

A STUDY ON CONSUMER AWARENESS OF ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS IN KARUR TOWN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the level of consumer awareness of organic food products among residents of Karur Town, Tamil Nadu. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire, and analysed through percentage analysis and tabulation. The study finds that while a majority of respondents are aware of the general health benefits of organic food, awareness regarding organic certification processes, the National Organic Movement in India, and identification of certified products through organic labels and logos remains significantly low. Quality emerged as the primary factor influencing purchasing decisions, and specialized organic stores were identified as the most preferred purchase location. The study recommends targeted awareness campaigns, expansion of organic retail outlets across localities, and stronger media engagement to bridge the existing knowledge gap and accelerate organic food consumption in the region.

Keywords: consumer awareness, organic food products, Karur Town, purchasing behaviour, organic certification

INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers in modern agricultural practices has raised serious concerns about food safety, environmental sustainability, and public health. Organic food, broadly defined as food produced without the use of artificial ingredients, synthetic preservatives, or irradiation, has emerged as a viable and environmentally

responsible alternative. The term "organic farming" was first coined by Lord Northbourne in his 1940 work *Look to the Land*, where he described a holistic and ecologically balanced approach to agriculture in contrast to chemically dependent conventional farming. Since then, the organic food movement has gained considerable momentum globally, with world organic food sales growing from USD 23 billion in 2002 to

USD 63 billion in 2011. In India, consumer interest in organic food has grown steadily, driven by rising health consciousness, concerns about chemical residues in food, and increasing disposable incomes. However, the intention to purchase organic food products remains limited due to inadequate awareness among consumers. The present study is situated in Karur Town, Tamil Nadu, a district known primarily for its textile industry and agricultural activity, and investigates the level of consumer awareness regarding organic food products. By analysing the awareness levels, purchasing behaviour, and influencing factors among 100 respondents, the study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of organic food consumption patterns in a semi-urban Indian context.

Andersen and Philipsen (1998) categorised organic products as credence goods, meaning goods whose quality attributes are difficult or impossible to assess through ordinary inspection or use alone. They argued that consumer purchasing decisions for such goods are dominated by perceptions rather than direct verification of quality, making labelling and certification systems critical to market functioning. Caswell (2000) identified five broad food quality attributes — safety,

nutrition, value, packaging, and production process — and noted that quality signals such as product labels help transform credence characteristics into search attributes, enabling consumers to more clearly assess product quality before purchase. Brewer and Prestat (2002) analysed consumer attitudes towards food safety and identified six underlying concern factors, including chemical issues such as pesticide residues and preservatives, spoilage, health, regulatory, deceptive practices, and information availability. Their findings indicated that as general concern with food safety increases, concern across all six dimensions rises proportionally.

Garibay and Jyoti (2003) reported that organic products in the Indian market are typically priced at least double the cost of conventional alternatives, and that distribution occurs through multiple channels including exclusive stores, supermarkets, direct farm sales, and mobile retail units. Ghosh (2004) noted that the distribution of organic products in India spans diverse channels, with specialized organic stores, conventional retail outlets, and direct farm sales each serving distinct consumer segments with varying price sensitivities and quality expectations. Sharma (2006) contextualised India's transition towards

organic farming within the legacy of the Green Revolution, noting that while the Green Revolution dramatically increased food production, it also introduced long-term negative consequences including chemical buildup in soil and water, reduced biodiversity, and threats to indigenous seed varieties.

Rao (2006) cited findings from India's first market survey by the International Competence Centre of Organic Agriculture, which projected the domestic organic market potential at over fifteen billion Indian rupees by 2015, signalling robust growth prospects for the sector. Menon (2009) observed that despite growing consumer preference for organic products — driven by health risk concerns, lifestyle associations, and environmental considerations — the Indian organic retail market remained in an early developmental phase, with retail outlets concentrated in large cities and product assortments limited in scope.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents in Karur Town using a self-administered structured questionnaire. Respondents were selected through

convenient sampling across different income groups. Secondary data were drawn from books, journals, and periodicals relevant to organic food and consumer behaviour. Statistical tools employed for analysis include percentage analysis, mean, chi-square test, tabulation, bar diagrams, and pie diagrams.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The demographic profile of the sample reveals that 29% of respondents belonged to the 35–54 age group, followed by 26% in the 18–34 age group, 23% aged 55 and above, and 22% aged 2–17 years. A substantial majority of respondents (76%) were male, and 72% were married. In terms of educational attainment, 32% had completed high school education, while 22% each held secondary school qualifications and bachelor's degrees. Agriculture was the primary occupation among 38% of respondents, reflecting the district's agrarian character. The majority (71%) belonged to nuclear family systems, and 55% of households comprised four members. Monthly income for 33% of respondents fell within the Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 range. Most respondents (66%) resided in urban areas, and 84% were non-vegetarian in their food habits.

Regarding awareness levels, only 20% of respondents were aware of organic food production processes, while 80% were not. Among those with some degree of awareness, 60% identified themselves as generally aware of organic food products, 20% as highly aware, and 20% as partly aware. The duration of awareness was above three years for 35% of respondents. A substantial 65% considered it very important to purchase food products free from synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

Quality was ranked as the foremost factor in food purchasing decisions, followed by eco-friendly nature, ripeness, freshness, labelling and packaging, and brand name. Newspapers, magazines, and books were the most cited source of awareness (35%), followed by television (23%) and friends and colleagues (21%). Specialized organic stores were the most preferred purchase location (34%), followed by supermarkets and hypermarkets (27%). Among product categories, fruits and vegetables were most frequently purchased (42%), followed by food products (23%) and milk (16%). Daily purchase was reported by 64% of respondents, and 30% had been consuming organic products for three years. Notably, 86% of respondents indicated willingness to continue purchasing organic

products even in the event of price increases, and 84% acknowledged that organic food products are priced higher than conventional alternatives. A majority (66%) rated organic products as very good in comparison to non-organic alternatives.

With respect to specific factual awareness, 38% were aware of the health benefits of organic food, while 37% and 35% were only partly aware of organic food production methods and standards respectively. Critically, 62% were not aware that farmers must obtain organic certification from accredited agencies, 68% were unaware of the National Organic Movement in India, and 56% were unaware that certified organic products can be identified through an organic logo and label.

FINDINGS

The study reveals that consumer awareness of organic food products in Karur Town is present but uneven. While most respondents possess a general awareness of organic food and its health benefits, knowledge of the institutional and regulatory dimensions of organic certification is strikingly low. The majority of respondents (80%) had no awareness of organic food production processes, and even larger proportions were uninformed about the National Organic

Movement, certification requirements for farmers, and the identification of certified products through labels. Quality was the dominant purchase criterion, and specialized organic stores were the preferred retail channel. The overwhelming willingness to pay higher prices (86%) signals genuine consumer commitment to organic food, but this commitment is constrained by limited access to information and retail infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that while organic food awareness among consumers in Karur Town is growing, it remains inadequate to drive sustained and informed purchasing behaviour. The gap between general awareness and specific knowledge of certification standards, organic labelling, and institutional frameworks represents a significant barrier to market development. Targeted awareness campaigns through television, digital media, and community health programmes are essential to bridge this gap. Expansion of organic retail infrastructure beyond large urban centres, government support for farmer certification under the National Programme for Organic Production, and active involvement of agricultural marketing cooperatives would

collectively create an environment conducive to the growth of organic food consumption. As consumer loyalty and informed purchasing behaviour develop, the organic food sector in India holds the potential to transition from a niche market to a mainstream consumption category, benefiting both public health and environmental sustainability.

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