



Bio Vet Innovator Magazine

Volume 2 (Issue 2) FEBRUARY 2025



Popular Article

The Growing Potential of Organic Dairy Farming in India: Health, Environmental and Economic Benefits

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Received: February 17, 2025

Published: February 23, 2025

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Introduction:

Organic dairy farming involves raising animals on organic feed, such as pastures grown without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, and with limited use of antibiotics and hormones. The milk produced from these cows is considered organic. Organic farming is a structured system of production governed by clear regulations that allow farmers to manage their unique conditions while maintaining organic standards. Cows and calves must be fed only organic feed, and pastures must be grown without synthetic inputs. Additionally, non-natural additives like mineral and vitamin supplements must be authorized for organic farming, and land used for growing organic crops must be free of pesticides. Animals over six months old must have access to pasture during the growing season, and organic animals cannot be fed slaughter by-products, urea, or dung. Calves must receive organic milk, and all animals should have access to the outdoors. Furthermore, milk must be piped directly from the udders to chilling and pasteurization units through automated systems to avoid contamination. Organic dairy products are the end result of this process. This farming system provides various benefits and involves specific management practices and regulatory oversight to ensure organic integrity, aiming to raise awareness among farmers, particularly in India and Jharkhand.

Management:

To label their animal products as organic, producers must not withhold treatment for diseases. A comprehensive herd health program should include strategies for disease prevention, parasite control, and illness treatment. Vaccines for endemic diseases that are not approved for organic farming are not allowed. However, the use of herbal, naturopathic, and homeopathic treatments is permitted for organic livestock. Antibiotic use is restricted to a maximum of 30 days, which is double the required withdrawal period. The use of hormones is strictly prohibited in organic farming. Sanitation methods, such as teat dipping and milking sanitation chemicals, are allowed, but equipments must be thoroughly cleaned with water three times before milking.

Benefits of Organic Milk:

Organic milk offers significant health benefits for both consumers and livestock, with numerous studies suggesting that it can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, depression, rheumatoid arthritis, and diabetes. This is primarily due to the higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), and antioxidants found in organic milk compared to conventional milk. Research has shown that organic milk contains 62% more omega-3 fats and less omega-6 fats, which are crucial for preventing health issues such as heart disease and inflammation. Furthermore, organic milk is rich in CLA, which not only fights cancer but also boosts the immune system and reduces tumor growth. Organic milk also contains higher amounts of essential vitamins like A, B, C, D, E, and K, and minerals such as calcium, magnesium, and iron, all of which are in highly bioavailable forms, ensuring better absorption and providing a wide range of health benefits, including enhanced metabolism, better immune response, and protection against chronic diseases.

In addition to its health benefits, organic dairy farming promotes animal welfare and environmental sustainability. Organic dairy cows are fed organic feed, graze on pasture, and are given access to the outdoors, with strict regulations preventing the use of antibiotics, hormones, and synthetic chemicals. This farming practice eliminates the risk of harmful residues such as pesticides, urea, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in milk, which are common concerns with conventional milk. The absence of these harmful substances makes organic milk a healthier option for consumers, as it does not contain residues from antimicrobial agents, hormones, or pesticides. Moreover, organic dairy farming supports biodiversity and reduces environmental pollution by avoiding synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

The demand for organic milk has been growing rapidly, driven by increasing consumer awareness about its nutritional advantages and the environmental benefits of organic farming. Organic dairy farming is also economically advantageous for smallholder farmers, as it can lower production costs and increase profits, especially if there is a strong demand for organic milk. India, with its rich dairy farming heritage, is well-positioned to capitalize on the growing global market for organic dairy products. However, the shift to organic dairy farming requires significant commitment from farmers, proper training, and regulatory compliance. Farmers must maintain detailed records to ensure that their practices meet organic standards and undergo regular inspections by certifying authorities.

Moreover, organic milk is particularly beneficial due to its higher antioxidant content, including lutein and zeaxanthin, which are vital for maintaining eye health and preventing conditions such as macular degeneration, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. Vitamins E and beta-carotene are more abundant in organic milk, providing additional benefits like slowing down the aging process and reducing the prevalence of chronic disorders. The increased nutritional density of organic milk also appeals to health-conscious consumers who are willing to pay a premium for higher-quality, environmentally friendly products. As a result, organic dairy farming not only offers health benefits but also holds great potential for economic growth, especially in developing countries like India, where it can lead to increased export earnings in the international market. However, to fully realize this potential, policy support, farmer awareness, and capacity-building initiatives are essential to create a thriving organic dairy sector.

Scope in India:

As consumers in India become more health-conscious and aware of the drawbacks of conventional milk, organic dairy production is attracting increasing attention. Organic milk is recognized for its superior nutritional value compared to regular milk, as it is free from antibiotics and other harmful toxins. It is also enriched with essential antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids, which are typically absent in conventional milk. This has led to a rise in demand for organic dairy products, as more consumers seek healthier alternatives. The growing popularity of organic options is further supported by the country's economic growth and an increase in disposable incomes. Between 2014 and 2019, the organic milk market in India grew by nearly 30%, and this trend is expected to continue with strong growth projections from 2020 to 2025.

Constraints in India

The organic dairy industry continues to grow rapidly, but it faces several challenges. Farmers seeking to use the organic label must adhere to strict regulations that prohibit the use of synthetic growth hormones, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, and harmful, long-lasting synthetic pesticides. In addition, organic practices must undergo a rigorous inspection and certification process to ensure compliance with established standards. Other challenges include managing the balance between supply and demand and reducing costs. Additionally, farmers face difficulties in sourcing organic inputs like grains, forages, and feed additives, replacing heifers, and ensuring the overall health of their animals.

Conclusion:

Organic dairy farming presents numerous health, environmental, and economic benefits, with growing consumer demand for organic milk due to its superior nutritional value and lack of harmful substances like antibiotics and hormones. In India, the sector is expanding rapidly, driven by increased health awareness and rising disposable incomes. However, the industry faces challenges such as strict regulations, the need for continuous supply and demand balance, sourcing organic inputs, and maintaining animal health. Despite these obstacles, organic dairy farming offers significant opportunities, particularly in a country with a rich dairy farming heritage. With proper support, awareness, and policy interventions, India can harness the potential of organic dairy farming to meet domestic demand and capitalize on international market growth.