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COUNTRYSIDE DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING THE DECLINE OF AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

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ABSTRACT

Farming is one of the main occupations and sources of income for many Filipino rural households. It provides not only employment opportunities for the country-side folks but substantially contributes to the overall economic growth and stability in rural areas. Contrastingly, however, the departure of farmers from this occupation has become a concerning trend. This phenomenon has a tremendous impact to the agricultural sector as it not only affects rural livelihoods but also poses challenges to food security and sustainability. Hence, this paper was thought of. The study utilized a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with twenty-two (22) participants who were former farmers and listened to their narratives about leaving the farming work. The findings revealed four (4) main themes concerning the economic, social, technological, and public service issues encountered by the participants. The sub-themes include: 1) accumulating debt; 2) experiencing capital loss due to calamities; 3) feeling of discontentment on profitability; 4) struggling to identify successor; 5) pursuing off-farm employment; 6) dealing with old age; 7) dissatisfaction in the delivery of public service; 8) difficulty in using machinery; and 9) insufficiency of subsidy programs. The predominant finding of this study was the economic challenges faced by the participants, stemming from accumulated debt accrued through habitual loans from large establishments in their barangay. The burden of debt has placed immense pressure on farmers, leading to economic hardships and ultimately driving them away from farming. This study focused on policy recommendations for reducing debt among farmers, reviewing format credit institutions for faster payouts, regulating informal lenders and private ownership of agricultural lots, and investing in village banking programs.

Keywords: agricultural workforce, agriculture, countryside development, debt accumulation, farmer, farming, food security, indebtedness, rural livelihood, outmigration

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is predominantly an agricultural nation, with a sizable majority of the population living in rural areas and relying on agriculture for their livelihoods (Statista, 2023). Of the 113 million people living in the Philippines, more than half reside in rural regions, and 36% of them are impoverished, with agriculture serving as their main and frequently only source of income (International Fund for Agriculture Development, 2023). About three percent (36%) of all employed individuals work in agriculture, which is still a major source of employment (Asia Development Bank, 2020). Years later, it was getting easier to see that there

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was a labor shortage. The Philippines is losing at least 1% of its labor force in the agriculture sector yearly, according to Samar Representative Edgar Sarmiento (Carbon, 2019). Based on the latest statistics obtained from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), it is unfortunate that the country's agriculture and forestry industry experienced the greatest reduction in employment during the third quarter of 2022. According to preliminary data from the October 2022 Labor Force Survey (LFS), which was provided last December 7, the agricultural and forestry industry shed 511,000 workers from 9.73 million in July to 9.22 million in October (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2022). People from rural areas travel to metropolitan areas because of the career prospects and greater income opportunities in cities. These factors are causing farm laborers to migrate to non-farm jobs (Rahman, 2022). Non-farm activities in rural families have a significant potential to increase rural employment, enhance income distribution, promote economic growth, and lessen poverty. Given how susceptible agriculture is to natural disasters and climate change, some farmers have been motivated to explore more secure non-agricultural careers (Herrera et al., 2020). Given the high proportion of the workforce employed in agriculture—which is often characterized by a labor shortage and unreported unemployment—agriculture may provide older, less mobile, less skilled workers with a bare minimum of income. Economic pressures like low farm incomes and restricted access to credit have been discussed as motivators for farmers seeking non-agricultural employment opportunities. As time went on, fewer farmers were found as they stopped farming and engaged in non-farm occupations (Peralta et al., 2018). According to Mendoza et al. (2016), the availability of agricultural employment opportunities, such as manufacturing, services, and construction, has influenced farmers' decisions to shift careers. The low growth of the agricultural sector in the Philippines has been attributed to the frequent conversion of arable areas to resorts, industrial parks, and residential subdivisions.

The fertile plains of Amulung, Cagayan, Philippines, have long cradled a thriving agricultural tradition. However, recent years have painted a concerning picture – a consistent trend of farmlands being converted into commercial lots, the gradual shift of farmers into other jobs, and the farming household’s vulnerability to lack of capital. According to the data obtained by the researchers, per locality, there has been a significant decrease in the population of farmers through the years in the localities outlined in the study.

Amulung, a landlocked municipality of second class, mostly relies on agriculture for its economic growth, particularly in the production of rice and corn. Furthermore, because the town is regarded as agricultural, the majority of its residents rely on farming for a living (Medrano, et al., 2016). Agribusiness occupies more than one-third of the land area in the Cagayan Valley region, particularly in the municipality of Amulung, which has about 4,000 corn growers and a total corn area of over 6,200 hectares. On the other hand, there were 3,700 farmers instead of 4,000, and the amount of tillable land under cultivation fell from 6,200 hectares to a total of 5, 327 hectares. It is the country’s leading producer of corn and second in palay production, as stated by Carol Pasion, agricultural specialist for the DA-Region 2 (Department of Trade and Industry, 2020).

Since 1990, Cagayan's population has grown at a rapid rate, and the number of houses has increased dramatically. A shift away from agriculture is indicated by the greater rate of out-migration among agricultural households, according to a study done in rice-producing villages in Cagayan Province. Researchers' curiosity was piqued by this case, leading them to look into

why farmers choose to change careers and quit farming. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of information in the local literature about the variables that may lead to a job change away from agriculture and the consequences this may have for both the agricultural industry and the Philippine economy as a whole (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2019).

Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the drivers behind the decisions of farmers. The objective is to contribute insights for the development of policies, particularly by the Department of Agriculture, to address and mitigate this trend.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the factors that influence farmers' decisions, namely, the momentous choices between remaining in their agricultural pursuits or embarking on new professional pathways by transitioning to alternative employment opportunities.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This paper will be significantly beneficial to tenant farmers, landowner farmers, government agencies, local and national public officials, higher education, and political science. Firstly, this study will benefit local farmers by potentially increasing their awareness and enabling them to make informed decisions about their career paths. Moreover, it can contribute to a greater recognition of the invaluable contributions farmers make to the community. Additionally, farm owners stand to gain insights that could enhance the efficiency and sustainability of their operations, fostering long-term success. Government agencies will also benefit by using this study to evaluate the effectiveness of existing DA and DAR programs aimed at retaining farmers. By identifying programs that are not yielding desired results, they can be reformulated or replaced with more effective initiatives. For local and national government officials, the findings may serve as a valuable resource for shaping policies that support the agricultural sector and address the specific needs of farmers. Higher Education can benefit where environmental science, rural sociology, and agricultural economics can flourish and provide a supportive atmosphere for multidisciplinary research and experiential learning to enhance the field of agricultural education. Through fieldwork, students can dig deeper into real-world issues, enhancing their learning and future career possibilities in areas such as rural policy and agricultural development. To prepare future generations to address the complex problems of food security and sustainable development, this research can also be used to inform curriculum creation. Lastly, the field of political science can benefit by shedding light on the political dynamics influencing the agricultural sector, such as the role of powerful elites and land ownership issues, the effectiveness of farmer organizations and advocacy groups, and the influence of international trade agreements and food policies.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Agricultural Industry

An article by J.C. published in the World Development magazine titled "Beyond the Budget: Rethinking Agricultural Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa" B.E. and Clay. Agriculture is a key source of income for the majority of the rural population (World Bank, 2023). Crawford (2022)

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defines "agricultural workforce" as "all those whose primary source of income comes from agriculture, including full-time farmers, sharecroppers, tenants, and landless laborers." Worldwide, agriculture is the primary source of income for over 2.5 billion people (out of the 3 billion rural residents). The agricultural sector's attempts to preserve its competitiveness in the global market and to distribute resources among other economic sectors for the goal of livelihood diversification or transition still depend in part on the process of entering and leaving farming activities. As a result, it seems that farming households are forced to diversify their efforts towards off-farm occupations as part of a livelihood transition strategy due to challenges like as poverty and income fluctuation (International Labour Organization, 2020). Nonetheless, compared to increases in the labor force in developing agrarian nations, the prospects for earning income outside of farms have not increased dramatically (Anriquez et al., 2018). As a result, a sizable portion of impoverished farmers around the world have no other means of support save farming. Therefore, this transformation continues to be difficult for emerging nations, especially in the South Asian region where 75% of the population lives in rural areas and 55% of these people are farmers.

In the Philippines, the overall number of jobs in the agriculture sector is dropping. The World Bank (2021) reports that 22.86% of Filipinos work in this industry, a decrease from 44.91% over the previous thirty (30) years. As of 2018, the agricultural industry accounts for 9.28% of the GDP. Despite making up only about 10% of the national labor force, that sector employs 24.3% of all workers in the nation. There are several urgent issues facing the agriculture industry, including a clear decline in the number of farmers and resources. The employment rate of farmers has decreased over the previous few years, falling from 12,030 in 2008 to 10,001 in 2018. The International Rice Research Institute is situated in the Philippines and is a leading agricultural research institution focused on rice-based agri-food systems. It also fosters innovation and teamwork in the agriculture sector, establishing strong partnerships both locally and internationally. Even though agriculture had a significant economic impact in the Philippines in the 1990s, the industry was severely neglected, accounting for only 8.9% of GDP. However, despite the COVID-19 pandemic's negative economic effects, the agriculture sector improved to account for 10.1% of GDP. With just P173.6 billion allocated for agriculture in 2023, the Philippines is one of the top importers of rice, which is a clear result of the industry's decline (Department of Budget and Management, 2023).

Thirty-four percent (34.3%) of poor farmers are employed in this industry, which is in decline but still receives minimal support from the government for modernization and innovation. The main causes of this drop are the costs and yield related to crops and products. To boost productivity and incomes, the industry is beginning to use technology by providing financial, technical, and marketing support to farmers, fishers, rural women, youth, indigenous groups, and farm families. Even if efforts are being made to improve and provide help, this is still taking place. Technological monitoring, assessment, and implementation of early warning systems for natural disasters and their aftermath are encouraged by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). To market and promote products to consumers, they also aim to incorporate technologies, such as digital infrastructure. To bridge gaps in the value chain and potentially prevent the negative effects of isolated implementation, DA and DICT have proposed that the adoption of ICT in the agriculture sector should be nationwide in scope. The Philippines' 1997 Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act mandates that the public and commercial sectors make use of

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cutting-edge technologies to increase food security, make it easier for people to access markets, and offer information that helps sustain rural livelihoods. This is consistent with the aligned strategic approach of the Department of Agriculture. The reliance on human and animal power, traditional farming methods, a lack of innovation and mechanization, and restricted access to food developments characterize the Philippines' current agricultural condition, which the First Industrial Revolution has been likened to.

The first quarter of 2020 witnessed a 1.2% fall in agricultural production, followed by a 0.5% increase in the second quarter, a 0.7% increase in the third quarter, and a 3.8% decline in the last quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. With a 0.1% fall in 2019, this is the second year in a row that there has been a decline. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Agriculture are putting into place an end-to-end market-based system notwithstanding the general decline that has been ascribed to the COVID-19 pandemic's effects (Madayag & Estanislao, 2021). Migration and sector income convergence are known to be correlated (Butzer et al. 2003, as noted in the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), 2020 research). Similarly, in Vietnam, migration type is strongly influenced by education level; migration with less education is linked to unskilled migration, whereas migration with more education is linked to skilled migration (Thinh et al. 2015). To feed a growing population despite a diminishing workforce, migration out of agriculture must be matched with increased agricultural productivity, which is only conceivable with intensified mechanization. Employment and income in agriculture are frequently confused with those in rural areas. Nonetheless, a large body of research on the nonfarm economy in rural areas has emerged, demonstrating the importance of nonagricultural jobs and incomes for both farming households and rural communities as a whole (Briones, 2017). The following conclusions are supported by related research: (1) Nonfarm employment in rural areas makes up a significant portion of total employment in rural areas; (2) Nonfarm employment has grown faster than agricultural employment over time; and (3) In developing nations, nonfarm employment accounts for about 30% of total employment in rural areas (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2020). Services are by far the largest contributor to nonfarm employment (3). Workers in more educated households are more likely to work in non-farm jobs in rural areas.

Although it has recently started to decline, the observable underemployment rate in agriculture has historically been far greater than in the other sectors. "Visible underemployment" is the term used to describe a situation in which an employee seeks additional work while working fewer than 40 hours per week in their principal occupation. Throughout the previous five years, the visible underemployment rate in agriculture—which is regarded as a primary occupation—has averaged almost 18% of workers, while it has only averaged 5–10% in other industries. Nonetheless, from 20 to 17 percent is the observable underemployment rate that has decreased since 2014 (Philippine Statistics Office Openstat, 2019). Workers in agriculture have been forced to take up other jobs due to the absence of full-time employment in the industry; as a result, when taking other jobs into account, the time-related underemployment rate is lower, averaging 16 percent. In the last three years, there has been a decrease in both the rates of visible and time-related underemployment, which reached 17 percent and 16 percent, respectively, by 2017. The rate of visible underemployment varies greatly between regions; some areas with a high concentration of agricultural workers also have rates of visible underemployment that are higher than average.

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Achieving inclusive growth—which generates jobs, pulls the majority into the economic and social mainstream, and steadily lowers mass poverty—requires the rise of the rural sector. There is a higher concentration of poverty, low productivity, and returns, low skill requirements, temporary or informal employment, and low skill requirements in the rural labor markets and agriculture of the Philippines. This is in line with a well-known body of development literature that suggests a traditional sector that is primarily found in rural areas and is heavily reliant on agriculture for a living. Development entails a shift in the economic structure that is based on increases in agricultural productivity, workforce migration from the traditional sector, and faster capital accumulation in the industrial and service sectors.

The perspective of structural transformation is supported by evidence from both international and Philippine sources. Past studies suggest that agricultural growth in the Philippines, in particular, contributes greatly to the reduction of poverty, is closely tied to downstream industry, and causes nonagricultural growth. Growth in the agricultural sector affects unskilled worker employment differently and, by keeping food prices low, indirectly lowers labor costs across the economy. Last but not least, increases in agricultural production can have long-term dynamic impacts by allowing farm households to invest in human capital, which promotes intergenerational income source diversification.

Education has a significant effect and becomes the most dominant variable in farmers' decisions to move to the industrial sector. The higher the level of formal education completed by farmers, they choose jobs that can provide sufficient income for them and can raise their social status. And with the provision of higher education, they can compete in the labor market (Niam, 2020).

2.2 Economic and Political Significance of Agriculture

Due to its connections to other economic sectors, which promote job creation and economic development, agriculture has an impact on global trade (Maryville University, 2022). According to USAID, nations with robust agricultural industries see increases in employment across other industries. Because farmers in these nations innovate using technology and farm management techniques to increase agricultural output and profitability, they also have greater per capita incomes than countries with stagnant or declining agricultural productivity. The agricultural sector's primary focus is food security. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2: Zero Hunger (United Nations, 2023), will depend on sustainable agriculture. According to the World Bank, the agricultural sector not only ensures food security but also increases the earnings of the poorest people up to four times more effectively than other sectors. Agriculture is a major contributor to job creation globally. In developing Latin American countries, for instance, agriculture contributes approximately 5% of GDP to the region and accounts for 25% of exports, per research on the significance of agribusiness from corporate and investment bank BBVA. In these nations, this practice generates jobs and economic activity. In the U.S., agriculture and related industries provide 19.7 million full- and part-time jobs, about 10.3% of all employment.

Almost all opinion formers from the different sectors believed that the most significant factor influencing farmers' adoption (or non-adoption) of climate change mitigation measures is cost and/or profitability. Farmers like free programs and incentives that match the difficulty of the task at hand, even though the programs don't always have to be financially successful. Having

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money to invest is especially crucial for renewable energy projects since they demand large sums of money. Although farmers are eager to put these policies into action, they eventually discover that "some of the ideals are just too expensive to fund." The cost of fuel and fertilizer, in particular, are important market considerations that influence the adoption of policies. The respondents said it was inevitable that when fuel prices rise, people will become more interested in finding ways to save energy. Additionally, they believed that the drive for efficiency would probably result in increased usage of carbon footprinting, energy monitoring, and eventually water auditing.

Spoor and Steyn (2015) contend that policies for agricultural development must go beyond simple increases in funding or budget allocation. It is constantly stressed how crucial farmer agency and empowerment are to fostering positive improvements in agriculture. One of the most important aspects of empowering farmers is providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to choose their farming practices. This means understanding sustainable practices, being up to date with the latest advancements in agricultural techniques, and being aware of the potential effects of climate change on crop yields. Giving farmers the tools and resources they need to implement their newly acquired knowledge is another aspect of empowering them. A farmer's capacity to optimize yield can be significantly increased by gaining access to state-of-the-art farming technologies, improved seeds, and efficient watering strategies. Success in agriculture requires not only individual empowerment but also strong market links and value chain accessibility. Farmers need a way to connect with markets that will fairly compensate them for their produce. Tightening these connections not only increases agricultural incomes but also fosters overall rural development. When farmers are linked to greater value chains, they can benefit from economies of scale, open up larger markets, and diversify their revenue streams.

2.3 Trends and Challenges in Agriculture

In the Philippines, the rate of urbanization has slowed down over the past 20 years, suggesting that the growth rate of the rural population has outpaced that of the urban population. Urbanization has an impact on the agricultural sector's employment rate, as seen by the sector's falling share of the national economy. Reduced land area and fragmentation of farm parcels, along with the conversion of agricultural areas to urban use, are the outcomes of urbanization (Bravo, 2017).

Farmers are more likely to be older people (over 45 and especially over 55), have less formal education or training (except those with specialized training in agriculture or veterinary medicine), work mostly for themselves but also their families, be mostly self-employed and be women with children. The researchers also mentioned that they have looked at the factors that lead people to leave agricultural jobs and move into other professions. The main results suggest that younger individuals are more likely to leave farming as they are more mobile and thus more inclined to find alternative employment or to flow to frictional unemployment. As a result in the study of Berk (2018), four variables were revealed that significantly influence the exit decision. Older producers, higher off-farm income, lower returns over variable cost, and greater diversification of farm income were more likely associated with a decision to leave dairy farming. According to a study by Niam (2020), the level of wages/income has a significant effect on the decision of farmers to move to the industrial sector. The low level of wages in the

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agricultural sector is the main reason for farmers to change jobs, especially in the industrial sector. The magnitude of the pull on the industrial sector causes farmers in the agricultural sector to move to the industrial sector. Anandita and Patria's (2016) analysis indicates that land ownership and land reform have a major effect on Indonesia's agriculture industry. According to the report, land ownership status and a lack of farmer re-generation are to blame for the diminishing number of farmers, while land reform is to blame for the declining amount of farmland. The decision rate to enter the industrial sector increases with the amount of owned agricultural land. The number of children, the existence of homes in the city center, and the monthly income level were found to have an impact on young farmers' decision to leave farming in the province of Niğde, according to a study by Berk (2018). This is a result of the families of young farmers who are involved in agriculture not wanting their offspring to follow in their footsteps. The circumstances of life and low-income rank among the primary causes. Thirty-nine percent of young farmers make less money each month than Turkey's minimum wage.

Due to its well-known nature—which mainly entails the cultivation of land—agriculture is still stereotyped as a low-income occupation in the Philippines (Secretario, 2021). The young people find it challenging to maneuver toward a more optimistic view of agriculture because of this problem.

Agriculture, food, and natural resources are the subjects covered in agricultural education, according to the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). Students are taught a wide range of abilities through the topics covered in agriculture classes, such as science, math, communication, leadership, management, and technology. However according to Dr. Eduardo Bagtang, President of Kalinga-Apayao State College (KASC), farming's perceived challenges are the primary reason why today's youth shun it (The Manila Times, 2013). Insufficient government funding for state universities and colleges; rapid urbanization of agricultural areas; devolution of agricultural services to local government units; and negative perceptions of agriculture as a profession are some of the factors contributing to the decline in enrolment in agriculture. A greater number of scholarships should be made available, and our study will help legislators, local government organizations, and government agencies like the Department of Agriculture (DA) and its affiliate bureaus prevent this global phenomenon of declining enrollment in agriculture degree programs. To advance the agricultural sector in our nation, the Commission on Higher Education may also establish additional degree programs in agriculture.

Entrepreneurship, construction, and service industries are among the career choices that formerly farming individuals have chosen, according to Rappler (2022). Additionally, "From Farm to Factory: Understanding the Migration of Rural Workers in the Philippines," a study published in 2020 by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies, examines the factors that influence rural-urban migration with a particular focus on the migration of former farmers to factories and other urban sectors. The statement underscores the significance of economic variables such as restricted prospects in rural regions and depressed agriculture earnings.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

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This study was anchored on the Structural-Push and Demand-Pull Theory (Fei and Ranis, 1961) which emphasizes the interplay of factors that individuals seek higher quality of life and improved well-being. It also explains the process of economic development in agrarian societies by focusing on the interplay between structural factors that push labor out of agriculture and demand factors that pull labor into the non-agricultural sector. Push factors include factors that make agricultural production less attractive, such as lack of employment opportunities, low agricultural incomes, poor infrastructure, and limited access to education and health care. Pull factors, on the other hand, represent the perceived advantages of urban areas, such as higher wages, better employment prospects, access to education and healthcare facilities, and the allure of urban lifestyles. Furthermore, it provides a holistic approach to understanding how households make decisions about their livelihoods. It recognizes that households are not monolithic entities but rather complex units with diverse needs, aspirations, and constraints.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative research design by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to achieve the study's objectives which will enable the collection of interview data to explore the reasons why former local farmers opted to leave farming and look for a different career path. This study aims to reveal and analyze participants' perspectives on their experiences.

3.2 Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at five (5) barangays of Amulung West, Cagayan, specifically, Barangays Pacac-Pequeno, Pacac-Grande, Masical, Palayag, and Alitungtung. The barangays were chosen based on the presence of a decline in the population of farmers.

3.3 Informants of the Study

The study involved twenty-two (22) informants. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, efforts were made to collect perspectives from a variety of demographic groups, including tenant and landowner farmers. The geographic scope of the study encompassed residents of Barangays Pacac-Pequeno, Pacac-Grande, Masical, Palayag, and Alitungtung within the Municipality of Amulung, Cagayan.

1. Pacac-Pequeno, Amulung. Five (5) informants joined the one-on-one interview. They shared first-hand experiences as farmers and presented grass-root-level issues and challenges in the industry that motivated their decision to quit the agricultural sector.
2. Pacac-Grande, Amulung. One (1) informant joined the one-on-one interview. They shared first-hand experiences as farmers and presented grass-root-level issues and challenges in the industry that motivated their decision to quit the agricultural sector.
3. Masical, Amulung. Four (4) informants joined the one-on-one interview. They shared first-hand experiences as farmers and presented grass-root-level issues and challenges in the industry that motivated their decision to quit the agricultural sector.

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4. Palayag, Amulung. Five (4) informants joined the one-on-one interview. They shared first-hand experiences as farmers and presented grass-root-level issues and challenges in the industry that motivated their decision to quit the agricultural sector.
5. Alitungtung, Amulung. Eight (8) informants joined the focus group discussion. They shared first-hand experiences as farmers and presented grass-root-level issues and challenges in the industry that motivated their decision to quit the agricultural sector.

The informants were purposively selected through the following criteria:

a) Participants must be former tenant farmers or landowner farmers.
b) Participants had to be farmers for at least three (3) years.
c) Must have stopped farming for at least five (5) years or have switched to permanent non-agricultural occupation;
d) Must have not engaged in any agricultural practice for at least five (5) years;
e) Must be a bona fide resident of the specific localities outlined in the study;
f) Participants must display a willingness to participate in the study.

3.4 Research Instrument/Data Source

The researchers used the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and a one-on-one interview method to build rapport with participants and elicit meaningful responses, even from those who are reluctant to share their experiences (Howden, 2020). After the discussion and the one-on-one interview, the researchers manually transcribed the audio recordings of the conversations. This involves listening to the audio recordings and typing out the spoken words into a written format. The purpose of transcribing the recordings is to have a written record of the conversations that can be analyzed for deeper comprehension. The transcription will be a Clean Verbatim Transcription, which corrects filler words, repeated words, and stutters. It essentially transcribes words exactly, but for improved readability (Verbit, 2023). The researchers will guide the discussion using a semi-structured interview format, collecting data on experienced farmers' perspectives regarding their farming experiences. The interview questions will address three main topics crucial to the study: (1) the factors that are driving agricultural farmers towards switching jobs; (2) the issues and challenges faced by farmers that fuel the tendency to shift, and (3) potential policies to make farming attractive.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers of the study initially sought permission from the SEAS Dean and Vice President for Academics through a letter of approval before initiating the data-gathering process. Following approval, the researchers will commence the data collection procedure. The initial contact with the local chief executive will be made via formal emails or letters, followed by a courtesy call after an agreement is reached. To engage in a deeper discourse, the researchers will personally visit the community. Before initiating the primary survey, researchers will actively seek consent from all participants. To enhance understanding and encourage personalized responses, the survey questions will be translated into the native languages of the respondents. Clear communication of the research goals will precede the formal interview process, allowing enough time for addressing any participant inquiries or concerns. A preliminary survey will be conducted to identify and qualify participants for

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subsequent inclusion in focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews, with participants explicitly informed of their right to discontinue participation if they feel uncomfortable. In adherence to ethical standards, researchers will seek permission for comprehensive recording and documentation of discussions, ensuring the assignment of confidential codes to safeguard participant anonymity. Expressing gratitude for participants' valuable contributions, a small token will be offered. Both the interview guide and consent forms will be meticulously crafted to selectively gather only essential data pertinent to the overarching research objectives.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study utilized Thematic Analysis and Narrative Analysis which examined and interpreted the stories or narratives people tell to gain insights into the meanings, experiences, and perspectives that underlie them. The researchers aim to comprehend the factors influencing farmers' decisions to exit the farming industry through their narratives and the political, cultural, and social context that shapes the farmers' decisions. This method elicits stories from participants as a source of understanding. The analysis involves three primary stages: description, analysis, and interpretation (Reeves et al., 2013). In the description phase, information extracted from interviews will be treated as factual data, with transcriptions simplified while preserving the fundamental meaning. Each piece of data will be labeled with the corresponding question and informant numbers for organizational clarity. Progressing to the analysis phase, the researchers will study the facts for recurring themes and fundamental ideas present across all data points. This involves comparing and contrasting data groups to reveal similarities and differences, ultimately leading to the identification of major themes and sub-themes. Finally, in the interpretation phase, the identified themes will be analyzed to provide a comprehensive discussion on the reasons behind farmers' decisions to exit farming and find other careers. This process aims to yield insights applicable to public policy, governance strategies, and local knowledge, shedding light on the immersive experiences of farmers within this industry.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the participants' profiles, the researchers took measures to obtain approval letters and design interview questions with care. Discussions about the key aspects of the research were conducted in a language that the participants found most comfortable. The study strictly adhered to the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012. To ensure the sensitivity and validity of all materials, the research adviser meticulously reviewed all papers, questions, and manuscripts before their use. The consent process was well-structured and clearly explained to the participants. A systematic orientation session was conducted to familiarize participants with the research's aims and objectives. To safeguard against coercion or forced participation, the researchers were vigilant. The anonymity of the respondents was maintained, and only essential data was collected and analyzed from them. This approach aims to uphold ethical standards and respect the privacy of the participants throughout the research process.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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This study was participated in by 22 former farmers. All of the participants were adult farmers whose ages ranged from 40 years old to 70 years old, with years of farming experience ranging from 3-30 years. All of them have completely left farming for almost 8 years or more and have a new job in manufacturing, construction, transportation, and delivery of public services. Each narrative is supported by the participant's own words, directly quoted from the audio transcript. The researchers synthesized data from interviews as a continuous representation of the lived experiences from which they were drawn. Responses from the interviewees who had similar patterns were combined or data saturation was used by using narratives of participants who comprehensively explained their experience. This study used a snowball sampling technique in which research participants helped the researchers identify potential subjects who have similar characteristics to them. This section was further divided into two: Section 1 focused on the specific context, emphasizing the details and experiences such as their reason for farming and their attachment to it. Section 2 involved a broader analysis of the underlying ideas and recurring themes conveyed in the narratives, looking beyond the specific setting to explore. Table 1 showed the profile of the participants.

Participant	Gender	Type of Farmer	Age	Years departed from farming
1	Male	Landowner	58	15
2	Female	Landowner	43	8
3	Male	Landowner	64	22
4	Male	Tenant	69	9
5	Male	Tenant	70	25
6	Female	Tenant	51	10
7	Male	Landowner	42	7
8	Male	Tenant	60	12
9	Male	Landowner	59	14
10	Female	Tenant	61	15
11	Female	Tenant	67	12
12	Female	Landowner	52	8
13	Male	Tenant	59	13
14	Female	Tenant	40	7
15	Male	Tenant	45	7
16	Male	Tenant	47	10
17	Male	Tenant	68	21
18	Male	Tenant	41	10
19	Male	Tenant	55	15
20	Male	Landowner	63	17
21	Male	Tenant	40	7
22	Male	Tenant	56	12

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

SECTION 1: SITUATED NARRATIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This section presented the compelling narratives of the participants regarding their reasons why they entered or continued farming until they decided to quit from it. The responses obtained

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shed light on the participants' aspirations, motivations, and sense of agency in relation to their farming choices. Moreover, these narratives resonated the participants' credibility as experienced farmers who were deeply committed to their vocation. Their involvement in farming was not transient; instead, it was rooted in deep and substantial reasons that affirmed their dedication and resilience in the agricultural sector.

A. Family life

Many of the participants expressed that their families were the primary reason for their involvement in farming. They emphasized that the desire to provide for their loved ones motivated them to continue farming. This sense of responsibility as parents is deeply ingrained in their daily lives, guiding their decisions and actions on the farm. They view farming not merely as a means of income generation but as a pathway to secure their children's education and future opportunities. It can be inferred that farmers may perceive education as a means to break the cycle of poverty and provide their children with better opportunities in the future. Additionally, farmer parents sell their land to fund their children's education. They hope their children will have a better future if they graduate from higher education (Salma, 2024). A study by Palis (2020) found that parents, although farming is their life, wanted their children to enter college education, rather than entering farming, for them to have a stable job and income in the future. These views of parents reflect the unattractive and unpleasant nature of farming in today's generation. Furthermore, rural farmworkers devote all of their time and resources to their children's education because they see a direct correlation between their income and their children's educational success (Ancheta, et al., 2023).

PY02: I dream of farming because it is for my student. Of course, I will do all kinds of work as a farmer until I finish planting, then I will look for other jobs just to have an allowance for my studying child. Of course, in farming of course what would you make your family eat and expenses of course I do farm as I still have harvest and I have a student which is my reason to work hard in farming and work so that I can provide for my student who is studying. It is the one who likes to study and the only one I support to study and I just want him to finish studying with the course that he wants.

PY05: I am farming because I have a family, because if I want them to live, that is why I farm so I have something to make my family live, right? That is it. My dream is to uplift my family, my children can study and finish school.

PQ02: It's grandmother Tessie. They give us 1 hectares of farm, as a start for our family. Yes before. When they get the farm. My feelings were hurt because they wanted to take it away from me, my brother-in-law. It is the only source that I can get from for my children who are studying. Nothing else.

B. Attachment to farming

Many participants stated their enduring love for farming, despite having momentarily stepped away from it. Despite leaving farming, many farmers still feel a strong attachment to the profession and express a longing to return if given the chance. This decision is often difficult, as farming is not just a job but a way of life deeply rooted in tradition. Most farmers are driven by their love for what they do – most of them can't imagine a life worthwhile doing anything

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else. It is this passion which gives farmers the strength to stand up and start again after a time of failure or disappointment. However, farmers cannot survive on love alone - love does not pay the mortgage, buy fuel, or make up for lost revenue after a bad season. And while they fell deep in love with their farm and the lifestyle that it afforded their family, it was the relentlessness of their worries that eventually wore them down (Weingarten, 2016).

PY02: Farming is truly beautiful sometimes as long as there is irrigation like that. But I really like farming. Yes, I like it, of course there is no other job

PY05: It is beautiful to have a farm. If the harvest is good. But if it is not, you would scratch your head. Because you cannot do anything, like if there is El Nino, would it there be any piece of rice that you will get?

PG01: On, kinayat ku ah ta kattunay ei mari peba matuytuyut (Yes, I like it in the past there was no drought)

PQ03: idi ah kayat ku ngem tatta madi kun aglakay met da tao'n eh idi kapigsa'k ah isu (In the past I like it but now I do not want it I am getting old. When I was still strong, yes)

MS02: Wen maam. Ajay lang met ti pagtrabahuwan idtuy ayan tayu tano lang makatulung ti pamilyak (Yes maam. That is only the job in our place just to help my family)

SECTION TWO: ESSENTIAL THEMES

The following six subsections presents the essential themes across all participants for the exploration of the decline of agricultural workforce. A discussion of each will be supported by passages the participant's own words extracted from the interview transcripts.

A. Economic Challenges

a.) Accumulating Debt. Many participants shared that their frustration mostly comes from debt and it is the predominant reason that they left farming. Strikingly each participant experienced almost the same scenario concerning their experience with handling debt. It mostly concludes with the common event of accumulating debt over time leading to them not being able to pay it and having to resort to selling their land or using their earnings in their harvests to pay their debt. Farmers rely on loans to fund their crop planting season, especially for purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and equipment as they lack the necessary funds because of high prices. However, when they harvest their crops, the earnings are primarily used to repay loans, creating a cyclical pattern. This cycle can become never-ending if the income from one harvest is insufficient to repay the entire loan, leading farmers to take out new loans for the next planting season. Most of the participants avail of loans from informal institutions, having very high interest rates. Additionally, farmers do not avail of loans sufficient for their production for fear of not being able to pay it back. Therefore, the insufficient inputs can be a limiting factor to their productivity. The high prevailing interest rate also makes it difficult for farmers to pay for their entire debts. According to Ing (2022), poor farmers' repayment of loans has been a significant challenge in agriculture. Usually, the terms of payment, interest rate, and collateral cause challenges for the farmers. Due to the shocks and strains of agricultural production, poor farmers accumulate debts. This was further affirmed in the study of Lubang

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(2019), where farmers claimed that they were forced to take out loans from informal creditors or loan sharks to buy seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs to commence production.

PQ02: Syempre maylumlum ka met ti utangen. Oh kasanu ka. Pinagbayad ku buo nga nuwang mi. Nagdakkalan. Binayadan da ti 50, 000 lang. Ag-utang ka manin, tapus another utang tu manin. Oh tu nukwa dumakkel. (Of course, you get drowned in debt. Then how are you? I paid using our buffalo. It was big. They only paid 50,000. You pay off one, then you borrow again. Then another debt again. It just keeps growing.)

PQ04: Agutang ka mut nu adda agpautang, iyutang mu met jay haan mu pay naapit. Nu adda swertem makabayad ka met adda pay ganansiya'm ngem nu malas mu met kut manayunan ti utang. (You borrow money again if someone is willing to lend, and then you use it to pay off the one you haven't paid yet. If you're lucky, you can pay off your debt and even have some profit. But if you're unlucky, your debt just keeps piling up.)

PG01: Syempre ha nu niyan gatut mu, pagammu, ngamin maggafgafu kanne akkom-koman mu awan na ma tanakkwan ngin. Ne mala as-asahan mi nay apit mi laman. Ya ziyat mi eh mari kami makapaga, nu mari kami makapaga eh gattut laman ah. Lalu kan mentenensya. Syempre ha nu niyan gatut mu, pagammu, ngamin maggafgafu kanne akkom-koman mu awan na ma tanakkwan ngin. Ne mala as-asahan mi nay apit mi laman. Ngam kattu matuytuyutin eh nesalda'k pinappagak ki magno. Marik ma mamentenansyan. Pinapappagak kan utang. No makibilag ka ittu marim makagatut. Ngam no makkoman ka ne menetenansyam kan koman mu eh maggatut ka. (Of course, if you have debt you pay it all from your farming nothing else. Our only hope is our harvest only. Our problem is that we cannot pay, if we cannot pay then we avail loan, especially in maintenance. Of course, if you have debt, you must pay it from your earnings in farming and nothing else. Our hope only lies in our harvest. But when dry season came, I sold my land to Magno because I cannot maintain it anymore. (I paid for my debt. When you work related to farm like drying, you won't be able to ask for loan. But if you farm in the field, and you maintain it, that's the time that you'll have to ask for loan.)

PY01: "Syempre ma'am, nu mari kami makagatut… nyan nu makagatut kami, mari itultuluy ya makkoman, syempre dumaka-dakal so ani gatut mi. Kada makkoman kami, makagatut kami. Kada mammula kami kunna. Gatut ti binhi, gatut ti abono, spray kunna." (Of course, ma'am. If we cannot avail of loans; there are times when we already have debt, and we do not continue farming. Of course, our debt keeps getting larger and larger. When we farm, we avail loans. When we plant crops, we avail loans to buy fertilizer, anti-pest spray like that.)

b.) Dealing with capital loss due to calamities. One salient point raised in the dialogues with the informants was the difficulty they experienced in times of calamities. They shared the grief that they always felt when the crops which they took so long to take care of were wiped out in one go and they suffered less earnings or no earnings at all. Participants generally cited calamities as one of the major reasons they lowered their standards and placed them in an unfortunate situation. The several years of being a farm laborer shattered in just a nap of a finger upon the arrival of a destructive calamity which resulted mainly, in capital loss or no earnings at all. Most of the participants initiate their planting season when the rainy season commences. There is growing evidence that extreme weather phenomena, such as drought and floods, have been common occurrences, and these affect farmers who depend heavily on rain-

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fed agriculture for their livelihoods (Belay et al., 2017). Due to the inability of small and lower farmers to resort to any coping strategies, they were forced to either change their occupation, sell agricultural land, or migrate to other places in search of occupation (Arora & Birwal, 2017).

PY02: "Syempre nu kuntsa mabbadjaw, awan mabilla edi awan pay ah gastos ku bannag mu la, puyat ganun. Ta rigat na laeng nu adda bagyo kasjay wennu awan tudtudu." (Of course, when it gets destroyed, there is nothing to dry in the sun. This also means our expenses and exhaustment went to nothing notwithstanding sleepless nights. The difficulty is when there is a typhoon and when there is no rain.)

PY04: "Yo ne bagyo ma'am tawe kita." (The typhoon ma'am, we did not have profit.)

An informant also added on how better it is to have a job that pays daily compared to farming which, when a calamity hits, there would be no income because of the destruction of the crops:

PY01: "Haan ka mut malugi nu innaldawan maam haan kasla ti talun maam nga nu mabagyo kut awan kita'm kun awan pay ani'm nga bingay mo ijay talun" (You will not experience financial loss if you are paid daily, unlike in farming, if a typhoon hit then there is no earnings and you have no share in the earnings of the harvest.)

Further, they elucidated that not only typhoons but also flash floods or simply floods made their lives miserable. Due to the flood, their crops which were ready to be harvested, became what they feared most, zero income.

PQ02: "Wen ah, lost ka nukwan nu malayus-sin. Adda pay ngarud kitam, kut awanin. Kasi idi nalayus ti mais mi eh kuwan, agharvest kami kuman kut nayyanod jay dadduman nga binuras min, ijay baba idi. Maysa ektarya idi." (Yes, you already lost when there is flood. Do you still have earnings? None. When our corn farm got flooded, we were ready to harvest it but then our harvest got washed away by the flood. That was one (1) hectare.)

c.) Feeling of discontentment on profitability. Profitability played a critical role in the participants' decisions to leave agriculture, particularly when expected incomes significantly differed from their actual earnings due to market prices and unforeseen calamities. When farmers' anticipated profits fall short due to low market prices or crop failure from natural disasters, they struggle to cover costs and sustain their livelihoods. In the Philippines, commercial farming is the primary practice of farmers. This means that after harvest, instead of consuming it, they directly head to the market to sell it for income. However, in this case, if the participants' hard-earned harvests were sold for an unsatisfactory price, they feel like it all went to nothing. Farmers often feel unsatisfied selling their crops unprofitably, which can significantly impact their decision to continue farming. Factors such as fluctuating market prices, limited access to reliable markets, and insufficient bargaining power can all contribute to low profitability for farmers (Kangile et al., 2020). The study of Casinillo (2022), the study reveals that the economic profitability of rice farmers has been low during the implementation of the Rice Tariffication Law and the farmers state that their income has decreased. This statement was further affirmed in the study by Factura et al. (2022) that many farmers rely on traders to organize the harvest, transport their products, and sell them to the market. Additionally, farmers are paid according to their daily market price, however, the prices are low.

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PQ04: "Wun. (pertaining to lost of crops because of calamities) Kasla manin tattan, jay pangapitam ti seventy kut agbalin nga in-innem lang" (Yes. Like now, you expect to harvest 70 cavans but you will only harvest 6 cavans.)

MS02: syempre ah maam. Makiporporsyento kami lang, nukuma nga 80 nga kaban maala mi, sangapulo lang mapan kaniyami. (Of course, maam, We only get a percentage, like for example, we got 80 cavans, only 10 is ours.)

PQ01: Idi agkuman nak kakaasi nak mangsustento jay kuman tapus bassit lang maalak. Ajay agbaba iti apit o wennu ani. (When I was still farming, I was pitiful to sustain the farm, and then I only get little [income]. It is when the income is low or the harvest.)

AL02: Yung ngayon sir? Kasi mababa po yung presyo. Nakasta maam nu nyan nga nu hanni pela hinan pela aggatang da pe maam kan presyo na maam ne pela mari da magukkag. 300 mangang ka peba, nalaka laka I presyo tapos nanginngina nu magatang (Right now sir? Because the price is cheap. It is good maam if whatever the price would be if they would buy it, it will remain the same and won't decrease. 300 pesos then your effort, the price is too cheap, then they will buy it expensively.)

B. Social Challenges

a.) Pursuing off-farm employment. Farmers often seek better lives in alternative occupations due to higher pay and improved comfort. Unlike farming, which is often characterized by uncertain incomes and strenuous physical labor, other jobs can offer more stable and lucrative opportunities. Industries like manufacturing, construction, transportation, and public service provide better wages, benefits, and working conditions. The results showed that the opportunities, working conditions, and daily wage offers in non-farm jobs opened new doors to the participants that made them look away from farming, which is far harsher than their current jobs. The study found that, as farmers diversify their income sources, their reliance on farming decreases, prompting the exit from the sector altogether. It also shows that alternative sources of non-farm income can reduce the incidence of farmers' indebtedness (Datta et al., 2018) and provide an important income source for many farm households, often leading to a gradual shift away from farming (Mishra et al., 2017). In addition, research conducted by Bartolini and Viaggi (2018) suggests that farmers engaged in off-farm work are more likely to leave agriculture due to the higher and more stable income provided by non-farm jobs, compared to the volatile and often lower income from farming.

PY04: "Wen ah ma'am, ta nu madadalen… awan pulos ti ma-gana mun nga makipagkomanen. Eh dejay per day ket anusam lattan ah uray 150 maysa aldaw kasjay… sigurado adda nga gastusem ken aldaw." (Yes, ma'am. When it gets destroyed, there will be no earnings in farming. Unlike in [carpentry], salary is given daily, then you have no choice but to settle with 150 per day. Atleast, you have money for your everyday needs.)

MS01: "Haan ka mut malugi nu innaldawan maam haan kasla ti talun maam nga nu mabagyo kut awan kita'm kun awan pay ani'm nga bingay mo ijay talun" (You will not experience financial loss when you are paid daily, unlike in farming, when there is a typhoon, you will not earn anything and no share in farming.)

PY02: Wen, napanaw nak lang tunu ag-conStruction. Eh nyan ne construction, daily ka mapagan kunna. Furniture kasjay ta adda met experience ku iti furniture. Pero awan met ti gamgamit mi. (Yes, I leave for construction. Because they are in construction, you get paid daily. Like Furniture, I have experience in doing furniture. But I don't have materials.)

A participant also shared that they had more time to improve their hygiene compared to farming where it is more on dealing with potentially dangerous pathogens living in muds.

MS02: "Yes maam ah. Tatta nga driver nak ket nakalinlinis nak nabanglu pay luput ku haan minagpipitak" (Yes, ma'am. Now that I am a driver, I look so clean, and my clothes are fragrant and not filled with mud.")

b.) Dealing with Old Age. Farmers often quit farming due to old age, as the physical demands of agriculture become increasingly challenging. Once manageable tasks become difficult or impossible, leading to a decline in productivity and efficiency. These participants' responses revealed the harsh reality faced by aging farmers, as the demands of agricultural labor become increasingly burdensome. The decision to retire from farming represents a deeply personal and often bittersweet choice, marked by a sense of recognition of one's limitations. The physical demands of farming seemed to have limited the participants' continuing attachment to their lands. A study by Fischer and Burton (2018) found that the physical demands of farming become increasingly difficult to manage as farmers age, mainly because of health issues and the physical strain of agricultural work.

PQ04: "Ajay matrabahuk idi, haan ku matrabahu tattan. Mabagkat ku idi ti duwwa latta tatta haanen" (The things I can do in the past, I cannot perform it now.)

PQ03: "Haanin, talaga nga kayat ku agrest ngin. Narigat mut ti kwan ta idi kapigsak kayak pay agbagkat. Ngem tattan ta lumakay da tau'n kut madik kayaten." (Not anymore, I truly want to rest now. It is difficult now, because when I was still considerably strong, I can still carry weights. But now, since I am aging so I do not want [farming] anymore.)

PQ05: Sarilik pay lattan nga mang-kwa agsardengin. Syempre mabannugan nak mitten eh. 59 years old nak idi nagsardeng nak, tattan 64 nakkun. (It is my own decision that I want to stop. Of course, I feel tired now. I was 59 years old when I stopped and now, I am 64 years old.)

c.) Struggling to identify successor. One participant's account shared the complex decision-making process involved in departing from a lifelong vocation due to the absence of a successor. He shared that his parents died and was only helping one of his relatives. This is a common problem as farming is viewed by the participant as a generational job and since no one could inherit his legacy, it became his reason to stop farming on top of being old. Additionally, family is a primary reason for continuing farming so the absence of it is also a prime reason to discontinue. Additionally, farmers want their children to get a higher education and work comfortably in other fields (Cheamuangphan et al., 2019).

PQ05: Syempre kanyak awan metti pamilya kun,natay da mettin, insardeng kun. (Of course, For me I do not have a family anymore and they died, so I stopped [farming].)

C. Technological Barrier

Difficulty in using machinery. Participants stated a prevalent issue that emerged which is the challenge of illiteracy in dealing with agricultural machinery. Participants expressed varying degrees of difficulty in adapting to and effectively utilizing modern farm equipment due to a lack of literacy in machinery operation and knowledge. The information era places importance on the vital role of technology. The adoption of precision farming systems, which promise efficient resource use and reduced costs for farmers, faces challenges in terms of reluctant adoption by traditional farmers as they may be hesitant to adopt precision farming systems because of a lack of knowledge and awareness about the benefits and operation of technology. Additionally, the problem arises when its introduction to the farming sector is too much to handle for traditional farmers. This means that if traditional farmers are not given knowledge or enough time to adapt to the utilization of innovative machinery, they feel like they are left out. Farmers are losing their jobs as a result of industrialization, which lowers agricultural production and, consequently, slows down economic growth in the nation (Praburaj, 2018). The number of agricultural laborers has likewise been steadily declining throughout the Philippines. A little over 250,000 employees have left agricultural positions annually since 2011 (Briones, 2017). In the future, these might pose a threat to the nation's food security, particularly as young people are reluctant to enter the farming industry. This is supported by a study by Barnes et al. (2019) highlights that limited knowledge and skills in modern agricultural technologies can discourage farmers from continuing in the sector. The inability to effectively utilize new technologies reduces farm productivity and profitability, leading to farm exits (Barnes et al., 2019).

PQ02: Nu agkoman ka kuma tatta, eh adda ti burasim. Eh tattan, ta haan ka met agmula ti kwan awan met panggidanin, panay reaper met ken seeder ti agkwan, su nga awan panggidanin. Awan pagkakitaanin. (If you farm now, you have harvest. Now, you did not plant crops, there is no sharing [of harvests], its always reaper and seeder [is being used]. That is why there is no sharing.)

PQ01: Ajay idi damu, panay nga nuang, sila mag araro. Tatta metten adda traktorin eh awanen ah! (In the beginning, everything they use in plowing the farming is carabaos. Nowadays, there are tractors, then there is none.)

AT08: Yung technology sir, sakto. Kasi sa makinarya…puro makinarya. High tech na kasi. (The technology sir, exactly. Because in machinery, always machines. It's now high tech.)

D. Limited Government Support

a.) Insufficiency of Subsidy Programs. The participants described the insufficiency or inadequacy of government programs. The most common scenario includes where government subsidies for farmers are equally divided among all recipients, irrespective of the size of their land holdings or the number of farmers involved. This approach lacks targeting, as equal distribution does not consider the varying needs and circumstances of farmers. This policy leads to discontent among farmers, especially those with smaller holdings who feel they are not receiving a fair share of government support. The absence of subsidy programs applicable to certain farmers further underscores the shortcomings of current government initiatives in providing meaningful support to all sectors of agriculture. The lack of adequate subsidy programs led to a decline in agricultural productivity and income, making it financially

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unsustainable for farmers to continue farming (Kramol & Ekasingh, 2020). In addition, the absence of subsidy programs in the agricultural sector contributed to low profitability and limited access to credit for farmers, ultimately leading to their decision to exit farming. (Adu-Gyamfi and Asiedu, n.d.)

PG01: "Mari sapat maam. Kurkurang peba. Syempre nu piyya ya area'm eh. Depende peba kanne budget ya DA nga maiddan kan barangay. Niyan tu 100 bags, 80 bags kunna laman tapus divided kanne aru ya farmers ira nga makatanggap tapus mari da peba iddan, equally divided peba. Niyan tu aru area na nga aru matanggap na kunyari 2 hectares tas equal to 1 bag. Kaniyakan itu eh 1 hectares gadwa saku laman." (It is not enough, ma'am. Inadequate also. Of course, the share in subsidy depends on how big is your area, depending also on the budget of the Department of Agriculture. There are 100 bags or 80 bags only, and then it will be divided on how many farmers will be receiving it. Some are also not given and it is equally divided. Some areas received a lot, there are areas like for example 2 hectares is equal to 1 bag but for me, I received half a sack for my 1-hectare farmland.)

PQ01: wen mam. Bumassit maala da idi nga abono kada bin-e. (Yes ma'am. There is decrease in the fertilizer and [bag of] seeds they received.)

AL01: Kurang parin, pero at least adda. (Still not enough, but at least there is.)

In addition, when asked to enumerate programs that they are beneficiaries of, other informants cited the inexistence of subsidy programs that apply to them:

PY04: "Awan peba ma'am, maski missa ba na kwan naranasan mi." (We still have not experienced any program, not even once.)

b.) Dissatisfaction in the delivery of public service. Participants also added the frustration they experienced because of the selective system of the government in giving benefits. This includes the choosing of the government on who they would want to give the benefits to without considering the emotions that will be felt by those who were not given. These findings revealed a concerning pattern of unfairness in the distribution of public services, as stated by the participants. It also underscored the frustrations and disillusionment experienced by participants who perceived the system as biased and unresponsive to their needs. Farmers facing inadequate financial assistance are more likely to exit the farming sector because of economic pressure (Mishra et al., 2017). According to Brown et al. (2019), farmers who perceive government support as inadequate often struggle to maintain their operations, leading to higher rates of farm exits.

PY02: Awan ta uray man nu kaspagaringan ket sumrek kami ti insurance ket awan met ti maawawat mi ti kasla libre nga bin e kasjay abono dik ammu apay nga naawan met ti nagan mi awan ti koneksyon mi iti barangay ta pilpilyen da met ti alaen da wennu ikkan da. (None because even if we enter to insurance, we are still not receiving anything like free seeds like that fertilizer, I did not even know why our name disappeared, we have no connection to the barangay because they are only choosing who they want to get and they want to give [support].)

AL02: Yakan maam nu nyan nga ayuda sana kang barangay tu parehas sapasap mari tu mapili pili lang, Oo maam mari ngammin nga farmers Gitta sangaw lima nga napili mafulu, yo nyan

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nga makina na maam. (Like me ma'am if there are subsidies from the Barangay, it should be equally divided, unlike they will give to those they favors. Yes ma'am not all farmers, like now only five are chosen but there are ten who have machineries.)

PY04: Syempre ma'am ta nyan mala pe ginan da pe tu barangay mi. (Of course, ma'am, the barangay only wants to favor and hear what they want.)

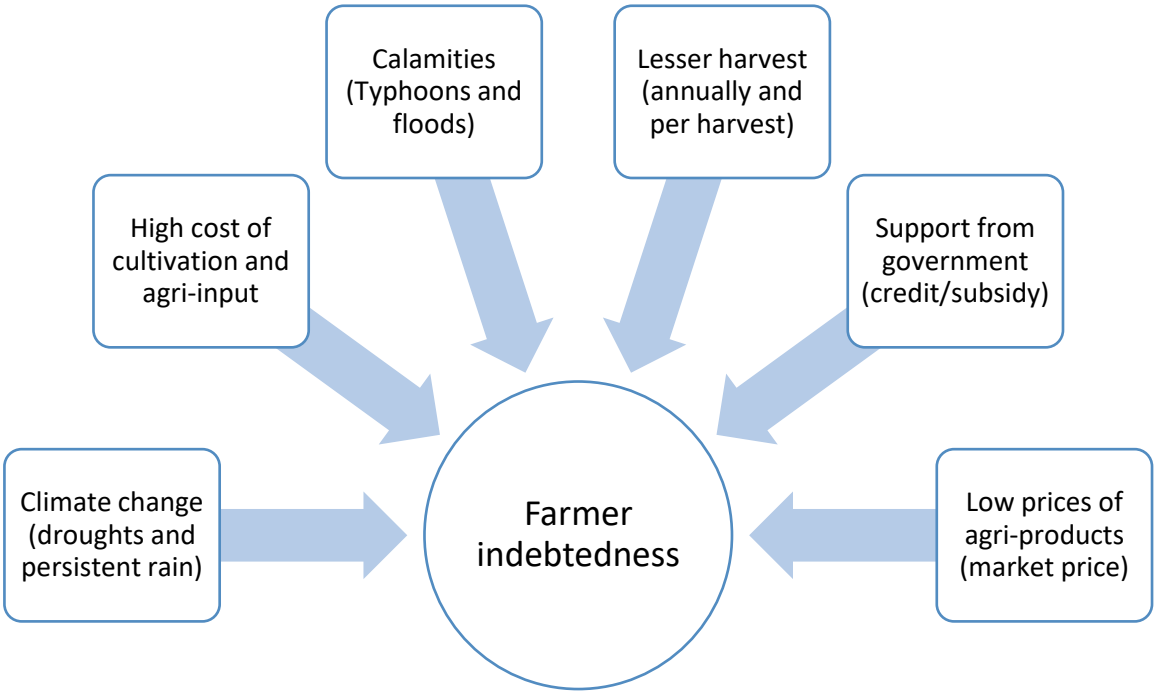

Figure 1. The broader context of farmer indebtedness

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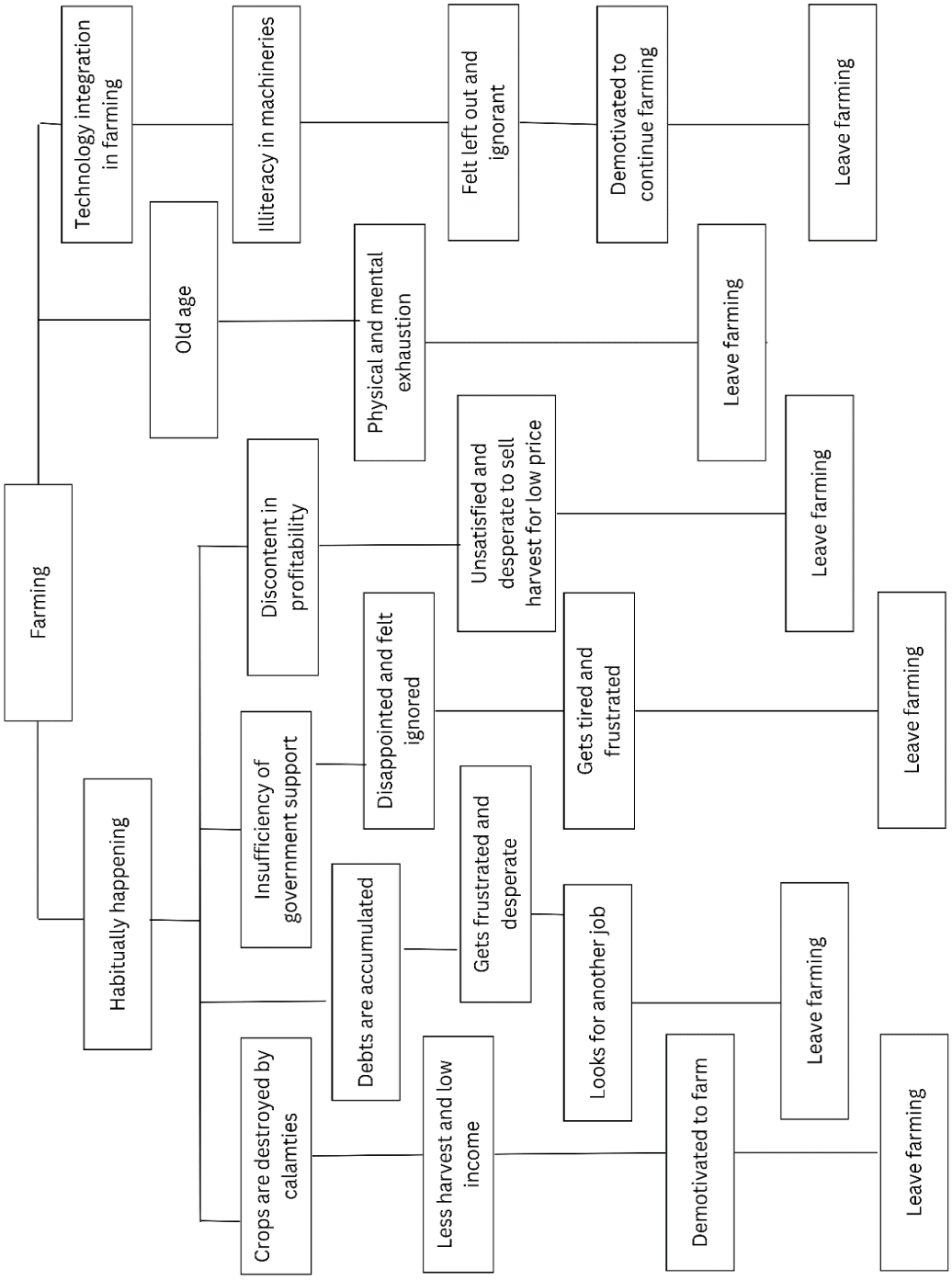

5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it depicts the saddening state of farmers regarding their struggles and experiences that drove them away from farming, concerning what the agricultural sector faces amidst food insecurity. Thus, this research aimed to explore the factors that

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influenced the decision of farmers to leave farming or switch to other job opportunities. The findings revealed four (4) major themes which are economic, social, technological, and public service issues, and nine (9) sub-themes which are: 1) accumulating debt 2) experiencing capital loss due to calamities, 3) feeling of discontentment on profitability, 4) struggling to identify successor 5) pursuing off-farm employment 6) dealing with old age, 7) dissatisfaction in the delivery of public service, 8) difficulty in using machinery 9) insufficiency of subsidy programs. The results found that accumulating debt is the predominant factor that influenced their departure. Here, even with years of experience as a farmer and with reasons to continue, a major problem can push them to leave their beloved profession, resorting to looking for other jobs such as in construction and manufacturing services as a way to repay their debts. Furthermore, the farmers often experienced indisposed when their crops get habitually destroyed by calamities resulting to capital loss. Thus, in a desperate bid to escape debt, farmers are forced to abandon farming.

6.0 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the generated findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the researchers strongly recommend the following:

6.1 Reviewing Loan Access for Small Farmers in the Philippines

The national government, through the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), should review the procedure for loans available to small farmers by re-assessing the requirements needed to acquire access to credit finance, such as submitting net income and two valid-ids, and focus on production plans and loan payment performance instead to minimize the costs, burden, delay for the small farmers specifically near rainy or planting season.

The institution should analyze the current loan application process at LBP, identifying unnecessary requirements. With this, they should replace requirements like net income statements and multiple IDs, which delays and burdens farmers especially near rainy season, with production plans outlining farmers' intended use of the loan for seeds, fertilizers, equipment, and consider past loan repayment history as a primary indicator of creditworthiness, demonstrating a responsible borrowing practice of farmers.

6.2 Investing in Village Banking Programs

The local government, in partnership with low-income entrepreneurs, should invest in rural-coded credit financing institutions and Village Banking programs, which are specifically designed to reach lower-income, less educated, or less accessible farmers who often live at remote areas as it proves difficult and costly to reach mainstream banking and microfinance institutions from rural areas and reduce dependence on informal lenders.

6.3 Regulate Access of Private Ownership in Agricultural Lots

The Congress should amend the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law and lower the retention limit of agricultural lots through analysis of the specific region's agricultural needs, and land availability to act as a safety net in reducing the conversion of agricultural land into non-

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agriculture use as unchecked private ownership of agricultural land contributes to fragmentation.

Through this policy, the government should identify what are high-tier and low-tier agricultural regions. This way, high-potential agricultural regions would have lower retention limits, encouraging large landowners to subdivide or redistribute land for more productive use. Less productive regions could have higher retention limits but with stricter regulations on land conversion to ensure long-term agricultural sustainability.

6.4 Enhancing the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation's Program

The national government should increase the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation's funding to expand its offerings and lower premiums. Additionally, streamlining the claims process through community verification and faster payouts (within 30 days) would improve convenience and encourage participation. Pilot testing weather-based insurance could also reduce risk for lenders and attract more private investment in agricultural credit. Through this policy, the PCIC should enhance its targeting and monitoring capabilities to identify misappropriation of subsidies, particularly at the barangay level, to further ensure that public resources are equitably distributed and properly given to its due beneficiaries.

6.5 Attracting Youth to Agriculture through Cooperatives

The national government, through the Department of Agriculture should invest in smart technology such as drone farming, precision agriculture, and increased revenue for the farmers as youth today are more technologically inclined and want light work. Also, to attract the younger generation, building an organization of organized young farmers who can effectively advocate for the profession of farming. Young farmers just need dedicated mentors to discover their voice and realize their potential in the farming world. They need more opportunities for participation and representation at all levels, including establishing a youth wing of farmers within the Local Youth Development Council to amplify their voices, strengthen cooperative networks, and facilitate advocacy efforts through physical or digital engagements. Additionally, supporting the creation of cooperatives specifically for young farmers or establishing youth sections within existing cooperatives can help foster collective action and knowledge sharing, among others.

6.6 Management of Land through Government Initiatives

The national government, through its power of eminent domain, should consider buying agricultural lands, which farmers waive the right to manage or maintain because of lack of capital, to be managed by the government and be used as public agricultural land for purposes of food security. Furthermore, when farmers lack the necessary capital to effectively cultivate their lands, it can lead to a situation where productive agricultural lands remain fallow or are not used to their full potential. By acquiring these lands through eminent domain, which is an inherent power of the government, and managing them as public agricultural lands, the government could ensure that these lands are utilized for food production.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHERS

1. Future researchers may use this study to add weight to longitudinal studies such as how the dynamics of politics (policy shifts) and economics (market fluctuations) influence exit decisions.
2. Future researchers can use this paper to further examine and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at retaining farmers, such as income support, training, and infrastructure or technological investments.

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