



ORGANIC FENUGREEK: THE NICHE MARKET MODEL OF A FARMER IN THE KOLHAPUR DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA

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Organic farming using green manures, compost, biological pest control, and crop rotation with no agricultural chemicals has several benefits like improving soil health and, ensuring biodiversity along with maintaining a toxic free environment. Researches show that increasing awareness of environment and human health motivated many consumers to opt for organic food produces (Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008; Paul and Rana, 2012) and they are willing to pay a premium price for good quality organic food products (Nandi, et al., 2017). As a result, new marketing

opportunities opened up for the organic food producers and that expanded the organic markets beyond the local farmers market to grocery store and restaurants in many countries. The present concerns over the environment, human and animal health suggest that demand for organic food will increase further. Moreover, organic food products may have more potential to get consistent and reasonably higher prices, making it a niche that a developing economy can withstand. In due course, trustworthy organic products market themselves.



In India, many farmers of urban and suburban areas have embraced a new paradigm that focuses custom-fit agricultural products as a strategy of adaptation for survival. In other words, it is a kind of farming as per the need of the city folks. Farmers are developing niche market focusing on specific product with the aim of satisfying the target consumers. The marketing model adopted by some farmers growing organic fenugreek in the Kolhapur district of Maharashtra is a good example for success of niche markets.

NICHE MARKET

A niche market is a small market segment in which a specific product is focused with aim to satisfy specific market needs, product quality, definite price range and demographics that it intends to target. This market has its own unique needs, preferences, or identity that makes it different from the market at large. For example, within a vegetable market of particular location, groups of consumers exist having discerning needs and preferences for different type of vegetables. Targeting such segment makes it possible for farm businesses to build their identity. Owing to tailor-made product producer face less competition, items in this niche market are difficult to find in general products.

For a consumer niche market provides products and services they need and desire. On the other hand it has limited growth because there is a small group of customers to buy products.

ORGANIC FENUGREEK NICHE MARKET MODEL

Mr. Sudhir Patil is a farmer from the Kolhapur district (Maharashtra) and he practices agriculture in a 5 acre ancestral land located on the outskirts of Jaysingpur city of the district. The livelihood of his five member family entirely depends on that 5 acres farmland. The farmer started to practice organic farming eight years back and he use decomposed organic manure, vermicompost, and green manures as nutrient inputs in farmland. As a soil health management technique he practices crop rotations, intercropping and growing of cover crops in his 5 acres land.

The farmer started vegetable cultivation few years back under the guidance of D. Y. Patil Education Society's Krishi Vigyan Kendra Kolhapur-I started supplying green leafy vegetables in the outskirts and neighboring area. However, he faced severe income loss as he received low price to his vegetables compared to the market price. However, the sizeable experience and skills in cultivation encouraged the farmer to cultivate need based vegetables. He identified fenugreek as the potential leafy vegetable that has a year-round demand in the market and can be profitably grown in his organic farmland (Figure 1 and 2).



Fig. 1. Farmer explain his farming technique to ICAR and KVK Experts



Fig. 2. A view of the fenugreek field of the farmer (Mr. Patil)



Mr. Patil allocated 20 R (0.5 acre) land for year-round cultivation of fenugreek and rest of the farmland for growing sugarcane, soybean, groundnut and sorghum. However, the fenugreek plots used to shift in every two years and use for growing sugarcane crop. After the harvest of cane the farmer incorporate all biomass of sugarcane plants into the soil. He divides the 0.5 acre (2000 square meter) land into four units of 500 m² each. Beds for growing fenugreek used to prepare by adding vermi-composts and other organic inputs using a self-developed tools, so as to cause minimum disturbance to the top soil layer (Figure 3). One fenugreek crop cycle (sowing to harvesting) complete in 35 to 40 days. Hence, he planned sowing of fenugreek in different plots in such a way that he gets 200-250 bunches of fenugreek leaves everyday for the market throughout the year.

The pests and diseases management of the crop has undertaken using *dashparni ark* (a natural plant extract prepared locally by soaking specific quantities of ten different leaves like *Azadiracta indica*, *Lantana camera*, *Pongamia pinnata*, *Nerium oleander*, *Jatropha curcas*, *Tinospora cordifolia*, *Annona reticulate*, *Calotropis gigantean*, *Carica papaya*, and *Vitex negundo* in water mixed with cow dung and cow urine for a period of thirty days), *karanj ark* (a natural plant extract prepared locally from the extract of *Pongamia pinnata* leaves), vermiwash and other organic products. As a plant protection measure farmer spray diluted *karanj ark* (250 ml in 15 liters of water) or *dashparni ark* (1 litre in 15 liters of

water) that can effectively control diseases like powdery mildew and cercospora leaf spot. All these practices helped him to lower the cost of cultivation.



Figure 3. Locally developed tools by the farmer for incorporation of organic manures into the soil

Harvesting used to be carried out either in the morning or late evening hours. In order to make fenugreek leaves dark green in color amid good quality produce farmer spray vermiwash eight days prior to harvesting. In one harvest (one slot) farmer gets nearly 6000 bunches from twenty R size plots and he used to harvest fenugreek leaves approximately eight times (eight slots) in one year. Economics of fenugreek farming is given in table 1).

Table 1. Economics of fenugreek cultivation (20R Size Plot)

Categories	One slot	Eight slots (one year)
Bunches (Nos.)	6000	48000
Average rate / bunch (₹)	9.00	9.00
Gross income (₹)	54,000.00	4,32,000.00
Cost of cultivation (₹)	20,650.00	1,65,200.00
Net income (₹)	33,350.00	2,66,800.00

The quality of fenugreek leaves along with the farmer's consistency and punctuality in supplying the material helped him to gain trust of consumers and develop his own niche market for organic fenugreek leaves in Jaisingpur area. That in turn helped him to increase his sale figure goes up to 48,000 bunches of fenugreek and earn an annual net income of around Rs. 2.67 lakh from organic fenugreek cultivation in just 0.5 acre of land. He believes that cultivation of organic vegetable is cost effective and sustainable only when farmer sell organic vegetables directly to consumer.



CONCLUSION

Small land holdings have bright scope in developing organic niche markets, as it receives fair price with consistent demand and also is extremely cost-effective if managed efficiently. However maintaining quality of product needs high skill and unswerving hard work. The success also depends on producers' resources, land size, proximity to populations (consumers), etc. Entire agriculture cannot serve on niche markets; however few portions of agricultural lands can be available for developing organic niche markets to take advantage of local urban markets and the increased demand for traditional foods. In coming days, agricultural sustainability is going to take massive shape in all policy related matters due to the growing influence of climate change impacts. It would call for the promotion of nature friendly approaches of farming such as organic farming wherein application of chemical inputs would be reduced. Under these scenarios, creation of niche markets for organic farm products would be an appropriate approach to support small and marginal farmers. The case of Mr. Patil, a contact farmer of KVK

Kolhapur-I have already demonstrated the benefits of systematic organic farming which can be replicated in the area.

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