



The future of organic farming

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To address this, we opened an outlet in Lalmatia, initially showcasing our products once a week. Ensuring sales was crucial for expansion. Our first customers included acquaintances, hostels, orphanages in Mohammadpur, and the neighbourhood. With support from well-wishers, we gradually expanded our market.

As demand for organic food grew, we increased supply to twice a week. In the early days, sales were inconsistent. From our first day's sales of Tk 1,500 in 2014, we have now grown to Tk 1 lakh in wholesale transactions.

How has Prakritik Krishi sustained its growth while fostering natural farming? To sustain ourselves, we prioritised cost recovery from the market rather than relying on external funding. Over time, we expanded to Manikganj, Araihazar, and Keraniganj, acquiring land through lending arrangements to increase production.

In 2018, we secured land in Baliakhor, Manikganj, establishing Prakritik Krishi as a long-term initiative. We conduct ongoing research and organise regular workshops and training sessions. At Prakritik Krishi Shikkhon, we host a three-day residential workshop monthly, open to all. To date, 500 participants from Bangladesh, India, and France have trained with us, and our next session will be the 49th workshop. These workshops bring together both local and international experts.

We also conduct one-day training for farmers on organic farming, covering soil quality, seasonal crops, seed varieties, eco-friendly lifestyles, and hands-on techniques. Our farm includes a seed bank with 20 indigenous rice varieties and 70 local vegetable varieties. We have expanded to four neighbouring villages, engaging 40 farmers in small-scale organic production.

Our Prakritik Krishi Biponon Kendra is thriving, with a permanent outlet on Salimullah Road and two cargo vans delivering organic produce. Farmers receive payment flexibly, either upon supply or after sales. Notably, 27 Dhaka families now practise organic farming with our support, producing their own food.

We are forming Prakritik Krishi Samaj to support farmers facing social challenges. Through Krishsanga, farmers exchange knowledge and discuss organic and hybrid



practices. To combat the local seed crisis, we organise seed exchange events, as some seed prices are exorbitant.

Our greatest aspiration is to establish an open agricultural university—rooted in farming communities and organic principles—where both teachers and students will be farmers.

Could you share some of the challenges you have faced and how you have managed to cope with them?

The biggest challenge in natural farming is psychological resistance. Farmers transitioning to organic methods often face neglect, discouragement, and even ridicule from family, friends, and society. Some are labelled pagol (crazy) for refusing chemical fertilisers, while others have even faced physical abuse.

Another major challenge is the aggressive marketing tactics of chemical companies, which put organic farmers in direct conflict with industrialised agriculture. The deeply entrenched market system overwhelmingly favours chemical-based farming. Reviving soil damaged

▲
A farmer tending to his livestock at Pran Boichitro Khamar.

PHOTO:
ZAHANGIR SHAH

over the last 30-40 years due to chemical fertilisation remains difficult. Additionally, lack of capital makes sustaining natural farming even harder. Farmers are often victims of microcredit schemes and predatory lending, which is why we strictly avoid loans.

Market management is another obstacle, as the system is skewed towards chemical farming. At universities, agricultural curricula primarily promote chemical-based methods, and the Department of Agricultural Extension continues advocating for their use. Dealers also push chemical fertilisers onto farmers. Competing in this system is difficult—for instance, while local poultry varieties sell for around Tk 700, industrially farmed ones cost only Tk 250, making organic options less viable for consumers.

Climate change poses yet another challenge. Flash floods and rising temperatures have already led to severe crop losses. Land degradation and ecosystem collapse are accelerating at an alarming rate. Additionally, chemical

fertilisers, pesticides, and hormones receive government subsidies of Tk 30-40 crore annually, while organic farming receives none, creating an uneven playing field.

Encouragingly, in the last few years, discussions around organic farming have gained traction.

What are the future prospects of natural farming that you envision?

Establishing a distinct niche is not difficult, but gaining visibility in large-scale markets remains a challenge. The fresh produce market in Bangladesh is worth Tk 1,200 crore, and organic food could capture 10-25 percent of the market as demand for healthier options grows. Health experts now advocate for organic food, providing guidelines on safe consumption.

At Prakritik Krishi, 12 dedicated individuals, including graduates, work round the clock, engaging with 500-1,000 farming families. Our success is not measured in financial profit but in the number of people benefiting from natural farming.

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