

*MISSION POSSIBLE:***A 100% ORGANIC WORLD**

A multipronged approach encompassing documentation, policy, technology, research, marketing and govt succour, can facilitate a 100% organic world

BY DR ARUN K SHARMA

Consumers are thronging shops, farmers' markets, e-commerce portals and even organic farms for fresh, quality organic products.

Farmers, too, are gradually distancing themselves from conventional cultivation, given the high costs and negative health impact associated with chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Furthermore, Organic is now receiving policy support and has become an integral part of government programmes for agriculture. Therefore, the moment is ripe to initiate 'Mission Possible: Organic as a Global Phenomenon'—a collective and multipronged endeavour to convert the world into organic.

DOCUMENTING UNCERTIFIED LAND

From 2000 to 2016, the organic market witnessed an uptick from USD 19 bn to 81 bn; land under organic cultivation from 12 mn to 53 mn ha; producers from 0.25 mn to 2.5 mn—testament to the exponential growth of the organic sector in a mere 16 years. Inclusion of non certified organic land in these statistics will further underscore the market's growth.

CONSIDERING BOTH MAXIMUM & MINIMUM AREAS

Intensive usage of chemicals has left at least 10 percent of irrigated areas at a stage of highest (maximum) input, in terms of chemicals and lowest output, with another 20 percent expected to reach this stage in the next 5 years. Retaining such areas under chemical cultivation is neither economically nor ecologically beneficial and restoration of such areas is possible only through the organic system. Similarly, in rainfed areas, which constitute 60 percent of the world's agriculture, the use of chemicals is still relatively low

(minimum), and conversion to organic can be achieved early and with ease, with the added advantage of enhanced yields.

REDUCING CHEMICAL USAGE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

A major lacuna is the dearth of ideal technology—such as systems for the adequate nutrition or protection of crops. So much so that many abandon the transition midway. Lack of research in specific areas, low quality of technology available, and spurious products in the market—all erode the confidence of the producer. Frequent non availability of specific products also acts as a deterrent; for example, pheromone traps are very effective but are often unavailable to farmers.

Ready and widespread availability of quality organic inputs and technology, as well as, customised knowledge (to every farmer) by the government and civil society will enhance adoption of organic farming far more than simply offering subsidies for organic cultivation.

CONVINCING RESEARCHERS & POLICY MAKERS TO JOIN IN

The key proponents spurring the organic movement so far are consumers and producers. The scientific community and policy makers have notably been absent from the discussion, sceptical of the movement because of apprehension of low yields, non availability of sufficient organic inputs and an inability in meeting food security needs, etc.

A valid quantification of organic farming and its numerous benefits will go a long way in eliciting support from these stakeholders, convincing them of the superiority of organic

over conventional, and bringing the movement under mainstream policy, education and research. Some pertinent issues to consider are:

- Research to compare organic versus conventional farming in totality.
- Comprehensive research regarding bioproducts, limits on their usage and their effects on the ecosystem. Currently, the use of bioproducts, botanicals and microbial solutions is not regulated, nor are reports available detailing their effect on the micro-ecology of soil and plants. More bioproducts are flooding the market, increasing risk of adulteration and of bio-pollution if these products are used indiscriminately.
- Use of energy friendly and eco friendly packaging is another aspect that is directly related to the sustainability of organic farming and requires quantification.
- Quantification and documentation of success stories across different agro-ecological zones, with a focus on farmer incomes and resilience to climate change to exemplify the impact of organic farming.

CLIMATE CHANGE: ORGANIC IS THE SOLUTION

The phenomenon of climate change is adversely affecting every aspect of life on the planet. One of the factors instrumental in contributing to climate change is heavy usage of chemicals in conventional agriculture. Organic farming, on the other hand, eschews all chemical inputs; the organic movement can, therefore, be a major step in mitigating climate change.

TOWARDS ORGANIC

At least 20 percent of the world's agricultural land is still untouched by chemicals, chiefly



in the rainfed areas of Africa, central Asia and South America. Engaging these areas in scientific organic farming will not only increase their productivity, but also serve to convert a vast area into organic in a relatively short time.

Similarly, a large number of conventional farmers utilise numerous eco technologies. For ex, the use of compost, biofertilisers and neem products, along with integrated nutrient and pest management, with very limited use of chemicals.

Rather than enforcing strict rules and regulations on these farmers, which may prove to be a deterrent to going organic, permitting them to convert at their own pace while providing them with consistent technical and financial support may serve as sustainable motivation.

TARGETING MILLENNIALS

The under-30 age demographic is the adequate target audience for the spread of the organic movement. Unlike older generations, the under-30 segment is willing to experiment and is more open to adoption of new products. Increasing concerns regarding health and fitness and a greater consciousness about the environment further make this segment important.

STREAMLINING MARKETING CHANNELS

The higher price point often makes organic products inaccessible to the masses, ultimately curtailing the spread of the movement. A large number of middlemen in the marketing channel, the cost of storing the harvest hygienically, as well as, processing and packaging costs—all add incrementally to the final sale price of the product. For example, the nutritive moringa leaf powder sold (with attractive packaging) to the final customer at USD15-20/kg might originally cost only USD 4/kg.

However, introduction of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) certification and popularisation of farmers' markets have revolutionised the market for organic products, eliminating the middleman and making produce easily available to consumers at significantly competitive rates.

Government organisations and NGOs should also promote direct sale of farm fresh organic products, making the industry profitable, and hence more viable, for both producers and consumers.

POLICY INTERVENTION & INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

Observing increasing consumer demand, the government is increasingly providing financial

support to organic agriculture. Rather than basing promotion on demand for organic products, the multiple benefits of this system—reduced financial burden for healthcare, improvement of the environment, conservation of natural resources, employment generation, etc—should be taken into account.

Organic should be promoted as a programme for transformation and upliftment of rural areas, fostering self sufficiency and enhancing incomes for farmers, since more than 60 percent of the population resides in rural areas and is dependent on agriculture for livelihood in most Asian, African and South American countries. This can be achieved through the convergence of multiple government ministries and departments, working together collaboratively to achieve organic expansion.



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a modern, innovative system in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Markus Arbenz, Executive Director, IFOAM - Organics International, says, "Today there is certified production in 170 countries in the world. The professional organic sector generates an annual turnover of \$80 bn. The people who shaped the organic movement from its beginnings in the 20th century (Organic 1.0) to the present (Organic 2.0), can look back at their astonishing achievements. Their experience is hugely valuable for the next generation. Following a holistic approach, they have succeeded in giving the organic process a secure place in the field, in processing facilities and store shelves, in the political agenda and, above all, a secure place in the heart of society. The organic process is successful because it functions practically in method and system and is sustainable for the future. In this way, the organic process and the extensive knowledge we have of it is at the frontline of the current debate on farming and nutrition."

GEARING FOR THE FUTURE

Dr Felix Prinz zu Löwenstein, Chairman of the German Federation of the Organic Food Industry, BÖLW, says, "Worldwide, organic farmers are, on average, younger than their conventional colleagues. The number of entry level employees is also higher. Organic startups are emerging all the time. In Germany alone, around a quarter of all food available was

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organically produced in 2016. And whilst the current generation of the organic sector moved across into organic, today, many entrepreneurs grow up with organic products. Like everywhere else, the generational transition in companies in our sector poses a great challenge. Exchanging experiences and advice is instrumental for the survival of these companies. Good training tailored to the needs of the sector is essential. There is still much to be done here!"

ESTABLISHED AIMS, NEW STYLES

The younger organic generation is spreading the traditional aims of a sustainable planet, respect for nature, ethics, a fair society and a global perspective from the field to the plate. Industry representatives affirm the persisting dedication of organic farmers, food manufacturers, distributors and customers.

At BIOFACH 2018, the new generation's political programme with company succession, trends in the startup sector and civil society will be

pertinent discussion topics. There will also be conversations on the younger generation's conclusions on the promises of the programme, with a review of past strategies to bolster future communication.

ABOUT BIOFACH

BIOFACH is a global leading exhibition for organic foods and is organised every February in Nuremberg, Germany. The international patron of BIOFACH is IFOAM - Organics International, the national supporting body of the Bund Ökologische Lebensmittelwirtschaft (BÖLW). A permanent component of this fair is the BIOFACH Congress, a globally unique knowledge platform.

With further exhibitions in Japan, United States, South America, China and India, BIOFACH World witnesses over 3,000 exhibitors and 100,000 trade visitors annually.

For further information, visit www.biofach.de/en/