

## The Role of Farmer Group in Empowering the Household Economy of Farmers in the Archipelagic Area

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### Abstract

Farmer groups have an important role in the economic empowerment of the group members. This is based on the view that, in general, the farmer group members are still entangled by various obstacles so that efforts to develop their farming businesses are often not optimal and ultimately affect the level of welfare of their own households. This research was done in a quantitative method with a case study approach studying Wijaya Farmer Group in Waiheru village, Ambon City. This research location was selected because Waiheru village was one of the largest vegetable producing or supplying areas in Ambon City. There were 20 key informants participated from a total of 40 members of Wijaya Farmer Group. The data was analyzed following stages proposed by Moustakes (1994). The results show that the income of Wijaya Farmer Group from the vegetable production was still relatively high at IDR 19,800,000 per year with an average annual income of IDR 64,223,500. Meanwhile, Wijaya Farmer Group was in the 'fairly playing a role' category in empowering the group members' household economy. In addition, the strategies applied for the development of farmer groups included developing the creativity of farmer group members and the access to capital.

### Keywords

Role of farmer groups; empowerment; household economy.



### I. Introduction

The role of farmer groups in various farming activities has become an interesting topic of discussion among various groups and has often been discussed in recent years (Nugroho, 2018; Falangi, 2020; Nabilah & Muhtadi, 2021; Handayani, 2019). This phenomenon implies that the agricultural sector has played an important role in the economic development of a region. It is proven from the provision of employment and food, and its contribution to the country's foreign exchange through exports and etc. Moreover, the fact shows that most of the land use in Indonesia has been naturally designated as agricultural land and almost 50% of the total workforce still depend on the agricultural sector for their needs. For this reason, the government's role in the agricultural sector is absolutely necessary as an effort to develop the economy and improve the living standards of the farmer community. The economic condition of the population is a condition that describes human life that has economic score (Shah et al, 2020). Economic growth is still an important goal in a country's economy, especially for developing countries like Indonesia (Magdalena and Suhatman, 2020).

Moreover, the lives of farmers are always close to poverty as a result of poor level of knowledge and education, unbalanced information and limited access to assets and other factors. One way to overcome this problem is through the formation of farmer groups. Farmer groups are non-formally bound farmer groups and formed on the basis of common interests, similar environmental conditions (social, economic and resources) and similar goals (Maulana, 2019; Nainggolan, 2014). Meanwhile, Raintung (2021) argued that the farmer groups are a form of farmer associations that can be used as a place for counseling.

Similarly, Primadani (2022) mentioned that the farmer groups are a group of farmers, breeders, and plantation workers formed on the basis of similar environmental conditions (social, economic and resources) and familiarity which aims to improve and develop the members' businesses. Generally, these farmer groups can be found in rural areas, where people in rural areas work in the agricultural sector and its sub-sectors. Kelbulan, et al (2018) argued that the success of a farmer group can be seen through the achievement of the results of the farmer group. This condition is the main goal of every farmer group formed by rural communities.

Maluku Province has a larger ocean area than its land area. From a total of 581.376 km<sup>2</sup>, the ocean area is 527.191 km<sup>2</sup> and the land area is only 54.185 km<sup>2</sup>. This geographical condition of Maluku Province is what causes it to be known as an archipelagic area. Meanwhile, plantation activities in Maluku have been carried out for generations so that they have their own characteristics in the land use compared to other areas. In addition, social and cultural factors have a great influence on the management and utilization of plantation crops. Data from Statistics Indonesia of Maluku Province in 2021 noted that the potential land area in Maluku was 775.586 ha, while its functional land was 41.012 ha. The ownership of this large potential and functional land area was not followed by the increase in number of farmer groups. The Maluku Extension Coordinating Board released the data in 2021 and mentioned that there were only 164 farmer groups formed in the period of 1995 to 2021.

Waiheru Village is one of the villages in Baguala District, Ambon City, Maluku Province that utilizes the existence of farmer groups as a forum to develop knowledge and skills in achieving the welfare of their group members. Wijaya Farmer Group is a farmer group assisted by the representative office of Bank Indonesia (BI) in Maluku Province since 2014. Wijaya Farmer Group consists as follows:

**Table 1.** Board of Management of Wijaya Farmer Group, Waiheru Village, Teluk Ambon Baguala District in 2021

| Name of Member | Position  | Name of Member | Position |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------|
| Darwis         | Chairman  | Umar           | Member   |
| Tasri          | Secretary | Usman          | Member   |
| Idul           | Treasurer | Majid          | Member   |
| Rizal          | Member    | H. Samrin      | Member   |
| Isal           | Member    | Siti           | Member   |
| Saharudin      | Member    | Ole            | Member   |
| Adi            | Member    | Saripudin      | Member   |
| Harianto       | Member    | Juda           | Member   |
| Kasmawati      | Member    | Purwati        | Member   |
| Suharni        | Member    | Majid          | Member   |

*Source: Research data (processed), 2021*

Interesting things about the existence of Waiheru village and the existing farmer groups are that the majority of farmer group members are immigrants from Bantaeng, South Sulawesi and only a few local people in Waiheru village who work as farmers and are registered as members of farmer groups. The existing main farming activity includes vegetable farming in a rental land area. Types of vegetables grown include water spinach, green mustard and spinach. These vegetables are supplied to traditional and modern markets in Ambon City so that Waiheru village is also known as the main supplier of vegetables in Ambon City. This condition certainly has an impact on the income of members of Wijaya Farmer Group.

Studies related to farmer groups had been carried out since 1968, mainly discussing about the mass guidance by the Indonesian government. However, the interest in the topic of farmer group research has only intensified since 1990s. A study on the role of farmer groups on the economic conditions of farmers was carried out by Maulana (2019) which showed that the role of farmer groups truly touched the members of farmer groups was as a mean for learning (48.78%) and cooperation (63.41%). A different finding was actually shown by Nazaruddin & Anwarudin (2019) who examined the effect of strengthening the farmer groups on the participation and motivation of young farmers in agricultural businesses in Leuwiliang, Bogor. They found that strengthening the farmer groups was the most important element in the farmer groups themselves. Meanwhile, the participation and motivation were elements in the medium category in farmer groups.

In relation to the motivation of farmer group members in improving group functions in general, Sukanata, et al (2015) and Effendy & Apriani (2018) also found similar results that the motivation occupied the medium category in the farmer groups in Lebak Regency, Banten Province. Researches by Mailina Harahap & Herman (2018); Wuysang (2014); Saptanno et al (2020) found that the social capital in the form of trust, social networks, social responsibility, norms and customs and cooperation were important aspects and real manifestations of an institution (farmer group) that was dynamic and had a significant influence on the income of group members. In addition, other researchers also found that the farmer group capacity was also determined by the participation and cohesiveness of the farmer group members (Astuti, 2019; Moniaga, 2015; Ruhimat, 2017).

Furthermore, regarding the role of farmer groups, a research by Hadi, et al (2019) revealed that the role of farmer groups was quite successful in encouraging their members to implement an organic farming system. This condition was caused by the farmers' lack of knowledge, low level of awareness and etc. However, the role of farmer groups could be in the form of a forum for sharing information, a place for discussion and gain knowledge, or as a provider of facilities and infrastructure in the farming activities (Lestari & Idris, 2019).

Various findings in the studies above show that the farmer groups have a crucial role in every farming business carried out by the community, especially in rural communities. Moreover, the rural communities have limitations in their efforts to improve their household welfare through farming. However, these studies still focused on the farming developed by local communities only. Meanwhile, the reality shows that in Waiheru village, Ambon City, Maluku Province, the community have homogeneous characteristics (natives and immigrants), so that the application of agricultural system will be different. Therefore, this research has a research opportunity on the contribution of knowledge related to the role of farmer groups in the archipelagic area. For this reason, the research problems in this study are: "How much is the income of farmer group members?"; "What is the role of farmer groups in increasing the members' income?"; and "What is the strategy of farmer groups in increasing the income of farmer group members?" Thus, this study aims to understand the role of farmer groups in increasing the farmers' household income in the archipelagic area.

## **II. Research Method**

This study was done in a qualitative method with a case study approach. The qualitative method was chosen considering that it was very flexible in narrating the social and cultural dynamics of society and could provide opportunities for the researchers to interpret empirical facts (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Meanwhile, the case study approach in qualitative studies had also become popular among academics to narrate various social, economic and cultural issues by paying attention to the credibility of information (Singh & Mukherjee, 2018; Singgalen, 2020). These considerations were fit to the conditions in Waiheru Village, Baguala District, Ambon City, Maluku Province. In addition, Waiheru Village was chosen as the research location as it is one of the villages with vegetable plantation land and is the main supplier of vegetables in Ambon City.

In-depth interview and observation technique were used as data collection techniques. The key informants involved in the in-depth interview process selected based on the criteria were people who had become members of Wijaya Farmer Group. There were 20 key informants participated from a total of 40 members of Wijaya Farmer Group who were willing to participate and be interviewed. Observations were made by visiting the research location to ensure that there was a relationship between the role of farmer groups and the economy (income). After the data was collected, it was analyzed following the stages proposed by Moustakes (1994) as follows: First, organize and transcript all the data collected in the field (in local language and in Indonesian). Second, decode the data by making notes about the one considered important. Last, eliminate the data unrelated to the research theme. In this stage, a horizontalization process was carried out by grouping statements with similar value and removing the one not relevant or overlapping data to the research theme to avoid deviations. These statements were grouped into “meaning units” and given details about the informants’ experience using a language that was clear and easy to understand. These are the focus of research discussion as well as the results in the Results and Discussion section.

## **III. Result and Discussion**

### **3.1 Characteristics of Wijaya Farmer Group**

As explained earlier, the Waiheru village community consisted of the native Maluku community and immigrant communities. The migrants from Bantaeng, South Sulawesi generally carried out the farming business among the Wijaya Farmer Group members. The land they used was a rental land area (not privately owned land) in which they planted vegetable crops. The profile of Wijaya Farmer Group was various in terms of age, education level, length of farming and the rental land area. Most of the Wijaya Farmer Group members were still in the productive age, and in average, they are 27 to 55 years old. The age category showed that most of them were still fit to do physical work and have a quite high work motivation so that it would be possible to positively affect the increase in the income to be achieved.

Furthermore, the farmers’ education level would also affect them in analyzing problems in the field, the ability to have a good critical thinking and to solve problems related to the economic conditions as an effort to fulfill the household needs (Alfred, 2011). In the context of Wijaya Farmer Group members, their education level varied greatly, ranging from elementary school to high school. Most of them are elementary school graduates (11 group members) and have been working in the farming sector for 1 year to more than 12 years. Each of them rents a land to farm and the land ranges from the

narrow to the wide category. However, most of them only have a medium-wide category of rental land area of 0.11 ha to 0.19 ha. The details can be seen in the following Table 2:

**Table 2.** Age, Education Level, Length of Farming, and Rental Area

| <b>Age Category</b> |                           |                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Age (Year)</b>   | <b>Informant (Person)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| 25-29               | 2                         | 10                    |
| 30-34               | 4                         | 20                    |
| 35-39               | 4                         | 20                    |
| 40-44               | 4                         | 20                    |
| 45-49               | 3                         | 15                    |
| > 50                | 3                         | 15                    |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>40</b>                 | <b>100</b>            |

| <b>Education Level Category</b> |                           |                       |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Education Level</b>          | <b>Informant (Person)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| Elementary School               | 11                        | 55                    |
| Middle School                   | 7                         | 35                    |
| High School                     | 2                         | 10                    |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>40</b>                 | <b>100</b>            |

| <b>Length of Farming Category</b> |                           |                       |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Length of Farming (Year)</b>   | <b>Informant (Person)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| 1-5                               | 6                         | 30                    |
| 6-10                              | 7                         | 35                    |
| >10                               | 7                         | 35                    |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>40</b>                 | <b>100</b>            |

| <b>Rental Area Category</b> |             |                           |                       |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Land Category</b>        | <b>Area</b> | <b>Informant (Person)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| Narrow                      | 0.05-0.10   | 7                         | 35                    |
| Medium                      | 0.11-0.19   | 11                        | 55                    |
| Wide                        | 0.20-0.24   | 2                         | 10                    |
| <b>Total</b>                |             | <b>40</b>                 | <b>100</b>            |

*Source: Field Data (processed data), 2021*

### 3.2 Farming Production and Income

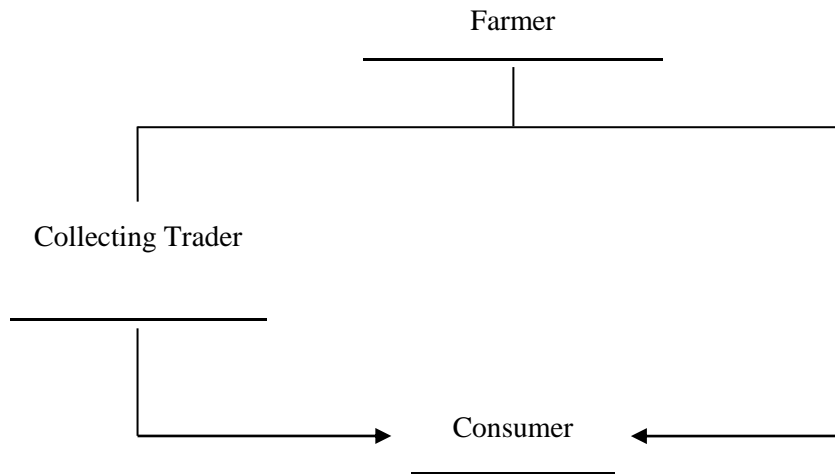
In the context of Wijaya Farmer Group, the land area was related with the farming productivity that could be achieved by each member of the farmer group. This happened as in the agricultural sector, the production process highly required the availability of land as the main production factor. The empirical findings of this study indicate that the informants plant water spinach, green mustard, and spinach. The amount of harvest of each vegetable is highly different. The highest average production is achieved by water spinach and the lowest is green mustard. The details can be seen in the following Table 3:

**Table 3.** Production Average

| Production Average (Bunch / Year) |               |               |         |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------|
|                                   | Water Spinach | Green Mustard | Spinach |
| <b>Total</b>                      | 163.500       | 121.540       | 143.300 |
| <b>Average</b>                    | 8.320         | 6.327         | 7.215   |

*Source: Field data (processed), 2021*

Table 3. shows that the water spinach has the highest average production compared to the other 2 types of vegetables. This happened because it was more favored by the community in Ambon City, so that many informants tended to choose to plant it. Further, it was found that the process for marketing various types of vegetables did not take so much time, so that the price offered was still affordable for the consumers. The following Figure 1. describes the marketing flow for vegetables done by Wijaya Farmer Group:



**Figure 1.** Marketing Flow of Vegetables in Ambon City

The marketing flow of vegetables in Ambon City as presented above shows that there are only 3 marketing institutions, namely farmer, collecting trader and consumer. At the first marketing channel, the farmers could sell vegetables directly to consumers who came to buy. Usually, these consumers or buyers came from the area around the plantation land. Another channel model was that the farmers directly sold their harvested vegetables to several traditional markets. While the third marketing channel was when the farmers sold the vegetables to the collecting traders who had become regular customers.

According to the researchers' observation, the collecting traders also harvested the vegetables with the farmers and then took them to several traditional markets in Ambon City, such as Mardika market, Wayame market and Rumah Tiga market. The farmers' income was the measure of income received by the farmers from their farming activities calculated from the difference between revenue and production costs. The average income received by the Wijaya Farmer Group members every month was around IDR 4,000,000 to IDR 5,351,000 and annually around IDR 64.2 million.

### **3.3 The Role of Wijaya Farmer Group as An Effort to Improve The Household Economy of Group Members**

The farmer group had an important and strategic role in the development of the agricultural sector. The emergence of farmer groups began from the fact that each

individual would not be able to meet his own needs and even it was possible that it would require greater costs. Meanwhile, the average farmer had not yet maximized his income. A different and better condition would be possible to happen if the farmers could work together and keep the production costs low. In the context of Wijaya Farmer Group, there were several roles farmer groups that had been identified, including as a learning platform, a forum for collaboration and a production unit.

The role of Wijaya Farmer Group as a learning platform in Waiheru Village is considered good with an average score of 48.62%. The indicator of cooperating with sources of information needed in the learning process ranks the highest at 74%. However, there are still several indicators with low scores, especially the ones related to the role of Wijaya Farmer Group as a learning platform, for example formulating collective agreements, solving problems, planning and conducting periodic meetings, providing motivation and understanding the wishes and opinions of group members. These various indicators are in the ‘poor’ category and this showed that Wijaya Farmer Group still needed a strong encouragement in overcoming the lack of farmer group’s role as a learning platform related to the organizational management. Furthermore, this condition could also happen because the average of formal education level of the members of Wijaya Farmer Group was still low, so that their managerial abilities could also be affected, as shown in Table 4. below:

**Table 4.** Roles of Wijaya Farmer Group as A Learning Platform

| No             | Indicator  | Score (%)    | Category    |
|----------------|--|--------------|-------------|
| 1              | Formulate collective agreements and solve problems in carrying out activities. | 53           | Fair        |
| 2              | Understand the wishes and opinions and problems of group members.              | 56           | Fair        |
| 3              | Provide motivation for group members.  | 39           | Poor        |
| 4              | Plan and prepare for learning needs.   | 38           | Poor        |
| 5              | Cooperate with sources of information needed in the learning process.          | 74           | Good        |
| 6              | Plan and conduct regular meetings.   | 54           | Fair        |
| 7              | Carry out meetings and learning.   | 37           | Poor        |
| 8              | Activeness in learning activities.   | 38           | Poor        |
| <i>Average</i> |  | <b>48.62</b> | <b>Fair</b> |

*Source: Field data (processed), 2021*

*\*Note: Poor, Fair, and Good refer to how well the role is played.*

Moreover, the role of farmer group as a forum for cooperation is at 57.5% in the ‘good’ category. It indicated that the existence of Wijaya Farmer Group was appreciated by the group members as a forum for cooperation. Further, there are several significant indicators in the ‘good’ category, including increasing the atmosphere of openness in the group, conducting cooperation and partnerships with providers of production facilities and creating an atmosphere of cooperation. These various indicators played an important role because they were facilitated by the togetherness as migrants from Bantaeng, South Sulawesi. In Ambon City, there was a fairly large association of South Sulawesi residents. This sense of togetherness was also what caused each member of Wijaya Farmer Group to have a sense of mutual trust between fellow group members, making it easier to work together.

**Table 5.** Role of Wijaya Farmer Group as A Forum for Cooperation

| No             | Indicator   | Score (%)   | Category    |
|----------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1              | Increase the atmosphere of openness in the group.                   | 63          | Good        |
| 2              | Division of tasks between groups.                                   | 52          | Fair        |
| 3              | Encourage discipline and responsibility among members.              | 60          | Good        |
| 4              | Cooperate in providing agricultural facilities and services.        | 47          | Fair        |
| 5              | Cooperating and partnering with providers of production facilities. | 72          | Good        |
| 6              | Availability of capital for groups.                                 | 37          | Poor        |
| 7              | Create an atmosphere of cooperation.                                | 74          | Good        |
| 8              | Adhere to agreements between groups and other parties.              | 55          | Fair        |
| <b>Average</b> |   | <b>57.5</b> | <b>Fair</b> |

*Source: Field data (processed data), 2021*

*\*Note: Poor, Fair, and Good refer to how well the role is played.*

Next, the role of Wijaya Farmer Group as a production unit could be illustrated through indicators in the 'high' category, such as establishing partnerships related to production units by 62%. This condition illustrated that every member of Wijaya Farmer Group realized that the collaboration could actually benefit them. However, the average score related to the role of Wijaya Farmer Group as a production unit is only at 45.37% in the 'fair' category. This condition implied that the role of farmer group as a production unit needed to be continuously encouraged so that the presence of Wijaya Farmer Group could be increasingly felt in terms of production units. Table 6. below presents the role of Wijaya Farmer Group as a production unit:

**Table 6.** Role of Wijaya Farmer Group as A Production Unit

| No             | Indicator  | Score (%)    | Category    |
|----------------|--|--------------|-------------|
| 1              | Obey and carry out the agreement that has been made.                                 | 51           | Fair        |
| 2              | Facilitate the application of technology.  | 47           | Fair        |
| 3              | Establish production-related partnerships.   | 62           | Good        |
| 4              | Increase the sustainability of production and the preservation of natural resources. | 54           | Fair        |
| 5              | Evaluate joint activities.   | 37           | Poor        |
| 6              | Compile and implement group needs.   | 40           | Fair        |
| 7              | Analyze and assess the farming business carried out and formulate improvements.      | 31           | Poor        |
| 8              | Administrative management.   | 41           | Fair        |
| <b>Average</b> |  | <b>45.37</b> | <b>Fair</b> |

*Source: Field data (processed data), 2021*

*\*Note: Poor, Fair, and Good refer to how well the role is played.*



### 3.4 Strategies of Wijaya Farmer Group in Empowering The Members' Economy

Empowerment was the effort for the Wijaya Farmer Group members to be economically independent based on their capabilities as their strength. Karsidi (2001) argued that the efforts to empower the farmer group members could be done through efficiency and productivity of human resource development, mastery of technology and institutional strengthening and improvement of economic and social facilities and infrastructure. Meanwhile, Astuti (2019) emphasized that the empowerment was always related to the community as the empowered party and the caring party as the party who empower. In other words, the empowerment could not be separated from the potential of farmer groups themselves.

In the context of Wijaya Farmer Group, the potential as the farmer group's strength was in the form of openness in the farmer group, highly experienced in farming, cooperation between farmers to empower each other and a sense of responsibility among group members to advance their farmer group. Besides, Wijaya Farmer Group had several opportunities to further advance its group members through the application of technology, collaboration with providers of production facilities and information sources, and partnerships with other parties. However, they had several limitations in carrying out their plantation activities, such as the low availability of capital, participation of group members, and education level of group members. Further, their other problems also included pests and diseases that often attacked their vegetable crops, the ownership of narrow land and the high price of vegetable seeds.

Facing with these various dynamics, the empowerment process should have a goal focusing on increasing the ability of group members to develop themselves in order to achieve a more prosperous life. Unfortunately, in carrying out these plantation activities, the farmers were also often faced with the fact that they had limited access to capital sources which was such an obstacle for the farmer groups and their members in increasing their income. On average, the farmers still relied on their own capital to develop their own farming business. Moreover, they only had poor rented land for their farming activities in which the land was an important production factor. This condition would certainly affect the efforts to increase the amount of production or harvest.

Another important influential factor was related to the poor education level of members of farmer group, where most of them were only elementary school graduates. Therefore, in terms of competitiveness, they would have a poor ability to compete. In fact, this competitiveness should be of a serious concern for every farmer group member as it would actually boost each member to increase the competitive advantages of the commodity they had. Kurniawan, et al (2021) stated that the competitive advantage of a commodity could be measured from how much resource allocation was used to achieve efficiency by utilizing raw materials around the settlement. The existence of this competitive advantage would actually increase the amount of income earned. The problems faced by the farmers made it clear that although they had various production factors, they still could not guarantee the welfare of the farmers' households. One of the efforts that could be done was to empower the farmers through farmer groups. This was crucial because it could minimize high production costs and lower information asymmetry barriers related to the use of appropriate technology, access to capital and price.

In addition, the farmers who were the members of farmer groups needed to consider the climatic and geographical conditions of the environment in which this farming business was done. In the context of Waiheru Village as a part of Maluku Province and an archipelagic area, the farming businesses should consider the characteristics of land, social, cultural and economic resources of the community so that the agricultural development process in the archipelagic area could be implemented and be sustainable.

## IV. Conclusion

Although Maluku is an archipelagic area, in general, the agricultural system implementation still relied on the local knowledge acquired passed for generations by the indigenous people of Maluku. Meanwhile, the agricultural system as the one studied in this study was mostly carried out by the immigrant communities based on the knowledge obtained from their area of origin. The following are conclusions based on the findings of this study:

1. The income earned by Wijaya Farmer Group through vegetable farming was still relatively high per year. The average income of members of Wijaya Farmer Group was IDR 64,223,500 per year with an estimated total income for a year of IDR 1,284,470,000.
2. The role of farmer groups in increasing the income of members of Wijaya Farmer Group had been considered quite good or quite fair. Wijaya Farmer Group as a learning platform had a score of 48.5 in the 'fair' category; as a forum for cooperation had a score of 57.12 in the 'good' category; and as a production unit had a score of 47.12 in the 'fair' category.
3. Wijaya Farmer Group had several strengths in terms of the openness within the group, and cooperation between groups. Meanwhile, their weaknesses included the poor availability of capital, low level of participation of group members, and poor education level. However, in terms of opportunities, they got the opportunity in the application of technology, cooperation with the providers of production facilities and partnership cooperation.
4. The efforts made by Wijaya Farmer Group to increase the members' income included developing the members' creativity and initiative in taking advantage of every opportunity.

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