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HARVESTING HEALTH AND PROSPERITY: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF ORGANIC ANIMAL AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA

Janet Chinwe Olowoyeye

Department of Agricultural Science and Technology, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science, and Technology, Ikere, Ekiti State

Corresponding author email: olowoyeye.janet@bouesti.edu.ng

Abstract

Organic animal agriculture in Nigeria offers a promising solution to the challenges posed by conventional farming, including environmental damage, animal welfare issues, and public health risks. This article explores the principles, benefits, and challenges of organic animal farming, highlighting its potential to drive economic growth, sustainability, and improved health. Global success stories prove its viability, and Nigeria's growing demand for healthier, eco-friendly products presents a significant opportunity. However, barriers such as high costs, limited market access, and insufficient farmer education hinder progress. This article outlines strategic solutions, including strengthening supply chains, improving market connections, investing in education and innovation, and implementing supportive policies. With collaboration among policymakers, investors, farmers, and consumers, organic animal agriculture can become a key pillar of Nigeria's agricultural economy, generating wealth, creating jobs, and enhancing national well-being.

Keywords : Health, Prosperity, Sustainability, Organic, Animal, Agriculture

History of Animal Agriculture in Nigeria

Animal agriculture in Nigeria has a long history that intertwines with the nation's cultural and economic fabric. Traditionally, livestock farming has been integral to the agricultural practices of Nigerian communities, serving both as a source of food and a means of livelihood. The majority of herders in Nigeria are livestock owners, a trend that has continued into modern times, reflecting the significant role animal husbandry plays in the country's economy

Before colonial influence, Nigerian societies relied on diverse forms of animal husbandry, tailored to the ecological and cultural contexts of various ethnic groups. Different communities raised livestock according to their needs and traditions, often integrating these practices with their agricultural systems. This period saw a variety of farming methods, including nomadic pastoralism, which allowed for the sustainable management of livestock in relation to natural grazing patterns. The colonial era introduced significant changes to the landscape of animal agriculture in Nigeria. Economic policies during this time prioritized resource extraction and

cash crop production, which disrupted traditional farming systems and led to socio-economic inequalities. The imposition of new agricultural practices and the monetization of livestock trade altered long-standing customs related to animal husbandry, pushing many farmers towards a more commercial approach to livestock farming. Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, animal agriculture began to evolve with changing dietary preferences and urbanization trends. By 2017, Nigeria had an estimated 80 million poultry, 76 million goats, 43.4 million sheep, 18.4 million cattle, and 7.5 million pigs, highlighting the country's substantial livestock population. The demand for animal products has surged, driven by population growth and the rising middle class, indicating a shift from subsistence farming to more intensive livestock production methods. Today, animal agriculture in Nigeria comprises various sectors, including poultry farming, cattle farming, goat farming, and fish farming, among others. Poultry farming is particularly prominent, often referred to as the "king of livestock farming" in Nigeria. The evolution from traditional nomadic practices to sedentary and intensive grazing systems has also led to challenges such as overgrazing and pressure on grazing lands, particularly in fragile ecosystems like the savannas and woodlands.

The future of animal agriculture in Nigeria is poised for growth, with the potential for increased domestic and international demand for animal products. This presents opportunities for farmers and animal scientists to enhance production while ensuring sustainable practices that meet both local and global market demands

The State of Organic Animal Agriculture in Nigeria

Organic animal agriculture in Nigeria is still very much in its early stages. Unlike crop-based organic farming—which has seen some progress due to growing awareness of food safety, environmental concerns, and public health—animal agriculture hasn't received as much attention. Most Nigerian farmers still depend on conventional methods that involve synthetic chemicals, antibiotics, and intensive rearing techniques. In states like Oyo and Anambra, some smallholder farmers engage in organic practices, but often not by design. Instead, these methods naturally align with organic principles, largely because farmers have limited access to synthetic inputs (Ogungbaro & Olaiya, 2024; Nenna & Ugwumba, 2014).

Interestingly, many farmers who raise animals "organically" are doing so by default rather than through formal certification. Certified organic livestock farming is extremely rare in Nigeria, mainly because there's very little infrastructure to support it. Where organic practices do exist, they typically involve using animal manure as fertilizer, relying on natural pest control, and drawing from indigenous knowledge to sustain farm systems. These approaches are usually part of mixed farming systems, where animals are not the main focus but play supporting roles in soil fertility and nutrient recycling (Atoma & Atoma, 2015).

But the road isn't without hurdles. Many farmers aren't aware of what organic standards really entail, and there's a lack of technical knowledge to guide them. Government support is minimal, organic inputs are often expensive, and there's a serious gap in market access. Consumers, too, aren't widely educated about organic animal products and are often unwilling to pay the higher prices they typically command (Mgbenka et al., 2015; Tikon et al., 2023). To make matters more complicated, national agricultural policies still heavily favor conventional systems—offering subsidies for chemical fertilizers and mechanization—making it harder for organic alternatives to compete.

That said, the potential is significant. Nigeria is blessed with a diverse range of climates and environments, along with hardy indigenous animal breeds that are well-suited to low-input, organic-style systems. Civil society organizations and initiatives like the Organic Farmers Association of Nigeria and regional markets in places like Ibadan are beginning to bridge the gap—raising awareness and offering platforms for farmers to sell organic products (Mgbenka et al., 2015).

Transforming traditional practices into fully certified organic systems won't happen overnight, but it's not impossible. Studies show that with the right training, support, and infrastructure, many existing farming methods in Nigeria could easily transition to meet organic standards (Olanrewaju et al., 2018). What's more, farmers are generally open to the idea—especially when they understand the health benefits, environmental advantages, and potential financial rewards (Okonta et al., 2023).

In conclusion, while organic animal agriculture in Nigeria is still finding its feet, the promise it holds is undeniable. With strategic policy backing, better farmer education, accessible certification pathways, and a strong push to inform consumers, this sector could become a cornerstone of Nigeria's sustainable agriculture movement.

Key Principles of Organic Animal Agriculture

Organic animal agriculture is based on a set of guiding principles that ensure ethical, sustainable, and health-conscious farming practices. Central to these principles are the four ethical foundations laid out by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM): health, ecology, fairness, and care. The principle of health emphasizes the maintenance of animal well-being through preventive healthcare, stress-free environments, and natural diets, thus aiming to create resilient animals rather than relying heavily on medical interventions (Vaarst & Alrøe, 2012). The principle of ecology focuses on the integration of livestock into farming systems, encouraging closed nutrient cycles and minimizing environmental impact. This includes practices such as rotational grazing, the use of organic feed, and recycling animal manure as fertilizer (Padel, 2019).

The principle of fairness requires that animals be treated with respect, allowing them to express their natural behaviors in a low-stress environment. This involves providing adequate space, access to the outdoors, social interaction, and species-appropriate housing (Vaarst et al., 2006). Meanwhile, the principle of care demands a precautionary approach to animal health and environmental management, emphasizing humane treatment and long-term sustainability over short-term gains (Saini et al., 2018).

In practice, these principles manifest as several key requirements in organic animal agriculture. Animals must be fed organic diets, free from genetically modified organisms (GMOs), antibiotics, and synthetic additives. Preventive health care is prioritized through good nutrition, hygiene, and environmental conditions, while the use of chemical medications is strictly limited to necessary interventions. Breeding strategies must support animal health and behavior rather than maximizing productivity, and reproduction must avoid invasive techniques like embryo transfer, which are considered unnatural (Vaarst et al., 2003).

Another central tenet is that animals are not mere production units but sentient beings. Their capacity for experience and suffering places moral obligations on farmers, which extend beyond

standard welfare to ensuring a good quality of life, including emotional and psychological well-being (Roderick & Vaarst, 2019). Organic animal agriculture also requires environmental harmony, such as maintaining biodiversity and minimizing pollution, thereby linking animal farming practices directly to ecological balance.

The holistic nature of these principles means that organic animal agriculture is not just a set of technical practices but a comprehensive approach to farming that integrates ethical treatment of animals, sustainable land use, and consumer health. While implementation varies by region and certification bodies, adherence to these guiding values is what fundamentally defines organic animal agriculture.

The Economic Potential of Organic Animal Agriculture in Nigeria

Organic animal agriculture in Nigeria represents a promising pathway to transform rural livelihoods, enhance food security, and align the country's agricultural systems with global sustainability goals. Despite its relatively early stage of formal development, the foundation for organic livestock farming in Nigeria is already strong, thanks to widespread traditional farming practices that mirror organic principles. Across many rural communities, farmers rear animals in free-range systems, feed them natural diets, and avoid synthetic drugs—methods that naturally align with organic standards, even if not formally certified (Lawal-Adebowale, 2018).

Economically, this sector holds immense potential due to rising consumer demand—both locally and internationally—for safe, premium-quality animal products such as organic meat, eggs, milk, and honey. Nigerian consumers, especially within the growing middle class, are becoming increasingly health-conscious and environmentally aware. These shifts in consumer preference are driving demand for products perceived as natural, chemical-free, and ethically produced (Mgbenka et al., 2015). For smallholder farmers, this presents a chance to tap into niche markets that offer price premiums, thus increasing their income and economic resilience.

One initiative that illustrates this growing interest is the Organic Farmers' Market launched in Ibadan in 2014, which created a platform for consumers to access certified organic goods and for farmers to benefit from value-added branding (Mgbenka et al., 2015). Beyond domestic markets, Nigeria also has export potential. With proper certification and regulatory alignment, the country can cater to the global market for organic animal products, which continues to expand due to concerns over food safety, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare.

Organic animal farming also offers cost-saving advantages for farmers. By relying on natural fodder, local feed ingredients, and indigenous methods of disease control, farmers reduce their dependence on costly imported inputs such as synthetic feeds and veterinary drugs (Augustine et al., 2013). This shift towards self-reliant production models can improve rural livelihoods by lowering overhead costs and increasing net income, especially when integrated into mixed farming systems that utilize animal manure for crop production.

Moreover, the labor-intensive nature of organic systems—such as rotational grazing, organic feed preparation, and natural disease management—creates employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas. These activities can be harnessed to engage youth and women, offering skills training and new income streams through feed processing, organic certification services, and direct marketing of value-added products (Ogungbaro & Olaiya, 2024). Small-scale

enterprises that produce organic manure, herbal treatments, and animal care inputs could flourish under such a system, contributing to rural industrialization.

Nonetheless, to fully unlock this economic potential, Nigeria must overcome several challenges. Most farmers who practice organic methods do so by default and lack awareness of the benefits of formal certification and branding. Without certification, their products cannot command the higher prices associated with organic labels. The cost and complexity of obtaining certification, coupled with inadequate government support, discourage many farmers from pursuing formal recognition (Oguamanam, 2015). Additionally, there are limited extension services or training programs focused on organic livestock production, and poor access to organized markets means that even certified producers may struggle to reach consumers willing to pay a premium.

Institutional support is gradually emerging. The Organic Farmers Association of Nigeria and regional markets are beginning to structure the value chain, promote awareness, and create opportunities for collaboration. Nigeria's diverse agro-ecological zones—with ample pasturelands and natural forage—offer a strategic advantage for low-cost, organic-compatible livestock production (Augustine et al., 2013). What remains is the need for a cohesive national strategy that includes favorable policies, infrastructure for certification and market access, and investment in farmer education.

In conclusion, Nigeria is well-positioned to become a leader in organic animal agriculture, leveraging its existing traditional practices, ecological diversity, and growing consumer interest. With the right institutional and policy frameworks, this sector can create a profitable, sustainable, and inclusive agricultural economy—one that not only boosts rural incomes but also contributes to health, environmental conservation, and national development.

Benefits of Organic Animal Agriculture

Organic animal agriculture offers a wide range of benefits that go beyond just the production of food—it touches on human health, animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and economic development. At its core, organic livestock farming avoids the use of synthetic chemicals, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and routine antibiotics, instead relying on natural practices that prioritize the well-being of both animals and the ecosystems in which they are raised. This approach creates a more holistic system that addresses some of the key challenges associated with conventional farming.

One of the most widely recognized benefits of organic animal agriculture is its positive impact on **human health**. Organic animal products such as milk, meat, and eggs are often free from antibiotic residues, synthetic hormones, and chemical additives. With increasing concerns over antibiotic resistance, organic farming practices offer a safer alternative by prohibiting the routine use of antibiotics in livestock. Studies have shown that excessive use of antibiotics in conventional livestock production can contribute to the development of drug-resistant bacteria, which pose serious public health risks (Horrigan et al., 2002). Organic systems help reduce this risk, offering cleaner and potentially safer animal-derived foods.

Animal welfare is another important pillar of organic livestock systems. Unlike conventional intensive farming, which often confines animals in small spaces, organic standards emphasize access to outdoor areas, natural behaviors, and stress reduction. Animals raised in organic systems typically enjoy more space, natural diets, and better living conditions. This not only

improves their quality of life but also enhances the quality of products they provide. For instance, organically raised chickens often produce eggs with better nutritional profiles, including higher omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin content (Huber et al., 2011).

Environmentally, organic animal agriculture promotes practices that are more in harmony with nature. Instead of relying on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides that can degrade soil and pollute water bodies, organic farming encourages composting, crop rotation, and the use of animal manure to enrich soil fertility. These practices contribute to healthier soils, improved water retention, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, organic systems support biodiversity by creating habitats for beneficial insects and microorganisms, while also avoiding the toxic effects of chemical runoffs seen in conventional systems (Reganold & Wachter, 2016).

Economically, organic livestock farming offers an opportunity for smallholder farmers and rural communities to improve their livelihoods. While organic production may initially require more labor and investment in knowledge and management, the products typically attract premium prices in the market. This price advantage can help farmers increase their income and reinvest in sustainable practices. Additionally, by using locally available resources such as indigenous animal breeds, native grasses, and traditional disease remedies, organic farmers can reduce their dependence on expensive imported inputs (IFOAM, 2021).

In countries like Nigeria, where traditional farming practices already align with many organic principles, transitioning to certified organic animal agriculture can unlock these benefits without requiring a complete overhaul of existing systems. It can build on the knowledge already present in rural communities while introducing new techniques that enhance productivity and sustainability. With growing consumer awareness and demand for healthier, more ethical food options, organic animal agriculture offers a viable path toward a more just and resilient food system.

The benefits of organic animal agriculture are far-reaching. It supports public health by reducing exposure to harmful substances, ensures better treatment of animals, protects the environment, and offers economic opportunities for farmers. As the world searches for more sustainable ways to feed a growing population, organic livestock farming presents itself as a compelling and responsible choice.

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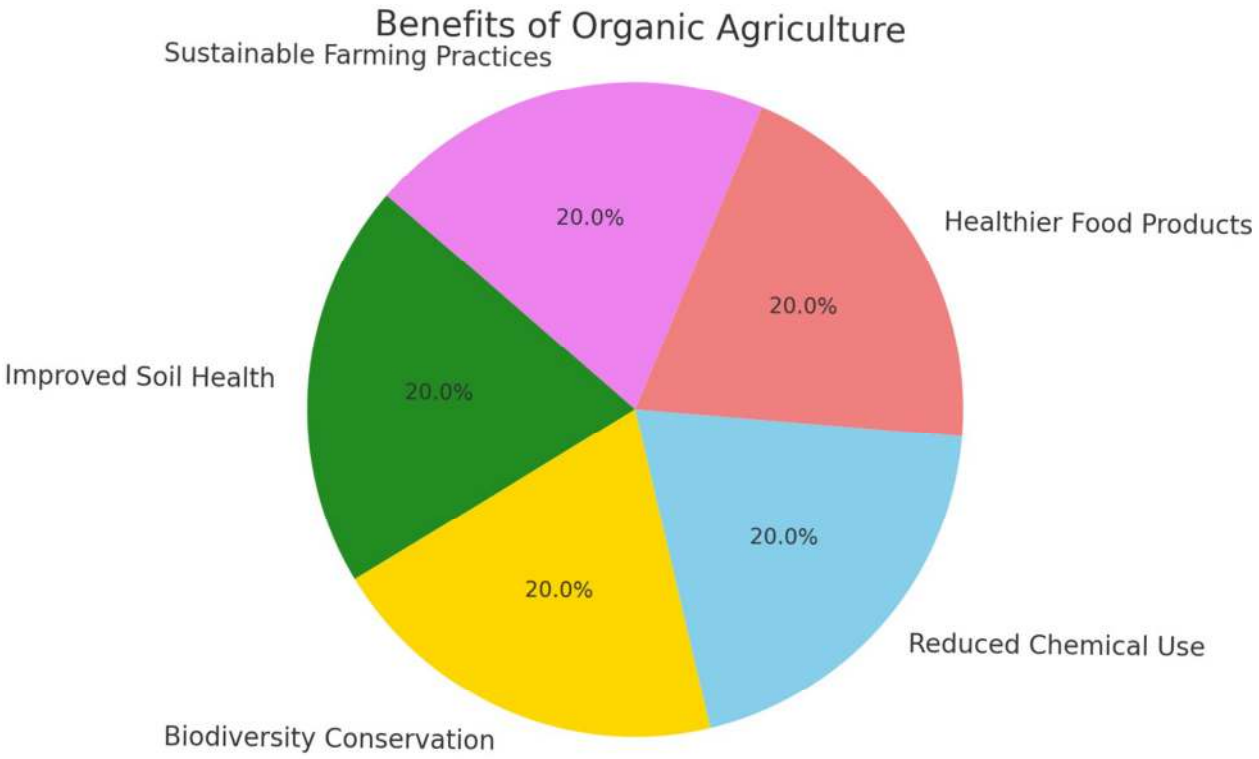

Challenges Facing Organic Animal Agriculture in Nigeria

Organic animal agriculture in Nigeria, despite its promise, faces a multitude of challenges that limit its development, scalability, and profitability. These challenges span technical, institutional, economic, and socio-cultural domains. Addressing them requires a multi-pronged approach involving farmers, policymakers, researchers, and consumers.

A major obstacle is the **low level of awareness and understanding** of organic animal agriculture among farmers. Most smallholder farmers, who dominate Nigeria's agricultural landscape, are unaware of the formal principles and long-term benefits of certified organic practices. Although many traditional systems already align with organic methods—such as using natural feeds or avoiding synthetic drugs—these practices are not documented, standardized, or optimized for productivity and market access (Lawal-Adebowale, 2018). This knowledge gap results in missed opportunities, as farmers cannot leverage organic certification to obtain premium market prices or consumer trust.

Another critical challenge is the **lack of infrastructure for organic certification and regulation**. Organic animal farming in Nigeria is largely informal, with few farmers undergoing any recognized certification process. The procedures involved in obtaining organic certification are often expensive, complex, and poorly understood. In the absence of national certification bodies or well-developed guidelines, farmers are left in a grey area—practicing organic by

default but unable to reap its economic advantages (Oguamanam, 2015). Additionally, the lack of a robust regulatory framework means there is little quality assurance, leaving consumers uncertain about the authenticity of organic animal products.

Market access poses yet another constraint. While there is growing demand for organic products, **dedicated distribution channels and organized markets** for organic animal goods are still underdeveloped in Nigeria. Most organic livestock products are sold in general markets without any special labeling, making it difficult for consumers to distinguish them from conventional ones. This undermines price premiums and reduces the incentive for farmers to invest in organic practices (Mgbenka et al., 2015). Moreover, urban consumers, who are more likely to demand organic products, are not well connected to rural organic producers due to poor infrastructure, limited logistics, and weak marketing systems.

Government policies also favor conventional agriculture, often providing subsidies for synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and mechanized tools while overlooking support for organic alternatives. This creates an uneven playing field and discourages the transition to organic systems. The absence of targeted incentives, extension services, and capacity-building programs for organic livestock producers has left many farmers without the institutional backing necessary to innovate or scale their operations (Tikon et al., 2023).

From an economic perspective, **cost is a major barrier**. Organic livestock production requires investments in knowledge, time, labor, and sometimes alternative inputs that are more expensive or harder to find. Farmers also struggle with record-keeping, rotational grazing management, and access to veterinary services that are tailored to organic protocols. These demands, without immediate returns, discourage participation—especially among resource-poor farmers who prioritize short-term survival over long-term sustainability (Atoma & Atoma, 2015).

Social and cultural perceptions further complicate the matter. In many rural areas, organic agriculture is viewed as old-fashioned or less productive, while chemical-based methods are seen as modern and efficient. These attitudes influence both farmer behavior and consumer choices, thereby slowing down adoption (Okonta et al., 2023). Without targeted education and awareness campaigns, these perceptions may persist, preventing the widespread acceptance of organic animal agriculture.

To overcome these challenges, a strategic and inclusive approach is necessary. **Government policy must take the lead** by integrating organic agriculture into national agricultural development plans. This can be achieved through financial incentives, subsidies for organic inputs, and the establishment of certification bodies. Equally important is the need for investment in **education and extension services** that can train farmers on organic animal husbandry, documentation practices, and environmental stewardship. Partnering with agricultural research institutions to develop and disseminate organic livestock technologies adapted to Nigerian conditions will also be vital.

Market development efforts should include **branding, labeling, and supply chain innovations** that link rural producers with urban consumers seeking organic products. Farmer cooperatives can play a central role in achieving economies of scale, aggregating produce, and negotiating better terms in the market. Public awareness campaigns, possibly using mass media and social platforms, will help change consumer mindsets and create demand-driven growth in the organic sector.

If these interventions are implemented effectively, Nigeria can unlock the full potential of organic animal agriculture—transforming it into a tool for rural development, environmental conservation, and improved public health. Below is a simple illustration highlighting the perceived severity of key challenges based on frequency in literature and field observations.

Common Challenges in Organic Animal Agriculture in Nigeria

Challenge	Relative Severity Score (1–10)
Lack of Certification Infrastructure	9
Low Awareness and Training	8
Poor Market Access	8
Policy Bias Toward Conventional Farming	7
High Cost of Compliance	7
Negative Cultural Perceptions	6

Relative Severity of Key Challenges in Organic Animal Agriculture (1 = Low, 10 = High)

Innovations in Organic Animal Farming: What Nigeria Can Learn from the Global Stage

As Nigeria seeks to expand its footprint in organic animal agriculture, there's a growing need to look beyond traditional practices and tap into global innovations that are transforming organic livestock systems worldwide. While the country has made strides in reducing chemical use and promoting natural livestock management, integrating novel practices seen in other parts of the world could position Nigeria as a leader in sustainable livestock farming across Africa.

One of the most exciting developments is the use of digital technologies in organic animal farming. In countries like the Netherlands and Israel, Precision Livestock Farming (PLF) tools—such as wearable sensors, GPS trackers, and real-time monitoring apps—are helping farmers track animal health, behavior, and productivity without compromising organic principles (Halachmi et al., 2019; Rutten et al., 2013). These technologies not only support animal welfare but also enhance traceability, a key requirement for organic certification. In Nigeria, such tools

remain underutilized. Adopting PLF within organic farms can help producers monitor pasture use, detect illnesses early, and boost consumer confidence through transparent recordkeeping.

Another global practice gaining ground is the agroecological integration of livestock systems. In countries like France and Brazil, farmers are shifting towards circular resource use—where manure from animals is returned to the land as fertilizer, and local feed resources replace imported concentrates (Wezel et al., 2020). These systems are not only environmentally friendly but also cost-effective. For Nigeria, where smallholder farmers often operate under resource constraints, implementing agroecological zoning and nutrient recycling could improve both soil and animal health.

Breed selection is another area ripe for innovation. In Europe, especially in Germany and Austria, there's a renewed focus on raising dual-purpose and heritage breeds that are more resilient to environmental stress and better suited to organic conditions (Hessle et al., 2014). These breeds thrive on natural pastures and require fewer medical interventions. While Nigeria has many hardy indigenous breeds, they are often overlooked in favor of commercial ones. Promoting local breeds in organic systems could improve sustainability while preserving genetic diversity.

Interestingly, other regions like Latin America and parts of Asia are also seeing a revival of ethnoveterinary medicine (EVM)—the use of traditional plant-based remedies to treat livestock diseases. In Mexico, for instance, herbs like garlic and aloe vera are used in certified organic farms to treat common infections without antibiotics (Molina-Cruz et al., 2021). Nigeria has a deep pool of ethnoveterinary knowledge involving herbs like neem, bitter leaf, and ginger. Validating and integrating these remedies into certified organic practice would not only reduce drug dependence but also give farmers affordable treatment options.

Finally, a standout innovation in advanced economies is the tracking of livestock carbon footprints. Countries like Sweden and New Zealand are developing tools that measure emissions from livestock production and link them with eco-labels that help consumers make climate-conscious choices (Knudsen et al., 2011). This trend is fast becoming part of organic certification processes. For Nigeria, developing a carbon-conscious organic livestock framework could create niche export opportunities and encourage more farmers to shift towards climate-smart practices.

Bringing these global best practices into the Nigerian organic livestock sector will not only elevate local production standards but also position Nigerian farmers to compete in international organic markets. With strategic investment, education, and policy support, the future of organic animal agriculture in Nigeria could be both sustainable and globally relevant.

Conclusion

While the prospects for organic animal agriculture in Nigeria are promising, several barriers still stand in the way of widespread adoption. The high cost of organic inputs, the complexity of certification processes, and the significant upfront investments remain key challenges for many farmers. Beyond these, persistent infrastructural gaps and limited access to stable markets further constrain progress in the sector.

However, to truly unlock the potential of organic livestock farming in Nigeria, it's time to look outward and inward simultaneously. Around the world, countries are integrating digital technologies like real-time animal health monitoring and precision livestock tools to support welfare-friendly and data-driven organic systems. Others are embracing agroecological models, which rely on circular resource use, indigenous knowledge, and ecological balance. These approaches are not only sustainable but are also proving economically viable in places like Europe and Latin America.

Nigeria has much to gain by adopting and adapting such innovations. Leveraging ethnoveterinary knowledge, promoting resilient local breeds, and developing frameworks for carbon-conscious organic certifications can set the country apart as a leader in climate-smart, organic livestock systems. These ideas are not only globally relevant but can be tailored to fit Nigeria's unique agricultural landscapes.

To make this a reality, stakeholders—including government agencies, private investors, and research institutions—must work collaboratively. Financial incentives like subsidies, grants, and affordable credit can ease the transition for farmers. Equally important is strengthening partnerships between researchers and farmers to co-create solutions rooted in both science and tradition.

Organic animal agriculture is more than a trend—it is a necessary shift toward health, sustainability, and resilience. With the right support and vision, Nigeria can pioneer a model that is both authentically local and globally aligned.

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