

Role of the Organic Food System in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: A Review Study

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Received September 18, 2024; revised and accepted October 4, 2024

Abstract: The greater Global concern today is climate change and global warming and to combat this issue the United Nations has set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by the year 2030 with the collective efforts of member nations. The conventional food system has exploited natural resources in a very negative manner which impacted both human health and the ecological system. The organic food system is an alternative to this which uses a natural way of production prohibiting chemical and artificial synthesis. This study aims to explore the role of the organic food system in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The result of the study shows that the organic food system has a significant positive impact in the form of environmental sustainability, public health, social impact, and economic impact on the people. The organic food system significantly contributes to the SDG1, SDG2, SDG3, SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, and SDG15 by reducing poverty, mitigating hunger worldwide, protecting the health of the people and well-being, sustainable consumption and production, climate action, protecting life on the land and under the water.

Keywords: Sustainable development goals; Organic farming; Climate action; Sustainability; Well-being.

Introduction

In recent decades, environmental degradation, global food shortages, and climate change have grown to be severe global issues requiring immediate response. Conventional agricultural systems have been linked to an acceleration of environmental decline, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and dangers to public health. These systems mostly rely on synthetic inputs such as chemical pesticides and fertilisers. The accomplishment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the UN is directly hampered by these issues, especially those that deal with reducing poverty, addressing hunger, improving health, combating climate change, and protecting ecosystems. The organic food system has come to light as a viable solution to these problems. With an emphasis on natural processes rather

than synthetic inputs, organic agriculture prioritises ecologically friendly methods to help rural livelihoods, enhance public health, and maintain ecological equilibrium. This study is important because it looks at how organic food systems might help achieve the SDGs by providing socially and economically inclusive and feasible solutions. Organic food systems can address several interrelated global issues, such as poverty and food security, climate resilience, and biodiversity protection, by promoting sustainable agricultural methods.

The day-by-day deterioration in the environmental condition and increasing global health diseases compelled people worldwide to think about how to exploit resources including the global food production and consumption process. To combat climate change and to achieve sustainable development and global

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prosperity. The United Nations has set to achieve some goals by the year 2030, these goals are known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There are 17 SDGs set by the UN which cover all the areas of human development and sustainability of the planet Earth. The UN Plan for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations made an Agenda of 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by the year 2030. The Agenda offers a shared road map for prosperity and peace for the world's population today and in the future. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which constitute an urgent call for international cooperation and action from both rich and developing countries, are its central pillars (UN, 2024).

In achieving sustainability in food consumption and environment the organic food products play a vital role. Organic food products are produced without any chemical or artificial synthesis; they are produced only with naturally grown fertilisers and manures. Organic farming prohibits the use of any chemical pesticides, fertilisers, herbicides, etc. The agricultural ecosystem becomes pliable through organic farming. It helps to face the destructive effect of climate change very effectively and develop environmentally friendly agricultural tools and techniques that avoid soil erosion and are resistant to changes in temperature and drought. The Organic products' production methods and techniques are the first and foremost rationale for

the sustainable consumption of organic food products which makes a balanced approach with the environment and the ecosystems that exist locally (Seyfang, 2007). Figure 1 shows how organic farming contributes to the overall food system, environment, and ecological systems compared to conventional farming.

This is a crucial field of study due to the rising demand for organic products worldwide and the growing awareness of their potential to promote sustainable development. This study aims to close knowledge gaps about how organic food systems support particular Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with an emphasis on the effects these systems have on economic growth, public health, and environmental sustainability.

Objective of the Study

The researchers aim to explore the role of the Organic food system in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Literature Review

Organic Food Production and Environmental Sustainability

The advantages of organic food production for the environment have been demonstrated by several researchers. By eschewing synthetic pesticides and

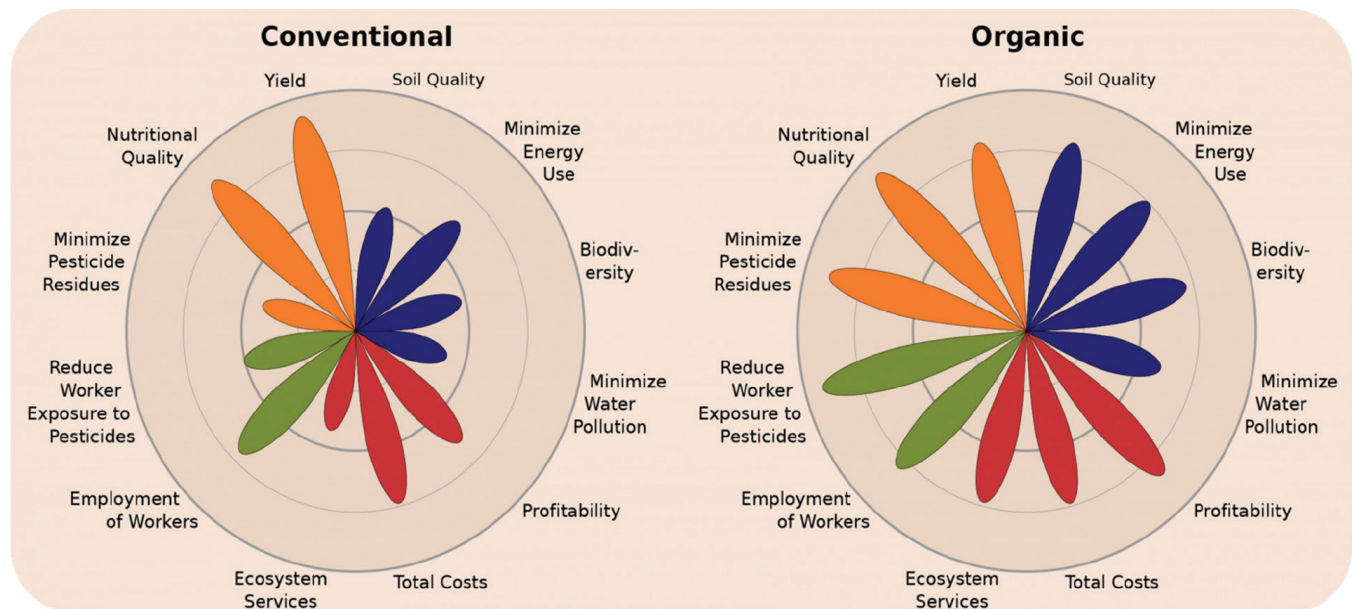


Figure 1: Comparison of conventional and organic agriculture: green (social well-being) (Production), blue (environment), and red (economic).

Source: (Nature & More, 2024)

fertilisers, organic farming increases soil fertility, boosts biodiversity, and lowers water pollution. According to Christian Schader et al. (2014), organic systems perform better than conventional systems in terms of environmental sustainability, particularly when it comes to lowering chemical inputs and fostering ecological health. Organic farming plays a crucial part in carbon sequestration, which is the process of storing carbon in the soil through the accumulation of organic matter, as noted by Gamage et al. (2023). Composting, crop rotation, and cover crops are examples of organic techniques that enhance soil structure and increase drought resistance and water retention. Given that organic farming reduces greenhouse gas emissions, it is in line with SDG 13 (Climate Action), which aims to alleviate the negative effects of climate change. Because organic farming produces agricultural landscapes rich in species diversity, Eyhorn et al. (2019) stress even more how important organic agriculture is to protecting biodiversity. Decreased usage of pesticides supports the survival of beneficial organism populations, such as soil microorganisms and pollinators. Organic farming directly supports SDG 15 (Life on Land), which aims to stop biodiversity loss and conserve terrestrial ecosystems. It does this by promoting ecosystem health. Nevertheless, there are continuous discussions concerning the scalability of organic farming despite these environmental benefits. While organic agriculture is more environmentally friendly, Reganold & Wachter (2016) note that crop yields are frequently lower in organic farming than in conventional farming. The ability of organic systems to meet the rising global food demand is called into serious doubt by this trade-off between sustainability and yield, especially in light of population increase and climate change concerns.

Organic Food Products and People's Health

Organic food has been shown to provide numerous health benefits, mainly because it has fewer toxic chemical residues. It has been discovered that organic food products especially fruits, vegetables, and dairy have lower pesticide levels and higher concentrations of vital nutrients. According to Winter & Davis (2006), organic produce significantly lowers the risk of chronic diseases since it has less pesticide residues and lower levels of nitrates.

Huber et al. (2011) went into further detail by demonstrating that eating organic food has potential health benefits in addition to its nutritional value. The higher content of antioxidants found in organic plant-

based foods has been associated with a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer. Additionally, the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids found in organic dairy products, including milk, are frequently higher in these goods.

The increasing amount of data supporting the association between eating organic food and better public health is consistent with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). According to a more recent study by Lairon et al. (2024), eating organic food is associated with improved overall health outcomes, with fewer incidences of pesticide-related illnesses and disorders being linked to lower levels of pesticide exposure. Given that vulnerable groups are more susceptible to the harmful consequences of chemical exposure, such as children and pregnant women, these findings are especially important.

Economic Impact of Organic Food System

In addition to promoting health and environmental objectives, organic farming has significant economic benefits, especially for smallholder farmers and rural communities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that, especially when price premiums are offered, organic farms frequently yield higher economic returns than conventional farms. Lobley et al. (2009) discovered that organic farms in England used more labour, which aided in the growth of rural areas and the creation of jobs. This is in line with SDG 1 (No Poverty) since organic farming gives small-scale farmers a chance to make more money.

However, there is no assurance that organic farming will be financially successful. Although organic farms in the US may make more money overall, Uematsu & Mishra (2012) warn that these profits may be negated by the expenses of organic inputs and certification. Widespread adoption may be hampered by the labour-intensive nature and greater initial cost of organic systems, especially in low-income nations.

Regional factors also affect organic farming's economic viability. According to Patil et al. (2014), organic farming was more profitable than conventional farming in some parts of India because of lower input costs; but, in other locations, questions regarding long-term sustainability were raised by nutrient imbalances in the soil. This implies that while organic farming can support SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by boosting food security and resilience, cautious management is required to guarantee the long-term economic viability of organic systems.

Social Dimensions of Organic Food System

Organic farming has significant social effects as well, especially when it comes to aiding underprivileged areas and ensuring that everyone has fair access to nutritious food. Local organic food projects, as noted by Seyfang (2004), frequently place a strong emphasis on social inclusion, fair trade methods, and community involvement. Organic farming can support more socially equitable food systems by emphasising food that is produced ethically and locally.

According to Macias (2008), organic food systems have the potential to enhance social cohesion in local communities by uniting disparate groups around shared values about health and sustainability. But the advantages of organic farming are not always shared equally; wealthy customers are more likely to be able to purchase organic goods. By ensuring that everyone has access to wholesome, sustainably produced food, organic food systems help achieve SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Reducing these discrepancies is crucial. A French study shows that consumers perceive organic food products to have social value because they carry social identity, class, or status. This information is beneficial for marketing tactics as it indicates that advertising campaigns should highlight the social value of organic products in addition to their health and environmental advantages. The researchers also found that just labelling a product as organic might not be adequate, the seller's behaviour as a whole, including communication and environmental standards, is also important in communicating sustainability to customers. To better understand the social value of organic food products, particularly among non-consumers and those who shop at bargain stores, the study suggests conducting additional research, including observational and quantitative studies (Costa et al., 2014).

The organic food system has a significant positive impact on the consumers' health alongside protecting the environment and ecological system. Organic farming helps to empower underprivileged farmers and economically to eradicate poverty. These eventually help to achieve different United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals took the role of the Millennium Development Goals during the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 in New York. The Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) are a group of 17 objectives and 169 targets that governments, corporations, and society at large must accomplish by 2030 (van den Broek & Klingler-Vidra, 2022). To solve the biggest global sustainability challenges, the SDGs provide a popular platform for civil society government representatives and organisations to work individually or in partnership, to have a positive effect and to be more accountable to stakeholders and businesses should use the SDGs as a crucial tool for integrating sustainability into their policies, plans, and practices (Mori Junior et al., 2019). A more promising and sustainable future that benefits everyone can be achieved with the help of the Sustainable Development Goals. They deal with global concerns like the environment, climate change, poverty, inequality, justice, and peace. Because the 17 Goals are interrelated, achieving them all by 2030 is essential if we are to leave no one behind. Figure 2 shows the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

Role of Organic Food System in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The organic agriculture system uses the natural method of production with lesser or no amount of chemical and artificial synthesis to keep the environment and ecosystem sustainable. Organic food consumption helps to improve the health of the consumers by preventing the chemicals in the food. Organic crops have higher levels of antioxidant activity and varied specific antioxidant concentrations, ranging from 18 to 69% higher which result in increased intakes of antioxidants and polyphenolics has been connected implies a lower chance of developing specific chronic illnesses such as disorders of the heart and nervous system, as well as specific cancers (Barański et al., 2014). Organic food consumption helps in achieving various Sustainable Development Goals in many ways. The role of organic food systems in achieving sustainable different development goals has been shown in Figure 3.

No Poverty-SDG 1

The biggest challenge of the world today is to eradicate poverty among the people, particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations. The UN set the standard as a person earning \$2.15 per day comes under extreme poverty and 8.4 percent of the world population comes under this (United Nations, 2024a). The organic farming system has the potential to increase the farmer's income while maintaining the stability and welfare of the farmers (Hm et al., 2020). In the same manner, as the majority of the farmers living in poverty are from rural



Figure 2: United Nations sustainable development goals.

Source: (UN, 2024)

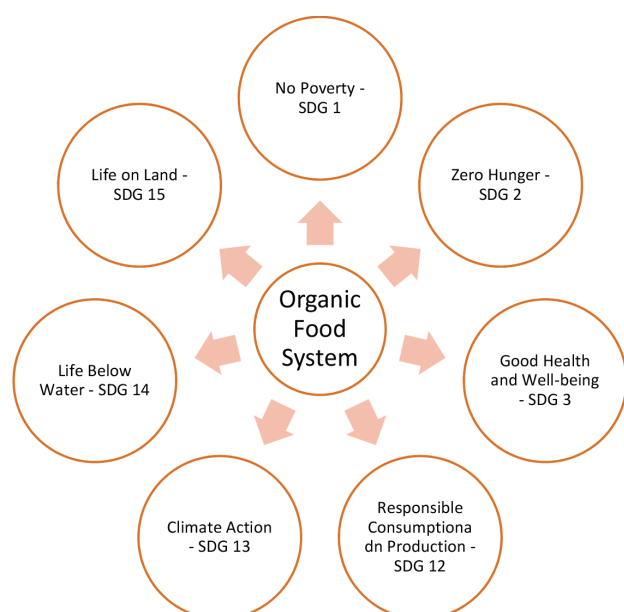


Figure 3: Role of organic food system in achieving different sustainable goals.

Source: Self Developed

areas, the higher income will help to further reduce poverty (Batra et al., 2024). There might be a potential financial benefit to the producers and distributors of organic food products which helps to reduce poverty and provide food security (Thongplew et al., 2023)

Zero Hunger – SDG 2

A possible strategy for tackling the problems with global food security is the use of organic farming systems.

Organic agriculture can help in creating a sustainable food system by strengthening rural economies, boosting resilience to climate change, and increasing nutrition. The organic food systems hold significant promise in the endeavour to eradicate hunger. These solutions can support a more just and equitable food system by emphasising sustainability, enhancing nutrition, and supporting rural economies. To achieve its full potential, organic agriculture has to confront certain obstacles (Batra et al., 2024).

Good Health and Well-being – SDG 3

Organic food contains no or very low levels of chemicals which prohibits the various toxic materials and increases the nutrition level of the food. The consumption of organic food can help lower pesticide exposure and improve the health of plant-based diets by avoiding chemical pesticides and fertilisers, which improves both human and environmental well-being (Lairon et al., 2024). There is a significant relationship between organic matter and the well-being of the people. For people who are more health-conscious, consuming organic food has a stronger beneficial influence on well-being, according to a partial process explanation based on cognitive health belief elaboration. It is suggested that consuming organic food may improve a consumer's subjective well-being (Apaolaza et al., 2018). Tomar et al. (2024) discovered that the entire ecosystem and human well-being benefit from the production and consumption of organic farming. Organic farmers are more likely to be perceived as enjoying high-quality

lives since they are generally joyful, content, and optimistic. This is because they are satisfied with their lifestyles. The female farmers acknowledged that the happier and more contented family dynamic results in fewer family arguments.

Responsible Consumption and Production–SDG 12

Organic farming adopts an approach that has no or minimum adverse impact on the environment and ecosystem. The producers choose organic food over conventional food products because it prevents soil degradation and protects the ecological environment. Organic farming produces livestock or crops without the use of synthetic inputs, including nanomaterials, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), artificial fertilisers, insecticides, and plant growth regulators (USDA, 2015). The consumers of organic food products are very much concerned about environmental deterioration and ecological contamination. Consumer preference for organic food is largely influenced by concern for human health and safety, which is consistent with the trend of observed declines in health over time which resulted in the purchase of organic food as a form of insurance or as an investment in their health (Yiridoe et al., 2005). Consumer's inclination towards organic food products is due to their ability to be more environmentally friendly and fresh than conventional food products methods of production (Gundala & Singh, 2021). Consumption of organic food products has been considered eco-friendly and sustainable to the environment by consumers (Sánchez-Bravo et al., 2020).

Climate Action – SDG 13

The organic agriculture practice helps to achieve SDG 13 – Climate Action. Due to causes including land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change, soil is currently one of the most vulnerable resources on the planet Earth. Soils are an important carbon storage system since they contain more carbon than both the atmosphere and terrestrial vegetation combined (FAO, 2024). The ability of organic farming and other sustainable agricultural practices to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it in the soil through the process of carbon sequestration, which raises the amounts of organic carbon in the soil, is one of the main advantages of these practices when it comes to climate discussion (Lal, 2007).

Life Below Water – SDG 14

The conventional organic farming system generates

an abundance of wastewater because of the use of excessive chemical synthesis which resulted in high concentrations in the water bodies which has become a great concern globally (Rad et al., 2022). Compared to conventional agriculture, organic agriculture uses less synthetic pesticides and has less of an impact on water quality. This helps prevent artificial pesticides from contaminating any water by significantly reducing the quantity of persistent and water-soluble synthetic pesticides that contaminate water (Vincent & Fleury, 2015).

Life on Land – SDG 15

The organic agriculture system is greatly associated with achieving the SDG – Life on Land, whose main aim is to “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” (United Nations, 2024b). Organic farming increases biodiversity because of the decreased or nonexistent input of chemical fertilisers and pesticides (Rundlöf et al., 2016), which helps to achieve this Sustainable Development Goal 15.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the path of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Organic Food System plays a critical role, which has a significant impact on the various facets of ecological, economic, and social sustainability. The adoption of organic farming practices that stress the natural methods of production, and prohibit the use of chemical synthesis, the organic food system helps in environmental protection, improving public health and communities' well-being. Organic farming maintains soil health and biodiversity and mitigates climate change by confiscating carbon in the soil. Furthermore, organic food production and consumption align with the Sustainable Development Goals by responsible consumption and production patterns and reducing the environmental footprints of agriculture. From an economic perspective, the organic food system strengthens rural communities by bringing in more revenue and eradicating poverty; on the social front, it promotes fair access to wholesome food and fortifies community resilience.

Through encouraging economic stability, enhancing health, and advancing environmental sustainability, the organic food system presents a viable strategy for fulfilling several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Through resilient

agricultural methods that improve global food security and zero hunger (SDG 2) and increase farmers' income, especially in rural regions, it plays a vital role in eradicating poverty (SDG 1). By lowering exposure to dangerous chemicals and enhancing dietary quality, it also helps to achieve SDG (Good Health and Well-being). Because organic farming minimises negative effects on the environment and protects the ecosystems, it is aligned with Responsible consumption and Production (SDG 12). Organic farming helps achieve two goals: preserving life on land and below the water (SDGs 14 and 15) and combating climate change (SDG 13) through carbon sequestration.

Future Direction

Even though this analysis shows how important organic food systems are to achieving the SDGs, more research is still needed to support these conclusions and fill in any gaps. Longitudinal research should be the main focus of future studies in order to evaluate the long-term effects of organic farming on sustainable development. These studies can offer more convincing proof of the socioeconomic, health, and environmental advantages of organic farming, especially when it comes to a particular SDG.

Further studies ought to examine the economic feasibility of organic systems across various geographical locations. The sustainability of organic farming practices may be impacted by regional differences in crop yields, input costs, and market accessibility, even if organic farming has demonstrated economic benefits in some places, such as improved farmer income and rural development. Comprehending these processes will facilitate the formulation of focussed approaches aimed at advancing organic agriculture in both developed and developing nations.

Additionally, the policy-focussed study is required to determine how governments may facilitate the expansion of organic farming practices. This involves looking into how to improve international cooperation to assist global sustainability initiatives and how to create policy frameworks, subsidies, and incentives to encourage farmers to use organic practices in nations.

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