

# Organic farming

The entry of big business defeats the organic farming movement's raison d'être—to counter the corporatisation of agricultural practices. BY **S. GOPIKRISHNA WARRIER**

**THE** world over, organic farming is growing rapidly in area and market size but becoming similar in characteristics to conventional agriculture and agricultural markets. The unique philosophy under which the organic agriculture movement started out in the 1960s is getting subsumed in the market economics that it set out to be an alternative to.

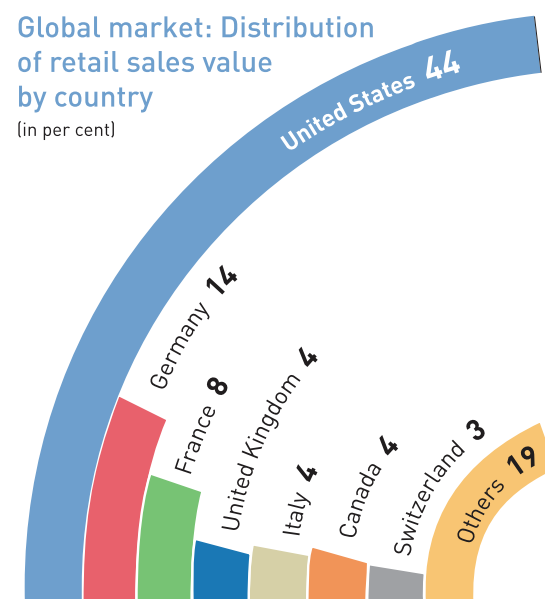
According to "The world of organic agriculture: Statistics and emerging trends 2014", published by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the area under organic cultivation increased from 11 million hectares in 1999 to 37.5 million hectares in 2012. The global market for organic produce grew from \$15 billion in 1999 to \$64 billion in 2012.

## SMALL LAND SHARE

However, despite this growth, the share of the world's organic agricul-

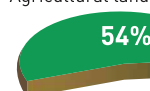
## Global market: Distribution of retail sales value by country

(in per cent)



## Definition of organic areas

Agricultural land



**Agricultural land**

(37.5 million hectares in 2012)

**Cropland:** arable land (cereals, vegetables, etc.); permanent crops (fruit, grapes, olives...); cropland (arable land and permanent crops); permanent grassland; other agricultural land

**Non-agricultural land**

(31.5 million hectares in 2012)

Wild collection/beekeeping, forest, aquaculture, grazing areas on non-agricultural land

Wild collection, other non-agricultural uses



tural land vis-a-vis total agricultural land is a mere 0.9 per cent. According to the FiBL-IFOAM annual survey, Oceania, at 2.9 per cent, has the highest share, followed by Europe with 2.2 per cent and Latin America with 1.1 per cent.

Among countries, India has the highest number of organic producers — 600,000. It has 500,000 hectares under organic cultivation. However, this is only a 0.3 per cent share of the agricultural land in the country.

## PRODUCTIVITY

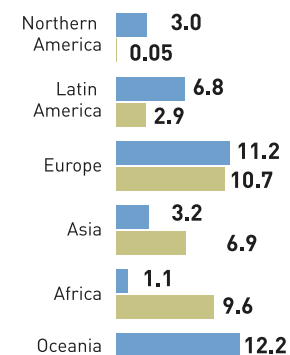
The productivity per hectare is lower in organic farms compared with conventional farms. But organic produce fetches a higher price owing to an ever-increasing demand for organic food. Meeting that demand requires economies of scale that local independent growers find difficult to meet.

## ENTRY OF BIG BUSINESS

This rather skewed situation is resulting in larger corporations and supermarket chains

## Organic agricultural land and other organic areas 2012

(in million hectares)



■ Agricultural land

■ Other areas (wild collection, beekeeping, aquaculture, forests, grazed non-agricultural land)

entering the organic market because they have developed and perfected the collection, delivery and marketing practices for conventionally grown foods. Coca-Cola, Pepsico, General Mills and Kellogg's are some of the big names that appear in the organic food market in the United States and in other parts of the world.

## SILENT SPRING

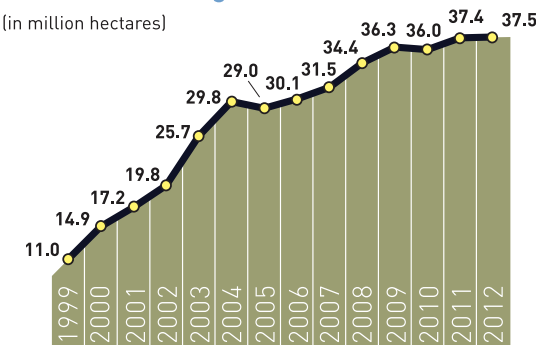
This is not what the organic farming movement had set out to do. Fired by Rachel Carson's 1962 publication "Silent Spring", the environmental movement had returned to organic farming to counter the corporatisation of agricultural practices and markets. The idea was to produce locally, without chemical inputs, and consume locally through local markets. Organic produce today is as

## The ten countries with the largest number of organic producers, 2012



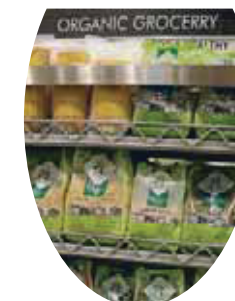
## Growth of the organic farmland 1999-2012

(in million hectares)



## The ten countries with the largest markets for organic food, 2012

(Retail sales in million euros)



much a globally traded commodity as its conventionally produced counterpart. The production and consumption statistics in the FiBL-IFOAM report reveal this fact. In 2012, the largest market was the U.S. with sales of nearly \$30 billion, followed by Germany (\$9 billion) and France (\$5 billion). Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Japan and Spain are the other countries among the top 10 marketplaces for organic foods.

## CARBON FOOTPRINT

However, the consuming countries are not always the producers. The 10 countries with the largest areas under organic agriculture in 2012 were Australia, Argentina, the U.S., China, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Uruguay and Canada.

This means that the retail customer for organic food in a supermarket in the U.S. could as well be buying a fruit grown in Australia and air-transported for thousands of kilometres. Fruit to fruit, this may mean a larger carbon footprint for the organic fruit than its conventional counterpart on the next shelf.

*S. Gopikrishna Warriar is regional environment manager with Panos South Asia. The views expressed in this article are personal.*

**Source:** The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends 2014, published by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

## The ten countries with the largest areas of organic agricultural land, 2012

(in million hectares)

