



ASEAN Journal of Agriculture and Food Engineering



Journal homepage: <https://ejournal.bumipublikasinusantara.id/index.php/ajafe>

Farmers' Coping Mechanism during the Pandemic

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ABSTRACTS

Agriculture is one of the country's most vital sectors and amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the resiliency of the agricultural sector has been tested. The said global issue highlights that the worldwide food supply is built on the shoulders of agricultural workers. This study aimed to learn more about farmers' experiences, particularly those residing in Sultan Kudarat. This paper utilized a qualitative approach using a purposive sampling technique among ten (10) participants in Sultan Kudarat province. These farmers have been in the farming industry for five years, cultivating at least 1 hectare of farmland. They are tenants of the land they cultivate, are producers of any crops, and members of any recognized farmers' associations. Through this study, we have gained knowledge about the experiences of farmers during the pandemic. This study revealed that farmers had encountered a lot of challenges during the pandemic, one of which was financial vulnerability due to the instability of work opportunities in the agricultural sector. However, farmers are incredibly resilient, to the point that they seek ways to overcome any challenges or obstacles brought by their work by looking for other jobs while they wait for their crops to be harvested so they can still sustain their daily needs.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 16 Jul 2022

First revised 20 Aug 2022

Accepted 28 Aug 2022

First available online 31 Aug 2022

Publication date 01 Sep 2022

Keyword:

Agriculture,
Coping mechanism,
Covid-19,
Farmer,
Pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is one of the country's most important sectors and has been given more light during this time of the pandemic. Following the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, the agri-food sector was severely impacted, and the food supply chain was disrupted worldwide (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). With these issues brought out, farmers, the backbone of agriculture, have been experiencing hard times ever since. In India, where lockdowns have turned out to be a black hole for the agrarian society, growers saw a decrease in their profits. The movement of agricultural commodities from their point of production to the final consumer has been hindered primarily as a result of the lockdown (Sahoo & Rath, 2020). A further issue is the labor shortages caused by the fear of transmitting the disease from one person to another, leading to the waste of harvested commodities, primarily fruits and vegetables perishable in the farmer's field itself (Arumugam, 2020). According to the Philippine Star, a reputable news organization, about 40% of Filipino workers are involved in our agricultural sector, and it employs only 25.96%, indicating that the sector is still struggling to gain adhesion as a priority in comparison to some of its bordering countries, which prioritize and place greater emphasis on agriculture. To add, in Davao City, the community quarantine enforced in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 COVID-19 outbreak resulted in a loss of income. The demand for vegetables has decreased dramatically because of this particular instance (Gu & Wang, 2020). The majority of eateries simply kept their takeaway and food transportation services. As a consequence, there are fewer buyers, and as a result, the farmers sold fewer vegetables.

The pandemic has affected the agricultural sector, especially farmers. Given the issues that were relayed, these predicaments resulted in the hardships of farmers amid the pandemic. By revealing their activities, insight into their lives will be made known. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about the experiences of farmers, specifically those who are situated in Sultan Kudarat. This study will then be used as a catalyst for future research, considering that the information gathered in this study will shed light on the challenges and coping mechanisms of farmers as the backbone of any country's economy.

2. METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative narrative study method where it brought forth the hardships and experiences of farmers amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. With the restrictions being imposed all over the country we decided to interview one of three ways, First, through a meeting online using applications i.e. Google meet, second, if a connection complication is being experienced by any of the parties a phone call shall be made in its place and finally, a face-to-face interview will be done with participants that are easy to access. A semi-structured interview was used in the data gathering of the study. Narrative analysis was also used in the analysis of this study.

2.1. Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are farmers residing in Sultan Kudarat. With specificity, they should meet the following requirements. He or she must be (a) a Farmer for at least five years, (b) cultivating at least 1 hectare of farmland, (c) tenants of the land that they cultivate, (d) producer of any crops, (e) a member of any recognized farmers' associations, and (f) a resident of Sultan Kudarat Province. The ten (10) participants chosen were the only ones to satisfy the given criteria imposed by we.

2.2 Data Gathering Instruments

We of this study made use of a semi-structured interview sheet as the basis for the flow of the interview done with the participants. A semi-structured sheet is a kind of tool that contains questions that are already predetermined by we and follow-up questions that are not planned before the conduct of the interview. In line with this, we also used a voice recorder to document the data that is being given by the participants.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

Initially, letters of communication were sent to the Chairman of the Laboratory High School requesting permission to conduct the study. The participants were then identified using the criteria provided by we. The in-depth interview for the participants was conducted online and the face-to-face interview was used if the internet connection was unavailable. All utterances made during the semi-structured interview were written precisely during the transcription, and the completed transcribed interviews were subjected to data analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Challenges Brought by the Pandemic

The pandemic has heavily affected the lives of farmers in more ways than one. The analysis done by we have brought light to the experiences of farmers amidst the pandemic. According to participants, they experienced a decrease in income was evident since there was a shift in their lifestyle that made living harder for them. The pandemic also raises concerns about the financial vulnerability of rural farming areas, particularly those where farmers' earnings are based on daily or weekly labour. Another one was the increase of farm inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, and chemicals yet there is a low market price for unhusked rice ranging from 12-15 kilos ([Zurayk, 2020](#)). These challenges contribute to the emotional distress the farmers are experiencing. Without a doubt, farming is a stressful job. Before the pandemic, the data showed that farmers are approximately five times more likely to commit suicide than the general population. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, some farmers are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety Mathews.

3.2 Recovery of Income Losses

The resiliency of farmers has been highlighted in the conduct of this study. With the income loss that they experienced and emotional instability, the farmers thought of different ways to cope with the struggles they are undergoing. According to the participants they would borrow money from known sources to pay for their expenses. Another way that they did was to find jobs outside farming such as carpenter, launderer, foodseller, and a tricycle driver. They would also plant their vegetables to be consumed later on. Aside from produce, they would raise livestock for additional income. Furthermore, the government is also playing a significant job in helping our agricultural workers through government aid such as 4ps and farmers' associations. However, even with the different aids, the government is providing they have emphasized that it is still sufficient. Numerous citizens have complained about the slow pace of food assistance, and relief workers trying to fill in gaps.

3.3 Overcoming the Challenges Brought by the Pandemic

Due to the difficult situation, the pandemic has placed the farmers in they needed to find ways to cope. Some of them would just entertain themselves by watching the television to get through their circumstance and momentarily forget about their problems. They would

also utilize what they have to avoid spending more expenses and would rather spend on cheaper alternative equipment. Some also increased their price to recoup their losses by a few pesos. Indeed, a farmer's resiliency is astounding the capacity to bounce back any internal and external circumstance they are facing.

4. CONCLUSION

Challenges like a decrease in income inputs have been impacted. An increase in the prices of materials like fertilizer, pesticides, and insecticides are heavily affected their monetary situation. Aside from that, the lack of job opportunities in farming due to the pandemic drove them to do other odd jobs to feed their family and sustain their living. These are the most common problems farmers face, especially in this pandemic. These experiences caused them mental stability amidst the global epidemic, as stated by some participants. The farmers that were interviewed were parents who were struggling to make ends meet since these parents rely mostly on farming as their daily source of income. Thus, farmers cope with these challenges by doing the following: Borrowing money from neighbors, friends, or relatives, Receiving and depending on financial assistance from the government and other associations, working other jobs such as being a carpenter, launderer, selling kakanin, and even farming other people's farms, raising livestock, and planting their food. Farmers have different ways of coping with this crisis. One raised their products higher, another preoccupied with watching television shows, and another forced themselves to find money to borrow and find another job. This shows that farmers overcome every challenge by being resilient.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research paper is about our determination and dedication to fulfilling our responsibilities as students. We, and for certain people to whom they place great gratitude for helping them. We owe the completion of this paper to the following: Ma'am Noraina Malantok-Aguil, Candellen Biadoma-Toledo, the participants, and the parents of we.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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