

## PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS OF CONSUMERS TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

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### **Abstract**

*Organic food promotes a balance of human, other living organisms and the nature. It also prevents artificial preservatives and ensures the originality of food. This prevents excessive use of harmful ingredients and thereby ensures safety of our health. This study is an attempt to ascertain the awareness of consumers towards organic foods in Tirunelveli District. The result of the study shows that lot of problems are faced by the consumers while purchasing the organic food in the markets. It is not easy for consumers to go to market daily for purchasing organic food because consumer buys in bulk. It is also found that these products are not easily available in the rural area; they are available mostly in urban areas. So, availability of organic food also affects the choice of the consumers. The other main reason for reluctance to purchase organic food items is that organic food is more expensive when compared to non-organic food. So, people with low level of income cannot afford to meet the expenses on these products. Even the organic consumers do not purchase more quantity of organic products. The varieties of organic food which are available in the market are also limited. There is a lack of awareness about organic food among rural consumers.*

**Keywords:** *Awareness, chemical residues, complaints, environment, organic food, perception, preservatives.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indian consumers are living in a dynamic world. They are continuously coming across new things in the world of food. They are becoming more and more conscious about their health; the Indian market is offering increasing potential for health friendly food segments such as that of organic food but the market for organic food is extremely in a nascent stage in India at present. Organic food serves as a promising alternative for the population concerned about the consequences of high amounts of chemical infusions in food items – both in terms of self - consumption as well as the ill impact on the environment. The affinity of an individual towards consumption of organic food items is highly dependent on the knowledge levels, expending capacity and accessibility of the consumers.

The market for organic food products in India has been growing at a rapid pace over the last few years. Rising health consciousness among middle class consumers in major cities across India has been the key factor contributing to growth in the market. Unlike conventional food, which involves use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, organic food products are manufactured using natural products. As a result, organic food products are free from chemical residues and are healthier compared to conventional food products. Organic food products include diverse food categories ranging from fruits & vegetables, dairy products, processed foods, pulses & food grains to other products such as beverages, confectionaries, etc.

A noteworthy trend that is being observed is gradual emergence of organic food as an essential part of the daily diet among the upper class population in India. Moreover, in light of the health benefits associated with consumption of organic food and rise in the number of diseases on account of excessive chemical contamination of conventional food, the preference for organic food is growing rapidly. In consonance with the growing health consciousness among consumers, restaurants and food chains in major cities are also adopting organic food products. Presently, India organic food

market is dominated by organic pulses & food grains, followed by organic processed food, organic fruits & vegetables, and organic dairy products.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Introduction of hybrids in addition to adoption of intensive cropping practices, demanded high chemical use to see the yield losses. At the moment thousands of chemicals square measure used for agricultural production. Those chemicals act with completely different parts of the plant scheme and contamination might happen in respect of lelement or the opposite. In recent years use of chemicals particularly fertilizer and pesticides became a cause for serious concern because it has been marked out as pollutants having adverse effects on setting as well as person. In recent years many reports suggests that the agrochemical, particularly the chemical fertilizers square measure leading to setting degradation by manner of polluting plant and soil environment, water bodies, effecting the layer etc. They additionally contaminate the bottom water and surface water leading to eutrophication of water bodies.

The presence of residues of insect powder in food commodities and alternative parts of the setting could be a matter of great concern. Even tiny quantities of the residues eaten daily at the side of food will build up to high level in body fat. There's so, a relentless worry that society is being slowly poisoned by the intake of food contamination with chemical residue. Whereas the fertilizer and also the chemical usage has result in enlarged crop production and bigger economic income to the farmers, their impact on soil and water setting and crop quality wasn't thought of relevant till the recent past.

### **Significance of the study**

Environment sustainability is a growing concern today. Not only the today's era consumers but also the organizations are getting aware of the benefits of the sustainable food products such as organic food as an alternative to look for healthier options for food products. Credit obviously goes to the increasing education level as well as income level of the consumer which is making them more aware about the healthier options for food so that they can survive under the stress and competition of today. It goes by saying "Eat healthy, Stay healthy". In third world countries such as India, benefits of organic food products have been realized gradually and government is also launching new policies and reforms so as to motivate and train the farmers in sustainable farming practices and in the safe use of its products. Policy changes or new policy with regard to sustainable product sector will boost the economy of the country. Policies for new product development will not only enhance the upcoming sustainable products' entire supply chain but also increase the country's revenue simultaneously being environment conscious.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study has the following objectives.

- ✓ To assess the various factors that influences consumers to buy organic food
- ✓ To know the perception and awareness of consumers regarding organic food

### **HYPOTHESIS**

- ✓ There is no significant difference in factors influencing to buy organic food among different profile variables of consumers in Tirunelveli District
- ✓ There is no significant relationship between level of awareness regarding organic food and profile variables of consumers.
- ✓ There is no significant difference in perception towards organic food among different profile variables of consumers.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The analysis and interpretation hinges on the data collected from representative sample. Primary as well as secondary data had been collected for the analysis of the study. To collect the primary data, respondents/ consumers of organic food were contacted in the organic trade fair. This place was chosen to reach all types of consumers of organic food. As it was weekend also, working

people and families with children were easily found. Most of the questionnaires were distributed in the fair and collected back within 10-20 minutes. Respondents were contacted face to face. The questionnaires were got filled in some multiple/ superstores.

### SAMPLING

A sample of 150 respondents was selected for the study. The study sample includes the respondents from Tirunelveli District. The sample was chosen using convenience sampling method. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. Structured questionnaire was framed from various researches to suit this specific study. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents for the study. This study attempted to gain knowledge about consumers' perception and awareness towards organic food. Primary as well as secondary data had been collected for the analysis of the study. To collect the primary data, respondents/consumers of organic food were contacted in the organic trade fair. This place was chosen to reach all types of organic food users. A sample of 150 respondents was selected for the study. Sample includes the respondents from Tirunelveli District. The sample was chosen using convenience sampling method. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents.

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### Influential factors among different gender group of consumers to buy organic food

Consumers of different gender groups have been influenced by different factors to buy organic food. In order to find out the significant difference in the influential factors among different gender group of consumers in Tirunelveli District to buy organic food, 't' test is attempted with the null hypothesis as, "There is no significant difference in Influential factors among different gender group of consumers to buy organic food". The result of 't' test is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

**Influential factors among different gender groups of consumers to buy organic food**

Factors	Gender (Mean Score)		T- Statistics
	Male	Female	
Price	3.7719	3.5376	1.579
Health advantage	4.1053	4.1183	0.113
Improved standard of living	3.9325	4.3118	2.555*
Convenience	3.9123	3.8495	0.428
Attractive Labeling	3.6316	3.5679	0.334
Environmental concern	3.9825	3.7312	1.739
Shelf life of the products	3.5263	3.3656	0.803

Source: Computed data

\*-Significant at five per cent level

Table 1 shows that the important influential factors to buy organic food among the male consumers are health advantage and environmental concern and their respective mean scores are 4.1053 and 3.9825. Among the female consumers, important influential factors are improved standard of living and health advantage and their respective mean scores are 4.3118 and 4.1183. Regarding the important influential factors to buy organic food, the significant difference among the different gender group of consumers, are identified in the case of improved standard of living since the respective 'T' statistics are significant at 5 per cent level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

#### Influential factors among different gender groups of consumers to buy organic food

Consumers of different age groups are influenced by different factors to buy organic food. In order to find out the Influential factors among different gender groups of consumers to buy organic food in Tirunelveli district, 't' test is attempted with the null hypothesis as, "There is no significant difference in influential factors to buy organic food among different age group of consumers in Tirunelveli District". The result of ANOVA is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Influential factors among different age groups of consumers to buy organic food**

Factors	Age Group (Mean Score)					F Statistics
	Below 25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	Above 55 years	
Price	4.0000	3.7273	3.7000	3.5192	3.3636	0.798
Health advantage	3.0000	4.3636	4.2400	3.9038	4.1818	6.253*
Improved standard of living	4.3500	4.0606	4.3200	4.0577	4.2727	2.116
Convenience	4.3000	4.0909	3.6600	3.9038	3.6364	3.372*
Attractive Labeling	4.2000	3.7273	3.2400	3.7812	3.4545	3.716*
Environmental concern	4.1000	3.7073	3.6200	4.1538	3.4554	3.443*
Shelf life of the products	4.0000	3.3939	3.1200	3.5769	4.3636	3.039*

Source: Computed data

\*-Significant at five per cent level

Table 2 shows that the important influential factors among the consumers to buy organic food who are in the age group of below 25 years are improved standard of living and convenience and their respective mean scores are 4.3500 and 4.3000. Among the consumers in the age group of 26-35 years, health advantage and convenience are the important influential factors to buy organic food and their respective mean scores are 4.3636 and 4.0909. The important influential factors to buy organic food among the consumers who are in the age group of 36-45 years are improved standard of living and health advantage and their respective mean scores are 4.3200 and 4.2400, among the consumers in the age group of 46-55 years, environmental concern and improved standard of living are the important influential factors to buy organic food and their respective mean scores are 4.1538 and 4.0577. Among the consumers who are in the age group of above 55 years the important influential factors to buy organic food are shelf life of the products and improved standard of living and their respective mean scores are 4.3636 and 4.2727. Regarding the important influential factors among the consumers to buy organic food, the significant difference among the different age group of consumers, are identified in the case of health advantage, convenience, labeling, environmental concern and shelf life of the products since the respective 'F' statistics are significant at 5 per cent level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### Perception towards organic food among different gender group of consumers

Consumers of different gender group have different perception towards organic food. In order to find out the significant difference in perception towards organic food among different gender group of consumers in Tirunelveli District, 't' test is attempted with the null hypothesis as, "**There is no significant difference in perception towards organic food among different gender group of consumers in Tirunelveli District**". The result of 't' test is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Perception towards organic food among different gender groups of consumers**

Perception	Gender (Mean Score)		T- Statistics
	Male	Female	
Organic food are more expensive than conventional products	4.2105	4.3118	0.935
Price of organic food is a barrier to buy	4.1228	4.0000	1.165
Organic food are more ecologically sound than conventional products	3.9123	3.7204	1.281
There is fewer varieties of organic food when compared with conventional products	4.1053	3.6882	2.332*
Organic food are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets	3.8596	4.1828	2.328*
Organic food labels can easily be imitated	3.1228	4.2903	7.425*

Organic food labels are confusing	3.5614	4.0538	2.919*
Ingredients on the labels tempt to purchase	4.0702	3.8817	0.985

Source: Computed data

\*-Significant at five per cent level

Table 3 shows the mean score of perception towards organic food among different gender groups of consumers along with its respective 'T' statistics. The important perception towards organic food among the male consumers are organic food are more expensive than conventional products and there is a fewer varieties of organic food when compared with conventional products and their respective mean scores are 4.2105 and 4.1053. Important perception towards organic food among the female consumers, organic food are more expensive than conventional products and organic food are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets and their respective mean scores are 4.3118 and 4.1828. Regarding the perception towards organic food, the significant difference among the different gender groups of consumers, are identified in the case of there is a little variety of organic food when compared with conventional products, organic food are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets, organic food labels can easily be imitated and organic food labels are confusing since the respective 'T' statistics are significant at 5 per cent level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### Perception towards organic food among different age group of consumers

Consumers of different age groups have different perception towards organic food. In order to find out the significant difference in perception towards organic food among different age group of consumers in Tirunelveli District, 't' test is attempted with the null hypothesis as, "There is no significant difference in perception towards organic food among different age group of consumers in Tirunelveli District". The result of ANOVA is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Perception towards organic food among different age group of consumers**

Perception	Age Group (Mean Score)					F Statistics
	Below 25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	Above 55 years	
Organic food are more expensive than conventional products	4.0000	4.0909	4.2800	4.4231	4.1818	1.629
Price of organic food is a barrier to buy	4.0000	4.0303	4.0200	4.0192	4.3636	0.755
Organic food are more ecologically sound than conventional products	3.7500	3.5600	4.0577	3.7273	3.7973	4.612*
There is fewer varieties of organic food when compared with conventional products	4.2500	3.6970	3.7000	4.0385	4.0000	0.873
Organic food are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets	4.0000	4.4200	3.6923	4.1818	4.0400	5.466*
Organic food labels can easily be imitated	4.5000	3.0606	4.2400	3.7885	4.2727	9.102*
Organic food labels are confusing	4.0000	3.9091	3.9200	3.6923	4.2000	0.865
Ingredients on the labels tempt to purchase	4.2000	3.8788	3.7000	4.1731	3.9091	2.049

Source: Computed data

\*-Significant at five per cent level

Table 4 shows the mean scores of perception towards organic food among different age groups of consumers along with its respective 'F' statistics. The important perception towards organic food among the consumers who are in the age group of below 25 years are organic food labels can easily be imitated and there is fewer varieties of organic food when compared with conventional products and their respective mean scores are 4.5000 and 4.2500.

Perception towards organic food among the consumers in the age group of 26-35 years are, organic foods are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets and organic food are more expensive than conventional products and their respective mean scores are 4.4200 and 4.0909. The important perception towards organic food among the consumers who are in the age group of 36-45 years are organic food are more expensive than conventional products and organic food labels can easily be imitated and their respective mean scores are 4.2800 and 4.2400. Perception towards organic food among the consumers in the age group of 46-55 years are organic food are more expensive than conventional products and organic food are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets and their respective mean scores are 4.4231 and 4.1818. For consumers who are in the age group of above 55 years, their perception towards organic food are price of organic food is a barrier to buy and organic food labels can easily be imitated and their respective mean scores are 4.3636 and 4.2727. Regarding the perception towards organic food, the significant difference among the different age groups of consumers are identified in the case of organic food are more ecologically sound than conventional products, organic food are not easily found in grocery stores or in the hyper stores /markets and organic food labels can easily be imitated since the respective 'F' statistics are significant at 5 per cent level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

#### Level of awareness towards organic food Vs Educational Qualification of Consumers

In order to test whether there is any relationship between educational qualification of the consumers and their level of awareness towards organic food, the following hypothesis is formulated. H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of awareness towards organic food and the educational qualification of the consumers.

The results of the Chi-square test applied on the level of awareness towards organic food and the educational qualification of the consumers are presented in table 5.

**Table 5**  
**Level of awareness towards organic food Vs Educational Qualification of consumers**

Sl.No	Particulars	Chi-square Value	p Value	Inference
1.	Organic farming is environment friendly	62.656	0.000	Significant
2.	Economical	24.598	0.006	Significant
3.	Advertising	65.869	0.000	Significant
4.	Offers and discounts	30.185	0.001	Significant
5.	Suppliers	22.249	0.014	Significant
6.	Queries and complaints	30.325	0.001	Significant
7.	Differentiation and identification of organic food	39.202	0.000	Significant

#### Source: Computed Data

Since the 'p' value is less than 0.05 in case of the educational qualification of the consumers and the level of awareness towards organic food "Organic farming is environmental friendly, economical, advertising, offers and discounts, suppliers, queries and complaints and differentiation and identification of organic food", the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between educational qualification of the consumers and their level of awareness towards organic food "Organic farming is environmental friendly, economical, advertising, offers and discounts, suppliers, queries and complaints and differentiation and identification of organic food".

### Level of awareness towards organic products Vs Monthly Income of Consumers

In order to test whether there is any relationship between monthly income of the consumers and their level of awareness towards organic products, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of awareness towards organic products and the monthly income of the consumers.

The results of the Chi-square test applied on the level of awareness towards organic products and the monthly income of the consumers are presented in table 6.

**Table 6**  
**Level of awareness towards organic products Vs Monthly Income of consumers**

Sl.No	Particulars	Chi-square Value	p Value	Inference
1.	Organic farming is environmental friendly	14.116	0.028	Significant
2.	Economical	22.087	0.001	Significant
3.	Advertising	6.456	0.374	Not Significant
4.	Offers and discounts	13.336	0.038	Significant
5.	Suppliers	21.103	0.002	Significant
6.	Queries and complaints	30.252	0.000	Significant
7.	Differentiation and identification of organic products	1.963	0.923	Not Significant

**Source: Computed Data**

Since the 'p' value is less than 0.05 in case of the monthly income of the consumers and the level of awareness towards organic products "Organic farming is environmental friendly, economical, offers and discounts, suppliers, queries and complaints and differentiation and identification of organic products", the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between monthly income of the consumers and level of awareness towards organic products "Organic farming is environmental friendly, economical, offers and discounts, suppliers, queries and complaints and differentiation and identification of organic products".

**Table 7**  
**Ranking of major problems of organic food**

Sl. No	Major problems faced in buying organic food	Total Score	Average	Rank
1.	Affluent people alone can buy organic food	6194	41.29	V
2.	Organic food is too costly & disproportionate to quality	9432	62.88	I
3.	Less awareness about organic food	7253	48.35	IV
4.	Organic food is only available in limited stores/ markets	7781	51.87	III
5.	Buying organic food is highly tiresome	8919	59.46	II
6.	Superiority of quality of organic food over non organic foods is not much convincing	5165	34.43	VI

**Source: Computed Data**

It is observed from the Table 7 that "Organic food is too costly & disproportionate to quality" has been ranked as the first major problems in buying organic food, buying organic food is highly tiresome has been ranked as second, organic food is only available in limited stores/markets is placed in third position, less awareness about organic food is ranked as fourth problem followed by affluent people alone can buy organic food which is ranked in the fifth position and Superiority of quality of organic food over non organic foods is not much convincing scores the least rank.

#### SUGGESTIONS

- There is a need to open organic products marketing shops in every extension areas of the city.
- The Creation of awareness of organic products is necessary among consumers.
- Sustained improvement in product features would lead to increase in consumption of organic food products.

- The increase frequency of viewing the advertisement of organic food products and better taste would influence the purchase organic food products. The influence of advertisement of organic food products with an increase in education found particularly among consumers.
- To persuade to buy organic good products, the variables like familiarity, personal ideology, social interaction and monetary cost and habits had greater influence in buying organic food products.
- The familiarity of the organic food products among customers depends on the promotional efforts of the marketers. The availability of organic food products needs wider advertisement.
- Allocation of separate shares for organic food products in departmental stores is also required
- Positioning of organic food products by their specific attributes has to done
- Positioning organic food products by influencing consumer beliefs about the benefits they derive on consuming deserves attention.
- Positioning by reputation for quality “only organic” attracts more customers.
- The attitudes of “never buying” could be modified by educating consumers on the benefits of organic food products.
- The price premium is the major hindrance for non-buying of organic food products. The customers need motivation to buy even with a small price premium than to just avoid on one hand and the cost of cultivation and cost of marketing to be brought under check on the other hand.
- The products initially should be made available in prominent market places and also gradually, in all the shops.
- Education programme on Environment and the benefits of organic products and consumption of organic food products will make the consumers more environmentally conscious “Green Consumer”.
- “Organic” to be promoted as “the way of life” than considering it as “product”.
- The agriculture marketing and co-operative departments should help farmers to get a good price for organic produce.
- Ensuring quality of organic by farmers through certification by the Organic Certification Department will help them to get a good price.
- Demand creation for large-scale production and availability of organic food products should go hand in hand. Accordingly a more responsible advertisement can play a positive and beneficial role in bringing out a desirable change among homemakers in Organic food products market.

## CONCLUSION

Keeping the risky effects of inorganic fertilizers and also the agro-chemicals on setting similarly as on the person, therefore, it's associate degree pressing would like for the developing country like India to shift the organic agriculture from the present inorganic agriculture as most of the cultivable soils in India contain organic carbon below the brink level and majority of the farming community is resource poor and getting of fertilizers and chemicals in adequate quantities is on the far side their capability. Agriculture is far and away the foremost vital occupation of the individuals of this region. Organic Agriculture can be a production system that avoids or for the foremost half excludes the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and growth regulators. The foremost aim of organic agriculture is to substantiate sustained productivity, environmental protection and making on the market food and food merchandise raised with none reasonably chemicals.

With increasing health consciousness and concern for setting, organic farming system has been drawing attention all over the world. Organic farming will be a holistic production management system that promotes and enhances agro-ecosystems health additional as bio-diversity, biological cycles and soil biological activities. As a result, there is widespread organic movement and enormous demands for organic merchandise.

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