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Organic Farming in India: A Pathway to Sustainable Development and Farmers' Prosperity

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Abstract: *India is an agrarian economy, with nearly 60 percent of its population directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for livelihood. Although the Green Revolution ensured food grain self-reliance, the excessive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds has resulted in declining soil fertility, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, and growing health concerns. In this context, organic farming has emerged as a viable pathway for sustainable development and farmers' prosperity in India. Organic farming emphasizes the balanced use of natural inputs such as farmyard manure, green manure, compost, vermicompost, bio-fertilizers, and bio-pesticides. This system improves soil health, enhances microbial activity, and maintains agro-ecological balance while reducing dependence on costly chemical inputs, thereby lowering cultivation costs and strengthening farmers' economic resilience. Rising health consciousness and increasing demand for chemical-free food have expanded domestic and global markets for organic products, enabling farmers to secure premium prices and higher incomes. This research paper examines the role of organic farming in achieving sustainable development and provides an analytical assessment of its current status, major challenges, and future prospects at both national and global levels. The study concludes that organic farming significantly contributes to environmental sustainability, resource conservation, income enhancement, and social well-being of farmers, making it a practical and effective approach for long-term agricultural development in India.*

Keywords: *Organic Farming, Sustainable Development, Environment-friendly Agriculture, Soil Health, Organic Inputs;*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Agriculture has always been the fundamental basis of India's civilization, culture, and economic structure. In Indian society, agriculture has not only been a means of livelihood but also an integral part of lifestyle, tradition, and cultural identity. Since ancient times, Indian farmers practiced agriculture in harmony and balance with nature. By using organic inputs such as farmyard manure, green manure, jeevamrit, beejamrit, panchgavya, and compost, they maintained soil fertility and protected environmental balance. Although traditional organic farming had relatively lower productivity, land, water, air, and human health remained protected over the long term. With the advent of the Green Revolution in the 1960s, the Indian agricultural system underwent a significant transformation. The use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds enabled the country to achieve food sufficiency and largely eliminate the problem of hunger. However, in the long run, the adverse effects of this transformation also became evident. The natural fertility of the soil began to decline, chemical residues in groundwater increased, the quality of crops deteriorated, and the cost of agricultural production rose sharply for farmers. Along with this, environmental imbalance, loss of biodiversity, and health-related problems among humans also increased. Amid these challenges, organic farming has emerged as an alternative, sustainable, and comprehensive agricultural system. According to H. Lampkin (2000): *Organic farming is a holistic production management system that promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity.* Indian scholar Dr. V. K. Singh (2018) defines organic farming as follows: *Organic farming is a system that ensures sustainable production while protecting land, the environment, and human health through the use of natural resources in place of chemical substances.*

The international organization IFOAM (2014) also considers organic farming as a production system based on natural processes, biodiversity, and local conditions to maintain the health of soil, ecosystems, and human beings. Thus, organic farming is not merely a technical method but a comprehensive philosophical approach based on harmony with nature,

social responsibility, and long-term economic stability. In the present scenario, the growing global demand for healthy, chemical-free, and environment-friendly products is making organic farming a strong instrument for sustainable development and farmers' prosperity in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Global and Indian studies on organic farming have established it as a highly effective system from the perspectives of sustainable development and farmers' prosperity. The conceptual foundation of organic farming was laid by Howard (1940) in "An Agricultural Testament", in which soil fertility, organic matter, and natural nutrient cycles were regarded as the core basis of agricultural production. Walters (1975) also emphasized the restoration of natural farming systems as an important means of reducing farmers' dependence on costly inputs. According to IFOAM (2014), organic farming is a comprehensive production system based on the principles of health, ecology, fairness, and care. Lampkin (2000), described organic farming as energy-efficient and economically beneficial in the long run. FAO (1999), argued that organic farming is more effective than chemical agriculture in conserving soil carbon, biodiversity, and natural resources. Similarly, Reganold and Wachter (2016), while reviewing forty years of global studies, concluded that organic farming is environmentally superior and economically competitive. In the Indian context, Badgley et al., (2007) demonstrated that organic farming provides a practical option of low-cost and stable income for small farmers. Singh (2018), highlighted that the growing demand for organic products in India presents significant opportunities for increasing farmers' income. Sharma et al., (2017), found that organic farming significantly improves soil structure and water-holding capacity. V Basil Hans and Raghavendra Rao., (2018), organic farming contributes to employment generation and the achievement of Sustainable Development. The study by Gomiero (2018), clearly indicates that organic farming promotes a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and enhances resource-use efficiency. The available literature suggests that organic farming is an environment-friendly, economically sustainable, and socially just agricultural system, which can play a crucial role in ensuring farmers' prosperity and sustainable rural development in India.

3. OBJECTIVES:

- To assess the role of organic farming as a pathway to achieving sustainable development.
- To examine the economic and social prosperity of farmers associated with organic farming, along with its environmental benefits.
- To study the challenges faced by organic farmers and the potential opportunities available to them.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study is descriptive in nature and focuses on analyzing organic farming in India, its principles and practices, and its role in sustainable development and farmers' economic and social prosperity. The study follows a qualitative analytical approach based on secondary data. The data are collected from national and international journals, research articles, government reports, publications of the Ministry of Agriculture, books, and documents from IFOAM, FAO, FiBL, APEDA, and other reliable online sources. This methodology makes the study systematic and objective-oriented.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Organic farming is a safe and eco-friendly alternative to chemical-based agriculture. It maintains balance among soil, water, plants, animals, and humans, promoting sustainable agricultural development. It relies on natural fertilizers, bio-pesticides, and traditional knowledge while completely avoiding chemical use. Thus, organic farming proves beneficial for the environment, human health, and farmers' economic prosperity.

5.1 Principles of Organic Farming: Organic farming is based on four fundamental principles Health, Ecology, Fairness, and Care as defined by IFOAM (2023). These principles view agriculture not merely as a production-oriented activity, but as a holistic process responsible toward ecology, society, and future generations. This framework aims to free agricultural systems from chemical dependency and promote a balanced, sustainable, and human-friendly model of farming (FAO, 2022).

- **Principle of Health:** This principle focuses on protecting and strengthening the interlinked health of soil, plants, animals, and humans. Organic farming enhances the natural recycling of nutrients and strengthens ecosystem resilience by improving soil organic matter, earthworms, beneficial microorganisms, and biological activity. According to IFOAM (2023) and FAO (2021), chemical-free production not only improves soil fertility but also enhances human health and ensures a safe and secure food system.

- **Principle of Ecology:** According to this principle, farming should be aligned with natural ecological processes, nutrient cycles, biodiversity, and local climatic conditions. The prohibition of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and GMOs in organic agriculture is intended to protect ecological balance. FAO (2022) and IPCC (2022) report that organic practices such as crop rotation, green manuring, and biological pest control help conserve soil, water, and air systems while increasing climate resilience.
- **Principle of Fairness:** This principle emphasizes equity, ethics, and transparency among all stakeholders in the agricultural system farmers, labourers, consumers, markets, and future generations. Organic farming promotes social justice, safe working conditions, fair remuneration, and the supply of pure food to consumers. According to IFOAM (2023), the aim is to link agriculture not only with economic activity but also with social welfare and community prosperity, thereby strengthening rural development.
- **Principle of Care:** This principle focuses on conserving natural resources, ensuring their sustainable use, and practicing agriculture with responsibility toward future generations. Its objective is to prevent environmental degradation, soil erosion, water pollution, and biodiversity loss. According to IFOAM (2023) and UNEP (2021), organic farming reduces the impacts of climate change by adopting precautionary decision-making, risk management, and innovation-based approaches. This principle prioritizes long-term environmental security alongside sustainable production.

5.2 Practices of Organic Farming: The practices of organic farming comprise a set of techniques and actions through which agriculture is made natural, environment-friendly, and sustainable in the long term. This system focuses on soil quality, biodiversity, farmer self-reliance, and the production of safe food. The major practices and features are as follows:

- **Practices for Enhancing Soil Fertility:** In organic farming, soil is regarded as a living system, and special emphasis is placed on improving its fertility. For this purpose, techniques such as the use of farmyard manure, compost, vermicompost, jeevamrit, green manuring, and recycling of crop residues are adopted. These practices increase organic matter, moisture retention, microbial activity, and activate the natural cycling of nutrients in the soil.
- **Natural Pest and Disease Management:** In the organic system, pest and disease control is entirely based on natural and biological means. Neem oil, neem extract, cow urine, garlic–chilli solution, Trichoderma, Bacillus thuringiensis (BT), and bio-agents such as Pseudomonas are commonly used. These methods are eco-friendly, safe for humans, and cost-effective, thereby maintaining better crop quality.
- **Crop Rotation and Intercropping Systems:** Instead of cultivating the same crop continuously, organic farming adopts a sequence of diverse crops, which helps maintain nutrient balance in the soil. The inclusion of leguminous crops facilitates nitrogen fixation, while intercropping reduces pest pressure and minimizes risk. These practices help stabilize productivity and protect soil health in the long term.
- **Water Conservation and Conservation of Natural Resources:** Organic farming places special emphasis on the sustainable use of water and natural resources. Techniques such as rainwater harvesting, drip and sprinkler irrigation, mulching, and moisture conservation are adopted. Moreover, priority is given to local resources to reduce dependence on external inputs, making farming more self-reliant and environmentally friendly.
- **Ecological Balance, Prohibitive Policy, and Social Responsibility:** Organic farming is based on the complete prohibition of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and GMOs, thereby ensuring environmental safety. This system promotes biodiversity and the conservation of beneficial insects and natural vegetation. At the same time, the use of local resources, community cooperation, and low-cost technologies make farmers socially responsible and economically self-reliant.

5.3 Contribution of Organic Farming to Sustainable Development and Farmers' Prosperity: Organic farming brings significant transformation to farmers' lives by promoting economic stability, social dignity, and sustainable development. It is not merely a production system but a holistic model that encourages the conservation of natural resources, generation of rural employment, and enhancement of health security. Through this farming approach, farmers' income becomes more stable, living standards improve, and social participation is strengthened. Consequently, organic farming lays a strong foundation for overall rural development and plays a vital role in achieving the objectives of sustainable agriculture.

- **Environmental Conservation and Long-term Soil Productivity:** Organic farming improves soil structure, biological activity, and water-holding capacity through chemical-free practices. The use of natural nutrient cycling, bio-fertilizers, and organic pest management techniques reduces environmental pollution and greenhouse gas emissions (Smith et al., 2019). This enhances the long-term capacity of natural resources and

maintains soil health, providing a strong foundation for both sustainable development and stable farmers' income.

- **Reduction in Production Costs and Increase in Economic Profitability:** Organic farming relies on local resources such as farmyard manure, green manure, compost, and bio-inputs, thereby reducing the high costs of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Lower production costs increase net returns, while organic products fetch premium prices in the market (Crowder & Reganold, 2015). These economic benefits stabilize farmers' income, reduce financial risks, and ensure long-term economic prosperity, making the agricultural system more sustainable.
- **Rural Employment Generation and Social Empowerment:** Being labour-intensive, organic farming creates greater employment opportunities in activities such as compost preparation, seed conservation, crop management, and processing. This enhances participation and self-reliance among rural households, particularly women and youth. Collective farming practices and active farmer groups strengthen social cooperation and community resilience (Forman & Silverstein, 2012). This process improves social welfare and fosters an overall environment of empowerment and development in rural society.
- **Health Security and Overall Improvement in Farmers' Living Standards:** Organic farming eliminates the use of harmful chemicals, protecting farmers from exposure to toxic substances and reducing health risks and medical expenses. A chemical-free environment enhances work efficiency, while the consumption of organic food improves family nutrition. Safe working conditions, a clean environment, and better health elevate farmers' living standards. Thus, organic farming promotes comprehensive well-being at economic, environmental, and social levels, making it a significant step toward sustainable development.

5.4 Challenges Faced by Organic Farmers:

- Limited technical knowledge of composting, crop rotation, and biological pest management, leading to low productivity in initial years
- High initial costs related to organic inputs and certification, creating financial pressure on small and marginal farmers
- Complex and time-consuming certification processes along with poor local availability of organic inputs
- Lack of organized markets, weak marketing infrastructure, and income uncertainty during the transition period

5.5 Opportunities in Organic Agriculture:

- Increasing consumer demand for chemical-free food and supportive government policies and schemes
- Growing international demand providing export opportunities and higher price realization
- Improvement in soil health, water conservation, and climate resilience through environmentally sustainable practices
- Strengthening of farmer income and market access through cooperatives, FPOs, and collective farming models

5.6 Status of Organic Farming at the Global Level:

- **Global Organic Agricultural Land and Regional Distribution:** According to the FiBL Survey 2025, global organic agricultural land reached approximately 98.9 million hectares in 2023, recording a 2.6% increase during 2022–2023. At present, organic farming is practiced in 188 countries, reflecting its wide global adoption. In terms of regional distribution, Australia accounts for the largest share with about 53.2 million hectares under organic cultivation, followed by India with approximately 4.5 million hectares and Argentina with around 4.0 million hectares. This indicates that India is emerging as a major country in terms of organic agricultural area, and highlights that organic farming is expanding across diverse geographical and agro-climatic regions (FiBL Survey 2025).
- **Global Status of Organic Farmers and Producers:** Globally, the number of organic farmers has grown to around 4.3 million, showing the increasing involvement of people in organic agriculture (FiBL Survey 2025). There are also about 0.13 million organic processing units, which help strengthen the organic value chain (FiBL Survey 2025). Among countries, India leads the world with over 2.35 million farmers practicing organic farming, followed by Uganda and Ethiopia (FiBL Survey 2025). This clearly shows that India plays a key role in global organic agriculture, not just in terms of area under cultivation, but also in farmer participation and human resources (FiBL; IFOAM).
- **Expansion of the Global Organic Market :** According to the FiBL Survey 2025, the global organic food market reached approximately €136.4 billion in 2023. This clearly indicates a continuous rise in consumer demand worldwide, with organic products gradually becoming part of the mainstream market (FiBL Survey 2025). Based on market value, the United States is the largest market for organic products, with a size of about

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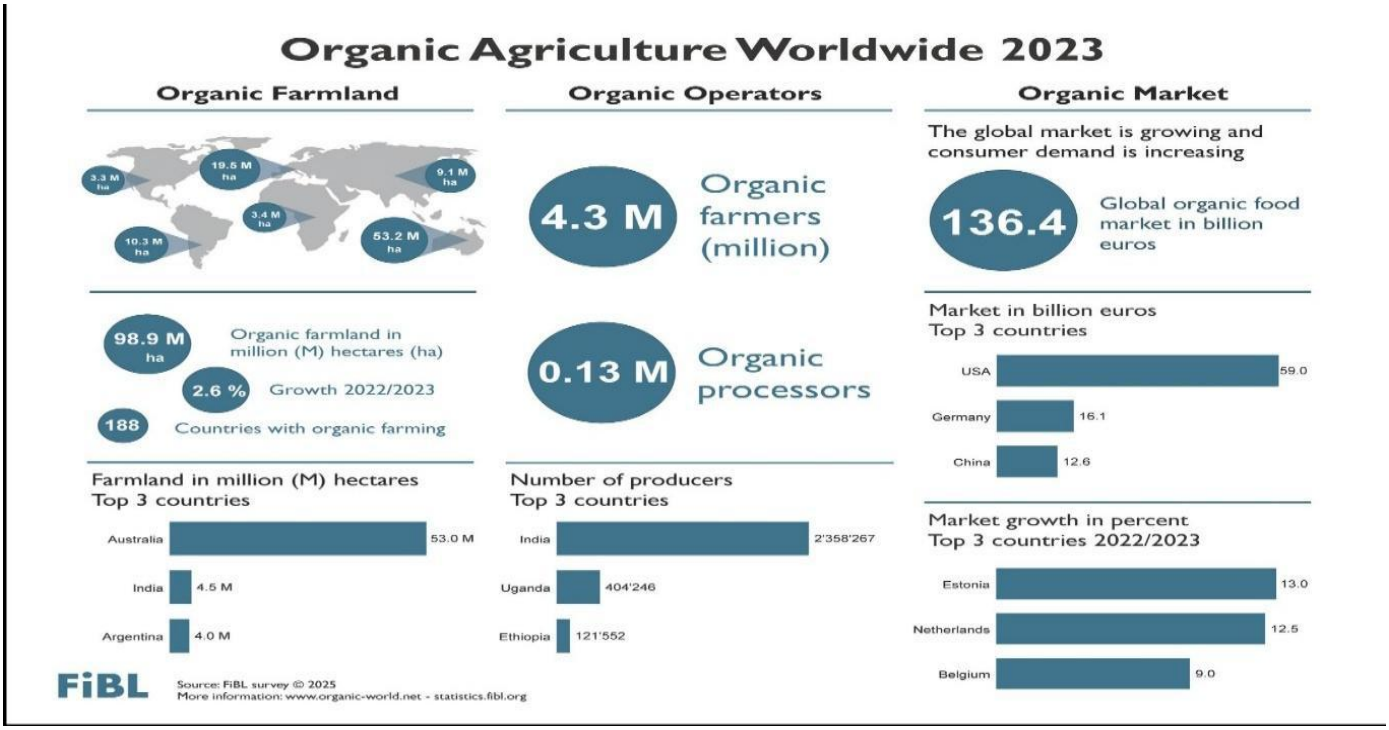
€59.0 billion, followed by Germany (approximately €16.1 billion) and China (around €12.6 billion) (FiBL Survey 2025). During 2022–2023, Estonia (13.0%), the Netherlands (12.5%), and Belgium (9.0%) recorded the highest market growth rates, indicating rapidly increasing demand for organic products in new and emerging markets (FiBL Survey 2025).

Figures: **1**



Source: FIBL survey 2025

5.7 Current Status of Organic Farming in India : In the global context, India has emerged as a major hub of organic agriculture. According to the FiBL Survey 2025, India ranks first in the world in terms of the number of organic farmers (approximately 2.3-2.4 million), while it holds the second position in total organic agricultural area. As of March 2024, India's total organic agricultural area is about 7.3 million hectares, including certified land, land under conversion, and wild collection (APEDA, 2024). At the state level, Madhya Pradesh leads in organic certified area, followed by Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat (APEDA). Sikkim holds the distinction of being India's first fully organic state, where the entire agricultural land is managed under organic practices (Press Information Bureau). These figures indicate that organic farming in India is steadily expanding in terms of land area, farmer participation, and market potential. Supported by a large farmer base, diverse agro-climatic conditions, and strong government policies, organic farming is emerging as an important pathway for environmental sustainability, economic growth, and food security.

Table:1. State-wise area covered under Organic Farming up to 2023-24

S. No.	State	Under NPOP Certification (Area in ha)	Under PKVY (Area in ha)
1	Andhra Pradesh	63,678.69	360,805
2	Bihar	29,062.13	31,783
3	Chhattisgarh	15,144.13	101,279
4	Goa	12,287.40	15,334
5	Gujarat	680,819.99	10,000
6	Haryana	2,925.33	0
7	Himachal Pradesh	9,334.28	18,748
8	Jharkhand	54,408.20	25,300
9	Kerala	44,263.91	94,480
10	Karnataka	71,085.99	20,900
11	Madhya Pradesh	1,148,236.07	74,960
12	Maharashtra	1,001,080.32	66,756
13	Odisha	181,022.28	45,800

14	Punjab	11,089.41	6,981
15	Tamil Nadu	42,758.27	32,940
16	Telangana	84,865.16	8,100
17	Rajasthan	580,092.22	148,500
18	Uttar Pradesh	66,391.34	171,185
19	Uttarakhand	101,820.39	140,740
20	West Bengal	8,117.80	21,400
21	Assam	27,079.40	4,400
22	Arunachal Pradesh	16,537.53	380
23	Meghalaya	29,703.30	900
24	Manipur	32,584.50	600
25	Mizoram	14,238.30	780
26	Nagaland	16,221.56	480
27	Sikkim	75,729.78	63,000
28	Tripura	20,481.36	1,000
29	Jammu & Kashmir	34,746.75	5,160
30	Puducherry	21.51	0
31	Delhi	9.6	0
32	Ladakh	-	10,480
33	Daman & Diu	-	642
34	Dadar & Nagar Haveli	-	500
35	Andaman & Nicobar	-	14,491
Total		**4,475,837**	**1,498,804**

***Source**:* Agricultural Statistics at a Glance, 2024

5.8 Indian Government Policy Support and Programs for Organic Farming: The Government of India has implemented several policy support mechanisms and programs to promote organic farming with the objectives of sustainable agriculture, improvement of soil fertility, environmental protection, and enhancement of farmers' income. Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) is one of the major programs for organic farming, focusing on sustainability, long-term soil fertility development, and the production of healthy food through organic practices. Under PKVY, organic farming is promoted through group-based approaches approved under the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), with support for cluster formation, training, certification, and marketing. Financial assistance of INR 50,000 per hectare for three years is provided, out of which a major portion is allocated for organic inputs. Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), launched in August 2007, is a supplementary central assistance scheme aimed at achieving annual growth in agriculture through the development of agriculture and allied sectors. It provides flexibility to states in planning agricultural programs, encourages increased investment, reduces yield gaps in important crops, and promotes reduced dependence on chemical agricultural inputs. Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER) supports organic farming in the north-eastern states by providing assistance of about INR 25,000 per hectare for three years for organic inputs, along with support up to INR 2 crore for farmer producer organizations, capacity building, and post-harvest infrastructure, thereby strengthening the entire organic value chain. National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), launched in 2001, is the world's largest organic certification program, recognized by the European Union, Switzerland, and the United States, and implemented by APEDA to facilitate third-party certification of organic products. In addition, the National Project on Organic Farming (NPOF) promotes the use of organic manures, biofertilizers, biopesticides, capacity building, model organic farms, and low-cost certification systems. Collectively, these programs provide comprehensive policy support for the growth of organic farming in India.

6. CONCLUSION:

The present study concludes that organic farming provides a sustainable and inclusive pathway for improving farmers' income and strengthening environmental health in India. The Green Revolution ensured food security in the country, but the continuous use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds has affected soil fertility, biodiversity, and the environment, while increasing production costs and health-related challenges. As a solution to these challenges, organic farming has emerged as an effective alternative. The study indicates that the balanced use of natural inputs such as farmyard manure, compost, green manure, and bio-fertilizers improves soil quality, microbial activity, and ecological balance. Reduced dependence on chemical inputs lowers production costs and stabilizes farmers' income, while the growing demand for chemical-free products provides farmers with better prices and profitable market opportunities.

Government initiatives such as PKVY, MOVCDNER, NPOP, NPOF, and RKVY have played a significant role in the promotion and support of organic farming. Thus, organic farming proves to be a sustainable solution for environmental conservation, farmers' prosperity, and long-term agricultural and rural development.

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