

The Organic Sugarcane Farming in Maharashtra: Present Performance and Future Challenges*

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I Introduction

Organic farming is a holistic farming system that promotes, improves and sustains the health of agro-ecosystem related to biodiversity, nutrient biocycles, soil microbial and bio-chemical activities. Organic farming emphasizes management practices involving substantial use of organic manures, green manuring and management of pests and diseases through use of non-synthetic pesticides and practices. Thus, organic farming avoids the use of harmful chemicals and promotes the use of renewable organic resources to improve and maintain the soil productivity and to manage the crop pests and diseases.

Organic farming is gaining importance in recent years in agricultural sector of several states, including Maharashtra, of our country mainly because of its impressive social, environmental and sustainability related benefits. Despite these beneficial features of organic farming, it is essential to examine its performance in terms of yields and returns. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to evaluate the economic performance of Organic Sugarcane (OS) cultivation *vis-à-vis* Inorganic Sugarcane (IS) cultivation in Maharashtra. The study also assessed the constraints of and benefits from OS farming from the perspectives of the farmers to suggest policy measures for development of OS farming in the state.

Ranked second, India produced about 292 million tonnes of sugarcane contributing about 23 per cent to the world sugarcane production during Triennium Ending (TE) 2002-2003. Sugarcane is the second most important commercial crop in India next only to cotton covering about 4.36 million ha in TE 2002-2003. It contributes about 7.50 per cent towards agriculture GDP and provides sustenance to about 50 million farmers, their dependents and a large mass of agricultural

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