

Zero Budget Farming in India: Issues and Prospects

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Abstract: The present paper examines the possibility of Zero Budget Farming in India. The paper address the issues related to organic inputs, productivity and economic possibilities of organic farming. The reasons for the following modern agriculture and reluctant towards the organic farming are discussed. The paper proposes various measures for ensuring organic inputs, creating awareness about productivity, economic viability, organic certification and subsidy, which would bring Zero Budget Farming in India at large scale.

Keywords: Organic, productivity, cost, certificate, subsidy

INTRODUCTION

The Union Budget 2019 has announced that the Government planned to give importance to Zero Budget Farming. This announcement is a good message to the environmentalist and farmers. At the same time, the concept Zero Budget Farming has raised various questions against its practical possibilities. Zero Budget Farming means without any 'credit' for cultivation and using 'costless inputs'. In India, Subash Palakar of Maharashtra introduced this concept widely. He is a Padma Sri recipient in 2016 for rendering huge service for the development of Zero Budget Farming.

Zero budget farming is not new to Indian agriculture. This method was rapidly dropped by our farmers after green revolution. Traditionally, farmers cultivated land by adopting nature based agricultural inputs at zero cost. At present, this method is called as organic farming and the recent development of this method is termed as zero budget farming at present. In India, 6.5 lakh farmers are involved in organic farming and 322 farmers engage in export of organic products. Sikkim is the only state where all the farmers involve in organic farming in the country. Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are the leading states in organic farming activity.

World of Organic Agriculture (2018) found that organic farming at world level is 57.8 million hectares wherein it is high in Australia with 22.6 million hectares. But, it is only 1.18 million hectares in India. The above statistics shows meagre level of organic farming activity through the world and particularly in India. For this, the farmers have lesser interest towards the organic farming due to its applicability in the existing economy. That is, organic farming requires exclusively nature based inputs, which is highly scarce. Besides, it creates doubt about the cost and yield of organic farming wherein the farmers hesitate to rely upon organic farming methods.

Organic Inputs

In traditional or organic method of agriculture, bullocks were used for ploughing. But, there is a drastic change in livestock/bullock rearing and as a result even marginal and small farmers adopt mechanization for ploughing their lands. Likewise, indigenous seed varieties were in used traditionally but high yielding and genetically modified seed varieties have occupied the agriculture through the country.

The organic manure used are animal waste, plant waste and treated waste. For controlling pests, neem oil, *panchaya kavya* (derived from cow dung, cow urine, milk, curd and ghee) are used in the organic method. But, the use of organic inputs in agriculture started to fall due to reduction in livestock population. Thus, the modern/chemical inputs in the markets are availed in surplus and the access towards the same is time consuming. Given this, the budget proposal of organic/zero budget farming can be mandated successfully?

Productivity

The available empirical evidences confirms that productivity of modern agriculture is high as compared to organic farming. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (2017) found that shifting from modern to organic agricultural method may lead to productivity loss in the initial three years. Thereafter, the productivity may increase only after the adoptability of lands towards organic farming. However, there is lack of confidence among the farmers in shifting from modern to organic/zero budget farming.

Cost and Yield

Organic farming involves higher cost due to non-availability of organic inputs. But, the chemical inputs are available at cheaper prices comparatively and also marketed in large scale. Majority of the studies confirm that the cost of organic farming is high wherein modern method of agriculture requires lower cost. The yield is also high in the modern method as compared to organic farming. It is because, the efficiency outcome in chemical used land is high. But, the organic inputs requires time horizon for influencing the yield. Thus, the cost

and yield widely differs between the modern and organic farming. That is, the yield is high and cost of cultivation is less in modern agriculture but the same is inverse in the case of organic farming. This result is evident from majority of the study that creates panic to shift from modern agriculture to organic farming, which questions adoptability of zero budget farming.

Organic Certification

In order to promote the organic farming, certification is given for marketing organic products. This certification promotes and attract the consumers towards the organic products by considering its quality and health aspects. Certification for organic products is given by private as well Government agencies. Large farmers and private companies make use of private agencies for organic certification. For certification, the private agencies collect Rs. 12,000 to Rs. 19,000 for travel and visiting. For report preparation and certificate Rs. 5,000 is collected respectively. In total, a minimum of Rs. 30,000 is collected for private organic certification. Besides, the amount differs according to the size of land.

But, the Government issues organic certification at free of cost in order to extent the organic farming widely in India. The Union Ministry of Agriculture introduced Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) for verifying the input use and methods thereby certifying the organic products. But, PKVY (2018) has published a report that except the states Tripura, Odisha and Karnataka, all other states have failed to use even 50 per cent of the funds allocated for certification. Besides, the Government have allocated additional fund of 44 per cent towards the organic certification programme.

Thus, the Government action towards organic farming has failed in all respects. The Government initiated PKVY for providing free organic certification so as all the farmers irrespective of their farm size may come forward. But, the farmers raise various doubt from the availability of raw materials to marketing organic products. Thus, it is important to note that there is a need for revamp of the organic farming process exclusively instead of simply proposing Zero Budget Farming.

Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

For attaining zero budget farming, the Government has to bring effective measures to prove that the method is feasible. The measures are as follows:

In organic agriculture, the prime issue is the availability of organic inputs. The major source of organic inputs are forest resources and livestock, which provides manure and substance for pest control. As we are aware that the forest resource and livestock population has drastically fallen, there is need to concentrate in this area. Therefore, the Government has to encourage and allocate more funds for afforestation programme and rearing livestock. As a result, the farmers would be availed with more organic inputs that too for zero cost. Researchers in the field of agriculture has found various strategies to attain zero budget farming. That is, rearing poultry in the crook of the agricultural lands. The waste generated by the poultry is used as the manure for the crops. Besides, the poultry gets food from the land by consuming the weeds and insects. Thus, poultry farming manages the land at free of cost as well additional income to the farmers through poultry. Similarly, fish are grown in the paddy fields where more water is used for cultivation. The fish consumes insects and weeds as food. As a whole, these modern methods in agriculture would help to attain zero budget farming to a larger extent.

In the market, the organic products are sold for higher prices as compared to other products. Since the cost of cultivation is high in organic farming, the prices of the same is high in the market. The consumers are reluctant to purchase the organic products due to higher prices in spite of its quality and health aspects. Given this, if a farmer is able to attain zero budget farming, the cost of organic farming will drastically come down and profit will be comparatively high as compared to modern agriculture. Besides, the organic products can be marketed at competitive price. This may attract the consumers in large sum and the demand for organic products will hike not only in domestic market as well international market. This information has to be disseminated among the farmers by explaining the preparation of inputs at zero cost thereby the monetary gains involved in the organic farming.

Organic certification is a huge process that creates hesitation among the rural agrarians. It is because, the time consumption, cumbersome and process that involves in organic certification. The Government has to ensure the certification process in a lighter and simple process so as to the farmers come forward for organic farming. For this, the Government has to appoint officials in each Panchyat Union thereby make the certification process simple. Making this in practice, would help the farmers to involve in organic farming in large numbers. In India, 80 per cent of the farmers are marginal and small farmers. In the initial stage of organic farming, there is a need for huge training process, awareness and subsidy for three years. As the marginal and small farmers belong to economically weaker section, there is a huge need for support in terms of guidance and financial requirements. Besides, the Government has to ensure the marketing of organic products by initiating exclusive organic markets for the benefits of producers and consumers.

Therefore, mandating the above measures may ensure the availability of organic inputs and create awareness about productivity, economic viability and organic certification. Also, financial and marketing support of the Government may assist the farmers in large numbers to achieve Zero Budget Farming in India.

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