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Organic vs. Conventional Farming: Balancing Markets, Sustainability & Livelihoods

*Savitha S
Retail Store Manager, Zuari FarmHUB Limited, Veppanapalli, Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu-635115, India
*Corresponding Author's email: savitha18.info@gmail.com

Organic farming growing crops and rearing livestock without synthetic chemicals is often viewed through lenses of health, sustainability, and ethics. Conventional farming prioritizes high yield and efficiency via synthetic nutrients and pesticides. Both systems have merits and limitations. This article explores current market trends, scientific comparisons, and human stories behind the fields.

Global Market Trends & Growth:

Region	Market Size 2022-23	CAGR (2025–2030)
Global Organic Food	USD 220B (2022)	approx. 10–15 %
India Organic Farming	USD 5.56 B (2024)	~10.4 % (to 2033)

- The global organic food market reached about **USD 220 billion in 2022**, projected to escalate toward **USD 1.05 trillion by 2034**.
- India's organic farming market was valued at **USD 5.56 billion in 2024**, projected to reach **USD 13.48 billion by 2033** at about **10.4 % CAGR**.

Key factors:

- Rising health awareness, environmental stewardship, and demand for chemical-free produce.
- Technological integration enhancing traceability and efficiency.
- Government support via subsidies, certification programs, and FPO initiatives.

Yield & Scientific Comparisons:

Farming System	Yield Comparison	Environmental Footprint
Conventional	Baseline (100 %)	Higher GHG & energy use
Organic	~10–20 % lower average	40–45 % less energy, lower emissions

- A 40-year Rodale trial reported that after a transitional period, organic systems achieved **competitive yields**, **3–6 times the profit**, **40 % higher yields during droughts**, **45 % less energy use**, and **40 % fewer carbon emissions**.

Scientific facts:

- Organic farming supports higher biodiversity, healthier soil structure, and reduced water pollution.
- Conventional systems maintain higher short-term yield per hectare, especially for export-focused monocultures.

Challenges and Limitations

Cost & Certification:

- Organic production requires more labour and longer conversion periods.
- Certification (like NPOP in India) is costly and complex. PGS (Participatory Guarantee System) offers a domestic, low-cost alternative.

Yield Gaps & Land Pressure

- Lower yields can pressure expansion into forests or uncultivated land, threatening biodiversity.

Supply Chain Issues:

- Limited cold chains, fragmented marketing, and inconsistent quality reduce profitability in many regions.

Human Stories from the Field

Savita's Transition – Madhya Pradesh, India Savita shifted from conventional wheat to organic millet and pulses after training under PKVY. "No more burning eyes or headaches from chemical sprays," she says. Her income has stabilized, and market prices are favorable.

Jeremy Brown – Twin Birch Dairy, New York, USA Jeremy uses sustainable practices without formal organic certification. "The cows are healthy and so is the milk," he says. Certification costs and red tape deterred him from going official.

Rodale Farm Trials – North America Farmers part of the Rodale Institute's long-term trials reported up to **6 times higher profit** on organic systems, particularly during drought years.

Toward a Balanced Future

Regenerative and Hybrid Systems:

- Integrating best practices from both worlds cover cropping, reduced tillage, composting, and digital monitoring can maximize output while minimizing harm.

Policy Recommendations:

- Encourage PGS certification among smallholders.
- Subsidize bio-inputs and invest in organic-specific cold storage.
- Promote farmer-led innovation and marketing cooperatives.

Conclusion

Organic and conventional agriculture are not enemies but alternatives shaped by local conditions, knowledge systems, and markets. A future of farming lies in **hybrid, adaptive models** that merge **ecological wisdom** with **technological innovation**.

As Savita, Jeremy, and countless others have shown farming sustainably is not only viable but increasingly vital.

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