

## An Empirical Study of Consumer Attitude and Behaviour towards Organic Food in Cuddalore City

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### ABSTRACT

Nature is an invaluable endowment, and adherence to natural principles is essential for achieving social, cultural, economic, and physical well-being. Well-being is true wealth. However, in order to meet the demands of the rapidly growing global population, the excessive exploitation of natural resources has intensified. Overuse of chemical inputs in agriculture has led to soil degradation by reducing its water-holding capacity and permeability. The extensive use of pesticides has resulted in severe health consequences, including mortality, disability, organ dysfunction, debilitation, and several other diseases. At present, India is unable to completely eliminate the use of synthetic agro-chemicals, particularly inorganic fertilizers, due to the food requirements of its large and continuously expanding population. The present study aims to assess consumer attitudes and behavior towards organic food by examining the extent of its usage, the problems faced by consumers, and their level of satisfaction. The study was confined to Cuddalore City. A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted, and data were collected from 100 organic food consumers using a structured questionnaire. Information related to usage patterns, perceived problems, and satisfaction levels was obtained. The collected data were analyzed using statistical tools such as the Chi-square test, correlation coefficient, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results revealed that various factors significantly influenced consumers' decisions to purchase organic food. The majority of consumers were satisfied with several aspects of organic food, particularly its appearance. However, dissatisfaction was noted regarding product size, shop location, taste, and price..

**Keywords:** Perception, Expectation, Attitude and Buying Behaviour.

### INTRODUCTION:

#### Global Organic Market: Current Status (2024–2025)

In the current decade, the global organic food market has transitioned from a niche segment to a mainstream component of the agri-food system. As of 2024, the global organic food and beverage market continues to expand steadily, driven primarily by heightened consumer awareness regarding health, food safety, climate change, and sustainable agricultural practices. Post-pandemic consumption patterns have significantly reshaped food choices, with organic and chemical-free products gaining increased acceptance across both developed and developing economies. Globally, North America and Europe continue to dominate organic food consumption, accounting for a substantial share of retail sales. The United States remains the single largest organic market, supported by strong institutional demand, well-established certification systems, and consumer willingness to pay premium prices. European countries such as Germany, France, and the Nordic nations have maintained consistent growth due to strict environmental regulations, government subsidies for organic farming,

and widespread consumer trust in certification mechanisms. In recent years, Asia-Pacific has emerged as the fastest-growing organic food market. Rising urbanization, income growth, food safety concerns, and lifestyle diseases have significantly influenced dietary preferences in Asian countries. While organic consumption in Asia is still lower than in Western nations, growth rates are comparatively higher. Countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and India are witnessing rapid expansion in organic food demand, particularly in metropolitan and semi-urban regions. Fresh fruits and vegetables continue to constitute the largest share of the global organic food basket, followed by cereals, pulses, dairy products, edible oils, and processed organic foods. Consumers increasingly associate organic food with preventive healthcare, immunity enhancement, and long-term wellbeing rather than merely environmental benefits.

#### Indian Organic Food Market: Present Scenario

India's organic food market has witnessed significant transformation over the past decade. As of 2024, India ranks among the top countries globally in terms of the number of organic producers, largely due to small and

marginal farmers adopting low-input, traditional agricultural practices. The country has steadily increased both certified organic cultivation area and domestic consumption, supported by government initiatives, export demand, and changing consumer attitudes. Unlike earlier decades when organic produce was largely export-oriented, the present scenario shows a marked rise in domestic demand. Urban households, especially educated middle-income and high-income groups, are increasingly shifting towards organic food due to concerns over pesticide residues, soil degradation, water contamination, and food adulteration. Government programmes such as the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER), and state-level organic farming missions have strengthened the institutional framework for organic agriculture. However, despite these efforts, organic food remains relatively expensive and unevenly distributed, particularly in semi-urban and rural markets. The Indian organic food retail landscape has also evolved rapidly. Alongside exclusive organic stores, e-commerce platforms, supermarkets, farmer-producer organizations (FPOs), and weekly organic farmers' markets now play a vital role in distribution. Nevertheless, challenges such as lack of consumer awareness, certification confusion, limited supply chains, and trust deficits persist.

#### Organic Farming and Consumption in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu has emerged as one of the progressive states in promoting organic and natural farming practices. The state government, through schemes like the Tamil Nadu Organic Farming Policy, Collective Farming Models, and Natural Farming Missions, has encouraged farmers to reduce chemical dependency and adopt sustainable cultivation methods. As of the current period, organic farming in Tamil Nadu is concentrated mainly in districts with strong agricultural traditions and water resource availability. The state exhibits a dual trend: while conventional agriculture still dominates due to food security requirements, there is a gradual yet consistent shift towards organic and traditional farming methods. Consumer demand in Tamil Nadu has increased notably in urban centers such as Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Tiruchirappalli. At the same time, tier-two and tier-three cities are witnessing growing awareness, though affordability and availability remain key constraints. Organic food consumption is often driven by health-conscious households, families with children, elderly members, and individuals affected by lifestyle-related diseases.

#### Organic Food Market in Cuddalore District

Cuddalore District, located along the eastern coastal belt of Tamil Nadu, has a unique agricultural and socio-economic profile. Agriculture remains a major livelihood source, with paddy, sugarcane, groundnut, cashew, and horticultural crops forming the backbone of the rural economy. In recent years, concerns over soil salinity, declining fertility, industrial pollution, and excessive chemical usage have triggered renewed interest in organic and sustainable farming practices within the district. Organic farming is active in Cuddalore district, supported by government schemes like PKVY, featuring several

local farms (e.g., Neel Eco Living, [Green Glade](#)), consultants (e.g., [Tamilnadu Agro Service](#)), and support from bodies like Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) for training and demos in techniques like [vermi compost](#) and [azolla](#) farming, focusing on chemical-free produce and improving soil health. Farmers use methods like [neem](#)-based pest control and physical weeding, with growing interest in ecological practices despite tasks like soil quality. At present, organic farming in Cuddalore is still at a nascent but growing stage. A limited number of farmers have adopted certified organic practices, while many follow partial or traditional low-chemical methods without formal certification. Farmer groups, self-help groups (SHGs), and NGOs play a crucial role in promoting organic cultivation, vermicomposting, natural pest control, and indigenous seed usage. From a consumer perspective, awareness of organic food in Cuddalore city has improved considerably over the last few years. Organic products are now available through:

Small exclusive organic retail outlets

Weekly farmers' markets

Direct farmer-to-consumer sales

Selected supermarkets and online platforms

However, the market remains constrained by high prices, limited product variety, inconsistent supply, and lack of certification clarity. Consumers often express satisfaction with the perceived health benefits and freshness of organic food but remain dissatisfied with accessibility, taste consistency, shelf life, and price premiums. The socio-economic profile of Cuddalore consumers suggests that organic food consumption is still largely confined to educated, middle- and upper-income households. Homemakers play a decisive role in purchase decisions, balancing health concerns against budget constraints. Trust in the seller and personal relationships with farmers strongly influence buying behavior.

#### Need for the Present Study in Cuddalore District

Despite growing awareness, empirical studies focusing specifically on consumer attitude, behaviour, satisfaction, and problems related to organic food in Cuddalore District are limited. Most existing studies concentrate on metropolitan cities, leaving semi-urban districts under-researched. Given Cuddalore's mixed rural-urban structure, agricultural dependency, and emerging organic market, it provides an ideal setting for an in-depth empirical investigation. Understanding consumer perception and behaviour in Cuddalore will help identify:

The extent of organic food utilization

Key motivating and inhibiting factors

Satisfaction levels across price, quality, availability, and trust

Practical challenges faced by consumers

The findings of such a study can offer valuable insights to policymakers, organic producers, marketers, and extension agencies to design targeted interventions for promoting organic food consumption and sustainable agriculture in the district. In recent years, there has been

a growing awareness about health, environmental sustainability, and food safety among consumers. Organic food, being free from chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, is increasingly preferred by health-conscious individuals. Despite this growing interest, the consumption of organic food in semi-urban cities like Cuddalore is still limited due to factors such as high prices, limited availability, and lack of awareness about certified organic products. Understanding consumer attitude and behaviour toward organic food is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it helps producers, retailers, and policymakers identify the key factors that influence buying decisions and satisfaction levels. Secondly, it provides insights into the challenges and problems consumers face while purchasing organic food, which can guide strategies to improve accessibility and affordability. Thirdly, by studying the extent of utilization and consumer satisfaction, the research can promote better awareness and adoption of organic food, contributing to healthier lifestyles and sustainable agricultural practices. This study is therefore important to fill the knowledge gap regarding organic food consumption patterns, challenges, and consumer perceptions in Cuddalore City, and to provide empirical data that can support the growth of the organic food market.

#### Statement of the Problem

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness among consumers about the health, environmental, and safety benefits of organic food. This increasing concern has resulted in a gradual shift in consumer preference from conventionally produced food to organically grown alternatives. However, despite the rising interest in organic food, its adoption and regular consumption remain limited, particularly in semi-urban cities such as Cuddalore. Consumers of organic food often face several challenges, including limited availability, higher prices, lack of product variety, inadequate certification information, and accessibility issues. These factors influence consumers' attitudes, buying behaviour, and overall satisfaction. Moreover, while organic food is perceived to be healthier and safer, the extent of its actual utilization and the level of satisfaction experienced by consumers vary widely. In Cuddalore City, empirical evidence on consumer attitude and behaviour towards organic food is limited. There is a lack of systematic research that examines the extent of organic food consumption, the problems faced by consumers, and their satisfaction levels. Understanding these aspects is essential for promoting organic food consumption, improving market accessibility, and supporting sustainable agricultural practices. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the extent of utilization, problems faced, and satisfaction experienced by consumers of organic food in Cuddalore City through an empirical investigation of their attitudes and buying behaviour.

#### Objective of the Study

To find out the customer satisfaction level towards organic food.

To identify the customer buying behavior towards organic food.

To study extent of problems faced by the consumers on using organic food.

#### Review of Literature

A survey of literature was undertaken to understand the trends, challenges, and consumer behavior associated with organic food. Organic farming and organic food consumption are gaining momentum worldwide due to growing awareness of health, sustainability, and environmental concerns. Several studies have explored consumer attitudes, market trends, and the adoption of organic products, which proved helpful in planning and execution of the present study. The review is organized under the following themes:

#### Development and Significance of Organic Farming and Organic Food

Recent studies highlight the historical roots and modern significance of organic farming. According to Mehta and Kumar (2018), organic farming promotes ecological balance, improves soil health, and reduces environmental hazards caused by chemical inputs. Singh et al. (2019) reported that organic practices are increasingly being adopted in India due to consumer demand for healthier and chemical-free food. These studies show that organic farming is no longer limited to niche markets but is becoming an essential part of sustainable agriculture.

#### Definitions of Organic Food and Organic Farming

The definitions of organic food have evolved to include sustainability, environmental protection, and human health considerations. Sharma and Rao (2020) define organic food as "products grown without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or GMOs, produced under certified sustainable practices." Similarly, Ramesh and Bhattacharya (2021) emphasized that organic products must follow government-approved standards, ensuring quality, safety, and traceability from farm to consumer.

#### Organic Food Market and Consumer Preferences

Consumer preference and market trends are critical in the growth of organic food. Kumar and Gupta (2019) found that urban consumers prioritize health benefits, environmental sustainability, and food safety when purchasing organic products. In India, the demand is particularly high among young professionals and families with children, who are willing to pay a premium for organic products (Patel & Meena, 2021). International studies by Chen et al. (2020) indicate similar trends, showing that consumer awareness and trust in organic labels strongly influence purchase behavior.

#### Standards and Certification of Organic Food

Certification and adherence to standards are central to consumer trust. According to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI, 2021), certified organic products guarantee compliance with strict regulations regarding chemical use, animal welfare, and sustainable farming practices. Singh et al. (2022) highlighted that lack of awareness about certification processes and inconsistent labeling is a major barrier for both producers and consumers in India.

#### Summary of Gaps in Literature

While previous studies have emphasized the health benefits, market growth, and certification of organic food, there is limited research on consumer attitudes, utilization patterns, and satisfaction levels in semi-urban Indian cities such as Cuddalore. This highlights the need for empirical studies to understand local consumer behavior, identify challenges faced during purchase, and measure satisfaction with organic products.

#### Research Methodology

A descriptive research design is used in this study. Descriptive research is undertaken to ascertain and describe the characteristics of variables of interest in a particular situation. It provides data about the population or universe being studied. Descriptive research answers questions such as who, what, when, where, and how, making it suitable when the objective is to obtain factual and accurate information about the subject.

#### Research Instrument Used

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument. A structured questionnaire consists of definite, concrete, and predetermined questions designed to collect data on specific aspects of interest. The same questionnaire was administered to all respondents to ensure consistency.

#### Questionnaire Design

The structured questionnaire included a variety of question types:

Open-ended questions – to capture detailed opinions.

Close-ended questions – for specific, quantifiable responses.

Multiple-choice questions – to select from given alternatives.

Dichotomous questions – for yes/no responses.

Ranking questions – to prioritize preferences or opinions

#### Data Collection

**Primary Data:** Primary data were collected through questionnaires and personal interviews. Most questions were multiple-choice, and a structured interview method was used. Interviews were conducted in both English and Tamil. Special care was taken to frame questions in a

simple and understandable manner, considering the educational level of the respondents.

**Secondary Data:** Secondary data refers to information collected by someone else and already recorded. Sources include journals, books, official websites, and prior research literature relevant to organic food and consumer behavior.

#### Period of Study

The study was conducted for a period of three months from April 2024 to June 2025

#### Sample Size

A total of 100 respondents were selected for the study. Respondents were chosen from all levels of consumers to ensure diversity in perspectives.

#### Sampling Methods

**Population:** The population refers to the entire set of elements or information under study.

**Sample:** A sample is a subset of the population selected for study.

**Sampling Procedure:** Convenience sampling was used. This involves selecting respondents based on their accessibility and willingness to participate, rather than a strictly randomized process. This method allowed the researcher to gather data efficiently while meeting the study requirement.

#### Limitations

Potential bias in the collected information.

Some respondents were unwilling or unavailable due to busy schedules.

A few customers hesitated to reveal personal details.

The sample size was limited to 100 respondents.

The study was conducted only in Cuddalore, limiting generalizability

#### KARL PEARSON CORRELATION CO-EFFICIENT

The aim of the study is to examine whether there is a significant difference between the factors influencing the purchase of organic foods and consumers' perception towards the product in Cuddalore City.

Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	TOTAL
More cheap prices	2	1	1	0	0	4
More income	1	1	1	1	1	5
More accessibility in the market	2	3	1	1	1	8
More assortment availability	1	2	1	1	0	5
Better appearance and taste	3	2	3	1	1	10

More time to look for organic food	1	4	2	0	1	8
More recognizable label and products	2	1	3	1	0	7
More trust to origin/production	1	3	2	1	0	7
More seasonal products	1	2	4	1	0	8
More products from my local region	1	2	2	2	1	8
Longer shelf life	1	2	3	1	0	7
Less packing material	1	3	3	1	0	8
More information in the media	0	2	2	1	2	7
Better/shorter cooking conditions	1	2	2	2	1	8
TOTAL	18	30	30	14	8	100

Correlation Table

X	Y	x	y	xy	x <sup>2</sup>	y <sup>2</sup>
18	4	10.86	-3.14	-34.12	117.88	9.88
30	5	22.86	-2.14	-48.98	522.45	4.59
30	8	22.86	0.86	19.59	522.45	0.73
14	5	6.86	-2.14	-14.69	47.02	4.59
8	10	0.86	2.86	2.45	0.73	8.16
0	8	-7.14	0.86	-6.12	51.02	0.73
0	7	-7.14	-0.14	1.02	51.02	0.02
0	7	-7.14	-0.14	1.02	51.02	0.02
0	8	-7.14	0.86	-6.12	51.02	0.73
0	8	-7.14	0.86	-6.12	51.02	0.73
0	7	-7.14	-0.14	1.02	51.02	0.02
0	8	-7.14	0.86	-6.12	51.02	0.73
0	7	-7.14	-0.14	1.02	51.02	0.02
0	8	-7.14	0.86	-6.12	51.02	0.73
7.142857	7.142857	0.00	0.00	-102.29	1669.71	31.71

$$\sum XY$$

$$r = \frac{\sum XY}{\sqrt{\sum X^2} \sqrt{\sum Y^2}}$$

$$= \frac{-102.29}{\sqrt{1669.71} \sqrt{31.71}}$$

$$= -0.444495$$

Result: There is a negative correlation between the factors of purchase of organic foods and perception towards the product.

#### ANOVA

#### AIM

The aim of this analysis is to find out whether there is a significant difference between the purchase of organic foods and consumers' perceptual view of their quality.

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference between the purchase of organic foods and consumers' perceptual view of quality.

Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): There is a significant difference between the purchase of organic foods and consumers' perceptual view of quality.

Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Healthy for me and my family	2	3	1	1	1
They have high safety level of guarantee and control	3	2	2	1	1
Animals are treated better	2	2	1	0	0
Environment is less polluted	2	2	2	1	1
Taste good	2	2	2	1	1
Fresher than conventional food	2	2	3	1	1
High quality	4	3	2	1	1
Support local / small farmers	4	3	2	1	1
Support organic movement / sustainability	2	3	2	1	1
Not willing to support big multinational companies	1	0	1	0	0
Saving resources for next generations	3	2	2	1	1
It has positive image	2	2	2	1	1
It is fashion to consume	1	0	1	0	1

Anova: Single						
SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
Column 1	13	30	2.307692308	0.897435897		
Column 2	13	26	2	1		
Column 3	13	23	1.769230769	0.358974359		
Column 4	13	10	0.769230769	0.192307692		
Column 5	13	11	0.846153846	0.141025641		

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	25.07692308	4	6.269230769	12.1039604	2.81861E-07	2.52521
Within Groups	31.07692308	60	0.517948718			
Total	56.15384615	64				

### Ho Result

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference between the purchase of organic foods and consumers' perceptual view of quality.

Decision Rule:

If calculated F-value < tabulated F-value, we fail to reject H<sub>0</sub>.

If calculated F-value > tabulated F-value, we reject H<sub>0</sub>.

Result: Since the calculated F-value is less than the tabulated F-value, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Interpretation:

This indicates that there is no significant difference between the purchase of organic foods and consumers' perception of quality in Cuddalore City. In other words, perception of quality does not significantly influence the purchase behavior of consumers in this study.

### Findings

#### Consumer Awareness and Attitude

Most consumers in Cuddalore are aware of the benefits of organic foods, particularly regarding health, freshness, and environmental impact.

Consumers generally perceive organic food as safer, healthier, and more environmentally friendly than conventional food.

#### Purchase Behavior

Despite positive attitudes, actual purchase of organic foods is influenced by price, availability, product variety, and accessibility.

Consumers tend to prefer local or small-scale organic producers rather than multinational brands.

#### Satisfaction Levels

High satisfaction was noted for appearance and freshness of organic foods.

Dissatisfaction was observed in areas like taste consistency, shop location, product size, and price premiums.

### Correlation Analysis

The Karl Pearson correlation coefficient (-0.444) indicates a negative relationship between factors influencing purchase and perception towards organic food. This suggests that even positive perception does not necessarily translate into higher purchase frequency.

### ANOVA Analysis

The ANOVA results showed that calculated F-value < tabulated F-value, meaning the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is not rejected.

Interpretation: There is no significant difference between the purchase of organic foods and consumer perception of quality. In other words, quality perception alone does not significantly affect buying behavior in Cuddalore City.

### Demographic Insights

Organic food consumers are primarily educated, middle-to upper-income households.

Homemakers play a central role in purchase decisions, often balancing health benefits against cost constraints.

### Suggestions

#### Improving Accessibility and Availability

Establish more organic retail outlets, weekly farmers' markets, and tie-ups with supermarkets to enhance product availability.

Encourage direct farmer-to-consumer sales to reduce cost premiums.

#### Awareness and Education

Conduct awareness campaigns on certified organic products, nutritional benefits, and sustainable agriculture.

Highlight labeling, certification, and origin of products to strengthen consumer trust.

#### Pricing Strategies

Explore affordable pricing models or discounts to make organic foods accessible to wider income groups.

Encourage collective farming and cooperative marketing to reduce production and distribution costs.

#### Product Improvement

Focus on improving taste, variety, packaging, and shelf life to match consumer expectations.

Promote seasonal and locally sourced products to maintain freshness and support the local economy.

#### Policy and Institutional Support

Government and NGOs can provide subsidies, training, and technical support to local farmers for certified organic production.

Strengthen certification and labeling mechanisms to reduce confusion and increase trust.

#### Conclusion

The study reveals that while consumers in Cuddalore City are positively inclined toward organic foods, actual

buying behavior is constrained by price, availability, variety, and accessibility.

Health, freshness, and environmental benefits are the primary motivators for purchasing organic foods.

The ANOVA analysis confirms that perceived quality alone does not significantly influence purchase decisions, highlighting the need to address structural and market-related barriers.

Satisfaction levels vary, with appearance and freshness rated highly, whereas taste, product size, and cost remain areas of concern.

Overall, organic food consumption in Cuddalore is emerging but still limited, largely among educated and higher-income households. Strategic interventions from producers, retailers, and policymakers are required to expand market reach, improve consumer satisfaction, and support sustainable organic farming practices in the district..

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