

DETERMINANTS FOR CONVERTING CONVENTIONAL TEA TO ORGANIC TEA FARMING IN NELUWA SINHARAJA BUFFER ZONE, SRI LANKA

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Promoting organic tea farming is getting popularized as conventional intensive tea farming which is also leading to emerging environmental and social problems. This study aimed to explore the determinants of farmers' conversion decision from conventional tea to organic tea in *Neluwa Sinharaja* buffer zone in Sri Lanka. A questionnaire survey of 200 organic and inorganic tea farmers was done in data collection. Descriptive analysis, Mann-Whitney test and logistic regression were employed in data analysis. Majority of farmers in both farming systems were male and within 41-50 age group. Moreover, farm gate prices of organic tea varied between Rs. 90-117 kg⁻¹, while conventional tea prices varied between Rs. 70-93 kg⁻¹. Organic tea farming reported better economic performances: high product price, maximum utilization of on-farm/community resources and low cost of production as well as better environmental performances like discharging non-polluted water, enhancing soil fertility and soil erosion compared to conventional tea farming. Logistic regression revealed that, farming experiences (OR=0.218), training participation (OR=4.348), access to extension services (OR=7.509), size of households (1.963), farm gate price (OR=1.829), yield (OR= -0.003) and total cost (OR=1.000) as determinants significantly ($p<0.05$) affecting on conversion decision from conventional tea to organic tea farming while land extent (OR=0.096) was significantly affecting determinant at 10% significance level in *Neluwa Sinharaja* buffer zone. The study recommends to focus on aforesaid significant determinants when motivating farmers to convert from conventional tea farming to organic tea farming in other potential areas in the country.

Keywords: Conventional, Determinants, Organic, Performance, Tea farming