

Two Brothers Organic Farms: building shared value in a competitive market

Seema Laddha and Vatsala Bose

Two Brothers Organic Farms (TBOF) was started by two ex-bankers Satyajit Hange and Ajinkya Hange. While contemplating their thoughts on organic farming in 2022, the brothers always pondered about its need for growth and expansion to meet market demands for maintaining the integrity of their brand. It raised questions about how to scale its operation and supply chain challenges to meet their vision.

TBOF resonated with its commitment to organic farming and the community development since 2014 (Figure 1). Till 2017 it had a turnover of INR 0.2m. Demand for organic product increased due to lifestyle diseases and growing interest in the potential health and wellness benefits of organic food products. This increase in demand was also aided by the COVID-19 pandemic which brought more awareness about organic products. Till 2020–2021 they achieved a turnover of INR 120m.

The Hange brothers made the product as per the consumers' requirements and added variety of products to their portfolio. They started selling variety of organic products ranging from fruits like papaya, pomegranate to ghee and Indian sweets such as laddoos. Shift in consumer preferences from traditional product to organic products posed challenge of fulfilling the expectation of consumers. This was the time when TBOF's demand outstripped the supply, and they were confronted with challenges in sustaining and scaling their business while maintaining the core values of organic farming. The increasing demand for their products prompted a reassessment of their business processes for long-term sustainability.

About Two Brothers Organic Farms – a brief overview

Ajinkya Hange and Satyajit Hange were two brothers who worked as bankers but quit their jobs in 2012 to pursue something unusual that fascinated them. They came from a farming family and had passion for it since childhood. While working in the banking sector, they used to visit their farms during holidays. To pursue their enthusiasm for farming, the two brothers had started an organic farm where they grew crops without adding any synthetically compounded fertilizers or pesticides.

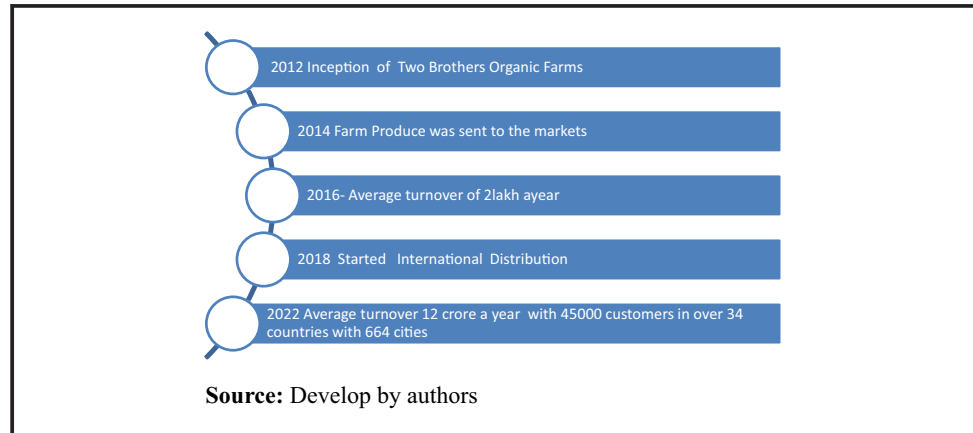
Being from an agricultural background, the dearth of support from family members originated from concerns about the inherent challenges associated with farming. They had experienced unpredictable earnings due to rainwater dependency, increasing infertility of soil, natural calamities and labor scarcity. Despite these challenges, the Hange brothers were determined to transform their passion into an occupation. They aimed to develop a community-based organic farming system where all members of the value chain could work together and benefit from it. They had also been interested in regenerative agriculture to secure rural livelihoods and offer solutions for health and environmental change.

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Figure 1 Timeline of TBOF



In 2014, the Hange brothers' dedication and persistence had culminated in the establishment of organic farms on their 8.5 hectare land. Initially, they had encountered a challenge when their farm products, cultivated with organic fertilizers, had been met with resistance and nonacceptance. But they had changed their course of action toward farm produce to packaged food.

Both siblings had graduated from Pune, a city in the Maharashtra state on the Deccan plateau in Western India. They had dedicated a decade in the banking sector before making the decision to shift to organic farming. Ajinkya and Satyajit had met people practicing organic farming, weighed the pros and cons and had realized the damaging effects of continuous and excessive use of fertilizers on soil health over the years:

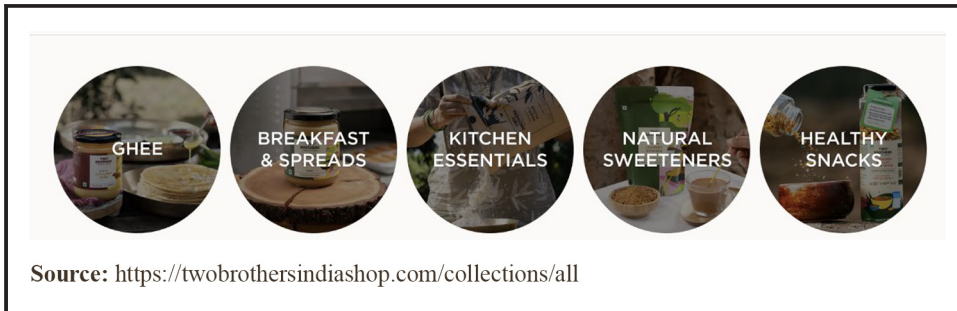
"Before we started, we realized that there was lesser produce in most of the farms due to decreased soil fertility and also because of inorganic farming practices. Moreover, the depleting ground water level and active labor were also concerns," explains Satyajit Hange.

The Hange brothers identified the importance of organic farming and wanted to help the farmers in their locality. However, people were initially resistant to the idea of organic farming, advising them not to get involved. Despite leaving well-paying and stable jobs for the volatile and unpredictable agricultural industry (Gupta et al., 2019; Goswami & Karali, 2022), they had been determined to grow true organic fruits and other crops that were healthy and nutritious. They turned their vision into reality by starting the TBOF in Bhodani, Village in Pune District of India.

Desi cow rearing, multicropping, mulching, indigenous seeds and forest trees had been the five pillars that had helped establish the current farming standard at the TBOF. They enhanced the use of cow dung and natural manure to fertilize plants. Instead of monocropping, they adopted modern procedures such as polycropping, which had improved soil fertility, water retention capacity and increased farm biodiversity. Presently, they have 25–30 varieties of fruits, vegetables and plants, including medicinal plants.

Ajinkya and Satyajit were looking after different portfolios (Figure 2). Ajinkya was responsible for all crop production-related activities, while Satyajit was involved in marketing and sales. They emphasized the importance of building a trusted brand based on quality. "Practice what you preach" was a core value for the TBOF. The Hange brothers not only practiced organic farming but also actively preached their methods. Their work brought organic food produce into people's homes and encouraged farmers to grow more organic produce. Today, TBOF is one of the finest producers of organic fruits, organic vegetables and desi cow ghee in India, practicing organic farming on a 20-acre land, and also the number of employees increased to 405 in a year from 2021 to 2022 (Figure 3).

Figure 2 Product portfolio



Today, they are selling products in 52 different countries using a direct marketing and word-of-mouth strategy. The company faced challenges as the demand outstripped supply, leading them to review their business processes for long-term sustainability.

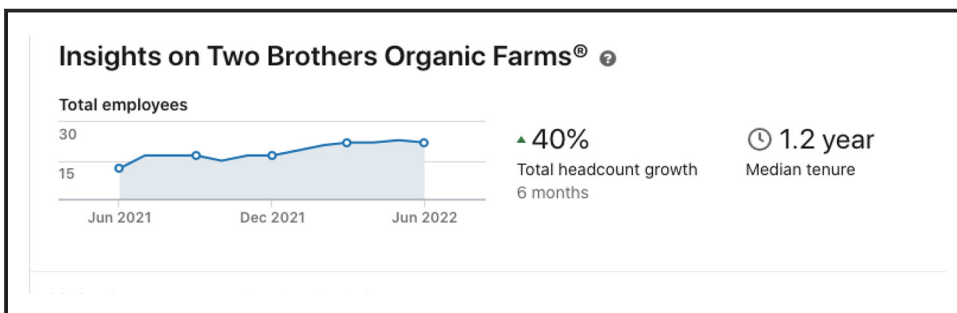
Indian agriculture sector and the growth trajectory of organic farming

The Indian agricultural sector had experienced significant growth, ranking second globally in production. However, challenges such as inadequate irrigation, soil degradation and market volatility persisted, hindering sustainable development. Recommendations included increased investment in irrigation infrastructure, improved soil management and adoption of modern technologies (Mubashir & Bhat, 2021; Mohanraj, 2023). Meanwhile, the organic farming market in India had shown steady growth, with certified organic agricultural land expanding from 1.5 million hectares in 2015–2016 to 5.4 million hectares in 2020–2021. Challenges encompassed high input costs, limited market access and the need for greater awareness. Overcoming these hurdles, coupled with continued government support and rising consumer demand, signaled a promising future for organic farming in India. Transitioning to organic practices required addressing pest control issues, marketing challenges and facilitating the shift from conventional methods through training and support programs.

Transformative shifts in postpandemic organic farming and consumption in India

In the aftermath of the pandemic since 2019, India's organic farming sector had experienced significant growth, ranking fifth globally with 23 lakh hectares of cultivated land as per the FiBL (The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture) and IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) Organics International Report 2021. The organic food market had surged to \$820m in 2020, with notable changes in consumer

Figure 3 Growth of employees



behavior favoring online platforms, exemplified by The Organic World's shift from 5% to 20% online revenue during peak COVID-19 pandemic.

This shift in consumer dynamics was a part of a broader evolution in India's agriculture industry, historically marked by a scarcity of organic products and awareness. Initiatives like those of the Hange brothers had inspired villages, including Shelgaon, Beed, Pathardi and Indapur, to embrace natural farming methods. Examining the market, the India organic food market had reached US\$1,510.36m in 2023, projecting a nearly 22% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2024 to 2032. Key drivers included rising incomes, a growing population, heightened health consciousness and government support through various schemes, shaping a transformative journey in postpandemic organic farming in India (EMR's research report). [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) provided more details on organic crop production and consumption (GAIN Report).

Product development process

TBOF's product development philosophy was based on traditional Ayurvedic methods. Their first produce was pomegranate in 2014, using cow dung and cow urine instead of chemical fertilizers. In the first year, the crop faced diseases, leading to losses. In the next year, they tried new techniques and different fruits such as papaya and oranges.

Initially, the primary purpose of the Hange brothers for bringing in cows was to obtain cow dung and cow urine, essential for producing agricultural inputs such as feedstuffs, fertilizers and approved plant protection products for organic farm cultivation. Cow milk was initially considered a by-product, as the brothers had acquired desi cows that yielded less milk compared to other varieties but with higher nutritional content. To make good use of the milk, the two brothers ventured into producing ghee. Today, they stand as prominent producers of Gir Cow ghee, A2 butter, A2 cheese, A2 buttermilk and bovine colostrum powder. In addition, they operate a biogas unit that converts cow dung and cow urine into cooking fuel and slurry, which is used to enhance soil fertility.

Another interesting product developed strategy adopted by the Hange brothers was Emmer Khapli Wheat Flour. Although regular wheat flour was a staple diet in India which was used to make chapatis, it was high on the glycemic index and low on fiber. TBOF tested an old variety of wheat called Khapli, native to India and suited to the digestive system. This variety had low productivity, required manual effort and was relatively

Table 1 India's organic crop production growth

Category	2019/2020	2020/2021	Year-on-year change (%)
Oilseeds	1,069,178	853,755	(20)
Fiber (cotton)	335,794	811,008	142
Sugar	335,794	797,628	138
Cereals and millets	271,534	321,006	18
Spices and condiments	57,379	104,821	83
Pulses	70,886	91,040	28
Medicinal plant products	70,436	80,534	14
Fresh fruits and vegetables	64,044	67,350	5
Tea	44,771	42,121	(6)
Coffee	20,149	22,402	11
Flowers	7,226	13,191	83
Dry fruits	8,481	11,500	36
Fodder	8,733	11,060	27
Other	2,486	5,797	133
On-farm processed food	2,753	4,004	45
Tuber products	4,653	3,135	(33)
Total organic production	2,374,299	3,240,349	36

Source: APEDA, FAS New Delhi office research

Table 2 Organic product consumption (\$ million)

India: organic packaged Category	Consumption (\$ million)							CAGR* 16%–19%	CAGR 20%–22%
	Food and 2016	Beverage 2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022		
Organic beverages*	38	44	53	63	71	81	92	18	14
Organic packaged food consumption	8	9	11	13	14	15	17	18	9
Total combined organic packaged food and beverages	45	54	64	75	85	96	108	18	13

Notes: *Compounded annual growth rate. CY 2021 is estimated, 2022 is forecast (out year). **This category includes packaged food and beverages that are certified organic by an approved certification body. Fresh food products and/or individual ingredients are not included within this category

Source: Global Organic Trade Account

expensive, but it offered health benefits. They started cultivating Khapli wheat in 2014, with awareness of this indigenous crop still low.

Today, TBOF had four different retail categories in their portfolio: ghee, breakfast and snacks, kitchen essentials and natural sweeteners. The farm-produced crops had a short shelf life, so they were processed into various finished products such as peanut butter, pickles, laddoos (sweets made with jaggery and nuts) and colostrum powder. Processed food had a shelf life of approximately six to eight weeks, sufficient for market consumption.

Until the end of 2022, the two brothers managed a diverse range of products spanning 12–13 different categories, totaling more than 170 stock keeping units. The expansion of their product line was driven by customer demand and the availability of raw materials (Figure 2). To maintain high standards of product and finished product quality, thorough checks were implemented at each stage, starting from raw material procurement to the final packaging. Laboratory testing adhered to German NABL approved standards and the guidelines set by the Food and Drug Authority of India. The brothers firmly believed that the company's unique selling proposition (USP) laid in the assurance of quality, making them confident that customers were drawn to their products primarily for their exceptional quality.

Changing consumer demand

The demand for healthier substitutes had surged due to the growing interest in new dietary preferences and enhanced methods of production, including farming practices, perceived as more nutritious and natural. A trend emerged in consumers' preferences for farm produce cultivated through natural methods, without pesticides or chemicals, collectively known as organic farming. This trend prompted a renewed focus on environmental and societal awareness.

Consumers began placing a high value on transparency in the supply chain, expressing a desire to understand the ethical practices used in various supplies. These shifts in demand had been attributed to economic growth, rising urbanization and increased income levels. Despite these factors, consumers had continued to seek affordable and readily available organic products that adhered to quality standards with certifications.

In the realm of agriculture, TBOF had been using various traditional methods in the recent past to enhance soil quality and facilitate better nutrient absorption for plants. However, the challenge had laid in comprehending the demands of the consumers. India maintained its position as the country with the most organic food producers globally, with Tanzania and Ethiopia (source: statista.com).

Competition

Organic markets primarily niched markets with few differentiating factors, such as selected market segments and closeness to the customers. The organic category had been highly

fragmented, featuring several local brands competing in various subcategories such as organic beverages, grains and cereals, poultry, meat and dairy. Major organic companies in the competitive landscape included:

- Suminter India Organics;
- Nature Bio Food Limited;
- Organic India Pvt Ltd; and
- Sresta Natural Bio Products Pvt Ltd.

All these companies had worked extensively with farmers and owned acres of land dedicated to organic farming. The organic markets had experienced substantial growth, and switching costs had been low. Consequently, more businesses had entered the sector, intensifying competition among organic producers and suppliers. Recognizing the growing demand for organic produce, even large brands had entered the markets (Figure 5).

TBOF endeavored to compete with various organic and other fast-moving consumer goods brands, primarily focusing on their past efforts in new product development, farming practices and innovative marketing techniques. The company had used digital marketing techniques, maximizing the use of their website for comprehensive market coverage.

Sales and marketing

The next big question that came to the minds of Hange Brothers, like every organization, was its sales. This nightmare had taken a toll on TBOF as their harvest was ready but had no takers. The reason was the price premium and external appearance of their produce. As already discussed, their initial produce was fruits like papaya and pomegranate. Organic produce was costly, and the commercial farm produce available in the market was cheaper. Ajinkya and Satyajit were not satisfied with the market price, so they decided to be a part of the farmers' market through their brand TBOF. In the beginning, fruit vendors were skeptical about keeping TBOF's organic produce in their cart due to the premium price and the rejections of the customers. Therefore, both brothers started selling their produce by themselves, going to the market along with vendors. This eventually created a stir in the market about their organic farm produce through their interaction with the customers and their quality.

TBOF's customer base primarily consisted of super-urban individuals, including customers from Bollywood which was a term commonly used to refer to the Hindi-language film industry in India. The company consciously targeted urban areas and like-minded individuals but rejected the notion of strictly demarcating customers based on urban or rural locations. The Hange brothers highlighted examples of customers from Ludhiana, interiors of Punjab and villages in South India to emphasize that they sell products based on demand, irrespective of urban or rural origins.

Marketing was done using positive word of mouth. They started selling their products in Pune and Mumbai due to two reasons: target customers were available in these cities, and there was perishability. In this manner, they wanted to understand the pulse of the market. These customers were health-conscious, understood quality and exclusivity and also understood the importance of organic farming.

For reaching out to more customers and answering queries, they used WhatsApp and developed a website to inform consumers about all the products and information related to the product. The use of social media such as YouTube, Instagram and Facebook helped the company increase its reach to customers.

The Hange brothers asked customers to visit the farm and see the processes to build a strong relationship with them. Many foreign visitors visited their farm and showed interest. Presently, the company reached 52 countries with almost 100,000 customers, offering

varieties of products such as nutritionally rich rice, Jowar varieties, traditional Khapli Wheat flour, peanut butter and groundnut oil. A significant portion of their customer base consisted of repeat clients, drawn back by the consistently high quality of the product.




TBOF adopted a multichannel approach, selling products through e-commerce platforms (Figures 6 and 7) and offline stores. Direct sales were used to deliver the product to other countries and other parts of the country. The company also connected with a few distributors who were selling products in Mumbai and Delhi. Approximately 85% of their business was generated from direct-to-consumer business, using their own social media channels and website. However, the company faced challenges with unsatisfactory support from Amazon, leading to a potential delisting (Figure 4). In addition, the brand actively promoted passionate individuals who sold their products offline. They deliberately refrained from supplying to organized retail chains, believing that such chains did not effectively convey the product's story and values. Nevertheless, 15% of their revenue still came from offline sales.

To enhance the customer experience and further engage with the community, the Hange brothers opened an experience center in New Delhi. This center showcased their commitment to value creation and delivery through its innovative features. The center would dedicate only 30% of its space to selling products, while the remaining area would serve as a studio that could accommodate around 25–30 people and include a library. The studio would be extended to other brands and individuals working in the sustainable space, offering them free access.

Promotional strategy

The Hange brothers actively used various social media promotional strategies, such as writing blogs, creating YouTube videos, maintaining an Instagram page and developing

Figure 4 Two Brothers versus other A2 Ghee

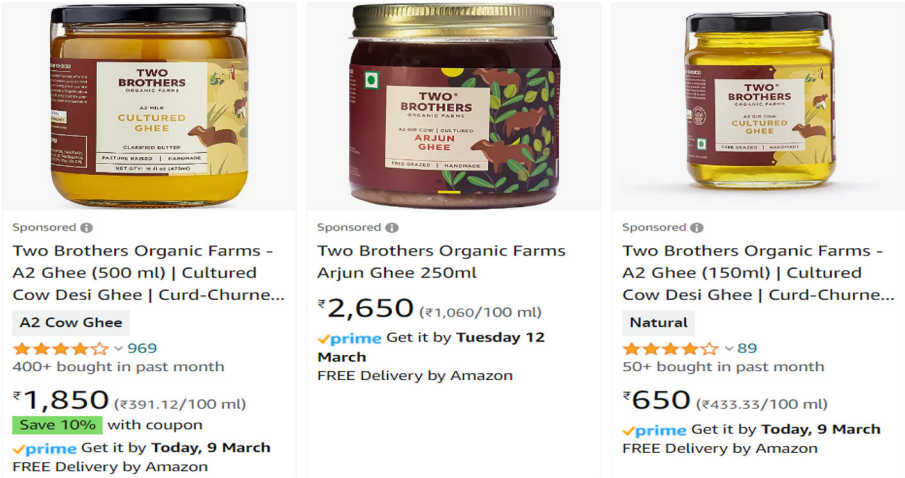
Criteria	Shahji Ghee	Gir Organic	Two Brothers
Brands	Shahji Ghee	Gir Organic	Two Brothers
Products			
Cow Type	A2	A2	A2
Cow Breed	Sahiwal, Gir Cow	Gir Cow	Gir Cow
Organic Ghee	Yes	Yes	Yes
Method of making ghee	Bilona Method	Bilona Method	Bilona Method
Grass fed-ghee	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ghee type	A2	A2	A2
Shelf life	6 months to 12 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 12 months
Preservative free	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ghee price per liter	₹1,799/- (Sahiwal Cow), ₹2,599 (Gir Cow)	₹2,690/- (Gir Cow)	₹3,200/- (Gir Cow)
Amazon Rating	4.4/5	4.6/5	4.4/5
Shipping Charges	Free	Free	Free shipping above ₹799/-
Replacement	7 days replacement on any damage		

Source: <https://shahjighee.com/blogs/news/girorganic-vs-two-brothers-vs-shahji-ghee>

Figure 5 Glimpse of farm



Figure 6 Sales discount on ecommerce platform



Source: https://www.amazon.in/s?k=a2+ghee+2+brothers&adgrpid=1322714093645897&hvadid=82669889863307&hvbm=bb&hvdev=c&hvlocphy=161234&hvnetw=o&hvqmt=b&hvtargid=kwd-82670509762326%3Aloc-90&hydadcr=2742_2167620&tag=msndeskstdin-21&ref=pd_sl_tz6x6i4qu_b

websites and WhatsApp channels. They were also using Google and other online advertisements aggressively to reach potential customers. However, their product did not lend itself well to mass-market promotion through large print advertisements or television campaigns. The unique nature of their organic farm products required a more personalized and informative approach to reach their target audience effectively. Furthermore, the company's production and backend processes were not adequately equipped to handle a 100x surge in demand that could potentially arise from a massive advertising push. They acknowledged that meeting potential mass-scale demand would necessitate several years of organic growth and expansion to enhance their production capabilities and infrastructure.

Figure 7

The screenshot displays three sponsored product listings on Amazon India. Each listing features a product image at the top, followed by the brand name, product description, category, rating (stars and number of reviews), price (current and M.R.P.), and delivery details. The first listing is for 'Two Brothers Organic Farms Peanut Oil' priced at ₹2,899. The second is 'Tata Simply Better Pure and Unrefined Cold Pressed Groundnut (Peanut) Oil' priced at ₹400. The third is 'Puvi HDPE 5L Cold Pressed Groundnut/Peanut Oil' priced at ₹1,757, marked as a 'Deal of the Day'.

Source: https://www.amazon.in/s?k=groundnut+oil+two+brothers&crd=3NZLAO3PUEHP3&spreffix=ground+nut+oil+two+brothers%2Caps%2C186&ref=nb_sb_ss_ts-doa-p_1_27

Brand building

After three years of understanding the nuances of farming and getting the farming aspect right, both of them started marketing the brand. The brand name should be synonymous with the value of the product and its heritage; otherwise, it would lose its shine and acceptability. They built their brand on pillars such as quality, story, transparency, pricing affordability and emotional connect. The company aimed to raise awareness about good food, ecological impact and the environment. They leveraged social media platforms to share videos about the production process, invited people to visit the farm and production center and published blogs that discussed the product's importance and real-life stories of its users. Lab test reports also provided to build trust among consumers.

The Hange brothers prioritized providing value and ensuring the happiness of every single customer. They believed that a happy customer became a brand ambassador through word-of-mouth promotion. Rather than chasing a large customer base, TBOF focused on delivering an exceptional experience to each customer, aiming for repeat customers and organic growth.

Shipping policies

Orders were typically dispatched within three working days if the items were in stock and within ten working days if some items needed to be produced. Delivery time depended on factors beyond their control, such as courier partner delays, weather conditions and strikes. Customs clearance fees and import duties might apply depending on the destination country's regulation; TBOF had offered free shipping only as part of promotional campaigns or special offers.

Business expansion

Two brothers had 9 acres of land in which they started organic farming with an intention to provide benefit to all the farmers in the locality. They encouraged and educated other

farmers for organic farming. Farmers were supported in the entire farming cycle starting from the selection of seeds to crop harvest and then to be taken for sale in the market. These crops were purchased by paying a premium price from the farmers, which then processed into different varieties of products as per the demand of the customers. Success and hard work of two brothers had helped them to develop associations with other farmers.

One dedicated team worked on a farmer's association called Farmers Relationship Managers (FRM). The team continuously worked on building farmers' networks by visiting various parts of the country based on values built by the company to ensure the quality of the product. The farmers' selection process was very rigorous because they needed to follow the process of organic farming and maintain quality standards. The Hange brothers had taken a huge step in this direction where they educated farmers about organic farming methods and techniques.

Efforts of marketing and FRM team successfully influenced people as well as local farmers to follow organic farming. This work was appreciated and recognized by authorities; the government of Maharashtra had sent farmers for the new farming practices. Ajinkya and Satyajit had trained 9,000 farmers by guiding them, assisting on their farms and sharing insights to improve production.

Managing value chain

Value chain was the most important aspect for Hange brothers. A dedicated three- to four-member team including both the brothers worked together for different activities to manage the whole value chain called departments. Every week, the Hange brothers conducted a departmental meeting to assess the situation and address any challenges or issues. These departments included marketing, sales, packaging, logistics, production and FRM.

The entire supply chain was managed using an enterprise resource planning system, using various technologies to track activities. A digital technology platform was used for marketing, along with word of mouth. Customer queries were resolved on time, and a customer feedback system was in place for new product development and modification. The Hange brothers spent hours with their customers to understand their requirements. The list of customers was segregated depending upon repeat customers, and relations were maintained with constant touchpoints, sending messages about new products and collecting feedback for existing products.

The logo of TBOF was simplistic and elegant, in muted shades. The use of colors in the packaging represented the farm (green and brown), the environment and sun (mustard yellow) and reflected their belief in wholesome, pure, unadulterated products (neutral beige). Labels featured an illustration that was colorful, detailed and told the village and farm life and the birth story of the product. There was also the use of images in place of text to explain. The label highlighted the farm's clean farming practices, the absence of harmful chemicals in processing and packaging that was as eco-friendly as possible. Notably, over 50% of farm labor was women, and they featured extensively on the packaging, which was a USP of the company. More manual processes were used for production, packaging, and labeling to maintain the traditional approach.

The 4,500 sq. ft warehouse located in Pune was the centralized location from where the product was delivered to the customer's doorsteps. Due to the perishability of farm-produced goods, the warehouse was located near the marketplace. To increase the shelf life of products and reduce wastages, they started processing food products.

A dedicated team worked to build a farmers' network ready to grow organic crops with the same value system. Farmers had the liberty to select the crop, and training and support were provided by the two brothers. Once the crop was ready, farmers could either sell

directly in the market or sell to TBOF. All collected crops were then processed by TBOF depending on demand using Ayurvedic, traditional methods.

Government scheme for organic farming

The Government of India had launched various schemes to motivate farmers toward organic farming, thereby increasing organic coverage in the country. These schemes included Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana to encourage the use of natural on-farm inputs for chemical-free farming, Mission Organic Value Chain Development for the North Eastern Region, Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme under Soil Health Management Scheme, National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm and National Food Security Mission. The cultivable land area under organic farming had increased to 29.17 lakh hectares in 2020 due to the focused efforts of the government. Organic promotion activities, awareness programs, availability of adequate postharvest infrastructure, marketing facilities and premium prices for organic produce led to the development of domestic supply and exports of organic produce. Increasing demand due to government efforts presented an opportunity in the market for organic farm products.

Dilemma

Hange brothers' TBOF resonated with their commitment to organic farming and the community they had nurtured. Their path of sustainable agriculture and dedication had witnessed with the customer handwritten letters, video testimonials and appreciation from renowned figures. Community-based shared value farming was an initiative started by Hange brothers under the organic umbrella, to hand hold of farmers based in rural Maharashtra, nurture them and give them a market platform to sell their organic produce working toward sustainable incomes. They were committed to practicing and promoting organic farming, emphasizing sustainable and regenerative agriculture practices.

However, as their demand outstripped supply, they were confronted with challenges in sustaining and scaling their business while maintaining the core values of organic farming. The increasing demand for their products prompted a reassessment of their business processes for long-term sustainability. This dilemma involved finding a balance between meeting market demands, expanding their product portfolio (Figure 2) and managing the entire value chain without compromising on their commitment to organic, sustainable practices.

The tension laid in the need for growth and expansion to meet market demands while adhering to the principles of organic farming and maintaining the integrity of their brand. It raised questions about how to scale their operations, address supply chain challenges and explore innovative solutions without compromising the essence of their initial vision. The Hange brothers should navigate this value chain dilemma to ensure the continued success and sustainability of TBOF.

Keywords:
Sustainability,
Value chain,
Marketing mix

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