

# A Qualitative Evaluation of the Sustainable Consumption Approach with Regard to Organic Products

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## Abstract

*This study looks at the value of sustainable consumption and its expanding effect in Indian commerce as it attempts to add to the conversation about consumer food purchasing habits in relation to sustainability concerns, with a focus on organic choices. The phenomena in actual situations were investigated using a qualitative methodology. Data from detailed components to categories, topics, dimensions, and codes were analysed. By providing a consumer decision map that outlines key elements that are crucial in the purchase of non-certified organic food, the research has added to the body of knowledge in this area. The practical knowledge provided by this study can help growers, businesses, and policy officials increase consumer comprehension, particularly in the 92 other nations that do not have laws governing organic food. The findings will be helpful in creating a quantitative model for future research. This study clarifies the consumer approach to sustainable consumption and its consequences for organic products by looking at the Sri Lankan model.*


**Keywords:** Organic products, sustainable consumption, India's consumer approach, evaluation of the Sri Lankan model


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## Introduction

After the outbreak of COVID-19, we have witnessed humans' tendency to shift from processed foods to organic products. Presently, these products are in the shopping carts of shopping giants like Flipkart, Amazon, Blinkit, etc. Organic products are cultivated within an agricultural framework that abstains from the utilisation of detrimental chemical fertilisers and pesticides, while adhering to an environmentally and socially conscientious methodology. This approach involves the natural growth of plants, which is consistently beneficial for one's well-being. The majority of nations have established legislation governing the cultivation of organic items, which serve to oversee and regulate the production of organic goods. The United States of America employs the USDA certification system for organic

products, while India utilises the India Organic certification, also known as NPOP (National Programme for Organic Production). With the onset of the Green Revolution, the use of fertilisers and pesticides has been the preferred option for farmers in states like Haryana, Punjab, etc. However, after the sudden increase in diseases and depletion of groundwater due to overuse of urea, pesticides, etc., there has been a growing culture of using organic products as a part of sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption, in simpler terms, refers to the utilisation of goods and services in a manner that reduces the adverse effects on the environment, so ensuring the fulfilment of human needs not only in the present but also for future generations. The practise of sustainable consumption entails the prudent utilisation of resources and the minimization of waste products and contamination. In this paper, we will assess the qualitative impact of the sustainable consumption approach with regard to organic products and offer insights on the Indian consumer's approach, with special emphasis on the case study of Sri Lanka. The present paper assesses the qualitative impact of the sustainable consumption approach with regard to organic products and the consumer approach to sustainable consumption with reference to the Sri Lankan model. We will further stress its importance and its growing influence in India's marketplace.

## Background

Organic farming presents itself as a feasible alternative to conventional agriculture, as it encompasses various aspects such as food safety and quality, environmental considerations, and animal welfare. Moreover, it serves as a catalyst for promoting sustainable development. The primary cause of this phenomenon is the shift in how consumers view food. According to researchers, food is no longer just a way to sate hunger but has taken on a variety of meanings as a result of consumer worries about health, the environment, and animal welfare. In the past three years, the organic food business in India has virtually tripled in size, with the domestic market now worth about INR 300 crore and the export market worth about INR 700 crore. Industry forecasts predict that India's organic food market will expand at a CAGR of more than 25% between 2015 and 2020. The steady emergence of organic food as a necessary component of the upper-class population in India's daily diet is also a promising sign for the numerous prospects this industry will have in the years to come. India's organic products are among the most exported to traditional markets, including the US, EU, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand. The steady emergence of organic food as a necessary component of the upper-class population in India's daily diet is also a promising sign for the numerous prospects this industry will have in the years to come. India's organic products are among the most exported to traditional markets, including the US, EU, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand. (Desai, 2021). Since 2015, the Indian government has encouraged organic farming under the ParamparagatKrishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), a national program. 13.9 million certified organic farmers farmed 0.59 million hectares (or roughly 0.4% of India's cropped area) under this program in 29,859 organic clusters. According to a study, organic farmers had 14–19% lower costs and 12–18% lower yields than conventional farmers. Overall, profitability is just slightly higher than it would be in conventional agriculture. According to the economy-wide economic surplus model, lower crop yields will result in lower producer and consumer surpluses. (2) Since the 1960s, conventional agriculture that relies on agrochemicals and is input-intensive has increased yields and solved worldwide challenges with food security. However, the environment and human health have been impacted by the ongoing, unbalanced, and frequently excessive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. (3)

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has witnessed a transition to organic products and their methods, as in the case of India and its neighbouring countries, specifically Sri Lanka. Fertiliser subsidies in Sri Lanka cost the country about \$260 million a year, or roughly 0.3% of its GDP. Fertilisers are primarily imported. The government devised an odd solution in 2021 to stop the loss of foreign exchange reserves, banning all fertiliser imports beginning in May 2021 and declaring that Sri Lanka would instantly switch to 100% organic farming. Based on an estimation, the implementation of the agrochemical prohibition by the president of Sri Lanka was projected to result in an annual cost reduction of \$400 million for synthetic fertilisers. This substantial financial saving might potentially be allocated towards enhancing the importation of other commodities. Additionally, the government said that using chemical pesticides and fertilisers had "adverse health and environmental impacts" and that such industrial agricultural practices were incompatible with the nation's tradition of "sustainable food." (BABA, Baba's Explainer: Sri Lanka's

Organic Farming Disaster). However, the transition to organic farming didn't help the situation; it rather made it worse. Daily food staples, including sugar, rice, and onions, have more than doubled in price in Sri Lanka, with sugar hitting a record high of Rs 200/kg. In addition, the cost of cooking gas and kerosene is rising. The decline in tea production during the month of October has generated apprehension, prompting concerns about potential repercussions on other significant export commodities like as cinnamon, pepper, rubber, cardamom, cloves, nutmeg, betel leaves, chocolate, and vanilla. Month over month, inflation in the nation has increased by 30 basis points. Compared to \$7.5 billion in November 2019, foreign reserves have dropped by 62% to \$2.8 billion in July. Additionally, the Sri Lankan rupee has fallen in value by 7% against the US dollar. (BABA, Baba's Explainer: Sri Lanka's Organic Farming Disaster)

### Impact on the Sri Lankan Economy

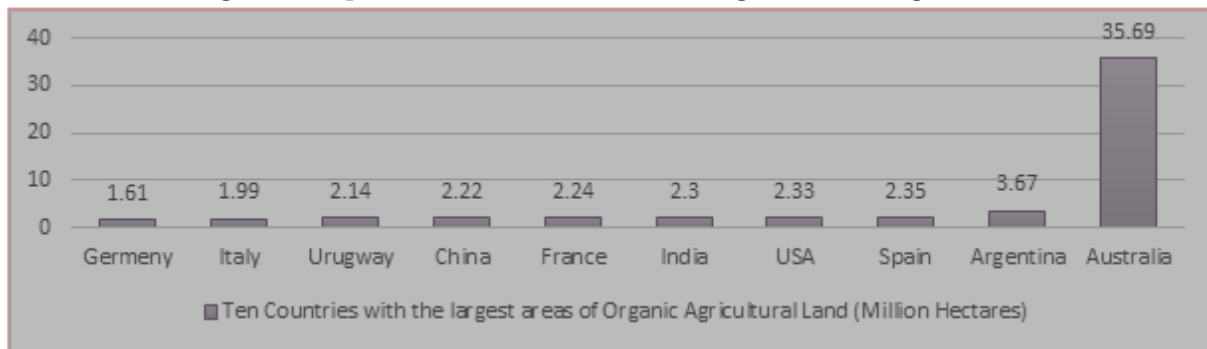
Sri Lanka underwent a rapid transition towards the adoption of organic farming practises. The utilisation of fertilisers was abruptly discontinued. The phenomenon in question exerted a significant influence on the production of food, hence contributing to the ongoing food crisis. Nevertheless, it should be noted that organic farming cannot be solely held responsible for this. It is evident that the yields obtained via organic farming are comparatively lower, ranging from 15% to 25%, in comparison to the yields achieved through conventional chemical farming. Nevertheless, this factor should be duly considered prior to any alterations in the agricultural landscape of Sri Lanka. 41% of the land is used for agriculture (the majority being rice, although more than 10% is used for plantation crops). Are farmers informed about the transition to organic farming? Only 20% of farmers in Sri Lanka have the knowledge to switch to entirely organic production, according to a poll. (Saigaonker, 2021)

### The best course of action

Avoid making a binary decision between conventional chemical farming and organic farming. Making audacious decisions to switch to organic farming is not the secret to agricultural reform success. It depends on teaching farmers, informing the public of the benefits they stand to receive, building the necessary infrastructure, and preserving a supply chain for agricultural inputs as it changes over time. Bhutan announced a policy in 2008 to switch to 100% organic food by 2020, but it is still having difficulty making the transition. Similarly, in the Indian context, choosing our own transitional road while properly preparing and implementing it is our success motto.

### Evaluation of the Growing Influence of Organic Products in the Indian Context and Lessons for India

Organic farming is expected to sustain the richness and purity of nature. Upon visiting an organic farm, one would observe a significant amount of insect, avian, and mammalian activity. Based on empirical evidence, ecological production areas exhibit a notable increase of approximately 30% in the presence of both fauna and flora, as compared to conventional farming practises. The lack of herbicides and the limited application of fertiliser are the primary factors contributing to this phenomenon. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a shift in public attitudes towards organic food, with an increased focus on the need of food safety and nutrition in bolstering immune system strength. According to the 2021 study by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FIBL), India occupies a distinctive position among the 187 nations that engage in organic agriculture. India possesses a land area of approximately 2.30 million acres, rendering it the domicile of 30% of the global organic growers. The total area dedicated to organic farming amounts to 11,60,650 PGS farmers and 15,99,010 India Organic farmers. Additionally, there are a total of 1703 processors and 745 dealers involved in the organic farming industry. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the share of land dedicated to organic farming throughout the country. According to recent data from the agricultural sector in 2021, there have been notable developments in farming practises (Farming, 2021).

**Figure 01: Top Ten Countries in terms of the largest certified organic area**

Source: FiBL Survey 2021

### Indian Organic Farming's Current Situation

Organic farming in India is now in its nascent stage. As of March 2019, the total area of cropland under organic farming practises amounted to more than 2.30 million hectares. This figure represents a proportion of 2% in relation to the whole net sown area of the country, which is estimated to be 140.1 million hectares. Considering the concentration of a substantial segment of this particular sector within a limited number of states, a select few have undertaken proactive measures to expand the scope of organic agriculture. Madhya Pradesh ranks first in terms of land area dedicated to organic cultivation, encompassing around 0.76 million acres. This accounts for nearly 27% of the total organic agricultural land in India. According to recent research in the field of agriculture, the topic of interest is farming in the year 2021. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic during the market year (MY) 2020/2021, it is seen that India's organic agricultural, food, and retail sectors have exhibited significant growth and success (Service, 2021). The cultivation or growth methods of our food can have a substantial impact on various aspects of our well-being, including physical, mental, and emotional health, as well as the environment. Individuals who experience sensitivity to certain foods, chemicals, or preservatives may observe a reduction or elimination of their symptoms by adhering to a diet consisting exclusively of organic foods. This is attributed to the fact that organic foods often include a higher concentration of advantageous constituents, such as antioxidants, in comparison to conventionally grown counterparts. Some benefits are as follows:

- **Produce grown organically uses fewer pesticides:** Synthetic fungicides, herbicides, and insecticides are commonly employed in traditional agricultural practises, resulting in the presence of their residues on and within the consumed food. Due to the absence of additives that serve to prolong its shelf life, organic food often exhibits a higher degree of freshness. The origin of organic food may not always be limited to local small-scale farms (Robinson & Segal, n.d.).
- **The environment benefits more from organic farming.** Organic agriculture practises have the potential to reduce energy use, minimise pollution, mitigate soil erosion, and enhance soil fertility. Farming without the use of synthetic pesticides is preferable for both avian and terrestrial fauna, as well as for individuals residing in close proximity to agricultural areas. According to Robinson and Segal (year),
- **Animals kept organically are not fed animal by products, growth hormones, or antibiotics.** The risk of mad cow disease (BSE) increases when animals are fed animal refuse, and the use of antibiotics can lead to the development of drug-resistant bacterial strains. Typically, animals raised organically have more space to roam and access to nature, which promotes their health (Robinson & Segal).
- **Limit your intake of salt and sugar.** The WHO advises limiting our intake of salt and sugar in our diet. According to research, excessive salt and sugar consumption should be avoided. Avoid consuming any preservatives, including sugar syrup, fruits with added sugar, processed juices, and cold beverages.
- **The cancer risk is lower.** Due to the absence of synthetic pesticides, organic food reduces the risk of developing cancer. According to a study by Friends of the Earth, participants who switched to an organic diet had 70 percent lower levels of the cancer-causing chemical glyphosate, which is the primary component of a common herbicide, in their systems after just one week (15 benefits of organic food).

- **Taste:** A 2014 study indicated that organic food can taste better as well, according to the British Journal of Nutrition. This is due to the fact that an organically produced plant naturally produces more antioxidants than a plant grown using pesticides. These have been demonstrated to improve the taste, aroma, and mouthfeel of the food, making organic food more pleasurable to consume (wellbeing, 2021).

### Lessons for India from Sri Lanka

**Create a strong regulatory framework.** India needs to create extensive organic farming legislation that includes standards, certification methods, and inspection practices. This can support preserving the integrity and authenticity of organic products.

**Strengthen certification processes:** Establish a trustworthy, open certification process that includes regular inspections, product testing, and traceability procedures. This can promote consumer trust and deter fraud in the organic industry.

**Promote education and training by making investments in training programmes and increasing the capacity of organic farmers, extension agents, and other stakeholders.** Their comprehension of organic techniques, soil management, pest control, and other important facets of organic agriculture will be improved as a result.

**Allocating funds for research and development in organic agricultural methods, techniques, and technology** is the main focus. Encouragement of scientific research and innovation can result in better methods, more output, and long-term organic agricultural systems.

**Create awareness** and demand among consumers by running campaigns to inform them of the advantages of buying organic goods and the value of assisting organic farming. This could increase interest in organic food and broaden its market.

**Enhance market connections by facilitating market entry and building robust supply chains for organic goods.** To secure fair prices and market opportunities for organic farmers, establish partnerships between farmers, retailers, and organic food producers.

**Encourage farmer cooperation** through supporting networks between farmers and knowledge-sharing platforms so that organic farmers can discuss problems, best practices, and successes.

### Way Forward to India

There is still a long way to go for the organic food business in India. However, it is impossible to deny that in recent years, shoppers have shown a growing awareness of and appreciation for organic food products. The spread of information has even reached rural areas, since people there can see the benefits of organic farming and healthy living for themselves. The Indian market has the potential to expand organic food options and foster new forms of culinary creativity if several pressing problems can be handled. Despite these challenges, particularly since the implementation of COVID, the organic food sector in India appears to be expanding. Furthermore, after the successful strategy of using organic products, Indian states should adopt the model in their respective states, keeping in mind all the shortcomings because Sikkim, at the end, is a north-eastern state with hilly terrain and Indian states have diversity in a geographical sense. In the end, we can conclude that Indian states should adopt policies that are not radical but sustainable (Author, 2022).

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