

# FACE-TO-FACE

December 2020



*“Domestic consumption of organic products in India is picking up at an annual growth rate of CAGR 25% and is currently valued at about INR 3500 crore. Concentrated production in value chain mode, ensuring quality through robust certification system, making certification accessible and affordable, ensuring production and processing as per international demand based on market intelligence can boost organic production.”*

Dr Ashok Kumar Yadav,  
Advisor, Mission Organic Value Chain Development  
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Government of India (GoI)

## ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IS GOOD FOR ALL, SO HAS A BRIGHT FUTURE...

Dr Ashok Kumar Yadav has rich experience of over 40 years, in Organic Agriculture development in India, working in various capacities at different levels. He was Director, National Centre of Organic Farming (NCOF) from 2006 to 2012. After that for three years, he worked as President, International Competence Centre for Organic Agriculture (ICCOA), while also being on the board of IFOAM-Asia. From 2015 to 2019 he served APEDA as Advisor (Organic Products).

Dr Mahesh Chander recently interviewed Dr Yadav to know his thoughts on the potential, opportunities, and steps needed to boost organic production in India.



Dr Yadav interacting with researchers at FiBL, (The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture), Switzerland

Over 2.8 Million producers grow organic foods worldwide in 71.5 Million ha land across 186 countries. The global organic market continues to grow and has reached \$100 billion mark. Over 103 countries now have an organic legislation. India continues to be the country with the highest number of producers (1,149,000), followed by Uganda (210,000) and Ethiopia (204,000).

The World of Organic Agriculture 2020, FiBL

<https://www.fibl.org/en/info-centre/news/global-organic-area-continues-to-grow-over-71-5-million-hectares-of-farmland-are-organic.html>

### How are various Asian countries doing in matters of Organic Agriculture?

China and India are the major organic agriculture producers in Asia. But other Asian countries too are working well to increase their share in the global organic market. Some countries worth mentioning are Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand, which are making systematic efforts to promote organic agriculture in their own ways. In the case of Sri Lanka, it has 6% area under organic agriculture that is totally export focused. In Korea, Hansalim is one good example of a cooperative association that produces environmentally friendly organic products, and organizes direct trade between farmers and consumers. It deals not only with a range of food items but also books, cosmetics, eco-friendly detergents and toilet rolls, etc. Food production follows agreed standards, for example, using no pesticides or chemical fertilizers and avoiding artificial additives. Consumer members monitor all processes and help inspect production centres. Here the producer takes responsibility for the consumer's life and the consumer, in turn, takes responsibility for the producer's livelihood.



Some countries in Asia are making moves to totally convert to organic; Bhutan for instance, is gearing up to go 100% organic by 2030. If we look at policies, infrastructure and strategies – what we call an ‘enabling environment’– China, among all Asian countries, has made tremendous progress in organic production and trade. India is not far behind and is developing enabling policies for an increased share in global trade. Some recent developments in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand also indicate growing attention of public sector towards organic.

### What, according to you, are the current challenges of organic production and marketing in Asian countries?

Thus far, Organic farming is driven by traditional practices, and it is being developed by practicing organic farmers. But these systems are different in different areas and may not deliver the desired results in all situations. Maintenance of productivity and ensuring premium prices to farmers; availability of organic management-compatible seeds and quality inputs are some of the major challenges. Appropriate packages and knowledge of diversified cropping systems in cropping-systems mode is missing, due to which many farmers follow mono cropping and fail. Also, majority of the farmers perceive certification as complex and costly. Post-harvest facilities being poor or not so well-developed is a big bottleneck. Besides, location of farmers with limited area is a major constraint in linking with market. Farmers owning small-sized holdings have small volumes of produce, so they are unable to market products by themselves and have to depend on middlemen, and because of this they often do not get remunerative prices. This shakes their confidence. We need to infuse more science that is blended with local knowledge to leverage organic production.

### There has been a lot of discussions on Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF), Paramparagat Krishi etc., in India. Is organic farming different from these?

Of late there is lot of confusion with different terms being used for chemical free, on-farm resource-based organic farming. As you mentioned, different terms are being used by different groups of people on different platforms, such as Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF), Rishi Kheti, Paramparagat Krishi, Biodynamic Farming, Natural Farming, etc. Let me say, all these are one and the same, under the broad umbrella of organic farming. So, as long as these adhere to the basic tenet that organic agriculture supports maximum on-farm reliance for inputs in place of chemicals and circulatory agriculture that depends on onsite management practices which are natural as far as possible, irrespective of the fact that organic/natural off-farm inputs are used or not, it is alright. We need to now move beyond such confusion while concentrating on the potential organic agriculture offers to developing country producers. India is the number one country in the world in terms of the number of certified producers (1,149,000), while it holds ninth position in terms of area under organic cultivation and probably third or fourth in terms of total arable land under such cultivation.



IFOAM Asia meet, Seoul, Korea / With IFOAM Asia Board members

### How is the Indian Government planning to march ahead to compete in the global market for organic products?

The target of the Government of India (GoI) is to add another 2.5 million ha area (currently it is nearly three million ha), increase exports to 2.5 billion USD, and increase domestic market share by INR 10,000 crore. So far the area under organic cultivation is just 2% and majority of the exports are in the form of raw commodities. We need to diversify our basket into processed, semi-processed, and ingredients sector. To augment the growing demand, GoI is planning to increase the area to about 5.5



million ha by 2025. GoI also aims to develop concentrated clusters with chosen commodities in value chain mode. The clusters are being converted into Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), and such FPCs are being supported for post-harvest handling facilities. For market linkages, efforts are being made to rope in professional agencies for handholding and linking such clusters/ FPCs with large retail chain operators, processors and exporters. FPCs are also being handhold for developing local marketing channels.

### **Can you please mention some of the schemes of Government of India for promotion of Organic Agriculture?**

The Indian government is very supportive of organic agriculture, as evident by various programmes and schemes launched to facilitate organic agriculture. GoI launched in 2015 two dedicated programmes, namely Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCD) and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) to encourage chemical-free farming. These two programmes, together with Agri-export Policy 2018, can make India a major player in global organic markets.

### **Is there any clear evidence of expansion of organic farming in India?**

Yes. One is Tracenet of APEDA which manages the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), and another one I can say is PGS-India portal for PGS certification which provides reliable data with full traceability about the area, farmers and production. As per the data available on Tracenet, India has brought 2.88 million ha cultivated area under third party certification with 2.75 million tons production of raw crop products. Besides this, PGS-India has registered more than 15 lakh farmers – bringing in 7 lakh ha area and production of about 6.5 lakh tons of various crop products. Under NPOP, the production is not limited to only the raw edible sector but also includes processed products, organic cotton fiber, functional food products, animal feed, seaweeds, mushrooms, cosmetics and personal care products. Exports have been the main driving force for the growth of the organic sector.

As per studies, India has a ready market of about INR 8500-10,000 crore during 2019-2020. Of this, while exports account for approximately INR 4686-5000 crore, domestic sales have touched a figure of around INR 3500 crore. Besides this, there are informal sales channels for which no reliable data is available, but it is likely to have a share of around INR 1000-1500 crores.

In terms of growth, exports are growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 19% while domestic demand is growing at 25% CAGR. Unlike conventional products, where our exports are mainly to neighboring countries and the Middle East, organic products are exported mainly to USA, European Union, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, Israel, UAE, New Zealand, Vietnam, etc., with better value realization.

### **What strategies, according to you, would help India do better in the organic sector, especially in boosting exports?**

I believe that augmenting supplies, concentrated production in value chain mode, ensuring quality through robust certification system, making certification accessible and affordable, ensuring production and processing as per international demand based on a network of market intelligence are some of the actions required to boost organic production. GoI, as also the various state governments, are making efforts on these lines. For instance, the certification system is being made simpler, affordable and accessible to small scale farmers which are no longer solely dependent on third party certification, which traditionally has been expensive.

Certification is an important element of organic produce, necessary to instill customer confidence. The twin programmes, namely PKVY and MOVCD, are promoting certification under Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) and National Program for Organic Production (NPOP), respectively, targeting

domestic and exports markets. The GoI has been promoting Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) under Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), wherein smaller groups and individuals too can benefit because it is an inexpensive system. Apart from these, various states are now setting up state organic certification agencies, which can help reduce certification costs too.

### **What, according to you, are the prospects for domestic consumption of organic foods?**

Till four years back, the entire organic sector was just export driven. But now, domestic consumption is picking up at a CAGR of 25%. Currently it is valued at about INR 3500 crore. COVID has added to the awareness and demand is increasing. More and younger entrepreneurs are joining the race as they see organic farming as an exciting opportunity having bright prospects in domestic as well as export markets. I see good growth in domestic consumption of organic products with advancing time.

### **Do you see any role for FPOs in promoting organic farming?**

Yes, surely FPOs have a crucial role in the promotion of organic farming. GoI has been promoting FPOs, including for organic farming, in a big way across the country through different agencies. About 40,000 clusters are being assisted under PKVY covering an area of about 7 lakh ha. Also, MOVCD has brought within its fold 160 FPOs cultivating about 80,000 ha. Now, the big challenge is to make these clusters sustainable. This is possible when market-led production starts in a contract farming mode, so that there is a ready market for the produce and industry also gets the desired quality and quantity when required. I would make special mention here of formation of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) in North Eastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram where 97 FPCs have been formed under Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region to produce, process and market, particularly organic ginger and turmeric, in value chain mode. Many of such FPOs are also being developed as Model FPCs. It has been a wonderful experience to see 10-12 FPCs which have established buyback – a win-win arrangement – with marketing agencies, including exporters. These FPCs are effectively channeling organic products to export markets as well as domestic consumers.



**Godson Organic Farm, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh**

### **What is the role of extension and research in promoting Organic Agriculture?**

In order to fill the gap in production and instill confidence in farmers about shift to organic, continuous research is a must followed by effective extension. The present extension system is not supportive and needs to overhaul its approach and understand the intricacies of the organic system. I think we

need dedicated extension professionals who have confidence in the organic production system. To develop confidence, evidence-based research outputs could be helpful. There are many research-worthy issues, as well as gaps in matters of soil fertility management, plant and animal health management, and alternative pest and disease management methods that can replace chemicals (pesticides, mineral fertilizers, antibiotics, allopathic medicines, etc.), which need to be addressed by a focused research system.

I would say that there should be better allocation of funds for organic agriculture research, which is currently very meager. The ICAR-Network Project on Organic Farming (NPOF) coordinated by ICAR-Indian Institute of Farming Systems Research (IIFSR) and operational in about 20 SAUs and ICAR research institutes is one good example, which has generated some good findings to support organic agriculture. These types of projects and programmes would help provide a good base for the development of organic agriculture.



**Participants at the X Annual Meeting of ICAR National Project Organic Farming (NPOF) at Udaipur (2015)**

I think the time has come when we must have one national institute on organic farming research and at least a dedicated department for organic agriculture in all the State Agricultural Universities (SAUs).

### **What role do you see for Extension and Advisory Services in the Asian and Indian contexts?**

Although organic farming is growing in most of the Asian countries, but everywhere it is growing on the strength of farmers or civil society organizations with negligible contribution from EAS. EAS, especially public sector extension services, are not engaged much yet. Extension system under public sector is mostly certification services centric, largely regulatory in nature and need to come out of it. The other Asian countries are more or less similar in this regard, except China, where there is strong support to extension services from government due to the good enabling environment that has been created.



**What should EAS do to help stakeholders of organic agriculture, like farmers and processors? How can EAS strengthen itself so as to be more helpful to farmers?**

Many functionaries of development departments, including EAS, are often not suitably aware of organic agriculture philosophy, principles, methods, practices, certification standards, etc. When any enthusiastic farmer approaches them with questions, such as how to switch from conventional to organic system of production, they often respond in such a way that the farmer doesn't get any concrete sense of how to do it. The development agents/extension functionaries need to be trained and oriented on organic production, processing and marketing practices by people trained on this system of production. The trained manpower in this area is currently very limited, but a critical mass



is growing due to an emerging need for the same. The NCOF, SAUs, ICAR institutes and MANAGE can intensify their efforts on capacity building, of field functionaries in particular. I am happy many of these institutions are now organizing capacity building programmes in this area, if we look at their training calendars. The KVKs having presence in almost every district can take up demonstrations and advisory work to promote organic agriculture, for which the KVK staff should be trained on organic agriculture systems.

I think certificate and diploma courses is the first requirement, followed by development of first-generation extension specialists. Organic Agriculture is a knowledge and skill-intensive system of food production, so extension personnel need to know principles, practices, organic standards, guidelines, certification process, conversion requirements for organic agriculture alongside market intelligence on organic products. Also, it is important that they have sound understanding of the farming systems approach and good liaison with practicing organic farmers for shared learning. This will create confidence and a mix of science and traditional wisdom for effective extension.

**Is there any move to introduce degree programmes in Organic farming in India?**

Yes, definitely. Recently ICAR has approved a Post Graduate Degree Programme in Organic Farming, which is likely to be available from August 2021. Some universities are running certificate and diploma courses too. A qualified and trained pool of manpower would give organic agriculture momentum in this country.

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