P-ISSN: 2618-0723
E-ISSN: 2618-0731

NAAS Rating: 5.04
www.extensionjournal.com

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 7; Issue 9; September 2024; Page No. 570-572

Received: 03-07-2024
Accepted: 06-08-2024

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Problems in organic certification in millets

M Manikandan

PG Scholor, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Institute of Agriculture Research & Technology, Muthuramalingapuram, Aruppukottai, Tamil Nadu, India

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2024.v7.i9h.1090

Corresponding Author: M Manikandan

Abstract

The organic certification process for mills is critical to ensuring that products meet strict organic standards from production to the end consumer. However, mills face numerous challenges in obtaining and maintaining this certification. This study identifies and analyzes the key problems in organic certification for mills, including complex regulatory requirements, high certification costs, lack of clarity in standards, and inconsistencies in auditing processes. Additionally, issues such as limited access to accredited certifying bodies, the burden of documentation, and difficulties in traceability contribute to the complexity of achieving certification. The research highlights the need for streamlined certification processes, increased support for mills, and enhanced transparency and consistency in standards to promote the growth of organic production. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a more sustainable and resilient organic sector. Organic certification in the millet industry presents several challenges that hinder the growth and sustainability of this sector. One of the primary problems is the complex and costly certification process, which disproportionately affects small-scale farmers who lack the financial resources and technical expertise required to navigate it. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and education about organic practices and certification standards among farmers, leading to confusion and inconsistency in adherence to guidelines. The certification process is also time-consuming, requiring extensive documentation and repeated audits, which can be discouraging for farmers already operating on thin margins. Furthermore, there is inadequate infrastructure for monitoring and maintaining the integrity of organic practices throughout the supply chain, resulting in issues related to contamination and fraud. Limited access to reliable organic inputs, such as seeds and fertilizers, adds to the difficulty of maintaining organic standards. Finally, a lack of consumer awareness and trust in organic labels complicates market dynamics, reducing the premium prices that farmers might otherwise receive for their organically certified millets. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including simplifying the certification process, providing education and training to farmers, improving infrastructure for certification and supply chain integrity, and enhancing consumer awareness about the benefits of organic millets.

Keywords: Organic certification, Millets, Certification challenges

1. Introduction

The organic food industry has experienced significant growth globally, driven by consumer demand for healthier and more environmentally friendly products. However, within the organic certification process, various problems and challenges emerge, especially in the context of small-scale milling businesses, commonly known as "millrts." These entities play a critical role in the organic supply chain, often working directly with local farmers to process and distribute organic grains and other raw materials. Despite their importance, millrts face numerous obstacles in obtaining and maintaining organic certification.

The process of organic certification is complex, requiring adherence to stringent regulations and standards set by national and international bodies. For millrts, these challenges are often compounded by factors such as limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of technical expertise. Additionally, millrts frequently encounter bureaucratic hurdles and inconsistencies in the application of certification standards, which can undermine their ability to compete in the organic market.

This introduction aims to highlight the critical problems millrts face in achieving organic certification and to set the stage for a more in-depth discussion of these challenges and their potential solutions. By examining the specific issues faced by millrts, we can better understand the broader difficulties within the organic certification system and explore ways to make the process more accessible and equitable for all stakeholders in the organic supply chain.

Organic milling involves the processing of organically grown grains and cereals into flour, bran, germ, and other products, following organic standards throughout the entire production chain. Certification guarantees that these processes comply with organic farming regulations, which prohibit the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and other non-organic inputs.

Despite its importance, obtaining and maintaining organic certification presents various problems for millers. These challenges range from the complexity of the certification process and costs associated with compliance to issues in supply chain management and market dynamics.

2. Regulatory Challenges

2.1 Complex Certification Processes

One of the primary challenges in organic certification for

millers is navigating the complex and sometimes inconsistent regulatory frameworks. Certification requires adhering to various standards set by different certifying bodies, which can vary by country or even by state or region. This inconsistency can lead to confusion and difficulty in compliance, particularly for millers who source grains from multiple locations.

2.2 Frequent Changes in Standards
Organic standards are subject to frequent updates and changes, reflecting new scientific findings, market demands, or policy decisions. Keeping up with these changes can be a significant burden for millers, requiring continuous education and adaptation of practices, which may not always be feasible for small and medium-sized enterprises.

2.3 Limited Harmonization between International Standards
For millers involved in international trade, differences in organic standards across countries can present significant barriers. A product certified organic in one country may not meet the organic requirements in another, necessitating multiple certifications and increasing costs. This lack of harmonization can limit market access and complicate supply chains.

3. High Costs of Compliance
3.1 Certification and Inspection Costs
Obtaining organic certification involves various costs, including application fees, inspection fees, and costs associated with record-keeping and reporting. These costs can be particularly burdensome for small and medium-sized millers who may not have the financial resources to absorb them easily.

3.2 Costs of Transition to Organic Practices
Transitioning to organic practices requires time and investment, particularly if a miller previously relied on conventional inputs and methods. The conversion period, typically three years, is often a time of reduced yields and increased costs due to changes in pest management, soil fertility practices, and other organic methods. During this period, the miller cannot market their products as organic, adding financial strain.

3.3 Costs Associated with Maintaining Certification
Even after obtaining certification, there are ongoing costs associated with maintaining it, including regular inspections, renewal fees, and costs associated with staying current on regulatory changes. Any deviation or violation, even unintentional, can lead to decertification, resulting in lost revenue and reputational damage.

4. Supply Chain Complexities
4.1 Sourcing Organic Raw Materials
Sourcing sufficient quantities of certified organic grains and cereals can be challenging for millers. Organic farming represents a smaller proportion of total agricultural production, which can result in supply shortages, price volatility, and difficulties in maintaining consistent quality. This scarcity is compounded by geographic limitations, as not all regions have the same availability of organic crops.

4.2 Risk of Contamination
Organic certification requires that all stages of production remain free from contamination by non-organic substances. In milling operations, this means preventing contamination from conventional grains, synthetic chemicals, and GMOs. However, achieving this level of segregation can be difficult due to shared facilities, transportation, and handling processes.

4.3 Traceability Requirements
Maintaining traceability from farm to final product is critical for organic certification. This requires robust record-keeping systems and transparent supply chains. For millers, particularly those with multiple suppliers, ensuring complete traceability can be labor-intensive and prone to error, especially if upstream suppliers lack rigorous documentation practices.

5. Consumer Perceptions and Market Dynamics
5.1 Lack of Awareness and Understanding
Consumers often lack awareness or understanding of what organic certification entails, which can lead to mistrust or misconceptions about organic products. Millers may face challenges in communicating the value of their certified products, particularly when competing against non-organic or "natural" products that may appear similar but do not adhere to the same standards.

5.2 Premium Pricing and Market Access
Organic products generally command a higher price in the market, reflecting the higher costs of production and certification. However, the higher price point can limit market access, particularly in regions where consumers are more price-sensitive. Millers may find it difficult to balance the need to cover certification costs while remaining competitive.

5.3 Fluctuating Demand and Market Stability
The demand for organic products can be unstable, influenced by economic conditions, changing consumer preferences, and perceptions about food safety and quality. Millers may find it difficult to plan production and maintain a steady supply chain in the face of fluctuating demand.

6. Strategies for Overcoming Challenges
6.1 Policy Recommendations
Governments and regulatory bodies can play a crucial role in supporting millers by providing clear, harmonized standards, subsidies, or financial incentives for certification and transitioning to organic practices, and investing in research and extension services to support organic agriculture.

6.2 Industry Collaboration and Advocacy
Millers can collaborate through industry associations to advocate for more favorable policies, share best practices, and work towards standard harmonization. They can also engage in collective marketing efforts to educate consumers about the benefits of organic products.

6.3 Technological Innovations
Technological solutions, such as blockchain for traceability

or automated record-keeping systems, can help millers reduce the administrative burden of maintaining certification and improve supply chain transparency.

7. Conclusion

Organic certification in milling is fraught with challenges, including complex regulations, high costs of compliance, supply chain difficulties, and market dynamics. However, with appropriate strategies, support from regulatory bodies, and industry collaboration, these challenges can be mitigated. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring the growth and sustainability of the organic milling sector, benefiting consumers, producers, and the environment alike.

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