

## A Shift towards Organic Products in View of Sustainable Consumption

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### Abstract

In the wake of recent debates on sustainability the awareness among people regarding sustainable consumption has increased. Governments across the globe have implemented measures to save resources in their drive towards sustainability. Production and consumption of organic products is one way in which one can hope to achieve sustainability. There is adequate literature available on organic farming and its impact on sustainability but the role of other organic products like clothes in sustainability has not been dealt with in detail. The knowledge of organic products among the consumers is limited to farm produce. There is also very limited study on the feasibility of organic products in the near future keeping in mind that they are resource intensive. The proposed chapter focuses on clarifying the meaning and dimensions of organic products. The changing trends in consumer consumption have been observed in the FMCG market, infrastructure, transport etc with the help of a few examples. The challenges associated with organic products have also been discussed. The chapter ends with suggestions of making sustainability achievable through adequate support provided to organic products.

**Key Words:** sustainability, sustainable consumption, organic products

### Introduction

The origin of the phrase, 'sustainable development' can be traced back to 1983, when the UN General Assembly constituted the World Commission on Environment and Development. At the time, its main target was to design 'a global program for change'. The commission released its report to the UN Assembly in 1987, in a document known as the 'Brundtland Report', or 'Our Common Future', in which consensus was reached and the 'sustainable development' expression was coined to include decision-taking processes and policies based on the interdependence and complementariness of economic growth and environment preservation (Osorio, 2005).

In the current socio-political environment sustainable consumption and production has been a topic of intense debate nationally as well as internationally. Research suggests that an increasing number of consumers around the world are becoming environmentally responsible in terms of their life styles and personal habits (Stone, Barnes & Montgomery, 1995). Concern for environment has become an international issue due to excessive human consumption around the globe. Terms like 'climate change' and 'sustainability' which were only limited to environmental text books are now a part of country's national as well as international policy.

The awareness among consumers and their sensitivity towards deterioration of the environment and its impact on their daily

lives has increased (Zaharia & Zaharia, 2014). This has led to the emergence of a new class of consumers, called the 'green consumers' owing to their concern for the environment, who are interested in purchasing 'organic' products which are safer for their health as well as the environment (Connolly & Prothero, 2003). Recently, organic products have gained popularity even in developing markets of third world countries like India (Chait, 2009).

'Organic' products offer a sustainable solution to the current consumption pattern. Recent debates regarding sustainability have given impetus to organic products. However, the pro-environmental concern is limited only a few sections of the urban population (Reijntjes et al., 1992). Access of organic products is still a challenge for the consumers on a wide scale (William, 2007). This chapter seeks to identify the challenges faced by the producers, suppliers and consumers of organic products. The first section of the chapter throws light on meaning of sustainable consumption. The second section throws light on a few successful examples of movement towards sustainable living from round the world. The next section focuses on meaning and types of organic products. The fourth section talks about challenges faced by organic products and the last section provides some suggestions on the requirements for making organic products a way of life for consumers in order to make the idea of sustainability a reality.

### **Section I: Meaning of Sustainable Consumption**

According to the 12<sup>th</sup> goal of 'Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations',

due to rapid industrialization and subsequent increase in consumerism, the natural resources of earth are either on the brink of exhaustion or not fit to be utilised anymore due to pollutants. Sustainable consumption as well as production is the only solution towards a healthier tomorrow for ourselves as well as the future generation. Sustainable consumption and production is all about preserving resources, optimising the use available resources, reducing wastage, providing access to basic services to one and all, bridging the gap between the haves and have-nots, thus ensuring a better quality of life. If a conscious attempt is made to make sustainable consumption a way of life it will go a long way in achieving wholesome development plans, lower future social, environmental and economic costs, reduce poverty and strengthen economic competitiveness (Kuhlman et.al, 2010).

It is a known fact that in most developed countries the current consumption trend is unsustainable because a lot of natural resources are being used and the emission level of industries is above permissible level. This is reflecting adversely on public health of developed as well as developing societies. Another point of concern is that the consumption pattern is lopsided. It is not enough to fulfil basic needs of people and is creating more needs which can no longer be fulfilled given the constraint in resources (Mc Donald et.al, 2006). Recognising these concerns, delegates at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) appealed to the international community to lend a hand in enhancing global living condition and to "*encourage and promote the development of a ten-year framework*

*of programmes on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards SCP” (United Nations 2002).*

The main aim of sustainable consumption and production is to ‘do more with less’. In a world already facing scarcity of resources, sustainability requires a combined effort of consumers, businesses, policy makers, retailers, stakeholders, development agencies etc. to join hands and to view their actions by keeping the environment in mind (Tukker et. al., 2008). This would require a systematic approach and cooperation among the above mentioned actors operating in the supply chain i.e. from producer to the final consumer.

According to Mont et.al (2009) the relationship between consumer behaviour and its environmental impact has been researched extensively in the past decade. That, consumer behaviour affects the environment has already been established by researches. There is, however, limited knowledge with respect to the role of policy frameworks to stimulate sustainable life styles. Facilitation of sustainable consumer behaviour and systems of production and consumption is required to achieve sustainability (Cohen 2009).

Sustainable consumption and production requires spreading awareness among consumers about altering lifestyles and educating them adequately. Since the consumer is ‘the king’ in the market, he/she ought to keep the greater good in mind (i.e. the environment) and make conscious purchase decisions. This is because in the age of globalisation, goods and services are consumed not only to

fulfil substantial needs (housing, clothing etc.) but also serve as a form of expression of the self in the societal context (Bourdieu 1984). Consumers buy or do not buy a product or service because they wish to associate (membership/ aspirational group) or disassociate (disassociative groups) themselves with societal groups. The symbolic value of consumption has to be considered as its primary function is increasingly self expression in the process of transformation to sustainable development (Lange 2005; Reusswig 1994; Rink 2002; Schulze 1992). Thus, while aiming at sustainable consumption and production, one needs to understand the psychographics of consumers before driving the message of sustainability.

It is because people have showed a change in their activities and purchasing behaviour over a period of time that we can say that there is a definite shift in psychographics. For example, keeping sustainability in mind, people are turning towards seasonal locally grown food and ‘vegan’ (vegetarian) diet. In fact ‘going vegan’ is now seen as a trend among youngsters and health conscious people. Choosing a vegetarian diet over non- vegetarian diet goes a long way in maintaining the balance in the food cycle.

Choosing to travel in a battery powered E-rickshaw, purchasing a cross automobile that is solar powered is another step towards preserving fuel. Thus, each time a consumer opts for a renewable, recycled or a green product, he/ she is lending a hand to sustainability. Sustainable consumption is voluntary because as consumers we have to make a choice to choose between an environment friendly and hazardous product. So, whether a consumer chooses to ride in his/her petrol run car to office or

voluntary chooses to car pool along with other employees in office; it is really the consumer's choice. Choice therefore, is the most powerful tool of sustainable consumption (Young et. al., 2010). Every time that a consumer decides to buy (or not to buy) a product, he/she is contributing to a more or less sustainable pattern of consumption. Each and every purchase has social, ethical and global implications (Oates et. al., 2010). If and when a consumer chooses a sustainable life-style he/she will have to undergo complex decision making. The three key stake holder groups i.e. consumers, marketers/producers and government institutions have to make a collaborate effort in ensuring sustainable consumption and production (Horne, 2009). Consumers can alter their life styles to a more sustainable one if they have adequate support of the producers and the government. For example, the Rio Earth Summit, Agenda 21 stated that 'eco-labelling' was an effective way to motivate consumers to adopt a more sustainable pattern of consumption by purchasing those products that are energy and resource efficient. Consumers are attracted to buy products with 'eco-labels' as they feel they are contributing to the environment. Measures like eco- labelling go a long way in promoting sustainable consumption and production.

#### **Some initiatives to move towards sustainable production and consumption:**

In this section, a few sustainable measures taken by the governments, manufacturers and producers of different sectors will be discussed. Needless to say, the purpose of all these sustainable initiatives was to reduce the carbon foot print on earth and

encourage consumers to adopt a life-style which would help reduce waste and save the natural resources of the earth.

#### **1. Transport**

Some initiatives undertaken to move towards environment friendly transport are discussed below:

##### a) The National Cycle City of Denmark- Odense

With a population of over 185,000, the Danish city of Odense is an example of propagating sustainability in mobility. The government laid out a well developed network of bike paths and started a bicycle promotion campaign in the early 1999. Due to intensive campaigning of the benefits of cycling for health and environment, the percentage of people cycling is increased by 24% (Dijkstra et.al., 1998). This example illustrates that it was due to the involvement of the government and the subsequent policies made by it to support a sustainable initiative that ultimately led to a steady success of the idea.

##### b) Zero and Low Emission Vehicles in Urban Society (ZEUS)

Eight European countries namely London, Stockholm, Helsinki, Bremen, Luxembourg, Athens, Palermo and Copenhagen put in consolidated efforts to revolutionise the transport sector by making it more environment friendly. They divided their efforts in four areas; city planning, fuel, vehicles and system and equipment. This initiative was taken to provide alternatively fuelled cars and the development of fuelling infrastructure. Thus, the main aim of ZEUS was to discourage oil consumption thereby,

attempting to save oil and natural gas reserves from depleting.

## 2. Infrastructure:

The infrastructure industry in both developed as well as developing countries like India, has also taken steps to move towards sustainability. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has launched the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) in 2001 with the mission to ensure a 'sustainable' built for all. Green buildings are an initiative which seeks to provide a healthier space for the occupants by ensuring a suitable location for the building, generating less waste, requiring less water and optimising energy efficiency as compared to conventional buildings (Kibert, 2016). The Council provides a plethora of services like rating buildings, certifying green buildings, holding training programmes with regard to green buildings. Within a span of six years the council has been to rate and certify nearly 2500 new buildings, residential societies, existing buildings etc. Thus, the IGBC aims to make India, a leader in spearheading the green building movement among the developing countries. Some of the prominent green buildings in India are:

- Suzlon One Earth, Pune- It is powered completely by renewable sources and the structure is designed to ensure maximum exposure to daylight thereby, reducing the need for electricity.
- Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad- designed in such a way that it has reduced the carbon footprint by 3,331 tonnes.
- Infinity Benchmark, Kolkata- is equipped with carbon dioxide sensors,

waste water recyclers, and rain water harvesting system (Lokaa, 2016).

## 3. Fast Moving Consumer Goods:

The FMCG industry is no stranger to the growing concern for sustainable consumption and production. Many consumer goods are going 'green' right from the raw materials used to prepare them to the final stage of packaging. According to an online report of Ethical Corporation (2016), Nestle and Unilever are not just the biggest consumer goods producers but also leaders in sustainable production. Due to the increasing realisation of the adverse impact of our voracious consumption pattern, consumers now wish to know whether their favourite brands are doing their bit to address the hazards facing the planet (Streeter, 2016). Consumers are also willing to pay more for a sustainable brand (Global Sustainability Report, 2015). The Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) are also referred to as the Base of Pyramid (BoP) with an immense potential to bring about sustainable production and consumption. They can be instrumental in bringing about social changes by bringing about changes in their suppliers, designers, sellers and distributors (Casado et. al., 2017).

An example in this regard includes the refill bottles of ketchups, hand washes, etc which ensure that the consumer need not buy the plastic bottle again and again. Sachets are a difficult replacement and are hard to recycle. Unilever is experimenting with pyrolysis, a material that can convert sachets into fuel oil. In a frenzy of being 'green' consumers, it is turning to technology for aid. There is also a mobile application by the name of 'ECO LABEL'. This app helps consumers to identify eco-

friendly products while shopping for groceries in a shopping mall.

New food products have been identified to keep the consumers interested and yet maintain sustainable consumption. For example, in place of fish, mussels are a sumptuous replacement for non-vegetarians. Mussels are rope grown in aqua-culture. They are filter feeders and do not require any specific food input which is a problem in aquaculture. Thus, they are good alternatives to the traditional fish as sea food. Being filter feeders, they check the pollution in the sea water and do not harm the sea bed in any way. All they need is a rope or a rope like structure to harvest. In another interesting example, Sharp's Doom Bar Beer has come with a mechanism whereby it uses only three litres of water to produce one litre of beer as against seven litres. Moreover, the company has also created ways in recycling the waste generated while manufacturing beer. The used grain and yeast slurry is fed to the dairy and pigs, the bottles of beer are also recycled to make glassed.

FMCG companies are increasingly realising that sustainable production has to be followed with attracting the concerned segment of the market by effective advertising. Modern consumers are 'innovators' and would be open to experiment with products if the means as well as the end of the product and service is sustainable. Solar water heaters, LED lights, energy saving televisions, air conditioners are a common sight in the electronic markets these days.

#### **4. Beauty and Skin-Care:**

Concern for environment and sustainability has even gripped the skin-

care market. An increasing number of companies are now modifying the composition of the products or changing the packaging to make the product as environment friendly as possible. Skin care products are, after all, everything that we apply on our skin. It is only befitting that these are environment friendly. For example, deodorants which have a disclaimer that they are 'ozone friendly' are preferable for application.

Pangea organics is a well known skin care brand which takes pride in making petrochemical, paraben and other harmful synthetic free products. The founder and CEO of the company, Joshua Onysko believes that sustainability needs to be filtered down to every aspect i.e. production, distribution as well as consumption. Pangea packaging utilizes brown or green glass so formulation efficacy is not compromised by light. Bottles are screen printed to prevent waste and so as not to hinder recycling.

Other brands in the industry have also followed the lead. Beauty industry has also taken the onus of reducing the carbon footprint and the waste generated. Neal's Yard, Tata Harper, Kiehl's are some of the famous brands that use recyclable glass and plastic bottles. Tata Harper goes a step ahead and uses soy ink scoring more points on sustainability. Thus, a consumer can cleanse their skin as well as their conscience while using these beauty products. World famous 'Dior' has also taken a few steps to cut down waste generated by their products (Murray, 2018). They have done away with the cellophane used in packaging, the outer cardboard box to pack the products and even the instructions/ benefits leaflet inside the box. 'Mac' has come up with a

unique idea of reducing the waste in the environment. If a consumer returns six empty Mac products to any of the stores, they get to choose a lipstick of their choice!

## **Section II: Consumption of Organic Products: A Step Towards Sustainability**

Organic products are classified as 'organic' if they are cultivated, processed and distributed without the use of pesticides and fertilizers (Pearson & Henryks 2008). Initially, 'organic' was a much needed reaction to the rampant use of artificial chemicals. Organic products may be conceptualised as 'eco- products that ensure better health and quality of life' (Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002). The term organic was created originally for food products, in order to prevent 'unnatural food production or genetic manipulation of natural products (Rahnama, 2016). Several definitions have been provided for the term 'organic'. The most comprehensive definition is the one provided by National Organic Standards Board of the United States Department of Agriculture. (December, 2000) The Association clarified that:

*“Organic food instead of how they are produced, define how they cannot be produced. They have to be produced without using sewage sludge, fertilizers, pesticides, genetic engineering, growth hormones, irradiation and antibiotics.”* (Rahnama, 2016. P. 381)

In the year 2015, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) defined organic agriculture as;

*“A production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people.*

*Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.”*

The interest in organic products with eco-friendly certification has increased in recent times in developed and industrialised countries (Bougherara and Combris, 2009; Falguera et al., 2012; Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen, 2017). Organic products or the commonly called 'green' products are pesticide free products, follow integrated pest management practices, are naturally grown and are considered healthier than conventional food products (Goetzke et al., 2014; Hemmerling et al., 2016; Lee and Yun, 2015). In an interesting argument regarding 'organic' food, FAO (2003) mentioned that the 'organic' is a process claim and not necessarily a health claim. It is given that the non-use of chemical and synthetic inputs will guarantee a specific process but it is not mean that the product concerned is tastier or healthier than conventionally grown products.

The market for organically grown/produced products has gained momentum substantially in the past decade (Ngobo, 2011). It is possible for consumers to buy food (yoghurt, biscuits, fruits, vegetables etc.) as well as non-food (clothes, personal-care products etc.) products. As mention earlier in the chapter, organic products are those that are produced without the use of hormones, fertilizers, pesticides or genetically modified components as opposed to conventional products. Brown & Dant (2008) clarify that there exists a demographic relationship between organic products and consumers. Consumers with high income

and high-level education are more likely to buy organic products. In another study, it was revealed that consumers of organic products are generally females (Davies et al., 2001). Younger consumers are found to have positive attitudes towards organically grown products (Magnusson et al., 2001), yet older consumers are likely to be purchasers as they are convinced about the 'value' for money aspect of the concerned organic product.

Organic food consumption is slowly becoming a way of life (Schifferstein, 1998). This is due to the fact consumers are deeply impacted by their value system. Values like altruism (relationship with others), ecology (harmony with universe and sustainability), benevolence, spirituality, self-direction (independent thought and action) have all been identified in consumers of organic food products (Krystallis & Ness, 2003). Consumption of organic food has also been linked to an alternative lifestyle that includes active environmentalism and vegetarianism (Cicia et al., 2002).

Apart from the environmental concern, there are various reasons for the consumers to choose the organic food products:

1. Organic food is healthier- Health is the pre-dominant reason for the popularity of organic food products (Tregear et al., 1994; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002). Consumers choose organic products over conventionally grown products as they wish to avoid chemically grown food products. Nutrition and superior quality of the products is the main reason of preference of organic products (Williams, 2002).
2. Organic products taste better- Some researchers have found that 'taste' is

a popular criterion in purchase of organic products (Magnusson et al., 2001). However, some researchers have denied the claim that organic food tastes better (Hughner et al., 2007). They believe that only a few organic products taste better than conventional products.

3. Organic food is safer- Outbreaks of diseases like salmonella, mad cow disease and *Escherichia coli* 0157 have led to a scare (Soler et al.). The interpretation of 'food safety' is not clearly defined and is left to the respondent.

4. Organic food supports local economy- Some researchers have found that consumers favour organic products because they feel that they are supporting the local community (Krystallis, 2002). Organic buyers reflect ethnocentric tendencies while purchasing products.

5. Going organic is fashionable- Due to the recent surge in concern for the environment and the consequent drive towards sustainable solutions, organic products are perceived by consumers as fashionable (Chinnici et al., 2002). Consumers purchase organic products out of curiosity and feel that they are lending a hand to building a sustainable environment.

Organic products are not limited to food only. There are in fact three categories three non-food organic products. These include:

- Cosmetics and Personal care items
- Textile
- Alcohol

Each of the three mentioned above is regulated in a different manner and if the consumer is aware, he can make a conscious choice of an organic product and thus consume sustainably.

**Personal Care Products-** The initiatives taken by the beauty and skin care industry towards sustainability has been mentioned earlier. Consumers may look for organically certified personal care products. For example, Eco-Cert, a certification body for sustainable development was the very first body to develop standards for “natural and organic cosmetics” in India. The aim of this body was draw up the support of experts, manufacturers, distributors and consumers to use ingredients in cosmetics that were GMO, paraben, silicon (among other chemicals) free. It stated that at least 95% of the total ingredients used in the cosmetic product had to be natural. It also introduced biodegradable nature of packaging. Apart from Eco- Cert, there are many other certifying agencies in India like:

- Natural Organic Certification Association
- Bureau Veritas Certification India Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai
- Control Union Certifications, Mumbai
- IMO Control Private Limited
- APOF Organic Certification Agency, (AOCA)

These are just a few of the certifying agencies that authenticate an organic product in India.

**Textile-** The apparel industry is one which has demand throughout the year. India has one of the largest markets for organic apparels and fabrics. India has been historically the largest producer of cotton and has attracted the western traders for very long. Organic cotton and export of organic textile produce has opened a wide market for India. The Indian Standard for Organic Textiles (ISOT) which was

developed under the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) is the certification body for organic cotton and textile products. The objectives of ISOT are:

- To ensure veracity of the ‘organic’ status of fibre in textiles and apparels, right from cultivation and harvesting of organic cotton through processing and labelling
- To provide assurance of the organic nature of the fibre used and to convey that the process of manufacturing has been done in a socially and environmentally sound manner.

According to ISOT, apparel is considered organic if ninety five per cent of the fabric is organic. Brands like Indigreen, No nasties, Forty Red Bangles, Anokhi, Bhu:sattva, Ethicus etc. are organic and are eco-friendly. These clothes are not for the elite class or the fashion conscious. They are for every individual who realises the need for sustainability.

**Alcohol-** Alcohol is categorised into three types: wine, malt beverages and distilled spirit. Wine can be considered organic if it is made with organic grapes. The same applies to malt and distilled spirits. A consumer must check the label for a 70 percent certification of organic on alcohol bottles.

Organic products are increasingly becoming popular and gaining a prominent position in the global consumption pattern. The organic market is expected to grow substantially in future, however, not without challenges (Murphy, 2006). There are debates over the whether the organic products are actually a measure to achieve sustainability. The fact that they are still the privilege of certain section of the society is another area of concern

### **Section Iii: Challenges To Organic Products**

This section explores the challenges being faced in the production and consumption of organic products in the wake of recent surge in concern for sustainability. On the brighter side the demand for organic products has phenomenally increased over the last decade. Production of organic products combines the best environmental practices, conservation of natural resources, ensuring that there is no genetic engineering involved (Essoussi et. al., 2012). However, there are several challenges that are threatening the consumption as well the production of organic products. These problems are at various levels: producer, supplier as well as the consumer.

**1. Lack of appropriate government policy-** As far as the government policy towards organic produce is concerned, the norms are ambiguous. In the absence of a standardised logo and a regulation on labelling, it is difficult to distinguish a genuine organic product from a fraudulent one. Unless standardised certification is made mandatory, the government will not be able to enforce any punishment towards fraudulent players. Moreover, the current law does not attach environmental and social costs to conventional production, so the mainstream market is given a massive hidden subsidy. The organic products do not get any government support in view of their contribution towards building a sustainable future.

**2. Logistic and suppliers' concern-** The supply chain of organic products is under developed as a result of which access to the market is difficult for small and medium scale organic producers. Slow shipment, shortage of pack houses and

refrigerated vehicles lead to large scale spoilage of organic food products which have a limited shelf life. Another concern is that organic products have to be stored away from conventional products in order to avoid cross- contamination (Aerston et al., 2009). This facility is usually lacking in the existing supply chains. The government has shown some initiative in supporting organic products via exhibition and fairs. However, a steady market for organic producers is still missing.

**3. Lack of awareness among producers-** There is a stark void of education, awareness and capacity building related to organic products in the farmers. They are still hesitant to grow crops without manure. For them, quicker yield ( by using pesticides) leads to quicker profits; since organic produce takes time, they do not see it as a lucrative option (Magray, 2017). The development of expertise in organic production is a major challenge. Information regarding soil, pest cycles, climate markets, etc. needs to be disseminated among the prospective organic producers. A centralised database to provide information regarding the organic process, certification, marketing is missing as a result of which organic production is growing at a very slow pace.

**4. Lack of awareness among consumers-** The health and environmental benefits of organic products are known to a conscientious consumer but this is not enough to increase the sale of organic products. Mass media has to use extensively to spread awareness about organic products and their benefits. Organic products should not be viewed as an alternative but as an essential in a consumer's day today life. This involves reaching out to the consumer's way of life

and choice. Organic products need to be positioned in such a way that a consumer incorporates them in his/her lifestyle. For the price conscious consumer, the high prices of organic products need to be justified with clear evidence to superiority of the product.

#### 5. Other pressing concerns

##### • Environmental concerns-

Research has shown that organic farming can have more of an adverse impact than benefits in the long term. In order to sustain the increasing population, more land will be required to grow organic crops. This would inevitably lead to deforestation on a massive scale ( Baker, 2015 ). New and advanced inputs such as ‘natural’ biocides and GMOs offer quicker yield thus farmers opt against organic farming as it is strenuous and the produce is limited, leading to lesser profits (Magray et al. 2017) .

‘Eutrophication’ which means the excess of nutrients likes nitrogen and phosphorus in the surface water usually occurs in organic farming. In conventional farming pesticides and fertilizers are used which also release nitrogen, however, the quantity and timing of release of nitrogen is as required by the crop. On the other hand in organic farming where manure is used, the nutrient release is slow and is not matched by the requirement of the crop. This results in excess release of nitrogen which causes acidification and eutrophication of soil. ( Hannah, R. 2017). Thus, instead of restoring the balance of nutrients in soil, cultivation of organic crops may have adverse effect on the soil profile. This may defeating the very purpose of growing organic crops; i.e., to lend a hand to a sustainable future.

- **Price concern-** Besides the long time period involved in growing organic products, the pricing of these products in the market is also an issue. Since organic products are free from pesticides, naturally their prices are higher than no organic products. However, some consumers feel that the prices of organic products are too high as compared to the quality of the product. There often emerges a cognitive dissonance among the consumers since the ‘organic’ aspect of the product is not very apparent for the high price quoted. For example, organic clothes are popularly referred to as ‘the riches’ rag’ since they come with a premium price. An organic cotton frock for girls is normally priced around Rs 800, a tag that will easily fetch a satin laced silhouette for adults in India. As of now, consumption of organic products is the privilege of the urban class.

- **Certification-** The certification of organic products is a lengthy process and many stipulations have to be met before qualifying to be an organic product. ‘Certification’ is a guarantee by the producer to the consumer that the product has been produced in an environment friendly and sustainable manner. The certification process of organic products differs product wise and is administered by different regulations which are unique in each country. This process is complex, lengthy and needs annual inspection in order to retain the organic certificate. It is difficult for small scale farmers or producers especially in developing countries to bear the cost of certification (Barret et al, 2002).

In case the producers of organic products in developing countries wish to sell their produce in the international market, the

must either pay for international inspection or use local inspection bodies that have been accredited by European certifiers, such as IMO (Switzerland), to undertake the audit and grant an 'organic' certification. This is not only a tedious task, but also beyond the means of poor farmers. International certification and inspection can be very expensive. For example, in 2000 Soil Association Certification (SAC), a body that certifies organic products in United Kingdom charged individual producers a certification fee of £200, inspection costs of £350 per day per inspector, airfares, accommodation and other expenses (Barrett et al., 2002). This process is too cumbersome and expensive for a small-scale farmer.

#### **Section Iv: 'The Way Forward'**

Since this chapter talks about the importance of organic products and their contribution in achieving sustainability, it must be realised that only a combined effort by the producer, stakeholders, suppliers, government and the consumer can help to improve the sale of organic products. This section focuses on the role of the aforementioned parties in making organic products a way of life, thus doing their bit to ensure progress towards sustainability.

**Role of Government-** The government has to actively take upon the onus of facilitating and supporting the organic products. To begin with, the awareness about sustainability has to be spread among public at large. The importance of consuming and producing in a sustainable manner has to be emphasised. Since organic products are a step towards sustainable production, their certification

has to be made simple, cost effective and transparent (Raynolds, 2004). A standard logo for organic products needs to be issued by the government so that genuine organic products get the benefit of premium pricing. With regard to organic products, when a producer decides to give up conventional farming, animal rearing etc he is bound to suffer initial losses due to the time and labour involved in yielding organic produce. It is at this stage that the government needs to carefully design subsidies to compensate for the loss in the conversion period. Steps have to be taken to educate the farmer and other organic producers. The government can build tie ups with NGOs working in rural areas to educate the organic producers regarding various aspects of growing the crop. Appropriate infrastructure like logistics need to be provided for the organic produce. Time consuming and complicated paperwork needs to be done away with. Most importantly, the government needs to formulate a policy that demarcates between conventional products and organic products. The organic products must be given the advantage of bearing a social and environmental cost since they are completely safe to the environment.

**Role of the supplier-** A variety of marketing channels need to be promoted. The consumers' enthusiasm and willingness to pay may be harnessed if small retailers play an active role in promoting organic products. Personal relationship and gaining the trust of the consumer will help to develop a strong organic retail network. Staff management and knowledge are other important elements that need to be taken care of retailers. A retailer must ensure that his

staff has complete information regarding price, quality as well as benefits of the organic produce being sold. Presentation of facts by retailers and their staff can go a long way in ensuring that organic products become a preferred choice of the consumer (Bolten et al., 2010 ). It is desirable that the suppliers are well aware of their respective regions i.e. the demographic and cultural orientation of the place. They should take up the onus of disseminating information about the latest trends in the organic market. They should help to establish a connect between producer and the consumer. They can aid in consumer awareness of organic products and creation of demand. They should help to meet the gap between the supply and demand of organic products.

**Marketing of organic products-** effective marketing of organic products is the key to success of organic products. Strategic marketing of organic products is essential in order to make them the first choice of the consumers. The marketers have to plan carefully well in advance the 4 P's of organic products. They must not assume that the products will sell just because they are 'organic' in nature. The nutritional and ecological qualities of the product must be visible in the promotional efforts so that the premium price of the product is justified. In order to ensure this, informative labelling, free samples, tasting, point of purchase literature should be available to the consumer. Word of mouth, relationship marketing are other ways of developing customer loyalty towards organic products. The advertising of these products should be such that encourages consumers to become 'agents' of change. Message of the advertisement should focus on how consumers can

contribute to sustainability by opting for organic products without any synthetic chemicals and produced in consonance with nature.

**Role of consumers-** The environmental ethic that has gained international prominence has held the consumer responsible for individual health, social action and environment quality ( Yiridoe et al., 2005). In this capacity, the consumer has to make informed choices while buying any product. In order to make an informed choice the consumer must have complete knowledge about the organic products and the competing conventional products. Knowledge and awareness are powerful tools that may have a direct impact on the consumers' attitude towards organic products and their willingness to pay a premium price for the organic products. For example, a consumer may be aware that organic food is expensive but he may know in detail the complexities of organic farming. Once he/she takes the initiative to 'know' about the process of production of organic products, the premium pricing will be justified and there will be no post- purchase dissonance. Consumers must analyse if their choice of product is impacting the environment. The most common example is opting for a paper packet instead of a polythene; opting for a cotton trouser than a denim; buying coarse and unpolished pulses and vegetables etc. Consumer has to make a conscientious choice to incorporate organic products in his lifestyle organic products. Thus, knowledge, awareness and individual initiative on the part of the consumer regarding organic products can have a positive effect on consumer attitudes and perception and, ultimately the buying decisions..

## Conclusion

The global society has undergone a noticeable shift as far as social responsibility is concerned. Mere concern for the environment has given way to sustainability (Finkbeiner et al., 2010). Sustainability is now accepted by all stakeholders (producers, consumers and policy makers) as the guiding principle for providing a future to the coming generations. They realise that resources have been consumed in a responsible manner with minimum wastage so that there is enough for the future generations. This is the essence of sustainability. All economic activities like mobility, construction, production of food, usage of energy has a direct impact on the environment and is directed by consumption. The more the consumption, the more is the production. Thus, increase in consumption and production will deplete natural resources and add toxins to the environment (Tukker, 2008).

A change in the pattern of consumption is the key to achieving sustainability. Consumers can exercise sustainable

choices if they are stimulated with adequate knowledge and awareness. Consumption of organic products is one way in which the earth's resources can be preserved and nourished. Organic products can also be seen as the answer to various health ailments that are caused due to chemicals present in conventional products. However, the shift to organic products is not easy as there are various practical problems which have to be tackled at every level; right from the producer to the consumer. The government has to take the responsibility of ensuring that access to organic products is made easy. This can only be a reality once the producers are able to meet the 'organic' criteria easily for their produce. They have adequate support of the government and can make profits so that they continue producing organic products. Last, but not the least, the consumers must realise that the choice they exercise while buying any product is the defining factor towards sustainability. Only when consumers join hands to make a difference in consumption patterns can sustainability be truly achieved.

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