



## **A Study of Scope and Limitations for Organic Farming in Maharashtra State**

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### **Introduction:**

Organic farming is an agricultural system that prioritizes sustainability, soil health, and ecological balance, avoiding synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). It emphasizes natural processes, such as crop rotation, composting, and biological pest control, to enhance soil fertility and manage pests. Organic farming promotes biodiversity by integrating diverse crops and fostering habitats for beneficial organisms. It aims to produce safe, nutritious food while minimizing environmental impact, reducing chemical runoff, and conserving water resources. This method aligns with traditional farming practices, enhancing resilience against climate change and fostering local ecosystems. Despite higher labor costs and lower yields in some cases, its long-term benefits include improved soil quality and reduced ecological footprint, making it a viable model for sustainable agriculture.

### **Initiatives for Organic Farming in Maharashtra State:**

#### ***Maharashtra Organic Farming Policy (2013)***

Launched in January 2013, this policy promotes organic farming as an integrated approach using local natural resources. It aims to enhance soil fertility, certify organic produce, and promote marketing. The policy rejects chemical use to ensure sustainable agriculture.

#### ***Vidarbha Organic Farming Initiative***

Started in 2020, this initiative enrolled 9,600 farmers across six Vidarbha districts to combat agrarian distress. It has shown success by reducing suicides and making farming remunerative, with plans to expand statewide. The project emphasizes chemical-free practices and collective efforts.

#### ***Natural Farming Target (2025)***

Maharashtra aims to bring 25 lakh hectares under natural farming by 2025, up from 9.5 lakh hectares. Initiated in 2016-17, it aligns with national goals to promote sustainable practices. The state supports farmers with training and resources.

***Art of Living Collaboration***

In 2023, Maharashtra signed an MOU with Art of Living to promote natural farming across 13 lakh hectares. The initiative includes training farmers in chemical-free techniques. It aims to restore agricultural sustainability and improve farmer livelihoods.

***Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation (MOFF)***

MOFF unites 4 million organic farmers to promote low-cost, sustainable practices using crop residues and fermented manure. It standardizes best practices adaptable to local needs. The federation focuses on reducing costs and ensuring consumer health.

***Pune's Organic Farming Hub***

Pune contributes 6,800 hectares to organic farming, with plans to reach 8,000 hectares. The Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) supports startups and farm-to-mouth supply chains. Post-Covid health awareness has boosted demand for organic produce.

***Organic Farmers Markets***

The state encourages organic farmers' markets in cities to connect farmers directly with consumers. These markets provide a platform for selling certified organic produce. This initiative enhances market access and ensures fair prices.

***Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)***

Under PKVY, Maharashtra promotes organic farming through cluster-based approaches and PGS certification. Farmers receive financial assistance and organic inputs. The scheme supports soil health and sustainable practices.

***Tribal Community Engagement***

Tribal regions, with 1.05 crore tribal population, drive 22% of Maharashtra's organic farming area. Cooperatives and digital platforms like "Brand Tribes" connect tribal farmers to markets. Policies emphasize culturally sensitive, community-led approaches.

***Subhash Palekar Natural Farming (SPNF)***

SPNF promotes zero-budget natural farming using on-farm biomass and cow-based inputs. It reduces external input costs and enhances soil fertility. The state supports SPNF under the Prakritik Kheti Khushal scheme.



### **Climatic, cultural and social suitability for organic farming in Maharashtra state**

Maharashtra's diverse climate, ranging from semi-arid to tropical wet, supports organic farming by enabling year-round cultivation of crops like millets, pulses, and fruits, suited to local conditions. The state's varied topography, including fertile Deccan plateau soils and coastal regions, favors organic practices like crop rotation and intercropping, enhancing soil health. Monsoon-dependent agriculture benefits from organic methods that improve water retention and reduce soil erosion. Tribal communities, comprising 9.4% of the population, practice low-input, nature-based farming, making organic adoption seamless. Socially, growing urban demand for chemical-free produce, especially in cities like Pune and Mumbai, drives organic markets. Awareness of health and environmental concerns post-Covid has boosted consumer support for organic products. The state's strong cooperative networks and farmer collectives, like the Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation, facilitate knowledge sharing and resource access. Government initiatives, such as the 2013 Organic Farming Policy, provide training and certification, fostering social acceptance. However, challenges like high initial costs and labor demands require continued support. Maharashtra's 25 lakh hectares under natural farming by 2025 reflect its climatic and social suitability. Overall, Maharashtra's climate, cultural roots, and social trends create a conducive environment for organic farming growth.

### **Benefits of Organic Farming in Maharashtra**

#### **Enhanced Soil Fertility**

Organic farming in Maharashtra promotes the use of compost, vermiculture, and crop rotation, improving soil structure and nutrient content. These practices reduce soil degradation, common in the state's semi-arid regions. Healthier soils support sustainable crop yields over time. This ensures long-term agricultural productivity for farmers.

#### **Environmental Sustainability**

By avoiding synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, organic farming reduces chemical runoff into Maharashtra's rivers like Godavari and Krishna. It conserves water through better soil moisture retention, crucial in drought-prone areas. Biodiversity is enhanced by fostering habitats for pollinators and beneficial insects. This aligns with the state's goal of ecological balance.

**Improved Public Health**

Organic produce, free from harmful chemical residues, meets growing urban demand in cities like Pune and Mumbai. This reduces health risks linked to pesticide exposure, addressing post-Covid health consciousness. Consumers benefit from nutrient-rich, safe food options. Local markets further promote access to healthy produce.

**Economic Benefits for Farmers**

Organic farming reduces input costs by using on-farm resources like cow dung and crop residues. Farmers gain premium prices through organic certification and direct market access. Initiatives like farmers' markets in Maharashtra boost income stability. This supports rural economies and reduces agrarian distress.

**Climate Resilience**

Organic practices, such as mulching and intercropping, enhance soil's ability to withstand Maharashtra's erratic monsoons and droughts. These methods improve water retention and reduce crop failure risks. Farmers in regions like Vidarbha benefit from more resilient farming systems. This strengthens agriculture against climate change impacts.

**Support for Tribal Communities**

Maharashtra's tribal regions, covering 22% of organic farmland, benefit from low-input organic practices that align with traditional methods. These communities gain economic opportunities through cooperatives and digital platforms like "Brand Tribes." Organic farming preserves their cultural heritage and promotes sustainable livelihoods. It empowers marginalized groups economically and socially.

**Biodiversity Conservation**

Organic farming encourages diverse cropping systems, preserving Maharashtra's native seeds and plant varieties. It supports ecosystems by reducing monoculture and chemical use, fostering beneficial insects and wildlife. This is vital in biodiversity-rich regions like the Western Ghats. It contributes to long-term ecological stability and resilience.

**Conclusion:**

Organic farming in Maharashtra holds immense scope due to its diverse climate, supporting year-round cultivation of organic crops like millets and fruits. The state's 25 lakh hectares targeted for natural farming by 2025, backed by policies like the 2013 Organic Farming Policy,



reflect strong governmental support. Cultural alignment with traditional practices and growing urban demand in cities like Pune and Mumbai enhance market potential. Tribal communities, contributing 22% of organic farmland, bolster the sector's growth through low-input methods. Initiatives like the Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation and farmers' markets improve access and economic viability. However, limitations include high initial costs and labor-intensive practices, challenging smallholder farmers. Limited awareness and access to certification hinder widespread adoption. Infrastructure gaps in rural areas restrict market connectivity. Despite these challenges, Maharashtra's conducive agro-climatic conditions and social support create a promising future for organic farming with sustained investment and education.

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