

Going green the organic way

As Awareness Grows About The Ill-effects Of Fertilizers, Organic Food Finds Many Takers

What is organic farming?

Organic farming is done without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The produce is free from contamination by human or industrial waste and is processed without any chemical or artificial preservatives. The seeds used are indigenous and not genetically modified. The products are more nutritious and resistant to diseases.



Benefits of organic food

- Organic fruits and vegetables contain up to 40% more antioxidants than the conventional stuff grown with the help of fertilizers
- This reduces the chances of various diseases like cancer, allergies, neurological disorders etc
- They contain important essential minerals



Things to look for before buying

Name of the agency and the unique certification number given by it. Agricultural and Processed Food Export Development Authority, under ministry of commerce, has accredited 13 international agencies which can certify farms in India for organic food production. But not all farms engaged in organic farming are certified as it's a long and expensive process

Risha Chitlangia | TNN

The colourful fruits and vegetables shine with the promise of good health, tempting the shopper to pick them up. However, behind the attractive looks lies the story of pesticide residue and an abundance of fertilizers, regular consumption of which adds to the chemical store in the human body. The end result is weakened immunity and chances of diseases like allergies, and even cancer. But all is not lost. The growing awareness about hidden health hazards has now fuelled a demand for organic food.

From just a couple of outlets selling organic products a decade back, the Capital now has a number of them. "The stores are still not enough to cater to the growing demand, but you can get organic food in many small retail outlets," said Ganesh Eashwar, co-founder of Dubdengreen, an organic food store in Shahpur Jat.

But a complete switch to organically grown products is still a distant dream. "Organic food is grown sans chemicals. As the demand goes up and more and more farmers switch to organic farming, it will become a way of life. A lot of doctors recommend organic products to their cancer patients but they themselves don't use it. People are yet to open up to the concept," said Jayashree Eashwar, who started Dubdengreen four years ago, and today even takes orders online.



Besides availability, cost is the other deterrent for those looking to make that switch. Organic food is 15-30% more expensive than conventional equivalents. For example, 100 gm of organically produced red chilli powder would cost somewhere between Rs 40-60, whereas its conventional equivalent would cost Rs 20-25. But physicist and Navdanya founder Dr Vandana Shiva begs to differ. "We should not forget the subsidy given by the government for import of fertilizers and other agro-chemicals. Last year, the government gave nearly Rs 1 lakh crore subsidy on the import of agro-chemicals. If we add the money, then con-

ventionally grown food would turn out to be more expensive," she said. But those who understand the importance of organic food don't mind paying that little extra. "I know it is expensive, but

The Price Factor

Cost of organic food is about 15-40% more than conventional equivalents

Price range

Item	Qty	Conventional (Rs)	Organic (Rs)
Red chilli powder	100gms	20-25	30-60
Basmati rice	1kg	50-80	90-175
Turmeric	100gms	20-25	30-65
Channa dal	1kg	60-70	100-120
Soyabean	1kg	55-60	60-80

Countries involved in organic farming

USA, Canada, Austria, Italy, Poland, Cuba

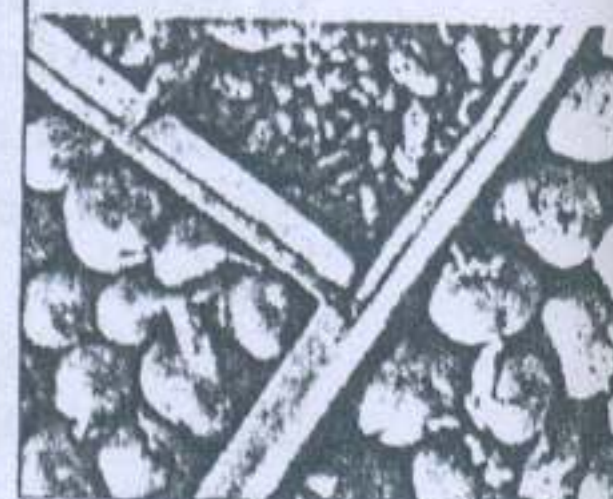
I don't mind paying as I'm confident of the quality. The taste is also much better," said Naby Mitra.

Consumer should look for the certification that ensures quality. In India, Agricultural and Processed Food Export Development Authority (APEDA) has accredited 13 international agencies which can certify farms in India for organic food production. "Certification is a long and expensive process. But not all products sold in India are certified. The certification also adds to the cost.

And one should not forget that as we are not using any pesticides or chemicals, the food is more prone to insect attack. Therefore, food products also get wasted," said

Outlets in Delhi

- Navdanya outlet in Dilli Haat and Hauz Khaz
- Sikkim Organics in GK-1
- Dubdengreen in Shahpur Jat
- Spencers in Gurgaon
- Khadi outlets
- Food Bazaar in Select City Walk Mall in Saket
- Kendriya Bhandars



Bhavdeep Kang, one of the trustees of Panchvati Foundation, an NGO that helps farmers in organic farming. "Non-organic farmers also get subsidy on the food products which organic farmers never used to get till recently. So prices are bound to be more," she added.

"The seeds are desi and are grown without using chemicals. It tastes just perfect and is more nutritious. The use of chemical not only takes away nutritional value but also disturbs the ecological system. Organic farming rejuvenates and detoxifies the soil," said Kang.

From cereals, pulses, spices to oil, pickles and other processed food, there is a large variety to choose from. But organic food is still a rarity. One can only hope that as demand surges, so would supply.



Categories of organic products

- Fully organic**
Products are certified
- Organic in conversion**
Products are from farms in conversion for organic certification
- Registered to organic**
Products are from farms which are not certified, process also not started, but

with no history of chemical use. Many processed foods are in this category

Store should follow a strict certification policy

Organic production in India

Export realization from organic products was US\$ 78 million in 2007-08

India exports to EU countries, US, Australia, Japan, Switzerland & Middle East





PTI

HIGH ON TABLE

New tie-up between ICAR, IRRI to boost carbohydrate content of rice

A key area deals with climate change solutions for India's rice farmers

Every degree rise in night temperature reduces rice yield by 10%

Flood-resistant rice being tested in three states

High-yielding rice crop to be reality soon

Zia Haq
New Delhi, January 21

INDIA HAS kicked off an ambitious project to genetically increase the carbohydrate content of rice, thereby increasing its yield — an initiative being described by scientists as “agriculture's equivalent of the moon mission”.

This is a long-term project of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). “It's agriculture's equivalent of putting man on the moon,” senior scientist and coordinator of the Rice-Wheat Consortium J.K. Ladha said on Wednesday.

Rice, by its very nature, belongs to the so-called ‘C3 pho-

tosynthesis' category that determines its carbohydrate/biomass content. The aim is to take this up to ‘C4', which will increase its grain yield and make it equivalent to maize.

India has 44 million hectares under rice cultivation. According to government figures, the country produced about 96 million tonnes of rice during 2007-08. According to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation, rice is the staple for 65 per cent of Indians.

The ICAR on Tuesday signed a landmark agreement with the IRRI, which will support and facilitate India's rice research for the next 3 years, boosting the country's rice production at a time of unprecedented price volatility.

Climate solutions

The collaboration, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, will also focus on climate-change solutions for India's rice farmers. Every degree increase in ambient night temperature can reduce rice yields by 10 per cent.

Ladha said the IRRI has helped put a new gene in the Swarna variety of rice — extensively grown in eastern India — to help make it flood-resistant. Climate change results in weather extremes, like drought and floods. The new Swarna variety is being tested in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. “The results are promising,” Ladha said. Different rice varieties are also being screened for drought tolerance, he said.

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and Mau districts in the eastern UP, are cultivating tulsi as a cash crop in addition to their routine agricultural practices. They are producing more than 2,000 tonnes of tulsi annually from over 1,000 acres of land.

Motivating the farmers wasn't difficult after my success story and when farmers came to know of the firm's approach, says Kailash. The Lucknow-based firm decided to bear the cost of

production as also the risks of crop failure and market volatility. Farmers were to only tend and harvest the crop. In short, each one contributes according to his ability. For the past ten years, in fact, the farmers have been paid even when the produce wasn't good enough due to adverse climatic conditions or pest attack.

What more, their produce fetches them eight times more

than the market value. If the rate of tulsi is Rs 10 to Rs 15 per kilo in the market, the firm buys it for, say, Rs 80 to Rs 90 per kilo.

For Organic India, too, the benefits are equally large. "This is because these farmers are producing pure organic tulsi, which fulfills the specifications of international market," said Krishan Guptaa, the CEO and Managing Director of Organic India.

The production cost for the

farmers, too, has gone down as they do not need to spend in chemical fertilisers. They do not have to worry about selling their produce either. The company not only provides them with organic manure but also reaches the field to buy the produce. The farmers have crop security because the company is a guaranteed buyer of their produce.

"The crop season is from January to June when the farm-

ers are assisted by field managers and technical managers of the company for best yield," adds Guptaa.

Meanwhile, the tulsi growers of UP have another task at hand these days — to supply one million saplings of tulsi for planting around Taj Mahal to check pollution. They have already handed more than 20,000 saplings on Republic Day to the district administration of Agra.

“These farmers are producing pure organic tulsi, which meets the specifications of the international market”

From the courtyard to farms Tulsi on a global journey

Nearly 10,000 farmers in Bundelkhand, Azamgarh and Mau in UP growing tulsi for international markets

EXPRESS

ALKA PANDEY
LUCKNOW

IT WASN'T the whiff of money but faith in the small, inconspicuous plant in his courtyard that nudged Kailash Nath Singh, now 87, to venture into something unheard of more than a decade ago.

When Organic India, then Indo-Israel Trading Corporation (IITC), asked him to take up organic cultivation (without the use of chemicals and fertilisers) of tulsi or Indian Basil, Kailash, bogged down by low yield from his farm and debts, was wary.

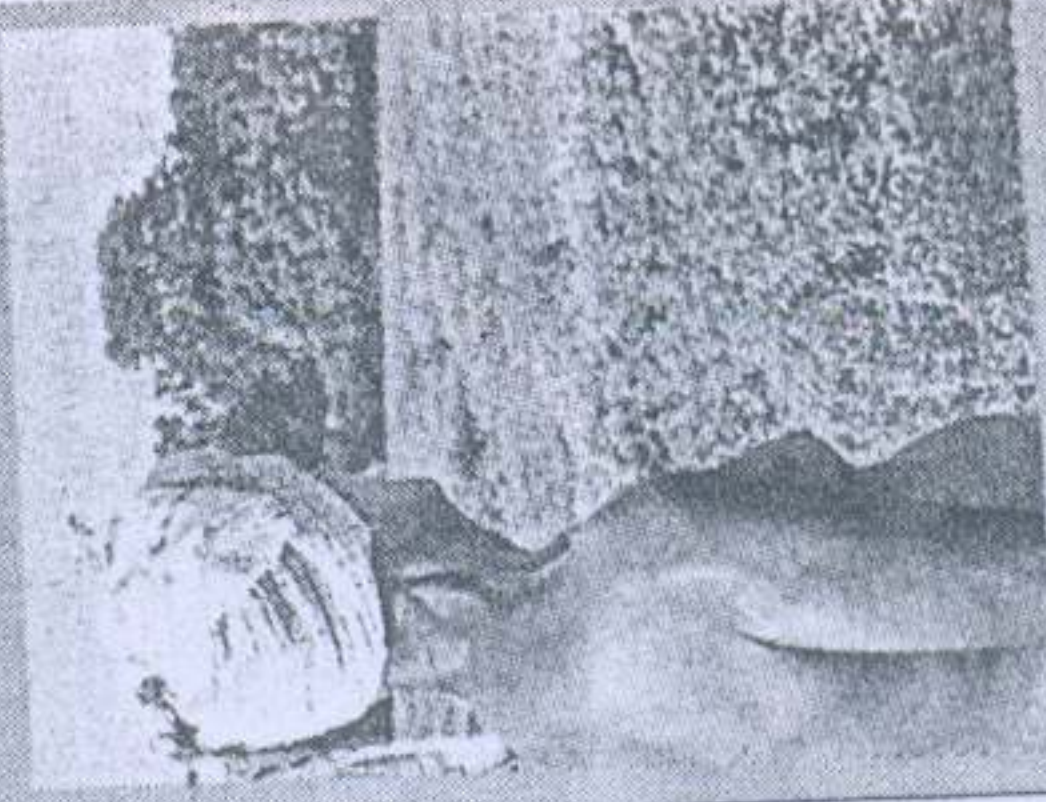
"Although the idea of cultivating tulsi sounded strange initially, I nonetheless accepted the offer. My scepticism changed to confidence once I saw how the firm operated," Kailash says.

The risk taken by the 75-year-old did pay rich dividends. And as Kailash's income rose, many farmers eagerly followed in his footsteps.

Now, over 10,000 farmers in the drought-hit districts of Bundelkhand, besides Azamgarh

Tulsi Mahotsav

AN agriculture festival called the Tulsi Mahotsav that celebrates the wonder herb Tulsi (holy basil) is held in Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh every year. Organised by Organic India with its Tulsi farmers, the festival is held at the onset of winter. It seeks to honour Tulsi and pay tribute to Tulsi farmers who have converted the ravaged soil into fields of prosperity. This is the only festival in the world which celebrates the queen of herbs.



A farmer's quest for a solution ends in pig success

In about 6-7 months, many of the sick trees became healthy

M.J. PRABU

“Farmers, equipped with an acute sense of traditional knowledge and wisdom, find a solution even when scientists seem to give up hope on dealing with some infestations or pests.

“A farmer's perseverance and determination in finding a cure for his problem has brought about surprising results,” says Dr. G. Namalwar, organic scientist.

Take the case of a farmer named Mr. G. Ranga Prabu at Pudhupatti village in Theni district, Tamil Nadu. With several acres of cardamom plantations and nearly 1,000 local variety coconut trees, Mr. Prabu had nothing to worry about in terms of monetary returns.

Difficult solution

But problems started some years back, when several of his coconut trees started to wither. Though a number of reasons were attributed by experts, hundreds of trees in Theni, Bodi and surrounding areas started to die.

“We tried our level best to control this problem by spraying chemicals. But it only aggravated the situation rather than control it. Like me, several farmers were desperate for a solution,” says Mr. Prabu.

Government officials who visited the district advised the farmers to cut the trees and were willing to pay Rs.250 as compensation for every tree cut to prevent the spread of infestation.

Mr. Prabu had also cut down some trees from his garden. About 100 hybrid white pigs are also grown in



PORCINE PROVIDENCE: The farmer, Mr. Ranga Prabu of Theni district, Tamil Nadu along with his pigs. - PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the coconut garden. The pig sheds are cleaned at regular intervals by two manual labourers. The dung and urine of the pigs are diverted through a small pipeline which flows into an open well.

“This saved my men a lot of labour, as otherwise they have to manually transport the waste to some other place and dispose it,” says Mr. Prabu. As usual, the well water was used for irrigating the coconut trees.

Surprising result

“In about 6-7 months, I was surprised to see many of my sick trees becoming healthy. Even the trees marked for cutting down starting growing. New fronds were noticed in almost all my trees,” says Mr. Prabu.

In addition, each tree started bearing about 80-100 nuts (a tree under normal condi-

tions bears 60-70 nuts a year). Seeing this transformation, farmers and officials have started visiting his farm. At present, the coconuts are being sold at Rs.6 each and the demand for the nuts is “encouraging,” he says.

Some alterations

Mr. Prabu decided to use the same method of using pigs' waste on his cardamom plants with some alterations.

Accordingly, he added one litre of diluted effective organisms (EM) along with 10 kg of pigs' dung, 40-50 litres of pigs' urine, 1kg of jaggery and virgin soil (soil in which no chemical fertilizers or pesticides are present) each.

“The result was amazing” says Mr. Prabu. “It took 6-7 months to see the results for my coconut trees but when I sprayed the EM solution on my cardamom, “I was able to

see the result in 24 hours. All the leaves became dark green in colour, the foliage more dense and the cardamom which was plucked was well formed, healthy with a pleasant smell.

“But farmers should take care to use water from a borewell or open well for making EM and chlorinated water should be avoided,” he emphasises.

Price of an animal

In addition Mr. Prabu also sells his pigs. Full grown animals (10 months) reach a body weight of 125-135 kg and are sold for Rs. 12,500 each (1kg costs Rs.100).

For more information readers can contact Mr. G. Ranga Prabu, No 136/7, Panchayat office street, C. Pudhupatti, Theni district, Tamil Nadu: 625556, mobile:9962552993.