



Organic Farming in Eastern India : Opportunities and Concerns

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Organic farming is an approach for sustainable agricultural production without deteriorating soil quality, farm diversity and avoiding hazards to the environment on a long-term basis. The awareness on environmental and health issues associated with modern intensive agriculture has led to an increasing demand for organic products across the globe. In India, about 5.71 million ha area is under organic cultivation that includes 26 per cent cultural area (1.49 million ha) and 74 per cent (4.22 million ha.) forest and wild area with around 6 lakh farmers practising it. During 2015-16, India produced 1.35 million MT of certified organic products such as fruits, vegetables, spices, dry fruits, coffee, cereals & millets, oil seeds, pulses, sugarcane, medicinal plants, tea, cotton, etc. Due to the increased demand of organic food and non-food products, the organic farming is becoming a profitable venture. Considering the growing interest towards the organic products government of India during 2014-15, formulated *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana* (PKVY) under the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA). The programme envisages development of 10,000 organic clusters and providing chemical-free farm inputs and increasing the certified area by 5 lakh hectare within a period of 3 years.

Eastern India comprising of seven states of Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Eastern Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal is gifted with rich natural resources like perennial water resources, fertile soils, adequate rainfall, abundant agricultural labour force etc. But, these resources are not yet harnessed fully to alleviate extreme poverty and deprivation prevalent in this region. Despite green revolution, Eastern India especially, the states of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Eastern Uttar Pradesh could only achieve relatively slow growth in the agricultural sector. The slow pace of agricultural growth is considered as a major reason for poverty in this region. Recent surge in the demand for organic foods can be seen as an opportunity to bring about positive change in farm sector in Eastern India. The rich soil resources coupled with traditional ways of cultivation may become a boon for the farmers to attract the global organic food market. Alongside rice based cropping system, if the vegetable, fruit and plantation crops are converted to organic farming, these together may fetch attractive prices both in domestic as well as international markets. The eastern region is well known for several region specific crop varieties like *Katrani* rice and *Jardalu* mango of Bhagalpur, '*Chiniya*' banana of Koshi region, *Shahi* Litchi muzaffarpur etc. which will fetch better price if grown organically. The Govt of Bihar is also envisioned in its roadmap to develop an organic corridor in Bihar for promotion of organic farming.

The major bottlenecks in moving towards the organic farming are lack of awareness regarding organic cultivation, non-availability of technological inputs like crop specific package of practices, fragmented land holding, limited number of certification agencies, higher cost associated with certification process and lack of market linkage of the organic produce. The important production challenges in organic agriculture are enhancement of soil productivity and crop pest/disease management. In order to improve the soil productivity and to reduce the damage from pests and diseases, there is need for development and commercialization of native bio-control agents and location specific microbial consortia. For the successful promotion of organic farming several steps need to be initiated which include development of crop specific package of practices for organic agriculture at regional level considering the availability of local resources, creating awareness among the farmers regarding profitability of organic production system, encouraging farmers to form producers company for cost effective organic certification and efficient marketing of the produce. In order to educate farming community, especially the rural youth, the systematized practice oriented diploma and certificate courses need to be offered at various institutions in local languages. Vocational trainings at various KVKs and other stake holders may further bring the positive impact.

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