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STRATEGY TO INCREASE THE CLASS OF FARMER GROUPS IN BERMANI ILIR DISTRICT, KEPAHIANG REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

The strategy of upgrading the class of farmer groups can include various components, such as member skill development, increasing agricultural production, effective financial management, marketing of crops, and risk management with the aim of improving the welfare and independence of farmer groups. Thus, farmer groups will be more productive and competitive in marketing their crops and carrying out their agricultural activities in a sustainable manner. Bermani Ilir District, Kepahiang Regency has a farmer group with the status of a beginner class as a whole, thus there is a need for a strategy to improve the class. This study was conducted in Bermani Ilir District with 9 expert respondents, 57 farmer group administrators and 57 farmer group members who were analyzed using SWOT. Based on the results obtained, the strategy for increasing the group class is in the WO strategy, namely by taking advantage of opportunities to minimize weaknesses. The results of the priority strategy obtained using QSPM analysis are that it was found that Improving Training and Administrative Management to Utilize Fertilizer Subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies are strategies with the first priority as a strategy to increase the class of farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District, Kepahiang Regency.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of improving the class of farmer groups is to help them improve their human resources (Muslimah et al., (2024). There are four levels of ability of farmer groups, namely beginner class, advanced class, intermediate class, and main class. Each level is assessed by how well farmer groups lead and manage their functions as a place to learn, cooperate, and work (Regulation of the Head of the Agricultural Human Resources Extension and Development Agency No. 168 of 2011). Poktan that has a beginner class is a new Poktan. If the requirements to move up to the next level are met, the first-class Poktan can become an advanced class. The highest class is the main class. The main group of poktan is a group that can be independent and has an agricultural business that develops from upstream (on farm) to downstream (off farm) (Gusti, 2021). Astuti and Wahyudi (2023) said that the more independent the poktan, the higher the class.

Kepahiang Regency is one of the regions that has the largest class of beginner farmer groups in Bengkulu Province, namely of the 906 existing farmer groups, 91.7% of which are beginner-class farmer groups (Agricultural Data and Information Center, 2023). One of the areas in Kepahiang Regency is Bermani Ilir District where there are 132 Farmer Group institutions that have been registered with the Ministry of Agriculture and spread across 18 villages and 1 sub-district and already have their respective class categories. The more advanced the farmer group, the greater the impact on increasing the level of knowledge, attitudes, and skills of its members. This means that farmer groups can manage their operations by making the most of the tools and resources they have. Based on the current situation, of the 132 farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District, Kepahiang Regency, all of them are still in the beginner class. This means that the implementation of the role of farmer groups in the area has not been carried out optimally because the beginner class is the class with the lowest level.

Based on the survey that has been conducted, there are several possible reasons why farmer groups are still in the beginner class, namely farmers' awareness of the importance of farmer groups is still low in carrying out farming, the government's participation in developing the capacity of farmer groups is low, the limited agricultural extension workers available for Bermani Ilir District, which is with a total of 19 extension villages only 7 people, The facilities and infrastructure to support extension for the improvement of farmer groups are minimal and some farmer groups think that it was established only as a forum to get assistance, even though the role of farmer groups is not just assistance but as a forum for learning, cooperation and production classes.

According to Margolang et al. (2018), given the high demands placed on farmer groups, it is important to support and empower them so that they can strengthen and gain access to agricultural development facilities. This can be

seen in the class of farmer groups that have been formed. An appropriate approach is needed to raise the status of farmer groups.

A strategy is a plan or action that is prepared with the aim of achieving certain goals within a specified period of time (Marpaung et al., 2023). The strategy of increasing the class of farmer groups is the process of implementing and implementing a plan formulated to increase the class of farmer groups. The strategy of increasing the class of farmer groups can include various components, such as member skill development, increasing agricultural production, effective financial management, marketing of crops, and risk management with the aim of improving the welfare and independence of farmer groups (Renda, 2023). Thus, farmer groups will be more productive and competitive in marketing their crops and carrying out their agricultural activities in a sustainable manner. Determining the right strategy for farmer groups can build networks, improve managerial skills, improve the quality of agricultural products and improve market and capital access (Lestari et al., 2024).

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The research location was specifically chosen in Kepahiang Regency, Bermani Ilir Regency, Bengkulu Province. The location of the study was chosen after considering information from farmer groups from the Agricultural Extension Center (BPP) of Bermani Ilir District. Of these, there are 135 farmer groups registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, but their condition has not improved significantly, namely they are still classified as beginners. The period of implementation of this research is August 2024–October 2024. The data used are primary and secondary data, where primary data is taken directly by the researcher with sample details as follows.

1. Kepahiang Regency Agriculture Office (1 Head of Extension Division)
2. Kepahiang Agricultural Extension Unit (1 Extension Coordinator)
3. Field Agricultural Extension Officer of Bermani Ilir District (7 Extension Officers)
4. Farmer Group Management (57 administrators)
5. Members of the Farmer Group (57 members)

Data Analysis Method

Identify Internal and External Factors

The process of identifying internal and external environmental elements involves considering the current state of farmer groups (Asimin et al., 2024). Today, data is separated into two categories: internal data and external data. Identify internal and external strategic elements, obtained from literature studies

and field examinations, that have the ability to influence the expansion of farmer groups.

IFAS and EFAS Matrix

The internal business environment is examined using the IFAS (Internal Factors Analysis Summary) matrix as an analysis tool. Using this matrix, businesses can determine which internal strategic aspects impact their strengths and weaknesses. Respondents then gave weight and assessment to these aspects of strengths and weaknesses (Nur'aini et al., 2023). The IFAS (Internal Strategic Factors Analysis Summary) table was created to develop the company's internal strategic factors within the framework of its Strengths and Weaknesses (Rangkuti, 2015). Meanwhile, EFAS is used to find external strategic elements related to opportunities and risks to the business and that businesses must be aware of and respond to in order to stay ahead of the rapidly changing environmental landscape and gain a competitive advantage (Fauzani et al., 2018). The process of determining external strategic variables that present opportunities and dangers to the organization results in an External Factor Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrix. IFAS and EFAS analysis will be used as follows.

Table 1 IFAS/EFAS Matrix Analysis

Internal/External Factors	Weight	Rating	Score
Strength			
1.			
2.			
Debilitation			
1.			
2.			
Total			

Source: Rangkuti, 2015

SWOT Matrix

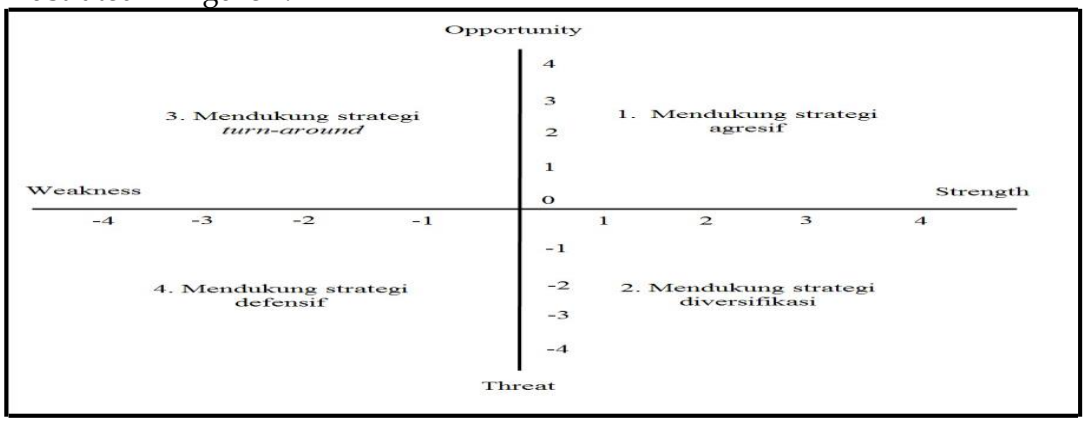
Rangkuti (2015) defines SWOT analysis as a methodical process to identify various aspects to develop farmer group strategies. The results of the SWOT analysis are the basis for the creation of the SWOT Matrix, which presents various potential strategies that may be implemented by farmer groups. The Swot matrix can be described as follows.

Table 2 SWOT Matrix

Faktor-faktor Internal (IFAS) / Faktor-faktor Eksternal (EFAS)	**Kekuatan (S)** Tentukan 5-10 faktor kekuatan Internal	**Kelemahan (W)** Tentukan 5-10 faktor kelemahan Internal
Peluang (O) Tentukan 5-10 faktor peluang Eksternal	**Strategi SO** Ciptakan strategi yang menggunakan kekuatan untuk memanfaatkan peluang	**Strategi WO** Ciptakan strategi yang meminimalkan kelemahan untuk memanfaatkan peluang
Ancaman (T) Tentukan 5-10 faktor ancaman Eksternal	**Strategi ST** Ciptakan strategi yang menggunakan kekuatan untuk mengatasi ancaman	**Strategi WT** Ciptakan strategi yang meminimalkan kelemahan dan menghindari ancaman

Diagram SWOT

SWOT analysis is a method that evaluates external elements, such as opportunities and threats, compared to internal factors, such as strengths and weaknesses (Widowati et al., 2022). The SWOT analysis graph utilizes IFAS and EFAS table data as an assessment benchmark. Each strategy in a SWOT analysis has an important significance indicated by its characteristics in each quadrant, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Analysis of Priority Strategy Design

Data analysis is used to determine the main priority strategy decisions in a business, namely the QSPM matrix, by conducting an objective evaluation based on factors that have been obtained from previous internal and external factor analysis (Setyorini and Santoso, 2017). The determination of this strategy is carried out as follows.

Table 3. QSPM Analysis

Factors	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3

	Weight	AXLE	BAG	Weight	AXLE	BAG	Weight	AXLE	BAG
Strength									
Debilitation									
Chance									
Threat									
Total									

Source : Rangkuti, 2016.

Caption: *US: Attractiveness Score; TAS: Total Attractiveness Score*

Based on Table 3, it is known that the *Total Attractive Score* (TAS) attractiveness value is obtained by multiplying the weight and AS values. After obtaining the total value of attractiveness, conclusions can then be drawn based on the highest TAS value which will be a priority strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identify Internal Factors

Identification of internal factors in SWOT analysis refers to the process of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of farmer groups in an effort to improve group class. By understanding these internal factors, farmer groups can formulate more effective strategies to maximize potential. Internal factors in this study were adopted from the farmer group class capability improvement guidebook (2018). After that, the researcher confirmed and discussed these factors with expert respondents regarding their ability to explain and identify strengths/weaknesses in an effort to improve farmer group class. The identification of these factors can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Identify Internal Factors

	Internal Factors
Strength	
1	Conduct training held by groups or extension workers
2	Management of plants, pests and diseases is carried out in an integrated manner
3	Can use agricultural technology well
4	Producing guaranteed quality of production results
Debilitation	
1	Not evaluating farming problems with groups
2	Not having enough capital in farming
3	The group does not have cooperation with capital providers, both formal/informal
4	Do not have a pooled fund pooled
5	Not having regular group meetings
6	Agricultural extension workers are less active in fostering groups as a whole
7	Less activity of members in the group
8	Group administration is not well organized

Identify External Factors

Identification of external factors in SWOT analysis involves assessing opportunities and threats originating from the environment outside the farmer group. By understanding these factors, farmer groups can formulate more effective strategies to take advantage of opportunities and overcome threats in the farming business environment in an effort to improve group class. External factors in this study were adopted from the farmer group class capability improvement guidebook (2018). After that, the researcher confirmed and discussed these factors with expert respondents regarding their ability to explain and identify opportunities/threats in an effort to improve farmer group class.. These factors are as follows.

Table 5. Identify External Factors

	External Factors
Opportunity	
1	Have clear market access
2	The production can be sold immediately
3	High demand volume
4	Good quality of agricultural land.
5	There are opportunities for effective fertilizer subsidies and distribution from the government
6	Availability of adequate infrastructure from the government
7	Agricultural land protection policy from the government
Threat	
1	There are always fluctuations in the price of production
2	Lack of availability of adequate agricultural technology
3	Lack of access to the use of agricultural technology
4	Lack of production assistance from the government such as seeds, pesticides

Source: Guidelines for improving the class ability of farmer groups, 2018

Internal Factor Evaluation (IFAS)

The analysis was carried out to find out the weight and rating values of internal factors, namely the strengths and weaknesses of a farmer group, namely using IFAS matrix analysis. In the farmer group in Bermani Ilir District, it is known to have internal factors of strength which amount to 4 indicators and 8 for weakness factors. The results of the IFAS matrix of farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District in an effort to improve the class of farmer groups can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE)

Internal Factors	Weight	Rating	Score
Strength			
1 Conduct training held by groups or extension workers	0,086	3,500	0,302
2 Management of plants, pests and diseases is carried out in an integrated manner	0,086	3,611	0,309
3 Can use agricultural technology well	0,085	3,548	0,303
4 Producing guaranteed quality of production results	0,086	3,571	0,308
Total			**1,222**
Debilitation			
1 Not evaluating farming problems with groups	0,081	2,357	0,191
2 Not having enough capital in farming	0,083	2,222	0,185
3 The group does not have cooperation with capital providers, both formal/informal	0,076	2,079	0,157
4 Do not have a pooled fund	0,080	2,421	0,194
5 Not having regular group meetings	0,080	2,540	0,204
6 Agricultural extension workers are less active in fostering groups as a whole	0,089	2,484	0,221
7 The activeness of members in the group is less active	0,084	2,556	0,216
8 Well-organized group administration	0,083	1,913	0,159
Total			**1,527**
Difference			**-0,305**

Source: primary data processed, 2024

The results of the IFAS matrix analysis on farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District consisted of internal factors of strengths and weaknesses. The weight values and ratings of farmer groups can be seen in Table 5.4. It is known that the total multiplication of weights and ratings on the strength indicator is 1,222, while the weakness indicator is 1,526. The difference between the strength and weakness factor is -0.305 which states that there are more weaknesses than strengths. In the strength indicator, the highest score or the most important factor is in the management of plants, pests and diseases carried out in an integrated manner obtained with a score of 0.309, then the next important factor is Producing guaranteed quality of production with a yield of 0.308, Being able to use agricultural technology well 0.303, and Conducting training held by groups or extension workers 0.302.

In terms of weakness factors, it is known that there are 8 indicators of weakness of farmer groups that are analyzed using the IFAS matrix. The total score value of the IFAS matrix on the weakness factor is seen based on the lowest total score value as the factor that has the highest importance, this factor is found in the weakness of agricultural extension workers who are not active in fostering

the group as a whole which has a value of 0.221, then continued with the active factor of members in the group of 0.216 and conducting regular group meetings 0.204. While the lowest score is in the factor of the group having cooperation with both formal/informal capital providers with a value of 0.157.

External Factor Evaluation (EFAS)

The analysis was carried out to determine the weight and rating values of external factors, namely opportunities and threats in a farmer group, namely using EFAS matrix analysis. In the farmer group in Bermani Ilir District, it is known to have external factors of opportunity which amount to 7 indicators and 4 for threat factors. The results of the EFAS matrix of farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District in an effort to improve the class of farmer groups can be seen in Table 5.7

Table 7. External Factor Evaluation (EFE)

	External Factors	Weight	Rating	Score
Opportunity				
1	Have clear market access	0,094	3,675	0,344
2	The production can be sold immediately	0,091	3,595	0,327
3	High demand volume	0,092	3,690	0,341
4	Good quality of agricultural land.	0,092	3,563	0,328
5	There are opportunities for effective fertilizer subsidies and distribution from the government	0,090	3,627	0,326
6	Availability of adequate infrastructure from the government	0,092	3,643	0,335
7	Agricultural land protection policy from the government	0,092	3,627	0,335
Total				**2,336**
Threat				
1	There are always fluctuations in the price of production	0,080	1,905	0,152
2	Lack of availability of adequate agricultural technology	0,091	2,460	0,224
3	Lack of access to the use of agricultural technology	0,092	2,468	0,228
4	Lack of production assistance from the government such as seeds, pesticides	0,094	2,571	0,241
Total				**0,845**
Difference				**1,491**

Source: primary data processed, 2024

The results of the EFAS matrix analysis on farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District consisted of external factors, opportunities, and threats. The weight values and ratings of farmer groups can be seen in Table 5.5. It is known that the total multiplication of weights and ratings on the opportunity indicator is 2.336, while for the threat indicator it is 0.845. The difference between the opportunity and threat factors is 1,491 which states that there are more opportunities than

threats. In the opportunity indicator, the highest value or the most important factor is to have clear market access which gets a score of 0.344, then the next important factor is the number of high demand with a yield of 0.341, the availability of adequate infrastructure and agricultural land protection policies with a value of 0.335. Meanwhile, the factor that has the lowest score value is found in the factor of the opportunity for effective fertilizer subsidies and distribution from the government with a score of 0.326.

In terms of threat factors, it is known that there are 4 indicators of threat to farmer groups that are analyzed using the EFAS matrix. The total score value of the EFAS matrix on the threat factor is seen based on the lowest total score value as the factor that has the highest importance, this factor is found in the weakness of production input assistance from the government which has a value of 0.241, then continued with the factor of availability of access to the use of agricultural technology of 0.228, the availability of adequate agricultural technology of 0.224. Meanwhile, the lowest score is in the factor of fluctuations in the price of production with a value of 0.152.

SWOT Matrix Analysis

The SWOT matrix on farmer groups is carried out to find out what strategies can be created to improve the class of farmer groups. The results of the SWOT matrix analysis consist of SO, WO, ST and WT strategies. The So strategy produces 5 strategies, WO 4 strategies, ST 4 strategies and WT 3 strategies.

Analysis of Strategy Alternative Selection

The results obtained are based on the IFE matrix and the EFE matrix, so a SWOT diagram is made in the next step. The process of internal and external factors in the management and use of irrigation water obtained will be matched first with the average score value of IFE and EFE on the SWOT diagram. The value of the difference between strengths and weaknesses in the IFE matrix that fills the x-axis in the SWOT diagram. Meanwhile, the value of the opportunity-threat difference in the EFE matrix that fills the y-axis in the SWOT diagram. The value of the internal factor difference in the IFE matrix (strength 1.221 – weakness 1.526) is -0.305 which fills the x-axis. The value of the difference of external factors in the EFE matrix (chance 2.337 – threat 0.844) is 1.492 which fills the y-axis. The results of the SWOT diagram can be seen in the following Figure 2:

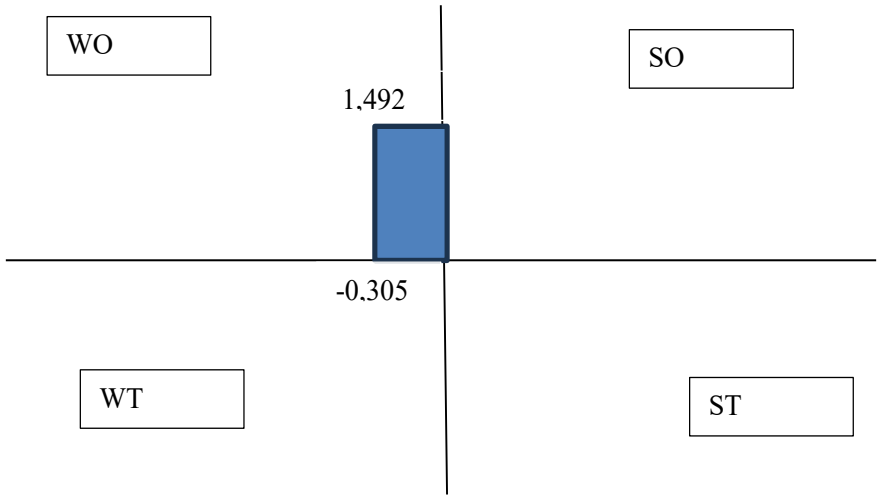


Figure 2 SWOT Quadrant

Based on the SWOT Diagram that has been obtained (Figure 2), it is concluded that at this time the strategy that can be carried out by farmer groups in efforts to improve the class of farmer groups is in the WO quadrant. This means that farmer groups can take advantage of existing opportunities to minimize existing weaknesses. Based on the results of the analysis, it is also stated that at this time, there are still many weaknesses owned by farmer groups in running their groups and efforts to improve the group class, thus the strategies that can be carried out are as follows.

1. Improving Evaluation and Regular Meetings to Utilize Market Access by Improving Farming Performance.
2. Optimizing Joint Funds and Capital to Increase Sales and Production Quality.
3. Increasing the quantity and quality of extension workers to take advantage of opportunities for good production results.
4. Improving Training and Administrative Management to Utilize Fertilizer Subsidies, Infrastructure and Land Protection Policies.

Priority Strategy

The analysis used for determining priority strategies is using the QSPM analysis tool or Quantitative Strategy Planning Matrix. According to Baroto et al. (2014), the QSPM matrix was used to obtain the main priority alternatives that had previously been identified through SWOT matrix analysis. In the previous analysis, an analysis has been carried out on alternative strategies to increase the class of farmer groups. In the SWOT matrix analysis, 4 strategies have been found. In the analysis, it is known that the position of farmer groups is in quadrant II (W-O). Where the quadrant is the best position in running a business. So it can be concluded that the strategy that will be continued in the QSPM

analysis is the strategy in quadrant II or the WO strategy. The QSPM analysis on the increase in the class of farmer groups can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9 Selection of Priority Strategies (QSPM)

It	Alternative Strategies	Total TAS	Rank
1	Improving Evaluation and Regular Meetings to Utilize Market Access by Improving Farming Performance.	5,44	II
2	Optimizing Joint Funds and Capital to Increase Sales and Production Quality.	4,4	IV
3	Increasing the quantity and quality of extension workers to take advantage of opportunities for good production results.	4,48	III
4	Improving Training and Administrative Management to Utilize Fertilizer Subsidies, Infrastructure and Land Protection Policies	5,65	I
Total		**19,97**	

Source: primary data processed, 2024

Based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out, the highest TAS value is found in the fourth strategy with a value of 5.65 (rank I). Thus, extension workers and related institutions must be able to improve training and administrative management to take advantage of Fertilizer Subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies. This happens because the administration of the group in Bermani Ilir District has not been well organized because the majority do not know and understand for sure about administrative activities. At this time, there are generally only guest books, member lists and others. However, the administration regarding finances has not been owned by the farmer group, making them hampered.

Training should not only focus on agricultural techniques but also include managerial aspects, such as financial management and farming administration. Thus, farmers are not only skilled in farming but also able to manage their businesses well. Research shows that this holistic approach can increase the competitiveness of agricultural products in the market (Hasibuan, 2022). Administrative management in the context of agriculture includes data management, resource management, and yield monitoring. Good administration allows farmers to more easily access market information, obtain subsidies, and utilize agricultural technology. A study shows that a transparent and accountable administrative system can increase farmers' trust in government programs and facilitate their access to resources (Sudarwati and Nasution, 2024).

The strategy of improving training and administrative management to utilize Fertilizer Subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies as a strategy that has the main priority can be used as material for improving the class of farmer groups. This can be seen from the suitability of the strategy with the assessment indicators of the farmer group's ability class. Some indicators that must be assessed in improving the class of farmer groups, these aspects are:

1. Planning ability

Farmer groups are expected to have the ability to plan their farmer group activities in writing and recorded. With the availability of a study plan or a farmer group meeting plan and a farmer group business plan which can be in the form of the preparation of the Definitive Plan for Group Needs (RDKK) of Subsidized Fertilizers, the preparation of a schedule for planting paddy fields so that the use of irrigation water can be conveyed to the officers of the farmer organization that uses water. Farmers are also expected to be able to make a simple map of agricultural land managed by members so that food crops can be used as Sustainable Food Agricultural Land (LP2B). Thus, the land of the designated group members can be protected and developed consistently to produce staple foods for food independence, security and sovereignty.

2. Organizing ability

By implementing increased training and administrative management to utilize fertilizer subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies, the group will have a clear organizational structure, have rules and norms that apply to its members, the farmer group will have complete bookkeeping administration in the form of member books, activity books, guest books, attendance list books, cash books, contribution books, meeting minutes books, Inventory book, and activity plan book

3. Ability to carry out activities

The implementation of improved training and administrative management to take advantage of fertilizer subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies, the group carries out regular meetings so that farmers who are members of the farmer group will have learning activities in the farmer group and the process of farmer learning activities will be able to improve the knowledge, attitude, and skills of farmers in carrying out their farming activities. The implementation of the training will minimize the obstacles encountered in farming activities because these problems will be solved together in farmer groups (Mahendrayanti, 2020; Afifah and Ilyas, 2021). Capital fertilization in farmer groups and the use of information and technology in farmer groups will occur if training and administrative management to utilize fertilizer subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies are implemented regularly and sustainably so that the improvement of the welfare of farmers and their families can be carried out (Hasibuan et al., 2022).

4. Ability to control and report

The implementation of improved training and administrative management to take advantage of fertilizer subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies, farmer groups will carry out the evaluation of farming that is carried out, farming evaluation activities can be in the form of evaluation of farming activity planning, evaluation of farming implementation, farming evaluation by involving elements from inside and outside farmer groups, as well as related institutions/agencies.

5. Ability to develop farmer group leadership

Farmer groups in the implementation of increased training to utilize fertilizer subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies will have capacity development of farmer group administrators, there will be preparation of candidates for replacement of administrators, farmer group management has a certain period for the replacement of administrators which will be contained in the farmer group administration book in the form of articles of association and bylaws of farmer groups based on the agreement of group members, So that there will be a replacement of the management by prioritizing managerial, agribusiness and entrepreneurial skills.

Furthermore, the strategic priority with rank 2 is to increase evaluation and regular meetings to take advantage of market access by improving farming performance with a TAS value of 5.44. A comprehensive evaluation paves the way for mature improvement recommendations within farmer groups. Regular evaluations allow farmer groups to present program implementation reports, outlining the achievements achieved and the obstacles faced (Yaumi and Zulkarnaini, 2024). This information is the basis for a comprehensive evaluation by group members, village governments, and other relevant parties. According to Rustandi (2017), the institutional evaluation of the group is very important to find out how far efforts have been made and what are the factors that contribute to success and obstacles. This evaluation also helps in aligning program goals and ensuring that the program can run more effectively and efficiently. Therefore, regular evaluations and meetings in farmer groups are very important to ensure the success of the program and improve farming performance.

The third priority strategy is to increase the quantity and quality of extension workers to take advantage of opportunities for good production with a TAS value of 4.48. Agricultural extension workers not only function as teachers, but also as facilitators and consultants for farmers. According to research by Wicaksono (2020), extension workers have a responsibility to educate farmers about efficient and sustainable agricultural techniques, as well as help them overcome problems faced in farming. By improving the quality of extension workers through continuous training, farmers will get the latest information on agricultural technology and better management practices. In addition, an adequate quantity of extension workers is essential to reach all farmers, especially in rural areas.

The last ranking strategy priority is to optimize mutual funds and capital to increase sales and production quality with a TAS value of 4.4. Optimization of mutual funds and capital involves the efficient management of financial resources owned by farmer groups. The process of forming a joint venture fund begins with awareness of the importance of joint funds that can be used to finance members' agricultural businesses. Farmer groups raise initial capital from members' contributions, then collaborate with local financial institutions to

strengthen capital and provide wider access to members. Optimizing funds with farmer groups and capital is a strategic step to increase sales and production quality (Sugianto and Utama, 2021). Through collective financing schemes, transparent management, and the adoption of modern technology, farmer groups can improve operational efficiency and market competitiveness. This strategy not only increases crop yields but also improves farmers' welfare in a sustainable manner.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

1. Based on the identification of internal and external factors, it is known that the total multiplication of weights and ratings on the strength indicator is 1,222, while for the weakness indicator it is 1,526. The difference between the strength and weakness factor is -0.305 which states that there are more weaknesses than strengths. Meanwhile, in terms of external factors, it is known that the total multiplication of weights and ratings on the opportunity indicator is 2.336, while for the threat indicator it is 0.845. The difference between the opportunity and threat factors is 1,491 which states that there are more opportunities than threats.
2. The results of the analysis that have been carried out state that at this time the strategy of farmer groups in increasing the group class is in the WO strategy. Of the 4 alternative strategies obtained, the fourth strategy, namely Improving Training and Administrative Management to Utilize Fertilizer Subsidies, infrastructure and land protection policies is the strategy with the first priority as a strategy to increase the class of farmer groups in Bermani Ilir District, Kepahiang Regency.

Suggestion

Based on the research results obtained, in an effort to improve group classes, the role of agricultural extension workers is greatly needed to assist groups in carrying out farming activities properly. Currently, extension workers in Bermani Ilir District are still lacking to accommodate all existing farmer groups. With the realization of the role and sufficient number of extension workers, it is hoped that it can help groups to actively and routinely evaluate farming activities so that farmers are also active in groups. Extension workers as companions to farmers in increasing farmer independence and welfare have an important role in agricultural development, so it is hoped that the government can improve the quality, quantity, and welfare of agricultural extension workers

who are catalysts for change for farmers and farmer groups. In addition, it is important to have administrative training in groups, because currently the majority of groups do not understand and implement good administration in groups, thus inhibiting the improvement of farmer group classes.

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