Abstract

Organic farming has recently gained increasing recognition as an effective and holistic approach compatible with the goals of agricultural practices that are socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. A point of fact is that organic farming is centered on minimizing the use of costly external inputs such as synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides in order to reduce farming cost on one hand, and increase income and productivity of rice farmers on the other hand. In Thailand, organic farming methods have been adopted slowly in rural communities especially among those facing socio-economic and agronomic constraints. Economic crisis and low farm productivity and profitability caused by using costly chemicals have caused farmers to suffer socio-economic disadvantages. However, the promotion and implementation of organic farming methods largely through conventional farm extension service could not serve all farmers because of numerous constraints of farm conditions, farmer socio-economic backgrounds, farm soil conditions, agricultural credit facilities and so on.

The key objective of this study was to examine empirically some factors influencing the practices of organic rice farming systems among farmers in Surin province. The study focused on farmers’ practices, adoptions, attitudes and opinions of organic rice farming methods including organic fertilizer and green manure utilization which are considered to be among the most important components to enhancing soil fertility, and hence, agricultural productivity. Furthermore, the farmers’ participation in the agricultural extension education efforts had also been surveyed. Lastly, a corollary consumer survey was conducted on the general perception and acceptance of organic food products sold in Bangkok supermarkets.
The finding of this study revealed that the majority of rice farmers in the study area expressed favorable and positive adoption of practices for organic jasmine rice farming system, expressed favorable and positive attitudes toward organic fertilizer for use in their rice farms, and articulated favorable and positive opinions and adoption towards green manure application to improve their farmlands. The study also found that farmers could increase rice production output and increase farm income, while reducing costs in farm input when they applied organic fertilizer and green manure. Overall, they had much better farm environment, planting conditions and general well-being as a result. Aside from that, farmers expected better health conditions from their abstention in the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The combined socio-economic, environmental and health benefits have tended to attract more farmers and accelerate the acceptance of organic agriculture in Thailand in the coming years.

The surveyed farmers expressed both neutral and positive participation towards extension education efforts to develop agricultural farming activities. They receivedmost of the agricultural information and knowledge from their participation in agricultural extension workers’ activities. The cooperation between rice farmers and extension agencies in the study area was found to be generally productive. Farmers surveyed were willing to join almost all aspects of extension activities especially those which had direct impacts for farmers in improving farm operations and yield. Among the urban supermarket shoppers surveyed, most of them demonstrated moderate knowledge about organic products but expressed some positive points of view towards organic food consumption largely due to their concerns for health and environmental safety.

It is clear from the results of this study that farmers’ social and economic backgrounds played important roles for the adoption, practice and perception of organic rice farming methods leading eventually to the acceptance and implementation of sustainable agricultural systems. The study found that organic rice farming is related to the demographic characteristics of rice farmers. Therefore, attitudes and adoption trends among the farmers were anchored on a number of socio-economic as well as non-socio-economic factors which have vital roles to cause farmers to change their perceptions and behaviors towards embracing organic rice farming. These constraints, recommendations and suggestions generated from this study should be further evaluated for their possible implications towards the further development of organic rice farming of Thailand in the future.