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Stakeholder Perceptions of the Organic Foods Industry in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Background: The organic food market in Sri Lanka has been growing steadily, driven by increasing consumer awareness of health and environmental sustainability. However, the market faces several challenges, particularly related to supply and affordability. **Objectives:** This study aims to identify the perceptions of four stakeholder groups regarding the key factors influencing the development of the organic food market in Sri Lanka, with particular emphasis on demand, supply, marketing, and related factors. **Methods/Approach:** This research adopted an inductive approach; qualitative surveys and thematic analysis of both primary and secondary data sources were used to analyse market conditions and the perceptions of four stakeholder groups in the organic food sector in Sri Lanka. **Results:** Findings indicate a rising trend in consumer demand, especially among younger urban populations. However, the market is constrained by high production costs, inconsistent supply chains, and limited consumer trust. **Conclusions:** To promote the growth of the organic food market, the study recommends increased subsidies for organic farming, enhanced government certification programs, and more substantial marketing efforts to raise awareness and build consumer confidence.

Keywords: Supply chain; consumer demand; Five Forces; organic food; developing country; trust

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Introduction

The consumption of organic food has become popular over the last few decades, mainly due to a shift in consumer preferences toward healthy, eco-friendly foods. Currently, the international market for organic foods is led by North America and Europe, as these regions have the most established certification standards and intensive marketing campaigns. According to the Organic Trade Association, the U.S. organic food market reached over $60 billion in 2021 and continues to grow. European countries are the most advanced in producing and consuming organic food products, especially Germany, France, and Italy, due to political support and consumer protection agencies (Amarasingam, 2015; Malkanthi, 2020b).

The organic food industry in Sri Lanka is relatively new, with limited production and market share despite the country's strong agrarian background and favourable climate. The demand for organic foods is growing, particularly among the working population concerned with health and environmental issues. However, challenges such as high production costs, weak infrastructure, and low consumer awareness hinder industry development. The government has begun offering policies and incentives to support organic farming and certification, though stronger implementation is needed (Kapuge, 2016; Malkanthi et al., 2021).

Organic farming plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable agriculture by protecting the environment, biodiversity, and soil health. By avoiding synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, organic farming helps maintain soil fertility and water quality, contributing to climate-resilient agriculture (Malkanthi et al., 2021). From a health perspective, organic foods are free from harmful chemicals and GMOs, and studies show they have improved nutrient density, including higher levels of antioxidants. Additionally, organic farming practices prioritise animal welfare, resulting in healthier livestock products (Malkanthi, 2020a).

Given the rising incidence of diet-related chronic diseases and the environmental degradation caused by conventional farming, transitioning to organic farming offers a solution. Developing the organic food sector in Sri Lanka could improve food safety, public health, and contribute to sustainable development goals. The objective of this study is to assess perceptions of four stakeholder groups in the organic food sector of Sri Lanka – retailers, farmers, professionals, and consumers- regarding the factors that affect demand for organic foods, the marketing factors associated with the organic foods industry in Sri Lanka, and strategies to promote the growth of the industry.

This research is crucial in understanding the current state of organic food demand, supply, and marketing in Sri Lanka. As an exploratory analysis, it provides preliminary insights into how global trends toward healthier, more sustainable food systems are being realised within Sri Lanka's socio-economic and cultural context. While organic food markets are thriving globally, Sri Lanka's market remains small and underdeveloped. This study aims to identify key challenges and propose strategies to promote the organic food sector, support the growth of sustainable agriculture, and enhance the nation's food security.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymaking and encourage organic farming practices, which are vital for environmental conservation and climate change adaptation. Additionally, as organic foods are perceived as healthier, the research explores their role in improving public health, particularly in combating chronic diseases. By examining barriers such as high production costs and low consumer awareness, the study offers recommendations to foster a more robust organic food market in Sri Lanka, including the involvement of government and non-governmental organisations to provide support and resources to farmers.

The demand for and marketing of organic foods in Sri Lanka have been largely under-researched, with limited application of existing studies. While global research consistently highlights the health and environmental benefits of organic foods, there is a distinct lack of literature focusing specifically on Sri Lanka. Most existing studies do not consider the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence the organic food market in Sri Lanka, creating a significant gap in understanding consumer trends, especially between urban and rural areas. Additionally, the literature does not adequately address barriers to market entry, such as the costs of obtaining organic certification and producing organic products, which hinder the sector's growth (Amarasingam, 2015; Malkanthi, 2020a).

The organic food sector in Sri Lanka is still in its early stages, characterized by a weak supply chain, low consumer awareness, and limited availability of certified organic foods. Existing marketing strategies, often borrowed from global best practices, are not tailored to Sri Lanka's unique local context. This misalignment has created a gap in the literature regarding effective marketing strategies, particularly regarding the use of new technologies and community-based marketing. Furthermore, there is insufficient understanding of how organisations – including the government, NGOs, and the private sector – can support the growth of the organic food market in Sri Lanka.

These gaps in the literature justify this research. Despite the extensive global body of work on organic food demand and marketing, much of it fails to consider the socio-economic and cultural factors specific to Sri Lanka. Previous studies tend to be comparative, focusing on other countries and offering strategies that may not be applicable in the Sri Lankan context. One key research gap is the lack of studies on Sri Lankan consumers' preferences, particularly regarding the rural-urban divide. While organic foods are widely regarded as healthier and more environmentally friendly, the local benefits of these practices are not well understood. It is essential to explore what motivates or hinders Sri Lankan consumers, both in urban and rural areas, from choosing organic foods over conventional options. Understanding these preferences is critical for designing effective, locally tailored marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, there is a shortage of research on Sri Lanka's organic food supply chain and marketing mix. While global studies on e-marketing and community marketing provide valuable insights, they fail to address the unique challenges Sri Lanka faces, such as infrastructure limitations and market-entry barriers. The lack of research on the roles of government policies, NGOs, and private-sector initiatives in promoting the organic food sector further exacerbates this gap.

This research is crucial for filling these gaps by offering a focused analysis of the organic food market in Sri Lanka. It aims to contribute new knowledge by examining consumer behaviour, supply chain challenges, and the impact of policies and marketing strategies, all within the context of Sri Lanka. This study will not only enrich the existing literature but also provide valuable insights for stakeholders seeking to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka and drive the growth of the organic food industry.

Literature review

Factors affecting demand and supply

Awareness of health and lifestyle is the primary reason people buy organic foods. Consumers are increasingly aware of the health and nutritional benefits of organic products. Chowdhury et al. (2021) found that health-related issues, environmental concerns, perceived quality, and lifestyle changes were evident in the context of

organic food purchase in a study conducted in Bangladesh. These variables explained more than three-quarters of the total variance in consumers' behaviours, highlighting the significance of health and other life aspects in determining the demand. Also, trust and availability were revealed as key factors that can be developed with the proper certification and marketing tools.

Another factor that significantly contributes to the demand is environmental consciousness. Considering this, consumer awareness of the environmental effects of food consumption boosts the purchase of organically grown foods. This is because there are global trends towards the use of organic, environmentally friendly, and safe foods. Huo et al. (2023) observed that there is a positive relationship between environmental benefits and the consumer's perception of the legitimacy of the organic labelling and certification schemes.

The other important factors include price perception and income levels. Organic foods are usually priced higher than conventional foods; thus, those in a better financial position will be willing to spend more in the name of health and a better environment. Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) found that income, education level, and occupation explained the extent of organic food consumption, with higher-income consumers more likely to consume organic products.

The availability of organic foods is affected by production issues and market structures. Organic farming requires standards that smallholder farmers often cannot afford. Furthermore, there is poor infrastructure in place to support the processing, storage, and distribution of organic products, which affects their steady supply. For this reason, certification processes are generally cumbersome and costly, thereby reducing the supply of certified organic foods in the market.

Organic Label and Certifications are vital to the supply chain, as consumers need to trust the labels they see. In a way, the demand for organic foods can be improved by developing sound marketing strategies that emphasise the foods' effectiveness and the confidence consumers place in them. Chowdhury et al. (2021) also stress that marketing and certification are crucial for building trust and enhancing the accessibility of organic products.

Therefore, it can also be said that direct marketing channels such as farmers' markets and organic bazaars may help improve the marketing access of organic producers. Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) found that consumers prefer to buy organic foods directly from producers, suggesting an opportunity to expand direct marketing outlets for supply.

Marketing strategies in the organic food industry

Key marketing strategies in the organic food industry (Figure 2) are essential for building brand loyalty and expanding market reach. Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) marketing enables producers to bypass intermediaries through platforms such as farmers' markets and subscription boxes, offering fresher products and better margins. Community-Based Marketing, such as Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), fosters trust and supports local economies by directly connecting producers and consumers. Educational Marketing, through workshops and online content, enhances consumer understanding and trust in organic foods. Product Innovation focuses on superfoods, niche diets, and eco-friendly packaging to meet consumer demands for differentiation (Dorin, 2018). Eco-Tourism and Experiential Marketing, through farm visits and participation in farming activities, strengthen consumer loyalty by directly involving consumers in food production (Nogueira et al., 2024). Partnerships with health experts, retailers, and restaurants boost visibility and expand reach (Creed-Dikeogu, 2015). Sustainable and Ethical Branding promotes fair trade and

environmental responsibility, appealing to conscious consumers. Lastly, Digital and Social Media Engagement leverages platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to increase brand awareness and foster consumer engagement.

In summary, these strategies – ranging from DTC marketing to social media engagement – help organic food producers build brand loyalty, educate consumers, and expand market presence.

Figure 2
Marketing Strategies in the Organic Food Industry

Source: Author's illustration

Policy and regulatory environment

Government Policies and Interventions in Sri Lanka: There is evidence that the Sri Lankan government has been encouraging organic farming through various policies and interventions to build a sustainable agricultural sector. Some of these include: the formation of the National Organic Control Unit (NOCU) and the adoption and launching of the Sri Lanka Good Agricultural Practices (SL-GAP) certification. These measures help ensure that the organic farming practices being practised meet international standards, thereby building consumer confidence in organic products. Also, it has launched incentives for farmers who switch from conventional to organic farming to increase organic food production. These policies seek to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides to protect the environment and users' health.

Private-sector participants and non-governmental organisations are key actors in promoting organic foods in Sri Lanka. ADRA and Peace Winds Japan are among the NGOs that assist local farmers by providing training, resources, and guidance to adopt organic farming. They also help market organic products through community markets and direct sales, as they are market access organisations. Also, they fund campaigns to raise awareness and inform consumers about the advantages of consuming organic foods, thereby increasing demand (Dhingra et al., 2018).

Private companies are also involved in developing the organic food market. Some firms, such as Good Market and Kenko 1st, have set up marketplaces that link organic producers and consumers, ensuring a market for organic products. Such firms also

tend to include rigorous certification procedures to ensure their products' quality is not compromised and to reassure consumers. Also, the private sector has invested heavily in research and development, which has advanced various farming methods and practices, as well as the marketing of organic food products, thereby strengthening the organic food sector (Dhingra et al., 2018).

Health, Safety, and Environmental Issues

The application of agrochemicals in conventional farming has negative environmental and health impacts. Mishra (2023) has pointed out that the liberal use of insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and weedicides has negative impacts on soil health, crop productivity, and food safety. These chemicals, which were intended to aid plant growth and agricultural production, have had long-term effects on human and animal well-being and food security. According to the WHO, pesticide poisoning kills three million people every year in poorer nations, which clearly indicates the adverse impacts of agrochemicals on the health of people.

Building on Banerjee et al. (2021), the authors provide a detailed explanation of the harm caused by agrochemicals, highlighting that their excessive use harms human health and the environment. Farmers who use these toxic chemicals, for instance, without adequate protective gear, are likely to develop severe health complications, including diabetes, reproductive disorders, neurological disorders, cancer, and respiratory disorders. These are the adverse effects of soil and water pollution, as well as the destruction of ecosystems in the region.

Therefore, greater emphasis is placed on research into safer farming practices and techniques. As discussed above by Banerjee et al. (2021), recent developments in nanotechnology hold potential to develop inputs that can minimise the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Such approaches help farmers mitigate the adverse effects of agrochemicals and produce food that is safe for human consumption.

The market for organic foods is ever-rising, as consumers believe they are healthier for them and for the environment. Ahmed and Rawaa (2024) note that organic foods are grown naturally with the use of natural fertilisers, and their production is subject to guidelines that prohibit genetically modified pesticides and insecticides. Animal welfare is also prioritized in organic farming, as animals are given more space and organic feed. This practice brings healthier, more nutritious foods to market. Organic foods do not contain chemical inputs, so consumers of organic foods are not at risk of diseases associated with antimicrobial resistance, which is on the rise. More and more consumers are turning to organically produced food products because they believe these products are healthier and safer to consume.

According to Pawar et al. (2022), non-organic foods, which have chemicals in them, lead to various diseases such as cancer, digestive disorders, headaches, ADHD, prenatal deformities, and immune deficiencies, early death, and others. While non-organic foods containing pesticides and chemicals are perceived as promoting disease-causing agents in the body, organic foods are perceived as healthy. Since organic farming dates to the medieval ages, it is appreciated for its effects on soil nutrient quality, the environment, and biological diversity. It is practised more due to its health benefits for people and is implemented across large areas of farming in India. The change in this direction also benefits people's health, the environment, and the economy by meeting the growing demand for organic foods.

Research questions development

Porter's Five Forces Model

This literature review explores the competitive environment and developmental barriers in Sri Lanka's organic food industry, using Porter's Five Forces Model and drawing on international and local empirical literature. The aim is to lay the foundation for three central research questions on consumer and producer motivations, supply-side constraints, and institutional policy interventions.

Porter's (1980) Five Forces Model is used to analyse the structural competitiveness of the organic food industry in Sri Lanka. This model includes five forces that shape industry profitability and market entry: the threat of new entrants, bargaining power of suppliers and buyers, the threat of substitutes, and the intensity of industry rivalry. Its utility in this study lies in mapping the power dynamics and market frictions experienced by stakeholders in the organic food ecosystem (Bruijl, 2018; Li, 2023).

1. Threat of New Entrants: In Sri Lanka, entry into organic farming is hampered by high production costs, certification burdens, and limited institutional support. These barriers deter smallholders and new entrepreneurs from entering the sector, restricting market expansion, and perpetuating the supply-demand gap.
2. Bargaining Power of Suppliers: Organic input providers – including certified seed suppliers and compost producers – hold significant influence due to the limited availability and high cost of quality inputs. This reduces farmers' margins and affects the affordability and quality of products in the retail market (Nechaev et al., 2018).
3. Bargaining Power of Buyers: While demand for organic food is growing, particularly in urban centres, consumer bargaining power is constrained by limited availability and price premiums.
4. Threat of Substitutes: Conventional food products – often cheaper and more accessible – pose a substantial substitute threat to organic foods. Despite growing environmental and health awareness, price-sensitive consumers often revert to non-organic options, underscoring the importance of product differentiation and trust in certification (Aydoğdu & Kaya, 2020; Huo et al., 2023).
5. Industry Rivalry: While domestic competition remains low due to the nascent nature of the market, competition is expected to rise with increased consumer demand and export opportunities.

Global market trends and demand-side motivations

Globally, the organic food market has expanded due to increased consumer awareness around food quality, sustainability, and long-term health (Nandwani & Nwosisi, 2016). In North America and Europe, organic consumption is supported by strong institutional frameworks, certification mechanisms, and branding systems (Haessner et al., 2024). These regions benefit from well-developed supply chains and robust government support, offering a comparative benchmark for Sri Lanka's developing sector.

In South Asia, consumer behaviour is similarly driven by perceptions of health, nutrition, and environmental sustainability. Chowdhury et al. (2021) demonstrate that health and lifestyle changes account for a significant proportion of organic purchasing behaviour. Similarly, Huo et al. (2023) highlight that environmental consciousness – particularly trust in labelling and certification – is a strong determinant of consumers' perceptions of legitimacy.

Local studies also affirm the health-oriented nature of organic food consumption. For example, Ahmed and Rawaa (2024) emphasise consumer concerns about

synthetic inputs and long-term food safety, while Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) found that income and education levels predict a willingness to pay a premium.

Supply-side constraints and certification barriers

On the supply side, Sri Lanka faces many of the constraints observed globally, including high production costs, lower yields during the organic transition phase, and expensive certification processes (Nechaev et al., 2018). The domestic market struggles with underdeveloped infrastructure, irregular access to inputs, and fragmented value chains, which limit producers' ability to meet market demand.

Certification processes, including SL-GAP and international standards, are often perceived as complex, unaffordable, and inconsistently applied (Golijan Pantović & Dimitrijević, 2018). This undermines both supply consistency and consumer trust. Chowdhury et al. (2021) emphasise the dual importance of certification and marketing in establishing credibility, underscoring the need to investigate how trust in certification influences both supply and demand.

Marketing strategies and institutional support

Given the market's structural and behavioural constraints, effective marketing and institutional interventions are needed. Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) models, such as farmers' markets and subscription boxes, can shorten supply chains and build community trust. Nogueira et al. (2024) advocate digital engagement and eco-tourism as powerful tools for connecting consumers and producers.

Sri Lanka's institutional landscape includes initiatives by the National Organic Control Unit (NOCU) and SL-GAP that aim to standardise certification and improve market access. NGOs such as ADRA and Peace Winds Japan support training and infrastructure, while private firms like Kenko 1st and Good Market provide commercial platforms and branding strategies (Dhingra et al., 2018). However, the literature lacks integrated evaluations of these institutional actors, which RQ3 addresses by identifying gaps and opportunities for coordinated intervention.

Health, environmental, and safety narratives

Mishra (2023) and Banerjee et al. (2021) highlight the risks associated with chemical-intensive farming, including soil degradation, chronic illnesses, and pesticide-related deaths. These concerns drive demand for organic alternatives. Pawar et al. (2022) further demonstrate that non-organic foods are associated with diseases such as cancer and ADHD, thereby reinforcing consumer shifts toward natural options.

Taken together, the literature reveals a confluence of motivations, structural limitations, and policy gaps in Sri Lanka's organic food sector. Porter's Five Forces Model enables a systematic analysis of the market's internal and external pressures, while the reviewed studies inform the design of the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the perceptions of key motivations driving the production and consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka among different stakeholder groups?
- RQ2: What are the significant supply-side constraints affecting the development of the domestic organic food market in Sri Lanka?
- RQ3: What policies and institutional interventions are recommended to improve organic food availability, affordability, and credibility in Sri Lanka?

Methodology

Background

The research design used in this study is descriptive, a type of qualitative research. This approach is selected because it is well-suited to analysing and understanding the complex nature of the organisation's food demand, supply, and marketing strategy in Sri Lanka. Through qualitative research, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the multifaceted factors that may define the field of organic food. To achieve an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of agricultural innovations, the study will use interviews and questionnaires to capture the views of professionals in the agricultural field, farmers, consumers, and retailers. This method enables researchers to obtain a clear perspective on the attitudes, motivation and experiences of stakeholders (Agius, 2013; Ugwu & Eze, 2023).

Procedure

In this study, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. A questionnaire was the primary method of data collection and was administered to participants in the organic food industry. The questionnaire is divided into several sections to focus on the needs and perspectives of each stakeholder type. Secondary data are collected from research articles and literature reviews on the organic food industry, providing general background information for the study and establishing trends and practices in the marketing of organic foods. Secondary sources support the primary data by presenting the findings of prior research and prior knowledge about the investigated phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). In general, integrating primary and secondary data sources provides a comprehensive evaluation of the demand and marketing aspects of the organic food market in Sri Lanka. Primary data provide real-time information from the sources, and secondary data provide background information to validate and elaborate on the primary data (Abuhamda et al., 2021).

Participants and Interview Protocols

Participants for the study were recruited using purposive sampling, a standard in qualitative research, which involves recruiting individuals with specific knowledge of the study's objectives (Patton, 2015). This method was used to obtain a broad view of the key factors and concerns of stakeholders operating in Sri Lanka's organic food market. Purposive sampling is well-suited to contexts where one seeks an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon rather than broad coverage of the population. The criteria used in recruiting participants involved ensuring they were frequent users of organic foods to provide a comprehensive understanding of current market trends, consumer habits, production issues, and policies over the past century. The choice of a total sample of twenty participants is grounded in Guest et al. (2006)'s recommendation that, even in qualitative research, small samples may suffice to attain saturation if participants are similar in terms of familiarity with and expertise related to the study topic. Further, this study is exploratory. As stated by Saunders et al (2019): "Questionnaires are a useful data collection method in exploratory research, particularly when the aim is to identify patterns or trends across different groups. Even in small samples, structured questionnaires enable comparability and standardisation, which are critical for initial theory development or construct refinement."

To reduce bias and increase the study's credibility, participants specialising in the organic food industry were purposively recruited to capture diverse perspectives on the industry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Basing data collection on diverse

stakeholder groups enhances reliability and validity by offering multiple angles on the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A total of 20 participants in Sri Lanka, selected through purposive sampling and including 5 from each stakeholder group, were interviewed in December 2023. The participants' ages ranged from 28 to 68, and their demographics spanned a wide range. Three participants are retired, and one participant is female (in the Home Gardener category. Their educational backgrounds are diverse. All participants completed Grade 8, and some hold graduate and postgraduate degrees. Farmers, consumers, and retailers have lower levels of education, with only 5 participants having a college degree or higher. In terms of religion, the majority are Sinhala Buddhists who believe green-related businesses align with their beliefs.

The researchers documented a complete list of participant attributes, including demographic information, experience levels, and sector-specific roles in the organic food sector. The research team selected farmers based on their organic certification information and farming experience, and targeted consumers based on their organic food purchase patterns and understanding of its advantages. Researchers targeted participants who actively worked within market operational structures or regulatory systems, drawing on diverse backgrounds to deliver substantial knowledge about the organic food industry. Appendix 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the study participants.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews using semi-structured questions, which enabled respondents to provide detailed information about their experiences while ensuring interview reliability (Hossain, 2011). Respondent groups were asked relevant and specific questions to provide depth to the responses gathered.

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The interview protocols described in this paper were systematically designed to align with the study's objectives, address the research questions, and fit within the context of the Sri Lankan organic food sector. The literature review guided the design development by elucidating current market trends, consumer behaviour, and production difficulties (Hossain, 2011; Samuels, 2019). The questionnaire was divided into five tailored sections targeting specific stakeholder groups, including potential users such as agricultural professionals, farmers, consumers, and retailers. Some of the questions were general, and some were specific, to include both depth of information and consistency of answers, while focusing on important aspects. During pretesting, participants were asked questions to assess the feasibility and relevance of the questions. Appendix 2 provides the interview questions for all four stakeholder groups.

To maintain trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability, the following strategies were adopted. Triangulation ensured a range of data sources was used, while member checks ensured the interpretations were accurate. Consistency and richness of participants' accounts were also captured by providing thick descriptions of their roles and contexts, and by considering transferability through purposive sampling. An audit trail of the questions designed and the analysis procedures was provided to enhance dependability. Bias was also avoided through reflexivity, and the results were

discussed to facilitate generalisation. This intensive strategy helped verify the data and its relevance, identify meaningful trends, and reveal the potential and challenges of the Sri Lankan market for organic foods.

The questionnaire was designed to gather qualitative insights from stakeholders in Sri Lanka's organic food sector, focusing on the current situation, influencing factors, and strategies to increase consumption. It consists of five sections targeting specific groups: agriculturists, farmers, consumers, and retailers (Hossain, 2011).

Part one addresses professionals from the Regional Agriculture Department, government agencies, and NGOs, exploring trends, challenges, and policies to improve the organic food industry. Part two targets farmers, including organic farmers, compost sellers, and home gardeners, and discusses investment barriers and supply-and-demand issues. Part three examines consumers' motivations, barriers, and opinions on organic food policies and marketing strategies (Samuels, 2019). Part four focuses on retailers, exploring demand patterns, sourcing, and customer perceptions of pricing. The questionnaire also includes open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses, thereby enhancing data quality for thematic analysis and identifying opportunities and threats in the organic food market (Samuels, 2019).

Analysis

This study used thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that identifies, analyses, and reports patterns (themes) in data to provide insights into the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to organic foods in Sri Lanka (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006). Thematic analysis is ideal for analysing large datasets and exploring relationships between factors in stakeholders' views. NVivo software was used to facilitate the thematic analysis. NVivo aids in organising, coding, sorting, and visualising data, allowing systematic coding of text data and the identification of themes and patterns (Anas, 2022). This software is handy for handling large amounts of qualitative data from diverse respondent groups.

The analysis involved several steps: (1) Data preparation, which includes cleaning and structuring data from questionnaires (Putney et al., 1999); (2) Coding, where text segments are assigned codes related to topics and subtopics, facilitating pattern recognition (Aspers & Corte, 2019); (3) Theme identification, where codes are grouped into broader categories, and themes are visualized using tools like mind maps (Aspers & Corte, 2019); (4) Data analysis, which involves examining the interrelations between themes and findings on the demand, supply, and promotion of organic foods (Aspers & Corte, 2021); (5) Validation, which involves comparing findings with existing literature and using triangulation to verify results (Aspers & Corte, 2021); and (6) Synthesis, where findings are organized into a comprehensive report that includes illustrative quotations and considers demand and marketing aspects of organic food (Nicholls, 2017).

NVivo was used in all six steps. Coding entails developing nodes or codes related to the topics and subtopics inferred from the data. Coding is cyclical: the researchers review the codes during data analysis and may need to modify them. This step helps reduce the data and makes the pattern recognition process easier (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The process that follows coding is categorising, in which the codes are sorted into larger categories. Thematic analysis is the process of analysing patterns and themes arising from the data. Themes are more general than categories and encompass the ideas underlying the data collected in relation to specific research questions. It is also helpful for presenting themes as mind maps and hierarchical bar charts to display interrelationships between themes (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

With themes identified, the next step in the analysis is to explain the data for each theme. This involves understanding the themes in reference to the objectives and

questions of the study. Scholars examine the interrelationships among various themes and the findings on the demand, supply, and promotion of organic products. Additional NVivo features that can be used to delve deeper into the information include query functions that enable users to search for specific terms or compare data across different respondent groups (Aspers & Corte, 2021).

To increase the validity of the results, validation procedures are used. This is accomplished by comparing the findings with previous literature and by comparing data from one source with that from another. Triangulation is therefore the use of multiple sources or data types to verify and corroborate findings, with a view to assessing the credibility of the results (Aspers & Corte, 2021).

Lastly, the findings obtained from the thematic analysis are synthesised into a comprehensive storyline. NVivo was used to help systematise and synthesise the findings, which are described in the comprehensive reports. These reports focus on specific themes, present illustrative quotations from respondents, and consider demand factors and marketing in the context of the Sri Lankan organic food industry.

Results

We next present the findings for our research questions, based on responses from four stakeholder groups.

Retailers

A concise summary of our analysis of retailers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of survey of retailers

Questionnaire	Vegetable Markets and Fairs	Local Vegetable Shops	Good Market & PGS System	Kenko 1st	Organic Export Companies
1. What is the current situation of organic food demand, supply, and marketing aspects in Sri Lanka?					
What trends do you observe in the demand for organic foods among your customers?	There is a steady increase in demand, particularly among health-conscious consumers.	Demand is growing, especially among younger and health-conscious customers.	There is a significant rise in demand for organic foods, driven by health and environmental concerns.	Demand is high, especially among urban consumers for premium organic products.	International demand is strong, with a consistent market for organic exports.
How do you source your organic products?	We source from local organic farmers and cooperatives.	We partner with local organic farmers and suppliers.	Products are sourced through PGS-certified local farmers.	We source directly from certified organic farms and suppliers.	We source from certified organic farms across Sri Lanka to meet export standards.
What marketing strategies do you use to promote organic foods?	Promotions through local fairs, social media, and word of mouth.	In-store promotions, local advertisements, and customer education.	Educational events, farm visits, and collaboration with health food bloggers.	Digital marketing, in-store promotions, and health benefit campaigns.	Branding and international trade fairs to highlight quality and certification.
2. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods.					

What challenges do you face in stocking and selling organic foods?	Inconsistent supply and higher prices compared to conventional foods.	Challenges include limited shelf life and higher costs.	Ensuring consistent quality and educating consumers about PGS certification.	Maintaining a steady supply and educating consumers about organic benefits.	Meeting international standards and ensuring a consistent supply chain.
How do you perceive consumer attitudes towards organic foods?	Consumers are increasingly aware of the health benefits and are willing to pay a premium.	Growing interest and willingness to try organic products, but price is a concern.	Positive attitudes, with increasing trust in PGS certification.	High interest in health benefits, but price sensitivity remains.	Strong preference for organic products, especially in health-conscious markets.
How does the pricing of organic foods affect their sales?	Higher prices limit sales to a niche market, but demand is steady.	Price is a barrier for some customers, but quality and health benefits drive sales.	Pricing is a challenge, but the trust in PGS certification helps.	Higher prices affect sales, but premium customers are willing to pay.	Pricing affects sales, but the export premium market remains stable.
3. To recommend policies and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka to create a healthy nation and sustainable agriculture.					
What policies do you think could help increase the availability of organic foods?	Government subsidies for organic farming and support for local markets.	Financial support for organic farmers and incentives for local shops.	Policies supporting PGS certification and farmer training programs.	Government incentives for organic suppliers and promotional campaigns.	Government support for certification and international marketing.
How can marketing strategies be improved to boost sales of organic foods?	More awareness campaigns and collaborations with local influencers.	Increased advertising, customer education, and promotional offers.	Enhanced educational campaigns and showcased the benefits of PGS certification.	Focused digital marketing and partnerships with health and wellness brands.	Stronger branding and participation in international trade fairs.
What role can retailers play in educating consumers about organic foods?	Providing information through flyers, workshops, and social media.	Educating customers through in-store events and informational materials.	Organizing educational events and farm visits to build trust.	Offering workshops and in-store demonstrations on the benefits of organic foods.	Providing detailed product information and participating in trade shows.

Source: Authors' work

Over the years, the two retailers have observed an increase in the proportion of customers seeking organic foods, especially among the health-conscious. This trend is evident, especially in urban markets, where the young and relatively affluent are the key consumers of organic products. For instance, participants in the Good Market & PGS System note that demand has increased due to health and environmental concerns. Likewise, based on the data, there is a steady demand for the country's organic exports, and Sri Lankan organic products are on the rise in international markets. This aligns with Chowdhury et al. (2021), who found that health and lifestyle awareness significantly influence organic food demand, particularly in South Asian urban contexts. Similarly, Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) highlight the role of income and

education in shaping organic consumption – consistent with the profile of Sri Lanka's urban organic buyers.

However, the organic food supply chain in Sri Lanka has some issues. Some retailers buy from local organic farmers and cooperatives, while others rely on PGS-certified growers to supply genuine certified products. However, the supply of organic food is unsystematic, and the costs of organic food production techniques are higher than those of conventional methods; therefore, organic food prices are higher. This pricing problem constrains the market to a certain level, but there is constant demand for healthy, high-quality food. These supply-side constraints are consistent with Nechaev et al. (2018), who note that high production costs, limited availability of organic inputs, and underdeveloped infrastructure are core barriers to organic supply chain development in emerging markets.

Promotional, educational, and digital marketing are marketing activities used by various retailers with slight differences. Vegetable markets and fairs use local fairs, social media, and word of mouth to advertise organic foods, while local vegetable shops use in-store displays and educate their clients. The Good Market & PGS System, which takes an educational approach, stages events and farm tours to promote consumer confidence. On the other hand, Kenko 1st uses digital marketing and in-store advertising, focusing on the health benefits of consuming organic foods for target urban consumers. Organic export companies engage in branding and participate in trade fairs to market their products' quality and certifications. These localised strategies reflect broader trends in the organic sector, where educational marketing and community engagement are critical to consumer trust (Nogueira et al., 2024). The variation in marketing approaches among Sri Lankan retailers underscores the need for cohesive branding and digital visibility in emerging organic markets.

Some of the variables influencing the demand, supply, and marketing of organic foods in the Sri Lankan market include inconsistent supply, short shelf life, and higher prices compared to traditional foods. Fluctuations in quality, a significant problem affecting the supply chain, make it difficult for companies to meet international standards, especially in exports. Moreover, people's awareness of organic certification and the importance of organic products and services is still relatively low.

Consumers' perceptions of organic foods are generally favourable, with an increasing appreciation of their health benefits. Manufacturers and retailers observe that consumers are more willing than ever to spend on organic foods, but price sensitivity remains a key factor. This is particularly true of local vegetable shops, where some customers are reluctant to buy organic products because of their higher prices. However, in the more developed countries served by Kenko 1st and organic export companies, consumers prefer to buy organic products due to their health consciousness and a preference for quality over quantity.

This is one of the significant factors affecting the sales of organic foods: food pricing. Pricing makes products rare, but those who appreciate quality and health will always demand them. This observation is consistent with Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020), who found that higher-income consumers are more likely to afford and choose organic foods. However, the general price sensitivity among Sri Lankan consumers limits mass adoption – a challenge also noted by Haessner et al. (2024) in developing-country contexts. However, for export-oriented companies, the premium market is secure, as buyers worldwide are willing to pay more for certified organic products from Sri Lanka. However, retailers also agree that price is a constraint on the domestic market for organic foods, especially among lower-income consumers. This division between the export-oriented and domestic organic food markets aligns with global trends

highlighted by Haessner et al. (2024), in which developing countries often cater to high-value international markets while facing affordability and supply reliability challenges in their domestic sectors.

Thereby, the retailers present several policy recommendations and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka and enhance sustainable agriculture. Thus, subsidising organic farming and supporting local markets may increase access to organic foods. Retailers also stress the importance of policies that would encourage PGS certification and farmer training to improve the supply chain and the quality of organic products. These proposed interventions align with policy mechanisms that emphasised government-led certification schemes and financial support as foundational for building a robust organic sector. The role of NGOs, as described by Dhingra et al. (2018), also reinforces the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in Sri Lanka.

Researchers believe the product could be marketed more effectively through awareness campaigns, engaging local personalities, and providing more information about the product. According to retailers, targeting specific client groups through digital media and strategic partnerships with companies in the healthy-lifestyle sphere may increase sales, especially in large cities. Also, exposure to international trade shows and better brand-building could go a long way toward expanding the market frontier for organic export companies.

Retailers also envision themselves as well-positioned to raise consumer awareness of organic foods. The interventions they suggest include distributing information through flyers, workshops, and social media, conducting farm visits, and holding in-store demonstrations. Such educational programs are crucial for building consumers' confidence and increasing their patronage of organic products.

Professionals

The results of our investigation into professionals' perceptions are shown in Table 2. Professionals indicate that while interest in organic food is growing in Sri Lanka – especially among health-conscious consumers – availability remains limited due to small-scale production, weak value chains, and insufficient input support. Organisations such as NOCU-NOCM and the Centre of Excellence for Organic Agriculture similarly note that despite rising demand, the domestic organic foods sector is constrained by supply instability and underdeveloped certification systems, echoing the broader supply chain challenges mentioned by Nechaev et al. (2018).

Table 2

Data Collection for Professionals in the Agriculture Field

Questionnaire	Regional Agriculture Department Staff	Instructor at the Regional Agriculture Department	Centre of Excellence for Organic Agriculture (Makandura)	National Organic Control Unit (NOCU-NOCM)	NGO (Peace Winds Japan)
1. Current situation of organic food demand, supply, and marketing aspects in Sri Lanka					
Can you describe the trends in demand and supply for organic foods?	Demand is increasing, but supply is still inconsistent due to limited organic farming practices.	There is growing demand among health-conscious consumers, but supply is lagging due	Demand is on the rise, particularly in urban areas, but supply chain issues and a lack of farmer	Demand for organic food is steadily increasing, but supply constraints and certification issues limit	Demand is increasing, especially among young consumers, but supply is not meeting the potential due to a lack

		to inadequate agricultural support.	participation hinder growth.	market expansion.	of infrastructure.
What marketing strategies are currently employed for organic foods?	We use social media campaigns and participate in local fairs to promote organic foods.	Direct marketing at farmers' markets and collaborations with retail chains are common.	Marketing strategies include farm visits, organic food festivals, and collaborations with local restaurants.	Strategies involve certification programs, awareness campaigns, and promoting local organic brands.	We focus on community-based marketing, educational workshops, and partnerships with local schools.
What challenges do you face in promoting organic foods?	Challenges include limited consumer awareness, higher prices, and unreliable supply chains.	Significant challenges are consumer scepticism about organic certification and higher prices compared to conventional foods.	Challenges are educating farmers on organic practices and overcoming the price barrier for consumers.	Main challenges include ensuring a consistent supply, maintaining certification standards, and competing with conventional foods.	We face challenges in changing consumer mindsets, ensuring consistent supply, and overcoming financial constraints.
2. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods					
What are the main factors influencing the demand for organic foods?	Health consciousness, environmental concerns, and food safety are key drivers.	Health benefits, environmental impact, and food safety concerns drive demand.	Increasing health awareness and environmental concerns are major factors.	Health benefits, safety concerns, and environmental impact are significant factors.	Health benefits, environmental sustainability, and food safety are primary influencers.
How does the availability of organic foods impact their market?	Limited availability restricts market growth and consumer adoption.	Availability issues lead to higher prices and reduced consumer trust.	Inconsistent availability makes it hard to build consumer trust and market stability.	Limited availability affects consumer trust and leads to fluctuating market prices.	Availability challenges hinder consistent consumption and market development.
What role do pricing and consumer purchasing power play in the organic food market?	High prices limit access for many consumers despite growing interest.	Price is a significant barrier; only higher-income consumers can consistently purchase organic foods.	Pricing significantly affects consumer choices; organic foods are often seen as premium products.	High prices and low purchasing power among many consumers limit market expansion.	Pricing and purchasing power are critical; affordability is a significant barrier.
3. To recommend policies and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka to create a healthy nation and sustainable agriculture					
What policies do you think are essential to enhance the organic food sector?	Subsidies for organic farmers, stricter certification standards, and educational	Implementing subsidy programs for organic farmers and establishing transparent	Policies should include financial incentives for farmers, improved certification processes,	Government subsidies, better certification processes, and educational initiatives for	Supportive policies include financial aid for farmers, streamlined certification, and public

	programs for consumers.	certification processes.	and public awareness campaigns.	both farmers and consumers.	education initiatives.
How can marketing strategies be improved to increase organic food consumption?	Greater use of digital marketing, collaboration with retail chains, and consumer education campaigns.	Enhancing online presence, partnering with health and wellness brands, and running educational workshops.	Improved marketing through digital platforms, local events, and collaborations with health organisations.	Expanding digital marketing efforts, promoting success stories, and increasing visibility at local markets.	Focus on community engagement, digital marketing, and educational outreach programs.
What role can government and private sector collaboration play in promoting organic foods?	Collaboration can provide financial support, improve certification processes, and increase consumer trust.	Joint efforts can enhance funding for organic initiatives, streamline certification, and boost public awareness.	Government-private partnerships can provide farmers with resources, improve supply chains, and enhance marketing efforts.	Collaboration can lead to better resource allocation, consistent policies, and broader consumer reach.	Partnerships can provide financial support, strengthen supply chains, and enhance public education efforts.

Source: Authors' work

NGOs like Peace Winds Japan also documented a disconnect between growing youth interest in organic products and the lack of supporting infrastructure, and this is a pattern reflected in prior research, such as Haessner et al. (2024), who emphasised that institutional support and coordinated market systems are essential to scaling organic agriculture in developing country contexts. Marketing strategies in Sri Lanka currently focus on education and awareness through social media campaigns, organic food festivals, restaurant collaborations, and school-based programs. These approaches appear consistent with the strategies identified by Nogueira et al. (2024), who emphasise the importance of educational marketing and community engagement in building consumer trust and enhancing brand loyalty.

Certification drives and community events are also used to increase brand visibility, as supported by Chowdhury et al. (2021), who found that certification and marketing efforts are critical for building trust and accessibility. However, challenges persist, including limited public understanding of certification, high prices, and unreliable supply chains. This is consistent with Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020), who found that price perception and income significantly affect organic food consumption, with higher-income consumers more likely to purchase organic products.

Professionals across institutions – such as the Regional Agriculture Department, COOA, and NOCU-NOCM – identify high production costs and low farmer awareness as critical barriers to supply expansion. The market's development is further hindered by inconsistent product availability, undermining consumer confidence and contributing to price volatility. This finding is consistent with Moen (1999), who highlighted how fragmented supply and market uncertainty limit the growth of other product markets.

Despite these challenges, health motivations, environmental concerns, and food safety are identified as strong drivers of demand, particularly among urban and middle- to high-income consumers. This trend supports prior studies by Chowdhury et al. (2021) and Huo et al. (2023), which found that health and environmental consciousness are central to organic food consumption decisions. However, as

Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) observed, lower-income households are often priced out, reinforcing the socioeconomic divide in organic food consumption. The current bifurcation between a stable, export-oriented premium market and an underdeveloped domestic sector reflects global patterns identified by Haessner et al. (2024), wherein developing countries serve affluent foreign markets while struggling to ensure affordability and supply consistency for local consumers.

Professionals emphasise that unless pricing and supply issues are systematically addressed – through government subsidies, farmer training, and improved certification processes – organic food will likely remain a niche market for the affluent consumers in Sri Lanka.

Farmers

The results of our analysis of farmer perceptions is shown in Table 3. Sri Lankan farmers' incentive for practising organic farming includes positive environmental and human health impacts. Organic farmers argue that organic farming is efficacious in improving soil and making produce healthier, thereby promoting sustainability. They view organic farming as a way to minimise the use of toxic chemicals and to improve the soil's long-term capacity to retain fertility. For example, commercial farmers embrace the limited use of chemicals and the improvement of soil health. At the same time, compost sellers emphasise that organic farming produces chemical-free compost, thereby boosting the ecosystem. This finding is consistent with Mishra (2023) and Banerjee et al. (2021), who highlight the environmental and health benefits of reduced agrochemical use and improved soil integrity through organic practices.

Home gardeners, in particular, are motivated by the need to feed their families with healthier foods that do not harm the environment. Some of these farmers adopted organic farming in response to increased consumer pressure or after attending workshops and training. However, they also face stiff challenges, including high production costs, limited availability of organic inputs, and pest control issues, among others, which somewhat hinder the uptake of organic farming practices. Similar motivations and challenges were documented by Ahmed and Rawaa (2024), Dhingra et al. (2018), and Nechaev et al. (2018), who emphasised that both consumer health concerns and institutional barriers shape small farmers' decisions to adopt organic methods.

Table 3
Data Collection for Farmers

Questionnaire	Local Organic Farm	Commercial Farmer	Compost Seller	GAP-Farmer	Home Gardener
1. What motivates you to be repeatedly involved in organic farming practice?					
What are the benefits you see in organic farming compared to conventional methods?	Organic farming ensures healthier soil and produce, promoting sustainability.	Organic methods reduce chemical usage and enhance long-term soil fertility.	Organic farming produces chemical-free compost, supporting soil health.	Organic practices reduce environmental impact and improve crop quality.	Organic farming provides my family with healthier food and reduces environmental harm.
How did you get started with organic farming?	I started as a response to growing consumer demand for	I shifted to organic farming after learning about its benefits	I began composting to support local organic farms and promote sustainability.	I adopted organic methods to comply with GAP standards and	I transitioned to organic gardening to provide my household

	organic produce.	through workshops.		improve crop quality.	with safe, healthy food.
What challenges do you face in organic farming?	Challenges include higher production costs and limited access to organic inputs.	Main challenges are pest control without chemicals and lower initial yields.	Finding a consistent market for organic compost and educating consumers.	Ensuring compliance with GAP standards and managing costs of organic inputs.	Limited space for gardening and finding organic inputs locally.
2. What is your perception of investing money in the consumption of organic foods?					
Do you think the price difference between organic and conventional foods is justified?	Yes, due to the higher production costs and health benefits of organic foods.	Yes, because organic farming requires more labour and higher-quality inputs.	Yes, organic products are healthier and environmentally friendly.	Yes, the benefits to health and the environment justify the higher costs.	Yes, organic foods are worth the investment for health and environmental reasons.
How do you manage the cost of organic farming inputs?	I manage costs by producing some inputs on-site and seeking local suppliers.	By purchasing in bulk and collaborating with other farmers.	I produce my own compost and sell excess to cover costs.	By using integrated pest management and efficient resource use.	I minimize costs by composting kitchen waste and using natural pest control.
Are there any financial supports or incentives for organic farming?	Limited financial support, mostly from NGOs and occasional government grants.	Some government subsidies and NGO programs provide financial assistance.	NGOs provide grants, but consistent support is limited.	GAP certification provides some financial benefits and market access.	Few incentives, mostly from community programs and small grants.
3. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods.					
How does the availability of organic inputs affect your farming practices?	Limited availability makes it challenging to maintain consistent production.	Availability of organic inputs is crucial for maintaining crop quality.	Consistent supply of compost is essential for supporting local organic farms.	Access to certified organic inputs ensures compliance with GAP standards.	Availability of organic inputs is crucial for maintaining garden health.
What is your experience with the marketing of your organic produce?	Marketing through local markets and direct-to-consumer sales has been effective.	Partnerships with organic food retailers and farmers' markets have been beneficial.	Direct sales to local farmers and community markets are effective.	Marketing through GAP certification and local organic markets is beneficial.	Sharing produce with neighbors and participating in local community markets.
How does consumer perception impact your sales?	Positive consumer perception of organic produce drives demand and sales.	Consumers' health consciousness and environmental concerns boost sales.	Educating consumers on the benefits of organic compost increases sales.	Positive perceptions of GAP certification enhance marketability.	Neighbors' trust in the safety and quality of organic produce increases demand.

Source: Authors' work

In addition, farmers indicated that organic food prices should be higher than those of conventional foods. They claim that organic farming is more labour-intensive and requires higher-quality inputs, which, in turn, means higher prices. Farmers, therefore, consider that the health benefits, as well as the environmentally friendly features of organic foods, justify the cost. For instance, GAP-certified farmers argue that the costs are relatively high, but the quality of the crops and the level of compliance with the certification standard will enhance marketability. This perception is consistent with the findings of Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) and Huo et al. (2023), who found that consumers and producers alike view premium pricing as justified by the labour, input quality, and health benefits associated with organic production.

Cost control of organic farming inputs is one issue farmers mention, regardless of farming type. Local organic farmers can minimise costs by producing some inputs locally and, where necessary, sourcing others locally, thereby enabling commercial farmers to take advantage of bulk purchasing and other arrangements with other farmers. Compost sellers, however, make compost themselves and sell the surplus to help cover expenses. To cut expenses, home gardeners practice techniques such as turning kitchen scraps into compost and using organic pest control methods. Though financial support for organic farming remains scarce, most farmers receive occasional government funding or support from NGOs or community funding. This reflects observations by Vidanapathirana and Wijesooriya (2014), who note that small-scale Sri Lankan organic farmers face persistent input cost burdens and rely on informal or sporadic funding from NGOs or state programs.

Accessibility of the organic inputs is a critical factor in the admissibility of the organic farming practices. Organic farmers say that raw materials, including certified seeds and organic fertilisers, are hard to come by; this, in turn, affects production and other measures such as GAP. This supply inconsistency affects the quality and quantity of organic produce available in the market, making marketing for organic farmers quite challenging. This supply-side barrier is consistent with Nechaev et al. (2018), who found that limited access to inputs undermines certification compliance and market readiness in organic farming systems.

Marketing of organic produce is a mixed affair for the farmers. Organic farmers producing in the local area tend to sell their products directly to clients via outlets such as local markets, which appeal to consumers who are particular about organic food. Organic food retailers and farmers' markets are helpful to commercial farmers. Although compost is usually sold by home gardeners or in small quantities by compost producers, its marketing is often through word of mouth, to farmers in the region, or to neighbours. This is because consumer perception is a key factor in determining demand and sales, as many consumers are influenced by health and environmental issues.

Consumers

Consumer perceptions revealed through interviews are summarised in Table 4. In Sri Lanka, the primary motivation for organic food consumption across age groups is linked to perceived health benefits and environmental impact. Teenagers and young adults (18–25), as well as young professionals (25–35), are particularly drawn to the concepts of "chemical-free" and "eco-friendly" consumption. In contrast, middle-aged adults (35–45) and senior citizens (60+) focus on food safety and avoiding health risks from pesticide use. Parents aged 30–40 prioritise their children's nutrition and are willing to pay more for safer food, placing family health above cost (Wijesinghe & Aththanayaka, 2021). These demographic-specific preferences are consistent with

global findings on health and environmental consciousness as key demand drivers in organic markets (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Huo et al., 2023).

Table 4
Findings for consumers

Questionnaire	Young Adult (18-25)	Middle-Aged Adult (35-45)	Senior Citizen (60+)	Parent (30-40)	Health-Conscious Professional (25-35)
1. What motivates you to purchase organic foods?					
What factors influence your decision to buy organic over conventional foods?	Health benefits and environmental sustainability.	Health benefits and food safety.	Health benefits and avoiding chemicals.	Health benefits for children and family.	Health benefits and supporting sustainable practices.
How do you perceive the price difference between organic and conventional foods?	Organic foods are worth the extra cost for health benefits.	Higher prices are justified for better quality and safety.	The price difference is significant but worth it for health.	It is expensive, but I prioritise my family's health.	The price is higher, but it is an investment in health and the environment.
What health benefits do you associate with organic foods?	Fewer chemicals, better nutrition, and overall well-being.	Reduced chemical intake and better nutritional value.	Lower risk of health issues related to pesticides.	Better nutrition and fewer chemicals for my kids.	Improved nutrition, fewer pesticides, and overall health.
2. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods.					
How easy is it for you to find and purchase organic foods?	It is relatively easy, especially in urban areas.	Moderately easy, but selection can be limited.	It is somewhat difficult, especially in smaller towns.	Somewhat easy in supermarkets and local markets.	Relatively easy due to online options and speciality stores.
What challenges do you face when buying organic foods?	Higher prices and occasional limited availability.	Price and occasional doubt about authenticity.	Price and limited availability in local markets.	Higher prices and ensuring authenticity.	Price and sometimes limited selection.
How do you verify the authenticity of organic foods?	Checking certifications and buying from trusted brands.	Looking for certification labels and reputable sellers.	Trusting labels and buying from known sources.	Checking labels and trusting known brands and sellers.	Checking for certifications and buying from reputable stores.
3. To recommend policies and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka to create a healthy nation and sustainable agriculture.					
What policies do you think could make organic foods more accessible and affordable?	Government subsidies and increased availability in local markets.	Subsidies for organic farming and consumer education.	Subsidies and local market support for organic foods.	Subsidies for organic products and better distribution.	Government support and incentives for organic farming.
How can marketing strategies be improved to increase your consumption of organic foods?	More awareness campaigns and promotions.	Clear labelling and health benefit promotions.	Community outreach and local market promotions.	Educational campaigns and family-focused promotions.	Targeted marketing highlighting health benefits and sustainability.

What role can consumer education play in promoting organic food consumption?	Education can increase awareness and demand.	Education can help consumers understand the benefits of products and trust them.	Education can build trust and encourage healthier choices.	Education can inform families about the benefits and safety of organic foods.	Education can highlight the health and environmental benefits, increasing demand.

Source: Authors' work

Despite organic products being more expensive, many consumers view the higher price as justified by quality and health benefits (Jayawardena et al., 2021). Younger consumers see it as an investment in personal and environmental health, while parents and older individuals also accept the premium because of its absence of synthetic inputs. Availability varies by region. Urban residents, particularly young, health-conscious individuals, can more easily access organic foods through online platforms and specialty shops. However, middle-aged consumers report limited variety in local stores, and elderly consumers in rural areas face greater access challenges. These access and pricing patterns reflect the broader market bifurcation noted by Haessner et al. (2024), in which urban, affluent segments dominate demand, while rural and lower-income groups face significant access and affordability barriers.

Price remains the primary barrier, with many reporting affordability as a limiting factor. Concerns over the authenticity of organic labels are also widespread. Consumers, especially middle-aged adults and parents, emphasise the need for reliable certification and labelling to verify organic claims (Jayasinghe, 2020).
Subsidies are widely seen as a solution to improve affordability and supply. Younger and older consumers recommend producer subsidies, while professionals highlight the importance of consumer awareness and credible labelling. Parents call for stronger supply networks and family-focused promotions to ensure access. Marketing strategies should be tailored to demographics. Young people suggest awareness campaigns that highlight the health and environmental benefits. Middle-aged consumers emphasise clear labelling and trust-building, while older consumers recommend engaging with the local market. Parents advocate for family-oriented educational outreach (Wijesundara et al., 2021).

Discussion

Based on findings from retailers, professionals, farmers, and consumers on the organic food market in Sri Lanka, several consistent themes emerged regarding demand drivers, supply-side constraints, pricing barriers, marketing practices, and necessary policy interventions. These insights are discussed in relation to our three research questions as follows.

Our first research question (RQ1) addressed stakeholders' perceptions of the key motivations driving the production and consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka. Our results indicate that across stakeholder groups, health and environmental considerations were consistently identified as primary motivators for both the production and consumption of organic foods. Farmers reported adopting organic methods to reduce the use of toxic chemicals and improve soil health. At the same time, consumers across age groups valued organic food for its perceived nutritional benefits and lower chemical exposure. Retailers and professionals echoed these motivations, citing increased demand among urban, health-conscious consumers. These findings are consistent with global research that emphasises health consciousness, food safety, and environmental sustainability as key determinants of organic food choice (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Huo et al., 2023; Ahmed & Rawaa,

2024). Particularly among parents and younger adults, the preference for "chemical-free" products aligns with broader consumer shifts toward ethical and sustainable consumption (Wijesinghe & Aththanayaka, 2021). These stakeholder perceptions affirm the relevance of health and ecological values in shaping Sri Lanka's organic food market.

Our second research question (RQ2) explored stakeholder perceptions of the significant supply-side constraints affecting the development of the domestic organic food market in Sri Lanka. Our findings reveal a second key theme: structural limitations that impede the expansion of Sri Lanka's domestic organic food supply. Despite rising consumer demand, stakeholders across all groups highlighted persistent supply-side constraints. Retailers reported reliance on local organic farmers and PGS-certified cooperatives but faced inconsistent supply and quality. Professionals emphasised the lack of infrastructure, low farmer participation, and fragmented value chains. In contrast, farmers identified high input costs, limited access to certified materials, and inadequate financial support as significant challenges. These findings are consistent with Nechaev et al. (2018) and Vidanapathirana & Wijesooriya (2014), who identified poor certification systems and infrastructural deficits as major impediments in similar contexts. Furthermore, the segmentation of Sri Lanka's organic sector—between an export-oriented, premium market and a constrained domestic market—reflects broader global patterns, in which developing countries cater to international markets while facing affordability and supply constraints locally (Haessner et al., 2024).

In addition to availability, price was identified as a significant structural barrier. While farmers justified higher prices based on labour and input intensity, consumers – particularly from low- and middle-income groups – expressed concern about affordability. Retailers confirmed that organic consumption is primarily restricted to affluent urban consumers. These observations echo findings by Aydoğdu and Kaya (2020) and reinforce the notion that affordability and income-based segmentation remain central challenges to equitable access to organic food.

Certification also emerged as a relevant constraint affecting supply and demand. Stakeholders, particularly professionals and consumers, pointed to inconsistent standards and a lack of consumer education about certification schemes such as GAP and PGS. Although these schemes aim to ensure transparency and quality, their inconsistent implementation has led to consumer skepticism. This aligns with the literature, which emphasises the importance of trustworthy, well-communicated certification systems in building consumer confidence and enabling market growth (Golijan Pantović & Dimitrijević, 2018).

Our third research question (RQ3) examined policies and institutional interventions recommended by stakeholders to improve the availability, affordability, and credibility of organic food in Sri Lanka. Our findings revealed strong consensus across stakeholder groups on the need for coordinated policy and institutional support to strengthen the organic food sector. Stakeholders recommended a range of interventions, including government subsidies for organic inputs and farming practices, improved access to affordable certified materials, and expanded training programs for farmers. These measures were seen as critical to increasing supply consistency, reducing costs, and improving adherence to certification standards. Professionals emphasised the importance of cross-sector collaboration between government bodies, private firms, and NGOs to address existing infrastructure gaps and improve outreach.

Retailers and professionals also emphasised the need for enhanced marketing and consumer education. Current approaches are fragmented, ranging from social media promotions and farm visits to word-of-mouth and educational events. While

export-oriented firms have adopted branding and digital marketing strategies, smaller retailers and producers lack access to such resources. A more cohesive, demographically targeted marketing strategy was advocated by consumers and professionals that emphasises health, sustainability, and the credibility of certifications. These recommendations echo the findings of Dhingra et al. (2018), who advocate for policy mechanisms that integrate institutional support, certification reform, and public education to foster a viable and inclusive organic food system.

Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the perceptions of four key stakeholder groups in the Sri Lankan organic foods sector. All three research questions posed in this study were thoroughly addressed through qualitative analysis of stakeholder perspectives, and the findings confirm their relevance and appropriateness to the research context.

The first research question, which explored the perceived motivations driving the production and consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka, was answered comprehensively using insights from the four stakeholder groups. The findings reveal that health consciousness, food safety concerns, and environmental values are the dominant motivators for consumers. On the producer side, economic viability, access to niche markets, and policy incentives play a central role. Institutional actors and supply chain experts highlighted the importance of trust in certification systems and the need for stronger links between producers and end consumers. These findings confirm the initial assumption that stakeholder motivations are multifaceted and vary significantly across groups.

The second research question, which examined the significant supply-side constraints hindering the development of the domestic organic food market, was also clearly supported by empirical data. Interviews revealed a range of structural barriers, including the high cost of certification, limited technical knowledge and training for producers, weak institutional coordination, and inadequate infrastructure, especially in rural areas. These constraints were consistently identified across stakeholder groups and reflect systemic weaknesses that limit scalability and consistency in the organic sector. The findings validate the research proposition that the domestic organic supply chain faces complex and interrelated challenges.

The third research question, focused on policy and institutional interventions to enhance the availability, affordability, and credibility of organic food, was addressed through both stakeholder suggestions and literature-backed recommendations. Participants emphasized the need for targeted government subsidies, streamlined and transparent certification procedures, investment in awareness campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives for farmers. Additionally, the role of consistent long-term policy direction — rather than ad hoc reforms — was highlighted as crucial for sector stability. These responses not only confirm the relevance of the question but also provide concrete, actionable directions for institutional stakeholders.

In addressing our research questions, we are the first to identify many factors underlying the development of this sector of the Sri Lankan economy. First, we highlight a growing consumer interest in organic foods in Sri Lanka, particularly among health and environmentally conscious individuals in urban areas. However, the market's expansion is hindered by several constraints, including supply chain inefficiencies, high production costs, and the absence of standardised certification systems. These challenges contribute to elevated prices and limit access primarily to affluent consumers. Despite these barriers, the organic food sector in Sri Lanka holds significant

growth potential—especially in the export market, where Sri Lankan organic products are gaining international recognition.

To fully realise this potential, coordinated efforts at both governmental and non-governmental levels are essential. Key priorities include improving certification systems, providing production subsidies, and increasing consumer awareness through targeted marketing and digital media campaigns. Building consumer trust through transparent labelling and reliable certification, alongside promoting sustainable agricultural practices, will be critical to the sector's long-term success.

The study also contributes to theoretical understanding by applying frameworks such as Porter's Five Forces, Value Chain Analysis, SWOT, and the Marketing Mix to explain the strategic dynamics of the organic market. Moreover, it engages with broader discourses on sustainable agriculture and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscoring the importance of supportive policies, infrastructure development, and capacity building. These insights lay the groundwork for further research and offer guidance for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to strengthen organic food systems in Sri Lanka and other developing contexts.

In terms of practical implications, the increasing public awareness of health and environmental concerns presents a valuable opportunity for the organic food sector in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, several challenges continue to hinder its full potential. These include inefficiencies in the supply chain, limited market access, and low consumer confidence in the authenticity of organic products. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach involving policy reform, consumer education, and improvements to supply and marketing systems.

Organic farmers often struggle to access essential inputs, such as certified seeds, organic fertilisers, and environmentally safe pest-control products. To alleviate this, the government and relevant stakeholders should work to establish more reliable supply chains and provide incentives such as input subsidies, tax exemptions, and financial support for certification. Encouraging conventional farmers to transition to organic methods through revised support structures could further enhance production and product availability.

Consumer scepticism regarding the authenticity of organic products remains a significant barrier. Strengthening certification processes, enforcing rigorous standards, and ensuring transparency in labelling are crucial for building trust. Public awareness campaigns should educate consumers on the value and meaning of organic certification to boost confidence and stimulate demand.

Improving market access, especially in rural areas where organic products are often scarce, is also vital. Expanding distribution networks and leveraging e-commerce platforms can make organic foods more accessible across regions. Digital marketing, including social media outreach and influencer engagement, offers an effective means to target younger consumers and promote the benefits of an organic lifestyle. While many consumers recognise the health advantages of organic food, further education is needed to highlight the environmental benefits and long-term health outcomes. Public outreach initiatives – through schools, community programs, and digital channels – can help shape informed consumer choices and drive demand.

Public-private partnerships will be fundamental to the sustainable development of the organic sector. Collaborative efforts among government agencies, NGOs, and private enterprises can facilitate investment in research, farmer training, and infrastructure development. Such partnerships can ensure the sector's long-term viability and deliver lasting benefits to producers, consumers, and the environment.

The findings of this study open several pathways for future research into the demand and marketing of organic foods in Sri Lanka. As the sector continues to show promise amid ongoing constraints, further scholarly inquiry is essential to deepen understanding across several key areas. While this study identifies a growing interest in organic food among urban, younger, and higher-income consumers, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the behaviour and perceptions of rural populations. Future research should examine rural consumers' motivations, economic constraints, and levels of awareness to provide a more inclusive market perspective.

Persistent consumer scepticism about the authenticity of organic products warrants deeper investigation. Future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of various certification and labelling systems – comparing local and international standards – and explore how consumers interpret and respond to these labels. This would help in designing more effective certification mechanisms that build trust and encourage informed purchasing decisions.

As digital engagement becomes increasingly central to consumer behaviour, future research should assess the role of digital marketing strategies – such as social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and online marketplaces – in promoting the consumption of organic food. These studies should also consider the reach and accessibility of digital platforms in rural and semi-urban areas.

Given the ongoing challenges related to limited inputs, high production costs, and inefficient distribution, research is needed to develop more effective supply chain models. Integrating technological solutions such as blockchain for traceability, AI for demand forecasting, and digital platforms for input distribution may offer practical ways to enhance efficiency and reduce costs.

This study also has several limitations, which in turn suggest opportunities for future research. As this study is exploratory, a limited number of participants from our stakeholder groups were interviewed. It is important to be cautious about generalising from conclusions based on 20 participants in a country as large as Sri Lanka. Accordingly, large-scale research across socio-economic sectors to assess stakeholders' perceptions in the organic foods sector will be valuable. The preliminary insights provided by this study are revealed through thematic analysis. Quantitative analysis, with a large sample of participants, can expand on our findings by gender, age group, urban versus rural demographics, and socio-economic status. Although this study suggests several policy interventions, larger-scale empirical research is needed to evaluate the real-world impact of existing and proposed policies. Longitudinal studies could examine how subsidies, tax benefits, and institutional support affect farmer participation, market expansion, and product affordability. Finally, the broader benefits of organic food systems in Sri Lanka remain underexplored. Future research should quantify the long-term health impacts of organic food consumption and the environmental advantages of organic farming. Comparative studies assessing soil health, biodiversity, pesticide residue, and water usage in organic versus conventional systems would provide critical evidence to inform policy and public discourse.

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Appendix 1. Study Participants

Participants for the Study can be identified as follows.

1. Professionals in the Agriculture Field – sample = 5
    - Regional Agriculture Department staff and instructors
    - Government agriculture bodies (Centre of Excellence for Organic Agriculture, National Organic Control Unit, SL-GAP)
    - NGOs (ADRA, Peace Winds Japan)
2. Farmers – sample = 5
    - Local organic farms
    - Commercial farmers
    - Compost sellers
    - GAP-farmers
    - Home gardeners
3. Consumers – sample = 5
    - Different age categories and demographics
4. Retailers – sample = 5
    - Vegetable markets and fairs
    - Local vegetable shops
    - Good Market & their PGS system
    - Kenko 1st
    - Organic export companies

Total sample = 20

Appendix 2. Research questionnaire

Part 1 – Select your Role

1. Professionals in the Agriculture Field
    - Regional Agriculture Department staff and instructors
    - Government agriculture bodies (Centre of Excellence for Organic Agriculture, National Organic Control Unit, SL-GAP)
    - NGOs (ADRA, Peace Winds Japan)
2. Farmers
    - Local organic farms
    - Commercial farmers
    - Compost sellers
    - GAP-farmers
    - Home gardeners
3. Consumers
    - Different age categories and demographics
4. Retailers
    - Vegetable markets and fairs
    - Local vegetable shops
    - Good Market & their PGS system
    - Kenko 1st
    - Organic export companies

Part 2 - Questionnaire for Professionals in the Agriculture Field

1. What is the current situation of organic food demand, supply, and marketing aspects in Sri Lanka?
    - Can you describe the trends in demand and supply for organic foods?
    - What marketing strategies are currently employed for organic foods?
    - What challenges do you face in promoting organic foods?
2. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods.
    - What are the main factors influencing the demand for organic foods?
    - How does the availability of organic foods impact their market?
    - What role do pricing and consumer purchasing power play in the organic food market?
3. To recommend policies and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka to create a healthy nation and sustainable agriculture.
    - What policies do you think are essential to enhance the organic food sector?
    - How can marketing strategies be improved to increase organic food consumption?
    - What role can government and private sector collaboration play in promoting organic foods?

Part 3 - Questionnaire for Farmers

1. What motivates you to be repeatedly involved in organic farming practice?
    - What are the benefits you see in organic farming compared to conventional methods?
    - How did you get started with organic farming?
    - What challenges do you face in organic farming?
2. What is your perception of investing money in the consumption of organic foods?
    - Do you think the price difference between organic and conventional foods is justified?
    - How do you manage the cost of organic farming inputs?
    - Are there any financial supports or incentives for organic farming?
3. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods.
    - How does the availability of organic inputs affect your farming practices?
    - What is your experience with the marketing of your organic produce?
    - How does consumer perception impact your sales?

Part 4 - Questionnaire for Consumers

1. What motivates you to purchase organic foods?
    - What factors influence your decision to buy organic over conventional foods?
    - How do you perceive the price difference between organic and conventional foods?
    - What health benefits do you associate with organic foods?

2. Identification of factors affecting demand, supply, and marketing aspects of organic foods.
    - How easy is it for you to find and purchase organic foods?
    - What challenges do you face when buying organic foods?
    - How do you verify the authenticity of organic foods?
3. To recommend policies and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka to create a healthy nation and sustainable agriculture.
    - What policies do you think could make organic foods more accessible and affordable?
    - How can marketing strategies be improved to increase your consumption of organic foods?
    - What role can consumer education play in promoting organic food consumption?

Part 5 - Questionnaire for Retailers

1. What is the current situation of organic food demand, supply, and marketing aspects in Sri Lanka?
    - What trends do you observe in the demand for organic foods among your customers?
    - How do you source your organic products?
    - What marketing strategies do you use to promote organic foods?
    - What challenges do you face in stocking and selling organic foods?
    - How do you perceive consumer attitudes towards organic foods?
    - How does the pricing of organic foods affect their sales?
2. To recommend policies and strategies to promote organic food consumption in Sri Lanka to create a healthy nation and sustainable agriculture.
    - What policies do you think could help increase the availability of organic foods?
    - How can marketing strategies be improved to boost sales of organic foods?
    - What role can retailers play in educating consumers about organic foods?