



## **Popular Article**

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# **Organic Farming vs. Conventional Farming: Agronomic Perspectives**

**Dr. Monika Vijay Kamble**

Assistant Professor, Department of Agronomy, Yashwantrao Chavan Government College of Agriculture, Karad.

**Corresponding author email:** [monikamble1994@gmail.com](mailto:monikamble1994@gmail.com)

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### *Abstract*

Agriculture has undergone profound changes within the last century mainly as a result of advancements in technology, artificial fertilizers, pesticides, mechanical innovations, and improvements in crop strains. These changes led to higher crop yields and met the needs of the fast-growing human population. However, issues such as land degradation, depletion of soils, reduction in biodiversity, and adverse impacts of intensive farming practices on human health have revived interests in sustainability. Organic agriculture has developed as a sustainable agriculture practice aimed at achieving ecological balance, biodiversity, and utilization of natural inputs. Conventional agriculture, on the other hand, uses intensive methods and artificial agro-chemicals to increase productivity. Each type of agricultural practice has its own strengths and weaknesses. The current paper aims to evaluate organic and conventional agricultural practices through an agronomic analysis. Key issues to be considered include soil fertility and nutrient management, pest and disease management, productivity, sustainability, economic considerations, and environmental impact.

**Keywords:** Organic farming, conventional farming, crop productivity, nutrient management, integrated farming

### **Introduction**

Agriculture is a major contributor to food security and rural development all over the world. The last few decades have witnessed great advances in agriculture owing to rising food demand, increased population, and technological developments. Conventional agriculture, sometimes called intensive agriculture or modern agriculture, gained dominance after the Green Revolution due to its capability of attaining maximum crop productivity using synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation, and advanced varieties of crops.

Despite the high agricultural output obtained from conventional agriculture, the harmful effects of chemicals have become more apparent in recent years. Among these adverse

effects, we can mention soil degradation, groundwater pollution, pesticide residues, emission of greenhouses gases, and biodiversity decline, all which constitute major environmental issues in intensive agriculture. Pesticide resistance and soil organic matter decline further cast doubt on the sustainability of chemically based farming systems.

Organic agriculture emerged as an alternative system of agriculture based on ecology, nutrient cycling, and minimal usage of chemicals. Organics are characterized by a concern for healthy soil, crop diversity, organic fertilizers, biological control of pests, and conservation of the environment. The market demand for organic products has risen greatly in recent years due to health and safety considerations.

### **Principles of Organic and Conventional Farming**

#### **Organic Farming**

Organic farming utilizes ecological/biological principles to ensure healthy soils and sustainability in the environment. Organic farming does not use any artificial fertilizers, pesticides, genetically engineered seeds, and growth hormones.

Main principles of organic farming include:

- Maintaining the health of the soil with the help of organic manures
- Rotations in crops
- Sustainable nutrient cycling
- Biological methods for pests and diseases control
- Biodiversity conservation

Organic farming makes extensive use of farm yard manure, composts, green manures, crop residue, biofertilizers, and biological control agents.

#### **Conventional Agriculture**

Conventional agriculture is largely centered on attaining high production levels using intensive inputs and technology.

Salient features of conventional agriculture are:

- Use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides
- Machinery used for farming
- High-yielding varieties of crops
- Monoculture production techniques
- Extensive irrigation processes

Conventional agriculture seeks quick and extensive agricultural production.

## **Soil Fertility and Soil Health**

### **Organic Farming and Soil Health**

Another major advantage of organic farming is that it helps improve soil fertility. Organic inputs like compost, farm yard manure, and agricultural wastes help build soil quality by improving soil structure, water-holding ability, air circulation, and biological processes.

Some of the advantages of long-term organic management practices include:

- High soil organic carbon content
- Microbial diversity
- Nutrient cycles
- Soil aggregation

Good quality soil helps ensure sustainable cultivation and helps make crops more resistant to drought and erosion. Scientific research indicates that soils under organic management usually exhibit higher biological processes than those under conventional management systems.

Organic farming is known to stimulate beneficial soil microbes including nitrogen-fixing bacteria and mycorrhizae, which are responsible for increasing nutrient uptake and growth of plants.

### **Conventional Farming and Soil Fertility**

The conventional farming practice offers the supply of nutrients instantly by the use of artificial fertilizers. These fertilizers are used accurately to ensure maximum production.

Nevertheless, the continued use of chemical fertilizers without the addition of sufficient organic materials might result in adverse impacts on soil characteristics.

Some issues common with intensive conventional farming are:

- The loss of soil organic matter
- Soil compaction
- Reduced soil microorganism diversity
- Imbalanced nutrient levels
- High soil acidity/salinity levels

Soil degradation is an issue of concern in intensive farming practices due to its effects on future agricultural output.

## **Nutrient Management**

### **Nutrient Flow in Organic Farming**

The flow of nutrients in organic farming is largely based on natural sources. The nutrients are gradually made available due to their breakdown by decomposers and microorganisms.

Important sources of nutrients are:

- Compost
- Farmyard manure
- Vermicompost
- Green manure
- Biofertilizers

The gradual process of nutrient supply ensures effective retention and minimum loss. But at times the supply of nutrients can be inadequate when the crops need more.

## Nutrient Management in Conventional Agriculture

Chemical fertilizers are used in conventional agriculture to supply plants with easily available nutrients.

Pros are:

- Availability of nutrients
- Quick effect on crops
- Easy handling
- Higher yield potential

However, misuse of fertilizers can result in nitrate leaching, water contamination, and increased carbon footprint. The problem of conventional agriculture is to enhance fertilizer efficiency without increasing environmental losses.

## Pest and Disease Management

### Pest Control in Organic Agriculture

Organic agriculture incorporates preventive and ecological methods for managing pests and diseases.

The following are some examples:

- Crop rotation
- Biological controls
- Plant-derived pesticides
- Pesticide-resistant plants
- Habitat manipulation

Beneficial insects, biopesticides, and ecological interactions are major components of organic pest control strategies. Despite the effectiveness of organic methods in reducing environmental pollution, pest management might not be as successful during outbreaks.

### Conventional Pest Control Methods

In conventional farming, there is high use of artificial pesticides for fast and effective control of pests.

Their benefits include:

- Fast response to pests
- Wide application
- Minimized crop losses

Nevertheless, misuse of pesticides can result in:

- Development of pest resistance
- Residue buildup
- Environmental contamination
- Decline of pollinators

### **Performance of Crop Productivity and Yields**

The performance of crop productivity is arguably the most controversial area of comparison between organic and conventional farming practices.

Higher yields are achieved through conventional farming as a result of:

- Availability of high nutrients
- Pest management
- Efficient irrigation
- Cultivation of high-yield crops

Conversely, there is usually a relatively poor performance regarding yields for organic farming. This could be during the period of transition or where the amount of nutrients is limited.

Nevertheless, differences in yield are dependent on the specific crop, climatic conditions, and other factors such as soil conditions and management strategies adopted. For instance, organic farming may have superior yields compared to conventional farming under conditions of drought or where the inputs are minimal.

### **Towards Integrated and Sustainable Farming**

The way forward in the future of agriculture may not lie in opting for either organic or conventional methods of farming but instead in combining the best aspects of each of them. Some examples are: Integrated Nutrient Management, Integrated Pest Management, Conservation Farming, Precision Farming, and Climate-Smart Agriculture, among others. The adoption of balanced agricultural practices that combine both science and nature may be the best option.

### **Conclusion**

The two farming approaches are unique in their agronomical strengths and weaknesses. On one hand, conventional farming has been crucial in boosting the world's food supply due to the heavy reliance on inputs and innovations. On the other hand, environmental sustainability

issues raised by intensive agriculture have made it increasingly essential to find sustainable options. Organic farming is advantageous because of its potential benefits to the environment, soil, and biodiversity despite the existing challenges associated with low productivity. In the agronomical context, there is no approach which would provide a comprehensive solution to today's agricultural challenges. A sustainable approach should incorporate both the strengths of organic and conventional farming approaches. The future of farming involves conserving resources, protecting the environment, climate-proofing farms and improving soil quality while ensuring food security for the ever-growing population.

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