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Factors influencing farmers' willingness to participate in organic certification programmes and the challenges they face: A study of Jadcherla Mandal, Telangana

¹ Mounika, ² Dr Sairani, ³ Dr P Radhika and Dr G Saivamshi Reddy ⁴

¹ School of Agribusiness Management, College of Agriculture, Rajendranagar, PJTAU, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

² Professor & Head of Finance, ICBM School of Business Excellence, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

³ Professor and Head, School of Agribusiness Management, College of Agriculture, Rajendranagar, PJTAU, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

⁴ Dr. G.Saivamshi Reddy, TED Coordinator Akshayakalpa research and Development Facility, Edulapalli, Shadnagar, Telangana, India

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Corresponding Author: Mounika

Abstract

Organic certification is a critical gateway that allows farmers to convert ecologically sound production practices into tangible economic returns through premium prices and access to formal organic markets. Yet, despite the rapid expansion of India's organic sector, farmer participation in certification programmes continues to lag behind the growth in organic cultivation, largely because the certification process is technically demanding, documentation-intensive, and time-consuming. This paper examines the factors that influence farmers' willingness to participate in organic certification programmes and the major challenges they encounter while obtaining certification, drawing on primary data collected from 100 farmers associated with Akshayakalpa Organic Private Limited in Jadcherla Mandal, Mahabubnagar district, Telangana. The sample comprised fully certified farmers, farmers undergoing certification, and farmers at the pre-certification stage, selected through purposive sampling. Data were analysed using percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, and the Garrett Ranking Technique. The results show that premium price realisation, continuous training and handholding support, improved soil health, and better market access are the leading motivators of farmers' willingness to participate in certification, while lengthy documentation and record maintenance, high certification cost, a prolonged conversion period, and difficulty in sustaining compliance with certification standards constitute the most pressing challenges. The findings underscore the need for simplified documentation systems, cost-sharing mechanisms, and sustained institutional handholding to convert farmer interest into successful certification outcomes.

Keywords: Organic certification, farmer willingness, Garrett ranking, certification challenges, handholding support, Telangana

1. Introduction

Agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the Indian economy, supporting the livelihood of a large share of the rural population. Growing concern over declining soil fertility, pesticide residues, and the long-term sustainability of input-intensive farming has directed attention towards organic agriculture as an ecologically balanced alternative. Organic farming avoids synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, and genetically modified inputs, relying instead on farmyard manure, composting, biofertilisers, crop rotation, and biological pest control to sustain soil health and productivity. India today holds the largest number of organic producers in the world and ranks second in organic agricultural area, with more than 17 lakh hectares under certified organic cultivation and a further 27 lakh hectares under conversion. This growth has been supported by national programmes such as the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), the Mission Organic Value Chain Development for the North-Eastern Region (MOVCD-NER), and Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi

Paddhati (BPKP).

Organic certification is the formal mechanism through which farm produce is verified as having been grown and handled according to prescribed organic standards. It builds consumer trust, opens access to premium domestic and export markets, and enables farmers to capture better prices for their produce. However, the certification pathway is neither simple nor cost-free: farmers must complete a mandatory conversion period, maintain detailed farm records, submit to periodic third-party inspection, and continuously comply with certification protocols. These requirements often prove difficult for small and marginal farmers who lack technical knowledge, documentation skills, and the financial cushion to absorb certification costs while forgoing premium prices during conversion.

Private organic aggregators have increasingly stepped in to bridge this gap by combining structured training with continuous handholding support - regular farm visits, documentation assistance, inspection preparation, and market linkage - to help farmers complete certification successfully.

Akshayakalpa Organic Private Limited is one such organisation working with farmers in Jadcherla Mandal of Mahabubnagar district, Telangana, where farmers are found across all stages of the certification journey: fully certified, undergoing certification, and pre-certification.

While the economic rationale for organic certification is well established in the literature, comparatively little empirical work has examined, from the farmer's own perspective, the relative importance of the different motivating factors and constraints involved in the certification decision. This paper addresses that gap by identifying and ranking the factors influencing farmers' willingness to participate in organic certification programmes and the challenges they face in obtaining certification, using evidence from Jadcherla Mandal, Telangana.

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a descriptive research design and was conducted in Jadcherla Mandal of Mahabubnagar district, Telangana - a semi-arid region where paddy, cotton, maize, groundnut, pulses, and vegetables are the principal crops, and where Akshayakalpa Organic Private Limited has been actively promoting organic farming and certification through training, field demonstrations, technical guidance, and market linkage support.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 farmer respondents associated with the firm, drawn from three certification stages: 50 fully certified farmers, 30 farmers currently undergoing certification, and 20 farmers at the pre-certification stage. Primary data were collected through personal interviews using a pre-tested, structured

interview schedule covering socio-economic characteristics, training participation, awareness levels, and the factors influencing willingness to participate in certification and the challenges encountered during the process. Secondary information was drawn from APEDA and NPOP publications, FiBL-IFOAM reports, NABARD publications, and company records.

To identify and prioritise the factors influencing farmers' willingness to participate in certification programmes, and the challenges faced during certification, respondents were asked to rank a predetermined list of factors and challenges in order of importance. Rankings were converted into scores using the Garrett Ranking Technique, in which the percent position for each rank is computed as $\text{Percent Position} = 100 \times (R_{ij} - 0.5) / N_j$, where R_{ij} is the rank given to the i th factor by the j th respondent and N_j is the number of factors ranked by that respondent. The percent positions were converted to Garrett scores using Garrett's conversion table, and the mean Garrett score for each factor across all respondents determined its overall rank - a higher mean score indicating greater relative importance.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Factors Influencing Farmers' Willingness to Participate

Farmers' willingness to take up organic certification is shaped jointly by the economic returns it promises and the institutional support available to help them meet its requirements. Respondents were asked to rank ten factors that could motivate their participation, and the resulting Garrett scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Garrett scores and ranks of factors influencing farmers' willingness to participate in organic certification (n = 100)

Motivating Factors	Score	Rank
Premium price for organic produce	76.84	I
Continuous training and handholding support	73.92	II
Improved soil health and fertility	71.46	III
Better market access for certified products	68.83	IV
Reduced cost of chemical inputs in the long run	65.72	V
Environmental sustainability	63.58	VI
Health benefits from chemical-free farming	61.94	VII
Increased consumer demand for organic products	58.67	VIII
Government support and policy incentives	55.81	IX
Influence of fellow farmers and success stories	52.46	X

Premium price realisation emerged as the single most influential motivator, securing the highest Garrett score of 76.84 and the first rank. Farmers evaluated certification largely through the lens of the price premium it would eventually unlock. Continuous training and handholding support followed closely in second place (73.92), indicating that farmers place almost as much weight on the availability of sustained technical guidance as on the financial incentive itself. Improved soil health and fertility (71.46) and better market access for certified products (68.83) ranked third and fourth, reflecting that farmers also value the longer-term agronomic and marketing benefits of organic conversion. Reduced cost of chemical inputs over time (65.72) and

environmental sustainability (63.58) occupied the middle ranks.

Health benefits from chemical-free farming (61.94) and increased consumer demand for organic products (58.67) were rated as moderately important, while government support and policy incentives (55.81) and the influence of fellow farmers' success stories (52.46) received the lowest scores, suggesting that direct institutional handholding is a stronger driver of participation than public policy support.

3.2 Challenges Faced by Farmers in Obtaining Certification

Table 2: Garrett scores and ranks of challenges faced by farmers in obtaining organic certification (n = 100)

Challenges Faced	Score	Rank
Lengthy documentation and record maintenance	74.86	I

High certification cost	71.52	II
Lengthy conversion period	69.84	III
Difficulty in maintaining certification standards	67.91	IV
Limited market access during conversion period	65.74	V
Inadequate awareness of certification procedures	63.58	VI
Labour-intensive organic farming practices	61.37	VII
Pest and disease management difficulties	58.92	VIII
Limited availability of organic inputs	56.74	IX
Delay in obtaining certification approval	54.61	X

Lengthy documentation and record maintenance was rated the most serious obstacle (Garrett score 74.86, rank I). Farmers described the ongoing burden of maintaining production records, input registers, and farm diaries as disproportionately time-consuming. High certification cost followed closely in second place (71.52), remaining a significant constraint especially for small and marginal farmers.

The lengthy conversion period ranked third (69.84): farmers must continue farming organically for an extended period while still selling produce at conventional prices, which discourages some from committing to the process. Difficulty in maintaining certification standards (67.91) ranked fourth, reflecting concern about sustaining continuous compliance. Limited market access during conversion (65.74) and inadequate awareness of procedures (63.58) occupied the middle ranks. Labour-intensive practices (61.37) and pest and disease management difficulties (58.92) were rated as moderate constraints, while limited availability of quality inputs (56.74) and delays in approval (54.61) were comparatively minor bottlenecks.

Read alongside Table 1, these results reveal a consistent pattern: the same domains that drive farmers towards certification - economic return and institutional support - are mirrored by the domains that most discourage them, namely certification cost and the burden of documentation.

4. Conclusion

Farmers' willingness to participate in organic certification programmes in Jadcherla Mandal is driven principally by the prospect of premium prices, reinforced by continuous training and handholding support, improved soil health, and better market access. At the same time, farmers face substantial barriers, foremost among them lengthy documentation requirements, high certification costs, and a prolonged conversion period.

These findings suggest that raising farmer participation requires simplified, farmer-friendly record-keeping systems; mechanisms that ease the cost of certification, such as subsidies or group certification models; and forms of transitional income or market support during the conversion period, alongside sustained handholding support.

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