothia, Samastipur, one village in each of the 38 districts was selected as organic or bio-village. Bio-village is a unit to improve physical, chemical and biological status of soil through locally available organic inputs and production of crops through scientific methods by farmers at village level. The concept helps to lower cost of production, increase fertility and check degradation of soil. Area under vegetable cultivation and number of milch animals are the two important criteria for selection of a bio-village.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr R K Sohane, director, Bihar Agriculture Management and Extension Training Institute (Bameti), told TOI, "Organic farming is in the agricultural roadmap of the Bihar CM. These organic crops will be available in

market for domestic buyers and for catering industry which includes hotels, flights, etc. But along with that, we are planning to export them to bring benefit to state farmers."

"The changing lifestyle of people and increasing demand for healthy food has forced the government to take this initiative," said Dr Ajay Kumar, deputy director, horticulture department, Bihar.

Highly placed sources at the state agriculture department said here today that the process for selection of villages for proposed organic corridor in districts of Patna and Nalanda was in the final stage.

A list of 90 villages in 10 blocks of Patna district had been prepared. Similarly, some villages in Nalanda district had also been selected for promotion of organic farming.

He said that villages had been selected by keeping in view that farmers could have quick access to markets for sale of their organic agriculture produce. Sources said Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was likely to inaugurate organic corridor drive in Patna and Nalanda districts soon. Sources said that encouraging results were being received from those places where farmers had opted for organic farming in the state.

Rupees 10 lakh every year, from one-hectare (ha) land -- an unbelievable proposition for all those bought up on the much-propagated idea that small farmlands are unprofitable. But Ramesh Chander Dagar has made this proposition into a reality. A visit to his farmland in Akbarpur Barota village, Sonapat district, Haryana can be quite an eye opener. The farmland resembles the laboratory of any agricultural scientist. Says Dagar, "I am a simple farmer, who has studied only up to the 10th standard. I used to keep hearing claims of the government that small land holdings are not viable for agriculture. And that set me thinking. About four years back, I set aside one ha from my agricultural land and started experimenting on it. Today I am confident that this land can give a minimum income of Rs 10 lakh per annum."

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN PROMOTING ORGANIC FARMING

The Bihar government has launched an "organic farming promotion programme" for the cultivation of organic crops in all the districts of the state. The government has decided to develop 38 "organic grams (organic villages)" for which a sum of Rs. 255 crore has been sanctioned for five years. Some of these villages are: Dahour (Patna), Sartha (Nalanda), Belsand (Gopalganj), Gaighat Jaata (Muzaffarpur), Rajapaakar (Vaishali) and Narpatganj (Araria).

This programme is being run under the leadership of A K Sinha, agriculture production commissioner (APC). At the district level, the district agriculture officer (DAO) has been entrusted with the task of monitoring the programme.

Any farmer residing in the chosen villages, who has land possession certificate (LPC), can do organic farming. For this, the minimum land requirement is one acre and maximum four hectares. In return, farmers growing organic crops will get all the benefits from the government.

At present, farmers in these villages are producing only organic vegetables and fruits, including potato, cauliflower, tomato, cabbage, peas, ladyfinger, carrot, litchi, guava, mango, etc.

At present, certification of organic crops produced in Nalanda has started which is being done by an agency, Ecocert. In Muzaffarpur, the National Agriculture Cooperative Marketing Federation (NAFED) is doing certification of "litchi". For the certification of organic crops in rest of the districts, the government will soon float tenders.

Under this plan, the government is currently helping these farmers in producing natural fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides. For the first time in India, Bihar farmers will get 50% subsidy for production of wormy compost, a natural fertilizer.

Agricultural Development Programmes

There are 14 major agricultural development programmes managed and monitored by Department of Agriculture, Government of Bihar which include 5 state sponsored, 4 centre sponsored and 4 Mission Mode projects. An attempt has been made here to examine the performance of three important agricultural development programmes i.e.; National Horticulture Mission (NHM), Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and National Food Security Mission (NFSM).

Role of Organing Farming in the Development of Economic Health of Farmers in Bihar

In the absence of a dedicated marketing channel in the country for certified organic farm produce — cultivation of which is thinly distributed across the Bihar — the proposal is seen boosting farmers' income and helping firms like Amazon, Big Basket and Grofers maintain steady supply of these food items.

The agriculture department expects the 50,000-hectare area to come under organic farming in the northeast region in the coming years. “Consistent volume and quality of organic produce is currently not available because of small land holding of farmers and lack of technology. The outlay of Rs 400 crore this year has helped in expand acreage,” said Pravesh Sharma, managing director of startup Sabziwala, a retail fruits and vegetables chain. “Further, with focus on marketing and brand building by the government will give a push to the sale of organic produce.”

Other Retail chain giant like Reliance Fresh also looking forward to have a deal with the farmers regarding production of organic farming produces.

CONCLUSION:

No doubt future of farmers is bright because organic farming has immense potential to encourage them due to effective return out of organic farm produces. Government is very serious to promote farmers towards organic farming than of traditional farming. Even in this budget Government has shown keen interest to develop agricultural infrastructure. A number of central sponsored projects have already been initiated in the State but they have not yielded the desired results. The strong monitoring system of agricultural projects, investment in irrigation and research, improving access of farmers to inputs and agricultural development programmes, increased agricultural credit to small peasants and tenants and, of course, increased generation and improved transmission of electricity are the prerequisites for higher and sustainable agricultural growth in the State. In the absence of these, desired rate of growth will remain elusive. Agriculture Extension officials should also be trained for modern agriculture technology and package of practices.

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