

Factors influencing college students from rice farming families in the Philippines to pursue non-agricultural degrees

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ABSTRACT

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One of the most pressing global challenges today is the aging workforce in the agricultural sector, which poses significant threats to food security. Carodan (2016) highlights a concerning trend: many farmers notice that their children are not interested in farming and instead encourage them to pursue other career paths. This study investigates the factors influencing farmers' children to pursue non-agricultural degrees and their limited interest in farming. Using a descriptive-quantitative methodology and purposive sampling, the research examines first-year non-agricultural students from farming backgrounds in a state university in the Philippines. The findings reveal that personal factors significantly shape their attitudes toward farming. Although these students possess farming skills and recognize their benefits, they have greater confidence in their current non-agricultural paths. Additionally, there is minimal influence from peers or parents on their career decisions. The study also notes an increasing trend of students selecting courses based on market demands to enhance their employability and economic efficiency.

1. Introduction

The agriculture sector faces severe challenges as farmers are aging across the globe (Rigg et al., 2020), and young people show declining interest in agricultural careers, threatening food security and sustainable development. In the Philippines, the average age of farmers is 53, with predictions of a farmer shortage within 12 years (Lauengco, 2022). Farmers' children are observed to avoid agriculture degrees, viewing them as undervalued (Malanon, 2015). Many of the farmers' children migrate to urban areas for better opportunities, raising the question: who will farm in the future (Girdziute et al., 2022)? Addressing this issue is crucial to ensuring a sustainable agricultural future.

Young farmers are vital to future food security and sustainable agriculture (Girdziute et al., 2022). Youths comprising 16% or 1.2 billion of the global population, can significantly impact the world with their creativity and capacity (United Nations, n.d.). UNESCO emphasizes its crucial role in leading a brighter future, recognizing its ability to develop more effective solutions to both current and emerging global challenges (UNESCO, n.d.).

Agriculture is one of the vital sectors in the Philippines, contributing to 8.6 percent of the total Gross Domestic Product in 2023 (Balita, 2024). Ironically, despite being one of the

world's largest rice producers, the Philippines is the biggest rice importer as of September 2024 (Fenol, 2023). Predictions suggest small family farms may disappear due to a lack of successors, significantly impacting food security since they account for 80% of food production (White, 2020).

Research has explored the motivations of students enrolled in agriculture courses, but there remains a need to understand why children from rice farming families lack interest in pursuing agriculture-related courses. Quijano-Pagutayao et al. (2020) found that young people, mainly females, participate in farming but avoid agriculture degrees due to personal choices and parental influence. However, males with agricultural experience, land ownership, and family involvement in farming are more likely to pursue agriculture degrees. Carodan (2016) noted that most farmers do not see interest in farming in their children and support their career choices outside of agriculture. Palis (2020) recommended government and agricultural institutions boost farmers' and their children's motivation to continue rice farming. Identifying the reasons behind the disinterest in agriculture among farmers' children is essential, which is the focus of this study.

The same study by Palis (2020) found that the physical and economic challenges of farming compel farm parents to encourage their children to pursue non-agricultural careers. This paper aims to answer the question: what personal, social, and familial factors influence the children of rice farmers to pursue non-agricultural degrees? This helps in understanding the emerging agricultural issues from the perspective of farmers' children in CLSU. The paper addresses existing gaps related to new trends or factors that have evolved in universities, as suggested by the study of Morrish et al. (2017).

Understanding these factors is globally significant, as it can inform strategies to attract young people to agriculture, particularly those with farming backgrounds. If no interventions are made to address the declining interest in agriculture among the youth, the sector will face severe implications for global food security. This research could provide valuable insights for policymakers and agricultural institutions to reverse this trend and ensure a sustainable agricultural future. As Proctor and Lucchesi (2012) argued:

“Given the reliance on small-scale farming for food production, food security, and its ability to absorb labor, how youth respond to farming opportunities and whether small-scale farming can meet their aspirations will be critical for future food security and employment” (p. 01).

Although many students are enrolled in agricultural courses at Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in the Philippines, many students from rice farming families are choosing alternative paths and forging their careers. This trend poses a potential threat to small-scale farms, as the likely inheritors of these farms are inclined to pursue non-agricultural careers. Thus, this study explores the socio-demographic profile of children of farmers who chose to pursue non-agricultural courses at CLSU in the Philippines. It examines the reasons why students from rice farming families at CLSU opted not to pursue agriculture-related courses. Additionally, the study determines whether there is a significant difference in students' perception of the marketability of non-agricultural versus agricultural courses, considering their socio-demographic profiles.

2. Theoretical basis

This study utilized the theory of Rational Choice, developed by philosopher Adam Smith in his 1776 essay “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.” The theory

asserts that individuals act based on rational calculations to pursue their best interests. According to Scott (2000), rational choice theory explains social phenomena through individuals' self-interested decisions. Initially used in economics, the theory has also been applied to disciplines such as sociology (Green, 2002). Key concepts include rational actors, self-interests, costs of actions, and perceived benefits (Ganti, 2023). This theory assumes that in decision-making regarding one's career, children and their parents evaluate continuing education costs against the potential benefits like higher future earnings (Glaesser & Cooper, 2014). The salience of the rational choice theory in Portugal's higher education was shown by the fact that students consider the cost and benefits when selecting a degree, with employability being the primary motivation for pursuing higher education (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013). This is supported by Zimmermann's (2019) assertion that students are forward-looking actors who form their educational aspirations based on their preference for degrees that carry the highest presumed utility and marketability.

In this study, the theory was employed to identify why the children of rice farmers pursue non-agricultural courses. Factors such as interests, costs, and perceived benefits of their chosen programs were examined. Self-interest was measured through career interests, while benefits were assessed via perceived outcome expectations. The study emphasizes that students did not randomly select their courses; their decisions were influenced by a rational evaluation of which choices would provide the most significant benefits.

3. Methodology

The study used a quantitative-descriptive design to provide accurate descriptions of the various factors influencing farmer children's decisions to pursue non-agricultural courses. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research design is appropriate in describing the relationship among variables. This method offers statistical measurement through t-tests, means, standard deviation, and frequency counts to describe the patterns, trends, and relationships among variables. T-tests were used to determine whether there were significant differences in the mean responses of respondents based on their age group, course type, order in the family, and sex at birth.

A non-random purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. Respondents were chosen from selected colleges in a state university based on the following criteria: (1) children of rice farmers, (2) first-year students enrolled in non-agricultural courses, (3) families farming rice on at least 5,000sqm of land, and (4) families with a minimum of five years of rice farming experience. The study included 115 respondents. Faculty members assisted the researcher in identifying and tracing these students.

The study collected data through a face-to-face survey using a structured questionnaire formatted as a Likert scale with a 4-point response scale to ensure forced choices - the questionnaire, consisting of 44 questions, aimed to measure respondents' agreement with various statements. The researcher formulated the instrument by examining existing studies and their corresponding findings. Initially, 129 questions were constructed and pretested, and to enhance the instrument's reliability, 85 of these questions were eliminated. The instrument's reliability and validity were confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.860.

The study was reviewed by the state university's Ethics Review Board to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The study adhered to ethical principles outlined by Bryman and Bell (2007) to protect respondents further.

4. Result and discussion

4.1. Result

4.1.1. *Socio-demographic profile of the children of farmers who pursued non-agricultural courses*

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in Terms of Personal Background

<i>I. Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
A. Personal Background		
Total Observations	115	100%
<i>Age</i>		
16 - 18 years old	63	54.5%
19 - 21 years old	52	45.5%
Mean: 18.5		
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	37	32.2%
Female	78	67.8%
<i>Order in the Family</i>		
Eldest	56	48.7%
Not being the eldest	59	51.3%
<i>Course/Degree Program</i>		
Science Programs	69	60%
Non-science Programs	46	40%

Source. Data analysis result of the research

Table 1 presents demographic data for 115 children of farmers from 25 sections of non-agriculture first-year courses at a state university. Among the respondents, 54.8% (n = 63) are aged 17 - 18 years, and 45.5% (n = 52) are aged 19 - 21, with a mean age of 18.5. The sample includes 32.2% (n = 37) males and 67.8% (n = 78) females. Additionally, 48.7% (n = 56) are the eldest among their siblings, while 51.3% (n = 59) are not. Regarding degree programs, 60% (n = 69) of respondents are enrolled in science programs, and 40% (n = 46) are enrolled in non-science degrees.

Table 2*Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in Terms of Family Background*

<i>I. Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
B. Family Background		
Total Observations	115	100%
<i>Parents involved in Farming</i>		
Father only	74	64.3%
Mother only	7	6.1%
Both Parents	34	29.6%
<i>Land Area</i>		
Below 3 hectares but not less than .5 hectares	85	73.9%
Above 3 hectares	30	26.1%
Mean:		
<i>Land Ownership</i>		
Owned	82	71.3%
Not Owned	33	28.7%
<i>Estimated Income every cropping</i>		
Below 50,000	45	39.1%
50,001 - 110,000	54	47.0%
Above 110,001	16	13.9%
<i>Years in Farming</i>		
05 - 09 years	23	20%
10 years and above	92	80%
<i>Family Member Engaged in Farming</i>		
01 - 05 Family Members	102	88.7%
06 - 10 Family Members	13	11.3%
<i>Farming as a Family Source of Income</i>		
Primary	78	67.8%
Secondary	37	32.2%

Source. Data analysis result of the research

Table 2 illustrates the socio-demographic background of the respondents based on their family circumstances. The data indicates that most respondents (64.3%) have fathers involved in farming, while nearly a quarter (29.6%) have both parents involved in agriculture. Only a few respondents have mothers engaged in farming.

Regarding land area, nearly three-fourths of the respondents (73.9%) have rice farmland below 3 hectares, while 26.1% have more than 3 hectares of rice farmland. Regarding land ownership, 71.3% own the land they cultivate, whereas 28.7% do not own the land they farm.

Additionally, 39.1% of respondents earn below 50,000 pesos per cropping season, 47% earn between 50,001 and 110,000 pesos, and 113.9% earn above 110,001 pesos. Furthermore, 20% have been farming rice for 5 to 9 years, while 80% have been farming rice for 10 years or more.

Moreover, 88.7% of respondents have 1 to 5 family members engaged in farming, while 11.3% have 6 to 10 family members involved. Finally, 67.8% of respondents rely on rice farming as their family's primary source of income, while 32.2% consider it their secondary source of income.

4.1.2. Reasons why CLSU students from rice farming families did not pursue agriculture-related courses

Table 3

Presentation of Grand Means and Overall Means as to Why Agriculture-Related Courses Were not Pursued by CLSU Students

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Operationalized Variables</i>	<i>Grand Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Personal Factors</i>		2.96	Agree
	Perception of Farming	2.63	Agree
	Self-Efficacy Beliefs	2.99	Agree
	Perceived Benefits of Farming	3.30	Strongly Agree
	Perceived Benefits of Career Choice	3.13	Agree
	Career Interests	2.73	Agree
<i>Social Factors</i>		2.33	Disagree
	Influence of Friends/Peers	1.84	Disagree
	Marketability of the Course	2.82	Agree
<i>Family Factors</i>		2.30	Disagree
	Parent Aspiration to their Children	1.98	Disagree
	Exposure into Farming	2.61	Agree

Note. Legend: 1 - 1.74 (strongly disagree), 1.75 - 2.49 (disagree), 2.50 - 3.24 (agree), 3.25 - 4.00 (strongly agree)
Source. Data analysis result of the research

Table 3 indicates that personal factors have the highest overall grand mean ($M = 3.03$) among all studied factors. While students acknowledge the benefits of farming, several reasons contribute to their decision not to pursue agriculture-related courses. These include their perception of agriculture as tiring, the belief that they lack the necessary skills to manage their family's rice farms, strong interest in non-agricultural careers, and perceived better marketability of these courses. This indicates a lack of personal desire to continue managing their farms despite recognizing the economic benefits of farming. Despite being exposed to farming ($M = 2.61$), students still pursue non-agricultural tracks. Even with farming experience and knowledge, they do not consider it an ideal career choice.

Students prioritize the marketability of their course choice over the influence of their friends or peers. Even family members do not influence their career development. It is also surprising that the respondents' parents have minimal impact on their course choice decisions ($m = 1.98$). However, exposure to farming did not discourage students from pursuing non-agricultural tracks ($m = 2.61$), as despite having experience and knowledge of agriculture, they still needed to choose it as an ideal career.

4.1.3. Analyzing variance in CLSU students' perception of the marketability of non-agriculture over agricultural courses

Table 4

Test Results for the Interaction of the Order in the Family, Sex at Birth, and Current College Course on the Perception that Non-Agriculture Courses Provide Better Life Opportunities

	<i>Order in the Family</i>	<i>Sex at Birth</i>	<i>Course</i>
<i>Pursuing non-agriculture courses provides a better life</i>	0.009	0.026	0.038

Source. Data analysis result of the research

Table 4 presents variances in respondents' perceptions based on their birth order, sex, and current course of study regarding the belief that pursuing non-agricultural courses will make them better off. The results reveal that eldest children, males, and those pursuing science courses are likelier to hold this belief.

4.2. Discussion

The findings focused on the interaction of personal, social, and familial factors influencing students' reluctance to pursue careers in the agricultural sector.

4.2.1. Personal factors

Personal factors emerged as the most significant in shaping respondents' decision-making processes, particularly their perceptions of career benefits, career interests, self-efficacy beliefs, and views on farming. Their decisions were notably influenced by their career aspirations, prevailing market trends, lifestyle considerations, and the economic viability of agriculture.

Douglas et al. (2017) also argued that the youths' lifestyle is increasingly disconnected from agriculture. Despite recognizing agriculture's financial and food security benefits, they perceive more excellent prospects in their chosen careers. Similarly, Prasetyaningrum et al. (2022) found that a contributing factor to the decline in farmers is the belief that the agricultural sector lacks promising prospects.

Moreover, students did not initially consider pursuing agriculture as a college degree and were unwilling to shift from their current courses to agricultural studies. Instead, they aim to secure formal sector jobs or seek employment overseas to alleviate their family's rice farming responsibilities. These results relate to the study of Henning et al. (2022), where they found that youths would instead work in offices and that youths who received tertiary education are less likely to participate in agriculture. According to rational choice theory, these students make career decisions based on self-interest, believing they can achieve more significant benefits and satisfaction.

Interestingly, these career interests align with market trends and demands, leading them to pursue fields for their economic advantages rather than personal passions. According to Hughes et al. (2015), the agricultural sector is unattractive, and undergraduates must be aware of its associated career options. They added that the food and agriculture sectors are in a competitive market for talent, emphasizing the sector's lack of appeal and perceived low pay. Thus, undergraduates take on careers outside the agricultural sector.

On a positive note, they plan to apply their courses to benefit their family's farm business. Manalo et al. (2019) similarly found that children of farmers aim to assist their parents by providing them with information that could potentially enhance their returns or income.

More than one-third of Filipino rural residents who rely on agriculture as their primary source of income are considered poor, as declining agricultural productivity and slow economic growth exacerbated their situation (Rich, 2023). It is in this context that students hold negative perceptions of the agricultural sector, primarily due to the low-income opportunities exacerbated by the rising cost of farm inputs necessary for rice cultivation (Welch, 1960). Khapayi and Celliers (2015) also found that market access is crucial for smallholder farmers, which may further discourage students from taking the path of farming. Singh and Singh (2016) identified several problems associated with farming, such as inadequate labor, high cost of cultivation, pest and disease problems, and low-income returns. There are fewer farmers with the perception that the agricultural sector is less promising in the future (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2022). This phenomenon can be correlated with the rational choice theory, wherein children of farmers identify and weigh the costs and benefits of getting involved in agriculture.

4.2.2. Social factors

Social factors, with a weighted mean of 2.33, exert the second highest influence on children of farmers' career decisions. Surprisingly, friends and peers do not influence their choice of non-agriculture courses, contrary to Owusu et al. (2021) findings that peers significantly affect students' career aspirations. Unlike previous studies, the children of farmers involved in the study do not let their friends or peers intervene with their career decisions as they wish to pursue a path based on their rational calculations, which would bring them more significant benefits. Instead, they prioritize marketable courses for better-paying careers than in agriculture.

The marketability of courses is the primary social factor influencing career decisions among children of farmers, who believe these courses offer higher salaries than agricultural jobs. Ephrem et al. (2021) found that many Congolese youths prefer NGO careers for better pay and social status. Similarly, White (2020) noted that rural youths seek formal sector jobs. They prioritize in-demand, accessible non-agricultural courses like information technology, data science, business, and engineering, while agricultural courses lag. McGoldrick's (2024) list of in-demand careers in the Philippines, including software developers, virtual assistants, computer engineers, system analysts, and aeronautics professionals, supports these choices as the highest-paying jobs in the country.

The study found that children of farmers base their career decisions on current market trends, believing they offer better prospects and economic benefits. Globalization and neoliberalism have commodified education, shaping career interests and course choices locally and globally (Morley et al., 2014). Rastogi and Dutta (2015) argue that neoliberal policies make traditional farming less attractive, pushing farmers' children toward free market careers. This

reflects the invisible hand metaphor, where pursuing personal benefits inadvertently serves society by meeting market demands.

Today, curricula are primarily shaped by market demands, driving students to choose courses perceived as efficient and leading to successful careers. Savage (2017) notes that neoliberalism has significantly influenced educational systems with market-based reforms. Balan (2023) adds that neoliberalism favors market-driven values like employability and commodifying education. In the Philippines, Sannadan and Lang-ay (2021) highlight how neoliberalism, through the K to 12 program, corporatized higher education to meet global market needs, treating students as commodities.

Children of farmers increasingly opt for marketable non-agricultural courses, prioritizing perceived success in the modern economy over farming's practical benefits. Hughes et al. (2015) found that agriculture needs more appeal due to low perceived pay, leading undergraduates to choose other careers. Neoliberalism has made agriculture less appealing and other careers more attractive, significantly influencing students' career decisions and rational choices.

4.2.3. Familial factors

Family factors minimally influence their decisions (weighted mean = 2.30), contradicting studies like Manalo and Van de Fliert (2013), where Filipino farmers encourage children to pursue college for better opportunities instead of farming. Palis (2020) found that many farm parents want their children to continue farming for income and food security. It was observed that farming parents did not hinder them in alternative paths nor encourage them in agriculture, signifying a more excellent agency in choosing their career paths among students. This disagreed with the study of Girdziute et al. (2022), which argued that the primary motivation of young people to work in agriculture is associated with having parents who are engaged in agricultural activities. The parents' minimal intervention could contribute to their children's inclination to eyeing for the marketable courses.

Despite acknowledging the benefits of farming or the agricultural sector and their exposure to agriculture, they opted to build their career path relative to their career interests rather than following their parents' footsteps. The article by IOWA State University stated that many parents wanted their children to take over the family farm business for the next generation. However, not all parties understood the realities of personal and farm business relationships.

Experiential education on farming from their parents has negatively impacted their views on farming. This is contrary to the findings of Begho and Begho (2022), wherein older farmers who are more knowledgeable and skilled in farming have better perceptions and find farming satisfactory than the younger farmers who intend to quit because of the hardships they face. Moreover, having firsthand experiences in farming allows them to evaluate their farming experiences and whether they can be advantageous or disadvantageous to them. Therefore, they can weigh the costs and benefits of farming. The complexity of farming may also deter them from farming or the agricultural sector.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The study provides insights into factors influencing the children of farmers to avoid agricultural careers. The trend of choosing courses based on market demands, driven by neoliberal principles, contributes to this scenario. Among the youths, pursuing agriculture may be irrelevant in their career paths as neoliberalism has attracted them to courses that are more

marketable than agriculture. This is why, despite recognizing farming benefits, children of farmers opt for non-agricultural careers to secure lucrative jobs and liberate their families from farming. Students with extensive farming experience find farming physically demanding and stressful, preferring less demanding careers. On the other hand, students who are more likely to consider agriculture-related courses typically have higher incomes from farming, come from families with long-term engagement in farming as a primary income source, and possess agricultural land ownership.

Examining the career choices of students from farming families through the lens of rational choice theory reveals several key points. First, their career choices emphasize personal growth over the need to engage in farming for sustainable food production. Second, these choices reflect the low status accorded to farmers in Philippine society, who are often viewed as being in the lower strata, making agriculture less attractive to college students. Third, while agriculture may remain an important sector in the Philippines, rice farming may no longer be a family enterprise, as it may persist within families but not through the children of farmers.

This study offers insights into the factors influencing students from rice farming families to choose non-agricultural courses. However, its scope is limited to students enrolled in a state university in Nueva Ecija. Given that Nueva Ecija has one of the highest numbers of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), this may have influenced students from rice farming families to pursue courses that are more globally competitive and marketable than agriculture.

Based upon the findings of this study, it is recommended that the agricultural sector and institutions within the Department of Agriculture, in collaboration with other government entities such as the Department of Education (DepEd), provide better and more extensive agricultural education in primary schools. This initiative aims to instill and boost children's interest in agriculture.

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