

Factors for Converting to Organic Farming in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Organic farming is a philosophy and a system of farming in value that reflects an awareness of ecology, social realities and the ability of individual to take effective actions in agricultural activities. In Malaysia, organic farming is still very young and slow growing industry. Department of Agriculture Malaysia was responsible for observing the development of organic farming and also published a standard for certified organic production under Malaysian Organic Scheme (SOM). The study was conducted to identify the factors for converting to organic farming in Malaysia among the certified organic farmers and organic farmers waiting for SOM certification. Questionnaire and interview were carried out to collect the data. No chemical residues, reduced high risk of diseases, providing of good health, good in taste and nutrients of organic produces, reduced environmental pollution, preservation of biological diversities, efficient uses of natural resources, increasing consumers demand, providing safety produce to consumers, and high market potential were the major factors for converting to organic farming in Malaysia.

Keywords: *organic, awareness, standard fertilizer*

Introduction

Organic farming was defined as a form of agriculture which excludes the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and plant growth regulators (Nugent and Drescher, 2006). It employs a number of strategies in maintaining land productivity like crop rotation, integrated pest management, use of compost and crop residue (Svotwa et al., 2008). The strategies focused more on the maximum use of organic materials for maintaining soil fertility and controlling pest management. In addition, it provided long term farming system, high quality of food and ensuring food safe for consumption (Franc and Martina, 2007).

Organic farming emphasizes conservation and rehabilitation as a part of solution to environmental sustainability and effective use of the natural resources. This approach has been developed to mitigate environmental impacts through reducing of land degradation and contamination, water surface pollution, carbon dioxide emission and increased biodiversity in the agriculture. Besides reducing the negative effects in the environment, organic farming supplied consumers with healthy food products (Skulskis et al., 2005). Increased awareness of food safety and concern towards environmental conservation among the consumers have increased the demand for organic products in the world (Niemeyer and Lombard, 2003).

Today, organic farming holds an important position in agriculture. It is hard to discuss about the future of modern agriculture without taking organic farming into consideration. In the developed countries, organic farming has been established and practiced for a long time and now developing countries also realise that organic farming is a rewarding alternative to meet sustainability of agriculture.

In Malaysia, organic farming is still a very young and slow growing industry where producers of organic farming focus more on the production of vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, herbs, spices, and grains. During the last few years, organic farming started to develop by the increasing number of organic farmers. The study was conducted with the aim to identify the factors for converting to organic farming in Malaysia.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted through a stratified random sampling survey. The organic farmers registered under Malaysian Organic Scheme were first listed from Department of Agriculture data base. They were later divided into two strata, which referred to the certified organic farmers and awaiting for certification. A total of 18 certified organic farmers and 30 organic farmers awaiting SOM certification were selected randomly as respondents in this study. The locations of study cover eight states in Malaysia. The respondents were interviewed by using questionnaire. Data was subjected to descriptive analysis in searching for patterns and trends of responses.

Results and Discussion

Most organic farmers in Malaysia perceived high market potential, long term profit and high profit margin as the important factors in converting to organic farming (Figure 1). Premium price for organic products and reduction of input cost in organic farming were not considered as the important factors in this study because they were not guaranteed factors for success in organic farming. Organic farmers in Malaysia were more interested to capture the niche market for the organic products. The increasing demand for organic products and reduction of food imports also contributed to the high potential market for organic products in Malaysia. High market potential for organic products was not the major factor for converting to organic farming in Malaysia but it is the most the important factors in other countries. Organic market potential recorded the highest percentage with 39% of organic farmers choosing organic farming because of that factor (Siera et al., 2008). Availability of niche market and high potential market were the major factor for choosing organic farming among the certified organic farmers in Oklahoma (Mitchell, 2007).

Ecological factor was another main factor in choosing organic farming in Malaysia. Most organic farmers in Malaysia identified reduce environmental pollution, no chemical use in organic farming, efficient use of natural resources and preservation of biological diversity as the important factors for converting to organic farming (Figure 2). Organic farming serves as an alternative solution for safer food production while solving the increasing environmental pollution due to agricultural activities. Nowadays, many organic farms are based on agro-ecology balance concept towards environmental friendly operation. Good agriculture practices are the important element to mitigate environmental pollution and produce safe products to consumers. Protecting environment and improving the soil fertility were the two major driving forces in the decision making to conduct organic farming (Niemeyer and Lombard, 2003).

Increases of consumer demand, providing safe produces to the customers, good environmental condition for the community, and sustainability of farms were also perceived as very important factors in converting to organic farming (Figure 3). Increases of consumer demand have always been associated with awareness of consumers regarding chemical residues in the food, health concern and nutrients contents in organic products. Organic farming was identified as a solution to produce safe products for the consumers due to absence of chemical residues in the foods. In addition, sustainability of farms is important in field production which is associated mainly with soil fertility. Most organic farmers practice crop rotation and add the organic matters like compost as a method to maintain the soil fertility. This practice will ensure that fertility of soil can be maintained in the long run as compared to excessive use of chemicals that can degrade the soil as time passes by.

All organic farmers in Malaysia indicated that health factor were a driving force for converting to organic farming. No chemical residues in organic food were thought as a very important factor because chemical residues contribute in increasing risk of diseases to the human being such as cancer (Figure 4). Nowadays, the awareness of consumers on healthy life is the motivation to organic farmers in producing the good quality and healthy products not only to consumers but also to farmers themselves, field workers and the others. Organic farmers in Oklahoma for example chose no chemical residue in the foods as the factors for practicing organic farming. Personal and family health factors were also chosen as the health factor in choosing organic farming (Padel, 2001). In short, health factors were important reasons in choosing organic farming not only in Malaysia but also in many other countries.

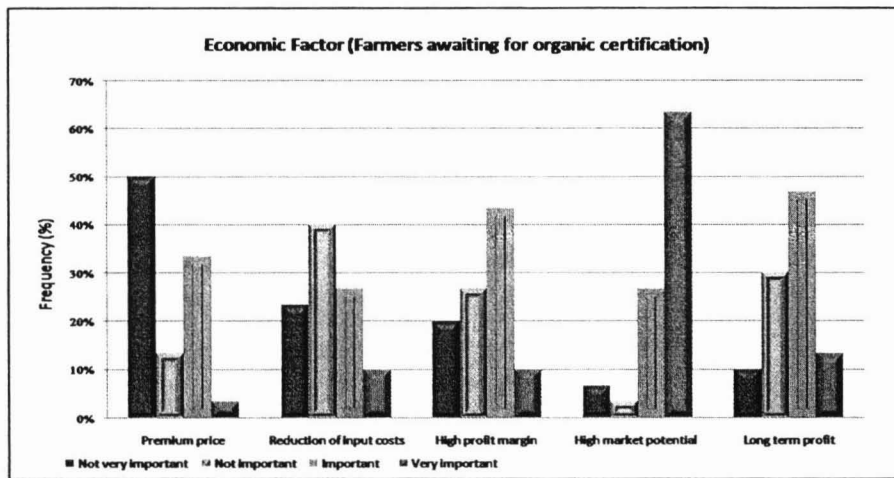
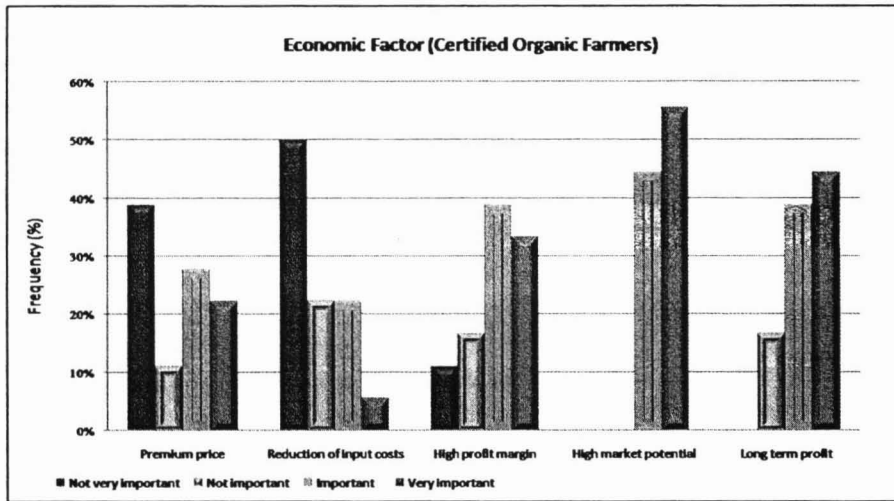
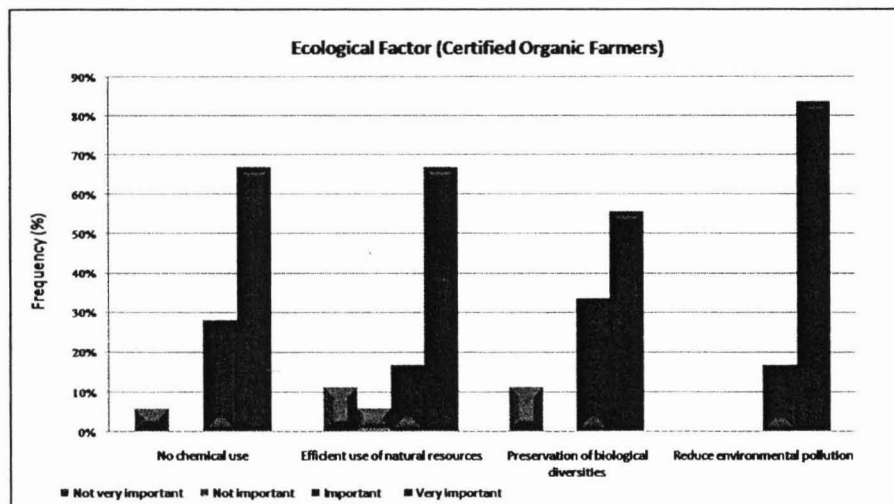


Figure 1: Economic Factor for Certified Organic Farmers and Farmer Awaiting for Organic Certification



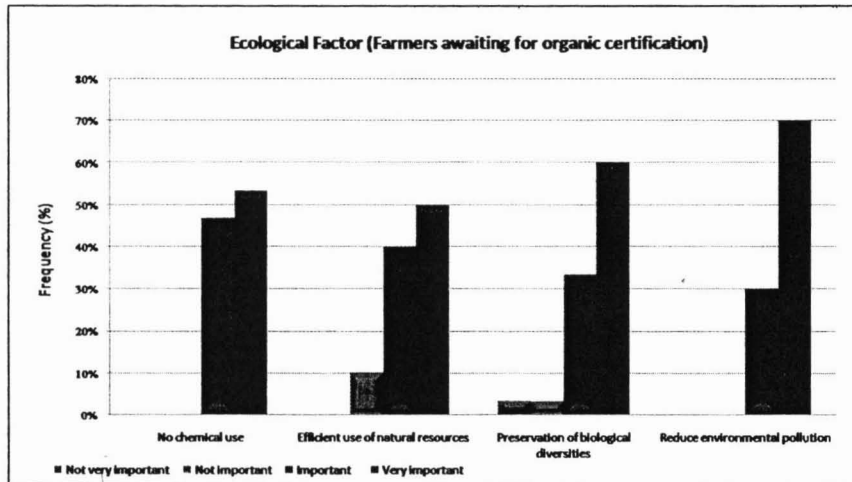


Figure 2: Ecological Factor for Certified Organic Farmers and Farmer Awaiting for Organic Certification

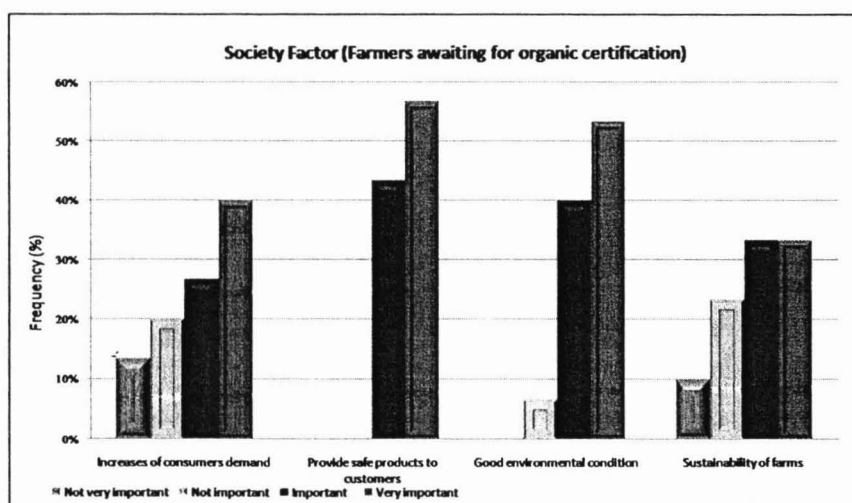
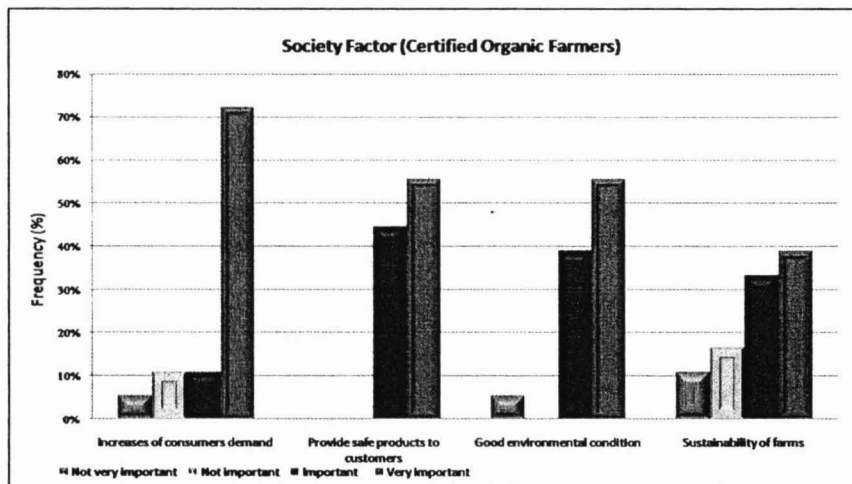


Figure 3: Society Factor for Certified Organic Farmers and Farmer Awaiting for Organic Certification

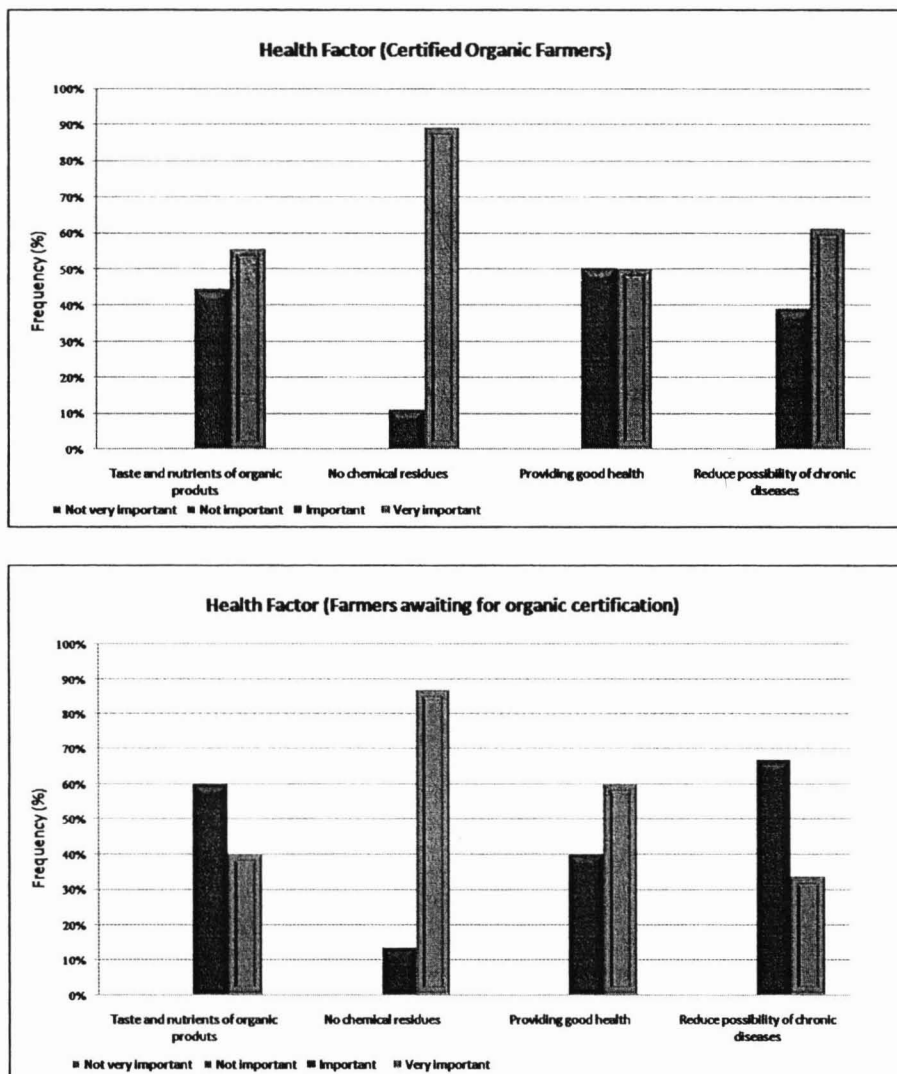


Figure 4: Health Factor for Certified Organic Farmers and Farmer Awaiting for Organic Certification

Conclusion

Choosing health reasons are concluded as the main factor for conducting organic farming in Peninsular Malaysia. Ecological and society reasons are ranked the next important factors in choosing such farming system. All these reasons are supported by high market potential of organic produces. In short, organic farmers not only can produce safe products to consumers but they can also generate profit from organic farming.

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