

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ORGANIC FARMING IN RURAL AREAS OF TAMILNADU

Dr. K. DHAVAMANI, Assistant Professor
PG and Research Centre of Management Studies
Bharathidasan University College
Perambalur - 621 107

Abstract

Organic farming in the Tamil Nadu has experienced considerable growth in the last two decades. The market for organic produce is estimated to be worth some 1.05 per cent of the Tamil Nadu grocery market. Interest in the organic sector however, stretches far beyond the apparent rapid growth and buoyancy of the market. Organic farming is promoted on the basis of the multiple benefits it provides; healthier food, improved farmed environment and a contribution to the rural economy. It is the environmental impacts of organic farming that have received most research attention and while some still contest the environmental benefits of organic farming, there is growing consensus that it does indeed offer certain environmental benefits over and above those of conventional agriculture.

Key words: Organic farming, sustainable agriculture, conventional agriculture, organic products, environmental sustainability, etc.

1. Introduction

More recently researchers have turned their attention to the role of organic farming in the rural economy and specifically, the potential for organic farming to contribute to rural development. It is frequently argued that organic farming can promote employment in rural areas and it can also contribute to rural development, for instance, through the provision of environmental services that underpin rural tourism. Given the wide-ranging implications of these claims it is not surprising that sometimes organic farming is presented as a panacea for the problems facing the food and farming sector. Equally, it is not surprising that it can stimulate just as vociferous 'anti-organic' feeling that sees in organics a rejection of the agricultural science that has led to such remarkable growths in yields and productivity in the last fifty years.

2. Concept of organic farming

The popular or 'lay' definition of organic farming defines it by what it does not do, or what is perceived by consumers not to be present. Commonly it is described as being farming without the use of chemicals, by which many people mean contemporary pesticides, fungicides and herbicides as well the absence of antibiotics and more recently genetically modified technologies. Parallel with the growth of interest in the organic sector, 'local food' has taken on increased economic, environmental and symbolic importance. Much of this is concerned with reducing environmental costs, particularly food miles but also a desire to increase local economic

multipliers and contribute to the connection of farmers and consumers. Although organic produce is not necessarily ‘local’, there is nevertheless a close alliance between local food and organic food. Combining a greater degree of localness in food sourcing with increased organic production would lead to considerable savings associated with the reduction of environmental externalities. Although the economic and social benefits of reducing negative externalities and increasing positive externalities are recognized, the potential for organic farming to contribute to rural economies is much more wide ranging than the focus of previous research would suggest. Against this background, the research reported here has sought to explore the hypothesis set out in the original research brief that organic farming provides an additional benefit to the rural economy over and above that of conventional agriculture, defined for the purposes of this project as ‘non-organic’. The approach adopted involved tracing the socio-economic footprint of a range of farm business types. The concept of the socio-economic footprint represents a development of earlier research tracing the economic footprints of small towns. In contrast to conventional economic analysis, the research focused on examining the socio-economic linkages associated with different types of farming such as sales and purchasing patterns but also evidence of social connectivity and embeddedness.

3. Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to review the organic farming and its socio-economic impact on rural areas.

4. Research methodology

The data were collected from 355 organic and non-organic farmers in Tamilnadu through a questionnaire.

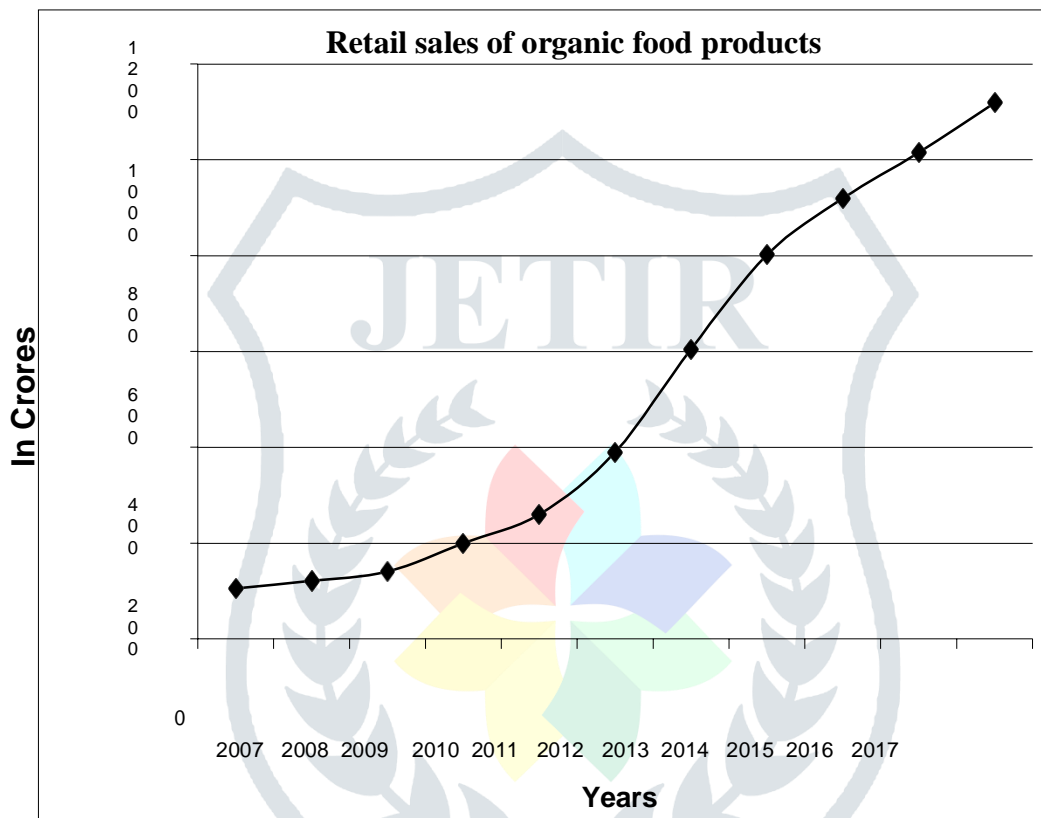
TABLE 1
Characteristics of a Social Movement

Characteristic Aspects of a Social Movement	Constituent parts
Informal interaction networks	Interaction between individuals, groups and organizations. Range of networks from loose to dense Precondition
Shared beliefs and solidarity	Symbolic redefinition New collective identity
Collective action focusing on conflicts	Promotion/opposition to change Contestation of a social stake
Use of protest	Unusual political behavior Frequent protest activity

5. Growth, development and current condition of organic sector

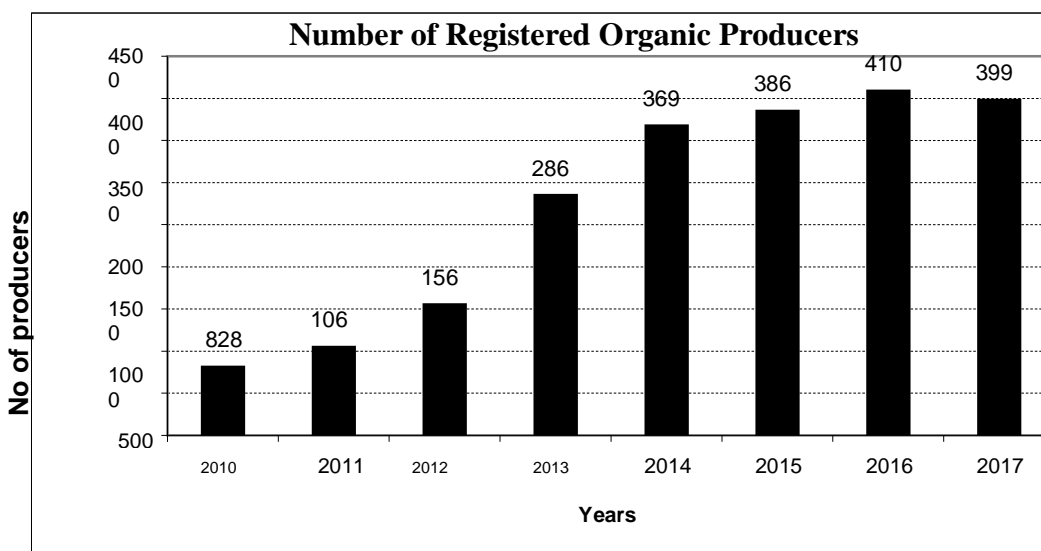
It is difficult to escape what sounds like hyperbole when describing the growth of the organic sector in the Tamil Nadu in the last ten years. The rise of organic food and farming has been remarkable, but only in the last seven or eight years has it become of economic and social consequence. Without understanding the scale of the organic sector and the dynamics within it the results of this research and their implications are less easily understood.

FIGURE 1



With such a clear market signal occurring at a time when the rest of the agricultural economy was fairing particularly badly it could be anticipated that a number of farm businesses would respond to the opportunity presented.

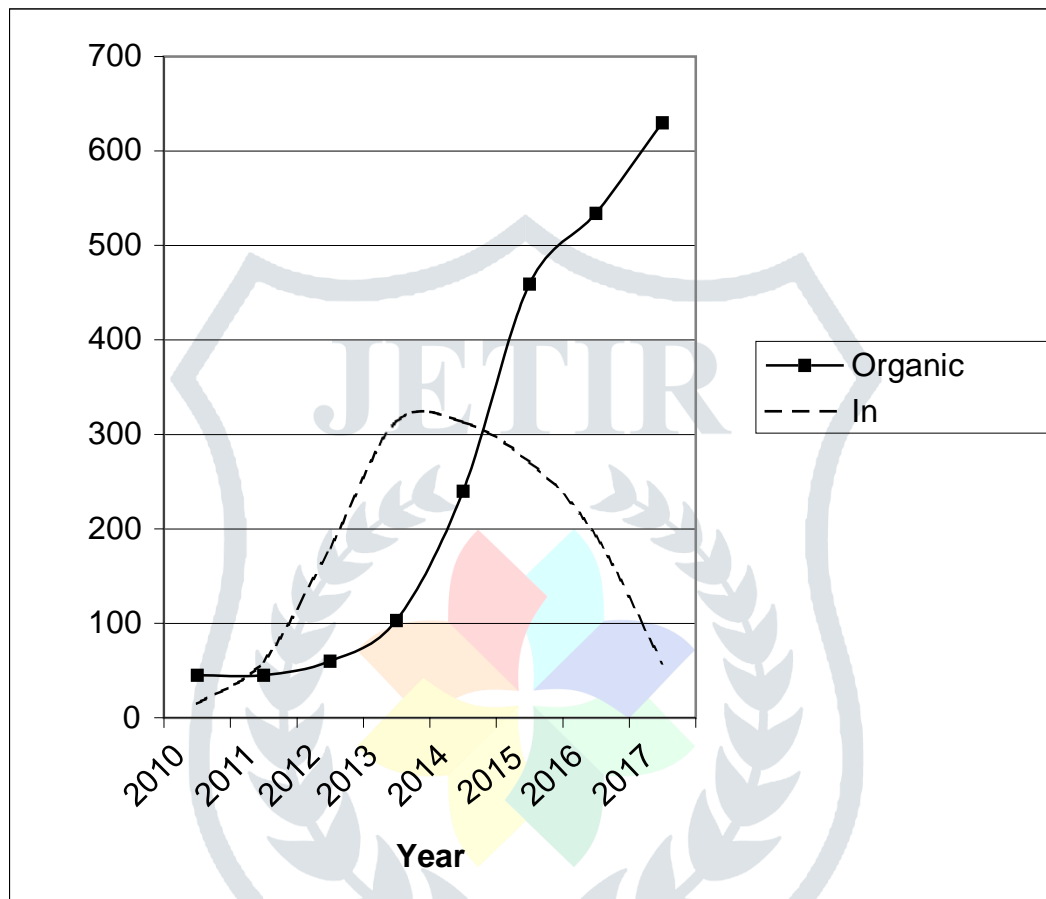
FIGURE 2



The number of farms engaged in organic production does not necessarily reveal the full progress of the sector, as the size and type of farms may be of equal importance. Data on the latter is quite restricted whilst the area under conversion and under organic production has much more commonly been used to assess the growth of the sector.

FIGURE 3

Growth of Organic Land and Amount of Land in Conversion



Until recently support for organic farming from the state has been limited and based on the environmental contribution that organic farming is deemed to provide. The other area of government support has been through the Organic Action Plan, set up after the recommendations of the Curry Commission in 2002. An Action Plan Team was formed of stakeholders and representatives of the food industry with the aim of: creating sustainable growth in organic farming and foods; increasing the share of Tamil Nadu produced food in the market; and promoting the organic sector throughout the food chain. The review of the Action Plan after two years of its operation found that there had been progress made on increasing the domestic sourcing of organic produce and integration in the national supply chain.

The growth and apparent potential of the organic sector as well as considerable policy intervention, academic researchers are beginning to identify limits to growth in the sector and to challenge received wisdom concerning the past growth of domestic organic farming. The role of multiple retailers in the growth and future shape of the domestic organic sector is beyond the

scope of the research reported here but the recognition of the uneven experience of the organic sector and the demands placed on producers supplying multiples are themes that re-occurred frequently in the empirical stages of the project. In turn, this suggests that if organic farming can and does produce an additional benefit over and above that of conventional farming, it will become increasingly important to understand the dynamics of the sector and the forces shaping its development.

6. Conclusion

As a farming system, organic farming can be understood in terms of a set of legally prescribed standards. This narrow definition can be contrasted with a broader perspective which views organic farming as a social movement; a collective project in which producers and consumers interact in various ways in order to share and pursue a particular set of ideals. Organic farming, and the supply of organic produce, has grown rapidly in recent years although the aggregate picture obscures important differences between sectors. To its proponents, organic farming not only offers a means of producing safer, healthier food under improved environmental conditions but it is also potentially a means of delivering rural development.

7. Reference

- Brandt, K., & Mølgaard, J.P. (2001). Organic Agriculture: Does It Enhance or Reduce the Nutritional Value of Plant Foods? *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 81, 924-931.
- Küstermann, B., Kainz, M., & Hülsbergen, K.J. (2008). Modeling Carbon Cycles and Estimation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Organic and Conventional Farming Systems. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 23, 38-52.
- Lotter, D. (2003). Organic Agriculture. *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, 21, 1-63.
- Nagarajan, S. S. (2003). Is Ecological Farming an Answer to the Punjab Crisis? *Kisan World*, 30, 11-14
- Sharma, R. K., Agrawal, M., & Marshall, F. M. (2009). Heavy Metals in Vegetables Collected from Production and Market Sites of a Tropical Urban Area of India. *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, 47, 583-591.
- Woese, et al. (1997). A Comparison of Organically and Conventionally Grown Foods - Results of a Review of the Relevant Literature. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 74, 281-293.