

THE RISE OF GIG ECONOMY AND ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIC FARMING

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Abstract :

The gig economy comprises of temporary, freelance, and contract-based work, often facilitated by digital platforms. Gig workers lack traditional employment benefits but enjoy flexibility and autonomy. Organic farming is a farming practice that focuses on sustainability by utilizing natural methods for crop cultivation and livestock production. Organic farming emphasizes soil health, promotes biodiversity and prioritizes sustainability. The demand for organic products has risen due to increasing consumer awareness about health and environmental concerns. The gig economy has reshaped the workforce by providing flexible, short-term employment opportunities, while organic farming has gained prominence as a sustainable and health-conscious approach to agriculture. Gig workers can assist in harvesting, packaging and distribution, offering farmers a dynamic workforce while generating income opportunities for rural communities. The intersection of these two sectors presents unique opportunities and challenges. This paper explores how gig economy principles can be applied to organic farming, analyzing benefits, risks, and potential future developments.

Key words- Gig economy, Gig workers, Organic farming, Sustainability, Digital platforms.

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Introduction:

The **gig economy** refers to a labor market characterized by short-term, flexible, and freelance jobs instead of traditional full-time employment. It includes independent contractors, freelancers, and temporary workers who take on "gigs" or tasks through digital platforms like Uber, Fiverr and Upwork. The primary appeal of the gig economy lies in its flexibility, giving individuals control over their work schedules and the ability to earn additional income (Freeman & Li, 2021). Gig economy covers a broad spectrum, ranging from physical labor to digital services. Unlike traditional employment, the gig economy provides flexibility and autonomy but often lacks essential benefits like job security, health insurance, and retirement plans (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). The gig economy provides businesses with a cost-effective workforce and enables workers to participate in diverse job

opportunities.

Organic farming is a method of agricultural production that eliminates the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Organic farming makes use of natural fertilizers like compost, manure, and green manure. Crop Rotation and Companion planting enhances soil fertility and pest control (Seufert et al., 2017). It prioritizes soil health, biodiversity, and long-term sustainability (Scofield, 1986). One of the key principles of organic farming is enhancing soil structure and fertility by promoting the activity of beneficial microbes and earthworms. Biological pest control methods, such as using natural predators and biopesticides, help reduce pest populations without harming the environment (Reganold & Wachter, 2016). Agroforestry and integrated farming systems are also commonly incorporated into organic farming to create

a more resilient and diverse agricultural ecosystem (Altieri, 1999).

Organic farming supports climate change mitigation by improving soil carbon sequestration and reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with synthetic fertilizers and intensive farming (Lal, 2004). Additionally, it contributes to water conservation by reducing chemical runoff and improving soil's water-holding capacity (Pretty & Bharucha, 2014). With rising consumer awareness about health and environmental concerns, the demand for organic products has steadily increased. Governments and international organizations are promoting organic farming through certification programs, subsidies, and research initiatives to encourage sustainable food production and support farmers in transitioning to organic practices (Willer & Lernoud, 2019).

Methodology:

This study employs a **comparative analysis** to examine the impact of the gig economy on organic farming, using **secondary data** from industry reports, academic literature, government policies, and case studies of organic farms that utilize gig workers. The research investigates **key opportunities** such as cost efficiency, farm productivity, and access to specialized expertise, and technological advancements, while also assessing **challenges** related to labor rights, digital access, regulatory compliance, and sustainability.

Objectives:

- **To analyze the role of the gig economy in organic farming.**
- **To explore technological advancements facilitated by gig workers in organic farming.**
- To identify key challenges associated with gig worker integration in organic farming.
- **To evaluate policy frameworks and support systems for gig workers in organic farming.**

The Role of Gig Economy in Organic Farming:

Organic farming relies on both seasonal and specialized labor, and the gig economy offers a flexible workforce to fulfill these demands efficiently. Organic farms require gig workers for various tasks, including manual and mechanical weed control, managing diverse crops. Digital platforms can connect farmers with workers for tasks such as planting, harvesting, and market sales. Freelancers specializing in composting assist farmers in setting up vermiculture (worm composting) and biochar production for soil enrichment. Gig workers have numerous opportunities in organic farming, including seasonal employment for short-term labor during planting and harvesting. Those with specialized skills in areas like soil health, permaculture and irrigation can be hired on a project basis. Additionally, farm-to-consumer delivery services provide a chance for gig workers to facilitate the distribution of fresh organic produce directly to customers. They can also assist with market and event staffing by working at farmers markets or organic food events. Urban farms depend on short-term workers for tasks such as installing vertical gardens, managing hydroponic systems, and facilitating farm-to-table deliveries. Furthermore, digital marketing and sales roles allow freelancers to manage e-commerce platforms and social media, helping organic farms reach a wider audience and grow their businesses.

The Sharing Economy (SE) offers a practical solution by enabling farmers to share agricultural resources, equipment, and services via digital platforms. Companies like EM3 Agri Services in India help smallholders access farming tools at lower costs, addressing organic farming's seasonal labor and resource demands. SE also supports the gig economy by creating flexible, short-term employment in organic farming. Integrating Sharing Economy and gig-based employment into organic farming can enhance

competitiveness, improve cost efficiency, and promote sustainability, enabling smallholder farmers to optimize resources and achieve greater economic stability (Sobhan Asian et.al., 2019).

The Government of India has implemented various policies and programs to encourage organic farming and facilitate the sale of organic products through e-commerce platforms. The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoA & FW) serves as the central authority responsible for developing and executing national policies and programs related to agriculture and its allied sectors, including organic farming. Some of the key initiatives under this ministry include the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), and the Mission Organic Value Chain Development for the North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER). Additionally, the National Program for Organic Production (NPOP), which plays a crucial role in shaping India's organic, farming policies, is overseen by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Darjee, 2023).

Challenges of Gig Work and Organic Farming-

The gig economy presents several challenges for organic farming, including labor rights and fair wages, as many gig workers lack benefits, making job security and equitable pay difficult to ensure. Additionally, skill mismatches can arise since organic farming requires specialized knowledge that gig workers may not possess. Job inconsistency is another concern, as farmers may struggle to find reliable workers for time-sensitive agricultural tasks. Moreover, the limited technological integration of farm-based gig platforms, compared to more developed sectors like ride-sharing and food delivery, further complicates the process. Sustainability is also a challenge, as frequent worker turnover can reduce the long-term efficiency and stability of organic farm operations.

Future Prospects and Recommendations:

To improve the integration of gig work into organic farming, several steps can be taken.

Develop Specialized Gig Platforms- Creating dedicated apps and online platforms can bridge the gap between organic farmers and skilled gig workers. These platforms would allow farmers to post specific job requirements, while workers can showcase their expertise and availability.

Training and Certification Programs- Providing well-structured training programs can help gig workers gain essential knowledge and practical experience in organic farming. These short courses may include subjects like soil health management, composting techniques, natural pest control methods, crop rotation strategies, and the effective application of organic fertilizers.

Fair Wage Policies- Implementing fair wage policies guarantees that gig workers in organic farming earn competitive and sustainable pay. Determining minimum wage standards according to industry benchmarks and local living costs can help to prevent exploitation.

Worker Cooperatives- Through collective efforts, gig workers can obtain long-term contracts with organic farms, providing them with a stable and consistent income. Additionally, it creates a more stable and supportive environment for gig workers. Worker Cooperatives – SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) supports women in rural areas by forming cooperatives. A similar cooperative model could be implemented for gig workers in organic farming, allowing them to secure better contracts with farms and negotiate fair wages collectively.

Digital platforms- Several digital platforms, including WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) and FarmRaiser, already link workers with organic farms. Organizations like Pusa Krishi (ICAR-IARI) and National Centre of Organic farming (NCOF)

offers training in organic farming techniques. Expanding these models and certification courses could create more gig-based opportunities in the agricultural sector.

Conclusion:

The gig economy has the potential to improve organic farming by providing flexible, specialized expertise in plant health diagnostics, pest management and sustainable cultivation practices. Gig workers can help farmers to optimize organic production while maintaining environmental integrity by utilizing AI-driven diagnostics, drone-assisted surveillance, and eco-friendly pest control methods. However, to maximize these benefits, investment in training, digital platforms, and fair labor policies are essential. If

properly implemented gig economy can play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable agriculture for a resilient food system.

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Cite This Article:

Dr. Nangare A.S. & Ms. Thosani P. (2025). *The rise of gig economy and its impact on organic farming.* In **Aarhat Multidisciplinary International Education Research Journal**: Vol. XIV (Number II, pp. 130–133).