

MyAgriShop: Linking Rural Farmers with Consumers to Increase Vegetable Sale and Improve Food Distribution During Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the vegetable industry in Sabah, farmers in rural areas, especially in Kundasang, have faced intermittent a problem to market the vegetables and fruits from their farms. This problem has intensified during this Covid-19 pandemic and probably beyond this period, as consumers and middle persons are limited due to the movement control order (MCO) to curb the disease but also because of the self-imposed discipline by households to travel less frequently to avoid being contracted with the disease. Farmers who usually sell their produce wholesale to hotels and restaurants directly or through distributors have an excess of highly perishable produce. Established vegetable supply chains, whether direct wholesale in contract farming, government agency intermediaries, or private intermediaries, are not active during the MCO. The MCO does not restrict the Inter-district movement of vegetables; however, farmers, particularly smallholders, do not have enough appropriate paperwork, networking, communications, assets, pricing strategy know-how, and financial resources to move their vegetables in high demand, i.e., households. These farmers also lack technological knowledge to extend the shelf life of their produce. To date, on-site scaled-up industrial factory to process their vegetables and fruit harvests is not economically sustainable. It is expected that the loss of income during the MCO will jeopardize smallholder farmers' ability to make a comeback after the MCO and Covid-19 are over. Because of the same MCO, households, on the other hand, could not purchase vegetables and fruits, as supermarkets and fresh markets have limited operating hours, while night markets, Tamu, and roadside vendors are all closed. This unexpected poor supply of vegetables could lead to a bigger health issue since, as a whole, Sabahan and the larger Malaysian society consume fewer vegetables and fruits than recommended for optimum health. Considering these problems, MyAgriShop was invented as an App to link rural vegetable farmers directly with consumers, specifically households, to increase vegetable sales and improve food distribution during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. This app could offer a better bargain between smallholder farmers and households, as the negotiation is direct and without the involvement of a third party.