



Farmers' Group Management System to Improve Public Services in The Agriculture and Fisheries Service of Lamandau District Central Kalimantan 2024

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Abstract

This research highlights the management of farmer groups in Lamandau Regency, which plays an important role in increasing the contribution of the agricultural sector to the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) of Lamandau Regency. By focusing on 663 registered farmer groups, this study aims to identify current managerial conditions, barriers faced, and strategies to increase productivity and farmer engagement through effective management. The results show that limited access to land, technology, and markets are the main constraints for farmer groups. In addition, poorly organised management and the suboptimal role of extension workers also affect farmer group performance. This research uses qualitative methods through surveys and interviews with respondents from farmer groups and agricultural extension officers, the results of which show the low participation of farmer group members in routine activities and management of production facilities. The study recommends empowerment strategies through more structured agricultural extension, enhancing the role of extension officers as facilitators and motivators, and developing farmer group managerial skills. It is hoped that the results of this study can improve the efficiency and contribution of farmer groups to the sustainability of farming businesses and serve as a guide for policies at the local government level in supporting the agricultural sector.



INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector holds a vital role in the economic structure of Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan Province. This is evident from its dominant contribution to the region's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP). Over the past three years, the agricultural sector has shown a consistent upward trend. According to data released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Lamandau Regency, the sector contributed 31.90% to the GRDP in 2021, increased to 32.10% in 2022, and rose further to 35.30% in 2023. This growth indicates that agriculture is not only a pillar of the regional economy but also holds strategic potential in improving the welfare of local communities. This increase is undoubtedly inseparable from the active role of the main actors in this sector – the farmers.

As the backbone of agricultural development, farmers in Lamandau Regency are organized into numerous farmer groups spread across various villages. According to the Agricultural and Fisheries Extension Division of the Lamandau Regency Agriculture and Fisheries Department (2023), there are approximately 663 active farmer groups. These groups are expected to function as effective organizational forums for farmers to exchange information, share production resources, solve farming-related problems, and collaborate in marketing agricultural products. Thus, farmer groups are not merely grassroots institutions but also serve as key instruments in supporting agricultural development policies based on community empowerment.

However, the existence of these farmer groups has not yet been fully optimized in performing their functions. Evaluations of group classifications over recent years show that most groups have not achieved independence and continue to face various managerial challenges. Some groups have even stagnated in their development, despite being established for over a decade. Field observations and secondary data indicate that common issues include weak group management, lack of organizational knowledge and skills among members, and low levels of active participation by farmers. These conditions suggest that farmer institutions at the village level still require more effective and sustainable management intervention strategies.

The phenomenon of weak farmer group management is also supported by previous studies. Hadi, Akhmadi, and Prayuginingsih (2019), as well as Hasan et al. (2020), found that the success of farmer groups in improving agricultural productivity is highly dependent on their ability to manage internal organizations in a structured manner. Furthermore, Wahyola et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of organizational functions within farmer groups, noting that weak management often leads to group failure in achieving autonomy and efficiency in farming activities. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of quality leadership at the group level, poor administrative skills, and insufficient ongoing support from local governments in the form of training and institutional development programs.

These conditions demonstrate that although farmer groups have been formally established and recognized by the government, not all have evolved into productive organizational entities. Contributing factors include limited access to resources, low organizational and managerial literacy among farmers, and a lack of continuity in agricultural extension programs. In addition, external challenges such as climate change, dependency on government subsidies, and misalignment between central programs and local needs further complicate the management of farmer groups.

In the context of Lamandau Regency, the challenges faced by farmer groups are of particular concern as the region is currently accelerating its agricultural development efforts. Therefore, it is essential to explore the current conditions of farmer group management in this area, identify the obstacles faced in managing these organizations, and formulate managerial strategies that can enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of farmer groups as integral parts of the agricultural extension system.

This study emerges in response to the need for strengthening farmer group institutions in Lamandau Regency. The main objective of this research is to formulate management development strategies for farmer groups that can increase farmers' active and collective involvement in managing their farming businesses. Through this approach, farmer groups are expected to transform from mere administrative instruments into driving forces of community-based agricultural development. Furthermore, this study aims to provide practical contributions for agricultural extension agents and local policymakers in designing more targeted farmer group development programs.

Additionally, the results of this research are expected to offer both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it will enrich the body of knowledge in agribusiness management and agricultural institutional development within a local context. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for decision-makers—both at the Agriculture Office and among field extension workers—in designing capacity-building programs for farmer institutions. Moreover, the resulting strategies are anticipated to foster synergy between farmer groups, local governments, and other stakeholders in advancing independent, competitive, and sustainable agriculture.

Considering the crucial role of managerial functions in supporting the success of farmer groups, this study focuses on three main aspects: (1) analyzing the current conditions of farmer group management in Lamandau Regency, (2) identifying challenges in managing farmer groups in relation to supporting agricultural extension tasks, and (3) formulating strategic approaches to improve the performance and role of farmer groups in sustainable agricultural development. This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing field-based data and supported by literature reviews and relevant theories on institutional management and public service..

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, employing data collection techniques through surveys and in-depth interviews. The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to comprehensively and holistically describe social phenomena, particularly in understanding the managerial conditions of farmer groups, which cannot be adequately explained through statistical data alone. According to Moleong (2012), the qualitative approach aims to understand phenomena in their entirety from the perspective of the participants, by engaging in direct interaction and observation within the relevant social environment.

The use of in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to explore the views, understanding, and experiences of informants regarding the dynamics of farmer group management. Meanwhile, surveys were conducted to complement the interview data through the distribution of semi-structured questionnaires containing indicators related to managerial functions within farmer groups, such as planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation of farming activities.

This study was conducted over a period of twelve (12) months, from January to December 2024, in several villages within the administrative region of Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan Province. The area was purposively selected due to its substantial number of active farmer groups and the significant role of the agricultural sector in the regional economy.

The research subjects were divided into two main groups:

1. Internal Group: Consisting of 10 respondents, including structural and functional officials from the Agriculture and Fisheries Office of Lamandau Regency—such as field extension agents, division heads, and agricultural institutional analysts.
2. External Group: Consisting of 10 farmer group representatives, selected with attention to variation in location, group age, and classification (beginner, developing, or independent groups).

The data collection techniques used in this study included:

1. In-depth Interviews: Conducted face-to-face with open-ended questions to allow for exploration of informants' experiences and perceptions regarding farmer group management.
2. Participatory Observation: Performed to directly observe farmer group activities, organizational structures, and interactions among group members during farming operations.
3. Document Study: Used to support the research with official documents, such as farmer group administration books, group classification assessments, extension reports, and institutional data from the Agriculture Office.

Data analysis in this study followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which consists of three stages:

1. Data Reduction: Filtering and summarizing important information obtained from interviews and observations.

2. Data Display: Organizing the information in the form of narratives, matrices, or charts to facilitate interpretation and understanding.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Formulating final findings based on emerging patterns in the data, and conducting cross-checks with various information sources (triangulation).

Through this approach, the research is expected to produce in-depth insights and strategic recommendations for the development of effective, adaptive, and sustainable farmer group management systems to support agricultural development in Lamandau Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The success of farmer groups in achieving their objectives is highly influenced by the active participation of members in group activities, as highlighted by Setiawan (2016) and Kusumaningrum (2017). Such participation includes attendance at Annual Member Meetings (RAT), involvement in regular group discussions, and engagement in agricultural development programs. However, interviews conducted in this study reveal that farmer participation in group activities remains low. Many farmers are not actively involved in group meetings, communal work, or the utilization of government-subsidized production inputs. This reflects weak organizational management, particularly among newly formed groups where leadership is concentrated in the hands of the group leader and clear organizational structures are lacking.

The limited involvement of farmer group members cannot be separated from their perception of a lack of transparency in managing government aid and the absence of tangible benefits from group membership. Similar complaints emerged regarding the underutilization of market facilities, communal work programs, and group cooperation. An exception was noted among watermelon farmers, who recognized the importance of collaboration during stages such as plant pollination. This illustrates that the effectiveness of farmer groups is heavily dependent on the type of commodity, technical needs, and the prevailing work culture on the ground.

Furthermore, findings from farmer groups reveal that many groups are only active during the early stages—primarily to access government aid—and become inactive once assistance is received. This results in a loss of collective spirit and the erosion of institutional benefits. In contrast, farmer groups that are able to operate actively reported greater profitability, sustainability, and social acceptance of their farming activities. These findings are in line with Silviana et al. (2023), who emphasized that active organizations enhance farming effectiveness.

In terms of group dynamics, Khairunnisa et al. (2018) stressed the importance of member roles through three indicators: task roles, maintenance roles, and blocking roles. Their study found that the first two indicators significantly influence group sustainability, while blocking roles have little to no impact. These findings indicate that group cohesion and functional involvement of members are critical factors in sustaining farmer groups.

Increasing farmer participation requires a systematic empowerment approach, such as agricultural extension. Ramandani et al. (2022) outlined that the empowerment of farmer groups through extension services involves four phases: initial

awareness building, capacity transformation, confidence enhancement, and welfare improvement. In Lamandau Regency, agricultural extension is carried out by district- and sub-district-level extension workers who act as facilitators, educators, and motivators. However, findings from this study indicate that extension services have yet to focus adequately on building the managerial capacities of farmer groups, thus limiting their impact on group governance.

From the perspective of extension workers, most reported having performed their educational roles based on the specific needs of local farmers and provided administrative guidance to the groups. Nonetheless, the lack of managerial training focus hinders efforts to strengthen institutional performance. This is further emphasized by Wicaksono (2020) and Dewi et al. (2023), who identified the role of extension workers as dynamic facilitators and innovators as essential to elevating the classification level of farmer groups.

Additionally, Astuti and Wahyudi (2023) asserted that there are five key criteria in farmer group management: Planning, Leadership Development, Organizing, Implementation, and Control. Among these, Implementation—especially in the sub-criteria of business operations—was found to be the most influential. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study, which found that farmer groups actively conducting business activities tend to have stronger institutional structures compared to groups that rely solely on aid-based programs.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the success of farmer groups depends not only on internal factors such as member participation and leadership but also on the strategic involvement of agricultural extension workers and the continuity of farming activities. Strengthening managerial capacity and ensuring the more strategic involvement of extension personnel are key to fostering independent and sustainable farmer groups in Lamandau Regency..

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented above, it can be concluded that the success of farmer group management largely depends on the active participation of its members in organizational activities, such as annual member meetings, regular group gatherings, and agricultural development programs. Low member participation may stem from a lack of transparency in managing government assistance, as well as the perceived absence of tangible benefits from the provided facilities and production resources. In some cases, farmer groups tend to become inactive after receiving government aid, thereby failing to fulfill the intended objectives of their establishment.

The role of agricultural extension workers is also critical in empowering farmer groups, encompassing functions as facilitators, innovators, motivators, and educators. However, the role of extension workers has not yet been fully optimized in guiding farmer group management, as extension approaches still lack focus on strengthening internal group management. This study highlights key managerial elements—planning, leadership development, organizing, implementation, and reporting control—as crucial factors determining the effectiveness of farmer group management.

Among these five criteria, implementation was found to have the most significant impact on the success of farmer group management, particularly in the execution of farming operations. Therefore, increasing member participation, optimizing the role of extension workers, and strengthening key managerial components—especially implementation—are essential to ensuring the success of farmer groups in achieving sustainable productivity and improved welfare outcomes.

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