

Lived Experiences of Filipino Rice Farmers in Contract Farming Arrangements

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800299>

Received: 20 August 2026; Accepted: 25 August 2026; Published: 02 September 2026

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Filipino rice farmers participating in contract farming arrangements. Seven (7) purposively selected rice farmers served as participants in the study. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis. Findings revealed that contract farming improved access to farm inputs, financial assistance, technical support, and market opportunities while presenting challenges related to implementation, input delivery, and contractual obligations. The study concludes that strengthening program implementation and institutional support can further enhance farmers' productivity, livelihood, resilience, and overall well-being through sustainable contract farming initiatives.

Keywords: Contract Farming; Filipino Rice Farmers; Lived Experiences; Sustainable Agriculture; Thematic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Service quality is an important factor influencing customer preference and satisfaction, particularly in the agriculture remains one of the primary drivers of the Philippine economy, providing employment, food security, and livelihood opportunities to millions of Filipinos, particularly those residing in rural communities. Among the country's agricultural commodities, rice occupies a vital position as the staple food of the Filipino population and serves as the principal source of income for many farming households. Because of its significant contribution to national food security and rural development, the government continues to implement programs and policies aimed at improving rice productivity, increasing farmers' income, and strengthening the country's agricultural sector. Despite these initiatives, many Filipino rice farmers continue to face economic, production, and marketing challenges that affect their productivity, profitability, and overall quality of life. Before the implementation of government-supported contract farming programs, many rice farmers experienced persistent financial constraints that limited their ability to sustain agricultural production. The lack of sufficient production capital often compelled farmers to borrow money from private lenders, traders, or informal financiers who imposed high interest rates. As a result, a considerable portion of their harvest income was allocated to loan repayments, leaving minimal financial resources for their families and subsequent planting seasons. In addition, inadequate capital prevented many farmers from purchasing quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and other farm inputs at the recommended time, leading to delayed planting schedules, reduced productivity, and lower crop yields. Farmers likewise encountered difficulties in marketing their produce because they depended heavily on traders and middlemen who dictated farm-gate prices. Without guaranteed buyers or stable market arrangements, many were forced to sell their harvest immediately after production at relatively low prices, thereby reducing their potential income despite months of labor and investment.

Recognizing these long-standing concerns, the Philippine government introduced various agricultural intervention programs designed to strengthen the productivity and competitiveness of Filipino farmers. Among these initiatives is the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Farming Support Program through contract farming, which seeks to provide qualified Irrigators' Associations with production inputs, financial assistance,

technical support, irrigation services, and guaranteed market arrangements through formal contractual agreements. Guided by the Revised Guidelines on the NIA Farming Support Program, the initiative aims to reduce production costs, improve access to modern agricultural technologies, increase farm productivity, promote sustainable rice production, and ultimately improve the socio-economic conditions of participating farmers. Through this intervention, the government envisions empowering smallholder rice farmers by reducing production and marketing risks while ensuring more stable sources of income.

Internationally, contract farming has been widely recognized as an effective agricultural development strategy that integrates smallholder farmers into modern value chains by providing access to production inputs, technical assistance, financing, and assured markets. Numerous studies have reported that participation in contract farming contributes to increased agricultural productivity, improved household income, and reduced production and marketing uncertainties. Nevertheless, existing literature likewise identifies several concerns associated with contract farming, including unequal bargaining relationships, delayed implementation of contractual obligations, dependency on contracting institutions, and operational constraints that may influence farmers' overall experiences and satisfaction with the program. These findings suggest that while contract farming offers numerous economic opportunities, its implementation also presents challenges that deserve careful examination.

Within the Philippine context, previous studies on contract farming have primarily emphasized its economic outcomes, policy implementation, productivity improvements, and market performance. Although these investigations have contributed substantially to understanding the effectiveness of contract farming as an agricultural intervention, they have generally concentrated on measurable indicators such as production, profitability, income generation, and program efficiency. Comparatively fewer studies have explored the lived experiences of Filipino rice farmers participating in contract farming arrangements, particularly how they interpret the opportunities, challenges, and realities they encounter throughout their participation in the program. Likewise, limited qualitative evidence exists describing how contract farming influences farmers' day-to-day agricultural practices, financial security, resilience, decision-making, and perceptions of government support within their local communities.

This gap highlights the need to understand contract farming beyond its measurable economic outcomes by listening to the voices of the farmers who directly experience its implementation. Examining their personal narratives provides valuable insights into how government interventions shape their farming practices, access to agricultural resources, financial stability, and overall well-being. Such understanding may also identify implementation gaps and practical concerns that can guide policymakers, agricultural institutions, and program implementers in strengthening contract farming initiatives and designing more responsive farmer support programs. Hence, this phenomenological study was undertaken to explore the lived experiences of Filipino rice farmers participating in contract farming arrangements. Through their narratives, the study seeks to generate context-based insights that may contribute to improving agricultural policies, enhancing government support mechanisms, and promoting sustainable and farmer-centered agricultural development in the Philippines.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Filipino rice farmers participating in the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Contract Farming Program. The phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because it seeks to understand how individuals experience, perceive, and give meaning to a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2024). In this study, the approach focused on the farmers' experiences before and after joining the program, the opportunities and challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to address difficulties, and the meanings they attached to their participation in contract farming. The design allowed the study to provide an in-depth understanding of how participation in the program influenced farmers' production practices, access to resources, livelihood experiences, and overall well-being.

The participants consisted of seven (7) Filipino rice farmers who were actively participating in the NIA Contract Farming Program in selected agricultural communities. Purposive sampling was employed to intentionally select participants who had direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon being investigated. This sampling technique is appropriate for qualitative research because it enables researchers to select information-rich

participants who can provide meaningful and detailed accounts of their experiences (Campbell et al., 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2024). Participants were included if they were currently participating in the NIA Contract Farming Program, had engaged in rice farming under the program for at least one cropping season, were at least 18 years old, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The selection emphasized the depth and richness of participants' experiences rather than statistical representation.

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized as the primary instrument for gathering the qualitative data. The interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and was reviewed by the research adviser and experts in qualitative research and agriculture. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain consistency in the topics discussed while giving participants sufficient opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and raise issues that emerged during the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The questions covered the participants' experiences before and after joining the NIA Contract Farming Program, the benefits and opportunities they received, the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to cope with difficulties, and the meanings they attributed to their participation. Follow-up and probing questions were also used to obtain clarification and more detailed descriptions. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Field notes and observation records were also maintained to document relevant contextual information and non-verbal responses that could support the interpretation of the interview data.

The trustworthiness of the study was established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, following the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and supported by Creswell and Poth (2024). Credibility was strengthened through member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulation. Participants were given opportunities to clarify their responses and verify whether the transcripts and preliminary interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. Dependability was addressed through an audit trail documenting the procedures undertaken during participant selection, data collection, transcription, coding, thematic development, and interpretation. Peer debriefing with the research adviser and individuals knowledgeable in qualitative research was also conducted to review the consistency of the analytical process. Confirmability was supported through researcher reflexivity and bracketing, wherein the researcher consciously set aside personal assumptions and preconceived ideas regarding contract farming to ensure that the findings remained grounded in the participants' accounts. Transferability was enhanced through thick descriptions of the research context, participants, data collection procedures, and findings, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the results to similar agricultural settings and contract farming programs.

The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis (2006), with consideration of the procedures discussed by Nowell et al. (2017). First, the researcher became familiar with the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts and noting significant statements and initial observations. Second, initial codes were generated by systematically identifying meaningful portions of the participants' narratives concerning their experiences, benefits, challenges, coping strategies, support received, and perceptions of contract farming. Third, related codes were examined and organized into potential themes representing recurring patterns across the participants' accounts. Fourth, the emerging themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them with the coded extracts and the complete dataset to ensure that each theme was adequately supported and distinct from the others. Fifth, the themes were clearly defined and named according to their central meanings and relevance to the research objectives. Finally, the researcher produced the report by integrating the themes into a coherent narrative and supporting the interpretations with appropriate participant quotations. Through this process, the study preserved the richness of the farmers' individual accounts while identifying common patterns that reflected their shared lived experiences of participating in contract farming.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Harvesting Hope Through Contract

Theme 1: Financial Security Through Government-Assisted Contract Farming

Financial Security Through Government-Assisted Contract Farming reflects the participants lived experiences of overcoming financial difficulties through the assistance provided by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Contract Farming Program. Prior to participating in the program, many of the rice farmers experienced

inadequate financial resources to sustain agricultural production. Because of limited capital, they often relied on loans from private lenders, traders, or informal financiers to purchase farm inputs necessary for rice cultivation. This dependence on borrowed capital increased production costs and reduced their income after every harvest. However, through the implementation of the NIA Contract Farming Program, the participants experienced financial relief through government assistance, enabling them to continue farming with greater confidence and reduced financial burden.

The participants consistently described financial assistance as one of the most valuable benefits of the contract farming program. They explained that the provision of production capital, farm inputs, and institutional support allowed them to sustain rice farming despite limited financial resources. Their narratives reveal that the program lessened their dependence on private lenders, reduced financial risks, and provided them with opportunities to improve their farming operations. More importantly, the participants emphasized that government assistance strengthened their confidence in continuing agricultural production and provided hope for improving their family's economic condition.

The following statements illustrate this theme.

“Mabudlay ang pagpanguma ilabi na gid kon wala ka sang kapital. Nagpasugot ako sa contract farming kay wala ako sang kapital. Wala na ako nagapangutang sang kapital kag indi na ako nagaproblema sa budget.”

F1

The statement of F1 shows that the absence of financial capital was a major obstacle in rice farming. His decision to participate in contract farming was primarily motivated by the opportunity to receive production assistance without borrowing money. The participant perceived the program as a practical solution to the financial difficulties commonly encountered by smallholder farmers.

“Wala na ako utang kag may fixed budget kami halin pagtanom asta pagani. Daku guid ang bulig sini sa amon pagpanguma.”

F5.

This response illustrates that contract farming enabled the participant to avoid dependence on informal lenders while providing a stable source of production support throughout the cropping season. The availability of a fixed production budget allowed the participant to manage farming activities with greater confidence and less financial uncertainty.

“Wala ako sang kapital gani nag-upod ako sa programa. Nakadugang guid ini sa akon pagpanguma.”

R6

The participant emphasized that joining the contract farming program improved the family's farming capacity despite limited financial resources. The assistance received reduced the burden of production expenses and made farming more manageable.

“Wala ko financial gani nag-upod ako sa contract farming. Mahapos na ang pagpanguma kag indi na kami mabudlayan.”

R7

The narrative demonstrates that the participant viewed contract farming as a means of overcoming financial limitations. The reduction of production expenses allowed the participant to focus on farm management rather than worrying about raising capital.

The experiences of the participants reveal that financial assistance remains one of the most meaningful benefits of contract farming. The availability of production inputs and government support reduced dependence on

loans, minimized financial risks, and encouraged the participants to continue farming despite increasing production costs. Their narratives indicate that access to financial resources is fundamental to sustaining agricultural productivity and improving household livelihood.

These findings are consistent with Hoang (2021), who found that contract farming can improve farmers' income by strengthening market linkages and reducing difficulties associated with agricultural production. Contract arrangements can also help farmers manage economic risks by providing more stable marketing conditions. Likewise, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) emphasized that contract farming can facilitate smallholder farmers' access to markets, productive resources, technology, and other forms of support, thereby contributing to improved livelihoods and sustainable participation in agricultural value chains. These forms of institutional support can help farmers improve productivity, strengthen economic security, and reduce their vulnerability to market-related uncertainties.

Furthermore, the participants' narratives affirm that government intervention plays a vital role in empowering smallholder farmers. The provision of production inputs, financial assistance, and technical support allows farmers to concentrate on improving crop production instead of worrying about production expenses. As a result, the participants developed greater confidence in their ability to sustain farming as their primary source of livelihood.

Another important observation from the interviews is that financial security was not viewed solely in terms of money. The participants also associated financial security with peace of mind, confidence, and reduced anxiety regarding farming expenses. Knowing that seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and other production requirements would be provided through the program allowed them to prepare for each cropping season without the constant fear of accumulating debt.

The findings therefore suggest that contract farming extends beyond simple financial assistance. It contributes to the overall well-being of farmers by reducing economic uncertainty, strengthening their capacity to invest in agricultural production, and improving their optimism regarding future harvests.

In summary, the lived experiences of the participants indicate that contract farming serves as an effective financial support mechanism for Filipino rice farmers. The program reduces dependence on loans, provides essential production resources, minimizes financial risks, and strengthens farmers' confidence in sustaining their livelihood. Despite the challenges encountered during implementation, the participants consistently regarded financial assistance as one of the greatest advantages of participating in the contract farming program.

Theme 2: Improved Access to Agricultural Inputs and Guaranteed Market

Another major theme that emerged from the lived experiences of the participants is Improved Access to Agricultural Inputs and Guaranteed Market. The participants consistently described contract farming as a program that provided them with quality farm inputs and assured buyers for their harvested rice. Before joining the program, they experienced difficulties obtaining production inputs due to financial constraints. Likewise, marketing their harvested rice often became another burden because they had to negotiate with traders who offered lower buying prices. Through contract farming, these concerns were significantly minimized because the necessary farm inputs were supplied and a ready market for their produce was guaranteed.

The following statements illustrate this theme:

"Binhi, pesticide kag fertilizer ang ginahatag sa amon. May ara man dayon nga makuha sang amon humay pagkatapos sang ani."

F1

The participant emphasized that the provision of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides greatly reduced production expenses. Moreover, the assurance that their harvest would be purchased after the cropping season removed the uncertainty commonly experienced in marketing agricultural products. This demonstrates that contract farming not only supports production but also secures market access for farmers.

“Nakakuha kami sang abono kag pesticide. Indi na kami nagapalibog kon sin-o ang mabakal sang amon produkto kay may sigurado na nga buyer.”

F2

The participant highlighted that access to complete agricultural inputs and guaranteed buyers provided peace of mind throughout the production cycle. Instead of worrying about the availability of resources or searching for potential buyers after harvest, the participant was able to focus on improving crop production.

“Kompleto nga farm inputs kag may mabakal guid sang akon produkto.”

R3

This statement indicates that the participant appreciated both the material assistance and the marketing support received from the program. The availability of agricultural inputs enabled the participant to improve production efficiency, while the guaranteed buyer ensured that the harvested rice would be sold without unnecessary delays.

“Indi kami nabudlayan sa pagbaligya kay may deretso nga buyer.”

R4

The participant emphasized that one of the greatest advantages of contract farming is the elimination of marketing problems. In previous farming seasons, selling harvested rice required negotiating with traders or transporting products to different buying stations. Under the contract farming arrangement, these concerns were significantly reduced because buyers were already identified before production began.

“Makabulig guid ini sa pagbenta sang amon produkto kay sure nga may mabakal.”

R5

The participant viewed the guaranteed market as an important source of financial security. Knowing that the harvest would already have a buyer encouraged the participant to invest greater effort in improving crop production.

“Binhi kag abono ang ginahatag sa amon kag indi na ang miller makapilit sang presyo.”

R6

This statement reveals another significant benefit of contract farming. Aside from receiving production inputs, the participant believed that the program increased farmers' bargaining power. Since buyers were already identified through contractual arrangements, farmers were less vulnerable to unfair pricing imposed by middlemen or private traders.

“Ready na ang produkto kay may sigurado guid nga makuha. Wala na kami nabudlayan sa pagbaligya.”

R7

The participant described how guaranteed market access removed one of the most stressful aspects of rice farming. Instead of searching for buyers after harvest, the participant could immediately deliver the produce according to the agreement, allowing faster turnover and preparation for the next cropping season.

The narratives consistently demonstrate that improved access to agricultural inputs and guaranteed markets are among the most valued benefits of contract farming. The provision of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and technical support enabled the participants to increase productivity while reducing production expenses. Likewise, guaranteed market access eliminated uncertainties associated with selling agricultural products, thereby contributing to more stable household income.

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), these findings support the report which states that contract farming improves agricultural productivity by ensuring timely access to quality farm inputs, extension services, and stable market opportunities. According to the FAO, contract farming reduces marketing risks and allows farmers to concentrate on improving production rather than searching for buyers after harvest.

Similarly, Ray et al. (2021) found that contract farming can provide farmers with greater income security and protection against market risks by establishing more stable marketing arrangements. In a related study, Hoang (2021) reported that contract farming can contribute to improved farmer income by reducing market uncertainty and strengthening farmers' participation in agricultural value chains. Contract arrangements may also encourage farmers to adopt improved production practices and technologies, particularly when buyers provide technical and production-related support.

The findings are also supported by the Value Chain Theory, which explains that integrating farmers into organized marketing systems strengthens agricultural competitiveness and increases income opportunities. By linking farmers directly to buyers through contractual agreements, contract farming reduces dependence on intermediaries, minimizes transaction costs, and promotes a more efficient marketing system.

The participants' narratives further reveal that guaranteed market access has psychological benefits. Farmers expressed greater confidence in investing time and effort in crop production because they were assured that their harvest would not remain unsold. This confidence contributes to increased motivation, better farm management, and stronger commitment to agricultural production.

Moreover, access to complete production inputs improved the participants' ability to implement recommended farming practices. The availability of certified seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides at the appropriate stages of crop production enhanced their capacity to achieve better yields while reducing unnecessary expenses.

Overall, the participants viewed contract farming as a comprehensive support mechanism that addresses both production and marketing concerns. Rather than focusing solely on financial assistance, the program provides a complete system of agricultural support that enables farmers to improve productivity, reduce production risks, and increase income stability.

Theme 3: Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Contract Farming

Despite the numerous benefits experienced by the participants, the interview data revealed that contract farming is not without challenges. The participants described several difficulties encountered during the implementation of the program, particularly the delayed distribution of farm inputs, delayed payment after harvest, pest infestation, and unpredictable weather conditions. Although these challenges did not discourage them from participating in the program, they acknowledged that these issues affected the efficiency of their farming operations and, at times, their financial stability.

The following are the statements that affirm this theme:

“Ang problema namon amo ang delayed nga pag-abot sang farm inputs kag delayed man ang pagbayad pagkatapos sang ani.”

R2

The participant explained that the delayed release of fertilizers and other agricultural inputs disrupted the proper schedule of farm activities. Since rice production requires timely application of farm inputs, any delay may affect crop growth and eventually reduce productivity. Furthermore, delayed payments after harvest created temporary financial difficulties, especially for farmers preparing for the next cropping season.

“May gamay nga problema sa waya-way kag sa pag-atrasar sang bayad.”

R3

This statement indicates that pest infestation and delayed payments were among the recurring concerns encountered by the participant. Although these problems were not severe enough to discourage participation, they nevertheless affected the participant's overall farming experience. The occurrence of pests required additional time and effort in monitoring crops, while delays in payment limited the participant's ability to immediately purchase other farming necessities.

“Delayed ang farm inputs pero ginapasensyahan lang namon.”

R4

The participant recognized that delays in the distribution of agricultural inputs were unavoidable in some instances. However, rather than withdrawing from the program, the participant chose to remain patient because of the overall benefits received from contract farming. This response demonstrates that the participant viewed the implementation challenges as temporary obstacles rather than permanent disadvantages.

“May atake sang peste kag usahay delayed man ang bayad.”

R5

The participant highlighted those environmental factors, particularly pest infestation, continue to threaten rice production despite the assistance received through the program. In addition, delayed payments affected household finances because the proceeds from the harvest were often intended to support daily living expenses and prepare for the succeeding planting season.

“May ara naga-ataki sang peste pero ginapaninguhaan gid namon nga masolbar.”

R1

The participant acknowledged that pest attacks remain one of the realities of rice farming. Nevertheless, through proper monitoring and application of pesticides, these challenges could still be managed effectively.

The participants' narratives consistently reveal that the challenges encountered were primarily related to the implementation of the program rather than the concept of contract farming itself. Delays in the delivery of farm inputs and payments affected farming schedules, while natural hazards such as pests and unfavorable weather conditions continued to influence crop productivity. Despite these concerns, the participants remained appreciative of the overall benefits provided by the program.

These findings support the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), which emphasizes that although contract farming offers numerous advantages, successful implementation depends on efficient coordination among implementing agencies, buyers, and farmers. Delays in fulfilling contractual obligations may lessen farmers' satisfaction and reduce the effectiveness of agricultural support programs.

Likewise, recent studies have shown that contract farming arrangements may encounter operational and institutional constraints that can affect their effectiveness and sustainability. Ho et al. (2021) identified delays in input delivery, payment, harvesting, and output delivery as among the concerns experienced by rice farmers engaged in contract farming. Similarly, Ray et al. (2021) noted that although contract farming may provide greater income security, farmers may still experience concerns related to contractual requirements and market arrangements. In the Philippine context, Hambloch (2022) further highlighted that contract violations, unequal bargaining relationships, indebtedness, and difficulties in fulfilling contractual obligations can undermine the sustainability of contract farming arrangements. These findings underscore the importance of timely input and payment delivery, transparent communication, continuous monitoring, and collaborative problem-solving among farmers and program implementers to ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of contract farming.

The findings are also consistent with the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, which recognizes that rural households are continually exposed to vulnerability caused by environmental hazards, economic uncertainties,

and institutional limitations. According to the framework, strengthening institutional support and improving access to resources enable farming households to better withstand these challenges while sustaining their livelihoods.

Another important observation from the interviews is that the participants did not blame the entire program for these implementation issues. Instead, they viewed them as areas that require improvement. Most participants expressed hope that the concerned government agencies would strengthen coordination, improve communication, and ensure the timely delivery of services. Their willingness to continue participating despite these challenges reflects their trust in the program and their belief that its benefits outweigh its limitations.

The participants also emphasized that farming itself is inherently uncertain because it depends on many uncontrollable factors, such as weather conditions, pest outbreaks, and market conditions. Consequently, they considered contract farming as a support mechanism that reduces, rather than completely eliminates, production risks.

The researcher therefore concludes that while implementation challenges remain evident, they do not diminish the participants' positive perception of contract farming. Instead, these experiences highlight the importance of improving program implementation through timely service delivery, stronger communication, and continuous technical support.

Theme 4: Resilience Through Patience and Effective Farm Management

The fourth major theme that emerged from the participants lived experiences is Resilience Through Patience and Effective Farm Management. The participants consistently revealed that despite experiencing delays in farm inputs, delayed payments, pest infestations, and other farming difficulties, they remained optimistic and continued participating in the contract farming program. Rather than allowing these challenges to discourage them, they demonstrated resilience by practicing patience, adopting proper farming techniques, and maintaining confidence in the support provided by the government.

Pasensya lang kag hulat sang sakto nga tiyempo. Amo lang gid na ang mahimo namon.

R2

The participant emphasized that patience has become one of the most important qualities of a farmer. Although delays in farm inputs and payment were frustrating, the participant understood that successful farming requires perseverance and the willingness to wait for favorable outcomes. This response reflects the participant's positive attitude in dealing with circumstances beyond his control.

"Mahabang pasensya lang guid. Bisan may problema, padayon lang sa pagpanguma."

R5

This statement illustrates that the participant viewed patience as an essential coping mechanism in farming. Instead of focusing on temporary setbacks, the participant remained committed to agricultural production because of the long-term benefits provided by the contract farming program.

"Good timing sang aplikasyon sang fertilizer kag pesticide para malikawan ang daku nga problema."

R1

The participant demonstrated that resilience is not limited to emotional endurance but also involves the application of appropriate farming practices. Proper timing in the application of fertilizers and pesticides helped reduce crop losses caused by pests and improved overall farm productivity. This response highlights the participant's ability to adapt to farming challenges through effective farm management.

"Gina tinguhaan namon nga masolbar ang mga problema pinaagi sa maayo nga pagdumala sang uma."

R1

The participant explained that whenever problems arise, they immediately implement appropriate solutions through careful monitoring of crops and proper farm management practices. Instead of giving up, they actively seek ways to protect their crops and maintain productivity.

“Bisan may waya-way kag iban nga problema, ginapadayon lang namon ang pagpanguma.”

R3

This statement demonstrates that the participant accepted farming as an occupation that naturally involves risks and uncertainties. Despite environmental challenges, the participant remained committed to continuing agricultural production.

Ginapadayon lang namon kay kabalo kami nga may maayo man nga resulta sa ulihi.

R7

The participant believed that persistence and patience would eventually result in a successful harvest. This positive outlook enabled the participant to remain motivated despite the difficulties encountered throughout the farming season.

The narratives of the participants reveal that resilience is an important characteristic among Filipino rice farmers. Their experiences demonstrate that farming is not merely dependent on financial resources or agricultural inputs but also on the farmers' determination to overcome difficulties through patience, proper decision-making, and effective farm management.

These findings are supported by contemporary perspectives on resilience and adaptive capacity, which explain that farmers can respond to adversity by developing strategies that enable them to withstand, adapt to, and recover from economic, environmental, and institutional disturbances. Darnhofer (2021) emphasized that resilience in farming involves the capacity to maintain essential functions despite disturbances while also adapting to changing conditions and, when necessary, transforming farming practices. Similarly, Manevska-Tasevska et al. (2021) explained that farm resilience is strengthened through robustness, adaptability, and transformability in responding to economic, social, environmental, and institutional challenges. These perspectives suggest that farmers' ability to adjust their practices, utilize available resources, and sustain their livelihoods despite unfavorable conditions reflects important dimensions of agricultural resilience.

Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) emphasized that resilient farmers are more capable of adapting to changing environmental conditions, market uncertainties, and production risks through continuous learning, improved agricultural practices, and effective resource management. The participants' narratives clearly demonstrate these characteristics as they continuously adjusted their farming practices to cope with the challenges encountered during contract farming.

The findings are likewise consistent with the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, which explains that rural households strengthen their livelihood through a combination of human capital, social capital, financial capital, and natural resource management. The participants' patience, farming skills, and willingness to adopt recommended agricultural practices enabled them to maximize the benefits of contract farming while minimizing production risks.

Another important observation is that the participants associated resilience with hope. Although they encountered delays, pest infestations, and weather-related problems, they continued to believe that the support provided through contract farming would eventually improve their farming conditions. Their optimism encouraged them to continue cultivating their farms despite temporary setbacks.

Moreover, the participants emphasized that the knowledge gained through technical assistance and practical farming experience contributed to their ability to solve farming problems independently. They no longer relied

solely on external assistance but actively participated in protecting their crops through proper pest management, timely fertilizer application, and regular field monitoring.

These findings indicate that resilience is developed through experience, continuous learning, and confidence in one's ability to overcome agricultural challenges. The participants' narratives demonstrate that resilience is one of the factors that sustain agricultural productivity despite the uncertainties associated with rice farming.

The researcher therefore concludes that resilience, expressed through patience and effective farm management, enables Filipino rice farmers to adapt successfully to the challenges encountered in contract farming. This resilience contributes significantly to sustaining agricultural productivity and improving farmers' confidence in achieving better harvests despite existing difficulties.

Theme 5: Contract Farming as an Empowering Government Intervention

The fifth and final theme that emerged from the lived experiences of the participants is Contract Farming as an Empowering Government Intervention. Throughout the interviews, the participants consistently expressed their appreciation for the contract farming program because it provided opportunities that improved their farming practices, reduced their financial burden, and enhanced their quality of life. More importantly, they viewed the program as a manifestation of the government's commitment to supporting smallholder rice farmers. Their narratives revealed that contract farming did not only provide material assistance but also restored their confidence and optimism in pursuing agriculture as a sustainable source of livelihood.

“Maayo guid ini nga programa para sa mga magagmay nga mangunguma. Daku guid ang bulig sini sa amon.”

R1

The participant described contract farming as a beneficial government initiative that directly addressed the needs of small-scale farmers. The assistance received through the program enabled the participant to continue farming without the burden of excessive production costs. This statement illustrates that government intervention plays a significant role in improving the economic well-being of farming communities.

“Programa guid ini para sa mga pareho namon nga wala sang kapital. Daku guid ang natabang sini sa amon.”

R6

The participant emphasized that the program specifically benefits farmers who lack sufficient financial resources. The participant recognized that without the assistance provided through contract farming, sustaining rice production would have been more difficult. This narrative demonstrates that government support creates opportunities for marginalized farmers to remain productive despite financial limitations.

“Malaking bulig guid ini sa amon pagpanguma kag kabuhi.”

R5

The participant viewed contract farming as more than an agricultural program. Instead, it was perceived as a livelihood intervention that positively influenced the participant's family's economic condition. The assistance extended beyond farm production and contributed to improving the overall quality of life.

“Mahapos na ang pagpanguma kag indi na kami mabudlayan sa pagbaligya sang amon produkto.”

R7

This statement indicates that the participant appreciated the comprehensive support provided by the program. By reducing production expenses and ensuring a ready market, contract farming allowed the participant to focus on improving productivity rather than worrying about financial and marketing concerns.

“Nalipay guid kami nga may amo sini nga programa sang gobyerno.”

R4

The participant expressed gratitude for the government's efforts to support farmers through agricultural development programs. This response reflects the participants' positive perception of government initiatives aimed at strengthening food production and improving rural livelihoods.

The participants' narratives consistently demonstrate that contract farming is perceived as an empowering intervention because it addresses several challenges simultaneously. It provides financial assistance, production inputs, technical support, and guaranteed market opportunities while promoting confidence and self-reliance among farmers. These benefits enabled the participants to become more optimistic about the future of rice farming.

The findings of this study support the report of the Department of Agriculture, which emphasizes that government agricultural support programs contribute significantly to increasing productivity, improving food security, and enhancing farmers' incomes through the provision of production assistance, modern farming technologies, and market linkages. Such interventions strengthen the agricultural sector while improving the living conditions of rural communities.

Likewise, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) explains that contract farming is an important rural development strategy because it creates mutually beneficial partnerships among farmers, government institutions, and buyers. Through these partnerships, smallholder farmers gain access to resources that are otherwise difficult to obtain independently. Consequently, contract farming contributes to poverty reduction, increased productivity, and sustainable agricultural development. The findings are also consistent with the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, which explains that strengthening institutional support enhances the livelihood assets of rural households. Government interventions that improve financial capital, human capital, and social capital increase farmers' ability to sustain agricultural production and adapt to changing economic and environmental conditions.

Another important observation from the participants' narratives is their desire for the continuation and expansion of the program. Several participants recommended that more farmers should be given the opportunity to participate in contract farming so that additional farming communities could experience similar benefits. This recommendation reflects the participants' confidence in the effectiveness of the program and their willingness to encourage fellow farmers to participate.

Furthermore, the participants associated contract farming with dignity and empowerment. Instead of relying solely on borrowed money or uncertain market conditions, they experienced a sense of independence because the program enabled them to manage their farms more efficiently. This empowerment strengthened their confidence in making farming decisions and motivated them to continue agricultural production despite existing challenges.

The researcher therefore concludes that contract farming serves as an effective government intervention that empowers Filipino rice farmers through financial support, technical assistance, market security, and institutional collaboration. Beyond increasing agricultural productivity, the program contributes to improving the participants' quality of life, strengthening rural livelihoods, and promoting sustainable agricultural development.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Filipino rice farmers participating in the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Contract Farming Program. Their experiences reveal that contract farming extends beyond providing financial assistance by serving as a comprehensive government intervention that strengthens farmers' livelihoods through production support, technical guidance, market opportunities, and institutional collaboration. Despite the implementation challenges encountered throughout the farming season, the participants demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and commitment to sustaining agricultural production. These findings emphasize that effective contract farming programs should

continuously strengthen institutional support, improve program implementation, and enhance farmers' capacities to promote sustainable agricultural development, food security, and improved quality of life among smallholder rice farmers.

The successful implementation of contract farming significantly contributes to improving the livelihood of Filipino rice farmers by providing continuous financial assistance, quality agricultural inputs, technical support, and guaranteed market opportunities. The findings demonstrate that government-assisted contract farming reduces farmers' dependence on informal lending, strengthens financial stability, and enables them to sustain rice production despite limited financial resources. Contract farming becomes more effective when institutional support is consistently provided throughout the entire production cycle.

Efficient program implementation and strong institutional collaboration are essential in maximizing the benefits of contract farming. The study concludes that timely distribution of agricultural inputs, prompt release of payments after harvest, responsive technical assistance, and effective coordination among implementing agencies and farmers contribute to increased productivity, reduced production risks, and improved farming outcomes. Strengthening these aspects of program implementation will further enhance farmers' confidence, satisfaction, and long-term participation in government-supported agricultural programs.

The lived experiences of Filipino rice farmers provide valuable insights for strengthening government agricultural support programs and promoting sustainable rural development. Their experiences demonstrate that successful contract farming extends beyond financial assistance by integrating continuous capacity-building, technical guidance, institutional collaboration, and effective program implementation. Strengthening these components will enable farmers to become more resilient, improve agricultural productivity, sustain their livelihoods, and contribute to the long-term development of the Philippine agricultural sector.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Above all, the researcher expresses profound gratitude to Almighty God for the wisdom, strength, courage, guidance, and perseverance that made the completion of this research possible.

Sincere appreciation is extended to the thesis adviser and all individuals who provided valuable guidance, constructive feedback, encouragement, and assistance throughout the research process. The researcher is also deeply grateful to the participants and their organization for generously sharing their time, experiences, and insights, which became an essential foundation of this study.

Heartfelt thanks are likewise extended to the researcher's colleagues and organization for their support and assistance during the conduct of the study. Special gratitude is given to the researcher's beloved family, particularly the husband, children, mother, sisters, and brothers, for their unconditional love, understanding, prayers, moral support, and unwavering encouragement throughout this academic journey.

Finally, this achievement is lovingly dedicated to the memory of the researcher's late father, whose love and inspiration remain a lasting source of strength. Above all, the researcher is grateful to everyone who contributed, in one way or another, to the completion of this scholarly endeavor.

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