

Organic Farming in India

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India ranks first in number of organic farmers and ninth in terms of area under organic farming. **Sikkim became the first State in the world to become fully organic and other States including Tripura and Uttarakhand have set similar targets. North East India has traditionally been organic and the consumption of chemicals is far less than the rest of the country.** Similarly the tribal and island territories are being nurtured to continue their organic story.

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The growth story of organic farming is unfolding with increasing demand not only in India but also globally. In a world battered by the COVID pandemic, the demand for healthy and safe food is already showing an upward trend and hence this is an opportune moment to be captured for a win-win situation for our farmers, consumers and the environment. With the aim of assisting farmers to adopt organic farming and improve remunerations due to premium prices, two dedicated programs namely **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCD) and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) were launched in 2015 to encourage chemical free farming.** With the simultaneous thrust given by the **Agri-export Policy 2018**, India can emerge as a major player in global organic markets.

The major organic exports from India have been **flax seeds, sesame, soybean, tea, medicinal plants, rice and pulses**, which were instrumental in driving an increase of nearly 50% in organic exports in 2018-19, touching Rs 5151 crore. Modest commencement of exports from Assam, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland to UK, USA, Swaziland and Italy have proved the potential by increasing volumes and expanding to new destinations as the demand for health foods increases.

Certification is an important element of organic produce to instill customer confidence. Both 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 Food Safety and Standards (Organic Foods) Regulations, 2017 are based on the standards of NPOP and PGS. PGS Green is given to chemical free produce under transition to 'organic' which takes 3 years.

About 40,000 clusters are being assisted under PKVY covering an area of about 7 lakh ha. MOVCD has brought in its fold 160 FPOs cultivating about 80,000 ha. For these clusters to become sustainable, it is important that henceforth 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. This is being pursued in right earnest with bulk buyers including the phyto extracts industries. The commodities with highest potential include ginger, turmeric, black rice, spices, nutri cereals, pineapples, medicinal plants, buckwheat, bamboo shoots, etc.

Supplies have started from NER including for Mother Dairy from Meghalaya, Revanta Foods and Big Basket from Manipur. **Number of instances of farmer groups setting up markets and selling directly is increasingly becoming common, especially in Maharashtra and Karnataka where fresh organic produce is lapped up by the urbanites and farmers get a better bargain with no intermediaries.** The presence of aggregators is imperative to bring about **economies of scale** for the small and marginal farmers. Hence the concept of market led **One district – One product** is being encouraged, as also development of more clusters in the vicinity of bigger towns where the appetite for organics will be much more.