

The Rising Demand for Organic Food and Farming in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Throughout the history of Sri Lanka, the islanders have practiced eco-friendly farming. We can trace the history of eco-friendly farming practices from the era of kingship as the farming was the main livelihood and farming related activities embedded to the culture and religious beliefs. The saying “ගමයි පන්සලයි වැවයි දාගැබයි”⁵ summarizes how much farming, culture and the religion was embedded together.

As an island nation with adequate natural resources Sri Lanka is being able to practice organic farming and sustainable eco-friendly agricultural practices. The farmer friendly weather with tanks, rivers, scattered all over the island with religious belief of optimum use kept farming a peaceful livelihood (Warnakulasooriya and Athukorala, 2016). With the arrival of the open economy and embracing the green revolution, the farmers found interest in high yield crop varieties which demand inorganic fertilizers, and pesticides.

By focusing only on high yield the farmers have lost some of the key expectations, outcomes, and ethics of environmental friendly agriculture and excess use of fertilizers, pesticides, and technologies created health issues among consumers. Having popular media started

⁵ Village, temple, tank, and stupa

to discuss the consequences of inorganic farming there is a rising trend among the consumers that they seek organic food, in order to be healthy and stay away from Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) like Kidney failures, cancer etc.

Objectives

The objectives of this performance are to, discover the attitude and awareness of the consumer about the organic food and identify the needs of organic farmers to meet the market demand with quality products.

Methodology

This research was performed with the primary data collection from 48 individuals by means of a questionnaire survey among randomly selected 04 farmers⁶, from Badulla and Monaraagala districts to get information about the supply and demand, and expectations during the period of June 2017. 04 established organic food sellers were interviewed at their respective outlets and the randomly selected 40 consumers at the same were interviewed on their consent.

The questionnaire for consumers collected the data on awareness on cultivation environment, type of fertilizers use, certification procedure, assurance, and their willingness to pay. The questionnaire for the farmer's collected the data on their education, capacity, revenue, challenges and opportunities and rewards they wish to have. Food seller's questionnaire collected the data of market demand, certification, challenges, strategies and pricing. Finally, the raw data was gathered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and the frequency and percentage was calculated for further analysis.

⁶ A farmer from a society which collects small amounts from its members and supply bulk as a society.

Results and Discussion

The awareness on the harmful effects of chemicals present in food is increasing among the consumers. The trend towards purchasing organic food is growing among people. Some of the prominent motivating factors to purchase organic foods include environmental concern, health concern and lifestyle, product quality and subjective norms. Given this background, we first investigate the descriptive statistics of the survey.

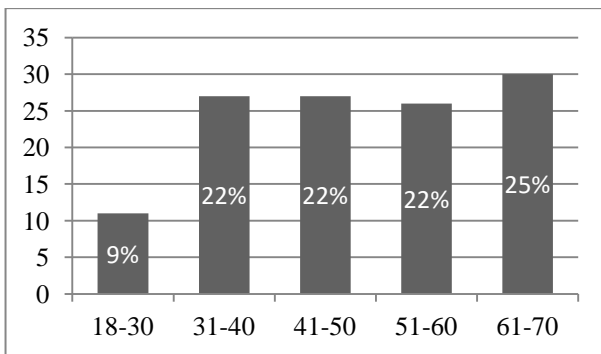


Figure 1: Age categories of consumers and participation to the survey

The age categories of the consumers reveals the purchasing power of the consumers as well as their willingness to pay. The consumers below age 30 has less purchasing power compare to other age categories. Also the data analysis shows that those who are above age 31 are having higher income and high profiles. On the other hand above age 31 categories are health conscious compare to below age 30 consumers.

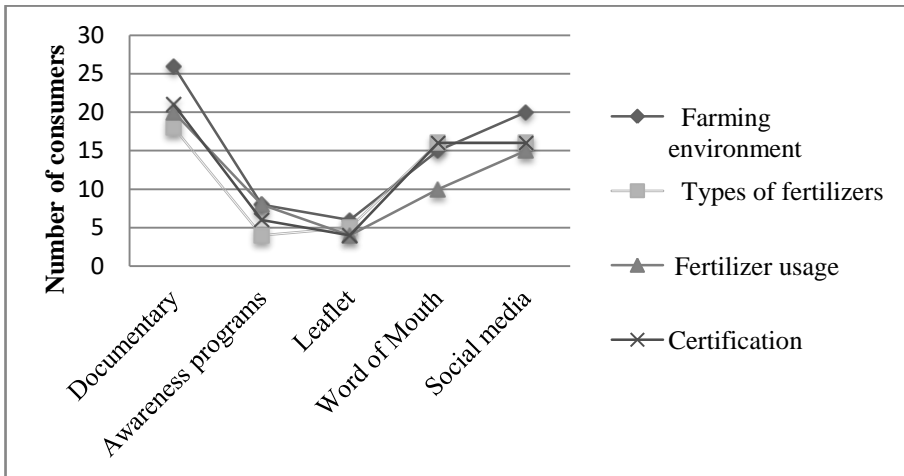


Figure 2: Consumer awareness on the basic ingredients of organic farming and awareness received mediums

The data of consumer’s actual awareness on organic food they consumed was collected and analyzed. Hence, the analysis tells that the type of awareness determines the quality of the awareness and right reasons to demand organic food.

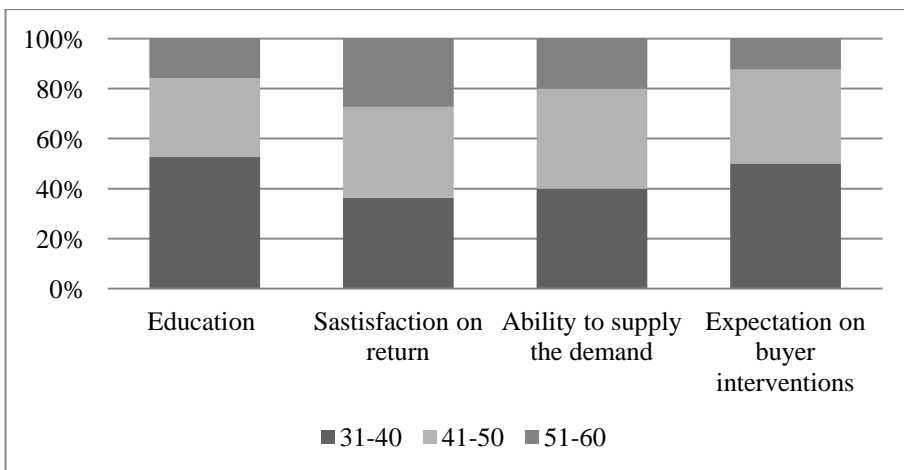


Figure 3: Farmer’s age expectations and capacity

The farmers' age and education seems to have a relationship with their level of satisfaction of the return and the interventions done by the organic food selling organizations. Also, the farmer's ability in supply the demand of the organizations also depends on the age and education.

The summary of the survey with individual farmers shows that 13 % of them would like to have training and workshops in organic farming including costing, budgeting, planning with training on leadership, marketing and organic farming. 37 % of them would like the food selling organizations to assist them in organic food certification whereas 50 % of the farmers would like to have all the training, workshops with assistance in getting certification.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The results reveal that consumers are not well aware of the essential ingredients in organic farming. It is recommended to have detail documentary / short video clips at both outlets and social media to give a better awareness. In order to meet the market demand, produce quality food and maximize the profit it is recommended for organic food selling organizations to capacitate the registered farmers with training and workshop in the area of strategic planning, value chain analysis, and supply chain management through visual media and exposure visits to successful farmlands.

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