

The Rise of Natural Farming in India: Prospects and Challenges

Sreevatsa Bhonagiri*¹, Sai Kumar Rondla ² and G. Venu Gopal³
*^{1,2 & 3} Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry, Agricultural College,
Polasa, Jagtail, Telangana.

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Introduction:

India has long been an agricultural powerhouse, with its vast agricultural land and rich biodiversity. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in natural farming as a sustainable and eco-friendly alternative to conventional farming methods. Natural farming, also known as organic farming, is a system that emphasizes the use of natural resources, biodiversity, and ecological processes to promote soil health, crop diversity, and environmental sustainability. With the Indian organic food market projected to reach \$10 billion by 2025, the prospects for natural farming in India are promising. However, there are also several challenges that need to be addressed to fully unlock the potential of natural farming. In this article, we will explore the rise of natural farming in India, its prospects, and the challenges it faces.

The concept of Natural Farming: -

Natural farming is deeply rooted in Indian tradition and is enriched with modern understanding of ecology, resource recycling, and on-farm resource optimization. It is an agroecology-based diversified farming system that integrates crops, trees, and livestock with



functional biodiversity. The key principles of natural farming include no external inputs, use of local seeds, on-farm produced microbial formulations for seed treatment and soil enrichment, cover crops and mulching for nutrient recycling, mixed cropping, management of pests through diversity and local botanical concoctions, integration of livestock, and water and moisture conservation.

The aim of natural farming is to restore soil health, maintain diversity in crop production, promote natural beneficial insects and microbes for nutrient recycling and pest control, and reduce the dependency on synthetic chemical inputs. It is a cost-effective farming practice with the potential to increase employment and rural development.

The Current Scenario of Natural Farming in India: -

Several states in India have taken up initiatives to promote natural farming. Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu are among the leading states in the adoption of natural farming practices. As of now, more than 10 lakh hectares of land in India are covered under natural farming. However, the acceptance and adoption of natural farming are still at early stages and gradually gaining acceptance among the farming community.

Prospects of Natural Farming in India: -

The prospects of natural farming in India are significant, with the organic food market expected to reach \$10 billion by 2025. The rise in consumer awareness and demand for organic and chemical-free food products presents a tremendous opportunity for farmers practicing natural farming. Natural farming not only improves soil fertility and environmental health but also offers better health benefits through higher nutrition density in food. It has the potential to generate employment and contribute to rural development. By reducing water consumption, minimizing production costs, and eliminating the application of synthetic chemicals, natural farming is a sustainable and economically viable option for farmers.

Challenges of Natural Farming in India: -

While the prospects of natural farming in India are promising, there are several challenges that need to be addressed for its widespread adoption. These challenges include:

- 1. Lack of Awareness:** One of the major challenges is the lack of awareness among farmers about the benefits and practices of natural farming. Many farmers are still unaware of the ecological and economic advantages of natural farming compared to conventional



farming methods. There is a need for awareness campaigns and training programs to educate farmers about the principles and techniques of natural farming.

2. **Marketing and Prices:** Marketability of organic produce and obtaining a premium price for the produce are essential for the success of natural farming. Farmers need assurance that their organic produce will be valued and sold at a higher price compared to conventionally produced crops. Developing effective marketing strategies and creating a robust supply chain for organic products is crucial to overcome this challenge.
3. **Shortage of Biomass in Soil:** Shortage of essential nutrients in the soil can lead to low productivity in natural farming. Biomass-rich soil is essential to improve nutrition for plant uptake. Farmers need to focus on improving soil fertility through the use of organic inputs, crop rotation, and composting techniques.
4. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** The lack of adequate infrastructure is another challenge faced by natural farmers. State governments need to formulate credible mechanisms and policies to support the implementation of natural farming practices. There is a need for the establishment of more organic certification agencies and the development of infrastructure for processing, storage, and transportation of organic produce.
5. **High Cost and Unavailability of Inputs:** The cost of organic inputs is often higher than industrially produced agrochemicals used in conventional farming. This cost factor can discourage farmers from adopting natural farming practices. Moreover, the unavailability of organic inputs and limited knowledge about the science of making organic fertilizers and pesticides through natural processes pose additional challenges.

Case Study: Natural Farming in Madhya Pradesh:

Madhya Pradesh, with the largest land coverage under organic cultivation in India, serves as a successful case study for natural farming. The state has approximately 11.61 lakh hectares of land under organic cultivation, accounting for 27% of India's total organic farming area. Major organic clusters in Madhya Pradesh include Badwani, Jhabua, Allirajpur, Chhindwara, Mandla, Dindori, Balaghat, Sheopur, Guna, Narsingpur, Katni, and Mandsour. In 2019, organic produce worth Rs 1.67 lakh crores were exported from the state.

Conclusion:



The rise of natural farming in India presents immense prospects for sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation, and rural development. With the organic food market projected to reach \$10 billion by 2025, there is a growing demand for organic and chemical-free food products. However, to fully unlock the potential of natural farming, the challenges of lack of awareness, marketing and prices, shortage of biomass in soil, inadequate infrastructure, and high cost and unavailability of inputs need to be addressed. By overcoming these challenges, India can establish itself as a leader in natural farming and contribute to a healthier and more sustainable future.

