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## Organic certification for agricultural produces in Alluri Sitharama Raju district of Andhra Pradesh: Awareness and constraints among farming community

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### Abstract

An explorative research study was conducted to examine the level of awareness and constraints in organic certification of agricultural produce by tribal farmers in hilly and agency areas of Alluri Sitharama Raju district of Andhra Pradesh during the year 2022-23. A total of 60 tribal farmers who are adopting traditional ways in cultivation of crops representing organic farming were randomly selected for the study. Questionnaire comprising of various aspects relevant to organic certification process in field crops was prepared and awareness on these aspects were analysed from the selected farmers through personal interview method. The analysed data inferred that, more than 90 percent of the tribal farmers were not aware on organic certification process *viz.*, how to apply, where to apply, how to keep records, kinds of certification programme available *etc.* Very few farmers *i.e.*, less than 20 percent were aware on little aspects relating to organic certification like market price and export system of organic food produce. The zenith constraints recorded as per farmer's opinion indicated that farmers felt it as a very tedious and lengthy process (Rank I), high cost of cultivation for certification (Rank II) and lack of awareness on procedure (Rank III). As present farming is gazing day by day for organic food produce organic certification for the agricultural produce is the need of the hour. Tribal farmers need to be sensitised in this regards by extension functionaries for organic certification as most of them cultivate the crops without chemical interventions. Further, Government may intend for some polices/ plans for organic certification of agricultural produce benefitting the tribal farming community.

**Keywords:** Organic certification, awareness and constraints, tribal farmers

### Introduction

At present cropping scenario, our country is stepping forward in reducing the environmental risks by chemical interventions in various crops through employing integrated nutrient management, encouraging adoption of bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides as an alternative for chemicals, biological based pest and disease management strategies and introducing organic farming. Organic farming is a holistic production system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health including bio-diversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. (Shankar *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[5]</sup>. According to FiBL survey 2021, India is home to 30 percent of total organic producers having 2.30 million ha in the World. The area under total organic cultivation is 27,59,660 ha (11,60,650 participatory guaranteed system, 15, 99,010 India Organic), 1703 total processors and 745 traders (NCONF, DA&FW, GoI, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Organic Certification is a requirement to demonstrate a product or operation to meet the set legal standards. In view of increased significance on health benefits and more purchasing supremacy of the consumers for organic products (Elayaraja and Vijai, 2022) <sup>[2]</sup> organic certification promotion had shifted the organic cultivation in to more profitable manner especially, for tribal farmers. Organic cultivation is being practiced by the few specific cultivators and de-facto in pockets of hilly/ tribal habitations and remote areas, wherein the entire farming is purely based on organic practices to the maximum extent of area. In these areas, farmers cultivate the crops in their own traditional way by adopting the knowledge gained from their ancestors, without imposing any external inputs and agro-chemicals. Those produce can be alleged as organic foods, but with regards to marketing them for premium prices, there is a lack of certification in a proper procedure.

Farmers need to use their certification as a brand differentiating tool (Chaitra and Chandrasekhar, 2018) <sup>[1]</sup> to reap good profitable net returns. At present in India two types of certification system exists *viz.*, Third Party certification (NPOP) system which is governed by Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry

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of Commerce which is mainly focused for export purpose and the other one is Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)-INDIA certification system (NCONF, DA\$FW, 2023) [4]. In hilly and tribal areas to increase the premium demand and prices for agricultural produce organic certification is needed and also to promote certified organic farming with combination of tradition and science in the de-facto areas of organic cultivation the extent of farmers awareness are to be assessed (Shankar *et al.*, 2021) [5].

Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) district of Andhra Pradesh is a complete high altitude hilly terrain and scheduled agency area for tribal farmers, wherein farmers cultivate variety of crops for subsistence since decades, and now shifting to commercial farming for remunerative net profits. Even though there are many feasible and well established types of organic certification procedures available, tribal farmers are not certifying their crops for organic, either individually or in groups. Due to sensitisation activities of NGOs and other extension institutions, farmers at present were aware of the basic summit that to reap better prices, authentication, branding or to export for their organic produce, they need to undergo organic certification. Hence, the present study was undertaken to understand the level of awareness among the tribal farmers at ASR district of Andhra Pradesh on various aspects of available organic certification process and the major constraints faced by them in adopting these certification procedures.

### Materials and Methods

The study was conducted using exploratory research design in Alluri Sitharama Raju district of Andhra Pradesh during 2022-23. Three mandals *viz.*, Chintapalli, G. K Veedi and Paderu mandals of ASR district were selected as the extent of area under crops is more with respect to organic way of cultivation in these areas. From each mandal two villages were selected randomly and from each village 10 farmers who are cultivating the crops without using any inorganic inputs were selected randomly. A semi structured interview schedule with a questionnaire was developed with a set of 23 reactions in organic certification aspects for seeking a total of 60 farmer's responses as aware or unaware. The constraints being faced by the farmers in relation to organic certification dealings were recorded and ranked according to number of farmers responses.

### Results and Discussions

The farmer's responses through personal interview method on various aspects of organic certification (OC) procedures and regulations and the constraints faced by the farmers in this regard are documented.

#### Farmer's responses on awareness on organic certification

The farmers responses on various aspects of OC clearly indicated that, among various aspects, almost all the responded farmers were not aware on the aspects like OC is done for wild and forest products, processing units and trading units (100%), OC is done for organic inputs also (100%), All the inputs are to be used as per the permitted guidelines of OC (100%) and in fact none of the farmer are aware of any authorised OC agency (100%). It reveals a

situation that, even the first and foremost basic information on where to approach or to whom they can contact for organic certifications is not known to the farmers. In ASR district around 90,000 ha area is under coffee plantation and the produce comes as a pure variety of forest harvests which can be certified and exported as organic product.

Regarding the examination conversion period of 2 year for annuals and 3 years for perennials for getting certification, almost all the farmers (98.33%) were not aware. The information on OC is done only through third party is also unaware by majority of farmers (96.67%), even almost all farmers are unaware of OC is done for milk products, livestock, livestock products, pet products, organic cosmetics and textiles (96.67%) and Record-keeping as written, day to day farming records is mandatory (96.67%). Farmers not only aware of the things and activities that can be certified organically, but also they were not aware that record-keeping is very crucial in organic certification.

Further, the results indicated that major majority of the farmers (96.67%) are ignorant on the fact of OC needs to be done through accredited third party agencies only. Few farmers who heard about organic certification were in opinion that OC can be done through local government agricultural institutions or land revenue department. Even some farmers expressed that as their lands are in remote forest areas and cultivate crops in traditional manner, once if their farm lands were certified as organic by land revenue department, it is similar to organic certification.

As per the evident from the results majority farmers (95.0%) were not aware of applying their crop produce for OC separately. Similarly, majority of farmers were not aware about extensive documentation of the farm activities (91.67%), process includes inspection of field, testing of produce by the certifying authority (91.67%), certification is a paid activity (91.67%) and largely all the benefits of the organic certification was not aware to majority of farmers (90.00%). Likewise, farmers lack awareness on aspects like, certification is done for farmers (83.33%), certified products gets worldwide demand (83.33%), PGS-Organic India certificate can be valid for both domestic and international market (83.33%), the same certificate is valid after three years (83.33%).

The results also indicate that, majority of the farmers were not aware of availability of PGS-India green certificate (80.00%), PGS-India green certification duration (80.00%), certification is done for crops, foods, green house crop production, aquatic plants, apiculture and mushroom cultivation (70.00%), organic certification would get premium price and export market (70.00%), organically certified products provide a distinct place in market (68.33%) and organic certification is done for quality assurance that the food products were genuine and from reliable source (65.00%).

The situation regarding awareness on OC by tribal farmers in ASR district revealed that, tribal farmers were absolutely unaware of many critical activities of organic certification as mentioned in Table 1. This was due the piece of evidence that, tribal farmers even though cultivate crops more organically; neither training programmes nor awareness cum popularisation demonstration programmes on organic certification were undertaken in the study area.

**Table 1:** Farmers responses on awareness on organic certification (OC)

(n=60)

S. No.	Organic Certification aspects	Response on awareness			
		Aware		Not aware	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1	Reorganization of OC through third party certification system only	2	3.33	58	96.67
2	OC is done for quality assurance that the product was genuine and from reliable source	21	35.00	39	65.00
3	OC is a tool to provide a distinct place in the market	19	31.67	41	68.33
4	OC is done for farms (individual or group)	10	16.67	50	83.33
5	OC is done for crops, foods, green house crop production, aquatic plants, apiculture and mushroom cultivation	18	30.00	42	70.00
6	OC is done for wild and forest products, processing units and trading units	0	0.00	60	100.00
7	OC is done for Milk products, livestock, livestock products, pet products, organic cosmetics and textiles	2	3.33	58	96.67
8	OC is done for organic inputs also	0	0.00	60	100.00
9	OC offers worldwide demand for organic foods	10	16.67	50	83.33
10	Participatory Guarantee systems (PGS-India Green certification) for domestic market	12	20.00	48	80.00
11	PGS- India green can get certification after one year	12	20.00	48	80.00
12	PGS – Organic India is fully organic for both domestic and international market	10	16.67	50	83.33
13	PGS – Organic India can get certificate after three years	10	16.67	50	83.33
14	OC is for those who applied with all details as per requirement	3	5.00	57	95.00
15	OC process include extensive documentation of all the activities of the farm and records	5	8.33	55	91.67
16	Record-keeping as written, day to day farming records is mandatory	2	3.33	58	96.67
17	During certification process, inspection to the field, testing of produce by the certifying authority	5	8.33	55	91.67
18	Certification is paid activity as per the norms of certifying agency	5	8.33	55	91.67
19	There is a conversion period of 2 year for annuals and 3 years for perennials	1	1.67	59	98.33
20	All the inputs need to be used as per the permitted guidelines of OC (seeds, nutrients, plant protection inputs etc	0	0.00	60	100.00
21	Organic certified produce get premium prices and permitted to export as organic product	18	30.00	42	70.00
22	Do you aware of all the benefits of getting OC	6	10.00	54	90.00
23	Do you aware of any authorised OC agency	0	0.00	60	100.00

### Constraints in Organic Certification

The study focused to enumerate the various constraints that farmers expressed while enquired about obtaining the organic

certification to their agricultural produce when explained about organic certification process and tabulated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Constraints perceived by the farmers for Organic Certification:

(n=60)

S. No.	Constraint	Frequency	Percent	Rank
1	Unaware of various benefits of OC	41		V
2	Lack of awareness on procedure of OC	51		III
3	Very high certification charges	43		IV
4	Very tedious and lengthy process	54		I
5	No OC activity seen so far in neighbourhood	34		VI
6	High cost of cultivation when cultivated for certification	52		II
7	Application, preparing the farm, meeting requirements needs separate engagement by the farmer	28		VII

Among the various constraints documented, the major constraints as per the number of farmers opined that organic certification is very tedious and lengthy process (Rank I) followed by high cost of cultivation when cultivated for OC (Rank II). Till now no farmer in this tribal area of ASR district had registered organic certification for their agricultural harvested produce. Other constraints include, lack of awareness on procedure of organic certification (Rank III), very high certification charges (Rank IV), unaware of various benefits of OC (Rank V), no OC activity seen so far in neighbourhood (Rank VI), and application, preparing the farm, meeting requirements needs separate engagement by the farmer (Rank VII).

Some of the constraints like lack of awareness can be addressed by undertaking specialised focused programmes on organic certification by various agencies working for agricultural development in the region. More support, incentives, information, and training programme are required

from Government to strengthen the organic farming area (Uma and Rachanna, 2018)<sup>[6]</sup>.

### Conclusions

Organic certification for agricultural crop produce is necessary as it benefits both the farming community to double their income and also to the buyers who receive qualitative organic foods. In the present study it was evident that majority of the tribal farmers are unaware of the organic certification rules/procedures/standards/regulations. Only few farmers are aware that organically certified produce has premium demand. Majority of the farmers opined the certification process as tedious and lengthy one which incurs high cost for cultivation and expressed as constraints. It can be concluded that as farmers are unaware the extension functionaries, NGOs and Government must work collaboratively to bring certain policies/programmes that create awareness on tribal farming on significance of organic

certification and encourage them to adopt in larger extent in hill and tribal areas.

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