Conventional and Organic Farmers in Iran: A Comparison Study on Perceptions, Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics

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Abstract

Organic farming in Iran has great potential for contribution in sustainable agriculture. In order to support the implementation of organic farming, policy makers need to have better understanding of farmers. The purpose of this study is to analyse the socio-economic characteristics of organic versus conventional farmers. In addition, we aim to investigate farmer's perception and attitude towards organic farming. The sample included 141 pioneer farmers (organic and non-organic farmers) in five provinces in Iran (Kerman, Golestan, Khorasan Razavi, Kermanshah and Fars). These regions have the highest number of organic farmers in the country. For conducting the analysis, we used Mann-Whitney Test, Chi-Square Test and Discriminant Analysis.

The results of Mann-Whitney Test show that perceptions of farmers about environmental risks and human health effects of chemical fertilisers and pesticides were significantly different among organic and conventional farmers. In addition, our results indicate that more than 60 % of farmers in the sample had very limited or no knowledge about organic farming. With respect to educational program, 77.3 % of respondents reported that they never enrolled in organic educational courses. Concerning the organic certification, our results show that 77.3 % of farmers were unfamiliar with the process of certification. Regarding organic market, almost all farmers (93.6 %) reported very limited or no knowledge about the available markets. Respecting demographic factors, our findings revealed that, organic farmers were more socially active and relatively younger than the conventional farmers. However, regarding the educational level, we did not observe significant difference between two groups. Using discriminant analysis in SPSS software, we analysed the differences between organic and conventional farmers. Four discriminating factors include having experience of organic agriculture, engagement in social activities, the experience of IPM methods on their own farm, and attending the sustainable agriculture courses were entered in discriminant function of organic farmers' characteristics. The results of our study suggest that in order to support the development of organic farming in Iran, policy makers, experts and extension agents' efforts should focus on extensional, informational and market-oriented plans.

Keywords: Conventional farmers, organic agriculture development, organic farmers, policy makers, sustainable agriculture

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