

## Organic Farming and Gender: An empirical perspective

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### Abstract

*Uttarakhand, a North Indian state (77° 34' and 81° 02' E longitude and 28° 43' to 31° 27' latitude) is one of the pioneering states in organic agriculture, it being the first state declared as organic in India. Here, the government has identified organic farming as a thrust area for agriculture development. It is promoting organic farming through the establishment of an institutional mechanism named the Uttarakhand Organic Commodity Board (UOCB). The UOCB was created on 19 May 2003, to promote, coordinate, centralize, and decentralize the dispersed organic activity in the state (<http://www.organicuttaranchal.org>). UOCB facilitated the sale of certified organic products worth a significant amount between 2003-2006. Activities at the moment mainly focus on organic crop production, but the interest in organic livestock production is also increasing.*

*The authors studied 111 male and 69 female randomly selected registered organic farmers, out of the 4,459 registered organic farmers in Uttarakhand, using a semi-structured Interview schedule and on-farm observations during 2006-2007, to learn among other information, the gender dimensions in organic farming, and in the context of their livestock production activities in particular. All the farmers had maintained some animals under a crop-livestock subsistence mixed farming system, mainly to meet household requirements of milk, but more importantly to harvest cow dung for use in crop fields, since these farmers were mostly focused on organic crop production activities. Land and livestock ownership was mostly dominated by males, whereas income was jointly managed by both men and women, followed by women members alone in most of the households. Animal husbandry activities were performed by men and women, followed by women members of the family, whereas, decision-making in animal husbandry activities, though they reflected plurality, the final decisions in most of the cases rested with men only. This study was not designed to compare the gender dimensions in conventional and traditional farms versus organic farms, yet it was appreciable that women's formal involvement was being encouraged through appropriate policy interventions in the state of Uttarakhand. Both men and women were involved in organic agriculture activities, but the final decisions in most of the cases rested with men only. This scenario commonly exists in the case of conventional farms. An alternative orientation to organic farming has the potential to alter gender relations in agriculture, both by creating a labor context in which women can more readily participate in farm production and management, and by introducing and promoting alternative ways of thinking that are more consistent with gender equality. The UOCB has to work towards realizing this transformative potential fully over time by changing the thinking profile of the stakeholders. To this end, the gender sensitization trainings imparted by the UOCB appeared to have played a key role in making women's participation more proactive and visible. Women's participation was also ensured by involving them in marketing centers run mostly by women to sell eco-friendly products, including organic items produced by women's Self Help Groups. However, more rigorous comparative studies are needed to indicate directly the female involvement in farm production and decision-making in organic farms.*

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