

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-IV (July – August) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



MUNICIPAL AGRICULTURE OFFICE SERVICES AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OF FARMER BENEFICIARIES IN SANTA MARCELA APAYAO

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| **Received:** 30.06.2024 | **Accepted:** 03.07.2024 | **Published:** 07.07.2024

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Abstract

This study assesses the satisfaction levels and challenges of 160 farmers regarding the Municipal Agriculture Office services in Santa Marcela, Apayao. With a mean age of 43.4 years, most farmers have a high school education, small families averaging four members, and an income of P12, 437.50 from 2.37-hectare farms. Service quality was evaluated based on assurance, empathy, tangibility, responsiveness, and reliability. Reliability ranked highest, while empathy ranked lowest. Core functions—crop development, regulatory services, fishery development, special projects, support services, farmer training, animal health programs, organic fertilizer production, and disaster services—were rated as "satisfied." These findings indicate room for improvement, aiming to achieve "Very Much Satisfied" ratings, suggesting that enhancing empathy and overall service delivery could significantly boost farmer satisfaction.

Keywords: *Farmer Satisfaction, quality service, crop development, Sta. Marcela, Apayao Municipal Agriculture Office*

INTRODUCTION

REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7607 of the Philippine Constitution popularly known as AN ACT PROVIDING A MAGNA CARTA OF SMALL FARMERS declares that it is the policy of the State to give the highest priority to the development of agriculture such that equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities is realized through the empowerment of small farmers. While the State recognizes the fact that the welfare and development of the small farmers is their primordial responsibility, the State shall provide the necessary support mechanism towards

the attainment of their socioeconomic endeavors. (Chan Robles Virtual Law Library). In pursuance of this policy, the State shall recognize the right of small farmers and farm workers, as well as cooperatives and independent farmers' organizations, to participate in the planning, organization, management and implementation of agricultural programs and projects especially through the bayanihan spirit. It shall support agriculture through appropriate policies, research, technology and training, and adequate financial, production, marketing and other support services to enhance

agricultural productivity. In addition, it shall provide incentives and reward systems to small farmers so as to accelerate agricultural productivity and to promote self- sufficiency and full development of agricultural potentials.

In the Philippines, the Republic Act No. 7160, also known as “the Local Government Code of 1991” provides more power, responsibilities, authorities, and resources to all local government units (LGUs) through decentralization system. As provided in Section 16, all local government units are mandated to provide basic services that will answer to the needs of their citizens in which agriculture support services is one among them. Agriculture is considered to be the primary source of livelihood in the rural areas of the country. The farmers - as the intended recipients and end-users of the Municipal Agriculture Office, the citizens are deemed in a better position to determine whether or not these services are delivered according to their needs, at the right time and to the extent that they fulfill their service requirements. Thus, the development of the Citizen Satisfaction Index System (CSIS), a component of the Local Government Watch program which was launched in 2012. Citizen Satisfaction Index System (CSIS) is an assessment tool for the service delivery performance of local governments mainly based on the knowledge, experience, and perception of the people. This is essential since it involves understanding the political and social issues and their perceptions of the government’s performance as well as services.

However, results of the CSIS are not properly documented and analyzed hence it has not attained its intended purpose. It s the aim of this study to bring to light the assessment of the farmers on their level of satisfaction of the services of the Municipal Agriculture Office in Sta Marcela, Apayao. Thus, this study aims to determine the profile of the farmer , level of satisfaction, and the problems encountered by the farmers with regards to the delivery of Core functions and provision of services of the Municipal Agriculture Office.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of the descriptive –correlational design. This was chosen because it describes the profile of the farmer-beneficiaries and their perceptions on the level of satisfaction of the services provided by the Municipal Agriculture Office and their problems related to agriculture matters. It is also correlational because it tested the relationships between and among the independent and dependent variables. The respondents for this study included 160 members randomly chosen from among the members in each of the farmers’ organization in Sta Marcela, Apayao using Krenjie and Morgan. The tool was used to collect data includes a survey questionnaire, interview guide for the discussion with key stakeholders, meetings with beneficiary communities and program implementers. The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts. Part 1 elicited data regarding demographic profile of the farmer- beneficiaries. The second part assessed the perception of the respondents on their level of satisfaction on the service quality provided by the Municipal Agriculture Office as regards: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, awareness and empathy. The third part measured the level of satisfaction of the farmers regarding the delivery of the core functions of the MAO.

Part IV elicited the problems encountered by the farmer-beneficiaries in the farm particularly on the provision of services by the Municipal Agriculture Office. The questionnaire used the 5-point Likert scale as follows:

Numerical Value	Descriptive Values	Satisfaction Scale
4.21	5.0	Always Very much satisfied
3.41	4.20	Often Satisfied
2.61	3.40	Sometimes Neutral
1.81	2.60	Seldom Not Satisfied
1.0	1.80	Never Not at All Satisfied

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents according to profile variables. Of the 160 farmer-respondents, most of them or 35 percent percent belong to age bracket 41- 50 followed by those whose ages are 51- 60 and 21-30 who are both 19.4 percent. The mean age of farmers which 43.4 years implies that the farmers of Sta Marcela, Apayao are relatively old and very few of the younger generations are into the farming business.

In terms of sex, there are almost equal participation of men and women with male a little more than women. This signals the becomingly active participation of women in agriculture.

As regards the educational attainment of the farmer-beneficiaries, they are almost equally distributed among the various levels of education. Most of them however are high school level or high school graduates. Nonetheless, a good number or 55 (34.4%) have reached college education. This is an indication that some college graduates are now motivated to go into farming which could be attributed to the presence or influence of the Agricultural colleges in the community and other universities nearby.

Size of farm families of Sta Marcela, Apayao is relatively small as shown by the mean of 4. However, there are almost 25 percent or one quarter of the total number of respondents have 6-9 family members.

The farm income of farmers shows that majority of them earn at most Php20,000.00 per cropping or Php40,000.00 per year since they only have two cropping annually. It is uncommon to gain much more especially that they only till an average of 2.37 hectares each. The mean income of Php12,437.50 semi- annually or about Php50,000.00 annually are still living below the poverty threshold level of (Php 7,337.00) per month for a family of 5 members. (PSA 2019). This is if farming is their only source of income. In Sta Marcela, Apayao however, farmers are engaged in other livelihood projects like vegetable growing, poultry and livestock raising, and fish farming which could augment their income in rice farming.

Many of the farmers do not own the farms they till. In fact, only 91 farmers own the farms they till while 21 of them or 13.1 percent lease their farms and 48 or 30 percent are only helpers (kasugpon in Ilocano).

Farms in Sta Marcela, Apayao are distributed among farmers cultivating an average of only 2.37 hectares each. Very few or only 15 or (9.4%) cultivate more than 5 hectares. All of them are members of farmers' associations of whom 3 had been 15 years now as members.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents according to profile variables

Age	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	21-30	31	19.4
	31-40	26	16.3
	41-50	56	35.0
	51-60	31	19.4
	61-70	15	9.4
	71-80	1	0.6
		160	100.0
	Mean Age = 43.4		
Sex			
	Male	85	53.1
	Female	75	46.9
		160	100.0
Highest Educational Attainment			
	Elem	17	10.6
	High School	88	55.0
	College	55	34.4
		160	100.0
Family Size			
	2-3	51	31.9
	4-5	72	45.0
	6-7	25	15.6
	8-9	12	7.5
		160	100.0
	Mean= 4.0		
Income			
	5001-10,000	76	47.5
	10,001-20,000	77	48.1
	20,001-30,000	7	4.4
		160	100.0
	Mean=		

	12,437.5		
Land Ownership			
	Owned	91	56.9
	Leased	21	13.1
	Others	48	30.0
		160	100.0
Land Area Cultivated (ha)	0.25 -1.0	40	25.0
	1.25 -2.0	54	33.8
	2.25 -3.0	28	17.5
	3.25-4.0	13	8.1
	4.25-5.0	10	6.3
	5.25-6.0	4	2.5
	6.25-7.0	8	5.0
	7.25-8.0	3	1.9
		160	100.0
	Mean= 2.37 hectares		
Years of Membership			
	1-5	92	57.5
	6-10	65	40.6
	11-15	3	1.9
		160	100.0
	Mean =5.3years		

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OF THE FARMER-BENEFICIARIES OF THE SERVICES OF MUNICIPAL AGRICULTURE OFFICE OF STA MARCELA, APAYAO

A. Reliability

To assess the reliability or dependability of the of the agriculture office personnel of Sta Marcela, Apayao, four items were asked from the respondents. From the data gathered, it came out that the MAO personnel are always available when required by the farmers and the employees always show sincerity in solving the concerns of the farmers. However, all items were answered "often" indicating a level of satisfaction of "Satisfied" and not being able to attain the highest level of satisfaction which is "Very Much Satisfied". This implies that there is still room for improvement as regards reliability of personnel to deliver their services.

Table 2. Level of satisfaction of farmer- beneficiaries of the services of the MAO Sta Marcela, Apayao as to Reliability.

A. Reliability	Weighted	Descriptive Value
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	Mean	
1. When the MAO personnel promise to deliver within a given time, they do so.	4.19	Often
2. The MAO services are always available as and when required by the farmers.	4.11	Often
3. The employees sincere in solving farmers' concern.	4.17	Often
4. The MAO personnel are able to perform their services right on time.	4.09	Often
Average Weighted Mean	4.14	Satisfied
B. Reliability	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
5. When the MAO personnel promise to deliver within a given time, they do so.	4.19	Often
6. The MAO services are always available as and when required by the farmers.	4.11	Often
7. The employees sincere in solving farmers' concern.	4.17	Often
8. The MAO personnel are able to perform their services right on time.	4.09	Often
Average Weighted Mean	4.14	Satisfied

B. Responsiveness

The responsiveness as a measure of service quality of the MAO personnel is measured in terms of 4 items indicating approachability and receptiveness. It is notable from the data that the farmer-beneficiaries are satisfied considering that all items were rated "often". Many of the respondents saw and felt the willingness and joy of the personnel to serve the farmers, by being accessible, ready to listen and provide prompt responses to farmers' inquiries. However, being rated "often" means there is still room for improvement of such indicators of responsiveness.

Table 3. Level of satisfaction of farmer- beneficiaries of the services of the MAO Sta Marcela, Apayao as to Responsiveness.

D. Responsiveness	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. MAO personnel are happy and willing to	4.16	Often

serve the farmers		
2. MAO personnel tell the farmers exactly when services will be performed.	4.19	Often
3. The MAO personnel are accessible, and they listen and provide prompt and honest responses to farmers' inquiries.	4.10	Often
4. The MAO personnel are not too busy to respond to farmer requests.	4.06	Often
Average Weighted Mean	4.13	Satisfied

D. Tangibility

The assessment of the farmer- beneficiaries on the physical image of the department which include physical facilities, tools, and machines used in order to provide the services, as well as representations of the services is presented in Table 4. It is noted that all items were rated "Often" resulting to a level of satisfaction which is "Satisfied". This implies that DA appear in public with decent employees, appealing physical facilities and materials that are well-crafted and visually appealing.

Table 4. Level of satisfaction of farmer- beneficiaries of the services of MAO Sta Marcela, Apayao as to Tangibility.

E. Tangibility	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. The DA has visually appealing physical facilities	4.14	Often
2. The employees are well dressed and neat in appearance	4.16	Often
3. The material associated with the service for example training manuals are visually appealing	4.07	Often
Average Weighted Mean	4.12	Satisfied

Assurance

The assessment of the respondents' level of satisfaction of the assurance as a measure of service quality is presented in Table 5. This includes the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

From the data, it is revealed that the farmer-beneficiaries "Often" felt that employees are consistently courteous to their interests.

Besides, the personnel “Often” make them feel safe in their service delivery and their staffs are knowledgeable and possess the skills required to resolve the farmers’ problems. Nevertheless, the average weighted mean of 4.11 with a descriptive value of “Satisfied” implies more enhancement is required for this dimension of service quality.

Table 5. Level of satisfaction of farmer- beneficiaries of the services of MAO Sta Marcela, Apayao as to Assurance.

F. Assurance	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. The support staff have the required skills to resolve problems and answer questions	4.10	Often
2. The employees make farmers feel safe in their service delivery	4.12	Often
3. The employees are consistently courteous to the farmers’ interest	4.12	Often
Average Weighted Mean	4.11	Satisfied

Empathy

The caring and individual attention paid to farmers by the MAO to meet each farmer’s demands properly is classified as empathy. The result shows that the farmers are satisfied as proven by their responses with a weighted mean of 4.11 indicating a well-mannered employees, and that they make the farmers feel safe in their service delivery “Often”.

Table 6. Level of satisfaction of farmer- beneficiaries of the services of MAO Sta Marcela, as to Empathy.

E. Empathy	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Value
1. The MAO personnel give customers individual attention	4.10	Often
2. The MAO personnel are committed to ethics and promote ethical behavior in the workplace	4.12	Often
3. Services are adjusted to suit individual farmer’s needs	4.09	Often
4. The operating hours are convenient to all	4.12	

farmers.		Often
Average Weighted Mean	4.11	Satisfied

Overall Level of Satisfaction

The entirety of the levels of satisfaction of the farmers on the quality of service of the DA personnel of Sta Marcela, Apayao is presented in Table 7. As previously discussed, the farmers are “Satisfied” with all the 5 dimensions of service quality. These resulted to an overall weighted mean of 4.12, or described as “Satisfied”. This implies that there is still an avenue for improvement on the delivery of services by the Municipal Agriculture Office of Sta Marcela, Apayao.

Level of Satisfaction of Farmers on the Delivery of the Core Functions of the Municipal Agriculture Office of Sta Marcela, Apayao

The evaluation of the farmers on their level of satisfaction as regards the delivery of the core functions of the Municipal Agriculture Office of Sta Marcela, These functions are categorized into areas namely: crop development regulatory services, fishery development, special projects, production support services, post-harvest support services, farmers’ competency enhancement, animal health programs, production of organic fertilizers, and disaster services.

As regards crops development program, the farmers are “satisfied” how the MAO personnel stock the seeds before distribution and they were also “satisfied” on the ways the seeds of rice, corn, fertilizers vegetables, other planting materials such as dragon plants, bananas, rambutan, lanzones and other fruit trees adaptable in the locality.

The establishment, maintenance and supervision of techno-demo farms by MAO personnel were likewise rated “Satisfied”

Relationship between the profile of farmer- beneficiaries to their level of satisfaction of the quality of services of the Sta Marcela, Apayao Municipal Agriculture Office.

To test if there is a possible associations between the profile of the farmers to their level of satisfaction, correlation analyses were made using the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation.

Not one among the profile variables was found to significantly influence the farmers’ level of satisfaction. This implies that regardless of age, sex and the other variables, their level of satisfactions are similar. This negates the findings of Maskey and Weber (1996) in their study on Evaluating factors influencing farmers’ satisfaction with their irrigation system in Nepal, where they found landholding size as a variable that significantly determine satisfaction which was also supported by Gorton et al. (2009) indicating a similar result stating that farm size is a significant determinant of members’ satisfaction.

There are problems encountered by the farmers in their farming activities. There are most pressing problems and they are ranked according the frequency of occurrence/incidence.

Topmost among the ten problems is the poor germination of seeds distributed to then by the MAO. Worst is, there are no replacement given in case farmers lack seedlings for their entire area. This was experienced by nearly all the respondents of this study. This implies that, the MAO does not choose the best source of quality seeds to be distributed to the farmers.

Second in rank as reported by 95 farmers is that there are practically no interventions received from the government. Although there are many programs of the department of agriculture, perhaps these are not very much applicable to their needs, hence they do not feel the impact of the said programs. Other problems that came out include: high values of machineries introduced to farmers; natural calamities which cannot be avoided due to climate change; poor access to water system from the main canal, pests and diseases. It was also known that the area for the distribution of seeds and other inputs from the MAO is very crowded. Lastly, refund from the Phil Crop Insurance Company for insurance of crops and animals take so long that the farming activities are delayed resulting to poor production.

Conclusions

This study aimed to assess the satisfaction levels of farmers with the services provided by the Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) of Sta Marcela, Apayao, and to identify challenges in delivering these core functions. It examined the profiles of farmer beneficiaries, including age, sex, highest educational attainment, family size, farm income, land ownership, land area cultivated, irrigation status, and length of membership in farmers' organizations. The study evaluated satisfaction across five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, awareness, and empathy, and identified problems encountered by farmers regarding MAO services.

The findings reveal that while reliability in service delivery is rated highly, empathy is a significant area for improvement. Addressing these issues can lead to enhanced overall satisfaction. The study highlights the need for targeted strategies to improve the quality of services, particularly focusing on empathetic interactions with farmers. By addressing the identified gaps, the MAO of Sta Marcela, Apayao can better meet the needs of its farmer beneficiaries, leading to increased satisfaction and more effective agricultural support. These insights are crucial for policymakers and MAO personnel as they work to enhance service delivery and support sustainable agricultural development in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned findings, the following are recommended: The MAO Sta Marcela, Apayao should consider a stricter monitoring of the delivery of services to the farmer-beneficiaries to increase the farmers' level of satisfaction. The MAO should conduct regular monitoring of intervention programs to have a better impact on the farmer-beneficiaries. The result of this study should be presented during an assembly of the Municipal Agriculture Office to make them aware of how the farmer-beneficiaries evaluate the quality of their services and how well they are satisfied.

Declaration of no conflict of interest

The author hereby declares no conflict of interest and this article is her original work.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to all those who in one way or the other contributed in the success of this study.

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