

Consumer Awareness and Perception for Organic Food Products – An Empirical Study in Karnataka State

Biraj Ameet Anil

Assistant Professor, Seshadripuram Institute of Management Studies, Bangalore, India

Abstract

Food quality and safety are gaining importance and many consumers believe that organic foods are safer, taste better, and provide better nutritional quality than conventionally grown food products. Organic food products have credence attributes, which are difficult to find before or after the use of the product. Organic food production and marketing is encouraged by several state Governments and central Government in India. Karnataka state Government is pioneer in encouraging organic farming as they were the first one to bring organic food product policy in 2004. All these factors need to make the awareness level of people in Karnataka to be at higher level and people to have positive perception about organic food products. An empirical research is undertaken to know the awareness level and perception of the people in Karnataka state about organic food products, by collecting the opinion of the customer through structured questionnaire. Sample size for the study is 1072; chi-square and t-test are used for the analysis purpose. From the study it became clear that people have heard about organic food products but their awareness level is very low. It was also found that there is a relationship between education and occupation to awareness level of organic food products. Government has to take initiation to build trust among the farmer, vendors and customer in connection with organic food product. Government also needs to take measures to enhance the awareness level among the people about organic food products.

KEYWORDS : Organic food product, credence attributes, awareness level, Karnataka Government

INTRODUCTION: ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS

Food is an important survival need for humans and everyone expect the food they consume need to be quality and adulteration free. Food quality and safety are gaining importance because of food product related scandals (Naspelli & Zanoli, 2006, p.2). Many consumers believe that organic foods are safer, taste better, and provide better nutritional quality than conventionally grown food products (Huang & Lin, 2007). It is difficult to make distinguish between organic food products and conventional food product, unless they are labeled by certifying agency or company. Organic products are credence goods; the information about the nature of the product is asymmetric because in most cases, consumers do not know whether a product is organic unless they are told (Giannakas, 2002). In case of search goods the buyers are able to find evidence of the attributes even prior to the purchase, whereas experience goods verification of attributes can only be experienced after the purchase. Credence attributes are products and service characteristics that cannot be detected by the buyer under ordinary circumstances, neither before nor after the buying process (Achilleas and Anastasios, 2008, p.830).

Frauds and mislabeling of a product can be inspected only by external organizations and likelihood of that happening depends upon the amount of monitoring in the respective product category and whether the company is famous enough for news paper (Achilleas et.al,2008,p.830). In India the terminology of organic food product is loosely used by the people, as there are no strict rules for monitoring the activities happening in the field of organic food product. Lower level of awareness and involvement by the consumer for food product purchase could be another reason.

Organic food products are those, which are produced as per the standards of organic farming. Organic farming is self-regulated farming, as per the broad standard given by certifying agencies. Organic products are grown under a system of agriculture without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides with an environmentally and socially responsible approach. This method of farming was existed in India from ages, before chemical farming was introduced to Indian farmers. Same age-old traditional farming methods can be adopted in organic farming but under the broad framework given by the certifying agencies.

In European countries, USA and other developed countries, government defined the standards in order to market food product as organic. The Government of India has implemented the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP). Under the NPOP several activities are happening viz., accreditation for certification Bodies, standards are getting set for organic production, promotion of organic farming etc. USDA has recognized NPOP conformity assessment procedures of accreditation as equivalent to that of US. With these recognitions, Indian organic products duly certified by the accredited certification bodies of India are accepted by the importing countries. Organic agriculture used to be a way of life in India and we need to relearn the old farm practices in a modern agriculture setting.

1.1 Organic farming : India and Karnataka State

Organic farming is gaining momentum and great response all over the world, as it is the means to address several food self reliance, rural development and environmental safety. The approach of organic farming is towards sustainable use of bio-diversity, in terms of both agriculture's contribution to biodiversity and biodiversity's contribution to agriculture. In India, most of the farmers were not even aware about chemical farming or using of fertilisers, until the green revolution took place in 1960's. Holistic, sustainable agriculture was adopted prior to green revolution. Growing population requirement for food and achieving self sufficiency in food, motivated policy makers to move towards organic farming in early 60's. By adopting chemical farming, high yield variety and intensive agricultural practices India could manage to achieve self sufficiency in food production but it resulted in several collateral damages.

Impact on biodiversity, environment, human and animal health is the visible problems of adopting chemical farming. Profits to the farmers from chemical farming have gone down over a period due to fall in yield, not getting a good price for good and also due to high cost of farming. Now, the research community, Government, scientists and academicians has already realized the importance of organic farming. Slowly, farmers'

community and consumers are shifting for organic farming and organic food product consumption respectively. All these reasons have made Government of India and many State Governments to promote organic farming in large scale. India is an agrarian economy, and the sustainable development of India depends upon the flourishing of agriculture. In this connection, Government of India has started National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), standards and accreditation during 2000 and National Organic logo " India Organic" has been created. The Government of Karnataka has also initiated action to promote organic farming in the State and intends to formulate policies related to its promotion.

In this direction, Karnataka state is not lagging behind. Karnataka state is the 1st State Government in India to formulate Organic Farming Policy way back in 2004 and revised organic farming policy in 2017. Several promotional programmes were adopted by the Karnataka State Government, which resulted in nearly one lakh hectares under certified organic cultivation. Karnataka state stands in 5th positin in the country in terms of total cultivated area under organic certification at 93,963 as on March 2016 (Organic farming Policy, 2017). Karnataka state is 3rd in the country in terms of total certified production at 2,82,633 tons. Research stations of all Karnataka State Agricultural Universities have developed Model Organic farms. Karnataka State Organic Certification Agency(KSOCA) established to provide reliable & efficient certification services at affordable fee. 14 Regional Federations of Organic Farmers Associations to facilitate value addition, processing and marketing. Regular Trade Fairs & exhibitions in Organics and Millets for awareness creation, promotion and to establish linkages is done by the Karnataka state Government. National trade fair for promoting organics and millets were done by the state government. By having more than 128 organic & millet marketers, traders, exporters Karnataka is doing very good in terms of developing organic food product market. Capital city of Karnataka, Bangalore is considered as organic & millet hub of India with over 400 exclusive organic & millet outlets, more than 400 corporate retail outlets and around 20 exclusive organic/millet restaurants. All these activities indicates that awareness among the people about organic food products in Karnataka need to be very good.

1.2 Awareness and perception of people for organic food products

Consumer buying behavior is the decision making process of the consumer at the marketplace, when purchasing a product or service. Consumer decision making is influenced by consumer attitude, motivation, learning, perception and beliefs (Kotler, 2001, pp.171-175). Consumer involvement is one of the important individual determinants of consumer buying behavior(Loudon & Bitta,2002, p.342). Consumer involvement depends on three main properties viz., intensity, direction and level of persistence. Intensity refers to the degree of involvement that the consumer experiences, which is either high or low. Direction refers to the focus or target of involvement in this study it is organic food product. Focus of the person is influenced by the personal factors, stimulus (product), situation and moderating factors such as ability to process and opportunity to process. Personal factors mean personal need, values, experiences and interest, which determines the persons interest for the product or services under

consideration. Persistency refers to the length of the time the consumer remains in a state of involvement (Loudon,2002,pp 341-344).

Many products are bought under conditions of low involvement and the absence of significant brand difference and under such circumstance consumer buys the product out of habit not strong brand loyalty (Kotler, 2001, p.177). Involvement of consumer is relatively low for purchasing of food products especially agriculture based food products. Moderating variables such as awareness and knowledge about organic food product act as crucial factor in determining in consumer buying behavior for organic food products. According to Chartrand (2005) consumer's awareness (either consciously or unconsciously) precedes the control, modification, elimination and change in human behaviors and decisions. Thus, effective consumer behavior can only be materialized through awareness. Therefore, to know the people awareness about organic food products an empirical research is undertaken in Karnataka state.

1. METHODOLOGY

The study is undertaken to know the awareness and perception of the people in Karnataka state about organic food products. In this connection a structured questionnaire was framed to collect the information from the respondents. Simple random sampling technique is adopted for the study. In total 1102 respondents were approached for data collection and among them 1078 valid response was received for the study.

2.1 Measurement

The independent and dependent variables were measured by using simple nominal scale through converting qualitative data into quantitative form by assigning values '1' and '0' to the favorable and non-favorable responses for the questions. There are two sections in the questionnaire comprises of demographics, consumer awareness and perception related questions. Consumer awareness level were measured in three parts viz., consumer awareness of organic food product, Organic farming and aspects related to organic food product and finally the total awareness measured by 18 items scale.

2. PROFILE OF THE CUSTOMER

A customer profile is categorizing the customer on the basis of certain common characteristics viz. gender, age, marital status, education qualification, occupation, monthly income, monthly spending etc. Customers are typically refer to someone, who regularly purchased from a particular store or company and consumer is the one, who engage in evaluation, acquiring, using, or disposing of goods and services (Loudon,2002,pp 341-344). **Consumer** is the one who consumes the goods, i.e. the user of the good and customer is the one, who buys the goods or commodity and pays the price for it. Customer, when purchase the goods for self consumption then he can be called as consumer as well. In this research focus is on ultimate consumer, who purchase for the purpose of individual or household consumption (Loudon,2002,pp 341-344). Customer and consumer terms are used interchangeably in the study, by keeping focus on ultimate consumer.

Table 1 : Profile and frequency of buying organic food products

Sr.No.	General Information	Particulars	No. of respond	%	Chi-Square	Significance
1	Place	Bangalore City	390	36.2	23.385	0.054
		Other City	415	38.5		
		Other Places	273	25.3		
		Total	1078	100		
2	Gender	Male	609	56.5	9.365	0.807
		Female	469	43.5		
		Total	1078	100.0		
3	Marital Status	Married	704	65.3	37.128	0.116
		Single	362	33.6		
		Other	12	1.1		
		Total	1078	100.0		
4	Education	Below 12th	286	26.5	93.222	0.0333
		Degree	410	38.0		
		Master Degree	281	26.1		
		Diploma	78	7.2		
		Professional	16	1.5		
		Others	7	0.6		
		Total	1078	100.0		
5	Occupation	Home maker	188	17.4	178.009	0.000,
		Employee	358	33.2		
		Professional	111	10.3		
		Business	140	13.0		
		Student	156	14.5		
		Retired	19	1.8		
		Agriculturist	66	6.1		
		Other	40	3.7		
		Total	1078	100.0		
6	Monthly Income	<Rs.20,000	390	36.2	77.498	0.252
		Rs.20,001- Rs.40,000	303	28.1		
		Rs.40,001- Rs.60,000	144	13.4		
		Rs.60,001- Rs.80,000	96	8.9		
		Rs.80,001- Rs.1,00,000	78	7.2		

		Rs.1,00,001 & more	67	6.2		
		Total	1078	100.0		
7	Heard OFP	Yes	998	92.6		
		No	80	7.4	279.383	0.000,

Most of the respondents were from Bangalore city and having basic qualification as degree. Nearly 33 percent of the respondents were employed and 36 percent of the respondents have stated to that their income is less than Rs.20,000. The above table clearly indicates that there is a relationship between awareness level and education & occupation of the respondents.

3. AWARENESS OF CUSTOMER

Awareness and knowledge of the customer about organic food product has influence on their decision making. There are no standard measures for testing the awareness level of the customer for organic food products. The level of awareness was expressed as the degree to which the customer has information relating to organic food products, organic farming and other issues/aspects relating to organic food products. Awareness is the conscious or unconscious response to the situation and it should not be confused with the perception of the respondents. Awareness and perception are very closely related as people make perception on the basis of existing knowledge and awareness. New knowledge or information influences the perception of the people, which may either reinforce the existing perception or completely change it. Here, an attempt is made to know the people awareness level as well as perception about organic food product by asking the question indirectly. Respondents were not asked to answer dichotomous question; instead they were asked to make multiple choices relating to organic food products, organic farming and various aspects relating to organic food product.

Choices made by the respondent were coded as '1' and '0' respectively for the selected option and ignored option. Multiple choices given to the respondents included both facts and perceptions relating to organic farming and organic food products. In case the options chosen by the respondents happen to be perceptions, then it was not considered for the count for awareness rather it was considered as count for perception. Perceptions were segregated as positive or negative.

4.1 Awareness on Organic food Products

An image a person carries about a product or service is determined by his awareness and perception. A basic question was asked to the respondents to know, whether they have heard about organic food products or not. Positive response to this question explains the success of promotional activities undertaken by the organizations involved in promoting organic food products. Favorable response given by the respondent was considered as '1' and it was taken into consideration for the total level of awareness.

There were 11 options given to the respondents to choose among the alternative by asking question, which options comes to their mind ; when they hear organic food

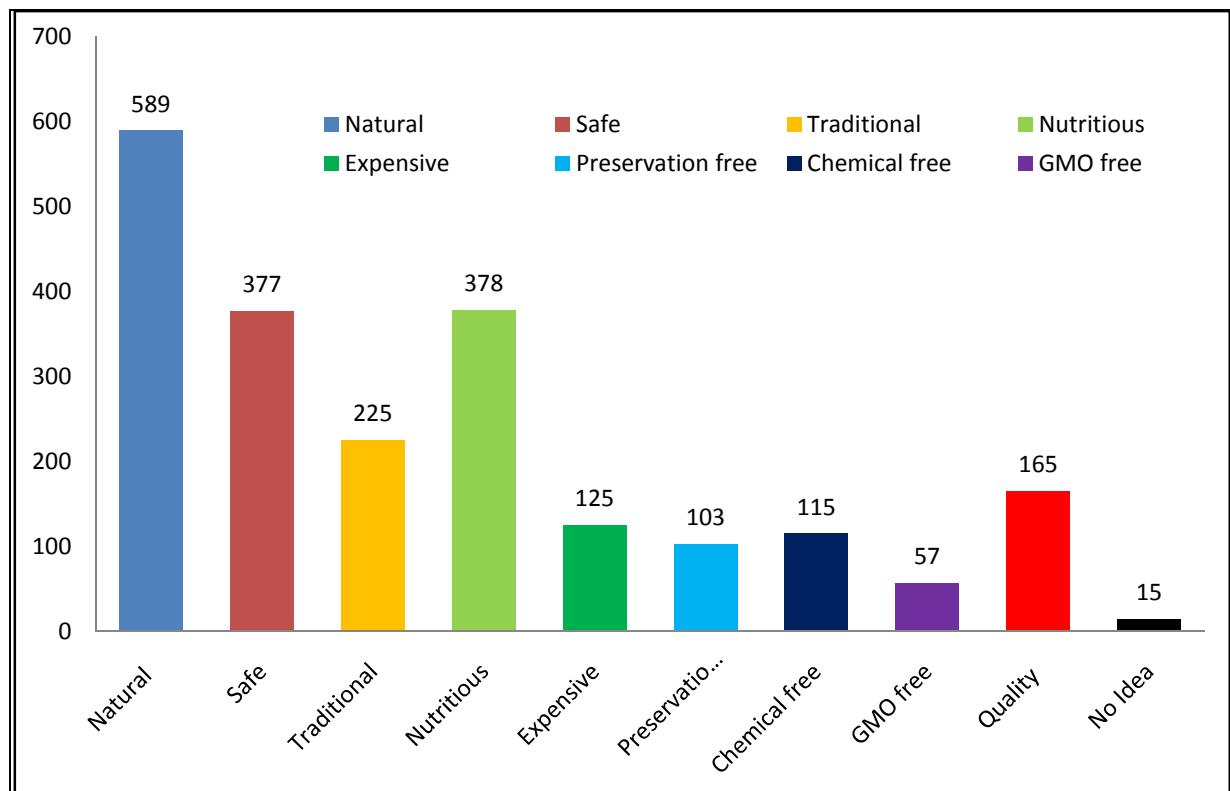
products. Respondent choosing no idea was not considered for awareness level and any other aspect mentioned in other specify category were re-considered among the exhaustive option already given or else ignored, if it was irrelevant. As per the chi-square test the test value is (chi-square = 781.74, p =0.00) significant and it can be concluded that significant number of people have heard about organic food products.

Table 2 : Image of organic food product

Image of OFP	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Natural	589	55	489	45	1078
Safe	377	35	701	65	1078
Traditional	225	21	853	79	1078
Nutritious	378	35	700	65	1078
Expensive	125	12	953	88	1078
Preservation free	103	10	975	90	1078
Chemical free	115	11	963	89	1078
GMO free	57	5	1021	95	1078
Quality	165	15	913	85	1078
No Idea	15	1	1063	99	1078

On an average 2 options were chosen by the respondents among the available options. This clearly indicates that most of the respondents don't have broader idea about organic food products.

Chart 1 : Customer Image on organic food product



Only 12 percent of the total respondents have image of organic food products as expensive and nearly 55 percentage of the respondents are of the perception that organic food product means natural food product. This has already created an alternative market, where natural grown food products are getting sold as organic food product by the vendors. This is due to lose usage of the term organic food product, not have strict policies and rules of monitoring and inspecting sales practices and also limited knowledge of customer about organic food products.

Customer awareness of food product is analyzed by taking into consideration respondents ticking of organic food product as safe, nutritious, preservation free, chemical free, GMO free and quality. Other characteristics of organic food products such as natural, traditional etc are considered as perception and people have good perception about organic food products. There are six characteristics, which are considered for awareness count for organic food products, and then one sample **t-test** is done by keeping test value as 6.

From the calculation given below it is clear that customer awareness of organic food product ($t = -168.164$, $p = 0.00$) is significantly low. There are several food product related issues customers are not aware, therefore the promotional campaign need to be information driven. It will also help in building and reinforcing the positive image of organic food products.

Table 3 : Customer Awareness of Organic Food product

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Awareness of Organic Food products	1078	1.1085	.95502	.02909

Table 4 : One-Sample Test of customer awareness of organic food product

	Test Value = 6						
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
Awareness of Organic Food products	-168.164	1077	.000	-4.89147	-4.9485	-4.8344	

Respondents' awareness level for organic food product is classified on the basis of total score as very low, low, medium, high and very high. The 20 percentage could be kept as

the interval size to determine the awareness level category. But the total score range from 0-6, therefore awareness levels could be individual score or class interval, which are done as follows:

Table 5 : Organic food product Awareness Level

Response	Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
0	Very Low level	298	27.6
1	Very Low level	479	44.4
2	Low level	206	19.1
3	Medium level	82	7.6
4	High level	9	0.8
5	High level	2	0.2
6	Very high level	2	0.2
	Total	1078	100

From the above table it is clear that, there is very low level of awareness among the respondents. Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 1308.325$, $p = 0.000$) makes it very clear that significant number of people are having lower level of awareness about organic food products.

4.2 Awareness of Organic farming

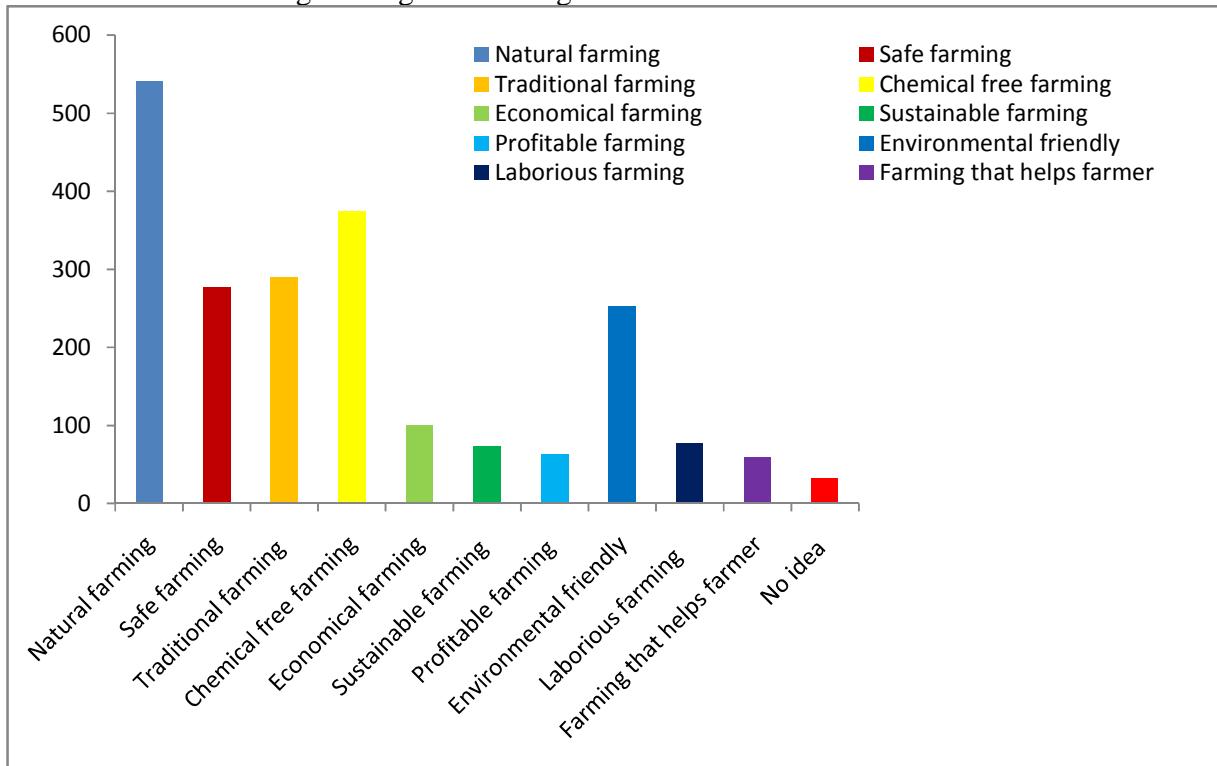
Customer awareness about organic farming is also quantified similarly as that of organic food product. Customers knowledge on organic farming helps them in understanding supply chain and pricing related challenges associated with organic food products. Similar to the organic food products, here also an attempt is made to know the image of the customer for organic farming.

Table 6 : Image of organic food product

Image of OFP	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Natural farming	541	50.2	537	49.8	1078
Safe farming	277	25.7	801	74.3	1078
Traditional farming	290	26.9	786	72.9	1078
Chemical free farming	374	34.7	704	65.3	1078
Economical farming	101	9.4	977	90.6	1078
Sustainable farming	73	6.8	1005	93.2	1078
Profitable farming	63	5.8	1015	94.2	1078
Environmental friendly	253	23.5	825	76.5	1078
Laborious farming	77	7.1	1001	92.9	1078
Farming that helps farmer	59	5.5	1019	94.5	1078
No idea	32	3.0	1046	97	1078

Most of the respondents are under the impression that organic farming means natural farming. But in reality, organic farming techniques include using of naturally available local resources and doing a sustainable farming. Natural farming is concerned with no or less human intervention in farming on the other hand organic farming is associated with creating a conducive environment by active involvement by the farmer.

Chart 2 : Customer image on organic farming



More than 50 percent of the respondents stated that organic farming is natural farming and it is a positive perception. Less than 6 percent of the respondents don't have any idea about organic farming. Only 7 percent of the respondents stated that organic farming is laborious.

Customer awareness on organic farming is analyzed using one sample t-test. For the test statistics few of the options given for the respondents such as safe farming, chemical fee farming, sustainable farming and environmental friendly farming were considered. Other options are the perception of the respondents.

Table 7 : Customer Awareness on Organic farming

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Awareness on Organic farming	1078	.9063	.89750	.02734

The mean value after calculation is less than one. This gives clear indication that most of the respondents are not aware about organic farming. Here also the average options selected by the respondents are 2, which is very less. It shows that people don't have more knowledge about organic farming

Table 8 : One-Sample Test for customer awareness on organic farming

	Test Value = 4						
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Awareness on organic farming	-113.175	1077	.000		-3.09369	-3.1473	-3.0401

One sample t-test for customer awareness on organic farming shows significance ($t = 113.17$, $p = 0.000$). It means significant numbers of respondents are not aware about organic farming.

Similar to organic food products, respondents' awareness level for organic farming is classified on the basis of total score as very low, low, medium, high and very high. The total score range from 0-4, therefore awareness levels could be individual score rather than class interval.

Table 9 : Organic farming Awareness Level

Response	Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
0	Very Low level	396	36.7
1	Low level	467	43.3
2	Medium level	148	13.7
3	High level	54	5.0
4	Very high level	13	1.2
	Total	1078	100

Here also the awareness level of customer for organic farming is very low and lot of work need to be undertaken by the concerned institutions for enhancing the awareness level of the people for organic farming. Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 776.69$, $p = 0.000$) also signifies that most of the respondents are not aware about organic farming.

4.3 Awareness on aspects/issues relating to Organic food products

There are various issues, which are associated with organic food products. These issues are benefits of consuming organic food products, organic food standards, organic farming methods, negative impact of conventional food, national organic movement. These are the diversified issues, concerned with organic food products. Knowledge about these

issues makes the customer get involved in the decision making process of buying organic food products.

Table 10 : Aspects/Issues aware about organic food product

Issues/Aspect of OFP	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Benefits of OFP	648	60	430	40	1078
Organic farming methods	305	28	773	72	1078
Organic food standard	268	25	810	75	1078
Organic certification	142	13	936	87	1078
Negative impact of conventional food	120	11	958	89	1078
National organic movement/ APEDA	30	3	1048	97	1078
Negative impact of conventional farming	61	6	1017	94	1078
None	28	3	1050	97	1078

The above table gives clear indication that 60 percent of the respondents are aware about organic food products benefits. Only 28 percent of the respondents have stated that they are aware about organic farming methods. People are least aware about APEDA, negative impact of conventional farming and food, and organic certification. Even though people are aware about organic food product benefits, they are not sure about the drawbacks of conventional food product. This has lead to a situation of people not shifting completely towards organic food products. One sample t-test is done to know the customer awareness of various issues. Mean score of customer awareness on various aspects of organic food product is 1.46, which is little better than awareness of organic food products and organic farming.

Table 11: One-Sample Statistics on issues or aspects of organic food products.

Aspects	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Organic food products	1078	1.4601	.81637	.02486

Table 12 : One-Sample Test on issues or aspects of organic food products

Aspects/ Issues	Test Value = 7						
	t	df	Sig. tailed)	(2- Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	

Organic food products	-222.803	1077	.000	-5.53989	-5.5887	-5.4911
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The above table gives clear indication that, significant numbers of people are not aware about various aspects of organic food products. Similar to organic food products, respondents' awareness level for various aspects of organic food product is classified on the basis of total score as very low, low, medium, high and very high. The total score range from 0-7, therefore awareness levels could be individual score rather than class interval.

Table 13: Aspects Aware about Organic food products

Response	Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
0	Very Low level	36	3.3
1	Very Low level	656	60.9
2	Low level	274	25.4
3	Low level	85	7.9
4	Medium level	22	2.0
5	High level	3	0.3
6	High level	2	0.2
7	Very High level	0	0.0

There is a lower level of awareness among the people about various aspects of organic food product.

4.4 Total Awareness

The total awareness level includes awareness about organic food products, awareness of organic farming and awareness about various aspects of organic food products. The study clearly indicates that the total awareness level of the respondents about organic food products is very low. Lot of awareness programmes need to be done intensively for enhancing the understanding and awareness level of the people, both in urban as well as rural areas.

Table 14: One-Sample Statistics for total awareness

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Awareness	1078	4.4007	2.07180	.06310

Table 15: One-Sample Test for Total awareness level

	Test Value = 18						
	t	Df	Sig. tailed)	(2- tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Total Awareness	-215.514	1077	.000		-13.59926	-13.7231	-13.4754

The mean score of the respondents is 4.4 for the total awareness level of 18. This shows that people are not having sufficient knowledge about any of the issues related to organic food products and all the test statistics have shown very high level of significance (0.000).

DISCUSSION

The analysis indicates that consumer awareness about organic food products, organic farming and various other aspects relating to organic food products is very low. This could be because of low involvement of the consumer for buying of organic food products in particular and food products in general. People are buying organic food products by habit and involvement in their purchase decision would be high in case their awareness and knowledge about organic food product increases. Karnataka state Government is successful in building base level awareness among the people about organic food products. Requirement from Government side is to promote organic food products in such a way that will enhance the understanding or awareness level of the people about organic food products, organic farming and various aspects relating to organic food products.

The analysis clearly gives indication that there is no significant relationship between place, gender, age, monthly income on awareness level of the customer. Education and occupation has significant influence on total awareness of the customer. Educated and people working as employees need to be encouraged to join the moment of promoting organic farming, and organic food products as volunteers for a social cause. Even highly educated people need a healthy and safe food. Once, the awareness level of educated people enhances then automatically their food product buying habits changes toward organic food. Looking at these changes in educated population others may follow and this educated population can advocate to others about the benefits of organic food product. There is a significant relationship between, people who have heard about organic food products and their frequency of buying organic food product. This clearly states that even working knowledge or awareness has an impact on frequency of buying organic food products.

CONCLUSIONS

State and central Government of India are playing their role effectively by making policies and programmes, but the successful implementation would be a challenge. Resources and institutions engaged in promoting organic farming are less in number. More universities, institutions, boards need to be formed to enhance the reach of Government policies. Implementation of Government plans through NGOs, SHGs, Farmers Association and Federation is good initiation by Karnataka Government. Karnataka Government also set the road map of how various institution need to play their role in promoting organic farming and organic food product market, but accountability and responsibilities are not clearly stated. Therefore, Government need to provide enough remuneration and incentives to these institutions, so as to make these programmes and policies successful. There has to be a separate organic food product grower board in Karnataka, and its offices must be spread across Karnataka. Success of organic food product market depends on the consumers enhanced knowledge and understand about organic food products. Organic food product attributes are credence attributes, therefore, awareness, positive perception and trust among the organic food product farmer, organic food product vendors and customer will play a key role in the success of this market.

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