

## Choice ORGANIC

Green farming gets boost as city consumers drawn to organic produces

PORIMOL PALMA

The new farm technologies, introduced during the Green Revolution in the 60's, contributed a lot to boost production and feed the country's rising population.

Within several years, farmers and agriculturists noticed that modern technologies -- irrigated water, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and improved crop varieties -- adversely affected soil fertility, biodiversity and human health.

Use of excessive pesticide, hormones, preservatives and ripening agents in food in the last decade raised serious concerns over food safety.

"This has created a huge demand for organic food," said Dr Nazim Uddin, coordinator of Bangladesh Organic Agriculture Network and also a farm scientist at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (Bari).

Around 12,000 farmers produce organic food -- rice, oilseeds, honey, vegetables, meat, fish etc -- on some 7,000 hectares of land, which is only 0.19 percent of the country's total farmland. The number of organic farmers doubled in the last decade, Nazim Uddin told The Daily Star.

Producers and agriculturists said supply of organic food still lag far behind the demand.

"Though the prices of organic food are higher than inorganic items, consumers often complain of not getting organic food," said Shaheen Khan, chief executive officer of Gemcon Food and Agricultural Products Ltd that runs supermarket chain Meena Bazar.

Farida Akhter, director of Ubinig, said the demand for organic food went up tenfold since 2009, and they failed to meet the soaring demand. Ubinig opened its organic food shop, Shashya Prabartana, in the capital in 2009.

### WHY ORGANIC FARMING?

Nazim Uddin said farmland soil is composed of 17 nutrients and five percent of organic materials. However, excessive use of chemical fertilisers causes depletion of these natural elements in soil.

Organic materials in Bangladesh's soil came down to around 1 percent from 5 percent, while chemicals used in land leach into nearby water bodies and underground, polluting the environment, he added.

Use of pesticides and herbicides kills many soil microbes as well as insects and animals like dragonflies, frogs that eat up harmful pests and earthworms. The chemicals get into the food chain, causing serious damages to human health, the Bari scientist told this correspondent.

According to him, vermicompost, cow dung and rotten crop plants or leaves, used in organic farming, enrich soil. Ubinig Director Farida said modern farming promotes

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Helal Uddin, a farmer of Mahashwarchanda village in Kaliganj upazila in Jhenidah using vermicompost to grow his pointed gourds. *Bottom*, a woman preparing vermicompost, a nutrient rich fertiliser and soil conditioner used in sustainable, organic farming and customers perusing fresh vegetables at Prakritik Krishi Bapon Kendro, an organic food shop located in the capital city's Mohammadpur area.

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