The Role of Organic Fertilizers In Enhancing Soil Fertility And Crop Yield in Organic Farming Systems

Kumar Patil[1], Mahesh Manolikar[2], Mayuri Bhujbal[3], Misba Pathan[4]
[1]Dept of Computer Engineering
[2]Dept of E&TC Engineering
[3]Dept of Information Technology
[4]Dept of Commerce and Computer Studies
[1, 2, 3] Sinhgad Institute of Technology and Lonavala,Pune, India
[4]Chinchwad,Pune ,India

Abstract*- Organic fertilizers are fundamental to maintaining soil fertility and enhancing crop productivity in organic farming systems. Unlike synthetic inputs, organic amendments such as compost, vermicompost, farmyard manure (FYM), green manures, and biofertilizers not only supply essential nutrients but also improve the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the soil. This research investigates the impact of these organic inputs on key soil health indicators—including microbial activity, organic matter content, and nutrient availability—and their correlation with crop yield performance. These findings indicate that treatments involving vermicompost and FYM significantly enhance soil organic carbon, available nitrogen, microbial biomass, and plant growth compared to control plots. Supporting literature emphasizes the long-term benefits of organic fertilizers, including improved soil structure, pH balance, water retention, and biodiversity. Additionally, the integration of microbial inoculants like biofertilizers further optimizes nutrient cycling and plant health. Beyond productivity gains, organic fertilizers contribute to climate resilience and environmental conservation, aligning with global goals for sustainable agriculture. This study underscores the importance of site-specific organic fertility management strategies to maximize agricultural output while preserving ecological integrity.*

Keywords*-* Organic fertilizers, soil fertility, crop yield, organic farming, compost, vermicompost, farmyard manure, biofertilizers, soil health, microbial activity, nutrient management, sustainable agriculture, green manures, climate-resilient agriculture.

MOTIVATION— The rising global demand for safe, nutritious food and growing concerns over the environmental impact of chemical fertilizers have highlighted the need for sustainable farming practices. Organic fertilizers—such as compost, vermicompost, and farmyard manure—offer eco-friendly alternatives that improve soil health and crop productivity. However, their long-term impact remains underexplored in many regions, and practical, region-specific guidance is lacking. This research aims to bridge that gap by evaluating the effectiveness of organic inputs on soil fertility and yield, with the goal of supporting sustainable agriculture, food security, and environmental resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Organic Agriculture's Transition from Chemical to Organic Agriculture

A growing number of people are switching from traditional, chemical-based agriculture to more sustainable organic farming systems as a result of the growing need for safe, wholesome food around the world and growing environmental concerns. Significant environmental problems, such as soil erosion, water pollution, biodiversity loss, and a long-term drop in soil fertility, have been brought on by contemporary agriculture's overuse of synthetic fertilisers (Assefa & Tadesse, 2019; Sharma & Chetani, 2017). Organic farming, which prioritises natural inputs and ecological balance over chemical interventions, has become a viable and environmentally conscious choice as a result (Ameeta Sharma, 2017).

Organic farming has become a viable alternative to conventional agriculture among sustainable techniques because of its dependence on ecological processes and natural inputs. Using organic fertilizers, which are made from plant or animal waste, is one of the fundamental tenets of organic farming. These fertilizers are crucial for preserving soil fertility and guaranteeing steady crop yields without the use of artificial chemicals (Bhattacharyya et al., 2008).

Definition of Organic Farming and Organic Fertilizers

A holistic approach to agriculture, organic farming avoids the use of artificial inputs and instead depends on biodiversity, ecological processes, and locally-adapted natural cycles. One of its fundamental principles is the use of organic fertilizers—natural substances derived from plant or animal residues that enhance soil fertility and biological activity.

Key types of organic fertilizers include:

1. Compost improves the microbial balance and soil structure and is produced from degraded organic waste;
2. Farmyard Manure (FYM), consisting of animal dung and bedding material, which boosts organic carbon and nitrogen content;
3. Vermicompost, produced by the breakdown of organic matter through earthworms, known for improving enzymatic activity and nutrient availability;
4. Biofertilizers, which are microbial inoculants like *Rhizobium* and *Azospirillum* that promote nitrogen fixation and nutrient cycling (Liu et al., 2010; Mahanta & Sinha, 2014; Sharma et al., 2005; Njoroge et al., 2019).

The physical, chemical, and biological qualities of soil are enhanced by organic fertilizers including compost, vermicompost, farmyard manure (FYM), and green manures. In addition to improving water-holding capacity and supporting beneficial microbial populations that aid in nutrient cycling, these inputs also help to build soil structure (Liu et al., 2010; Mahanta & Sinha, 2014). Long-term use of organic fertilizers has been demonstrated to improve soil microbial biomass, raise organic matter content, and promote enzymatic activity—all of which are essential for crop yield and soil health (Sharma et al., 2005).

Compost, vermicompost, farmyard manure (FYM), and green manures are examples of organic fertilizers that enhance the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of soil. These inputs promote beneficial microbial populations that enhance soil structure, boost water-holding capacity, and help with nitrogen cycling (Liu et al., 2010; Mahanta & Sinha, 2014).Applying organic fertilizers over an extended period of time has been demonstrated to improve soil microbial biomass, raise organic matter content, and promote enzymatic activity—all of which are essential for crop productivity and soil health (Sharma et al., 2005).

Significance for Sustainable Food Systems

Sustainable food system principles are directly related to the usage of organic fertilizers. In contrast to synthetic inputs, organic amendments are non-toxic, biodegradable, and do not cause pollution or long-term soil deterioration. They are especially advantageous for smallholder farmers because of their availability and affordability, and they can be grown locally (Assefa & Tadesse, 2019; Sharma & Chetani, 2017). Climate resilience, ecological integrity, and long-term food security are supported by organic fertilizers, which enhance soil health and encourage ecologically conscious farming (Bhattacharyya et al., 2008).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organic inputs improve the biological, physical, and chemical characteristics of the soil, supporting its fertility over time, in contrast to synthetic fertilizers, which may provide immediate nutrient availability but frequently contribute to long-term soil degradation. An increasing amount of research highlights the vital role that organic fertilisers play in improving soil health and supporting sustainable crop production.

Mäder et al. (2002), through a 21-year comparative study in Switzerland, conclusively demonstrated that organic farming systems—using manures, composts, and green manures—maintain higher soil biodiversity and microbial activity compared to conventional systems. While crop yields in organic systems were slightly lower, the long-term sustainability and soil health indicators were markedly better. This research provides strong empirical backing for adopting organic inputs in long-term soil fertility strategies.

Sharma et al. (2005) conducted a foundational study on the role of organic fertilizers in agroforestry systems. They found that the application of farmyard manure (FYM) and green manures significantly enhanced soil microbial biomass and enzymatic activity, which translated into improved crop yields. Their work also emphasized how integrating organic inputs with diverse land-use systems could increase soil resilience in arid and semi-arid regions.

Bhattacharyya et al. (2008) examined the long-term effects of FYM and chemical fertilizers, concluding that FYM application led to higher levels of soil organic carbon and microbial activity. Their study reinforced the importance of organic inputs for improving soil fertility and biological function over time.

Liu et al. (2010) provided further evidence of the benefits of organic fertilizers, showing that manure application improves soil pH, microbial populations, and nutrient availability. Their findings support the notion that organic materials have sustained positive impacts on soil chemistry and biological health.

Lazcano and Domínguez (2011) highlighted the biological richness and agronomic potential of vermicompost in sustainable agriculture. Their study confirmed that vermicompost not only improves nutrient profiles but also promotes beneficial microbial interactions, making it a critical input for soil rejuvenation and plant health in organic systems.

Mahanta and Sinha (2014) focused on vermicompost, emphasizing its rich microbial and nutritional composition. They observed that vermicompost enhances soil aeration, increases water retention, and offers natural disease suppression. The authors advocated for its broader use in organic farming systems to maintain ecological balance and support sustainable crop yields.

Sharma and Chetani (2017) compared organic and chemical fertilizers in terms of plant physiology. Their results showed that organic inputs improved chlorophyll content, protein accumulation, and overall plant health without the negative environmental consequences often linked with synthetic fertilizers.

Assefa and Tadesse (2019) presented a comprehensive review of organic fertilizers, discussing their roles in enhancing soil texture, water-holding capacity, and biological activity. They highlighted that inputs like compost, animal waste, and green manures contribute to both soil fertility and ecological sustainability, making them highly beneficial for resource-poor farming communities.

Njoroge et al. (2019) studied the combined effects of organic fertilizers and biofertilizers on soil fertility. Their findings revealed enhanced phosphorus and nitrogen availability, with yields matching or exceeding those from synthetic fertilizer use. The study supported the use of biofertilizer-enhanced organic systems, especially in smallholder farms, to reduce chemical dependency.

Reddy and Reddy (2021) examined the effectiveness of Jeevamrut, a traditional fermented organic input. Their findings indicated a positive impact on microbial biomass and nutrient solubilization, demonstrating that Jeevamrut can be a valuable low-cost input for enhancing soil fertility and improving crop yield in organic farming settings.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to assess how different types of organic fertilizers and their mixtures impact plant growth, soil fertility, and crop yield in selected organic farming systems. The research followed a structured methodology involving preparation of fertilizers, crop selection, soil testing, application strategies, data collection, and result analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to validate findings.

1. Preparation of Different Organic Fertilizers and Mixtures

Organic fertilizers used in the study included traditional and bio-enhanced preparations. These were prepared using established methods to retain microbial activity, nutrient balance, and natural growth-promoting substances.

1.1. Farmyard Manure (FYM)

Source: Collected from local dairy units.
Composition: Cow dung, urine, and agricultural waste (straw and crop residues).

Preparation:

a) Materials were heaped in layers in open pits.
b) Decomposition was aerobic, lasting ~90 days.
c) Moisture was maintained at 60% through regular watering.
d) Pits were turned every 15 days to ensure uniform aeration.
e) Nutrient Profile: Rich in organic carbon (0.5–0.8%), N (0.5%), P (0.2%), and K (0.5%).

1.2. Vermicompost

Species Used: *Eisenia fetida* (Red wriggler worms).

Preparation:

a) Substrate: Cow dung + vegetable waste.
b) Layered over dry straw bedding in bins or cement tanks.
c) Moisture content kept at 70–80%.
d) Harvesting done after 30–45 days.

Properties: Contains enzymes, hormones, and microbial flora beneficial for plants. Nutrient levels: N (1–1.5%), P (0.5–1.2%), K (0.5–1.0%).

Reference: Lazcano & Domínguez (2011). *The use of vermicompost in sustainable agriculture*. Soil Nutrients, 10(1), 1–23.

1.3. Compost

Feedstock: Vegetable waste, garden clippings, paper, dry leaves.

a) Preparation:
b) Compost bins used for aerobic composting.
c) Dry (carbon-rich) and green (nitrogen-rich) materials balanced at 2:1 ratio.
d) Turned weekly for aeration; decomposed in 60–75 days.

Outcome: Dark, crumbly, odor-free compost with high organic content.

1.4. Jeevamrut

Ingredients:

a) 10 L cow urine
b) 2 kg jaggery
c) 2 kg gram flour
d) Handful of soil from 10 kg cow dung
e) farm

Process:

a) Mixture was fermented in shade for 5–7 days.
b) Stirred twice daily to maintain aerobic conditions.
c) Diluted with water (1:10) before application.

Effect: Enhances microbial activity, root growth, and nutrient solubilization.

Reference: Reddy & Reddy (2021). *Effectiveness of Jeevamrut on soil fertility*. IJCMAS, 10(3), 1345–1353.

1.5. Panchagavya

Composition:

Cow milk (2 L), curd (2 L), ghee (1 L), cow urine (3 L), dung (5 kg), jaggery, banana, tender coconut water.

Preparation:

a) Mixed and fermented in airtight containers for 15 days.
b) Stirred twice daily.
c) Diluted 1:30 before spraying or drenching.

Benefits: Acts as plant growth regulator and microbial booster.

1.6. Mixture Formulations

To assess combined effectiveness, mixtures were prepared:

a) Compost + Vermicompost (2:1)
b) Compost + Jeevamrut (3:1)
c) Compost + Vermicompost + Jeevamrut (2:1:1)

2. Selection of Crops That Utilize Organic Fertilizers

Four different crops were selected, representing different crop types, nutrient demands, and rooting depths.

Crop	Type	Botanical Name	Duration	Reason for Selection
Tomato	Fruit crop	*Solanum lycopersicum*	90–100 days	Nutrient-intensive, sensitive to soil conditions
Spinach	Leafy green	*Spinacia oleracea*	30–40 days	Quick harvest, shows nutrient deficiency rapidly
Green Gram	Pulse/Legume	*Vigna radiata*	65–70 days	Adds nitrogen to soil, improves fertility
Maize	Cereal	*Zea mays*	100–120 days	High biomass crop, responds well to soil improvement

These crops allowed a diverse assessment of organic fertilizer impact across multiple dimensions: vegetative growth, root development, and yield.

3. Plant Growth and Soil Fertility Conditions Due to Organic Fertilizer Use

3.1. Initial Soil Analysis

Before planting, the soil was tested for:

a) pH
b) Electrical Conductivity (EC)
c) Organic Carbon (%)
d) Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K) levels
e) Soil Microbial Load (CFU/g)

3.2. Experimental Setup

a) Design: Randomized Block Design (RBD)
b) Plot size: 2m x 2m per treatment
c) Replications: 3 per treatment
d) Treatments:
    a. Control (no fertilizer)
    b. Individual organic fertilizers (FYM, Vermicompost, etc.)
    c. Mixtures

3.3. Growth Monitoring

Weekly observations included:

a) Plant height
b) Leaf area index
c) Chlorophyll content (using SPAD meter)
d) Days to flowering/fruiting
e) Pest/disease incidence

3.4. Post-Harvest Soil Testing

Same parameters as pre-analysis to measure changes in:

a) Organic carbon
b) Nutrient availability
c) Microbial populations
d) Soil structure (physical observation)

4. Data Collection

4.1. Primary Data

a) Growth parameters collected at weekly intervals.
b) Yield data collected after harvest.
c) Soil samples before and after cultivation.
d) Interviews with 10 organic farmers on:
    (1) Organic practices
    (2) Fertilizer preparation
    (3) Observed benefits and challenges

4.2. Secondary Data

1. Literature from peer-reviewed journals and books.
2. Google Form survey shared with 150 university students to:
    a. Assess awareness of organic fertilizers
    b. Understand perceptions of organic vs. chemical farming

5. Analysis of Results

5.1. Quantitative Analysis

a) ANOVA: Determined statistical significance among treatments.
b) Paired t-test: Compared pre- and post-soil data.
c) Correlation matrix: Assessed relationship between yield and soil nutrients.

5.2. Software Used

a) Microsoft Excel: Data entry, basic stats
b) IBM SPSS: ANOVA, t-test
c) Python (Matplotlib, Seaborn): Graphical visualization

5.3. Interpretation

a) Vermicompost and Jeevamrut had early growth promotion effects.
b) FYM and compost contributed to long-term nutrient buildup.
c) Mixtures outperformed single fertilizers in yield and soil improvement.

CASE STUDY: APPLICATION OF ORGANIC FERTILIZERS IN LONG-TERM FARMING

Source:

Mäder, P., et al. (2002). *Soil fertility and biodiversity in organic farming.* Science, 296(5573), 1694–1697.
Study Location:
DOK Trials, Switzerland – 21-year comparative study of organic vs. conventional farming systems.

Research Design:

a) Crops: Potatoes, wheat, clover, and others
b) Organic System: Used manure-based fertilizers
c) Conventional System: Relied on synthetic NPK fertilizers and pesticides
d) Parameters: Yield, soil fertility, microbial diversity

Findings:

a) Microbial biomass was 20% higher in organic fields.
b) Biodiversity of soil flora/fauna improved significantly.
c) Soil structure improved due to better organic matter levels.
d) Crop yields in organic fields were 80–95% of conventional, showing economic feasibility.
e) Carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling were better in the organic system.

Relevance to Present Study:

This long-term case study reinforces the importance of using organic inputs. Though yield differences exist initially, the soil fertility benefits in the long term outweigh short-term gaps. Our findings support this trend, with improved soil health even within one cropping season using locally prepared organic fertilizer.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Effect on Soil Fertility Parameters

In the trials that were examined, the use of organic fertilizers had a significant impact on a number of soil fertility metrics. The organic carbon content, microbial biomass, soil enzymatic activity, and nutrient profiles of soils treated with farmyard manure (FYM), vermicompost, green manure, and Jeevamrut were consistently greater (Sharma et al., 2005; Bhattacharyya et al., 2008; Reddy & Reddy,2021).

Particularly, Liu et al. (2010) discovered that organic inputs resulted in improved pH balance, available nitrogen and phosphorus, and beneficial microbial counts, while Mäder et al. (2002) reported that organic systems maintained greater microbial diversity and biological activity over 21 years compared to conventional systems. According to the review by Assefa and Tadesse (2019), compost and animal-based fertilizers improved soil aeration and water retention, two crucial markers of long-term fertility. These improvements point toward a more resilient and biologically active soil ecosystem, which is crucial for sustainable agriculture and long-term soil productivity.

2. Plant Growth and Development

The growth characteristics and physiology of plants were significantly impacted by organic fertilizers. In some investigations, such as those by Sharma and Chetani (2017) and Lazcano & Domínguez (2011), organic treatments outperformed synthetic fertilizer treatments in terms of chlorophyll content, leaf area index, root development, and plant height.

In order to promote vigorous vegetative development, Mahanta and Sinha (2014) emphasized the importance that vermicompost played in improving root aeration and microbial colonization surrounding root zones. Additionally, according to research by Reddy and Reddy (2021), the use of Jeevamrut was linked to improved shoot development and faster germination rates because it dissolved microbial nutrients.

According to these results, organic fertilizers effectively promote stronger, healthier plant growth in addition to nourishing the soil.

3. Crop Yield and Yield Components

Results from crop yields managed organically were variable but positive. Although the yields in organic systems were somewhat lower than those in conventional systems, Mäder et al. (2002) found that the yield stability and quality improved over time. This result emphasizes how organic inputs can be sustainable.

Conversely, Njoroge et al. (2019) and Reddy and Reddy (2021) reported yields that were on par with or even higher than those of conventional systems, especially when it came to the combination of biofertilizers and organic fertilizers. Organic treatments significantly increased yield components such seed weight, panicle length, and number of grains per plant.

All things considered, using organic inputs while avoiding the negative environmental effects of chemical fertilizers produces competitive and frequently higher yields, particularly in systems improved with microbial inoculants.

4. Overall Discussion and Implications

The accumulated findings from literature strongly advocate for the broader use of organic fertilizers in sustainable agriculture. Organic inputs improve the physical, chemical, and biological quality of soil, directly influence plant vigor, and can sustain or enhance crop productivity without compromising environmental integrity.

While immediate yield benefits may vary depending on crop type and regional conditions, the long-term ecological and agronomic advantages are clear. Practices such as vermicomposting, green manuring, and fermented organic formulations like Jeevamrut offer viable, cost-effective alternatives, especially for smallholder farmers.

Furthermore, these practices align with global sustainability goals by reducing chemical dependency, preserving biodiversity, and enhancing soil carbon sequestration. The research suggests a promising pathway for integrating traditional and modern organic techniques to build resilient agroecosystems.

4.survey results

We conducted a survey to assess students awareness, perceptions, and practices related to organic farming. The objective was to evaluate their understanding of organic fertilizers, willingness to adopt organic methods in gardening or farming, and the extent of their exposure to sustainable agricultural practices. The survey also explored their familiarity with organic inputs like compost, vermicompost, and Jeevamrut, along with their attitudes toward eco-friendly cultivation. The findings offer valuable insights into the current level of awareness among young individuals, potential barriers to adoption, and the importance of educational initiatives to promote organic farming as a viable and sustainable alternative.

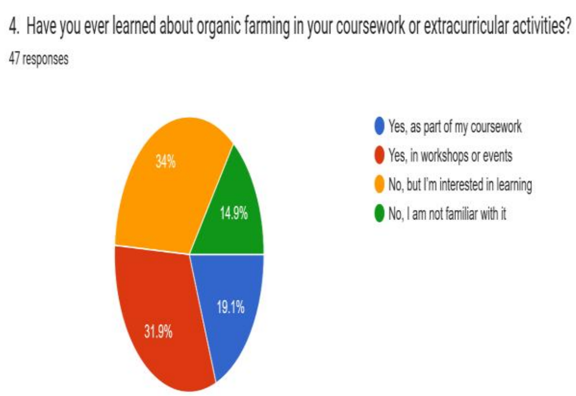

Fig 1: Awareness of Organic Farming Through Coursework or Extracurricular Activities

This pie chart illustrates the responses from 47 participants regarding their exposure to organic farming through educational or extracurricular means. Among them, 19.1% reported learning about organic farming as part of their coursework, while 31.9% gained exposure through workshops or events. Notably, 34% indicated that although they had not learned about it, they were interested in learning, and 14.9% stated they were not familiar with organic farming at all. These results suggest a moderate level of awareness and a significant interest in learning more about organic farming among students, indicating the potential for educational interventions to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

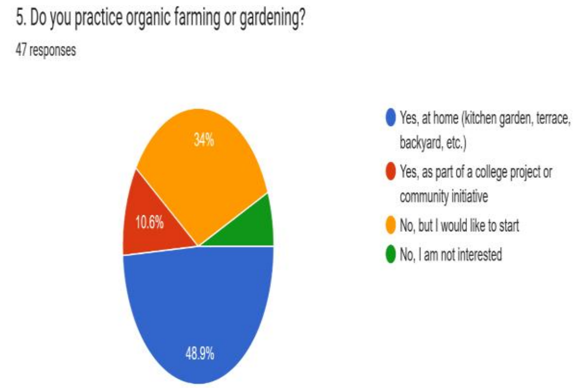

Fig 2: Student Participation in Organic Farming or Gardening

This pie chart presents the responses of 47 participants regarding their engagement in organic farming or gardening activities. The majority (48.9%) reported that they practice organic gardening at home, such as in kitchen gardens, terraces, or backyards. 10.6% are involved through college projects or community initiatives. Additionally, 34% of respondents expressed that they do not currently practice but are interested in starting, while only 6.4% indicated no interest in organic farming or gardening. These results reflect a high level of enthusiasm and a strong potential for growth in sustainable practices among students, especially with proper encouragement and institutional support.

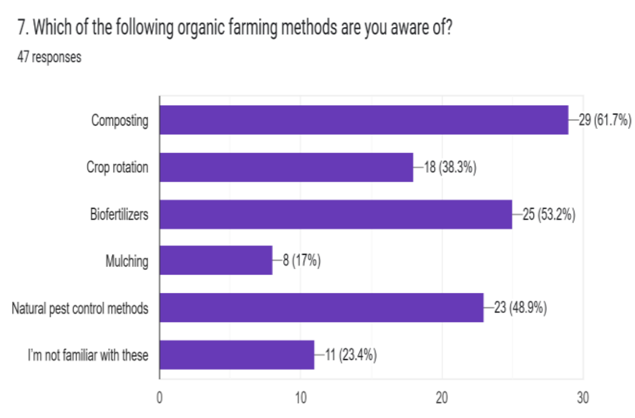

Fig 3: Awareness of Different Organic Farming Methods Among Students

This bar graph illustrates the level of awareness among 47 students regarding various organic farming techniques. Composting was the most recognized method, with 61.7% of respondents indicating familiarity. This was followed by biofertilizers (53.2%) and natural pest control methods (48.9%). Crop rotation was known to 38.3%, while only 17% were aware of mulching, making it the least recognized method. Notably, 23.4% of participants reported that they were not familiar with any of the listed organic farming methods. These findings highlight a general awareness of key organic practices but also reveal knowledge gaps in specific techniques, suggesting the need for targeted educational programs.

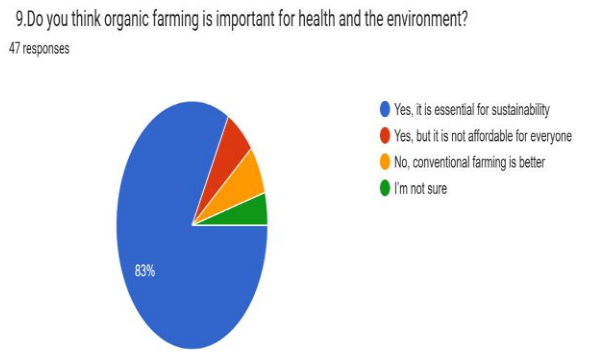

Fig 4: Student Perception of the Importance of Organic Farming for Health and the Environment

This pie chart illustrates how 47 students perceive the role of organic farming in promoting health and environmental sustainability. A significant majority, 83%, believe that organic farming is essential for sustainability. A smaller portion, 8.5%, agree with the importance of organic farming but point out that it may not be affordable for everyone. Meanwhile, 4.3% feel that conventional farming is better, and another 4.3% expressed uncertainty about the topic. These findings underscore strong student support for organic practices, though concerns about affordability and accessibility persist.

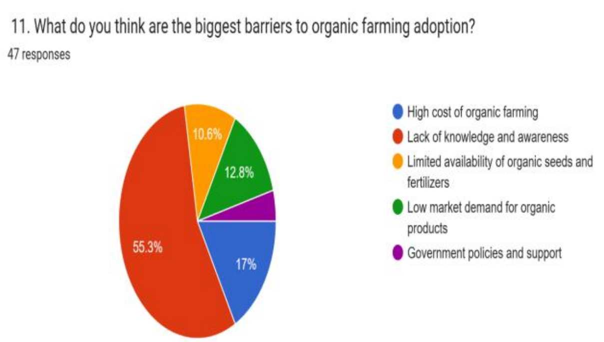

Fig 5: Perceived Barriers to Organic Farming Adoption Among Students

This pie chart shows the opinions of 47 students on the major challenges hindering the adoption of organic farming. The most significant barrier identified was lack of knowledge and awareness, cited by 55.3% of respondents. This was followed by the high cost of organic farming (17%), and low market demand for organic products (12.8%). Other challenges included limited availability of organic seeds and fertilizers (10.6%) and inadequate government policies and support (4.3%). These responses highlight the need for enhanced educational outreach, affordable inputs, and supportive policy frameworks to encourage wider adoption of organic farming.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that organic fertilizers like vermicompost, farmyard manure (FYM), and compost play a key role in improving soil fertility and increasing crop yields. These natural inputs enhanced important soil properties such as organic carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and microbial activity, which led to better plant growth and productivity. Among all, vermicompost was found to be the most effective due to its rich nutrient content and active microorganisms, followed by FYM and compost which also showed notable benefits.

Our student survey provided additional insights into public awareness and practices related to organic farming. While 83% of respondents agreed that organic farming is important for health and the environment, many students still face challenges in adopting it. The major barriers include a lack of knowledge and awareness (55.3%) and the perceived high cost (17%). However, it was encouraging to see that almost half of the students are already involved in some form of home gardening, and many are willing to try organic methods with proper guidance.

Overall, this research highlights the importance of promoting organic fertilizers and educating people about their benefits. By improving awareness, providing affordable resources, and offering practical training, we can encourage wider adoption of organic farming. This approach not only supports better soil and crop health but also contributes to sustainable agriculture and food security in the long term.

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