

## System loopholes may weaken organic exports

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India needs to strictly adhere to standards to achieve potential.

With the European Union blacklisting five Indian organic certification agencies and concerns being raised over the country's process, India's organic exports may not achieve a 10-fold increase in next five years unless the Union government takes stringent measures to ensure quality, according to experts.

According to a report by US Department of Agriculture (USDA), India's organic products market - food and beverages, health and wellness, beauty and personal care and textiles – are estimated to grow to \$10.1 billion by 2026, s against \$1.04 billion in 2020-21. However, challenges related to India's organic control system and increased incidences of fraud continue to impact the credibility of India's organic sector, and its exports, according to the report released in September 2021.

More than 50 per cent of organic exports from India go to the US. We lost our organic recognition from USDA last year. In ethylene oxide (ETO) issue, five organic certification agencies from India were de-recognised by European Commission. There are more problems in the store and it is a bellwether of India's organic agriculture. Having a huge pool of localized agriculture graduates across the country, government should develop “competent person” model, using Skill India and Digital India.

The problem with regard to organic certification is that loopholes in the system are taken advantage of by unscrupulous elements. This is one of the reason why some of the export consignments did not conform to ETO norms, resulting the EU issuing quite a few rapid alerts against Indian shipments.

Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) in October last year had derecognized five firms by suspending accreditation to Aditi Organic Certification for a year and banning four others - CU Inspections India , ECOCERT India, Indian Organic Certification Agency (Indocert) and OneCert International - from registering any new organic processor or exporter for organic products certification.

### **Block chain system**

The action followed after some shipments cleared by them failed to meet the norms for ethylene oxide (ETO) presence, which was also flagged by the European Commission.

The biggest challenge in organic products marketing is assured product integrity. Without traceability and use of blockchain technology it will be very difficult to win consumer confidence. All laboratories and certification companies must be part of blockchain system to avoid fake certificates and test report, Sardana said adding without tough measures, reliability cannot be ensured.

As many as 44 per cent (or 2.32 million) of the world's certified organic farmers are from India, the highest in the world. Still, India's total certified organic area is about 2.3 million hectares, as against world's total area of 72.3 million hectares, according to USDA.

Source: The Business Line