



Original Article

Organic Farming in Marathwada Region: Challenges and its Benefits

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Organic farming in Marathwada offers a sustainable alternative to drought-prone and input-intensive agriculture. It improves soil health, conserves water, lowers costs, and supports rural livelihoods, especially for small and women farmers. Despite its benefits, adoption faces barriers like yield reduction, weak market access, and persistent water scarcity. Strengthened policies and support systems are vital to scale its impact on sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Organic Farming Marathwada Sustainable Rural Development Soil and Water Conservation Agrarian Challenges.

Introduction

Agriculture forms the backbone of rural livelihoods in India and the Marathwada region of Maharashtra is no exception. However, the region has been facing persistent agrarian distress due to recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, soil degradation and overdependence on chemical-intensive farming. These challenges have not only reduced productivity but also pushed many farmers into a cycle of debt and poverty. In such a fragile environment, the search for sustainable agricultural practices has become crucial for ensuring food security, economic stability and ecological balance. Organic farming has emerged as a promising alternative, offering multiple benefits by improving soil fertility, conserving water, reducing dependence on costly chemical inputs, and diversifying farm production. It is particularly significant in Marathwada, where smallholder and women farmers are adopting organic methods to improve nutrition, resilience, and incomes. While the approach holds strong potential for sustainable rural development, it also faces challenges such as initial yield declines, lack of institutional support, and weak market linkages. This paper explores the role of organic farming in Marathwada, highlighting both its benefits and constraints, and suggests pathways for scaling it as a model of rural sustainability.

Review of Literature

1. **Singh and Thomas (2018)** studied the role of organic farming in drought-prone areas of India and found that it improves soil fertility, enhances water retention, and reduces dependency on chemical fertilizers. Their research showed that organic farming not only benefits the environment but also lowers cultivation costs for small farmers.



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2. **Patil et al. (2020)** focused on Maharashtra and highlighted that women farmers adopting organic farming reported better household nutrition and diversified incomes. The study emphasized that community-based models like farmer groups and cooperatives are essential for scaling organic practices.
3. **FAO Report (2021)** noted that organic farming contributes significantly to sustainable rural development by linking ecological benefits with economic security. However, it also pointed out challenges such as limited market access, certification issues, and the need for stronger government support.

Objective:

To analyze the benefits of organic farming in Marathwada with respect to soil health, water conservation, income generation and rural livelihood sustainability.

To identify the key challenges faced by farmers in adopting organic farming and suggest measures for promoting its wider adoption in the region.

Organic farming in India:

Organic farming in India is gaining importance as a sustainable alternative to chemical-intensive agriculture. It emphasizes the use of natural inputs such as compost, green manure, bio-fertilizers, and crop rotation to maintain soil fertility and ecological balance. India is home to one of the largest numbers of organic farmers in the world, with states like Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan leading in cultivation. The government has promoted organic practices through schemes like the *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)* and the *National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)*. Organic farming not only reduces environmental pollution but also improves food quality, farmers' incomes, and rural sustainability.

Organic farming in Maharashtra:

Organic farming in Maharashtra is steadily growing as farmers look for sustainable alternatives to chemical-intensive agriculture. The state has diverse agro-climatic conditions, making it suitable for organic cultivation of cotton, soybean, pulses, oilseeds, fruits, and vegetables. Regions like Marathwada and Vidarbha are witnessing increasing adoption due to rising input costs and frequent droughts. Several NGOs and farmer groups have promoted organic practices, empowering small and women farmers through community-based models. The government also supports organic farming through schemes like *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)* and cluster-based development programs. Despite challenges of market access, certification, and yield transition, Maharashtra has significant potential to emerge as a leader in organic agriculture.

Importance of Organic Farming

Marathwada is one of the most drought-prone regions of Maharashtra, with frequent crop failures, declining groundwater levels, and high input costs leading to farmer distress. In this context, organic farming holds great importance as it reduces dependence on costly chemical fertilizers and pesticides, improves soil fertility, and enhances the water-holding capacity of land. It also ensures safer food production and provides opportunities for diversified cropping, which is vital for nutritional security and stable incomes. Importantly, organic farming has empowered women and small farmers in Marathwada, enabling them to adopt low-cost, eco-friendly methods that improve both household resilience and community sustainability.

Types of Organic Farming

1. **Pure Organic Farming** – This involves avoiding all chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and relying entirely on organic inputs like compost, green manure, and bio-fertilizers. Some farmers in Marathwada are gradually moving towards this model to restore soil health.
2. **Integrated Organic Farming** – A more common approach in the region, where farmers combine organic practices with limited use of traditional methods. This includes crop diversification, use of farmyard manure, vermicomposting, and integrating livestock with crop farming.
3. **Climate-Smart Organic Models** – NGOs like *Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)* have promoted the **One-Acre Model**, where women farmers practice multi-cropping with organic inputs. This ensures food security, income generation, and resilience against droughts.

Benefits of organic farming in Marathwada region:

1. Improved Soil Fertility and Health

Continuous use of chemical fertilizers has degraded the soil quality in Marathwada. Organic farming, through the application of farmyard manure, compost, vermicompost, and green manure, helps restore soil nutrients and enhances microbial activity.

Farmers have reported better soil texture and water-holding capacity, which is crucial in this drought-prone region.

2. **Cost Reduction and Economic Relief**

Farmers in Marathwada often fall into debt due to the high cost of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Organic farming reduces this dependency by using locally available organic inputs, thereby lowering cultivation expenses.

Case studies show that input costs drop significantly when switching to organic practices, improving net profits.

3. **Water Conservation and Climate Resilience**

The region suffers from recurring droughts and depleting groundwater. Organic methods improve the soil's ability to retain moisture, reduce runoff, and minimize irrigation needs.

Diversified cropping systems under organic models are more resilient to climatic shocks compared to mono-cropping of water-intensive crops like sugarcane and cotton.

4. **Diversified Income and Nutritional Security**

Through mixed cropping and kitchen gardening, organic farmers in Marathwada produce vegetables, pulses, and cereals that ensure household food security and provide additional sources of income.

Women-led models like the *One-Acre Organic Farming Model* have shown success in generating steady cash flow and ensuring balanced diets for farming families.

5. **Women's Empowerment and Community Resilience**

Organic farming initiatives in Marathwada have empowered women by recognizing them as decision-makers in agriculture.

Many women's groups and cooperatives have adopted organic methods, building community resilience and inspiring other farmers to transition toward sustainable farming.

Challenges of organic farming in Marathwada region:

Marathwada is one of the most drought-affected regions of Maharashtra, with rainfall well below the state average. Organic farming requires efficient water management, but persistent water shortages remain a critical obstacle.

1. **Initial Yield Reduction During Transition**

When shifting from chemical-intensive to organic farming, many farmers experience reduced yields in the first few years. This discourages adoption, especially among resource-poor farmers who cannot afford temporary income losses.

2. **Lack of Institutional and Technical Support**

Agricultural extension services, organic seed availability, and farmer training programs are still inadequate. Farmers often rely on NGOs for guidance, but large-scale institutional backing is missing.

3. **Market and Pricing Barriers**

Organic farmers struggle to access organized markets that recognize and reward their produce with premium prices.

Middlemen often exploit farmers, and without strong farmer producer organizations (FPOs), smallholders fail to secure fair prices.

4. **Certification and Policy Gaps**

Organic certification in India is expensive and bureaucratic, making it inaccessible for small and marginal farmers in Marathwada.

Government policies and subsidies continue to favor conventional farming and high-input crops like sugarcane, leaving organic initiatives underfunded.

5. **Social and Economic Distress**

The region has one of the highest farmer suicide rates in India, largely due to debt and crop failures. While organic farming provides long-term solutions, the immediate distress prevents many farmers from experimenting with new approaches.

Benefits vs Challenges.

Benefits	Challenges
Improves soil fertility and water retention.	Severe droughts and water scarcity.
Reduces input costs, lowers farmer debt.	Yield reduction in transition years.
Provides diversified crops and nutrition.	Lack of institutional and technical support
Enhances climate resilience.	Limited market access and low prices.
Empowers women and builds community strength.	High cost and complexity of certification.



Conclusion

Organic farming in Marathwada presents a promising pathway for addressing the agrarian distress caused by droughts, soil degradation and rising input costs. By enhancing soil fertility, conserving water, reducing dependence on chemicals, and diversifying farm income, it contributes to both environmental sustainability and rural livelihood security. Successful initiatives, particularly those led by women farmers, demonstrate that organic practices can strengthen household nutrition, empower communities, and build resilience against climate change.

However, widespread adoption still faces significant barriers, including initial yield reduction, limited institutional support, poor market access, and high certification costs. For organic farming to thrive in Marathwada, there is a need for integrated policy support, improved extension services, affordable certification processes, and stronger farmer cooperatives. If these challenges are addressed, organic farming can become not just an alternative but a cornerstone of sustainable rural development in the region.

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