

The 'Better for you' concept: Leveraging the opportunities in spice value chain

The global shift toward health-conscious consumption has positioned spices not only as culinary essentials but as functional ingredients aligned with the 'Better for you' food trend. This paper explores how health-driven consumer demand presents strategic opportunities across the spice value chain, particularly for small-scale farmers, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). By leveraging traditional knowledge, collective action, and partnerships with Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), producers can add value, improve incomes, and access premium market. The study highlights value-addition methods, supply chain best practices for preserving bioactive compounds, and innovations such as spice-based wellness products. Emphasis is placed on standardization, traceability, and clean-label marketing to meet evolving consumer expectations. The integration of scientific validation with indigenous practices creates potential for sustainable and inclusive growth. Ultimately, spices are transitioning from basic commodities to high-value, health-promoting foods, offering a viable pathway to empower rural communities and reshape the global spice industry toward a more equitable future.

SPICES have held a place of high value throughout history—not just for their flavour, but for their healing properties as well. Cultures as ancient as Egypt, India, and China used spices as part of their medicinal traditions, and today, modern research is increasingly confirming what our ancestors already seemed to know. As more people become health-conscious, they're starting to pay attention to how spices can contribute to wellness, not just to taste. In this deep dive, we'll explore the health benefits of everyday spices backed by science, examine the active compounds responsible for those benefits, and consider what this means for small farmers, cooperatives, and self-help groups, especially as the spice supply chain continues to evolve.

The 'Better for you' idea in the food world is all about creating products that are a bit healthier than traditional options—without losing the taste or convenience people love. This trend is a direct response to more and more consumers wanting to eat better, but not necessarily give up the flavours and comfort of their favourite foods. These types of products usually have less sugar, sodium, saturated fat, or calories, and often include good-for-you ingredients like fiber, protein, or vitamins. Unlike 'free-from' foods that totally cut out certain ingredients, 'Better for you' options are more about small improvements—nudging nutrition in the right direction while keeping the food familiar and enjoyable. The goal is to make healthier eating easier and less overwhelming. This category appeals to people who care about their health but still value taste,

convenience, and cost. Think snacks with less sugar, baked instead of fried chips, whole grain versions of popular cereals, lower-sodium soups, high-protein dairy, or drinks with added nutrients.

'Better for you' has become more than just a marketing slogan, it's a real shift in how people think about food. Consumers are beginning to see food as a kind of medicine, seeking options that offer more than just sustenance. In fact, market research shows that over 65% of consumers worldwide are actively looking for foods that support their health in tangible ways. This change also comes with a desire for clean-label products. Shoppers increasingly want to know what is in their food and prefer natural, familiar ingredients over anything synthetic. Spices fit this mold perfectly: they add flavour without the need for artificial additives. Moreover, with healthcare costs on the rise, there is a growing interest in preventive health—people are using food as a way to stay healthy before problems arise. Spices with known medicinal properties, like turmeric and ginger, are becoming everyday staples, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic sparked interest in foods that support immune health.

Empowering small-scale farmers through collective action

Small-scale farmers are the unsung heroes behind much of the world's spice production. Yet despite their essential role, many of them face challenges when it comes to earning a fair income. Fragmented markets and

limited negotiation power often mean they do not get the value they deserve for their hard work. However, as demand grows for high-quality, health-promoting spices, a new window of opportunity is opening—especially for farmers who come together through cooperatives, farmer collectives, and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). By working together, small farmers can pool their resources, share knowledge, and collectively market their crops. This kind of collaboration allows them to reach larger, more lucrative markets—ones they would not be able to access individually because of minimum volume requirements or strict quality standards. Through collective action, they can invest in shared tools like drying machines, quality control labs, and storage spaces—investments that would be too costly for a single farmer to afford.

One of the biggest advantages is collective bargaining. When farmers unite, they gain the power to negotiate better deals, secure advance payments, and lock in long-term contracts that bring income stability. These larger groups also make it possible to deliver consistent quality in large quantities, which is essential for premium buyers. Farmer collectives also enable standardization. By coordinating planting and harvesting times and following shared quality guidelines, they ensure that the spices meet the high expectations of today's health-conscious consumers—particularly in terms of potency and purity.

Role of self-help groups in the spice economy

Self-Help Groups—especially those led by women in rural communities—are also making big strides in the spice industry. These groups often hold deep traditional knowledge about the health benefits of local spices, giving them a unique edge in markets that value authenticity. One of the most promising areas for SHGs is value addition. With simple tools and basic training, members can clean, dry, grind, and package spices—significantly boosting the value of their products without needing major investments. Many SHGs are now creating their own signature spice blends designed for specific health benefits, like boosting immunity or reducing inflammation, by combining ancestral wisdom with current health trends. Their success is rooted in blending tradition with quality control and direct-to-consumer marketing. Thanks to the internet, many SHGs are now reaching consumers directly. Through e-commerce platforms and local markets, they're able to tell their story, highlight traditional processing techniques, and offer traceable, authentic products. Urban shoppers, increasingly drawn to genuine, wellness-oriented products, are willing to pay more—helping SHGs capture a larger share of the value chain.

Farmer producer organizations expanding market access

Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) play a crucial role in connecting small-scale spice growers with larger, more lucrative markets. They act as a bridge between grassroots production and commercial-scale buyers, helping farmers gain access to market opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach. One of the key advantages of joining an FPO is the ability to secure certifications—like organic, fair trade, or geographic indication labels—that signal quality and origin to premium

buyers. These certifications often require meticulous documentation and strict adherence to standards, which is challenging for individual farmers but manageable through collective efforts.

FPOs can also create their own brands, highlighting traits such as sustainability, traceability, and health benefits. By crafting a strong brand identity rooted in both traditional wisdom and scientific validation, FPOs can offer more than just raw spices—they can sell trusted products that earn consumer loyalty and command higher prices.

Sharing infrastructure is another big plus. Through collective investment, FPOs can purchase advanced equipment—such as drying units, grinding machines, packaging systems, and quality testing labs—that individual farmers couldn't afford on their own. This shared access allows smallholders to produce commercial-grade spices that meet international standards.

Partnering with micro, small and medium enterprises

When farmer collectives team up with Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), both sides benefit. MSMEs bring technical know-how, product development capabilities, and established market channels, while collectives offer a steady supply of high-quality raw spices. Together, they can co-create high-value products tailored to modern health trends.

These partnerships are giving rise to innovative spice products—like concentrated spice drops, capsules, and ready-to-use pastes—that preserve the spices' active compounds while offering convenience for consumers. These types of products can sell for two to three times the price of raw spices, and the profits are distributed across the supply chain.

Tech integration becomes easier too. With an organized supply base, MSMEs can implement tools like blockchain for traceability, digital quality checks, and direct-to-consumer sales platforms—all of which are difficult to scale when working with scattered individual farmers.

Opportunities across the spice value chain

As more consumers look for health-focused food products, there are valuable opportunities for everyone involved in spice production and processing. Even basic steps like cleaning and packaging can add value. At the higher end, complex processes like extracting active compounds or formulating health-targeted blends present even greater revenue potential.

Custom spice products designed for specific wellness goals—such as joint health, cognitive function, or metabolic support—are gaining traction. These blends can command price premiums of 50 to 100% compared to general-purpose mixes.

Communities with deep-rooted spice traditions have an edge too. Many traditional spice combinations offer real health benefits that science is only now beginning to confirm. When properly documented and commercialized, these remedies can become valuable products, provided indigenous rights and community benefits are respected.

Key supply chain practices for preserving spice benefits

To ensure spices retain their health properties, supply chain practices need to be fine-tuned from farm to table. Growing methods are important—organic cultivation not only appeals to wellness-focused consumers but may also boost the production of natural protective compounds in plants.

Choosing the right spice variety is essential. For instance, certain types of turmeric have much higher curcumin content than others, making them ideal for premium products. Timing the harvest correctly is just as crucial, as bioactive compounds peak at specific maturity stages. Farmer collectives can coordinate harvests across multiple farms to capture these peaks.

Speed matters too. The sooner spices are processed after harvest, the better their active compounds are preserved. Processing temperature is another factor; low-heat methods are preferred to avoid destroying sensitive compounds.

Storage and transportation need special attention as well. Moisture control helps prevent spoilage and protects health-boosting compounds. UV-protective packaging, cool storage, and sealed containers all help maintain potency, flavor, and safety until the product reaches the consumer.

Price premium opportunities and market positioning

The health-driven spice market holds exciting potential for earning premium prices, especially when products are clearly differentiated. Spices that come with standardized levels of bioactive compounds—backed by scientific testing—can sell for two to three times the price of their standard counterparts. Collaborations with academic institutions to validate health claims not only lend credibility but also serve as a strong marketing tool to support higher pricing.

Certifications are another powerful driver of value. Organic spices typically fetch 20–40% more than non-organic versions. Fair trade status can increase what socially conscious consumers are willing to pay by 10–25%. Geographic indication labels and protected origin designations can push prices even higher—sometimes several times the base rate—by highlighting the unique characteristics of spices grown in specific regions.

Today's buyers are also willing to pay more for transparency and traceability. Products labeled as single-origin and traceable to specific farms or regions often command a 15–30% price premium over generic, blended alternatives. Tech like blockchain or QR codes that show a spice's journey from farm to table help reinforce trust and justify premium pricing.

Strategic insights and future outlook

While the future looks bright for health-focused spices, it's not without its challenges. Regulations on health claims vary from country to country, especially for exported products. This makes it essential for producers to understand compliance and adjust their marketing accordingly. Farmer collectives and their MSME partners can actually turn this into an advantage by building

specialized knowledge in navigating these regulatory environments.

As big players move into the health spice space, concerns about competition and commoditization are growing. However, small producers working through collectives have a unique advantage: authenticity, deep traditional knowledge, and the ability to offer highly traceable products—things that large-scale operations often struggle to replicate.

Climate change is already affecting many spice-growing areas, but it also presents a chance for collectives to adopt climate-smart farming practices. These efforts not only protect future harvests but can also serve as strong selling points in eco-conscious markets.

Investing in consumer education is also key. People are more likely to buy premium health products when they understand their benefits and how to use them. This creates an opportunity for Self-Help Groups and collectives to become trusted educators, sharing traditional knowledge that enhances both their brand and their market reach.

CONCLUSION

The rising interest in “better for you” ingredients is reshaping the spice industry—and it's creating big opportunities, especially for small-scale farmers and women-led Self-Help Groups. As consumer demand for natural, health-promoting foods grows, so do the chances for these producers to move beyond bulk commodity sales into more profitable, sustainable business models.

Collective action allows farmers to pool their resources, access technical support, and gain leverage in negotiations. SHGs can draw from their traditional wisdom and take on value-added processing to build niche brands and earn higher incomes while preserving cultural heritage.

When these collectives partner with MSMEs, the results are even more impactful. Together, they can produce high-quality, authentic, and traceable spice products that meet modern wellness trends. These partnerships are helping to turn the spice trade from a raw commodity business into a vibrant wellness sector rooted in genuine health benefits.

Ultimately, this transformation offers something for everyone: better income and recognition for rural communities, high-integrity products for health-conscious consumers, and a more sustainable, equitable future for the spice industry. As research continues to back traditional knowledge with scientific evidence, spices are stepping into a new role—not just as flavour boosters, but as functional foods that support a healthier world.

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