

Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Sustainable Organic Farming in India through Policy and Technical Interventions at FPO level - A case Study from Haryana

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Abstract

Owing to the nutritional and health benefits, positive impact on environmental and socioeconomic status of organic food, the annual growth rate of organic farming worldwide has been about 20 per cent for the last decade (Flávia et.al. 2020). Although India hosts the second largest number of certified organic farms (44,926) yet, due to 82 per cent of the Indian farmers being small and marginal (FAO), which creates challenges in their sustainability, it couldn't yet contribute significantly to global organic food production. To address these challenges, the FPO seems to be a potential tool and further empowered with the adoption of organic farming systems it can address human as well as soil health and environmental issues. Despite interventions from the Government and other relevant bodies, the predicted success couldn't be achieved, especially among FPOs having the main objective of organic farming. The current study was conducted among the FPOs of Haryana state, having organic farming as their major objective, to identify the pain points; areas of intervention and to formulate solutions to help them achieve their goals.

Keywords: Organic Farming, Policy, FPO, Haryana

Introduction

The annual growth rate of organic farming worldwide has been about 20 per cent for the last decade (Lotter, 2003), accounting for over 31 million hectares of area and generating over 26 billion US dollars in annual trade

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worldwide (Escobar and Hue, 2007). This surge is being attributed to nutritional and health benefits; positive impact on environmental and socioeconomic status of organic food (Chopra et al., 2013). Among 130 countries practicing organic farming worldwide, area-wise, India is at 13th position, although it comes at second place with respect to the total number of certified organic farms (44,926). In India where 70 per cent of rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood, 82 per cent of the farmers are small and marginal (FAO), which creates many challenges in their sustainability, majorly being, small landholdings, limited resources, and thus lesser bargaining power. To address these challenges, the government has been trying to empower farmers in many ways. Recently great focus has been given on the promotion of the Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) which can be a potential tool to address these issues. Empowered with the adoption of organic farming systems it can further become a potential tool that addresses both human as well as soil health and the environment (Sunila et.al. 2021). But despite a number of interventions from the Government and other relevant bodies, till now the predicted success couldn't be achieved, especially among FPOs having the main objective of organic farming. The current study was conducted among the FPOs of Haryana state, having organic farming as their major objective; to try to identify the pain points; identify areas of intervention and formulate solutions to help them achieve their goals.

Data and Methodology

The study was conducted in Haryana state, collecting both primary and secondary data from various sources. There are a total of 452 FPOs registered with SAHFAC in Haryana which are spread across all 22 districts of the state. Out of these, only 4 per cent reflected organic farming in their names which were considered for the current study. Purposive sampling technique was used to study the FPOs majorly focusing on organic production, with a sample size of 20 FPOs. Some individual farmers also were contacted, and information was collected using questionnaires, survey form, interview and field visits. The secondary data related to this study

was collected through the mandate records maintained by the FPOs, SAFIC, state departments, internet, online survey (Email), books and journals, online blogs etc. The observations were collected in the form of pictures, questionnaires, interview notes etc. The data collected was presented in a tabular form and analysed using standard statistical means.

Status of organic farming in Haryana FPOs

The average registered membership of the studied groups was 393 members, out of which only an average of 17 per cent of the members practiced organic farming. Wheat was the most widely grown crop (62%) popular among the FPO organic members, followed by vegetables, which were grown by 46 per cent of the FPOs. The reason for the popularity of traditional crops is the ease of cultivation and ease in selling the produce. Only 40 per cent of the FPOs producing organic produce were found to have their own retail counters to sell the product; that also was not continuous in most cases. Only 20 per cent knew about PGS but they were not able to utilize, due to lack of handholding. Most of them pointed out that cost of organic cultivation was prohibiting the adoption of certification among the members, 42 per cent were not even aware about certification or felt the need for certification (Table 1). Only 30 per cent used certified organic products available from various government and private vendors. Others were either not aware of any such products or were highly resistant to the adoption of such products, as they thought anything except cow dung, cow urine or other crop products were prohibited in organic farming. Only 30 per cent of them had any formal training on organic farming, which they were not even practicing fully due to various reasons. The study material was found to be insufficient, and most of the protocols they were using were quite different from those suggested by IIFSR, Modipuram.

The knowledge of the respondents regarding organic farming practices was accessed by interview and scored on a 1-10 scale, where the information gained at IFFSR was considered as standard. The average was only 4.4, and it ranged from highest 7 to lowest 3. Most organic farming practicing farmers

used only farm yard manure and cow urine and buttermilk preparations.

Table 1. Reasons for lesser adoption of organic certification

Reason for lesser adoption of organic certification	FPOs (%)
Lengthy process	25
High Cost	42
Lack of awareness	42
Need not felt	42
No distinctive economic advantage of certified produce	50
Lack of guidance	50

Major challenges observed with reference to organic growers and farming

Identification of issues being faced by the FPOs: During the study, the following issues were identified

- a. **Financial barriers:** Unavailability of funds to start production and marketing and high rate of interest by private financiers
- b. **Inputs related:** Non-availability of certified products, high cost of certified inputs, lack of proper knowledge about the organic inputs and how to make them
- c. **Agronomic support:** No standard package of practice available as per local soil and other conditions; lack of structured guidance and costly weed control
- d. **Certification related:** High cost of certification; misleading certification consultants
- e. **Post harvest infrastructure:** Lack of dedicated post-harvest facilities for organic produce

- f. **Marketing related:** Non-availability of organized organic markets locally; marketing for individuals is very costly; FPO members are not able to work collectively due to intragroup issues; lack of marketing support from the government
- g. **Other issues:** Difficult to organize farmers due to lack of faith and trust among themselves, lack of ethics among the growers, they don't mind using a few chemicals especially fertilizers; improper information about organic farming circulating among the growers through peer groups and social media.

Potential solutions

- i. As suggested by the FPOs
 1. Government should provide a marketing platform
 2. Authentic organic inputs should be available easily
 3. Structured training may be provided to the members
 4. Handholding in certification
 5. Need help in motivating group members
 6. Contract farming or assured price should be available for the produce
- ii. As suggested by individual farmers
 1. FPO should provide a marketing platform
 2. Organic inputs should be available at a reasonable price
 3. MSP for produce
 4. Training should be available near them or at their village

5. Financial aid should be provided for organic certification
- iii. As suggested by other stakeholders
 1. There should be structured organic markets in nearby towns
 2. Assistance should be provided in certification
 3. Proper system should be in place to stop fraud with customers

Recommendations based on study findings

- i. Immediate need to spread awareness about organic farming and clear the prevailing myths and doubts about organic farming.
- ii. Proper practical training should be provided to all FPOs interested in taking up organic farming
- iii. Govt should form a working group which can keep in constant touch with such groups and provide handholding till they are self-sufficient
- iv. There should be structured and regulated markets for organic food
- v. More awareness and motivation are needed to inculcate ethical practices among growers and traders

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Haryana has an opportunity to take advantage of its proximity to the national capital and its two metro-cities (Gurgaon-Faridabad) as an organic market. It has the highest NCR area with productive land, high density and good condition road network as compared to Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Although Haryana government has been promoting organic farming and FPOs since long, significant results are yet awaited. However, FPO is a very potential means to organize farmers and help increase their socio-economic status, but multiple factors hamper in getting the desired results. Some factors identified as a barrier to the success of organic farming in

FPOs are lack of proper knowledge of the subject, lack of regulated market and non-availability of certified organic inputs and costly certification process.

There is a need for a comprehensive framework that integrates organic farming with bottom-up responses, technology diffusion with reciprocal knowledge flow from farmers' institutions and their local resources and innovation. A state-wide organic awareness campaign is essential to change the attitude of producers and consumers both and encourage them to go for "organic farming". During the study, the lack of formal training on organic farming was identified to be one of the key factors where immediate attention is desired. The most potential tool which can bring significant momentum is proper training in organic farming practices and handholding to the groups in practicing them on the farm. This will help in generating large-scale farmers' acceptance to solve the ecological crisis in the context of climate change and to address the health and livelihood security of large rural masses of India.

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