

Can India Make Clean Food Affordable, Not Just Aspirational?

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Clean food in India is moving beyond a niche consumer preference. Consumers increasingly want to know how their food is grown, sourced and processed. Yet, products positioned around cleaner ingredients, responsible sourcing and greater transparency often come at a premium, keeping them out of reach for many households.

The question is not whether consumers are willing to pay more for better food. It is whether the industry can build a system where better food does not have to cost significantly more.

The premium on clean food often reflects what happens before a product reaches the shelf: better raw materials, responsible farming, careful handling, testing, storage and traceability. These are necessary investments. The challenge is to make them more efficient without compromising quality or safety.

The answer begins at the farm.

One of the biggest opportunities lies in reducing avoidable cultivation costs. Responsible farming should not automatically mean higher costs for farmers or consumers. Through Khetika Saathi, our Sustainable Agriculture and Training Hubs, we work with farmers to promote Integrated Pest Management (IPM), soil testing and better agronomic practices.

By helping farmers understand crop health, monitor pest populations, make inputs like fertilisers, natural pesticides at farm and use agricultural inputs more judiciously, we aim to reduce unnecessary expenditure while supporting productivity and responsible farming. The objective is not simply to use fewer inputs, but to use the right inputs at the right time.

Better testing can improve the economics of quality.

Agricultural produce varies in quality depending on its origin, cultivation, harvesting and storage. Without reliable testing at the procurement stage, different grades may get mixed, quality differences may go unrecognised, and problems may be discovered only after transportation or processing.

Better testing infrastructure enables segregation at source, allowing produce to be graded and directed towards appropriate applications. It can improve price transparency for farmers, reduce avoidable handling and help businesses procure more consistently. Food that does not meet applicable safety requirements must, of course, be handled separately and not diverted into another food application.

Testing, therefore, is not merely a compliance cost. Integrated into procurement, it can become an economic tool that helps the industry manage variability and reward quality more effectively.

Better storage means less wastage and better value.

A significant opportunity to improve food affordability lies in strengthening India's storage infrastructure. Inadequate storage, poor moisture control, unsuitable temperatures and improper handling can lead to spoilage, pest infestation, quality deterioration and, in some commodities, the development of harmful toxins.

Appropriate storage facilities, scientific warehousing, moisture management and temperature control wherever required can help preserve raw-material quality and extend shelf life. Combined with better inventory management and transportation, these measures can reduce post-harvest losses and prevent valuable agricultural produce from going to waste.

For farmers, lower losses can mean more saleable produce and better realisation from their efforts. For food businesses, it means more consistent raw materials, fewer avoidable losses and more efficient procurement. Ultimately, reducing wastage across the supply chain can help lower the cost of delivering quality food to consumers.

Storage, like testing, should not be seen merely as an additional cost. It is an investment in protecting the value already created at the farm.

A more efficient supply chain benefits everyone.

India's food system remains fragmented, with multiple layers between farms and consumers. These layers perform important functions, but unnecessary complexity can increase costs and limit visibility. Stronger farmer relationships, predictable demand, clear quality standards, appropriate storage and better demand forecasting can improve efficiency while reducing wastage.

Affordability cannot come at the expense of farmer economics. Through Khetika Saathi and our sourcing approach, we aim to build a more dependable supply network where farmers benefit from informed agricultural practices and clearer market linkages, while consumers gain access to responsibly produced food.

Scale is the next lever. Larger and more predictable procurement volumes, efficient processing, technology-enabled quality management and better distribution can spread fixed costs across higher volumes. The objective is not to eliminate the cost of responsible production, but to make the systems supporting it more efficient as they grow.

This is the distinction between premiumisation and mainstream adoption. Clean food cannot become mainstream through consumer awareness alone. It requires better cultivation practices, reliable testing, intelligent segregation, scientific storage and a supply chain designed for quality as well as efficiency.

India has the agricultural diversity, food-processing capabilities and consumer demand to make this transition. What is needed is stronger integration between farmers, testing systems, storage infrastructure, processors and markets.

At Khetika, our ambition is not to create a small market for expensive clean food, but to build the capabilities required to make responsibly produced food more accessible over time.

The measure of progress should not be how much premium consumers are willing to pay for clean food. It should be how much the industry can reduce that premium without compromising quality, food safety or farmer livelihoods.

Clean food must move from being an aspirational purchase to an everyday expectation. Making that possible will require better farming, better testing, better storage and a more efficient food system—at the scale of India's mainstream market.