



A Study on Customer Awareness about Certification Towards Organic Products

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Crossref

Open Access

Manuscript ID:

BIJ-SPL4-Jan26-MD-141

Subject: Commerce

Received : 03.09.2025

Accepted : 22.01.2026

Published : 31.01.2026

DOI: 10.64938/bij.v10si4.26.Jan141

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Abstract

As more organic products are available in the Indian market place than ever before, consumers can only be expected to be knowledgeable and informed with more new organic options than conventional products that simply appear healthy or new, and all this variety of products and claims lends its self to not evaluating the structure of their claims and legality. As difficult as this might be, is sometimes can be easily ways to help consumers decide whether what they are looking at is organic. When it comes to organic certification there are symbols that appear on products that stood with certification organizations. Consumers can routinely take a peek at the symbols and explore whether the original source or true the product was comprised of organic really means something or not. Organic certification that exists for certification for organic agricultural producers or organic food producers. In general, ANY food producer, from a seed supplier or grower/farmer, food processor, affected trader, or distributor, or a restaurant can certify themselves as organic. For organic products and producers relative to National standards for Organic Production, the certifying body is the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority of India (APEDA). The organic products certified by the India accredited certification bodies that discharge India Organic certification mark are well accepted in many importing countries. Typically organic food products that are produced in India and exported will carry the India Organic certification designation mark by the APEDA producer. It has approved 11 certifying agencies for inspections, including some subsidiary agencies of foreign certifying agencies and some local certifying agencies. The current research paper presents the current status of consumer awareness toward certification of organic products in Virudhunagar District.

Keywords: Organic Products, Awareness, Organic Certification, APEDA

Introduction

At present, many purchasing consumers are altering their lifestyle towards a healthier and more eco-friendly choice of food purchasing non-pesticide food options. Consumers have returned to choosing natural products. There are both health and environmental reasons that consumers see from organic products, as well as providing support for farmers in the local area. As the worldwide population continues to rise

steadily, the need for food and raw materials for agriculture will continue to increase. This puts pressure on the farmland and geographical area of the country to feed the population, which is directly proportional to the need to grow more food products. Under this constant pressure, producers have begun to use more support inputs such as chemical fertilizers, and chemicals used for protect plants. There are various interpretations by individuals identifying what



organic farming methods are, as organic farming incorporates many different definitions. For many individuals, organic farming is simply the addition of organic manure or natural methods for protection of plants instead of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.

About Organic Certification

Tamil Nadu has established its position in the Indian organic farming arena through the adoption of various certification systems that allow for product integrity to be confirmed and a commitment for quality standards to be maintained. The principal frame of reference in Tamil Nadu to manage the process of organic certification is the National Programme on Organic Production (NPOP), operationalised under the Foreign Trade Development and Regulation Act. NPOP is overseen by the Agricultural and Processed Foods Export Development Authority (APEDA), with two accredited certification agencies being comprised of six public sector agencies and fourteen private management organizations. The certification system in Tamil Nadu has both advantages and disadvantages for farmers. The farmers in the studies from the Cauvery Delta Zone cited the "cumbersome certification process" as a key limitation, with a much reported value of 79.90. The complicated nature of the certification system presents a unique barrier, especially for the marginal and small farmers, who compromise a significant portion of the farming community. Nevertheless, the successful case of certification was an organic certification was awarded to tribal farmers in Namakkal district from the Kollihills when they finished the mandatory three years of farming under the the Paramparaghat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) scheme, was an evidence of this success. Organic certification in Tamil Nadu includes various crops, such as paddy, vegetables, and spices from traditional foods, plantation crops, and with high value and value-added products. The state has ample processing plants and export infrastructure.

Companies like Miracle tree Life Science, headquartered in Madurai, have received several certifications including FSSAI, HALAL, and organic certification verification certificates for export market. Despite the implementation challenges, certification has brought an assurance of tangible economic return; certified organic producers in states, such as Nilgiris, also reported a higher benefit-cost ratio compared to conventional farm systems.

Review of Literature

Thagersen, Pedersen, and Aschemann-Witzel (2019) studied how information on organic certification interacts with information on country of origin to understand consumer decision-making in developing compared to developed economies. These researchers found that certification can help bolster weak reputations of countries or unknown brands, thereby increasing consumer trust and purchase intentions. The certifying organization was more valuable when consumers were already more familiar with the certifying organization and the enforcement of the standards. This suggests that simply having a certified logo displayed while may not be sufficient to improve consumer trust or opening behavior, but recognition and higher-level of trustworthiness could be even more influential to consumer behavior. In terms of implications of their research on consumer trust in the Indian context, this suggests that improved consumer trust in certifying organizations and better educating consumers on reporting could provide a stronger influence in consumer behavior.¹

In their study titled "A Study on the Consumer Awareness of Organic Certification of Food Products in Mysore City," Chaitra Bharath and H.M. Chandrashekar discovered that consumers of organic food need to update knowledge about the certifications on organic products.²

In their research "Consumers' Awareness and Consumption: A Study of Organic Product," Ripal

¹ Thagersen, J., Pedersen, S., & Aschemann-Witzel, J. (2019). The impact of organic certification and country of origin on consumer food choice in developed and emerging economies. *Food Quality and Preference*, 72, 10–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2018.08.006>

² Bharath, C., & Chandrashekar, H. M. (2012). A study on the consumer awareness of organic certification of food products in Mysore city. *International Journal of Research in Commerce, Economics & Management*, 2(3), 108–112.



Patel and Gautam Donga stated The main reason of consuming organic food is to protect environment from pollution and healthy food in comparison to conventional food.³

Research Methodology

This research paper is derived from the detailed study on, " A STUDY ON CUSTOMER AWARENESS ABOUT CERTIFICATION TOWARDS ORGANIC PRODUCTS" that is based on both primary and secondary data. This study focuses on Sivakasi area and its surrounding areas. The primary data was collected from the consumers through a primary data collection tool that was designed only for this study. It envisaged awareness towards organic products certification, logo awareness, and preference to purchase. The questionnaire collected comprehensive aspects regarding safety of food, level of awareness about organic food, reasons for purchasing organic produce, problems for purchasing organic produce and socio-economic status of organic produce consumers.

Objectives of the study

- To know about the social economic factors of the respondents.
- To understand the awareness level of the respondents
- To analysis the problems faced by respondents

Sample Design

The overall sample size involved a total of 121 respondents from the Sivakasi area and its nearby places, based on the convenience of the investigator. The data collected was handled using simple methods like percentage analysis and chi-square test.

The following hypotheses are developed to test the relationships between variables:

H0 - 1: The consumer's independence of qualification has no significant relation with whether they realize their brand is certified organic.

H0 - 2: The income has no significant relation to the period of purchase organic products.

Findings

1. Demographic Variables

Profile data related to gender, income level, marital status, and education level of the respondents, were collected during the survey. The analyzed data indicates in the following table, most participants 75 respondents (62%) were female, with the remaining of 46 (38%) respondents were male; as seen on Table 1 below.

Table 1 Demographic Variables

S.No.	Demographic Variables	No.of Respondents	Percentage
1	Gender		
	Male	46	38
	Female	75	62
	Total	121	100
2	Income Level		
	below 15000	47	39
	15000 – 25000	36	30
	25000 – 35000	18	15
	35000 – 45000	11	9
	Above 45000	9	7
	Total	121	100
3	Educational Qualification		
	Higher Secondary Level	11	9
	Undergraduate Level	59	49
	Post graduate level	29	24
	Professionals	16	13
	Others	6	5
	Total	121	100
4	Marital Status		
	Married	76	63
	Unmarried	45	37
	Total	121	100

Source: Primary data.

The table indicated that 54% of respondents have a monthly family income of Rs 15000 - Rs45000, followed by 49% of respondents at the undergraduate educational level, and finally, 63% representing all respondents are married.

³ Patel, R., & Donga, G. (2019). Consumers' awareness and consumption: A study of organic product. International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences, 9(5),



Purchase of Organic Products

Information about products consumed routinely, thoughts about the safety of their foods, and the prevalence of purchasing organic products from survey participants were obtained. . The data analyzed and displayed in the table below indicated the following: 91 (75%) of the participants reported feeling very safe about the foods they consumed, 70 (58%) of the survey participants reported regularly using conventional products, 42 report using organic products but most of the participants alternately used organic products as reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Purchase of Organic Products

S.No.	Demographic Variables	No.of Respondents	Percentage
1	Feel the foods are safe		
	Yes	91	75
	No	30	25
	Total	121	100
2	Regularly used products		
	Conventional products	70	58
	genetically modified products	8	7
	organic products	42	35
	Total	121	100
3	Purchase or consume organic products		
	Yes	89	73
	No	32	27

S.No.	Demographic Variables	No.of Respondents	Percentage
	Total	121	100
4	Period of purchase or consume		
	Less than 1 year	78	65
	1 - 3 years	24	20
	3 - 6 years	11	9
	more than 6 years	8	7
	Total	121	100

Source: Primary data

The table above shows that 73% of the respondents sometimes buy or consume organic products. 78 (65%) of the respondents have been consuming organic products for less than 1 year. Other details are noted in the table above.

Relationship between the Income and Period of Purchasing Organic Products

The research asked about respondents' income and organic product purchasing time, in order to find out the truth about the relationship between income and period of purchasing. A null and alternate hypothesis were also formulated to establish the study for this relationship to be assessed:

H0 : There is no significant relationship between the Income and Period of Purchasing organic products

H1 : There is significant relationship between the Income and Period of Purchasing organic products

The Kruskal Wallis test was used for this null hypothesis testing the P values was established and calculated using the SPSS package, they are outlined in the table below.

Table 3 Relationship between the Income and Period of Purchasing Organic Products

S. No	Period of purchase	Size	Mean Rank	Chi-square value	P value
1	Less than 1 year	78	61.25	7.214	0.027
2	1 - 3 years	24	69.40		
3	3 - 6 years	11	84.90		
4	more than 6 years	8	93.75		

Source: Primary data



The table shows that since the P value is lower than 0.05 for the case of period of purchasing organic products (0.027), we reject the null hypothesis. This means that there is a significant association between income of the respondents and period of purchasing organic products. This suggests that income has to do with how regular a respondent will purchase the organic products.

Relationship Between the Independence of Qualification and Whether the Consumers Know if the Brand is Certified as Organic

The survey examined the consumers' understanding regarding brand certification of organic and the consumers qualification. In order to evaluate the association between those differing variables, the

following null and alternative hypothesis were developed for testing:

H0 There is no significant association between the Independence of Qualification and whether the consumers know if a brand they buy is certified as organic,

H1 There is significant association between the Independence of Qualification and whether the consumers know if a brand they buy is certified as organic.

To test this hypothesis a Kruskal Wallis test was employed; P values were ascertained by using SPSS package (which are presented in table 3).

Table 4 Relationship between the Independence of Qualification and whether the Consumers know if the Brand is Certified as Organic

S. No	Awareness	Size	Chi-square value	P value
1	Higher Secondary Level	11	3.787	0.403
2	Undergraduate Level	59		
3	Post graduate level	29		
4	Professionals	16		
	Others	6		

Source: Primary data

The preceding table points out that since the P value is greater than 0.05 in relation to awareness about organic products (0.403) at a level of significance of 5 per cent, the null hypothesis is accepted. It means that there is no relationship that is significant between awareness of organic products and the gender of the respondents. This means that the gender of the respondent is not relating to awareness of organic products.

Reasons for Purchasing of Organic Products

Reasons for purchasing organic products included the following benefits: maintains good health & safe, better taste, environmental friendly, free from hazardous chemical, and helps to lose weight. The analyzed data show that 21 respondents (17%) purchase the organic products to be 'free from hazardous chemicals, however, only 15 (12%) of the

respondents purchase the organic products to have 'Better taste' as illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 5 Reason for Purchasing Organic Products

Sl.No	Parameters	No.of respondent	Percentage
1.	Maintain Good Health and safe	52	44
2.	Better taste	15	12
3.	Environment friendly	17	14
4.	Free from hazardous chemical	21	17
5.	Fresh	7	6
6.	Help to lose weight quickly	4	3
7.	Try something new	5	4

Source: Primary data



The above table illustrates clearly that two leading responses for purchasing organic products are health and safety (44%), followed that, lastly 5 (14%) respondents are noticed to purchase organic food for a new experience.

Knowledge About Organic Certification

The participants in the study provided knowledge about organic certification in respect to, awareness of certification, and problems associated with organic certification and identifying certification logos were collected during the survey. The analyzed surveys indicated that 49 of respondents (40%) having awareness of organic certification and Only 18 (15%) of the respondents were able to identify the organic certification logo as identified in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Knowledge About Organic Certification

Sl.No	Parameters	No.of respondent	Percentage
	Awareness about organic certification		
1	Yes	49	40
2	No	72	60
	Total	121	100
	Identify the organic certification logo		
1	Understandable	18	15
2	Logo Confusion	11	9
3	Trust Issues	33	27
4	Low Knowledge about Certification Standards	41	34
5	Difficulty in Differentiation	10	8
6	Limited Communication by Marketers	8	7
	Total	121	100

Source: Primary data

The table above indicates that the majority, 72 (60%) respondents, do not have enough awareness about organic certification, but they are willing to pay premium price to purchase organic products but do not have any idea about organic certification. 41 (34%) respondents are low knowledge about certification standards. Other information is highlight in the above table.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and during the survey the following suggestions are made for increasing the consumption of organic products by the consumers in the Sivakasi area and its surrounding areas.

1. There is an need for government agencies and companies to create awareness to consumers via awareness campaigns.
2. Orgainc foods must have logos of certification scheme clearly marked and brief descriptions of the certification scheme below each logo.
3. QR codes and/or a mobile application can provide a wealth of information on the certifying agency, standards for the product, mall for the product, and verification to enhance consumer confidence.
4. Certifying organizations must hold high standards firmly and provide a record of compliance to improve credibility.
5. The marketing needs to target the major consumer segments (age, income, education) to increase understanding and possible purchasing behavior.
6. The organic food consumers need to familiarize themselves with potential organic product certification for the premium they are paying. NGOs and other consumer forums need to work towards creating a cooperative environment to exchange knowledge on organic product certification schemes.

Conclusion

The findings indicated that while interest is increasing due to consumers wanting to buy organic produce, awareness and understanding of certification logos is low among consumers. Few customers are aware of the process and difference between the certified organic product they are purchasing and products sold



as natural or chemical free, as it significantly undermines trust and impacts their purchasing decisions. Awareness of certification is critical since it has a significant impact on consumer confidence. Certification agencies have to do a better job to provide more clear labelling, education and transparency around awareness and educating consumers. Some co-operative partnership between producers and government must consider knowledge and awareness of organic standards and increase exposure of credible logos. Enhancing consumer awareness and education will generate market growth and provide consumers with the trustworthy, quality conscious, and healthy food they are looking for. The government must assist farmers to achieve the certifications at a subsidized price as the cost of the process is prohibitive to a farmer in India. It is advised that collective certification in the collective society model be encouraged to cross the cost barrier. Collective certification opens up a collaborative opportunity in learning, capacity building, and collaborative resource use.

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